

the review

May / June 2019

the official magazine of the  michigan municipal league



REVITALIZING HAMTRAMCK

Local Investment. Regional Impact.

Governor's Road
to Opportunity

Creative Approaches to
Attracting Investment

the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

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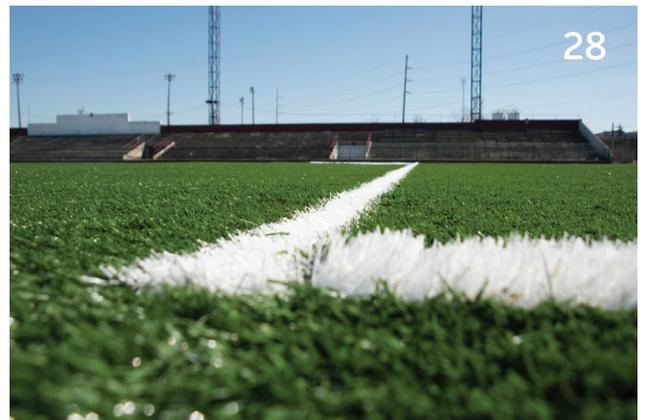
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the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

Volume 92, Number 3

We love where you live.

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A Legislative Medley

In 2013, we hailed a piece of legislation as a game changer and we have never looked back. Called the Michigan Invests Locally Exemption Act (MILE), this innovative law—one could say an economically life-saving law—finally gave businesses the tools they need to receive funding support from Michigan investors of all income levels. No longer did they have to chase and compete for limited capital funds to invest in their communities. Fast forward to 2019, and so far, the results have been very impressive. Communities have been able to invest in their future like never before. You can learn more about these successes this spring when, in collaboration with Piper & Gold Public Relations and a committee of community capital stakeholders, the League will publish a report titled *Empowered Spaces and Connected Places: A Retrospective in Michigan Crowdfunding*.

The cities of Hamtramck and Hudsonville are moving forward with some exciting long-term investments in their communities. The Michigan Municipal League Foundation announced that Hamtramck will be receiving a grant of over \$800,000 from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation to create a master plan and community engagement process. This is an important first step towards the renovation and activation of their 26-acre Veterans Memorial Park campus, which includes Keyworth Stadium and historic Hamtramck Stadium. This historic stadium was once home to the former Detroit Stars and is one of the few remaining Negro League ballparks in the country. Several civic organizations also held a complementary crowdfunding campaign to raise \$50,000 for the restoration of Hamtramck Stadium through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's Public Spaces Community Places program. This powerful crowdfunding tool allows communities to dream big and participate in pivotal change.

Building on previous investment successes in their downtown, Hudsonville has developed an award-winning master plan (Imagine Hudsonville 2030) to create a more traditional downtown for the city. They are working in close partnership with the League, the League's Foundation, MEDC, and Michigan State Housing Development Authority. These are both excellent examples of citizen- and partnership-driven investments that will not only serve residents today but will put these communities on a sustainable trajectory for future generations.

At the end of 2018, League President Melanie Piana and I were invited to attend the UN National Habitat Conference on Placemaking in Wuhan, China. This is one of several meetings that the UN National Habitat has held all over the world. With a population of 10.61 million, Wuhan is the most populous city in central China, as well as the capital of the Hubei Province. When I travel to places far and wide, I am always reminded of how small the world can feel. Although we speak different languages, placemaking is the universal language that speaks to us all. It gives us a platform to share and exchange the best ideas out there. It always comes down to the human experience—connecting people in a positive way, whether it is through public spaces, housing, streets and sidewalks, businesses, or arts and culture. In these pages, President Piana will give you more insight on what we learned, as well as takeaways for our own work here in Michigan.

A huge shout-out to Michigan-based Munetrix for their generous support of the Dark Store Legislation Defense Fund. In September 2018, they donated 10 percent of all new customer subscriptions. The City of Escanaba received a check for \$4,100 to assist with their Dark Store legal expenses. This amount was donated on behalf of eight municipalities that signed up for Munetrix during the promotional period. Munetrix is among the nation's largest aggregators of municipal and school district data. Through partnering with Munetrix, communities and school districts can manage their data and access services to assist in developing budgets, financial projections, and future decision-making. Munetrix President Robert Kittle states that this donation is just one way to support its mission of "Helping communities help themselves." Thank you, Munetrix!



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“ The budget that I’ve introduced will begin to correct decades of disinvestment in local communities by keeping more taxpayer money in the area it comes from. ”

The Road to Opportunity

Michigan is at a Crossroads

By Governor Gretchen Whitmer

After decades of disinvestment, local communities across our state are struggling to address their crumbling infrastructure, broken education systems, and widening skills gap. These problems aren't isolated to rural areas or urban communities, or consolidated to districts that voted for Republicans or Democrats. They're issues that people across the state face every day, and they're putting our families, our workers, and our economy at risk.

We're faced with the choice between continuing down the path of disinvestment that led us here or forging a new path with real solutions that will solve all of these problems.

The budget that I've introduced will give local communities the resources they need to make these much-needed improvements by (1) keeping taxpayer dollars in local communities, (2) fixing the damn roads, and (3) closing the skills gap to begin attracting businesses and ensure that every Michigander has a path to a good job right here in Michigan.

Increasing Revenue Sharing

Since 2000, the State of Michigan has told local communities to do more with less by cutting the amount of revenue sharing that cities, villages, and townships receive.

When revenue sharing is cut, there are fewer police officers and fire fighters to keep communities safe; there is less money to fix the local roads that are getting worse every day; and much-needed investments to upgrade public services are put on hold.

The budget that I've introduced will begin to correct decades of disinvestment in local communities by keeping more taxpayer money in the area it comes from. My budget includes an additional \$41.8 million in revenue sharing for cities, villages, townships, and counties—bringing the new total to nearly \$1.4 billion. This is a three percent increase over the prior year, and while it won't fix everything overnight, it's a crucial step in helping our local communities thrive.

Every additional dollar that we increase through revenue sharing is one more dollar that can go toward making sure our cities are a place where our kids stay, our families thrive, and other people move to for opportunity.

Fixing the Damn Roads

If you've ever driven north over the Ohio border into Michigan, that sudden jolt you feel the second you arrive in our state as your tires bounce over pothole after pothole reminds you that you're home.

But it isn't just cars and drivers that are paying the price for our pothole-littered roads. Our crumbling infrastructure hurts businesses' bottom lines and limits our economic potential because businesses don't want to invest in a state that doesn't invest in itself. We need to act now before our roads truly become irreparable or even more businesses leave our state.

Whether it's from the nonpartisan Senate Fiscal Agency, experts at the Michigan Department of Transportation, or a commission formed by former Governor Snyder, study after study has shown us that the \$1.2 billion road funding package in 2015 was billions of dollars short and only slowed the decline of our roads.

My budget provides a long-term solution to our decades-in-the-making transportation crisis by restoring our roads to the national standard of 90 percent in good or fair condition by 2029. This is an aggressive proposal that guarantees that ALL of the money raised at the pump is constitutionally protected and will be allocated to the highest traffic and most commercially important roads.

We need a comprehensive plan that fixes the roads in the present and prevents this problem in the future. Drivers need to know that they can drive to and from work and drop their kids at school without blowing a tire or cracking a windshield. Businesses need the peace of mind that they can safely transport their products. And our state needs to do a better job of working with local communities to make this a reality.

But the reality is that improving our system of transportation doesn't just mean fixing the damn roads. I know many city leaders are concerned about transit, and they are right. We need to do a better job of moving people to jobs, local businesses, and sporting events, while also encouraging development along these transit corridors. To accomplish this goal, I've proposed increasing our investment to support innovative projects in public transit, rail, and mobility services.



As I've said before, I didn't run for governor to manage the decline of our state. I ran to make sure that Michigan is a home for opportunity for generations to come, including laying the groundwork for the transit and jobs of the future.

Attracting Investment/Talent

At the Detroit Auto Show in January, I met with auto executives who said their number one challenge was attracting enough talent. This is something that I've heard from business owners from Macomb to Marquette and from Grand Rapids to Gogebic County.

The reality is that far too many of our best and brightest are leaving our state after getting their degrees, and we're struggling to attract business as a result. In fact, Amazon cited "brain drain" as an inhibitor to sustainable, long-term success in their decision to overlook Michigan as their next headquarters.

That's why I've set a goal for our state to increase the number of adults with some form of postsecondary degree or certification from the current attainment of 44 percent to 60 percent by 2030.

To meet this goal and close the skills gap, I've introduced the MI Opportunity Scholarship and the Michigan Reconnect pathways. The MI Opportunity Scholarship, to be implemented in 2021, will make Michigan the first state in the Midwest to offer tuition-free community college, and will help bring down the cost of a four-year degree or skills training program. The Michigan Reconnect pathway will help adults re-skill and connect them with good-paying jobs in high-demand careers.

With this plan, we can close the skills gap and make our cities a more competitive option for investment, which will put more Michiganders on a real path to good jobs.

The Road to Opportunity

Despite our challenges, Michigan's greatest strength is—and always has been—our people. It's no accident that Michiganders are a diverse, persevering, and innovative group, and it's up to us to give every person a platform to build upon these successes.

