

the review

May / June 2023

the official magazine of the  michigan municipal league



Battle Creek Connects Neighbors through Nextdoor

>> p. 22

Civic Index

>> p. 6

Love Letters to Ypsi

>> p. 14

Equity in Code Enforcement

>> p. 18

the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

Features

6 **Building and Measuring Civic Capital—The Capacity of a Community to Solve Problems and Thrive**

By Doug Linkhart



10 **Podcasts: Trust and Belonging through Alternative Messaging**

By Morgan Schwanky



14 **Ypsi Residents Celebrate City's Bicentennial by Writing Love Letters to Ypsilanti**

By Sarah Rigg

18 **Strategic Code Enforcement: Advancing Equity and Improving Compliance**

By Libby Benton

22 **COVER STORY Battle Creek Nextdoor: Hosting Community Conversations**

By Jessica VanderKolk

26 **CapCon 2023 Highlights**



Columns

- 5. Executive Director's Message
- 31. Legal Spotlight
- 32. Northern Field Report
- 34. Municipal Finance
- 37. Municipal Q&A
- 38. Lab Report

COVER
Three residents active in their neighborhoods and on Nextdoor join Jessica VanderKolk, communications manager for the city (second from the right): Sam Gray, Housing Commission; Kathy Antaya, Sustainable BC Committee; and Lynn Ward Gray, Planning Commission (former city commissioner and vice mayor) at Claude Evans Park.

See mml.org for the electronic version of the magazine and past issues.



Follow Us:





COVERAGE THAT FITS YOUR BUSINESS AND YOUR BUDGET



At Blue Cross, we know you want the best for your employees. That's why we offer plans designed to fit any budget, and coverage you can use almost anywhere. With benefits that cover pharmacy, dental, vision, mental health and no-cost programs for you and your employees, Blue Cross adds up to smarter care and better coverage.

For more information, contact your local BCBSM licensed agent or call the MML Risk Management Department at 800-653-2483.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network are nonprofit corporations and independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. W009536

FACT SHEET



Municipal Attorneys...
Managers...
Department Heads...

Add to our
growing
collection!

Do you write one-page
explanations of
municipal topics for
your council or staff?

If so, submit them to
the League as possible
Fact Sheets.

These one-page information
sheets offer a clear and
concise explanation of
a variety of municipal topics.
The *Fact Sheet* is an additional
piece of information, such
as a sample ordinance,
policy, or resolution.

These fact sheets are
available online at mml.org.
Email kcekola@mml.org
for details.



the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

Volume 96, Number 3

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.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

President: Barbara A. Ziarko, Councilmember, Sterling Heights

Vice President: Robert Clark, Mayor, Monroe

Terms Expire in 2023

Peter Dame, Chief Development Officer, Portage
Carla J. Filkins, Mayor, Cadillac
Khalfani Stephens, Deputy Mayor, Pontiac
Mark Washington, City Manager, Grand Rapids
Stephanie Grimes Washington,
Director of Government Affairs, Detroit

Terms Expire in 2025

Rebecca Chamberlain-Creangă, Councilmember, Troy
Don Gerrie, Mayor, Sault Ste. Marie
Valerie Kindle, Mayor, Harper Woods
Joshua Meringa, Councilmember, Grandville
Tim Wolff, Village Manager, Lake Isabella

MAGAZINE STAFF

Kim Cekola, Sr. Editor
Brittany Curran, Art Developer
Monica Drukis, Editorial Assistant
Marie Hill, Brand & Creative, Asst. Dir./Photography
Rebekah Melcher, Advertising
Tawny Pearson, Copy Editor
Morgan Schwanky, Content Developer

ADVERTISING INFORMATION

Classified ads are available online at
www.mml.org. Click on "Classifieds."
For information about all MML
marketing tools, visit
<https://mml.org/programs-services/marketingkit/>

Terms Expire in 2024

Robert La Fave, Village Manager, L'Anse
Raylon Leaks-May, Councilmember, Ferndale
Deborah Stuart, City Manager, Mason
Keith Van Beek, City Manager, Holland

Terms Expire in 2026

Joshua Atwood, Commissioner, Lapeer
Stephen Kepley, Mayor, Kentwood

TO SUBMIT ARTICLES

The Review relies on contributions from municipal
officials, consultants, legislators, League staff
and others to maintain the magazine's high quality
editorial content. Please submit proposals by
sending a 100-word summary and outline of the
article to Kim Cekola, kcekola@mml.org.
Information is also available at:
<https://mml.org/programs-services/marketingkit/>

SUBSCRIPTIONS

\$24 per year for six issues.
Payable in advance by check, money order,
Visa/MasterCard/American Express.
Make checks payable to Michigan Municipal
League. Phone 734.669.6371;
fax 734.669.4223 or mail new
subscription requests and checks to the
Michigan Municipal League, P.O. Box 7409,
Ann Arbor, MI 48107-7409.

The Review (ISSN 0026-2331) is published bi-monthly by the Michigan Municipal League,
1675 Green Rd, Ann Arbor, MI 48105-2530. Periodicals postage is paid at Ann Arbor MI. POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to THE REVIEW, 1675 Green Rd, ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2530.



Trust and Belonging

So, let's start with a little history lesson: We've long assumed the discovery of agriculture some 10,000 years ago is what caused people to settle down together in communities, so they could share the new demands of farming and food production. From there developed all the fundamentals of modern civilization, from property ownership to government and the rule of law.

But maybe we've got it backwards.

At nearly 12,000 years old, Turkey's Karahan Tepe and other archaeological sites nearby are rewriting that familiar history. According to evidence from these oldest known villages, people who shared a common system of beliefs formed permanent settlements hundreds or even thousands of years before they figured out how to domesticate plants and animals. Simply put: the need to feed a large permanent community was the cause of agriculture, not the effect of it.

So that means belonging to the same social and emotional fabric is what first tied people together—everything else followed. And our cover story is about the City of Battle Creek using the popular NextDoor social media app to facilitate communication between the city and its residents.

Yep, seems like humans have been building community wealth for a very long time.

Here at the League, we believe that community wealth is built on a wide-ranging foundation: lifelong learning, public health, arts and culture, financial security, sustainability, and infrastructure.

But it is the social fabric itself—a shared sense of trust and belonging—that ties people and these components together into an interdependent framework. In the most basic sense, it is that thing we call community.

These aren't just vague, soft-soapy, feel-good concepts. They are core essentials to forming a successful society. In order to function effectively as a community, people need to be able to trust each other—their neighbors, their leaders, their government and the services it provides. Each individual has to feel they are a part of that larger group, able to hear and be heard, and to have access to the same resources and services.

When you build that sense of trust and belonging among your residents, you have woven a strong social fabric that will help your community to survive the storms, and to thrive and grow. Everything else will follow and is built on that foundation.

In this issue of the *Review*, we're going to talk about how we can foster and nurture those most vital elements among our neighbors, local leaders, and partner organizations. We'll show you ways to connect people that strengthen our sense of place and increase our ability to solve problems and share resources.

There are all kinds of ways that can happen:

The Village of Pentwater transformed its village council chambers into a community center called Park Place, with state-of-the-art media technology and flex space that residents can use for meetings, banquets, dances, hobby clubs, fitness classes, you name it.

In Ypsilanti, residents are being invited to write postcards on why they love their city. The "love letters" will be displayed during the city's bicentennial celebrations next year. YpsiWrites is a community engagement project being staged at public events throughout the year, creating an ongoing way for residents to interact with their community.

The City of Battle Creek is using the popular NextDoor social media app to facilitate communication between the city and its residents. And our cover story is about the City of Battle Creek using the popular NextDoor social media app to facilitate communication between the city and its residents.

To cultivate community and reach as broad an audience as possible, municipalities are producing their own podcasts. Podcasts offer a form of communication that differs from tradition.

How would you rank this statement—"It is easy to find residents to serve on local boards and commissions or run for office"—as a challenge, a strength, or somewhere in between? The Civic Index, created by the National Civic League, is a self-assessment tool for measuring a community's civic capital. Use it as part of an exercise to address common local government engagement challenges.

These are just a few examples of how we can build the vital social fabric that is at the core of every strong community. Communities grow best from within. When residents feel they truly belong to a community they can trust to hear them and answer their needs, there is no limit to what they can accomplish.

Let's help get them there.



Daniel P. Gilmartin
League Executive Director and CEO
734.669.6302; dpg@mml.org



Building and Measuring Civic Capital—The Capacity of a Community to Solve Problems and Thrive

By Doug Linkhart

How safe would a community be if people didn't know their neighbors or trust the police enough to report crime? How healthy would a community be if we relied only on professionals, rather than improving behavior and the environment?

Civic engagement happens wherever there are people.

Yet, some communities have a strong culture of engagement where residents, organizations, government, and others recognize and value engagement and community-decision making. In these communities, we see fewer intractable problems and a higher quality of life. Communities with inclusive civic engagement—where everyone has a place at the table to define, direct and implement public services and amenities—experience greater equity, display greater civic pride and exhibit stronger civic responsibility.

The Michigan Municipal League's Pillars of Community Wealth Building

We define community wealth building as strategies that build community and individual assets, creating resilient and adaptable systems to address social and economic needs.

We see trust and belonging as a social and emotional fabric that ties the community members and these components together in an interdependent framework:

Trust in neighbors, community leaders, local governments and the other partners and services in place to help our communities thrive is essential to achieving community wealth.

