

the review

November / December 2022

the official magazine of the  michigan municipal league

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THIS USED TO BE NORMAL

**Public Health
Community Wealth Building**
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- B. Patio Nook
- C. Back Garden
- D. Away Room
- E. Pocket Study
- F. Living Room



GREEN FACTORS

**Harassment of Local
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Housing Pattern Book
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See mml.org for the electronic version of the magazine and past issues.

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the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

Volume 95, Number 6

We love where you live.

The Michigan Municipal League is dedicated to making Michigan's communities better by thoughtfully innovating programs, energetically connecting ideas and people, actively serving members with resources and services, and passionately inspiring positive change for Michigan's greatest centers of potential: its communities.

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Public Health

Did you know your zip code can help predict how long you'll live?

How about this: If a person is hit by a car going 20 mph, one in ten will die. At 40 mph, only one in ten will survive.

Or this: According to a report from the Surgeon General, Americans on average are sicker and die sooner than their peers in comparable wealthy countries... but we spend more on healthcare than any other nation in the world.

All these factoids have one thing in common: they are issues of public health. And public health builds community wealth. It's that simple.

In the most basic medical sense, health is the absence of disease. But public health is not just about healthcare. It's about all the environmental, economic, and social conditions that promote the safety and wellbeing of communities as a whole. It includes access to healthcare, but it also includes safe and affordable housing, social and civic connection, reliable transportation, proximity of green spaces and recreation, access to nutritious food, and opportunities for employment.

When this foundation of basic human needs is met, people thrive. And when people thrive, communities thrive.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, our biology is only one small part of what determines our overall health. The reality is most health outcomes have nothing to do with what happens in a hospital or doctor's office. What matters more are the conditions in which we are born, live, work, learn, play, and age.

Health equity is inescapably linked with economic and social equity. If you're born into poverty, live in an unsafe and threatening environment, and have few opportunities for a good education and gainful employment, chances are you will die years or even decades sooner than your more fortunate neighbors.

So how can we in local government better the odds for so many members of our populace? And why should we care?

We care because when any neighborhood suffers these impacts, the entire community suffers. The solutions start with good public policy based on the principles and strategies of community wealth building.

Beyond basics like clean water and sanitation, safe and affordable housing is critical. What we build and don't build has a direct impact on the health and sustainability of our community.

We can transform vacant lots into pocket parks and community gardens. We can convert empty commercial buildings into civic centers and open our green spaces to free music and entertainment events. We can provide community development funds to assist in the creation of arts and cultural programs. We can turn parking lots into weekly farmers markets, and paint murals on faceless walls.

Municipalities with more people walking and cycling have fewer traffic injuries and deaths per mile traveled. So, we can add parking-protected bike lanes in commercial corridors and slow zones on residential streets to make cycling and walking safer, and use traffic-calming tools like speed cushions and traffic circles. We can build non-motorized paths that further encourage walking and cycling for both recreation and work commutes.

In short, we can use all the tools in our placemaking toolbox to improve public health by creating safe, vibrant, and inclusive places where people want to live, work, and grow.

In this issue you'll read about our new *Pattern Book Homes* guide, and an eye-opening study on harassment of local officials. We'll also share all the successes and highlights from Convention 2022. Last but not least, our Community Wealth Building article will focus on the physical and mental health benefits of outdoor recreation, and a Community Excellence Award entry for a local city-township mental health clinic—which takes us right back to where we began with this column: public health.



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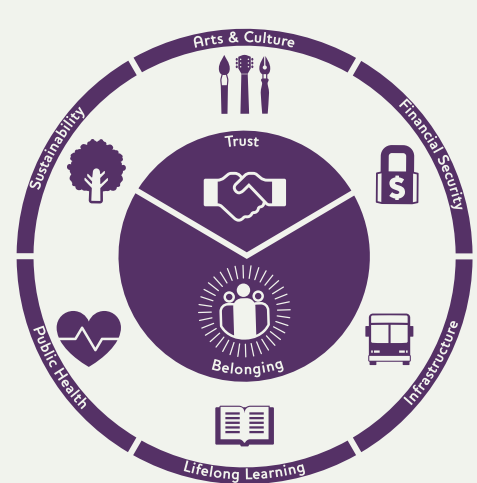
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Public Health and Local Government Action

Compiled by Kim Cekola



The State of Michigan illustrated the profound effect of outdoor recreation with its eponymous *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (SCORP 2018–2022), which is heavily excerpted here. “Every community in Michigan is within 50 miles of a state park or recreation area, and even closer to numerous local and regional parks or recreation spaces... They provide numerous social, health, economic, and environmental benefits...” As a pillar of community wealth building, public health encompasses the safety, health, and wellbeing of residents. The following pages include examples of both physical and mental health responses by municipalities: local recreation and physical and mental health facility projects submitted to the League through our Community Excellence Awards. While mental health may not be the typical issue municipal governments confront, police have felt the toll of mental health calls in their communities.

Michigan has world-class recreation assets. Our Great Lakes, inland lakes, rivers and streams, forests, sand dunes, and other natural resources provide an unparalleled foundation to support outdoor activity. Across ownership types, Michigan has more than 8 million acres of public land. Our 103 state parks and recreation areas, state forests, and game areas, as well as the hundreds of federal, regional, and local parks help keep our residents healthy, advance the prosperity of the state, and connect people to the outdoors while providing opportunities to take part in a wide range of outdoor activities.

On a statewide basis, residents are highly satisfied in terms of both the quality and quantity of outdoor recreation. Many of our statewide recreation assets were designed to serve as destination locations, drawing visitors from across the state and around the country for weekend and extended trips. The state has excelled in developing innovative funding models such as the Michigan Natural Resource Trust Fund, the State Park Endowment Fund, and the Recreation Passport to support the acquisition and development of these spaces.

These innovative funding models have helped us develop our recreation infrastructure at the state and local levels. However, Michigan’s recreation needs continue

Public Health—quality of life disparities are recognized and addressed while services are focused on increasing health impacts and fostering the human experience in public life.

to evolve. Now, greater emphasis is emerging around the need to further develop funding mechanisms that support maintenance of existing recreation assets to ensure that they continue providing high-quality experiences for Michigan’s residents and visitors. Additionally, greater emphasis is emerging around the need to enhance recreation opportunities close to home. While residents are satisfied with the amount and quality of outdoor recreation opportunities within 30 minutes of their house, there is a lower rate of satisfaction than on a statewide basis. Enhancing recreation opportunities close to home can help ensure that our communities are desirable places to live, enhance our economic prosperity, and support a healthy and active lifestyle for all Michiganders. For example, recreation amenities increase property values; attract visitors, employees, and businesses; and enhance physical activity levels, leading to decreased obesity rates.

Differences in participation and satisfaction rates also become evident when reviewing survey results for different demographic groups and races. Michigan’s investments in recreation amenities, programming, and staffing should seek to ensure that recreation opportunities are connected and accessible to residents and visitors of all backgrounds, abilities, means, and geographic locations.” (*Michigan Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2018–2022*, by Public Sector Consultants for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, (p. 41).

MUNICIPAL OUTDOOR RECREATION PROJECTS

Byron Canoe and Kayak Launch

The Village of Byron lost the majority of its historic downtown due to an arson fire in 2012. This devastated our tight-knit community. The village lies on the beautiful Shiawassee River and we're rediscovering the river as a valuable asset that draws people to the area for nature, recreation, and fun. We recognized that there is great potential for tapping into the river for canoeing, kayaking, and river walks. With that in mind, we completed a new canoe and kayak launch near downtown on the Shiawassee River Heritage Water Trail. Locals had been using the site as a makeshift boat launch for several years, but it was rocky, muddy, and unstable. On top of that, its unofficial status as a safe put-in discouraged many people from using it or even seeing the river as a valuable part of the community. The new launch is much more attractive and inviting, complete with parking and informative signage. It offers residents and visitors an opportunity to paddle their way into the heart of the village.



Community Impact:

We wanted to strengthen the perception of this part of the Shiawassee River as an attractive recreation spot and foster a sense of stewardship for the river in our residents and visitors. Since completing the launch improvements, we have seen a significant increase in use and it's helping launch other development activities in the community. Plus, this project has given a little hope to our community that we can bounce back from tragedy.

Gibraltar Downtown Kayak Launch

The City of Gibraltar spent many years planning, securing funding, engineering, and building a public access kayak launch in its city center. This new ADA compliant and barrier free accessible launch builds on a strong movement in southeast Michigan to take advantage of our greatest natural resource, the Detroit River and Lake Erie basin. Installed in a unique location, the building of this launch meets location priorities listed in the downtown development plan and builds off a synergy with adjacent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Properties located to the north, Gibraltar Recreation Properties located to the west, and Huron Clinton Metro Park properties located to the south. The location is also very significant because of the natural canal system that allows you to kayak from one end of town to another, providing a unique transportation option.