We have an opportunity here in Michigan to finally give local communities the resources they need to make much-needed improvements, while simultaneously working together to fix the damn roads and close the skills and talent gap. I'm ready to work with members of the Michigan Municipal League and local leaders across our state to get the job done.

Together, we can keep our foot on the gas and put Michigan on the road to opportunity. 

Governor Gretchen Whitmer is the 49th governor of Michigan. You may contact her at 517.373.3400.

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A SNEAK PEEK AT EMPOWERED SPACES AND CONNECTED PLACES:

A Retrospective on Michigan Crowdfunding

By Kate Snyder & Veronica Gracia-Wing



A painter brings the Alpena mural to life.

“... the League and the MEDC collaborated to create a new crowdfunding program called Public Spaces Community Places. And the results have been astounding.”



Lansing's Pop Up Art project was fun for all ages.



Today, Michiganders may take for granted that everyone can help fund community projects.

Social media calls to action inspire us to kick in a few bucks for a cool new space in our neighborhood. Pride in our region leads us to invest amounts significant to us in a business we're longing to have in our downtown district. We cheer for nonprofits when they surpass a crowdfunding goal for an art installation to enhance placemaking.

We see our role in creating empowered spaces and connected places. But it wasn't always that way.

Think all the way back... to 2008 or so. In the throes of the Great Recession, it was hard for anyone to secure capital—from new and growing businesses to banking customers with solid credit to government and community agencies. Traditional funding sources had dried up. And forget it if you were a startup.

This was a time for innovation. And innovate we did...

In 2013, Michigan lawmakers got to work creating a first-of-its kind, state-level tool: the Michigan Invests Locally Exemption Act, which gives businesses the ability to receive funding support from Michigan investors of all means. Across the state, organizations including the Michigan Municipal League, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the Small Business Association of Michigan, the Council of Michigan Foundations and businesses such as Revalue understood what the MILE Act could mean for communities.

These organizations presented at workshops across Michigan, meeting with residents, community organizations, and economic developers to start putting the MILE Act into action for both investment and donation-based crowdfunding.

Putting Crowdfunding into Action

Further, the League and the MEDC collaborated to create a new crowdfunding program called Public Spaces Community Places. And the results have been astounding.

More than \$7 million in Public Spaces Community Places projects have been funded, representing 37,364 patrons, 196 projects, and \$6,004,441 in matching sponsor dollars. Numerous local businesses have grown and been sustained by community investments. But, we'll be the first to admit: we haven't done a great job talking about the successes and Michigan's crowdfunding leadership.

We're changing that.

Together with Piper & Gold Public Relations and a committee of community capital stakeholders, the League will publish *Empowered Spaces and Connected Places: A Retrospective in Michigan Crowdfunding* this spring. In addition to further exploring the roots of crowdfunding we shared above, the retrospective will highlight case studies of community capitalism in action. We're capturing the high fives and the hard work, the hits and the misses—all with an eye toward learning and growing so every state can activate a previously dormant network of community capitalists.



Putting the finishing touches on part of the Alpena mural.

The cherry on top?

We're unveiling the retrospective at the national Community Capital Conference, presented by the National Coalition for Community Capital (NC3) in none other than our very own Detroit this June. We are thrilled to welcome and host ComCap19 in the befitting birthplace of innovation and shining example of resilience and grit. ComCap19 provides a place and time for community capital advocates to come together to connect, learn, and return home with tools and best practices.

So, stay tuned. We can't wait to share the full report with you in late spring! We hope to inspire folks to get to work, while celebrating Michigan's empowered spaces and connected places. 

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Going First

A Bold Step That Paid Off for Hudsonville

By Michelle Fare & Dan Strikwerda

Someone had to go first. The City of Hudsonville was a car-centric community with no major private investment in the downtown since the mid-1990s. Someone needed to be the first player to spark reinvestment in a downtown that was otherwise at risk of decay.

For years, the city worked to find a developer that was interested in being that catalyst, but to no avail. In 2016, they took a bold step. They bonded for \$4.6 million to be the catalyst themselves. "It was a leap of faith, but a well-planned and purposeful leap," said City Manager Patrick Waterman.



Ribbon cutting for Dorados Mexican Grill in the Hudson Center building.



Residents provided input at information kiosks.



City Manager Patrick Waterman and Mayor Mark Northrup are pleased with the popularity of the city's Terra Square development.

Gaining Community Support

How did Hudsonville, a city of 7,300 people, get to the point of having the confidence to make such a large commitment? It all began with a partnership with the Ottawa County Planning Commission to create a vision that became the backdrop for Hudsonville's future. With the assistance of a planning consultant, Nederveld, Inc., several award-winning plans and a form-based code were created. One main objective was creating a quality plan that was unique to Hudsonville while being intentional about setting goals that could be implemented. Over one third of the master plan focuses on implementation. But even more important was creating a plan that had community buy-in.

"The vision for Hudsonville was put together through an immense amount of community input," said Waterman. "We knew that it would be received positively from the residents and we were unwilling to allow that vision to be put on a shelf and start collecting dust."

Gaining input from the residents and businesses was taken seriously. It was not just viewed as a requirement for Master Plan approval. It was an opportunity to learn what the community really wanted and garner their support for future implementation. Seeking input was well-publicized through multiple articles, presentations, and online sources. One unique source of gathering community support was 6-foot tall kiosks placed in a variety of active spaces throughout the community.

Another key to a successful vision was minimizing proposed infrastructure changes by considering the existing urban fabric wherever feasible. It was important as we went through the planning process that the end product would enhance Hudsonville's vibrancy, livability, and aesthetic character, and was also achievable.

Jumping In

The first completed project was the Terra Square Farmers Market, an indoor-outdoor farmers market facility which doubles as private event space on non-market days. The Terra Square Farmers Market, which won the Michigan Municipal League's Community Excellence Award in 2017, also is home to a co-work space and a farm-to-table restaurant.

In addition to the farmers market, bond proceeds were used to construct the Harvey Street woonerf—a street shared equally by cars, bicycles, and pedestrians—which now serves as the "front door" for new businesses opening downtown. Before the improvements, Harvey Street had an unwelcoming appearance and was used as a back entrance for many businesses. Converting this street to a focal point was an opportunity to turn a negative feature into a community asset.

"The city of Hudsonville did not have a main street. We had large expanses of parking with retail along the edges. Focusing in on Harvey Street as the pedestrian-oriented

“It was a leap of faith, but a well-planned and purposeful leap.”

corridor allows us to have a space that people feel comfortable being on foot, essentially creating a main street feel from scratch,” said Hudsonville Mayor Mark Northrup.

Finally, Hudsonville completed a landscaping project on Chicago Drive, a divided highway along the edge of downtown. By adding ornate landscaping and lighting along this corridor, it is now very evident to passersby that they are entering a place worth visiting.

Cascading Effect

That bold step of being first in has really paid off. In 2018, the Hudson Center opened to the public. This \$4.2 million, three-story, mixed-use building is home to two restaurants, a coffee shop, offices, and nine residential units.

The city isn't stopping there, though. They have partnered up with the League and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to help other developers connect to the vision for downtown.

“We still have much work to do to realize the vision for Hudsonville, so we continue to meet with other potential partners,” said Waterman.

After becoming Redevelopment Ready Certified, Hudsonville gained access to these additional resources and technical assistance which has really helped the city connect on a more professional level with potential investors and developers.

The League supported Hudsonville's progress through a grant that paid to have an architect put together sketches of the future downtown Hudsonville. With those in hand, the MEDC helped organize a Developer Day in Hudsonville that showcased the city's potential redevelopment opportunities.

It's hard to stand on an undeveloped area and see all of what is planned. The downtown sketches have been critical in sharing the vision. The city has had a lot of interest from other development groups now looking to find their next project in Hudsonville. It's exciting to be part of helping our community's vision come to reality.

So, the lesson learned? “Be bold for your community,” said Mayor Northrup. “You cannot sit idle and wait for someone

to come in and implement your vision for you. We had to be our own catalyst. It was what was needed to get that first big player in the door, and from here we hope to see much more for Hudsonville.” 