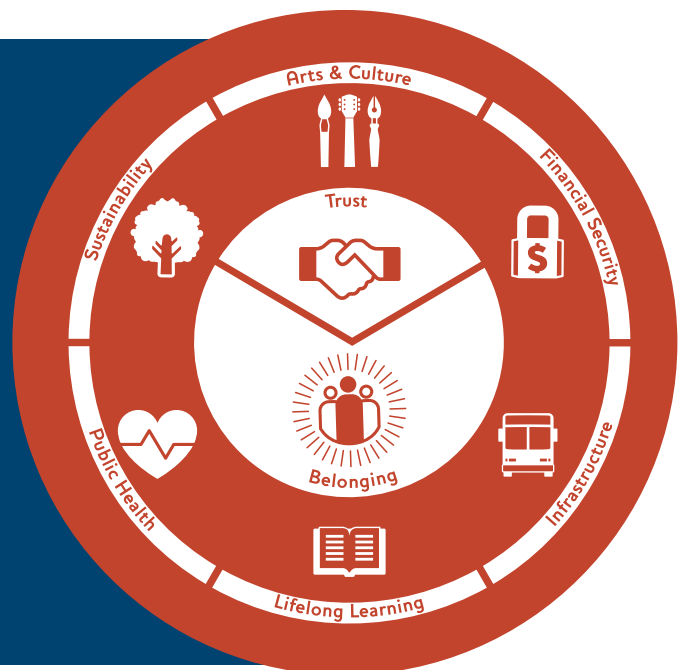
Belonging to the community is what strengthens the tie between community members and the place. Without people, a place is just a physical object. Connecting people who support each other and themselves in a localized way brings a place to life and increases access to community resources and social network.

7

Components of Civic Capital

- Engaged Residents
- Inclusive Community Leadership
- Collaborative Institutions
- Embracing Diversity and Equity
- Authentic Communication
- Culture of Engagement
- Shared Vision and Values

Theodore Roosevelt, one of the founders of the National Civic League, called on Americans to “be actors, and not merely critics of others” at our first annual Conference on Good City Government. Roosevelt and about a hundred other civic leaders came together in 1894 to form what was then known as the National Municipal League, ushering in more than over 100 years of municipal civic reform. These principles continue to guide our work. We believe that, through inclusive civic engagement, the many parts of a community—government, business, schools, residents, nonprofit agencies, faith-based organizations, and others—can work together to address public needs and desires. Whether it's economic development, safety, health, education, environmental quality or other matters, civic leadership and community partnerships can lead to lasting solutions that represent the values and desires of each particular community.





“The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens.”

—Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

It was these same themes that Alexis de Tocqueville identified in *Democracy in America* when he wrote that “the health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens,” and marveled at the ease in which the American people worked together for the common good.

De Tocqueville’s warning that the health of democratic society lies in the functions performed by its citizens is echoed by the League’s experience. So, in the 1980s, the National Civic League coined the phrase, “civic infrastructure” and created a civic index to describe and measure the essential elements of community in which everyone has a role in decision-making and public problem-solving.

Few public officials would ever claim that government can build a great community or solve any problem by itself. Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said that we should “never depend upon institutions or government to solve any problem. All social movements are founded by, guided by, motivated, and seen through by the passion of individuals.” Institutions and governments cannot solve community issues on their own—that is the role of residents working hand in hand with one another and leveraging the strength of local groups, associations and institutions. Community is a joint endeavor. Great communities have at their core, strong, inclusive, civic engagement that capitalizes on the ideas and talents of all members of the community to ensure the common good and create lasting health and prosperity for all.

In January 2019 the National Civic League released the fourth edition of the Civic Index, a self-assessment tool consisting of a set of questions that provide a framework for discussing and measuring a community’s civic capital. Since it was first developed in 1986, many communities have used the Civic Index to better understand their civic strengths and to identify gaps or areas in need of further attention, soliciting community input to create a baseline measure of their civic capital, and monitor progress over time as they work to enhance their internal capacity. The Civic Index is intended to be subjective and qualitative; how a community ranks on the index depends on the views of residents and other community stakeholders. And, importantly, the rankings by different parts of the community should not be averaged, lest the differences among various parts of the community be lost.

The full Civic Index is available from the National Civic League. This Index describes the seven components of civic capital, provides examples of each, lists the 32 questions that are used to gauge each component, and provides ideas on how to use the index. What follows here is a synopsis of the seven components.

Engaged Residents: Residents play an active role in making decisions and civic affairs.

Inclusive Community Leadership: The community actively cultivates and supports leaders from diverse backgrounds and with diverse perspectives.

Collaborative Institutions: Communities with good civic capital have regular collaboration among the government, business, nonprofit, and other sectors, as well as structures in place that facilitate such collaboration.

Embracing Diversity and Equity: Communities with healthy civic capital recognize and celebrate their diversity. They strive for equity in services, support, and engagement.

Authentic Communication: Healthy communities need credible, civic-minded sources of information presented in a way that residents can use.


Culture of Engagement: Involvement by residents, businesses, nonprofits, and other stakeholders in every aspect of civic affairs should be part of local culture—an expectation, not an afterthought.

Shared Vision and Values: Communities with shared values and civic pride have a common foundation for addressing public matters.

Summary

Civic capital doesn't always assure that a community will be prosperous or that residents will be happy. As Hampton, Virginia, City Manager Mary Bunting, says:

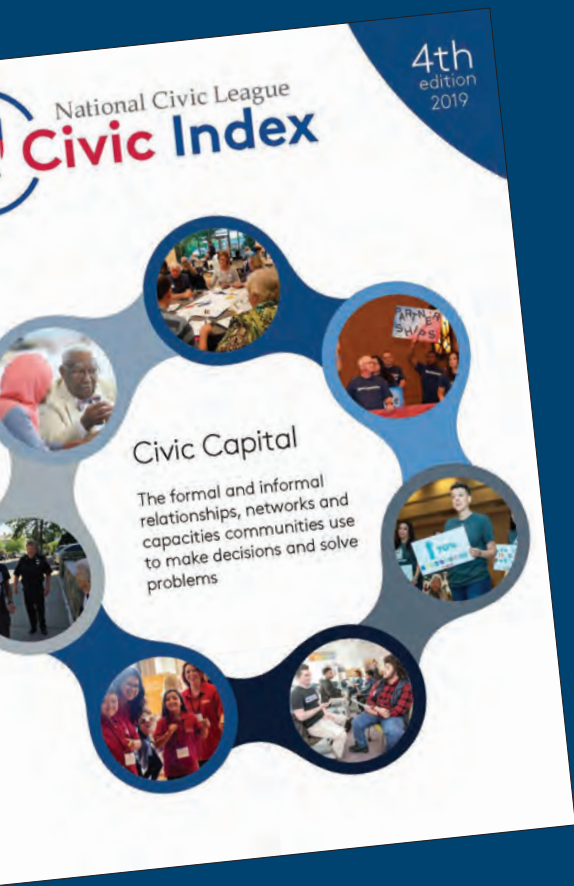
“Engagement never guarantees that everyone will be happy with the result. That utopia doesn't exist. However, engagement does produce better decision-making and, more importantly, better feeling about the process used to make decisions. When residents know they have (and how) to make a choice to influence decision-making, they inevitably feel better about it.”

At the same time, our experience with communities during the past 125 years of the National Civic League's existence and the 70 years of recognizing All-America Cities is that communities that have the qualities measured by the Civic Index are more able to address difficult issues, withstand challenges, and maintain a high quality of life. Because so many issues facing communities disproportionately affect certain populations within a city, inclusion and equity are particularly important in assuring the well-being of the community as a whole. 

Doug Linkhart is president of the National Civic League. You may contact him at 303.571.4343 or dougl@ncl.org.

Las Vegas, NV residents come together to tend a community garden together.





National Civic League
Civic Index

Engaged Residents: Residents play an active role in making decisions and civic affairs.

Inclusive Community Leadership: The community actively cultivates and supports leaders from diverse backgrounds and with diverse perspectives.

Collaborative Institutions: Communities with good civic capital have regular collaboration among the government, business, nonprofit, and other sectors, as well as structures in place that facilitate such collaboration.



MUNICIPAL HUMAN RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

At Shifman Fournier, we believe that law firms that only provide legal counsel don't necessarily understand the process of resolution of government challenges and its importance to communities. Our philosophy allows us to deliver well-grounded advice and deep knowledge of the factors that go into cases creating strategies to solve complex labor issues. Our expertise includes advising communities, municipalities, and counties throughout Michigan with a wide range of issues that they are challenged with.

Our unique, professional experiences have demonstrated this philosophy in action, from managing a city and its diverse operations, to overseeing one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the State. This experience strengthens our ability to understand the impact upon employees and residents when making decisions on labor policy.

31600 Telegraph Road, Suite 100
Bingham Farms, MI 48025
(248) 594-8700
shifmanfournier.com



QBS Beats Low Bid

Want to save \$ on your next project?
Hire the best with QBS!

- QBS**
- saves time
- saves money
- improves owner satisfaction

QBS

Qualifications-Based
Selection



Website: QBS-MI.org Email: info@QBS-MI.org Phone: (517) 332-2066

Podcasts:

Trust and Belonging through Alternative Messaging

By Morgan Schwanky



Despite their recent success, podcasts have been around for a lot longer than many realize. What was once a predownloaded app (that made many scratch their heads), podcasts have turned into a very popular platform. Invented in 2004, the term podcast first appeared in an article in *The Guardian*. In 2023, almost two decades later, there are over five million podcasts across the world.