Community Impact:

The kayak launch location is in the city's center. It provides for a unique opportunity to improve one of the main focal points of the city. In addition, synergy is created with surrounding property uses (recreation, food, etc.) that leads to a vibrant downtown full of energy and pedestrian activity. Public access to what is normally a private resource (waterfront, and water access) is provided by the development.

Mount Pleasant Fitness Trail

The City of Mt. Pleasant completed a fitness trail with an outdoor fitness equipment station in Island Park. The trail connects an existing semi-circular trail at the south and north ends of the park's 50 acres, while creating a circular paved pathway around the park's perimeter. A prefabricated pedestrian bridge was brought in to replace an existing aging pedestrian bridge. The new bridge connects Island Park with Pickens Fields, incorporating an existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the overall site design. The addition of the exercise equipment area is unique to the park and the city and provides the opportunity for users to utilize the exercise equipment in an outdoor setting.



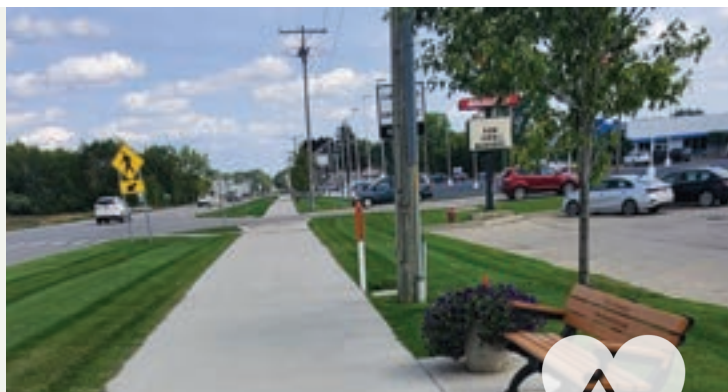
Community Impact:

The completion of the fitness trail and replacement of the pedestrian bridge continues to allow park visitors convenient and safe access from Island Park to Pickens Field to the north. The old pedestrian bridge had fallen into disrepair and if left in place, would have posed a safety threat to pedestrians crossing the bridge. Both Island Park and Pickens Fields are two heavily visited areas near

downtown that are frequented by individuals and families utilizing the park's many attractions, including tennis courts, basketball courts, skate park, pavilions, playgrounds, amphitheater, and baseball/softball fields. The completion of the circular fitness path allows for convenient access to all areas of the park and the outdoor fitness area encourages park visitors to focus on their personal health and fitness.

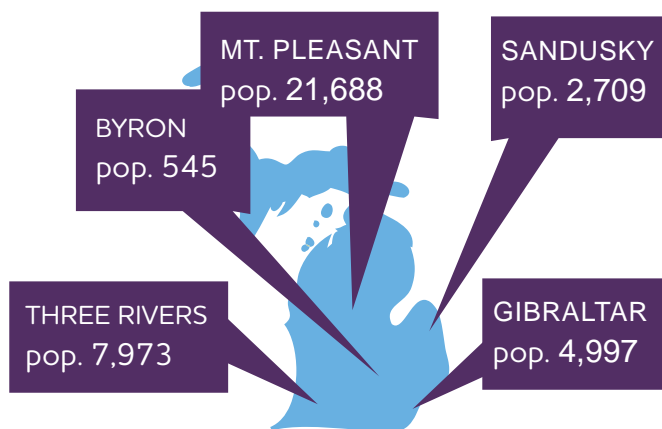
Sandusky Non-Motorized Pathway

The City of Sandusky is a low-moderate income community, and many citizens rely on other means of transportation to traverse our community. Over the years, there have been many pedestrian/vehicle accidents due to citizens having to navigate along the edge of M-46 next to vehicles. The city installed a one mile plus non-motorized pathway to safely connect neighborhoods to the commercial and service districts. The path runs along the south side of M-46 and is 10-feet wide with benches and trees placed along the mile stretch. In addition, on the north side of M-46 and Dawson Street there is a newly developed path that is 6-feet wide and stretches over 3,000 feet, with new trees and benches along the pathway.



Community Impact:

Community members young and seasoned can safely enjoy the new pathway to connect with local shopping, restaurants, banks, and service-related businesses. This pathway is more than just a connection to business and amenities in our community—it has become a place of recreation for our residents to run, walk, or bike safely. We are excited for the future phases of the pathway which will connect our residents to the downtown, industrial park, hospital, and our community parks. One of our parks also has an already-established one -mile loop that has become a destination for residents and visitors alike. We look forward to the day when all of our community is linked with pathways to connect our residents.



MUNICIPAL OUTDOOR RECREATION PROJECTS



Community Impact:

The sports complex original plan left space open for other amenities to be added as time and money allowed. Four projects came up almost immediately with funding from local citizens and businesses. A kid's playground, two pickleball courts, an 18-hole disc golf course and a paved 1-mile-long walking path around the perimeter. These attractions have opened up the area to all age groups to come and enjoy an activity or just being outside for a walk. This has made the park an activity hub for a much broader range of people with specialized interests that we didn't anticipate. There is still room for more sports fields or activities to be added as donors want to come forward. The park is serving the interests of a diverse group of citizens and making it a true gathering place for people of all walks of life.

Three Rivers Youth Sports Complex

Our project is an 80-acre youth sports complex that was born from a community visioning session and has morphed into a recreational hub for a variety of interests. It was completed through a partnership between the City of Three Rivers, St. Joseph County, and a local 501c3 (River Country Sports Commission) formed by parents to represent Little League Baseball, AYSO Soccer, and Rocket Football. St. Joseph County provided an initial \$2.8 million dollars donation toward the park and the city and volunteers raised another \$2,047,250 million dollars through a fund-raising campaign to build and maintain the park. The city has an agreement with the sports commission that they operate the park during the playing seasons and take care of maintenance costs during that portion of the year. The city maintains ownership of the park and is responsible for the buildout and long-term maintenance.

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CO-RESPONSE (CORE) CRISIS OUTREACH PROGRAM

Mental Illness

"Mental illnesses are common in the United States. Nearly one in five U.S. adults live with a mental illness (52.9 million in 2020). Mental illnesses include many different conditions that vary in degree of severity, ranging from mild to moderate to severe."

(National Institute of Mental Health)

Social Isolation

"In recent decades, people in the United States and around the world have experienced soaring rates of social isolation, with profound impacts on health and well-being. These impacts are felt most acutely by people who are marginalized because of their race, income, location, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Isolation is also exacerbated by commonly-experienced disruptive events such as changes in a person's family, home, or employment status. Although efforts to address social isolation began before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the virus further exacerbated health disparities and shuttered many of the gathering places that had served as antidotes to isolation."

(Socially Connected Communities: Solutions for Social Isolation; Healthy Places by Design, 2021)

Birmingham Police Chief Mark Clemence was more troubled about the situation in his community than in all of his 37 years in law enforcement—and as he spoke to his fellow law enforcement leaders in neighboring communities, he knew they were experiencing similar problems, where too many police calls were those involving mental health issues. Many of the calls for help were from the same people, at the same addresses—"frequent flyers," in their parlance. Rather than assisting, Clemence and many local officers felt helpless at their inability to provide relief and support to those in need.

(The Oakland Press, 8/6/2021)

The Co-Response (CORE) Crisis Outreach Program is a partnership between law enforcement and mental health professionals to better serve people in mental health crisis in Birmingham and surrounding communities. In September of 2021, the Auburn Hills, Birmingham, and Bloomfield Township Police Departments partnered together with the Oakland County Health Network to contract a full-time clinician to work within the police departments. The mental health clinician co-responds to crisis calls for service with police

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BLOOMFIELD
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officers, conducts follow-up with community members and families, and provides additional resources. Crisis calls for service are dynamic in nature and can be scary for those suffering a mental health crisis. The clinician has the expertise to assist in de-escalation at the scenes and meet people where they are in times of need. She provides additional support, resources, and advice to not only people in crisis, but to law enforcement officers responding to these types of calls.

There are police departments with a full-time social worker on staff, but what makes our program unique is the agreement between the Oakland County Health Network and the three municipalities. The mental health clinician is employed by the Oakland County Health Network, so she is knowledgeable and directly connected to all mental health resources available within the county. This position bridges the gap between local law enforcement and these essential county resources.