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Small Steps Toward a Better Community

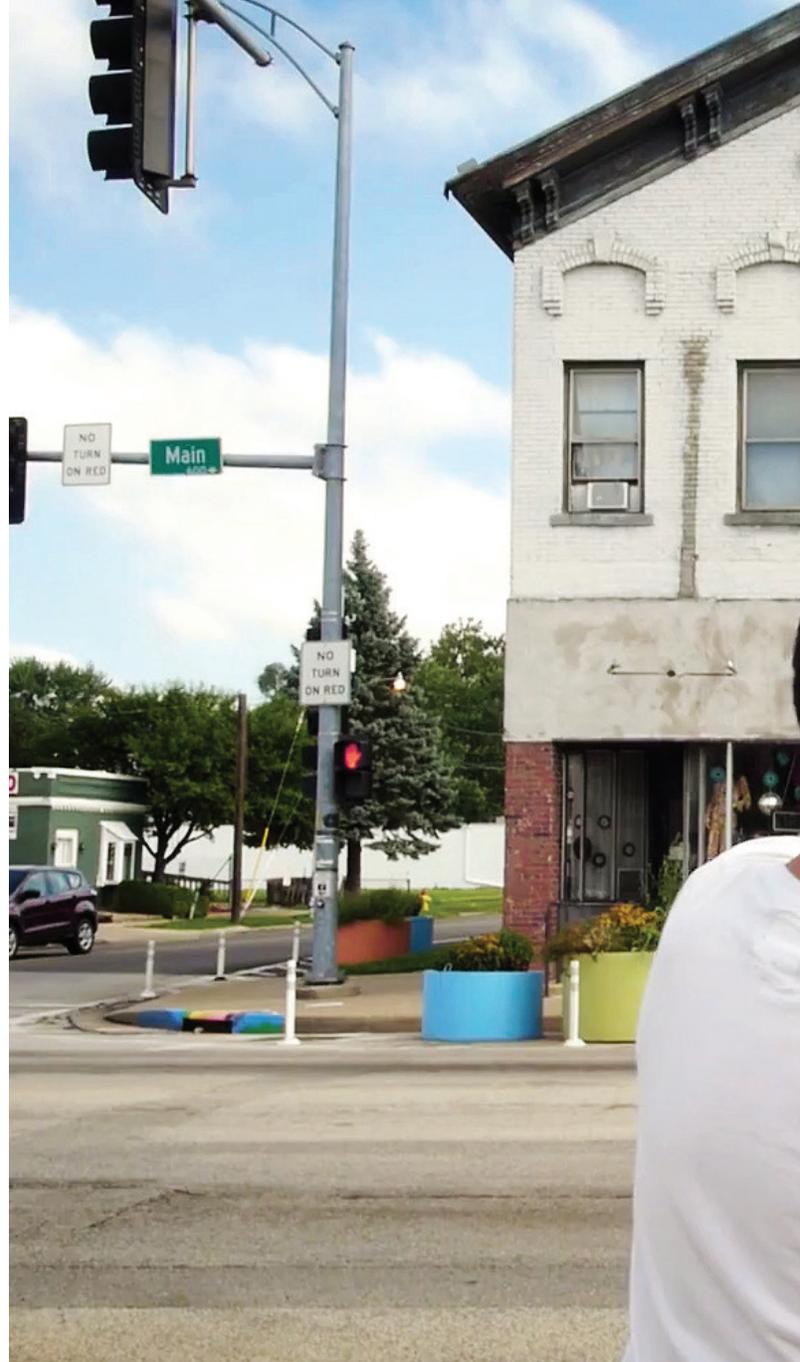
Starting a Regional Conversation Around Small-scale Development

By Anthony Corso

Reprinted by permission. Originally published by *Peoria Magazines* in *iBi* magazine, March 2019, peoriomagazines.com.

In March 2018, Bernice Radle—a small-scale real estate developer from Buffalo, New York and member of the Incremental Development Alliance—came to Peoria to share her story. It was a story about loving a place and turning that love into a business with a mission to revitalize a neighborhood—one building at a time.

The Incremental Development Alliance is a not-for-profit comprised of small-scale real estate developers working in cities across the United States. The Alliance works to build the capacity for local residents—including small business owners, neighborhood advocates, design and real estate professionals, builders and others—to invest in and strengthen their own neighborhoods. At the same time, they work with city partners and civic leaders to help create a thriving ecosystem for small developers that can enable the kind of development their community needs.



Members of Peoria's Small Scale Development 309 MeetUp group study a local small development project.

Bernice was brought to Peoria by the Small-Scale Development Host Committee, a group of regional stakeholders convened by the City of Peoria's Innovation Team to grow the local community of small-scale developers in partnership with the Incremental Development Alliance. The goal was to share Bernice's story (and others like it) with a regional audience in order to build on an important national movement in Peoria. This movement aims to create a new generation of small-scale developers empowered with the tools, strategies, inspiration, and support to incrementally transform the neighborhoods and districts they care about.

The lessons Bernice shared show what is possible when people move from lamenting the challenges facing their neighborhoods to becoming a force for positive change by



reinvesting in them. She described a formula combining a strong connection to place, relationship building, and hard work over time to create vibrant neighborhoods. Until the late 20th century, this is how most neighborhoods and cities were built: incrementally, over time by residents, small business owners and other small-scale developers.

Too much real estate development in neighborhoods today, however, is extractive—exporting wealth outside the region. In principle, small-scale development is about creating the kinds of projects that contribute to place, rather than extracting from them. Bernice reminded the audience that no one from outside the community was coming in to save their neighborhood—they need to do that work themselves. And they would need the help of a network of small-scale developers and champions.

The Big Impact of Small-Scale

Small-scale development involves the development or redevelopment of small real estate projects—those between one and three stories and less than 20 units. By its very nature, small-scale development offers a more adaptable way to develop real estate that leads to more resilient neighborhoods and districts.

By creating diverse residential, commercial and mixed-use building types with diverse ownership, these places can better weather the ebb and flow of the economy. In addition, they can make it easier to launch or grow small businesses by providing the types of spaces they need. This is critical when you consider that in most communities, small businesses employ the vast majority of residents.



Cultivating Small-Scale Developers

Following Bernice’s lecture, more than 80 area residents signed up for a daylong workshop to learn the fundamentals of small-scale development, covering topics from building typologies and site development, to financing and project pro formas. The Host Committee’s attempt to kickstart the conversation and start building an organic network of small developers, investors, and small-scale development champions was beginning to take shape.

“This movement aims to create a new generation of small-scale developers empowered with the tools, strategies, inspiration, and support to incrementally transform the neighborhoods and districts they care about.”

In April 2018, an energized group of 82 community members took part in small-scale development training led by the Incremental Development Alliance. Besides learning the nuts and bolts of small-scale development, participants were introduced to an online platform connecting them to a national network of small-scale developers and “neighborhood-level doers” that support one another and share notes on what works and what doesn’t. The following month, several Host Committee members and training participants launched the Small-Scale Development 309 MeetUp group (and an online Facebook group of the same name) to support the growth of this network of local and regional small-scale developers, investors and champions.

Through often “standing-room-only” MeetUp events hosted at recently completed small development sites in Peoria, people were introduced to local partners and resources as well as other training opportunities.

In October, three budding small-scale developers attended a two-day regional small-scale development bootcamp in South Bend, Indiana to test their project ideas and get feedback from established small-scale developers. They will share what they learned—along with insights from other bootcamp participants—at an upcoming Small-Scale Development MeetUp.

These efforts were just the start of a long-term journey to create a supportive ecosystem for small-scale developers—enabling those in our community who want to make better places to do so. Learn more about the Incremental Development Alliance at incrementaldevelopment.org. 

Anthony Corso is the chief innovation officer for the city of Peoria, Illinois, where he directs the Innovation Team. You may contact him at 309.494.8561 or acorso@peoriagov.org.



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Livable to Lovable

Placemaking Across the Globe



By Melanie Piana

Walking through Tanhualin, a pedestrian-focused historic street in Wuhan, China, there was a quaint jewelry storefront that beckoned me inside. Believing I had enough time to step briefly away from my tour group, I started selecting gifts for my co-workers back home. My language barrier with the shop owner led to a longer negotiation on price. Once I paid and looked down the street, the entire tour group was gone.

I started wandering down Tanhualin Street, wondering where it ended. Hopefully, I would find the group there. Instead, I discovered a bustling outdoor vegetable and meat vendor market. My adventurous spirit tingled with delight. Look what I found! What are those new scents? My walk led me to another active neighborhood street, where every day Chinese life was underway. It was a place worth investing my time.

An intrepid world traveler, I was ecstatic to discover the Chinese city of Wuhan last November while representing the Michigan Municipal League with Dan Gilmartin at Placemaking Week, a gathering of global urban thought leaders to reimagine the future of Chinese cities. Sponsored by UN-Habitat, a United Nations Human Settlements program, and the Project for Public Spaces, a long-time program partner with the League, we learned how international cities, including those in China, are creating adaptable and engaging places.

Conference attendees participated in one of four thematic tracks over the three days: waterfronts, historical streets, community placemaking, or healthy communities. From the UN-Habitat meeting with the mayor of Wuhan, small group tours throughout the city, group work sessions with Wuhan city planners, and small group expert-led presentations, Dan and I focused on historical streets and took in the sights of Wuhan.

We heard from placemaking experts from the cities of Yangon, Kuala Lumpur, Amsterdam, Toronto, and Auckland, and the city planners and urban planning students representing Wuhan. What makes a successful place? The League has been educating and advocating for local elected officials to embrace placemaking for years now. What themes can we draw from the Chinese and international city experts that we can apply to our own communities in Michigan? The following are my conclusions.



League President Melanie Piana explores Wuhan, China and participates in a placemaking workshop.

Livable to Lovable

“Livable cities” is an oft-used phrase to describe how thoughtful city design leads to places where people want to live. The phrase “Liveable to Lovable” challenged me to elevate my thinking beyond just living as the benchmark standard for creating a place. A downtown pocket park with trees and a few benches is totally livable, right? But lovable? Throw in moveable furniture, a small stage, and a kid-friendly activity—now that park is on its way to becoming lovable.