In the local government arena, Michigan Public Radio launched *Minutes* in 2021 to provide information on municipal governance, something it felt was underreported in local news. The program downloads recorded council meetings for more than 40 cities in Michigan and converts them into podcasts. The ability to access elected officials' discussions and actions through an additional medium, on one's own timetable, increases the prospect of aware and educated citizens. This creates a better understanding of what decisions are being made and why. Fostering this understanding is pivotal for constituents to have trust in their community leaders and is a vital component of creating communities where people want to live.

To build trust and belonging in their communities through sharing stories and information, municipalities have also taken to producing their own podcasts. This article highlights the work of four cities: Grand Rapids, Holland, Rochester Hills, and Sterling Heights.



Holland's #MiHolland Update

#MiHolland Update started airing in 2018 and is hosted by Marianne Manderfield, the city's public information coordinator. They also bring in special guest hosts who are subject matter experts.

"We really wanted the podcast to be about topics that required a deeper dive of information for residents about timely topics, things that need more time and that are more conversational," said Manderfield.

The podcast covers a variety of content including municipal projects and initiatives, departments such as the city's K-9 unit, the city's popular Tulip Festival, and more. In the episode "Understanding the City's Budget Process," City Manager Keith Van Beek explained the activities that take place throughout the budget process, beginning with citizen input.

Utilizing a podcast platform is one of the many avenues the city wants to reach as many members of the community as it can.

"We always want to reach more folks... we've looked at it as one more form of communication to our community. Not everybody is going to listen to a podcast in the same way that not everyone is on Instagram, not everyone is on Facebook. We want to ensure that we are doing enough different types of messaging and getting the information out," said Manderfield.

Listen on the city's website at <https://shows.acast.com/cityofholland>, as well as on *Spotify* and *Pandora*.



Grand Rapids' Behind the Badge

Behind the Badge was originally started in 2018 and at the time was hosted by Sergeant Dan Adams. It was then revamped in 2022 and is now hosted by civilian Bruce Niemchick.

The podcast aims to give a behind the scenes look at the city's police department—its operations, its people, and their experiences.

Neil Gomez is the city's police department community engagement sergeant and works closely with Niemchick.

"It's another avenue to communicate with the public. We're aware that we really need to be reaching out to the public. We saw how popular podcasts were becoming and the importance of community relations. We want to show the community we are here to help," said Gomez.

Niemchick describes his approach to the podcast as "conversational, like sitting down to have a cup of coffee." His goal is to show the personal lives and the struggles of those within the police department. You can listen to the podcast on *Spotify*.



Rochester Hills' Right Down the Street

Right Down the Street was started in 2021. Mayor Bryan Barnett explained: "We were emerging from a pandemic and looking for ways to connect with one another and highlight the incredibly diverse and interesting people living and working in Rochester Hills."

Barnett hosts the show which has dozens of episodes featuring a variety of guests that share their stories, including local business leaders, the county sheriff, university instructors, long-distance runners, and even Barnett's own siblings.

"Our goals are to celebrate the ideas and perspectives, the creativity and passion, and the backgrounds and vocations of our people. It raises the awareness of the diversity of our neighbors, introduces us to new ways of thinking, and familiarizes us with those we didn't know, or didn't know much about. It's about investing time and getting to know people—people who literally live or work right down the street," said Barnett.

To listen, visit rochesterhills.org/rightdownthestreet.

Coming soon

Sterling Heights

Sterling Heights' SHTV—Our Stories in Sound

SHTV—Our Stories in Sound is projected to air in late spring 2023. They have created two segments and recording is underway.

Melanie Davis, the city's community relations director will be hosting one of the segments called "I am Sterling Heights." It will feature local people and business leaders.

"As a community, we're always looking for different ways to get our messages and stories out. We try really hard to meet our residents where they are. If you start looking at trends in communication, podcasting has grown so exponentially over the last two years. It was the next platform that we were not currently using that we needed to be on," said Davis.

The second is called "Off the Cuff" and will have content about the city's police department.

"This will be an opportunity to do more long-form programming," said Dan Rizek who is the city's broadcast services coordinator.

It will be available on *Apple Podcasts* and *Spotify*. 

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



**PLANNING
DESIGN
BUILDING**



Delivering thoughtful solutions

It all starts with listening. McKenna professionals engage with community officials to identify key opportunities and understand challenges. Our team works with you to develop creative solutions that realize the unique vision of each planning, design, and building project.

Secure the support and resources of the state's best talent when you need it.

Scan here to watch a brief video about McKenna's capabilities



Communities for real life.




Taking the headache out of your telecom challenges

Telecom Expense Management & Cost Optimization

Phone System & VoIP Consulting

Mobile Device Management

mml@abilita.com | abilita.com/mml | 888.910.2004

ENDORSED BY:




The Law Firm For MUNICIPALITIES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAPITAL PROJECTS & INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRUCTION AGREEMENTS & LITIGATION DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/INCENTIVES ELECTIONS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ENVIRONMENTAL & REGULATORY LAW HOSPITALS & HOUSING INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENTS LABOR & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS LOCAL, STATE & FEDERAL TAX 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OMA/FOIA PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS REAL ESTATE STATE/FEDERAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS TAX INCREMENT FINANCING
---	--	---

From innovative projects and municipal bonds to collaborative agreements and tax increment financing, cities and villages and their attorneys throughout Michigan rely on Miller Canfield's 170 years of collective wisdom and diverse expertise.



DETROIT ANN ARBOR TROY LANSING KALAMAZOO GRAND RAPIDS CHICAGO

millercanfield.com/PublicLaw



ELECTED OFFICIALS ACADEMY Upcoming In-Person and Virtual Trainings

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/education-events/league-calendar/

ELECTED OFFICIALS ACADEMY CORE & ADVANCED WEEKENDERS

Bay City
Friday & Saturday
May 19-20, 2023

Upcoming 2023 League Trainings—Save the Dates!



Michigan Municipal League FOUNDATION

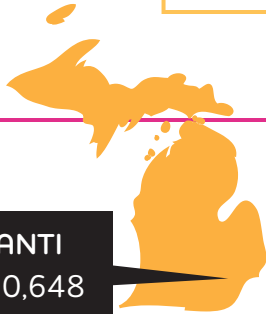
We're on a mission to create and cultivate resources, partnerships, and opportunities that Michigan communities need to thrive.



LEARN MORE TODAY

Ypsi Residents Celebrate City's Bicentennial by Writing

Love Letters to Ypsilanti



YPSILANTI
pop. 20,648



By Sarah Rigg

The nonprofit YpsiWrites is distributing postcards for residents to write about why they love their city, and the resulting love letters will be displayed during bicentennial celebrations next year.

Referencing everything from their favorite local shops to the welcoming feel of their city, Ypsilanti community members are writing Love Letters to Ypsilanti in anticipation of the city's bicentennial next year.

Caroline Sanders, associate director for community relations and engagement at Eastern Michigan University's (EMU) Engage@EMU office and a Washtenaw County commissioner representing District 4, originated the idea earlier this year.



"I have heard many stories about people and their positive experiences in the city, and I thought [writing love letters] would be a lovely way to capture these experiences," she says.

"It would encourage current and former residents to pen some loving words about their time in Ypsilanti that would allow for the creation of a collective archive of love letters that help celebrate the city's 200th birthday."



Sanders mentioned the idea at a meeting attended by **Ann Blakeslee**, another EMU employee and co-founder of nonprofit community writing center YpsiWrites, and Blakeslee asked how YpsiWrites could help.

"When she asked if YpsiWrites could play a role in this bicentennial initiative, my answer was a resounding yes," Sanders says.

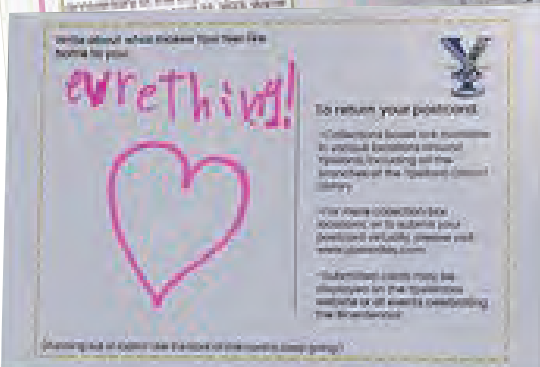
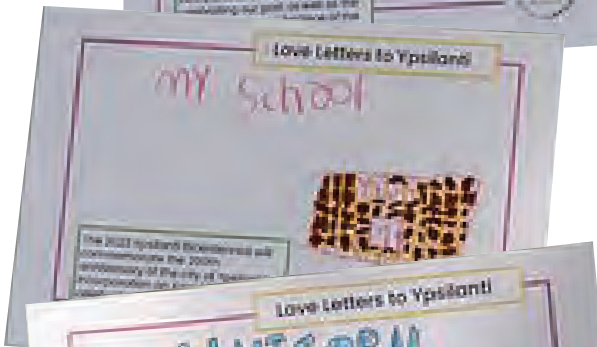
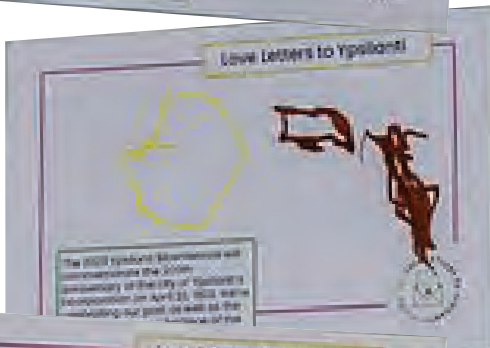
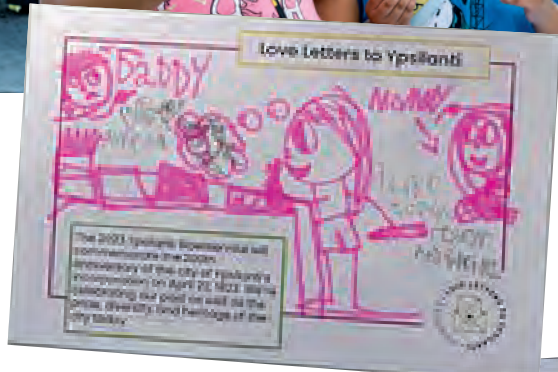
What Makes Ypsi Feel Like Home to You?