"In my 37 years as a police officer, I've never seen the number and type of mental health issues we're seeing," Clemence said. "About 50 percent of the mental health calls we're going on are people under the age of 30. Twenty-four percent are under 17, and 26 percent are between 17 and 30 years of age. There's a huge substance abuse issue. COVID-19 is an X factor—we haven't had normal socialization, and people have been cooped up." *(The Oakland Press, 8/6/2021)*

Community Impact:

The need for professionals with the training and background to assist those experiencing a mental health crisis is more important now than ever. Having a clinician who can assist law enforcement by deescalating a situation increases the wellbeing and safety of the person in crisis, officers at the scene, and the entire community.

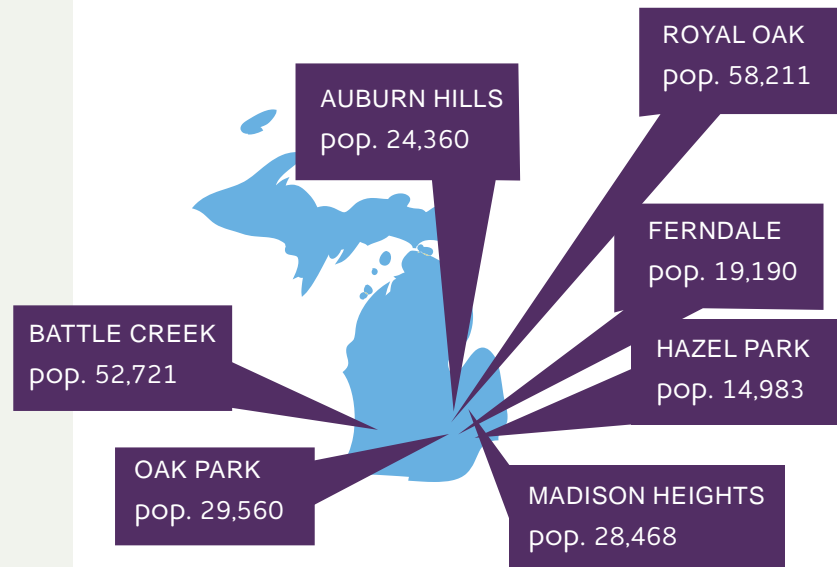


PUBLIC EMPLOYER SPONSORED HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTERS

Public employer sponsored health and wellness centers have been introduced by cities as an alternative to the traditional health care model that will save money and improve the health and wellness of employees. At the centers, high quality care can be delivered on-site at a lower cost to the employer than the traditional model, and at little or no cost to the employee. The centers concentrate on basic health care and wellness services. The model provides quick service at little or no cost to employees, who otherwise may not have chosen to obtain health care service. The centers have been shown to be better at the identification of pre-chronic conditions and the treatment of various highly expensive chronic conditions. In addition to saving money, these centers also improve morale, presenteeism and productivity as employees can access and receive quality wellness-focused care in a timely manner. When the staff is healthy, productivity increases.

The on-site center is an exciting but relatively new concept for municipalities in Michigan. The parties involved see this as a unique opportunity. How can "we save on health care costs without sacrificing care and without increasing employee costs? Is that even possible? The short answer is yes. The successful collaboration that developed, implemented, and is now maintaining an alternative for not only providing health care but also reducing costs, would best describe the creativity and originality of our project.

The Battle Creek center is comprised of the following entities: the City of Battle Creek, Calhoun County, and Toyota Tsusho America. In January 2015, Musashi Auto Parts and Systex Products Corp were added. The public/private nature of the Battle Creek collaborative is seen as not only a budget impactor but also an economic development tool center. MiLife Health and Wellness Center was created from a collaboration between the cities of Ferndale, Madison Heights, and Royal Oak through a shared services agreement. Oak Park and Hazel Park joined the collaboration in 2018. These five communities are very close in proximity, and the center is located in the lower level of the Madison Heights City Hall building. It was designed this way to provide very easy access to staff, but also to save on building/lease costs.



How are the centers unique and creative?

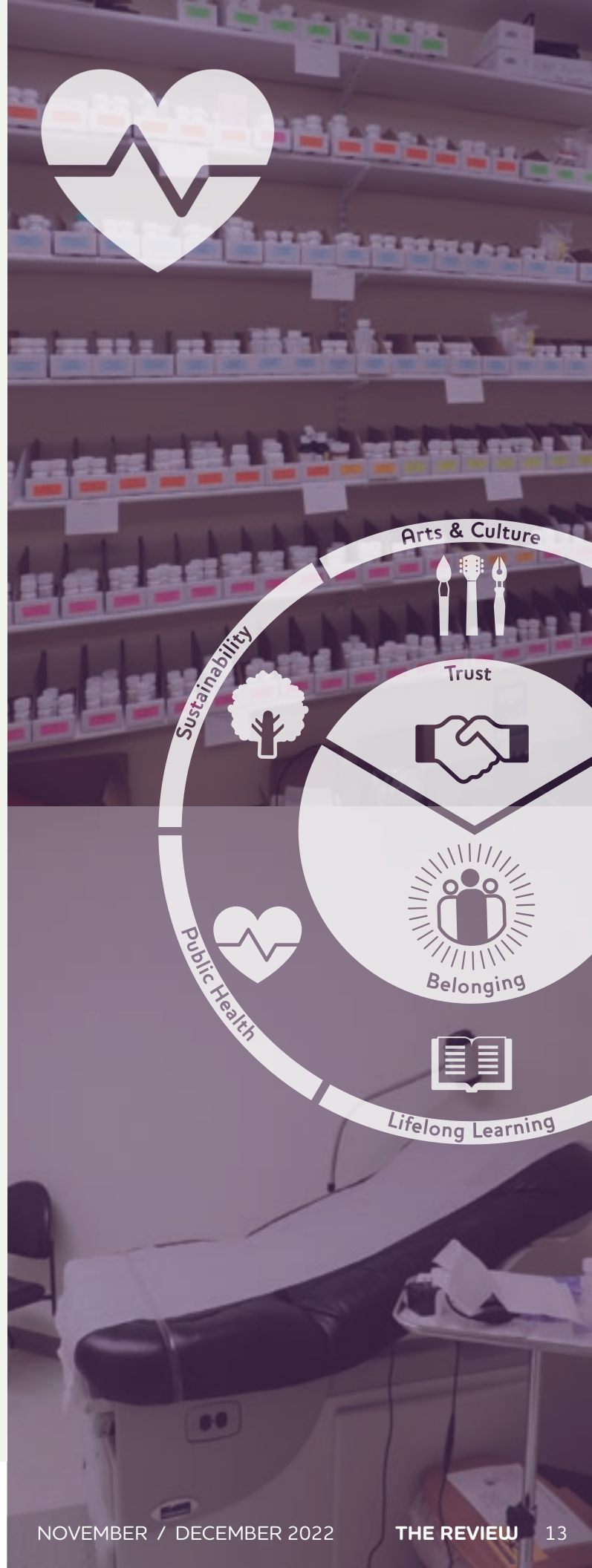
They provide a brand-new opportunity to:

- Reverse the rising healthcare trend using a direct-cost pass through model for delivering primary care to employees/retirees
- Improve employees' health and productivity with a Wellness Program that engages them and can focus on identifying and treating chronic and pre-chronic conditions
- Provide a collaboration opportunity—partner with other cities, schools, or key private sector employers
- Increase collective purchasing power to negotiate lower pricing direct with providers and suppliers
- A more cost-effective approach to managing workers' compensation and occupational health services
- Lower or no co-pays for office visits, blood draws and generic drugs dispensed at the center
- Provide easier and more convenient access to care for employees
- Create an environment that provides a greater opportunity to engage in wellness
- Offer a sensible alternative for seeking medical services that does NOT take the place of an employee/retiree primary plan

Replicability

The model is quite easy to replicate and has already been replicated. We see a tremendous opportunity to develop a “network” of health and wellness primary care centers around the State of Michigan. Municipalities are uniquely positioned to partner together, leveraging their employee populations, to seek out alternative ways to deliver health care services in a more cost-effective manner.

It has been easy to replicate due to the across the board understanding and support of the model itself. Our vendor at the time of origin, CareHere, has over 170 centers across the nation and has developed a turn-key process for getting the centers up and running. Premise Health bought CareHere but all the local representatives and staff stayed the same. In addition, all public sector communities involved have strongly embraced this collaboration in that we are all open to each other's ideas regarding what works, what doesn't work, what would be more efficient, etc. We hope our communities' adoption of this model, and the success we have found in it, will make other community leaders consider this option for their community.



Community Impact

From a budgetary perspective, solutions that result in less funds being spent on medical costs (i.e., chronic conditions/ events), frees up funding to be used in a different area within the budget. This greatly impacts the community as it can shift money that otherwise would have been used to fund health care to other services that benefit the citizens and community as a whole. City collaborations on employer health and wellness centers set the stage for competitive communities and cost savings. Within the first year of operations, city savings was \$210,700; employee savings was \$177,294; and Occ Med Savings was \$16,000+ (6 months).