Belonging, Inclusion, and Well-being

Every community seeks to create spaces where people feel welcome and a sense of belonging. The “soul of a place” wants to be discovered or enhanced; a place comes to life by the people who visit and interact with it. Elected leaders need to focus on human-scale design and create a community process that focuses on creating places, not just development for the sake of development. A place with intimacy, where people are drawn to it and want to hang out, is better equipped to retain and attract talent.

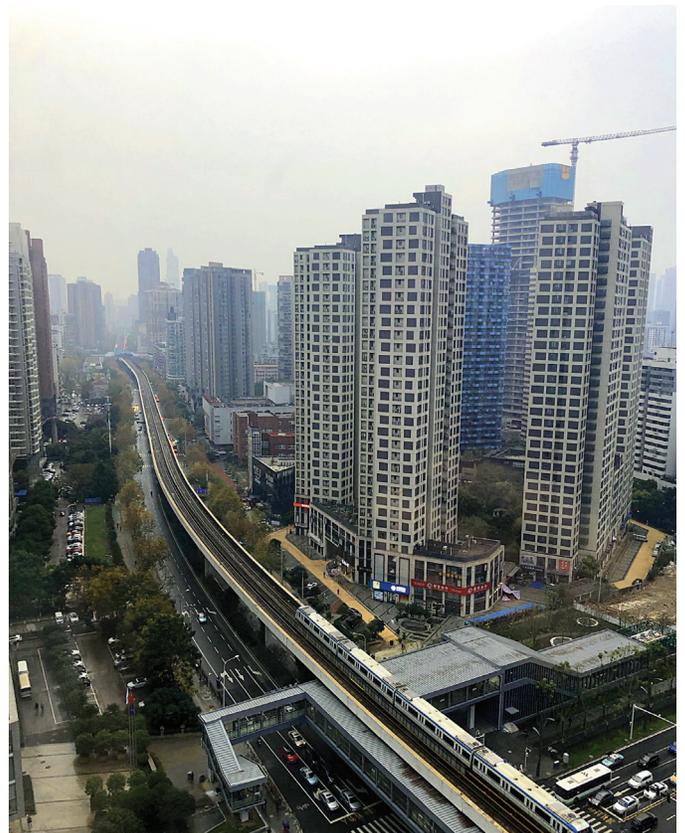
Cultural and Identity Preservation

“Cultural heritage is a non-renewable resource” is another message that resonated with me. Every community wants to preserve their unique identity and culture. Ferndale is no different, with our strong LGBTQ population and fierce entrepreneurial spirit. In many global cities, tribal culture is a focus of preservation efforts, like the Maori in New Zealand. A community needs to celebrate who it is, instead of embracing some manifestation of another community’s success. Maintaining a strong community sense-of-self can be achieved during times of growth, even with new, mixed-use buildings that transform the look and feel in a downtown or commercial district. A placemaking approach is a mindset that manifests preservation efforts that result in better outcomes for the people you serve.

Confronting Same Issues, Different Scale

Elevating well-being is one goal of placemaking, not only for visitors but also for people living near the place undergoing transformation. Changing a forgotten space (ugly alleyway, for example) or enhancing an existing neighborhood or public space elevates the quality of life. While many cities are leading with placemaking, avoiding displacement of low-income residents, seniors, and minorities from their neighborhoods is a globally shared concern. Intentional community engagement—listening to residents upfront in the process— is critical to really learning what people’s needs are to understand and support a pending change.

Realizing I had walked in the complete opposite direction from the tour group, I spent my alone-time absorbing Chinese neighborhood life. It was mesmerizing because it was so different from home.



The city of Wuhan, China offers everything from quaint street markets to ultra-modern skyscrapers.



Eventually, I found my way to the lecture hall where our tour group was hearing from the Chinese students on the community planning process for the next investment stages for Tanhauin Street. The experts in the room split into small groups, giving feedback to the student planners about how they could approach redesigning housing and storefronts adjacent to Tanhauin Street. I reported out for our group and had an exchange with a Chinese student about housing around the vendor market street I had visited earlier.

My American perspective found the market street fascinating—a cultural asset to preserve. The student told me that the housing around the market was low-quality and old; many residents did not have proper plumbing or toilets inside their homes. These residents wanted to move away from this street, as selling fruits and vegetables in this type of space represented poverty and limited access to opportunity. Avoiding displacement and preserving cultural heritage while tearing down existing housing to build new are universal challenges.

Instead of taking the bus back to our hotel, my new Chinese friend guided me and two other experts from the Netherlands to visit the Yellow Crane Tower, a historical tourist site. She took us through city streets, famous food stalls that served traditional Wuhan hot/dry noodles, and showed us the Yangtze river walk at night. Eight miles of discovery—that's how far I walked that day, learning how Wuhan plans to build for its future around place.

When you dig deeper, why a neighborhood develops the way it does is just as important as what is developed. Design matters. 

Melanie Piana is president of the Michigan Municipal League Board of Trustees and a Ferndale councilmember. You may contact her at 248.210.8645 or mpiana@ferndalemi.gov.



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CAPCON2019



CapCon19 Highlights
March 19-20
Lansing Center
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CAPCON2019



For all the photos from this year's Capital Conference and other League events, go to mml.org/flickr.

We're very excited that more than 600 attendees joined us for Capital Conference this year! The positive energy created by that large crowd was exhilarating! We were especially pleased to have Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist, and Secretary of State Benson there in person.

Nationally-known General Session speakers enlightened us on framing issues to get the best response from constituents, and shared techniques to encourage tolerance and civil discourse in our communities. Breakout Sessions covered everything from recreational marijuana and new election-related laws to equity and inclusion and social media.

There was also plenty of time to network with colleagues, meet with vendors at the Expo, and talk with state legislators in a relaxed breakfast setting. The League is proud to have honored two of those legislators—Sen. Jim Stamas and Rep. Jim Lilly—with Legislator of the Year awards. As you flip through these pages, you'll see many other members who were honored for their efforts to make their communities and our state a better place.

For more details, visit our Capital Conference website at cc.mml.org. To learn about the League's municipal finance reform campaign, visit saveMlcity.org



GALA

2019 CAPCON AWARDS



Front: Jim Lilly, Paula Zelenko, Maureen Donker
Back: Clyde Robinson, Rob VerHeulen, Mark Vanderpool, Brenda F. Moore, David Lossing, not pictured: State Senator Jim Stamas



Legislator of the Year
Award: State Representative
Jim Lilly (R-Macatawa)



Legislator of the Year
Award: State Senator
Jim Stamas (R-Midland)



Ambassador Award:
Brenda F. Moore,
Mayor Pro Tem, Saginaw



Legislative Award of Merit:
Former State Representative
Rob VerHeulen (R-Walker).



Community Builder Award:
Maureen Donker, Midland



Jim Sinclair Exceptional Service
Award: Mark Vanderpool,
City Manager, Sterling Heights



Outstanding Service Award:
Clyde Robinson,
City Attorney, Kalamazoo



Michael A. Guido Leadership
& Public Service Award:
Paula Zelenko, Mayor, Burton



Honorary Life Membership Award,
David Lossing, Former Mayor, Linden

CAPCON AWARDS 2019

16/50 Project Women's Municipal Leadership Program —First Graduating Class

(l to r) Amy Aubry, Eilis Seide, Elizabeth King, Frances McMullan, Laura Lam, Kelly Bean, Duska Brumm, Linda Morrison, Elle Getschman, Samantha Seimer, Kendra Howard, Donna Stallings (not in photo).



Elected Officials Academy Level 1 Graduates

(l to r) Colleen Brown, Bill Colovos, Janet Dillon, Sharlan Douglas, Dennis Hennen, Lee Kilbourn, Joe LaRussa, Raylon Leaks-May, Larry Moss, Abu Musa, Greg Pawlica, Michael Radtke, Theresa Rich, and Kathy Winczewski.



Elected Officials Academy Level 2 Graduates

(l to r) Sam Bolt, John Hoppough, Robert Monetza, and Kimberley Sims (not in photo).



Elected Officials Academy Level 3 Graduates

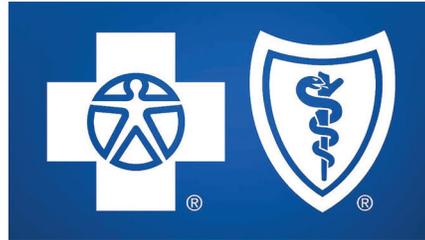
(l to r) Sandra Howland, Joe Greene, and Monica Galloway.



For all the photos from this year's CapCon and other League events, go to mml.org/flickr. Also, check out our #CapCon19 conversation on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

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... this diverse community where more than 30 languages are spoken wants to be THE recreation destination for Michigan residents. ”

The City of Hamtramck calls itself “the world in two square miles.” Now, this diverse community where more than 30 languages are spoken wants to be the recreation destination for Michigan residents.

“A place for the kids to play baseball, soccer, cricket, tennis. A place to bike,” Hamtramck Public Schools Superintendent Tom Niczay says without taking a breath. “Walking paths; a place where people can exercise; a venue for music concerts; movies in the park - or in the stadium; a place where we can have local art shows. To make it a true destination, not only for Hamtramck residents, but for the entire area.”

“I want there to be so much activity that it’s a freeway sign: Hamtramck Recreation District, this exit.”