An YpsiWrites team took on the project, deciding that postcards would be a good format for most people to write their love letters. YpsiWrites volunteer **Brent Miller** says postcards are "sturdy, visual, and a pretty accessible format most people have engaged with."



YpsiWrites volunteer Carissa Mares developed a postcard prototype, and volunteers piloted postcards at various events this summer.

The team gathered feedback, revised the look of the postcards, and added a logo. The first of what will be a variety of love letter prompts is, "What makes Ypsi feel like home to you?"



Photos by Doug Coomb

Working with the city's bicentennial commission, YpsiWrites is hoping to gather responses from adults, children, EMU staff and students, current residents, and former residents. The format is open-ended and contributions don't necessarily have to be in the form of a letter. For example, visual art has also been accepted.

"We're already seeing a variety of different stories being shared," Miller says. "Some people write about silly experiences, or serious experiences like attending a city commission meeting. We're also getting drawings from children about their favorite things. One young person sent in a rendering of their school, and another wrote about their favorite shop, Unicorn Feed and Supply."

City residents can participate in a number of ways. They can pick up postcards from any Ypsilanti District Library (YDL) branch and submit them through a book return box. They can also respond through a form on YpsiWrites' website. "Online, people type in their responses virtually, or they can take a picture of their response and upload it," Miller says. "We're trying to get as many responses as we can and engage as many writers as we can."

Additionally, YpsiWrites will staff tables where people can fill out postcards and submit them on the spot at various events through the end of 2022 and into 2023, including EMU's Homecoming week. Blakeslee says the team is working on ways to get more postcards into children's hands as well, possibly by sending love letter postcard packets to local schools.

"We'll be everywhere with this for the next year and a half," Blakeslee says.

After collection, YpsiWrites will share the love letters in a variety of venues. YpsiWrites will host a rotating selection of letters on its website. Blakeslee also imagines creating a display of postcards at each YDL branch, or asking businesses to host a collection on their community bulletin boards. She says there will likely be a display at EMU as well.

Miller says some of the postcards will be shared via social media, and the YpsiWrites team members working on the project have discussed developing a performance based on some of the postcards.

The Power of Letters

YpsiWrites will also offer a series of events that coordinate with the love letter campaign.

"We'll host a series of workshops focused on all kinds of letter writing: writing for change, for ideas, love letters, thank you letters," Miller says.



BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION



The city formed a bicentennial committee to plan a year of festivities that kicked off with a New Year's Eve celebration. "All year long, we're inviting present and former members of the community, and those with ties to Ypsilanti, to celebrate 200 years with us," said Maria Skrzynski, marketing coordinator at Destination Ann Arbor. She has been working with the committee on the #Ypsi200 Facebook page.

Events

- **New Year's Eve:** A kid-tested ball drop downtown at 7 pm then a Times Square-style ball drop at midnight
- **4th of July celebration** will reveal a **time capsule** buried in 1973
- **Tours highlighting African-American history** during the city's Juneteenth celebration.
- **August 19 celebration** featuring county and state officials, music, and historic site bus tours.
- **A Bicentennial History Book** containing stories from 40 Ypsi authors.


More information and updates on all events will be available at www.ypsireal.com/ypsi200/ or the bicentennial Facebook page at www.facebook.com/Ypsibicentennial.

The first of these is a virtual letter-writing workshop called "Dear Reader: The Power and Meaning of Letters." Postcards will also be available at an in-person Writers Room event Oct. 22 that's part of YpsiWrites' anniversary celebration.

Anyone interested in hosting their own postcard-writing event can also request postcards by emailing ypsiwrites@gmail.com.

The Love Letters to Ypsilanti project is just one part of what will be over a year-long celebration of the city's bicentennial. The bicentennial committee's plans include a New Year's Eve kickoff, a special homecoming event in 2023, a time capsule, and more.

"My hopes and dreams are that the Ypsilanti bicentennial celebration will be an overwhelming success that will bring people back [to Ypsilanti] to celebrate, see the wonderful changes, and create lifelong memories for everyone involved," Sanders says.

More information about the Love Letters to Ypsilanti project is available at www.ypsiwrites.com/bicentennial-love-letters-to-ypsilanti. More information about the city's bicentennial is available at www.facebook.com/Ypsibicentennial 

Sarah Rigg is a freelance writer and editor and the project manager of On the Ground Ypsilanti. You may reach her at sarahrigg1@gmail.com.

This story originally appeared in Concentrate Media, which covers the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti area from a solutions-oriented perspective. Read more at Concentratemedia.com.



Thriving Communities Don't Happen by Accident™

Public officials across Michigan work with the attorneys of Plunkett Cooney to develop safe neighborhoods and healthy business districts that residents are proud to call home. Whether in council chambers or in the courtroom, your community can count on Plunkett Cooney for the right result.

- Civil Rights ■ Direct Representation ■ Election Law ■ Errors & Omissions
- Intergovernmental Agreements ■ Labor & Employment Law ■ OMA & FOIA
- Public Safety Liability ■ Vehicle Liability ■ Zoning, Planning & Land Use

AUDREY J. FORBUSH

Direct: (810) 342-7014

aforbush@plunkettcooney.com

PLUNKETT COONEY

ATTORNEYS & COUNSELORS AT LAW

CHARLES L. BOGREN

Direct: (616) 752-4606

cbogren@plunkettcooney.com

Bloomfield Hills | Detroit | Lansing | Flint | Grand Rapids | Marquette | Petoskey

www.plunkettcooney.com



Strategic Code Enforcement: Advancing Equity and Improving Compliance

By Libby Benton

During a presentation on strategic code enforcement in Austin, Texas, Phil Crowe had an epiphany. As executive administrator for the Louisville Metro Government's (LMG) Codes and Regulations department, Crowe was proud that his department treated all properties with housing and building code violations the same, regardless of property owner, type, or neighborhood. The policy's intent was to ensure fairness with the goal of resolving code violations so that buildings would be safe for residents and the community.

But as he listened, Crowe realized this traditional approach to code enforcement often had the opposite effect. Low-income homeowners would use their limited dollars to pay fines when that money would be better spent making repairs. Meanwhile, absentee owners and unscrupulous landlords simply ignored citations and fees altogether. In both cases, code enforcement was not bringing properties into compliance.

LMG needed a better approach. Luckily, Crowe experienced his "aha" moment at the Center for Community Progress' 2022 Vacant Property Leadership Institute (VPLI), a four-day training where small delegations of local leaders learned about equitable strategies to address vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties.

After VPLI, Crowe and his colleagues wasted no time implementing reforms. They gave code enforcement officers more discretion to issue warnings and waive citations, shifted their strategy on abandoned properties from ineffective penalties to timely abatement, worked with Community Progress to conduct a racial equity audit of their policies, and dedicated \$1 million in new home repair assistance funds to owner-occupied properties.

In the year since Phil Crowe's epiphany, Louisville has drawn local media attention for its efforts to create a more strategic, equitable code enforcement process. Louisville's journey and the resources it used along the way can serve as a model for communities in Michigan and across the country.



What Is Strategic Code Enforcement?

Code enforcement commonly refers to the local government process used to bring private properties into compliance with local property maintenance standards, such as housing and building codes. Traditionally, this process is complaint-based, uses fines and criminal prosecution to obtain compliance, and treats all properties the same. However, this punitive approach is rarely effective (especially in addressing vacant and abandoned properties) and disproportionately harms residents of color through, among other things, overenforcement against vulnerable homeowners and underenforcement against landlords.

In contrast, *strategic* code enforcement seeks to bring properties “up to code” in equitable, efficient, and effective ways by:

- Creating different enforcement strategies for different owner types, property types, and neighborhood markets;
- Focusing on bringing properties into compliance, rather than collecting fees or punishing property owners;
- Addressing property conditions early and proactively; and,
- Building relationships with residents and community organizations.

For owner-occupied residential properties in weak housing markets, a strategic code enforcement approach might include providing grants and low-interest loans to low-income homeowners for repairs, sending notices before issuing citations, and connecting homeowners to additional resources and social services. For tenant-occupied properties, this approach might include conducting proactive inspections, partnering with organizations to educate tenants about their rights, and ensuring tenant access to legal services for protection from retaliation.