From a health-related perspective, this center model has been able to serve employees who had not previously seen a physician in a long period of time. Chronic conditions have been identified and are now being treated that could have led to unknown or unforeseen major high-cost situations such as a heart attack, stroke, etc. Employees who feel better are much more likely to perform at a higher level. This impacts our communities because we are able to obtain greater productivity from the very lean staff we all have. From a morale standpoint, this has positively impacted our communities because employees receiving these services are able to do so at no cost. Staff is thankful for this option

because the implementation of this model has afforded some of our communities the ability to hold off on requiring greater employee contributions for health care, or cuts in the benefits currently offered.

From a labor relations standpoint, the center has also improved relationships with our unions, which further impacts our community as each municipality faces labor costs due to employee-related issues. Demonstrating success, one center at a time, will position municipalities to grow and invest in their most valuable asset—their employees, the public servants that make local government work. All stakeholders, employers, and employees alike, have been battling over the re-distribution of the total health care dollars spent. Why not pursue a more innovative approach by creating a health care plan alternative that recognizes that employees must have access to affordable, quality care; that places the “patient” first and simultaneously saves money for the employer and taxpayers. The health and wellness primary care centers do just that. Municipalities small and large can collaborate, pool their resources, and use the savings generated through operating a center to re-invest and expand the center. This would include the ability to explore additional medical service offerings to employees while continuing to lower overall costs and impacting a long-term health care trend.



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Breaking Down the Statewide Survey Regarding Harassment and Violence of Local Governments

By Morgan Schwanky

The Center for Local, State and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan's Ford School of Public Policy recently published its latest policy brief. For the first time, CLOSUP surveyed Michigan's local government officials and employees on their experiences with harassment, threats, and violence.

We want to break down the results from this survey and look at its key findings. We also will explore the implications of the survey's findings and what they mean for Michigan communities.

The facts and statistics discussed in this article were found in the report created through the analysis of the surveys turned in from a variety of local government staff. For a copy of the brief "Statewide survey finds a majority of Michigan local governments experiencing harassment or other abuse," go to closup.umich.edu.

The survey found that 47 percent of the state's top officials have personally experienced harassment over the last few years as part of their role in local government.

This 47 percent included both elected and appointed local officials from counties, cities, townships, and villages throughout the state. The harassment includes online and in-person harassment in the form of disrespectful or hostile comments, the use of slurs and/or other graphic language, shouting, and rude or aggressive gestures.

The survey also provided some insight as to how likely an official would be to report incidents depending on a variety of variables. It was determined that harassment is reported more commonly in areas that have more than 5,000 residents. In these areas, two-thirds of officials' report having these issues. But communities with 5,001-10,000 residents have the highest reporting percentage. These percentages decline in both directions of population size, with a less severe decline as the population rises.

Four in ten officials in rural areas report problems with harassment, and the percentage rises to 49 percent in mostly rural areas. It steadily rises to 66 percent in mostly urban, and up to 70 percent in urban areas.

Only 15 percent of jurisdictions statewide report being subjected to “actual” threats, while 3 percent report violent actions (e.g., physical assault or destruction of property). However, in areas with more than 30,000 residents, 7 percent of officials report violent actions, and 33 percent report experiencing threats.

Top officials from 50 percent of jurisdictions say they have not personally experienced violence, threats, or harassment as part of their role within local government.

But top officials in Michigan’s communities are not the only ones experiencing this rise in harassment, threats, or violence. 53 percent of jurisdictions report these issues against any members of their local government, including themselves.

Along with 47 percent of top officials, 28 percent of board/councilmembers, 23 percent of clerks or election staff/workers, and 26 percent of other jurisdiction personnel also reported experiencing these same issues.

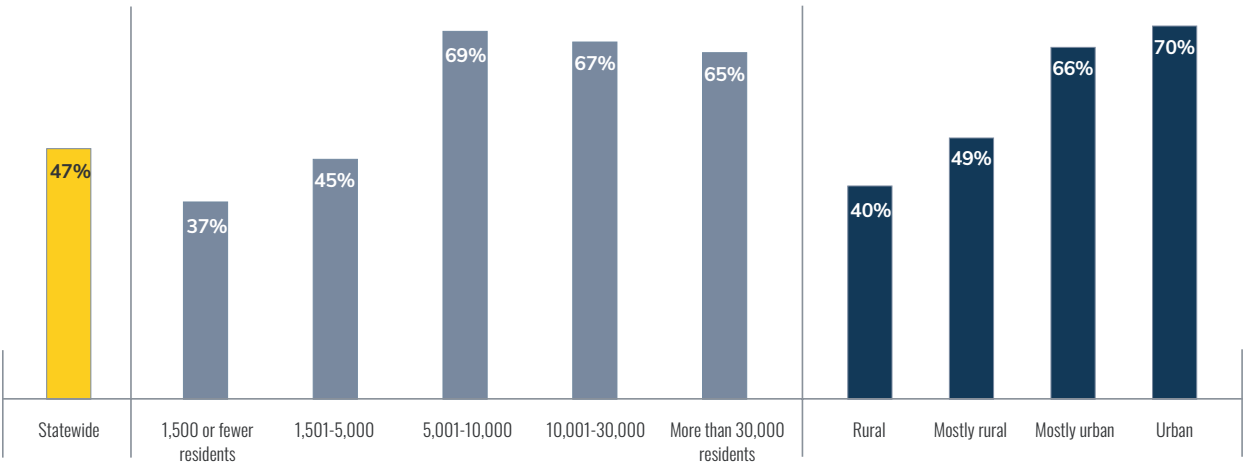
The organization put out a press release addressing their findings, and the implications that can be drawn. The following quotes were originally provided for that press release.

“Unfortunately, these findings are indicators of the problems facing our democracy today. Local leaders generally want their residents engaged in their government’s work, but not like this,” said Tom Ivacko, executive director of CLOSUP. “We’re very concerned about the health of our democracy and will continue to monitor it for growing threats.”

The organization believes that there are multiple factors contributing to this rise of this poor (and in some cases unlawful) treatment of our local governments. “In the climate of misinformation about government, and questioning of election officials, this report is disheartening,” said Natalie Fitzpatrick, the project manager on the survey. “These officials report they see negative impacts from the worsening political climate on the willingness of people to work or serve in the jurisdiction’s government. Long-term, that could create problems.”

Figure 1

Percent of jurisdictions where top officials report experiencing harassment over the last few years as part of their role in local government, by population category and urban-rural self-identification

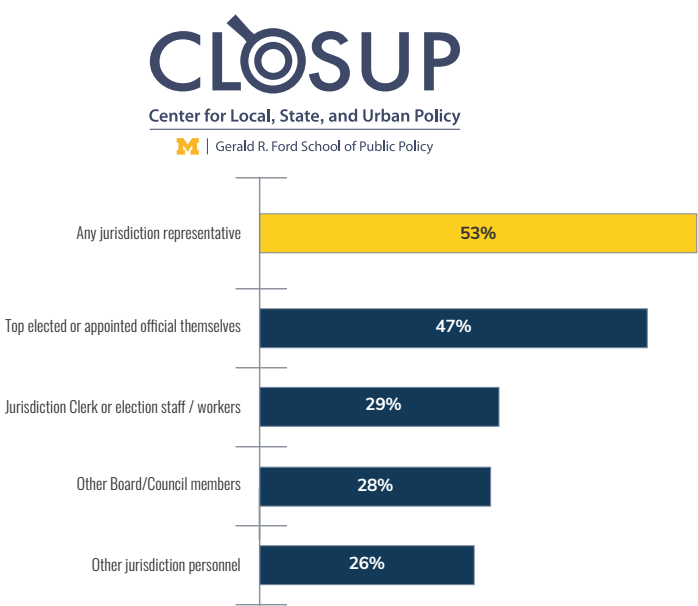


Waning Civic Engagement

One of the consequences from this rise in abuse of our local officials and other government workers is a negative impact on residents’ civic engagement. Even the 23 percent of jurisdictions that have not reported any issues with harassment, threats, or violence personally, agreed that this rise of abuse across the state has made an impact on their community as well. The survey results showed that the worsening political climate and issues with abuse of those serving in local government has caused fewer residents speaking at meetings and/or serving on committees.