The community is well on its way to achieving that vision, thanks to support from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and a group of unlikely partners. An \$807,000 grant from RCWJF will allow the community to create a master plan and community engagement process for Hamtramck’s 26-acre Veterans Memorial Park, which includes Keyworth Stadium and historic Hamtramck Stadium. The project also created a special partnership between the City of Hamtramck, Hamtramck Public Schools, the Michigan Municipal League, the MML Foundation, Detroit City Football Club, and the Friends of Historic Hamtramck Stadium.

“The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is enthusiastic about supporting the Michigan Municipal League Foundation and partner organizations in this endeavor,” said Jim Boyle, vice president of programs and communications for the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. “We’re particularly excited about how, through collaborative planning among several key entities, this work has great potential to benefit the youth of Hamtramck and the community in general for decades to come.”



Officials from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation celebrate the new partnership at a December 2018 press conference.



Engaging the Community

The project will include meaningful community involvement on how to best develop the Veterans Memorial Park area. That could include updating the Historic Hamtramck Stadium, which once hosted the Negro National League Detroit Stars baseball team, to include a cricket pitch, creating bike paths, and setting aside open areas for pick-up soccer. It also includes replacing the Keyworth Stadium turf, which is about a decade past its expected life span.

Lifelong resident Thomas Jankowski, 59, envisions walking paths, public restrooms, landscaping with trees and shade, and a cricket pitch at the current ball field. Jankowski owns two businesses in Hamtramck, the Whiskey in the Jar bar and Empire Disposal, which hauls waste from construction demolition projects. The bar already sees more business on days when the Detroit City Football Club plays at Keyworth and he hopes improvements envisioned in this project will draw even more people to the city—both as customers and residents.

On game days, “it looks like it was 40 or 50 years ago when I was younger,” he said. “Hamtramck has a lot to offer. It’s got a lot of potential. It’s a walking community; a friendly community.”

It’s a vision that will inevitably create opportunities for play and attract visitors for games and other events, said Dan Gilmartin, the League’s CEO and executive director.

“The League strongly supports the concept of placemaking and creating safe spaces for people to gather and enjoy,” Gilmartin said. “That’s exactly what this project does, and we’re pleased to be a part of it.”

The MML Foundation is the League’s fundraising arm and is serving as the project’s fiduciary. It’s also bringing the partners together and helping tell the story of the project’s impact on the community, Gilmartin explained.

Playing Benefits Kids and Community

Located in Wayne County and surrounded almost fully by the city of Detroit, Hamtramck has a population of more than 22,400. Settled by the French, its early residents included a large German-American farming community and, later, Polish laborers who came to work at the Dodge Brothers auto plant. Most recently, the community has attracted a large number of immigrants, many from Bangladesh, Yemen, and Bosnia.

It’s also a place where children don’t have the types of access to sports and other physical activities that research shows leads to “greater cognitive function, positive mental health, better educational outcomes, and lower healthcare costs into adulthood,” according to the Aspen Institutes’s *Sports & Society Program State of Play* report.

“In an urban environment like Hamtramck, it can be hard to find places to play,” Hamtramck Mayor Karen Majewski said. “Our parks should be places where kids can play and families can gather. This investment is really important in recognizing and developing opportunities for our kids to be active and healthy.”

In the first visible milestone, Bobcats rolled up pieces of the old turf at Keyworth Stadium on a cold, but dry day in early March. While it’s a step that’s galvanized the notoriously rabid Detroit City Football Club fan base—known for their use of red and yellow smoke bombs during matches—it’s a step

A Little History

Beyond the recreation opportunities, the two stadiums in Hamtramck's Veterans Memorial Park hold historical significance.

Built in 1930, Hamtramck Stadium was home to the Negro National League Detroit Stars from 1930-31 and again in 1933. The field was also home to the Detroit Wolves of the Negro East-West League in 1932, and to the Negro American League Detroit Stars in 1937.

The stadium hosted many Negro League legends, including Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell, and Detroit's own Norman "Turkey" Stearnes. Today, it is one of only five Negro League home ballparks still in existence and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2012. In 2014, a State of Michigan historic marker was dedicated at the site.

Owned by Hamtramck Public Schools, Keyworth Stadium was opened by former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1936. Keyworth was the first Works Progress Administration project in the state of Michigan. Today, it is used by Hamtramck middle and high school teams for soccer and football. The stadium also hosts the semi-professional Detroit City Football Club for more than a dozen matches each year.

The DCFC has been a strong supporter of Keyworth Stadium, including using a crowdfunding campaign to raise more than \$740,000 to help make structural improvements to its grandstands, and make renovations to the bleachers, locker rooms, restrooms, and lighting.

They're also a driver of economic activity for its host city. For the 2018 season, DCFC averaged nearly 5,800 attendees per match, with 85 percent of them coming from outside the city. Hamtramck bars, restaurants, and retailers cite DCFC match days as their busiest days of the year.

toward creating a public space that is thoughtful and programmed with a mind toward sustainability, DCFC owner and founder Sean Mann said.

"Keyworth is a key part of the community and a region-wide asset," he said. "This will make Hamtramck a regional destination again. It brings people into Hamtramck where they'll hit the historic restaurants and shops and make a trip of it."

The excitement and anticipation for the upcoming changes are palpable as residents talk about the future. On the day the community announced the grant, the high school band played and student athletes—many wearing white football jerseys—milled about excitedly in a large white tent set up on the Keyworth Stadium field.

Speakers shared their vision for the future, stressing the importance of the project's special sauce: cooperation. Hamtramck High School junior Amra Dzanic, who plays basketball and soccer, and runs with the cross-country team, thanked partners for taking on the project.

"I'm grateful to be able to play on new turf and am excited for what the future is going to hold for the city of Hamtramck and for our Hamtramck athletes," she said. "It's a great feeling knowing that people are willing to invest their time, money, and effort into us. It will inspire us to push even harder to achieve our goals." 

Gisgje Dávila Gendreau is the Michigan Municipal League Foundation president. You may contact her at 517.908.0306 or gisgje@mml.org.



Hamtramck School Board Trustee Showkat Chowdhury and Hamtramck City Councilmember Saad Almasmari are pleased that the master plan project for Veterans Memorial Park is underway.



COMMUNITY Excellence Award

2018 GEA Finalist

The Armory Project Owosso, Michigan

The Armory Project was designed to be a historic rehabilitation of a 103-year old armory in Owosso. The project used multiple financing sources, including an Michigan Economic Development Corporation Community Revitalization Program grant, brownfield credits, and the first ever National Trust Community Investment Corporation Small Deal Fund use of New Market and Federal Historic Tax Credits. The project transformed the building into a community use center that houses all the region's business and economic development resources, incubator and conference spaces, farmer's market, community meeting space, performance amphitheater, and the only public event restroom space in Owosso. The Armory also serves as a trail head for The Fred Meijer Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Trail and proposed Shiawassee National Water Trail. The project sits between the museum/art district and the downtown, acting as a way point, and has been a catalyst for other historic projects in the downtown. The once abandoned armory now thrives again with purpose.

Replicability

The project is a great example of public/private cooperation between the City of Owosso, State of Michigan, and Shiawassee Regional Chamber of Commerce. The real replication opportunities lie in the ability to say that a large project like this can actually happen and having the type of



partnerships and cooperation that can explore every aspect of financing options, finding solutions to difficult problems, and keeping the conversation moving forward.

Creativity and Originality

The creativity and originality came from the addition of the tax credit financing piece from the National Trust Community Investment Corporation. Through our Owosso Main Street program, we were able to obtain the first Small Deal Fund financing package in the country. The project is also original in the way the historic architecture was paired with state-of-the-art features and technology, making the space light and usable with a robust infrastructure. The building offers the only 10GB Internet service in the region, making it attractive to data driven startups.

Impact

In an impoverished community such as Owosso, the impact can be measured in many ways. The community now believes that large projects like this can happen. The Armory serves as an economic development and community resource as well as an attraction tool. We were able to take an abandoned piece of Owosso's history and bring it back to life as a community center and a place that the public can utilize in many ways. Moreover, the addition of community restrooms will assist with the many events that happen in the downtown and the visitors center will act as an information source for out-of-town visitors.



LOCAL AGENCIES NOW HAVE A LONGER WINDOW TO BID ON SURPLUS MDOT EQUIPMENT

By Dan Weingarten



Hheavy equipment no longer needed by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) now has a better chance of staying in the public domain and becoming a valuable resource for local agencies. The Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget (DTMB) is charged with collecting surplus MDOT equipment—along with property seized by police or items voluntarily surrendered at airports—and making it available to the public for purchase. Recent legislation now makes it easier for local agencies to acquire this surplus MDOT equipment.

Public Act 245 of 2016, passed by the Legislature and signed by former Gov. Rick Snyder, gives local road agencies—such as county road commissions, cities, and villages—more time to bid on surplus snow removal, road construction, or maintenance machinery. Previously, there was only a three-day window for local agencies to arrange a purchase. MDOT and the Michigan Municipal League worked together to promote PA 245, which allows local units of government more time to make their purchasing decisions.