For vacant properties where traditional enforcement approaches have been ineffective, a strategic approach would focus on mitigating harm and working to return the property to productive use. This could include boarding buildings and mowing grass, placing a lien on the property for the full cost of such abatement, and transferring the property to new responsible ownership.

As Phil Crowe and LMG learned, effective strategic code enforcement is rooted in a commitment to advancing equity and meeting resident needs. Communities must recognize how unjust, discriminatory policies and practices—including code enforcement—have contributed to current property conditions and concentrated such properties in neighborhoods of color. And they must work with residents and grassroots organizations to craft strategies that seek to repair the harmful effects of these policies and practices.

How Can Communities Use American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) Funding to Achieve More Equitable Code Enforcement Outcomes?

The economic impacts of the pandemic left many property owners with fewer resources to make repairs, and COVID-19 safety precautions limited some communities' ability to conduct housing inspections or respond to maintenance complaints. As a result, some communities are using ARP funds to help bring properties up to code. In doing so, many communities are also using this opportunity to transition from traditional code enforcement to a strategic approach.


For example, Bay City, Michigan allocated \$3 million in ARP funds to home repair and code enforcement activities, aimed at providing financially struggling property owners support to achieve code compliance. Detroit launched an ARP-funded roof repair and replacement program (roof disrepair is the code compliance issue that most commonly blocks residents from other home repair programs).

Communities are also using ARP funds to partner with residents to address housing conditions. Syracuse, New York allocated \$800,000 to support its Community Ambassador program, which connects tenants to the code enforcement department and other resources, and Youngstown, Ohio allocated nearly \$150,000 for a quality of life and property maintenance ambassador.

Finally, communities are using ARP funds to help gain control of vacant properties and return them to productive use. The State of Michigan recently expanded its Blight Elimination Program with an appropriation of \$75 million in ARP funds.

How Can I Learn More?

Community Progress is here to help! Explore our publications, events, or reach out:

- Read "Revitalization in Michigan: A Guide to Transforming Vacant, Abandoned, and Deteriorated (VAD) Properties through Code Enforcement"
- Attend our free, virtual VAD Properties Academy June 21-22, which will include sessions on strategic code enforcement
- Contact us to learn how we can provide customized, expert guidance to help your community reimagine its code enforcement system 

Libby Benton is the associate counsel to National Initiatives at the Center for Community Progress. You may contact her at 877.5.4842 x170 or ebenton@communityprogress.org.



63

Michigan communities have a 22-person planning department. You can, too.

"They're always available to provide advice on most planning or zoning issues and their advice is based on 35 years of experience in numerous communities throughout Michigan."

R. Brent Savidant, planning director, City of Troy



Carlisle | Wortman
ASSOCIATES, INC.

CWAPLAN.COM 734.662.2200



Municipal law comes with a unique set of challenges. We've been solving them for well over 50 years.

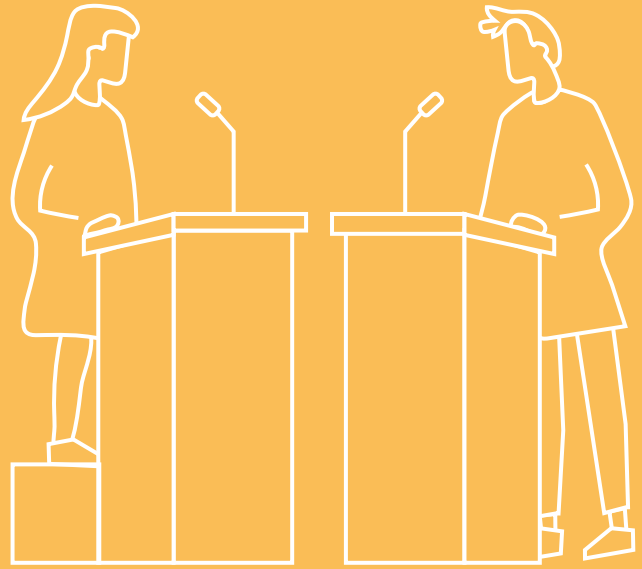
Our attorneys are highly knowledgeable, relationship-driven, and passionately serve villages and cities with a level of accessibility that's second to none.

mikameyers.com **We get you. We've got you.**

EQUALITY



EQUITY



mml.org/dei | deiteam@mml.org

MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE CONVENTION 2023



SAVE THE DATE!
OCTOBER 18-20



FOLLOW OUR SOCIALS FOR FUTURE DETAILS

**TRAVERSE CITY,
MICHIGAN**

Jessica VanderKolk, Battle Creek Communications Manager, and three enthusiastic Nextdoor users: Lynn Ward Gray, Planning Commission (former city commissioner and vice mayor); Kathy Antaya, Sustainable BC Committee; and Sam Gray, Housing Commission.



BATTLE CREEK
pop. 52,721

BATTLE CREEK **nextdoor** HOSTING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

By Jessica VanderKolk

When the City of Battle Creek declares a snow emergency, as we did in February, neighbors have about 24 hours to park off the streets so we can fully plow the Michigan winter snowfall in the forecast.

We send that message quickly, on a long list of channels. We share with our regional media, on our website, via a texting platform, translated for our Latinx and Burmese communities, and on the social media platform specially made for local government messaging and engagement: Nextdoor.

Our Nextdoor alert pinged over 10,000 member cell phones and email boxes immediately, so anyone parked on the street would receive the update and know our requested action.

Battle Creek initially joined Nextdoor in 2015 with our police department, after our chief learned about the platform at a conference. It was a slow start, but we joined fully as the City of Battle Creek one year later, in February 2016.

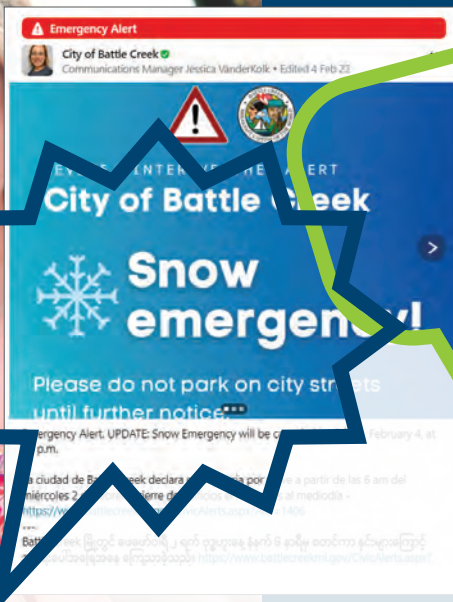
It all started with an extremely neighborhood-level topic: recycling. Any curbside service is important to our neighbors, and we use Nextdoor to inform and connect with our community about recycling, construction projects they'll see right out their windows, crime and crime prevention, and questions they have about all of those services and more.

"Nextdoor is unique in that the city cannot participate in neighborhood conversations, but the city can host conversations, and I think that builds trust around us listening and engaging, but not interfering," said Battle Creek City Manager Rebecca Fleury. "This is a new premise for our elected officials, but they engage in their own neighborhoods, share information from staff, and we can all participate in conversations in a meaningful way."

We have worked hard over the last eight years to build a trusting and safe space online where we can engage with our community in real ways. It shows in the praise, suggestions, and thanks we receive from our neighbors, and in the national recognition we received in 2022. Battle Creek earned the Government Social Media Golden Post Award last year for the Best Nextdoor Presence. The judges recognized the way we translate emergency information into other languages that benefit our community, as well as our high level of engagement on the platform.

While we do not regulate the speed of our engagement and frequency of posting, our tiny, mighty communications team of two understands the best practice of checking the platform daily, and often do post and engage daily. To date, we have grown Battle Creek's Nextdoor membership to 10,400 neighbors.

Kathy Antaya (Sustainable BC committee member) and Jessica VanderKolk (City communications manager) in Battle Creek's Urbandale neighborhood.



“Nextdoor is unique in that the city cannot participate in neighborhood conversations, but the city can host conversations, and I think that builds trust around us listening and engaging, but not interfering.”

—Battle Creek City Manager Rebecca Fleury

Our police department worked to set up Nextdoor with our local nonprofit organization that provides programs to create and promote stable homes and neighborhoods. While I remained hesitant, later in 2015 I met one of Nextdoor's top neighbors—Joseph Porcelli, in part, the platform's leader in building relationships with agencies across the country. Our discussion brought to light the ways communities can use Nextdoor as part of a balanced communications strategy. That clicked for me, still early in my tenure with the city and eager to keep building relationships between the city and our community.

I mentioned earlier that we started with recycling. It was a doozy of a service change, moving to every-other-week recycling from weekly, and to 96-gallon carts from small, open boxes. We know that direct mailings—especially in Battle Creek, where many people still appreciate holding information in their hands—are an important way to inform neighbors about these types of changes.

We did mail postcards, but we also used Nextdoor, because recycling is one of those curbside services. We shared the information in multiple posts, answered dozens of questions in the comments, and used the Event feature to invite neighbors to open houses where they could learn more, and see and touch the new carts.


At the time, we felt disheartened by a post with 25 comments trending negatively. But we experienced real engagement, and we got through the changes together. We built on that, and continue working through changes as a community, be it the COVID-19 pandemic, an entire change of curbside waste haulers, routine infrastructure maintenance, citywide boil water advisories, or snow emergencies.