Figure 2

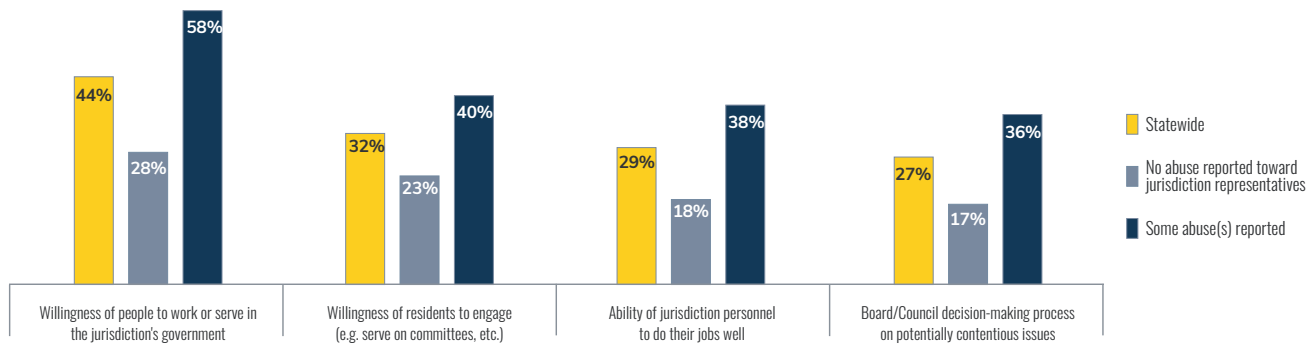
Percent of jurisdictions reporting various members of the local government that have experienced harassment, threats, or violence over the last few years as part of their role in local government



Note: responses for “none” and “don’t know” are not shown; responses from village officials not included in calculation for election staff/workers as villages in Michigan do not administer elections; the calculation for election staff includes both self-reports from clerks themselves and reports from other respondents.

Figure 3

Percent of jurisdictions reporting negative impacts from harassment, threats, and violence on local government functions, by experience of jurisdiction personnel




Note: responses for "other," "none," and "don't know" not shown.

It has been hard to not be made aware of the increase in abuse the last few years. Over the summer, two men were convicted for their involvement in the attempted kidnapping of Governor Whitmer. A quick Google search results in pages of articles describing incidents of threats and abuse happening all over the state.

The League's CEO and Executive Director Dan Gilmartin was interviewed by the *Detroit Free Press* on these issues. "It's a very, very difficult time to be a local official. They're much different than your seasoned politicians at the state and federal level. Most of these people are putting in a ton of time for next to no money," Gilmartin said.

It is evident that this attitude is a growing phenomenon, not just in Michigan but the rest of the country as well. "Overall, it's become mainstream for people to try and tear

down institutions. You see that in the rhetoric nationally and at the state level. I think at the local level, city hall represents an institution." When digesting this information, it is important to acknowledge, as Gilmartin pointed out, that many of our local officials put in a lot of time for little to no compensation.

Working within municipal government is not easy, and this uptick in abuse has already begun to discourage residents from participating in their local government. The League will continue to support its members through educational programming and seminars. We know your job is not easy and we commend you for taking on a role with the scrutiny and potential harassment that may come with it. 

Morgan Schwanky is a content developer for the League. You may contact her at 734.669.6320 or mschwanky@mml.org.

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REVIVING HOUSING PATTERNS TO HELP MICHIGAN THRIVE

By Melissa Milton-Pung



Searching for Something That Isn't There

If you were to begin a housing search today, could you find a new place to live in your community? And if you could locate housing, could you effectively compete for that home? Finally, here's the kicker: could you even afford to purchase or rent without being housing cost-burdened?

In most Michigan housing markets, this feat is increasingly impossible.

As I wrote earlier this year, when discussing the new Michigan Statewide Housing Plan (SHP), we have abundant evidence of the need for new (and rehabbed) housing units. Housing prices are up a whopping 84 percent since 2013. And it's hitting Michigan right where we live. The SHP endeavors to not only set the stage for the rehab of existing housing units but also calls for creating at least 75,000 new housing units. The plan also endeavors to rectify historical inequities in housing access and other housing challenges.

It will take time and many partners to accomplish those goals. Right now, the need for housing is growing daily. Especially apartments and condos.

The lack of available smaller-scale housing units is a wet blanket to economic mobility. It artificially limits job growth due to a shortage of options near employers. It is depressing the ambitions of not only early-career professionals, but also all kinds of families, both big and small, across many age groups.

HUD defines cost-burdened families as those “who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing” and “may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care.” Severe rent burden is defined as paying more than 50 percent of one’s income on rent.

We see this urgency cropping up in neighborhood social media groups, where residents are helping their friends or family search the shadow market for apartments available to rent. We hear about it when an aging relative on a fixed income is “renovicted” by a management company that tacitly refuses to renew their lease. The renovated unit then goes to an eager new tenant, who quickly signs at top dollar. We see it manifesting in the fierce proliferation of sales offer love letters, a questionable tactic employed by realtors with aggressive sales offers, which erodes the intentions of the Fair Housing Act. And we witness it in the resistance of retirees against downsizing from their larger homes. Even though they say it’s far too much room for them, that they’d like to move, and that the upkeep is tiring. Why? Because where will they move when there are waiting lists months and even years long for smaller-scale apartments or condos?

On the practical side, the *Pattern Book Homes* publication also outlines step-by-step instructions for tuning up zoning. It teaches municipalities how to do simple tweaks to enable the kind of development we admire. And, in suggesting the concept of communities choosing to designate pre-reviewed plans, it helps advocate for the build out of neighborhoods with a healthy mixture of housing formats and human scale.

Finally, it provides copyright-free construction plans for multi-family housing using designs modeled after those popular kit homes.

Wait a second, did I just say “free”? Yes! FREE.



THIS USED TO BE NORMAL

Welcoming More Neighbors, Without the Sprawl

A quick solution to address this pressing housing need is building new houses. But where? On vacant lots in existing neighborhoods and large empty parcels within Michigan cities. Not out on the fringes.

Thanks to funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), the League has partnered with East Arbor Architecture to publish “*Pattern Book Homes for 21st Century Michigan*.” This guide provides clear-cut resources for valuing the historic neighborhoods we love, enabling the kind of development we desire, and helping speed up new housing development while lowering construction costs.

This publication establishes that multi-unit housing used to be normal in older Michigan neighborhoods like the Old West Side in Ann Arbor, Heritage Hill in Grand Rapids, Mechanic Street in Bay City, or the Westside in Lansing. It recounts how many of those homes, built between the 1920s and 1950s, were sold by well-loved companies such as Sears, Roebuck & Co, Montgomery Ward, and Bay City, MI-based Aladdin Homes. And it uncovers a secret: many of those houses are actually duplexes or fourplexes. Those pattern book homes gave home builders simple templates that could be customized based on each family’s needs. Oftentimes, these kit homes included designs for multi-family construction that allowed the owner to live in one unit and use the other as an investment property or provide room for multiple generations.

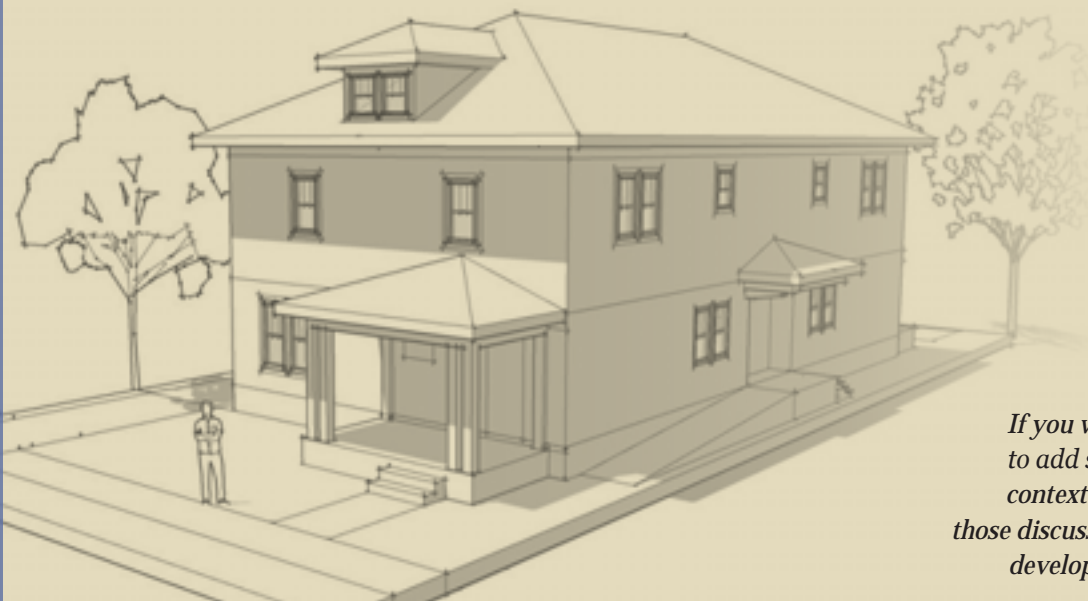
Home builders can choose from a two-family duplex (“The Linden”) or a four-family quad (“The Grove”). Plans are 95 percent complete. They only require review by the local municipality, site engineering, and a few selections dependent on region, such as foundation depth, amount of insulation, and snow loads. All the heavy lifting is done ahead of time—shaving off considerable cost and time—and cutting straight to the chase for getting new homes built.