Local agencies now have 10 business days to bid on available MDOT equipment at fair market value through an online auction prior to the equipment being offered to the public. In order to bid, agencies must register with MiBid on the Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget's Shop Surplus! web page. The latest information on the surplus program can be found there as well. The MiBid online auction site is available to browse and bid 24 hours a day at www.michigan.gov/mibid.

There are many compelling reasons for local agencies to take advantage of the surplus program. Surplus equipment costs less than buying new. By buying quality surplus, local agencies can obtain well-maintained equipment which can last for many more years. The bottom line is that surplus equipment can make for a more efficient operation, stretching each road maintenance dollar further.

The transportation department values its partnerships with local units of government and is constantly striving to

find ways to work with them and help them meet their goals. MDOT and local agencies already cooperate closely to keep the state's infrastructure working. Throughout most of the state, for example, local road agencies maintain state trunklines under contract to MDOT. Extending the time frame for local agencies to purchase surplus state equipment will strengthen this partnership to ensure maintenance and repair of our state's roads.

Questions regarding the program may be directed to the State Surplus Office at 517.241.4859 or by email at shopsurplus@michigan.gov. 

Dan Weingarten is the communications representative for the Michigan Department of Transportation Superior Region. You may contact him at 906.485.6322 ext. 136 or weingartend@michigan.gov.



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

Six-year Statute of Limitations Applies to Suit for Abatement of Public Nuisance

FACTS:

Fraser Township filed a suit seeking injunctive relief to abate a public nuisance against Harvey Haney and his wife in May 2016. The Township alleged that the Haney's were raising approximately 20 domestic hogs on their property in violation of a township ordinance and creating a nuisance due to the stench and flies drawn to the hog waste. Haney admitted he began raising hogs on the property in 2006. There was no evidence, however, that any new hogs were brought onto the property after 2006.

Although required by court rules, in their first responsive pleading the defendants failed to raise their defense that the township's claim was barred by the statute of limitations. Nor did the township, at that time, object to the defendants' failure to timely raise the defense. Nonetheless, the issue was fully briefed and arguments made as a result of defendants' motion for summary disposition, claiming that the six-year general period of limitations under MCL 600.5813 was applicable. The trial court denied the motion, reasoning that the statute of limitations did not apply against the township because the case constituted an action in rem, i.e., an action against property, not subject to MCL 600.5813.

QUESTION:

Did the defendants waive the statute of limitations defense since they failed to raise it in their first responsive pleading?

ANSWER:

No. The Court of Appeals held that, under the facts of this case, the trial court made an express holding after full participation by both parties with respect to the asserted statute of limitations defense with the township's implied consent.

QUESTION:

What is the applicable statute of limitations that applies to an abatement of a public nuisance?

ANSWER:

Six years. The Court of Appeals reversed the holding that the township's claim was for the abatement by the individual defendants of a nuisance against the public subject to the six-year general period of limitations (MCL 600.5813) and was not an action in rem. Although the township had not specified whether its action was a public or private nuisance, the Court stated that a public nuisance "involves the unreasonable interference with a right common to all members of the general public." Noting that "the period of limitations runs from the time the claim accrues" irrespective of when the damage results under MCL 600.5827, the Court held that the claim accrued when the Haney's first began to keep hogs on the property. The township asserted that each day that the Haney's continued to keep pigs on the property constituted a separate violation for which a new accrual period began. The Court held that the so-called continuing wrongs doctrine was held to be inapplicable in Michigan pursuant to the Michigan Supreme Court's decision in *Garg v Macomb Co Community Mental Health Services*, 473 Mich 1205 (2005) as applied in *Marilyn Froling v Bloomfield Hills Country Club*, 285 Mich App 264 (2009). Since there was no evidence of additional swine being added to the property resulting in a newly accrued cause of action since 2006, the Court held that the township's action was barred by the six-year statute of limitations.

Township of Fraser v Harvey Haney, No. 337842
(approved for publication January 17, 2019)

New
League Medical
Marihuana Report
Aims to Help
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Choose



AVAILABLE AT:

mml.org/resources/information/mi-med-marihuana.html

Tackling Health Care and Pension Funding Crisis

By Rick Haglund



Gladstone, a small Upper Peninsula community, is among hundreds of local governments in Michigan that have amassed billions of dollars in unfunded pension and retiree health care liabilities. After years of delaying the inevitable, Gladstone city officials are tackling the problem. Its nearly 20 retirees are not happy.

Earlier this year, the city commission voted to end its pricey retiree health insurance plan and give retirees a \$620 monthly stipend to purchase their own insurance. The payments to retirees will stop when they reach age 65. “For some of them, it was the first time they had to make any decisions on health care,” City Manager Darcy Long said. “The city did everything for them.”

Long said he doesn’t blame the retirees for being upset and attempting to get the city to reconsider. But the cost of retiree benefits was becoming unsustainable at a time when his city and many others are struggling to provide basic services in the face of revenue sharing cuts, slow-growing property values, and state-imposed tax limits.

And Gladstone couldn’t kick the unfunded liability down the road any longer, even if it wanted to. A 2017 state law requires local governments to report their unfunded retiree benefits to the Treasury Department annually and file an action plan.

The law, passed in the final days of the 2017 legislative session, calls for local government pension systems to be 60 percent funded while retiree health care benefits must be 40 percent funded. Gladstone has nearly \$2.5 million in unfunded retiree health care liabilities and \$7.2 million in unfunded pension debt, according to Treasury Department figures.

Long said Gladstone’s plan, approved by the state, will bring the city into compliance over five years. Its plan takes savings from eliminating retiree health care and using proceeds to boost pension funding. Gladstone also is sinking

about \$191,000 from this year’s budget into the pension fund. The funding represents about 5 percent of the city’s general fund budget, or about \$40 for each of the city’s 4,750 residents. “How else are we going to fund it? We’re not getting any more money from the state,” Long said.

Widespread Problem

Statewide, cities and other local units of government had \$19.4 billion in unfunded pension and other post-employment benefits, mostly retiree health care, in 2017. Of that, about \$9.8 billion was in unfunded pension debt and about \$9.6 billion was in other post-employment benefits, according to the Treasury Department.

The pension plans of most cities and other local governments are funded above the 60 percent threshold in state law. Average funding among 893 plans submitted to Treasury Department was 74 percent in 2017, according to the latest data. There were 139 underfunded plans disclosed to the state.

But retiree health care plans are far more troubled, with average funding across 524 plans of just 25 percent. Among them, 195 plans were below the 40 percent funding requirement.

Some say local governments have only themselves to blame for negotiating overly generous benefits with public worker unions and not adequately funding them over many years. But it’s not quite that simple. Retiree health care costs have exploded beyond what most could have anticipated. And strained budgets forced many local units to shrink workforces through early retirements, which added to pension costs.

Long said when he arrived in Gladstone two years ago, he found a myriad of benefit agreements adopted by city officials over the years that were inconsistent and unsustainable. Retiree health care benefits were “put into effect with no pre-planning” and paid out as they came due. “It made it very difficult to administer, if not impossible,” he said.

But Long said the state-imposed reporting and action-plan requirements were rushed and complicated, creating additional costs for local governments. State officials didn't release a list of best practices for local units until September, just two months before the action plans were due. And paperwork requirements were voluminous. Gladstone's plan was 80 pages long. "This was the most complex public policy decision put on local government—besides marijuana," Long said, chuckling.

Bill Anderson, a government finance and operations specialist at the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, said many local governments have been forced to significantly downsize their workforces over the past 20 years because of revenues that weren't keeping up with the cost of providing services.

"That caused a ripple effect through pensions systems," he said. "In a lot of cases, local governments offered early retirements" to shrink staff sizes. "There were fewer assets going into pension systems and earlier withdrawals.

If local units were operating at the employment levels of 20 years ago, the problem wouldn't be of this magnitude." Local governments in Michigan shed 10,000 jobs between 2007 and 2015, an 8 percent drop from the 125,000 people they employed in 2007, according to the Treasury Department.

Steep cuts in state revenue sharing to local governments also have hurt their ability to adequately fund retiree benefits. The state has diverted about \$8.6 billion in statutory revenue sharing since 2002 for its own use, according to the Michigan Municipal League. That's nearly as much as the total unfunded liability in local government pensions. "As much as the state wants to point fingers, there wouldn't be any problem in the pension system" if revenue sharing hadn't been slashed, he said.

Taking Action

Local governments are using a variety of actions to boost funding of retirement benefits. Rogers City is taking advantage of a state law passed in last year's lame duck session that allows cities with single-A bond ratings to issue bonds to pay down pension debt on retiree health care date. Bonding previously was restricted to communities with AA ratings or above.

Joe Hefele, city manager of Rogers City, said his community of about 2,700 on the shores of northern Lake Huron is struggling to pay \$400,000 a year to the Municipal Employees' Retirement System for pension funding with a \$2 million annual general fund budget. That payment is likely to rise to \$1 million a year if the city does nothing, he said.

Rogers City is planning to sell \$6 million in bonds to eliminate its pension fund debt. The state constitution prevents local governments from reducing pension benefits.

"The onus is on us to solve this and provide basic services," Hefele said. "We believe (selling bonds) provides the best and only opportunity to do this."