Recently, a neighbor sent a Nextdoor message concerned that we changed her street sign from “Court” to “Drive.” Sending that right over to our traffic manager, he realized it was a mistake, and a crew changed it back within the week. This is a prime example of the neighborhood pride people feel, and how our engagement on Nextdoor keeps that going, and builds on it.

Nextdoor has some excellent features that we use, and other communities can, too.

- **Alerts**—I mentioned these earlier as a way to reach people right away, no matter how they set up their Nextdoor notifications. We use these sparingly, for weather emergencies, a missing person, or an urgent service change that affects the entire city (like the boil water advisories I referenced).
- **Real labels**—When you add staff to your community’s Nextdoor account, you have the opportunity to use your real name, title, and photo. I recommend you do that. In my experience, it creates a civil conversation when neighbors can see who is posting, and who is interacting with them.
- **Focused visibility**—When we have a boil water advisory or a road closure that will only affect one block in one neighborhood, the other 51,049 neighbors in Battle Creek don’t have to receive that information. I appreciate that we don’t oversaturate the community with information that doesn’t directly affect them.

Nextdoor isn’t perfect, and I look forward to the platform’s continued growth, too. You cannot schedule posts ahead of time, which means I set reminders for myself to post particular information at particular times. And you cannot natively add alt text to images. I add image descriptions to the bottom of my posts to address that, so anyone using a screen reader still receives the information.

You may feel like I did, and not want to add another platform to your process, or you may have another excellent way to engage at the neighborhood level. If you don’t, Nextdoor might be the right platform to try in your community. Different organizations use Nextdoor in wonderful ways, sharing important information, building trust, and connecting people where it counts—in our neighborhoods. 



Jessica Vanderkolk is the communications manager for the City of Battle Creek. You may contact her at 269.966.3355 x 1204 or JLVanderkolk@battlecreekmi.gov.



Engineering . Architecture . Land Surveying . Coastal & Waterfront
Landscape Architecture . Planning . Digital Solutions . Site Development

Benton Harbor
Kalamazoo/Portage
Grand Haven
Grand Rapids

269.927.2295
abonmarche.com Resilient . Transformative . Community Driven



Where danger meets opportunity.



Local Government Risk Management

You Own It

One great thing about the Michigan Municipal League's Liability-Property Pool and Workers' Compensation Fund is that they are owned and controlled by their member communities. The programs provide long-term, stable, and cost-effective insurance for League members and associate members.

Learn more here: <https://mml.org/programs-services/risk-management/>.



michigan municipal league
liability and property pool

We love where you live.

mml.org/insurance/pool

CAP CON 2023

MAXIMIZING THE MOMENT

Thank you for attending!



League President Barb Ziarko greets general session speaker Christopher Coes of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Members about to attend the Michigan Woman in Municipal Government luncheon.



It was so great seeing many both new and familiar faces at this year's CapCon in Lansing April 18-19. We were so pleased to have upwards of 500 people attend the conference, including members, business participants, guests, and League staff.

Community leaders from throughout the state representing municipalities of all shapes and sizes attended a variety of sessions important to the functioning of local government. Highlights included a brief speech and award presentation by Governor Gretchen Whitmer, a general session on transportation infrastructure, barrier-free design, a panel from new legislative leaders, hiring practices, new voting laws, both a general session and breakout session on housing, and much more.

President Barbara Ziarko, Sterling Heights councilmember, kicked off the event with a general session presentation on the many ways the League is continuing to make victories for local government. There was also time set aside to network with colleagues, meet with vendors at the Expo, and talk with state legislators in a relaxed breakfast. The League also held a press conference about our Women's Municipal Leadership Program, which has helped raise the percentage of women local chief administrative officers from 16 percent to over 20 percent since the start of the program in 2017. 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 CapCon website at <http://blogs.mml.org/wp/cc/>.

Pontiac Deputy Treasurer Tyler White applauds during a general session.



Congratulations To Our 2023 Legislator of The Year Award Recipients!



State Senator Winnie Brinks (left)



State Senator Thomas Albert (middle)



General session featuring state legislative leaders.



Welcome entrance to the 2023 CapCon exhibition hall.



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



Michigan Women in Municipal Government (MUIMG)

(Page 26 photo caption) Cassopolis Village Manager Emilie LaGrow accepted an award from Governor Gretchen Whitmer recognizing Emilie and Cassopolis for embodying the underdog spirit and true Michigan grit.

16/50

GRADUATES & PRESS CONFERENCE CELEBRATION

16/50 Project Women's Municipal Leadership Program Graduating Class of 2023

Front row R to L: Colleen Niedzwicki, Mary Worland, LaTarro Traylor, Meg Schubert, Jessica Schisser, Gretchen Gomolka, Jennifer Rosser-Nesbitt, Casey Clear, Tara Peltoma.

Back row (standing only) R to L: Karen Mondora, Macy Barcheski, Kaitlyn Aldrich, Susan Barkman, Michelle King, Jessica Manley



For photos from this year's CapCon and other League events, go to [flickr.com/photos/michigancommunities](https://www.flickr.com/photos/michigancommunities). Also, check out our #2023CapCon conversation on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

EOA ELECTED OFFICIALS ACADEMY GRADUATES



Elected Officials Academy Level 4 Graduate

Lisa Hicks-Clayton,
Dearborn Heights



Elected Officials Academy Level 3 Graduates

(l to r)
Valerie Kindle, Harper Woods
Lee Kilbourn, Auburn
Janet Dillon, Saline
Colleen Brown, Montrose
Not pictured:
Pauline Repp, Port Huron

Elected Officials Academy Level 2 Graduates

(l to r)
Larry Moss, Greenville
David Tossava, Hastings
Joe LaRussa, Farmington
Mike DeVore, Lowell



Elected Officials Academy Level 1 Graduates

(l to r) Ivery Toussant, Jr., Harper Woods,
David Tossava, Hastings
Marty Chambers, Lowell
Laura Casey, Novi
James Barrus, Greenville
Not pictured:
Anita Ashford, Port Huron
Janae Fear, Owosso
Jaime Greene, Michigan State Representative



THANK YOU TO OUR **CAP CON 2023** SPONSORS



PLATINUM SPONSOR



Nonprofit corporations and independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

GOLD



TITANIUM SPONSOR



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

SILVER

ABONMARCHE CONSULTANTS, INC.
VORTEX AQUATIC STRUCTURES
INTERNATIONAL

SIGNATURE SPONSORS

WELCOME RECEPTION



michigan municipal league
workers' compensation fund
liability and property pool



INDEPENDENT • COMPREHENSIVE • REPEATABLE

REGISTRATION



MOBILE APP



LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST



MOBILE CHARGING STATION

MCKENNA

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

ALLEN EDWIN HOMES
RETAIL STRATEGIES

A LA CARTE SPONSORS

COFFEE BREAKS

HENNESSEY ENGINEERS
ITC HOLDINGS CORP.

The Headlee Amendment, Proposal A, and Public School Academies

The Taxpayers for Michigan Constitutional Government and several individual taxpayers (TMCG) filed an original action in the Court of Appeals in 2016 against the State of Michigan and various state departments to enforce § 30 of the Headlee Amendment (Const 1963, art 9, §§ 25-34). The Headlee Amendment was passed in 1978. Section 30 of the Headlee Amendment states as follows:

The proportion of *total state spending paid to all units of Local Government, taken as a group*, shall not be reduced below that proportion in effect in fiscal year 1978-79 [Const 1963, art 9, § 30]. Emphasis supplied.

Section 30 prohibits the State of Michigan from reducing monies paid to units of **Local Government**, taken as a group, in effect in 1978.

Section 33 defines “Local Government” as “**any political subdivision of the state**, including, but not restricted to, school districts, cities, villages, townships, charter townships, counties, charter counties, authorities created by the state, **and authorities created by other units of local government.**”

TMCG’s complaint centered on what categories of state spending should be classified as “state spending paid to all units of local government” for purposes of section 30. TMCG argued, in part, that neither Proposal A funds nor state aid to public school academies (PSAs) should be included. Proposal A was adopted in 1994 and revamped how schools were funded. PSAs are commonly referred to as charter schools. The Court of Appeals rejected both arguments, finding that the State did not violate section 30 by classifying Proposal A funding paid to school districts and PSA funding as state funds paid to local government.

On appeal, the Michigan Supreme Court affirmed that Proposal A spending is properly categorized as state spending and should be counted in the calculation of total state spending. It remanded the case to the Court of Appeals, however, to consider whether PSA funding should be counted as state spending paid to a unit of local government. The Court noted that a PSA authorized by a state public university is not to be counted under section 30. It remanded the case, however, to consider whether state funding to PSAs authorized by a school district, an intermediate school district, [ISD], or a community college should be included.

The Court of Appeals on December 22, 2022, noted “that Section 33 explicitly provides that the term “Local Government” includes “school districts.” The question for the Court of Appeals was whether an ISD or community college is a “public subdivision of the state” and, thus, a “Local Government” for purposes of the Headlee Amendment. The Court found that an ISD and a community college qualify as political subdivisions of the state and are therefore units of local government within the meaning of Headlee and that funding by them to PSAs must be counted as state spending to a unit of local government for purposes of section 30. The Court found that the distinctive marks of a political subdivision were missing with respect to the Bay Mills Community College and therefore not a unit of local government for purposes of §§ 30 or 33 of the Headlee Amendment.