But Are They Cute?

No matter how free the plans are, they won’t get built unless people like them.

These homes look like they belong in Michigan. They are comfortably familiar, like a kindly grandmother who is sure to have cookies stashed someplace. These homes will fit seamlessly into the existing fabric of our communities.

While there are presently only two floorplans available, there are several exterior architectural styles from which to choose to allow for individual customization. Each of the home plans was thoughtfully designed to allow them to be visually and functionally compatible with the common housing types already found throughout Michigan. Enduring styles, ready to be inserted into classic neighborhoods.



If you want your neighborhoods to add small-scale, fine-grained, context-sensitive new homes like those discussed here, make it easy for developers to build those homes.

To be clear, when we enable new construction, we are not advocating demolition. Far from it. We are, instead promoting a pragmatic approach to reclaiming vacant lots laid bare by Recession-era blight removals, activating double lots never fully built out, or repopulating larger parcels reclaimed from abandonment. This type of new construction is respectful of, and compatible with, the building forms, siting, scale, setbacks, and other landscape characteristics already in place.


And these homes will be comfortable, too. Construction specs feature private main entrances, separate HVAC systems, individual washer and dryer units, universal accessibility design, and sound buffering.

This playbook, on how to add more housing into Michigan communities, meets a current need and enables the neighborhoods we desire. Over time, we will add to the library of free buildable plans. Find out more at www.MichiganPatternBookHomes.org and be on the lookout for our next phase in 2023.

Reviving to Thrive

Over the past several decades, Michigan's land use has expanded outwards with new greenfield construction on an auto-oriented landscape. Yet, that approach has not helped our existing neighborhoods grow their housing stock or utilize the surrounding infrastructure. *The Pattern Book* home publication looks back to what is already familiar and learns some lessons from our past. And, when builders use these plans in coordination with local officials, they will save on design costs and reduce approval timeline. Communities will increase the housing they so desperately need much faster than building typical custom homes. That's a lot to love.

This kind of gentle density helps Michigan communities welcome more neighbors. Using lot vacancies on already developed land taps into existing infrastructure investments. Water, sewer, power, transit, and internet are already there. And the location gracefully reduces strain on adjacent agricultural lands by limiting sprawl.

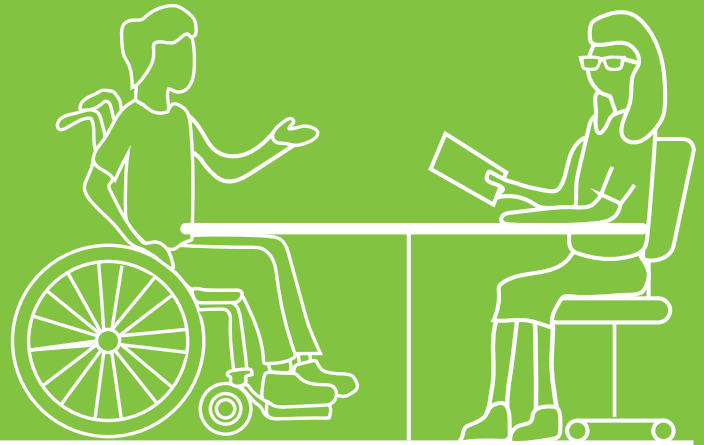
The Pattern Book Homes guide adds to the value of a community's overall housing stock by creating new housing units alongside its existing housing stock. By reviving a classic way of layering density into our existing neighborhoods, we will strengthen communities, increase housing choices, and allow many kinds of families to thrive. 

Melissa Milton-Pung is a policy research labs program manager for the League. You may contact her at 734.669.6328 or mmiltonpung@mml.org.

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Community Excellence Award Winners Cassopolis, Michigan

MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE **CONVENTION**2022 HIGHLIGHTS



Barbara Ziarko, Board of Trustees President, (MML)

This year's Convention marked a reset for our local leaders. Positive change is happening across the state. Thanks to the hard work of our members, now is the moment to shape a future that turns this potential into prosperity. Attendees spent Oct. 19-21 meeting with transformational thinkers and fellow local leaders to fill up on inspiration, energy, insight, and new tools at this year's 2022 Convention!



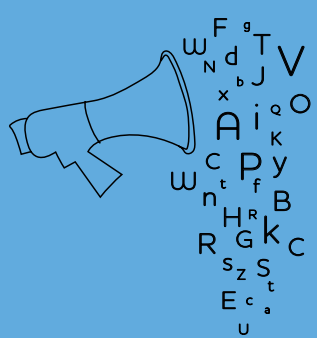
The opening general session with Symone D. Sanders Townsend, Rebecca Chamberlain-Creanga - Troy City Council Member, and Mariah Walton was very inspirational.



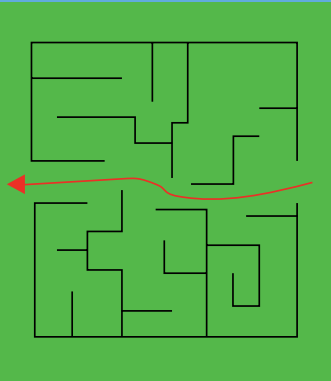
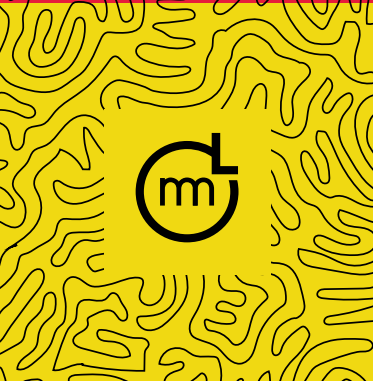
Cellist and vocalist Jordan Hamilton wowed attendees playing a mixture of classic pieces as well as some of his original music.

Shanna Draheim, Director, MML Policy Research Labs.





Award winners recognized during Convention (from left) - former East Lansing Mayor Nathan Triplett (Honorary Life Membership), Fenton Mayor Pro Tem Pat Lockwood (Sinclair Award), Westland Mayor Bill Wild (Guido Award), Sterling Heights Councilmember Deanna Koski (Sinclair Award), Huntington Woods Commissioner Jeff Jenks (Sinclair Award), and L'Anse Village Manager Bob La Fave (Community Builder Award). Not pictured, former Dearborn Mayor John B. "Jack" O'Reilly (Honorary Life Membership).



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Michigan Black Caucus-Local Elected Officials (MBC-LEO).



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Explore Muskegon Lake
"Restoration Efforts Tour."



"Transformation Investments Tour"
at Pigeon Hill Brewing Company.



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

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



NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS OFFERINGS

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

ELECTED OFFICIALS ACADEMY CORE & ADVANCED WEEKENDERS

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

Upcoming 2022-23 League Trainings—Save the Dates!



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Statute of Limitations Does Not Bar Enforcement of a Continuing Violation of Zoning Ordinance

FACTS:

Defendants Harvey and Ruth Ann Haney owned property in Fraser Township zoned for commercial use. The Haney's first brought a hog onto the property in 2006 and maintained hogs on the property since that time. The keeping of hogs is a use permitted only in an agricultural district under the applicable zoning ordinance. In 2016 the township filed a complaint against the Haney's requesting a permanent injunction to prevent the Haney's from raising hogs or other animals on their commercially zoned property in violation of its zoning ordinance. The Haney's argued that the township's claim was barred by the six-year statute of limitations (MCL 600.5813) since the defendants had kept the hogs on the property since 2006. The trial court ruled that the statute did not apply reasoning that this was an action involving the "property" and not about the actions of a person. The Court of Appeals reversed, holding that since the Haney's had kept the hogs on the property since 2006, the township's case was time barred.

ISSUE:

Does MCL 600.5813 bar the township from enforcing its zoning ordinance?

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT:

The Court held that if the violation of a municipal ordinance involves a continuing action by the property owner, and some of the actions occurred within the period of the statute of limitations in MCL 600.5813 does not bar the action, and in most cases, can be prosecuted as long the violation continues.

The Court noted that the keeping of hogs on the property was not a one-time occurrence and is not a use which is finished on the first day they were brought onto the property. Rather, the township "seeks to remedy only violations that occurred within the statutory period of limitations." Whether the zoning violation accrued continuously or each day, "it accrued within the limitations period, and plaintiff's action was timely because its complaint was initiated within six years of defendants' most recent offenses."