At this writing, Rogers City also had a tentative agreement with its employee unions to end retiree health care benefits for employees with more than 25 years of service. Instead, eligible workers will get a lump sum payment to buy insurance on the Obamacare health exchange when they retire.

Rogers City also has ended its defined-benefit pension plan for newly hired workers and replaced it with a 401(k)-style defined contribution plan.

Some local governments don't expect to meet state funding standards for 30 years. And it's unclear what will happen if their plans fail. Long, the Gladstone city manager said there needs to be more understanding of the retiree benefits problem by taxpayers who are ultimately paying the tab. "Nobody seems to want to talk about it," he said. "It should be discussed at the bars and the coffee shops because it affects everybody." 

Rick Haglund is a freelance writer. You may contact him at 248.761.4594 or haglund.rick@gmail.com.



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Housing North

By Sarah Lucas



Northwest Lower Michigan is a Pure Michigan poster child and one of Michigan's economic hotspots. Its beautiful beaches, idyllic countryside, and small-town charm are drawing ever-more visitors and investment. Its economy is growing, tourism is booming, and businesses are hiring.

Or, they're trying to, anyway.

As housing becomes less and less affordable, many businesses are finding it difficult to recruit the new workers that are needed for the region's growing economy. Industries from tourism to health care to manufacturing are scrambling to find help because that would-be help can't find housing they can afford, that's available to rent, in decent condition, or that isn't located long distances from jobs.

On the surface, this seems like a fairly simple problem. There's not enough housing, so build more of it. Right?

Unfortunately, building new homes isn't as simple as it sounds.

Obstacles to Affordable Housing

Between high land costs, construction labor shortages, rising material costs, limited and expensive infrastructure, and taxes, it's difficult—almost impossible—to put together financially viable projects that are affordable to the workforce. These developments require some level of subsidy, whether it's from grants, tax incentives, or land donations.

That's true everywhere, but rural Michigan has fewer options for those subsidies. The few public funding programs available to support affordable or workforce housing are mostly designed for urban areas, making it difficult for rural communities and small towns to compete for the dollars that are needed to make these types of projects work. What's more, local governments don't have the policy tools needed to incentivize or support housing development. Local zoning may not allow the type of housing that's needed. And even when all the pieces are in place, public opposition can derail the project.

Surmounting Those Obstacles

After decades of struggling with these barriers, Northwest Michigan's stakeholders are now building resources to overcome them. With stakeholder input from around the region, and support from Rotary Charities of Traverse City, the Frey Foundation, and Networks Northwest, a new organization known as Housing North was created in 2018 to support and connect housing partners, and to create new development tools and resources.

Northwest Michigan has some great models of successful development. They often feature land that was donated or sold at below market value; re-use of existing or historic buildings; redevelopment in underused commercial areas; or access to grants or tax incentives to fill financial gaps. Almost always, these ingredients for success require sustained partnerships across sectors between local governments, nonprofits, private developers, and even employers. Housing North was organized to facilitate those partnerships, connecting stakeholders with resources and partners that will allow them to move forward.

Housing North will also help those stakeholders as they work towards new incentives and subsidies—like tax relief, new funding programs, or zoning incentives—that are needed to support workforce housing development. Too often, proactive communities that want to offer or access those tools find themselves hamstrung by the lack of enabling legislation. Housing North is working with partners to explore and advance changes to state policies that will allow communities to address their housing needs at the local level.

Other efforts focus on structuring and developing flexible funding sources for housing projects that can meet local needs; creating messages and strategies to communicate solutions to the many stakeholders involved in the development process—including the public; and exploring options for employers and other community partners to participate in solutions.

As simple as it sounds, building housing is a complex problem with no silver bullets or easy solutions. The housing shortage facing Northwest Michigan requires work on multiple fronts from many partners. Housing North will help the region build and organize the resources needed for that work, creating pathways to long-term change in the region's development landscape. 

Sarah Lucas is the executive director of Housing North. You may contact her at 231.342.1242 or sarah@housingnorth.org.



Technical Assistance Moves Placemaking to the Next Level

By Melissa Milton-Pung

Michigan Municipal League has launched a new program to help communities attract investment interest in underutilized public properties.

The Developing Great Places program tackles individual sites, sets them up with solid research, and helps connect them to private developers to move the community's public-sector efforts forward.

In partnership with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, and the Michigan Municipal League Foundation, the League has already worked with over a dozen cities on advancing the redevelopment potential of prime sites in their community. To share lessons learned and inspire as many communities as possible, we've assembled our work into a new online collection of resources, success stories, and how-to guides, which are available at placemaking.mml.org/great-places.

"We're pleased to provide communities with tools to turn underperforming sites into game changing developments," said Dan Gilmartin, CEO and Executive Director of the League. "These resources will give communities strategies for increasing quality of place and attracting private investment while giving a boost to taxable value in the process."

To date, projects have included assisting several Certified Redevelopment Ready Communities® in selecting, prioritizing, and preparing redevelopment ready sites; creating momentum for site reuse on formerly blighted properties; and helping implement projects envisioned in local master plans or community meetings. In each case, the goal is the same: help Michigan communities attract development that aligns with their local identity and improves their city's economic sustainability.

"MEDC is excited to be part of the Developing Great Places initiative," said Katharine Czarnecki, senior vice president of community development for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. "This work will spur economic development and growth in communities of all shapes and sizes for years to come."

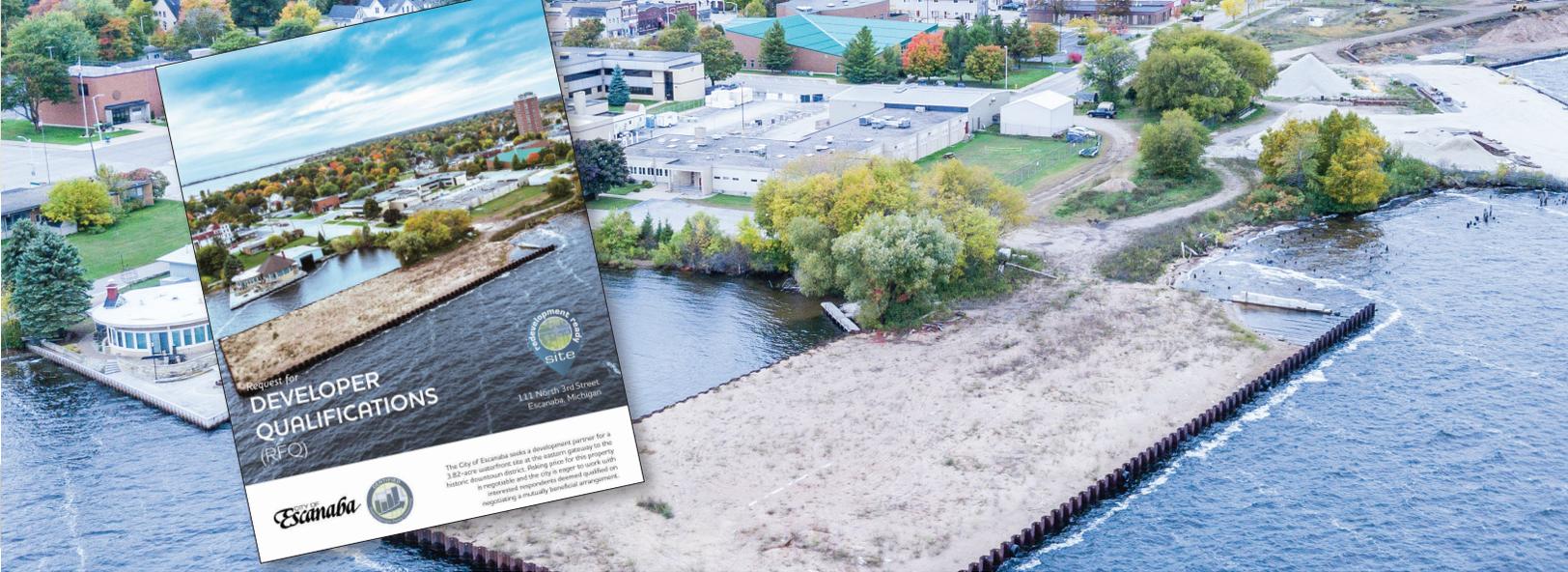
Assistance Comes in Different Shapes and Sizes

The projects are as varied as the communities themselves. In Ferndale, we helped the community with plans to create a closed loop sustainable campus focused on supporting business-to-business commerce for food-based enterprises. "The technical assistance we received on this project was instrumental in helping us get from concept to action," said Ferndale's Community and Economic Development Director, Jordan Twardy. "We knew we were going ahead with the anaerobic digester to generate energy from yard waste for use in the business incubator, but the site planning assistance we received helped us make this decision more confidently."

In Hudsonville, the emphasis was on conceptual renderings and environmental assessments for the Village Green envisioned in the city's master plan. For Roseville, it was stakeholders' strong desire to encourage new development at Utica Junction to create an anchor for a traditional walkable downtown. And in Ypsilanti, it was helping the city conduct a parking study and impact analysis of newly opened local businesses, therefore informing capital improvements planning for three separate commercial districts.