Taxpayers for Michigan Constitutional Government v State of Michigan, No. 334663 (Michigan Court of Appeals) December 22, 2022.

See also Legal Spotlight Column, *The Review*, September/October 2020.

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.

Pentwater's Park Place: An Inside Look

By Morgan Schwanky



PENTWATER
pop 890

The Village of Pentwater's Park Place project was submitted as part of the League's 2022 Community Excellence Awards.

Park Place has previously held other names: the DPW garage and the Friendship Center. The building has now gone through two major renovations. The first was during the 1980s when it was transformed into the Friendship Center. The latest renovation is the Park Place project.

During both transformations, the Pentwater community utilized space that they already had and made it a place—a place for members of their community to come together.

When the village's millage was renewed, it was evident where they could utilize those funds: revitalizing their community center.

"[The building] was in dire need of an upgrade," Village Manager Chris Brown said. "It was the consensus of the taxpayers that 'We want to see this upgraded and some investments put into it. This needs to be revitalized.' So, we undertook this project of 'What do we want to do with it? How much money can we afford to spend on it?'" Brown said.

Once ideas starting rolling, Brown and the village council realized that the project could take on providing solutions to a variety of their needs including a meeting space for their municipal building.

"We met the crossroads of having to move our old village hall to create a new village council chamber and a new village hall. At that point we decided that we could throw a little extra money at it," Brown said.

This resulted in creating a place where all those needs could be met. This solution solved multiple needs of the community. Through investing in what they already had, it also saved the community space and money.

"Coupled with the millage, we were able to fund this project for under \$200,000 and did a complete renovation inside."

The community recognized that the building was being underutilized in its current state; however, it was a space that had potential.

"Our village hall is strictly administrative offices. Rather than constructing a large room for our public meetings that is used three days a month—and then sits empty the rest of the time—it didn't seem like a good investment. We decided to put the additional funding that we would have spent on that into renovating our community center. [Park Place] is the building we use for our monthly council meetings—it's a multipurpose space. In a small village we don't have the versatility of all these resources, so we have to pack things together. We figured it was a better bang for our buck with taxpayer money," explained Brown.

Their work began in the fall of 2019. Despite some stops and delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was completed in the fall of 2020.

The village had a variety of support to get the project done—with multiple organizations, clubs, and individuals providing funds and volunteers. Brown highlighted two individual volunteers who were particularly influential on the project: Steve Bass and Claudia Ressel-Hodan.

Bass is a Hollywood production designer and multi-E Emmy award winner. "He donated his time and talent to us, so we didn't have to spend money on design and architecture. He did quite a comprehensive plan, right down to the artwork on the walls," Brown said. The place that Brown once considered "drab" is now a welcoming, modernized space that features both historic art and casual cottage décor accents. Bass expressed, "I live in Hollywood as a set designer, but I made Pentwater my primary home, because I love our quaint village. I want[ed] to help design a beautiful space as my gift to the community."

Ressel-Hodan played a major part in spearheading the project. She served on the village council at the start of the project. She has retired from the council, but she now serves as the director for Park Place. "It's ironic her mother, who lived in the community before her, was instrumental in the beginning of the Friendship Center in the '80s, so she is a second generation for the revitalization of it," Brown said.



BEFORE



DURING




AFTER

As it stands today, Park Place welcomes the community for a variety of activities from three distinct spaces: the flex area, the business center, and a living room space.

The flex area provides adequate space for functions such as school dances, chair yoga, knitting groups, euchre, weddings, etc. It also includes a business center for meetings and a cozy living room-like space for relaxing. It is open 29 days a month for residents to use. The village council also uses it twice a month to hold its meetings.

The Pentwater community has really embraced the redesigned place. Since its reopening, there have been a variety of groups from coffee social hours, line dancing, and even a youth gathering space.

“It’s been very well received. Our citizens are very proud of it. Any given day of the week, there is something going on over there.” Brown said.

Despite its size and lack of resources, the village used creativity, a generous volunteer base, and the love of the community to create a meaningful place. 

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

State-Budget Surplus and Municipalities

By Rick Haglund



After decades of shortchanging local governments, state officials are sending more than \$300 million from an unprecedented state budget surplus—estimated at \$9.2 billion in January—to local communities still rebounding from the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. And hundreds of millions more could come from Governor Whitmer’s proposed fiscal 2024 budget.

Two supplemental 2023 budget bills passed earlier this year allocate \$250 million to build or refurbish 2,000 housing units and spruce up downtowns. Another \$60 million in grant funding will help build local community centers. Whitmer’s proposed 2024 budget will pump more than \$400 million into housing, downtown development, and replacing lead water service lines across the state. Plus, the governor proposes an ongoing seven percent statutory revenue sharing increase for cities, villages, and townships with two percent of that to be spent on public safety. Her budget would give those local units a 10 percent one-time appropriation with half of that for public safety.

“Revenue sharing has been terribly underfunded for the better part of two decades,” said Hazel Park City Manager Ed Klobucher. “There’s been a systemic amount of damage done. We’re grateful that the state is looking to address that.” The spending comes at a time when the COVID pandemic has hollowed out many downtowns. Workers who once commuted to office jobs were ordered to stay home at the start of the pandemic in March 2020. Many have yet to return three years later. Working from home has shuttered restaurants and other businesses that served downtown workers.

At the same time, Michigan is straining to retain and attract young talent as its population ages and businesses scramble to find workers. There’s a growing recognition in Lansing that housing and placemaking efforts to make communities more attractive are key to meeting the state’s workforce needs. “Putting funding toward that tells us people do see the work we’re doing,” said Dana Walker, executive director of the Michigan Downtown Association. “It’s very exciting to see the commitment coming

from the governor’s office and possibly legislators as well,” she said regarding the proposed state budget.

Some fruit from initial funding is being seen in downtown Alpena where a \$5 million grant from the state’s Revitalization and Placemaking Grant program is providing crucial support for an estimated \$12 million development consisting of 15 apartments, and commercial and retail space being built there. “People increasingly look to live downtown to be in a vibrant, walkable environment,” said Anne Gentry, executive director of the city’s Downtown Development Authority. The grant program was initially a one-time initiative funded by federal COVID relief dollars, but Whitmer has proposed extending it at least through next year.

Downtowns see more housing as key to their survival. “Housing is a big need for downtowns,” Walker said, adding that they need to get creative in producing more housing units by doing such things as allowing for housing to be built at the back of retail stores, as well as on upper stories of buildings. Gentry said it’s “exciting” to see state funds being allocated to support local communities. “They all contribute to the various ingredients for a successful downtown, and when our downtown is strong, so is our community,” she said.

Another housing program, not specific to downtowns, aims to build and rehabilitate housing for middle-class families. The Missing Middle Housing Program, which started in 2022, this year will make \$50 million in federal American Rescue Plan money to help developers reduce the high cost of construction. The plan aims to “support the growth and economic mobility of employees” by boosting available housing stock, according to the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

Whitmer’s fiscal 2024 budget also would spend \$226 million to remove and replace 40,000 lead water service lines across the state over 10 years. That’s a boon to Hazel Park and other communities that are being required by the state to replace lines because of high lead levels in their drinking water. Hazel Park, a city of about 15,000 residents, has been replacing lines for several years but needs state assistance to finish the job, Klobucher said.


“Revenue sharing has been terribly underfunded for the better part of two decades. There’s been a systemic amount of damage done. We’re grateful that the state is looking to address that.” ”

-Hazel Park City Manager Ed Klobucher

He and other municipal leaders say they’re pleased with the proposed increases in revenue sharing, which has been declining for years. Klobucher said his working-class city has struggled to fund government services. It had to rely on budget cuts and raising local taxes to head off a takeover by a state emergency manager during the Great Recession of the late 2000s. “Revenue sharing isn’t gravy on mashed potatoes,” he said. “It’s an integral part of how municipalities are funded.”

Whitmer’s budget would boost constitutional and statutory revenue sharing to a total \$1.71 billion, up 71 percent from \$994 million in fiscal 2010 at the depth of the Great Recession, according to a Citizens Research Council of Michigan analysis. But that’s still down \$520 million from fiscal year 2001, adjusted for inflation. Whitmer’s 2024 budget would give cities, villages and townships \$327.1 million in one-time and ongoing statutory revenue sharing, a 17 percent increase over the current budget.

The state repeatedly cut statutory revenue sharing to balance its own budget, especially between 2000 and 2009 when Michigan was in a one-state recession as the auto industry cratered. But bipartisan legislation introduced in March would prevent the state from cutting statutory revenue sharing below the \$528 million in current revenue allocated to cities, villages, townships, and counties. Local officials say the proposed Revenue Sharing Trust Fund would help improve the quality of life in Michigan communities and help the state compete for talent.

“Having served on the Rochester Hills City Council for seven years, I’ve seen the economic importance of having strong communities,” said Sen. Michael Webber, R-Rochester Hills, one of the legislation’s sponsors. “This trust fund will help protect municipal resources and benefit every corner of this state.” 

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



ServeMICity

YOUR CONCIERGE FOR NAVIGATING NEW STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING

 michigan municipal league  foundation
michigan municipal league

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

MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

HANDBOOKS

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

Topics covered include:

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

Numerous appendices include:

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



Q. I need clarification on the Open Meetings Act (OMA). There were different rules during COVID-19 and I need to know if it is still OK for a member of council to call into a meeting to participate.