The Court further relied upon the Zoning Enabling Act and cited MCL 125.3407 which provides that a "use" of land in violation of a zoning ordinance is a nuisance per se, which is inherently ongoing.

Township of Fraser v Haney, No. 160991, February 8, 2022.

Note: This column previously reported the Court of Appeals' decision in the May/June 2019 issue of *The Review*. An appeal was made to the Michigan Supreme Court resulting in the reversal of the Court of Appeals decision as noted above. Gerald A. Fisher (a municipal attorney serving as an appointed township supervisor until November of this year), and Steven P. Joppich (Rosati, Schultz, Joppich & Amtsbuechler, P.C.) represented the Michigan Municipal League and State Bar Government Law Section as amicus counsel on the appeal.

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

Digitizing Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports

By Rick Haglund

Annual audits that local governments are required to prepare contain a wealth of critical financial information. But these dense public documents can be difficult for anyone without an accounting degree to decipher and can mask looming financial problems hidden in the voluminous data. The audits, which must be filed with the state Treasury, are produced in a static format that “severely limits their accessibility, comparability and usefulness for many stakeholders,” said Stephanie Leiser at the University of Michigan’s Ford School of Public Policy.

Leiser says it’s time to modernize these audits, known as Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports (ACFR). She’s leading a pilot project involving the City of Flint, the Ford School’s Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy and XBRL US, a free, digital open standard developer, to digitize the required data. “I’ve talked to so many people about it,” said Leiser, who leads CLOSUP’s Local Government Fiscal Health Project. “Everyone says it’s a great idea; someone should do that. We figured out that someone had to be us.”

XBRL (eXtensible Business Reporting Language) is a standard currently being used for financial statements by over 100 agencies in 60 countries, including the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Leiser said. Currently, municipalities and other local units of government provide the ACFR and related reports to the state in what Leiser said is an outdated PDF format that lacks transparency. Analyzing the PDFs requires cutting and pasting them into spreadsheets, a time-consuming process. XBRL-formatted statements are both human- and machine-readable, allowing the underlying digital data to be “easily searched, sorted, merged, compared, analyzed and put to use,” according to CLOSUP. Municipalities can more easily benchmark operations against their neighbors using digitized reports. “I think that’s got a lot of people excited,” Leiser said.

Robert Widigan, Flint’s chief financial officer, said he overcame some initial skepticism about the value of digitizing local government financial statements after talking to a former state Treasury colleague who told him that digital financial statements would be “a revolution” in local government reporting. “I said, ‘It’s an audit. How exciting can it be?’” But he’s now convinced digitization is a critical development in making financial statements clearer and more accessible to key stakeholders. “This is important,” Widigan said. “I think it’s about time we digitized and modernized municipal finance reporting for transparency and better government.”

Flint’s water crisis and Detroit’s historic 2013 bankruptcy were the result of financial crises “decades in the making,” Leiser and Capri Backus, a CLOSUP student policy analyst, wrote in a 2021 white paper calling for the digitization of local government finance reporting. Signs of fiscal stress might have been detected much earlier if those cities and others facing financial woes had better tools to analyze trends, they said.

The Flint pilot project is being funded with a \$120,000 grant from the Mott Foundation to build the initial data framework. Widigan said the city is contracting with Workiva, which provides an XBRL-based platform that organizations can use to produce digital financial statements. It’s currently digitizing its fiscal year 2021 audit statements. “Eventually the goal will be to post it to Treasury’s website,” Widigan said.

Leiser echoed Widigan’s ambition. “Our goal is to get everybody reporting in this format,” she said. CLOSUP is also working with Ogemaw County and Gratiot County’s Pine River Township with a population of about 2,400, to digitize audit statements. “If Pine River Township can do it, anyone can do it,” she said.




While there are upfront costs to converting to digital financial audits, Leiser and Widigan said there could be long-term cost savings through increased cost efficiencies. Widigan said city employees would save time, for instance by not having to hand-enter data from the ACFR audit into other financial reports the city prepares.

Digitized audits are not yet accepted by Treasury, but that might change. The state's current fiscal budget requires Treasury to collaborate with a Michigan university to identify opportunities for local governments to produce and file required financial reports with Treasury using the XBRL standard. It was expected to form a pilot program committee by the end of December that would make recommendations to Treasury about requiring local governments to file digital audit statements. "We're in full learning mode," Treasury spokesman Ron Leix said.

Several other states, including California, Illinois, and Oregon, have started pilot projects to digitize local government financial reports or are considering doing so, Leiser said. Some of those projects have stalled over concerns about new mandates on local governments and technical issues. In 2018, Florida became the first state to require the filing of local government audits using XBRL. The law took effect for fiscal years on or ending September 1, 2022.

XBRL said in June that digital financial reporting by local governments nationally "got a huge step closer" because of the Flint pilot project. CLOSUP and XBRL developed a comprehensive set of standards covering 2,800 digital definitions of concepts that appear in audits and related financial statements local governments must file with the state Treasury. The collection of those digital definitions, known as a taxonomy, can be "easily transferred to other U.S. states," XBRL said.

Better financial data is more important than ever at a time when municipalities face monumental challenges that require greater understanding of their financial impacts, Leiser said.

"Local communities are being asked to tackle some of the most important issues facing our country," she wrote in her 2021 paper, including public health, systemic inequality, police reform and deteriorating infrastructure. "But what might it mean to 'defund the police' or invest in infrastructure if we do not have a shared understanding of the fiscal context in which these decisions are made?" 

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U.P. Trail Initiatives and Public Health

By Morgan Schwanky



The Upper Peninsula is known for its beautiful nature filled with hills, forests, waterfalls, and more. It draws travelers from around the world to experience its wonders. And there has been extensive planning to make accessing these wonders a good experience for all.

U.P. Regional Planning

The Eastern U.P. Regional Planning & Development Commission (EUPRP&DC) partners with local stakeholders to develop land use policy, digitally map routes and trails, create and update non-motorized transportation plans, develop water trails, and more.

Jeff Hagan, CEO of EUPRP&DC, has been involved with the commission for many years. “We’ve always worked with MDOT very closely, and through that effort we developed a non-motorized plan that encompasses the whole U.P.; the initial plan was done in 2009.”

Many of the projects also build upon themselves and create larger initiatives. “We were invited by MDOT to participate with the other two regional planning commissions in the U.P.—Central UP Planning and Development (CUPPAD) and Western U.P. Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR)—to update that 2009 plan. That updated plan was started in the end of 2020.”

Hagan went on to explain the purpose of these plans: “When we update this plan, we try our best to identify what’s going on in the region. We aggregate all that information, and it goes into the overall plan. We try to locate as much information about the various trail initiatives in the region, what is being proposed, and what is needed.”

The commission also took accessibility into account, making sure that everyone can enjoy the trails. Hagan commented that user-friendly kayak launches that are ADA accessible have been added in the Sault Ste. Marie area. There is still funding available through the state, and Hagan expects more communities will be implementing ADA accessible docks in the future.

Non-Motorized Trails

A major initiative within the U.P. has been creating trails specifically for non-motorized users. Hagan noted that having these designated trails provide another layer of public health: safety. Trail users will not be on the same roads as motorists, which greatly decreases the chances of them being hurt in an accident involving a motorized vehicle.

Hagan highlighted the Spirit Stone Trail, which runs between Brimley State Park and the Iroquois Light House in Brimley. The trail was developed by the Bay Mills Indian Community, and it worked with the Chippewa County Road Commission to identify funding. It is one of the few off-road separated pathways in the region. “Their focus was on healthier communities and safety. It is located adjacent to the county highway in Bay Mills, with a fifty-five-mile-per-hour speed limit, and the way to get from point A to point B was to walk or bike on the road. There are different community assets that are not accessible other than by walking,” Hagan explained.

Trail Use Increased During COVID-19


The COVID-19 pandemic affected the public health of the entire state, and the planning commission knew that it needed to update its guidelines. Due to public indoor gyms closing on and off during lockdown periods, the commission saw a large uptick in visitors. Even with social distancing in place, people were able to still get out and exercise with less risk. The increase in use caused more people to discover what the EUPRP&DC had to offer, which Hagan and his colleagues already knew. “We place a high importance on these trails, we see the value of them. We see the health benefits.”



The parking lot of the Railroad Depot Park in Ironwood serves as the trailhead for the region's massive network of recreational trails for hikers, cross-country skiers, snowmobilers, mountain bikers, and ATV-ers.

Community Wealth Building

One of the pillars of community wealth building is public health. The goal of this pillar is to focus on increasing health impacts and fostering the human experience in public life. There are many ways communities can implement projects that will improve human health. The many trails that encompass our U.P. are a great example of this. At the surface, the utilization of these trails improves the fitness and general cardiovascular health of those who use them. Along with benefiting physical health, exercise also positively impacts mental health (as well as the additional benefit of Vitamin D exposure from being outdoors).