Each project is intended to help communities activate some of their underperforming properties. But perhaps more importantly, the foundation for our work with these cities is helping them clearly communicate their goals and expectations for their sites. In many cases, essential elements of the project were illustrative images and data to communicate to potential developers a good grasp of the opportunity for impact in each location.

"We often get asked, 'how can we make placemaking happen in our communities?'" said Gary Heidel, Acting Executive Director of officer for MSHDA. "This new initiative lays out the how and provides a road map to placemaking. This work helps make placemaking possible, and that will make our communities more attractive places to live, work, and enjoy."



Escanaba seeks proposals for a city-owned lot near downtown.

Some communities, such as Middleville and Escanaba, received expert help last year from the League through an RRC-funded predevelopment assistance program. Now, they're using those tools.

For Middleville, the focus was on a municipally-owned lot in the village center. The site is near a new riverwalk on the Thornapple River, a canoe livery, a popular restaurant, and a farmer's marketplace which doubles as an ice rink in the winter. A mixed-use historic building is also currently being rehabilitated across the street. These features made it a good candidate for a new infill building to address the region's increased short-term housing demands.

"We have long wanted to find a new use for this former hotel site that would add vitality to our community," said Duane Weeks, Middleville village manager. "We now see a new future for this lot that will benefit the whole downtown area."

For Escanaba, it was a site on the shores of Lake Michigan within walking distance of downtown, on a city-owned parcel and former county jail lot. The League's consultant team provided data-driven advice and market analyses to help the community determine not only what local leaders wanted, but what was financially feasible in a unique regional market. This work resulted in a Request for Proposals (RFQ) package, which the city is now using as they work with MEDC to promote the site.

Middleville seeks proposals for a housing development on a site near the new riverwalk.



RFPs Lead to Action

And as for clinching the deal, Allegan and Muskegon have recently announced good news. Allegan, which launched its riverfront redesign years ago as part of our inaugural class of PlacePlans, is abuzz about a new proposal for a boutique hotel downtown. The developer was attracted by the RFQ developed by the League's consultant team late last year. Muskegon, meanwhile, is moving forward with a massive lakefront development that received formal city approval last month. The League, MEDC, and MSHDA facilitated that deal through development of an RFQ and legal assistance with title and environmental issues.

More projects are underway. Even if your community is not eligible for direct assistance via MEDC, League staff has distilled their experiences into "how-to guides" that are applicable to any community, large or small. They are available at placemaking.mml.org/great-places/. 

Melissa Milton-Pung is a civic innovations program coordinator for the League. You may contact her at 734.669.6328 or mmiltonpung@mml.org

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Michigan Association of Mayors

By James M. Rynberg

The Michigan Association of Mayors (MAM) annually sends out a notice to the mayors/presidents of Michigan cities and villages to either a) renew their membership in MAM, or b) consider having their community represented by joining or rejoining MAM. All of us, especially in today's world, need to take advantage of every opportunity to have our voices heard. One very effective way to do that is to participate in MAM.

As we outlined in our December 2018 notice to Michigan mayors/presidents, in addition to the usual acknowledgment of your membership (certificate of membership, lapel pin, and decal) you will also receive a recognition ribbon at the Michigan Municipal League's Capital Conference. Beyond that, your participation in MAM also offers the following:

- MAM Summer Workshop—August 1-2 in Port Huron, hosted by Mayor Pauline Repp
- MAM Legislative Breakfast—Held during Capital Conference, this event provides a chance to talk with your legislative representatives
- Participate in Listserv—An on-line forum that encourages communication between colleagues
- Mayors' Exchange—Perhaps the most underused opportunity for community communication and collaboration.

In an effort to build interest in revitalizing the Mayors'/Presidents' Exchange, your MAM officers discussed methods of making this program seem more 'doable' and 'relevant' for

communities to consider. As part of that discussion, it was suggested we have a couple representatives talk about their experience with this program.

Pauline Repp, Mayor of Port Huron since 2009, offers the following: "Port Huron has participated in Mayors' Exchange for many years (other than a break of about 10 years during the economic downturn). Last year, we re-initiated the program and exchanged with {the City of} Holland and it was a wonderful time with many ideas shared. It reminded me of how important it is to look outside of your own community for solutions to issues facing us all. It is an extremely worthwhile endeavor at a minimal cost."

Since I have a little more "road under my wheels," I am happy to share some observations that the City of Fremont has experienced in the years I have been honored to serve. When I assumed the role of mayor in 2004, former Mayor Ray Rathbun had been very active in MAM and MML. A significant part of his leadership was seeing that Fremont participated in the Mayors' Exchange program— an opportunity that offered



MAM is a frequent sponsor of the Legislative Breakfast at the League's Capital Conference.

members of the participating city councils a chance to interact and accompanying members of our city staff the opportunity to meet and share experiences.

Beyond that, our community implemented a variety of initiatives, as a direct result of these exchanges. We began our public art program; place flowers throughout the community annually; installed a community disc golf program; revitalized our skate park; repurposed a two-block downtown area into a calming, pedestrian-friendly, welcoming area; and installed a pavilion which houses our farmers' market and provides a venue for various outdoor activities throughout the year. The idea for each one of these accomplishments was borrowed from one of our exchange communities. Through the years, these communities were and are more than willing to share their successes. Isn't that what we are all about? Sharing successes with each other as we continue to build our communities, our state, and our nation?

When you consider your MAM membership, also consider initiating or revitalizing an exchange program for your community. If you or your community have not hosted a Mayors'/Presidents' Exchange, please contact the Michigan Municipal League office. The staff will be pleased to offer whatever assistance they can to help you have a meaningful and value-added experience. We look forward to having you as a representative of our partner communities in this great state. Together we can.



MAM members enjoy a boat cruise at the 2018 Summer Workshop in Bay City.

Those that know me better also know that I invariably end with a quote:

"The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little 'extra.'" Jimmy Johnson, former head coach of the Dallas Cowboys.

Since we have all been elected to do a little extra, let us come together under MAM and be willing to share our communities with each other. 

James M. Rynberg is the mayor of the City of Fremont and president of the Michigan Association of Mayors. You may contact him at 231.924.2101 or mayor@cityoffremont.net.



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Q. Didn't the Legislature make changes to the fireworks legislation?

A. Yes, new legislation—PA 635 of 2018—reduces the number of days per year that consumers can set off fireworks. Previously, there were approximately 30 days per year that fireworks could be shot off until 1 a.m. The new law reduces the number of days to 12, requires fireworks vendors to provide a notification of the allowable dates and times to shoot fireworks with every purchase, and increases civil fines to \$1,000 for each violation of the law.

In addition, the law states:

“A local unit of government may enact an ordinance regulating the ignition, discharge, and use of consumer fireworks, including, but not limited to, an ordinance prescribing the hours of the day or night during which a person may ignite, discharge, or use consumer fireworks. If a local unit of government enacts an ordinance under this subsection, the ordinance shall not regulate the ignition, discharge, or use of consumer fireworks on the following days after 11 a.m.:

- (a) December 31 until 1 a.m. on January 1.
- (b) The Saturday and Sunday immediately preceding Memorial Day until 11:45 p.m. on each of those days.
- (c) June 29 to July 4 until 11:45 p.m. on each of those days.
- (d) July 5, if that date is a Friday or Saturday, until 11:45 p.m.
- (e) The Saturday and Sunday immediately preceding Labor Day until 11:45 p.m. on each of those days.”

Q. Didn't the Legislature make changes to TIF reporting?

A. Yes, new reporting requirements took effect on Jan. 1, 2019 for municipalities and authorities. Requirements include sending a copy of the current TIF plan to the Department of Treasury; holding two informational meetings a year; posting TIF information on your municipal website; and sending an annual report to Treasury, the municipality, and the governing body of each taxing unit levying taxes captured by the authority. For more information, see the League's Economic Development Tools Fact Sheets, available at mml.org:

- Financing Tools
- Corridor Improvement Authority
- Downtown Development Authority
- Local Development Financing Authority
- Neighborhood Improvement Authority
- Waterfront Tax Increment Financing

Q. Didn't the Legislature recently amend the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)?

A. Yes, in late 2018 the Legislature made two significant changes to Michigan's FOIA in response to municipalities' challenges in responding to the widespread Emily request. The first change prevents anonymous FOIA requests or requests from a person with only a first name and sparse contact information. The second change prevents a municipality from being stuck waiting indefinitely for a response when it requests a deposit or final payment after it receives a deposit for a FOIA request. It also saves a municipality from storing records during that indefinite waiting period that could otherwise be destroyed under state law.

1) Name and Contact Information Changes

A requestor must include his/her complete name, address, and either a valid telephone number or email address; and, if a request is made by a person other than an individual, the complete name, address, and valid telephone number or email address of the person's agent (who is an individual). Addresses must comply with U.S. Postal Service addressing standards.

2) Deposit Changes/Notice Requirements

If a municipality requests a deposit and does not receive it within 45 days, and the requestor did not file an appeal of the amount, then the FOIA request is considered abandoned by the requestor. The municipality does not have to fulfill the request. In conjunction, the municipality must include a due date for when it must receive the deposit with the deposit letter. The deposit letter is considered received three days after it is sent, making the due date 48 days after the date the letter is sent. See our Fact Sheet “Responding to Emily FOIA” at mml.org.

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

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