A. The amendment to the OMA that permitted virtual meeting attendance during COVID-19 has expired. The only permissible reason for virtually participating in a council meeting after December 31, 2021, is to accommodate a member absent due to military duty.

Q. Are members of the audience allowed to videotape council meetings? I had heard it was illegal to do so without the consent of all participants.

A. From the Michigan Open Meetings Act (OMA), MCL 15.263 “The right of a person to attend a meeting of a public body includes the right to tape-record, to videotape, to broadcast live on radio, and to telecast live on television the proceedings of a public body at a public meeting. The exercise of this right does not depend on the prior approval of the public body. However, a public body may establish reasonable rules and regulations in order to minimize the possibility of disrupting the meeting.”

Q. We are thinking of changing our clerk position from elected to appointed. How many cities appoint the clerk and how many elect? How is the change made?

A. Of the 276 cities with home rule charters, 42 elect the clerk, leaving 234 with various means of appointment (appointment by the mayor/appointment by the city manager with approval of council/appointment by the city manager).

To change the clerk’s position from elected to appointed, you must amend the city charter.

See the League’s Fact Sheet “Charter Amendment: HRC Legislative Body Resolution,” available at mml.org.

Q. We are considering combining our clerk and treasurer positions. How is this done? We are a general law village.

A. You must amend your charter (PA 3 of 1895, the General Law Village Act) to combine the offices of clerk and treasurer. The General Law Village Act lays out a reporting duty between these two positions for checks and balances in the village. To combine them, you must create the checks and balances in a different way, such as with the clerk/treasurer and the president or the clerk/treasurer and the council.

Sample ballot wording:

Shall the Village of _____ amend Article 1, Section 1, Chapter 2 of the village charter to combine the offices of the village clerk and village treasurer, and to provide that reports and accounts of the clerk/treasurer be made directly to the village council?

Q. Other than through a recall election, how is a councilmember removed from office?

A. If you are a city, city charters may have provisions on removing a councilmember. Here are some examples of such provisions:

- for any reason specified by statute for removal of city officers by the governor;
- for any act declared by this Charter to constitute misconduct in office;
- habitual drunkenness;
- conviction by a court of competent jurisdiction of a felony;
- willful violation of any provisions of the charter or ordinances;
- incompetency to perform the duties of his or her office;
- willful neglect of duty;
- corrupt or willful malfeasance in office;
- willful misconduct to the injury of the public service;
- if the officer shall absent himself or herself continuously from the city for more than thirty consecutive days in any one year without the permission of the council;
- in the case of any members of the council, if such officer shall miss four consecutive regular meetings of the council, or twenty-five percent of such meetings in any fiscal year of the city, unless such absences shall be excused by the council and the reason therefor entered in the proceedings of the council at the time of each absence;

As there was no removal process in the General Law Village Act, in 2018 the Michigan Election Law was amended to include:

The governor shall remove all village officers chosen by the electors of a village if the governor is satisfied from sufficient evidence submitted to the governor that the officer is guilty of official misconduct, willful neglect of duty, extortion, or habitual drunkenness, or has been convicted of being drunk, or if it appears by a certified copy of the judgment of a court of record of this state that a village officer, after the officer’s election or appointment, has been convicted of a felony.

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.

PUBLIC SPACES, COMMUNITY PLACES

By Melissa Milton-Pung

One of the most powerful and prolific tools for placemaking in Michigan is the *Public Spaces Community Places* (PSCP) program. Created by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) in 2014 in collaboration with the League and the web-based donation platform Patronicity, PSCP innovatively leveraged state agency investment to double the money of local crowdfunding campaigns through a process coined crowdgranting.

At the end of the 2022 calendar year

- \$12,577,052 crowdfunded
- \$10,889,568 matched
- 335 projects
- 59,193 patrons

Public Spaces Community Places (PSCP) annual report is available at <https://www.miplace.org/4b0093/globalassets/documents/pscp/pscp-annual-report-2022.pdf>

It was the first program of its kind in the country. And it revolutionized public space projects across Michigan.

This past year, PSCP hit a major milestone. It has now awarded \$10 million in matching funds to more than 300 projects across the State of Michigan.

I recently sat down with Paula Holtz of the MEDC and Mahala Clayton of Patronicity, to talk about their 97 percent success rate and the program's extraordinary ability to instill community pride as residents make real-time donations and become directly invested in their surroundings. We reflected on its impact from the Copper Country Curling Club in Calumet to an off-leash dog park in Detroit, in bringing food trucks to Flint and splashes of color to Jackson, and many places in between.

It's been nearly a decade since this program was founded and the program is well-known. Thinking back to the beginning of this program, what inspired its creation?

PH: This concept was borne out of the 2008 recession, when it was difficult for anyone to secure capital. There was a lot of

buzz around that time over local investing, then our leadership teams took it to the next level to use this newly legislated tool to invest in public spaces. PSCP got traction because it allows people to feel part of a project. They can kick in a few dollars—or even a few thousand—to help make a new public space in their community a reality.

MC: We really pride ourselves on flexibility to try and fund projects that are meaningful within each community. Criteria is the activation of public space and patron support. A relatively new development is that this program is now accessible to Low-Profit Limited Liability Companies (L3C). This form of social enterprise is a great fit for PSCP projects. They straddle the space between nonprofits and for-profits in a self-sustaining structure to achieve a social mission.

What are some of the unexpected outcomes of the PSCP program?

PH: For me, it's the reach; we've done projects in villages with a population as small as 291 people, all the way up to cities with populations well over 600,000. We have seen the success of placemaking projects from volunteer-led groups with three to four active members to larger foundations with over 20 members. Access regardless of income is also huge. Eighty-four percent of all 2022 PSCP projects took place in communities where the Median Household Income was below the state's Median Household Income. It's also the amazing partnership we have with MML and with Patronicity, keeping ideas fresh.

MC: MEDC has driven a constant state of innovation. They have kept a finger on the pulse of what local places need and pivoted to respond to shifting desires to increase inclusion and equitable access. For example, the recent refocus toward universal design has opened up public spaces to many more Michiganders.

What's popular lately? What kind of projects do you wish would be submitted?

PH: Common trends are mural projects, parks and trails, and the latest craze: pickleball courts! Just because it's a common trend, though, doesn't mean it's any less impactful for the community that's building this new amenity.

These campaigns are successful because they are community-led, not MEDC-prescribed. For more information on the history of crowdfunding in Michigan, check out the *Community Investment, Community Growth* report at crowdfundingmi.com

We have made a conscious effort this year to ensure the public spaces being funded via PSCP are designed to be available and accessible to the broadest group of community members possible. We have partnered with Disability Networks MI to assist us in identifying opportunities for these popular public spaces to be most accessible. They will provide a review of a PSCP project and if they provide a support letter, PSCP will offer an additional (up to) \$25,000 match for new public space projects that are “universally designed.” This is in addition to the maximum \$50,000 match provided for the activation of new public spaces.

MC: We want to see universal design the standard, either in new space creation or in making beloved places more accessible. There’s so much we can do to design public spaces more creatively.” She also points out that this mindset is where the placemaking realm headed. To be more inclusive for everyone, universal design increases enjoyment for more Michiganders, regardless of ability. I don’t know that we can call places truly public if they aren’t accessible to everyone.




The Children’s Nature Playscape brought a greenspace and natural playscape to downtown Kalamazoo. The space includes climbing features, an obstacle course, running water features, native plantings, and accessible pathways.

“Crowdgranting” combines crowdfunding—the practice of funding a project or venture through small donations from a large number of people, typically online—with a reward-based sponsor matching grant.

The program will now also be available to existing public spaces that are upgrading with universal design elements—applicants can request up to a \$50,000 1:1 match to make these spaces more accessible to all. To qualify for the funding applicants must obtain an accessibility/universal design review of their project from an organization representing people with disabilities.

**Where do you see this program going?
What’s your predictions for future trends?**

PH: We consistently spend down every dollar. Each year, our goal is to run out of money, demonstrate demand, and prove the continued need for this program in making great places in Michigan. We hope it will keep going strong.

MC: We have high hopes this program will only continue to grow. It’s open to all Michigan communities. There’s a lot of emerging opportunity for placemaking in rural areas. This program is an attainable tool that people can use in even the smallest of communities, and they are met with resounding success and public support. 

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.



Led by the City of Jackson and the Jackson Young Professionals, Bright Walls mural festival hosted more than 40 different artists from across the globe. There are 41 murals throughout downtown, attracting nearly 200,000 visitors from across the Midwest and beyond.



michigan municipal league

1675 Green Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48105



COMMUNITY Excellence Award

The Community Excellence Award, the League's annual statewide competition, recognizes outstanding municipal services, projects, and programs.

2023 Community Excellence Award Timeline

4/19/23: Start submitting projects
6/5/23: Deadline for submissions
7/18/23: Four finalists announced
10/19/23: MML Convention, Traverse City

For details go to cea.mml.org

WINNERS

2022 - Cassopolis
2021 - Rochester Hills
2020 - Canceled Due to COVID
2019 - Bay City
2018 - Fraser
2017 - Hudsonville
2016 - Beaverton
2015 - Westland
2014 - Harbor Beach
2013 - Ironwood
2012 - Grandville
2011 - Clare
2010 - Grand Haven
2009 - Lathrup Village
2008 - Jackson
2007 - St. Joseph