Trails aid in the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle for the whole body and mind; they provide opportunity for exercise, recreation, and rejuvenation. U.P. municipalities, including Ironwood and Negaunee, have submitted their trails projects as a part of the League's Community Excellence Awards. Ironwood won the Community Excellence Award Cup in 2013 for its Railroad Depot Park project. The Community Excellence Awards highlight and celebrate the projects across the state that are making our communities thrive. 

Morgan Schwanky is a content developer for the League. You may contact her at 734.669.6320 or mschwanky@mml.org.





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MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE HANDBOOKS

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

Topics covered include:

- Structure and Function of Local Government in Michigan
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- Planning and Zoning Basics

Numerous appendices include:

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



Q. Are we required to provide city email addresses to our elected and appointed officials?

A. Although cities and villages are not required to provide email addresses, doing so provides a level of convenience and even protection for your officials and employees. Any email which “is prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a public body in the performance of an official function” would be subject to FOIA. Thus, any emails dealing with city business is subject to a FOIA request even if stored on a personal computer. Using the “official email” makes it much easier for the FOIA coordinator to comply with the request rather than having to search personal computers—and smart phones—for the relevant documents. A number of municipalities even provide laptop computers for officials in addition to those provided to employees.

Q. Are we permitted to display a nativity scene on municipal property?

A. Yes, but only under certain conditions. Federal courts have ruled that local governments can display nativity scenes and other religious symbols of Christmas if these are part of a display that include secular holiday symbols. Secular symbols include wreaths, Christmas trees, Santa, etc.

For more information, see the League’s Fact Sheet: Holiday Displays & Nativity Scenes, available at www.mml.org.

Q. I am uncertain of what the rules are for compensation of city councilmembers. It seems from the League’s Wage & Salary survey, that everyone pays a little bit differently (e.g., per meeting, quarterly; and, different dollar amounts, etc.). What governs how councilmembers are compensated? We get paid \$10 a meeting which seems antiquated in 2022.

A. The Home Rule City Act (MCL 117.3d) requires that language addressing compensation for the mayor and councilmembers be in the city charter. Many city charters are 50 years old (or older) and if a specific dollar amount was set when the charter was adopted (such as \$5 or \$10) it has not increased over time. There are two ways to change this: 1) through a charter amendment (it is recommended that you set the amount by Resolution), or 2) by instituting a Local Officer’s Compensation Commission.

The Local Officer’s Compensation Commission (LOCC) provision was added to the Home Rule City Act in the early 1970s, which gave cities a better mechanism to set realistic compensation for elected officials. Some charters contain language that the compensation commission will determine pay. Instead of a charter provision, cities can appoint

a Local Officers Compensation Commission (five members in a city of 20,000 population or less and seven members in a city over 20,000). The LOCC shall determine the salary of each local elected official. This determination shall be the salary unless the legislative body, by resolution adopted by 2/3 of the members elected to and serving on the legislative body, rejects it. The determination of the commission shall be effective 30 days following its filing with the city clerk unless rejected by the legislative body. If the determination is rejected, the existing salary shall prevail. (MCL 117.5c)

Q. We have had instances where individuals have come into our municipal hall and been disruptive, belligerent, and even threatening. Do you have any suggestions on what to do about this?

A. The council could adopt a policy on the safety/security of employees at city hall. The League has a few sample policies that contain language such as: “Employees of the city have the right to discharge a person from city property when the work environment is being disrupted, when degrading or disparaging remarks are being made, when harassing behavior exists, and when the threat or perception of violence exists. The employee has the right to contact the police department if a person refuses to leave upon the employee’s request. To request samples, please email info@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.

The League’s Inquiry Service would appreciate receiving sample orientation materials for newly elected councilmembers. We are hoping to add to our collection. Please email any orientation packets you have created for your new elected officials to info@mml.org.

Community Exchange Success: Ludington and Holland



By Margaret Mooney

As Michigan's official nonpartisan organization for chief elected officials, the Michigan Association of Mayors (MAM) is committed to fostering relationships among not only mayors and village presidents, but also the communities they serve. Toward this goal, MAM created the Mayors' Exchange program over 30 years ago. Now called the Community Exchange, this program pairs Michigan communities so that they may visit and learn from one another. To participate, communities submit a brief application sharing any preferences or goals they may have for their partnership. After applying by the February 1 deadline, MML reviews the applications and pairs the communities based on these requests. From there, participants work together to arrange "exchange days" to host each other and collaborate on issues of their choosing.

This year, the cities of Ludington and Holland teamed up for a Community Exchange—eager to connect and learn more about what makes their communities unique, as well as what they may have in common. Holland Mayor Nathan Bocks describes the Community Exchange experience as "a great opportunity to meet other community leaders and share experiences and stories about how and why we do our respective jobs, the challenges associated with them, and the benefit and satisfaction there is in serving our communities." Bocks is among several participants who shared that the opportunity to speak directly with colleagues about the issues impacting their communities was an extremely valuable part of the experience. He adds that it was both "surprising, but not surprising how similar our communities are and how similar our challenges and opportunities are."

Ludington City Councilors Jack Bulger, Les Johnson, and Kathy Winczewski shared their thoughts on the Community Exchange experience as well. For Bulger, "the interaction with other city officials reminded [him] that what [they] do in Ludington is not the only way things can or should be done." He notes that while Holland is a larger city with "more resources" than Ludington, they are "alike in many ways, with some industry and an economic base relying on tourism." Johnson adds that navigating their

label as a "tourist town" has played a role when trying to draw businesses and industry to Ludington—which is exactly the sort of challenge a Community Exchange can help examine. According to Winczewski, "the opportunity to share challenges and successes and to explore future plans for both cities" was an important part of why the Community Exchange program is something she would "love to do again."

While the decision on who attends the exchange days is up to each community, Ludington and Holland's participation from their mayors, several councilmembers, and municipal staff brought a range of perspectives and knowledge to the table. Many participants also expressed that the relaxed environment of the exchange days encouraged casual conversations that may not happen otherwise. Holland City Manager Keith Van Beek adds that the "extended opportunity to see another community, share experiences with colleagues from another community, and also interact with officials from our own community in a more informal setting" helps make the Community Exchange program great.




Among the projects and ideas that participants hope to bring back to their communities are new approaches to waterfront development, public utilities, broadband service, downtown development and small businesses, and community events. Mayor Bocks notes that “Ludington has invested in significant waterfront development in recent years and there are opportunities in Holland to do this similarly.” Ludington Mayor Steve Miller also recognizes Holland’s “successfully executed community development projects” and says that information about funding options for such projects is something he hopes to share with his community. Ludington City Manager Mitch Foster highlights that both the Nature Playscape and Holland Energy Park are notable facilities. Foster describes the Nature Playscape as “really creative” and praises the Holland Energy Park for its “incredible impact on the entire community.” Also describing the work being done in Holland, Bulger calls their approach to public utilities “very impressive” and “not what [he] would have expected in a relatively small community.” He goes on to say that the engineering behind their snow melting sidewalks is “ingenious.” Winczewski describes Holland’s famous Tulip Time Festival to also be “very impressive” and enjoyed learning about the planning and execution of an event that size.



Ludington Mayor Steve Miller and Holland Mayor Nathan Bocks discuss their Community Exchange Day at a recent Michigan Association of Mayors meeting.

Overall, Ludington and Holland’s success was a result of “everyone involved in [the] exchange being on the same page as far as striving to reach the same goals for the betterment of the city and community,” says Johnson. Johnson also commends Holland on its ability to work together, saying that “whatever they are doing really seems to be working.”

Questions about the Community Exchange program may be directed to Margaret Mooney at mmooney@mml.org. 

Margaret Mooney is a membership associate for the League. You may contact her at 734.669.6324 or mmooney@mml.org.



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Traverse City Boardman Lake Loop Trail

In Summer 2022, the City of Traverse City and its partners celebrated the completion of the Boardman Lake Loop Trail. Bicyclists, pedestrians, and users of all abilities will be able to circumnavigate the 5-mile loop through heavily wooded and urban areas around Boardman Lake, a 339-acre watershed that is part of the Boardman River. The completed Loop will connect the library, parks, neighborhoods, local businesses, and Northwestern Michigan University Center, in addition to businesses along the Cass and South Airport corridors.

A majority of the Loop is owned by the city, in partnership with Grand Traverse County and Garfield Township. TART Trails (Traverse Area Recreation Trails) works in partnership to support the development and maintenance of the trail. The \$8.9 million, multiple year planning initiative has been made possible through financial contributions from a number of organizations and individuals over decades that are passionate about mobility and the future sustainability of our region.

