

# The Review

The official magazine of the  michigan municipal league  
March/April 2024

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# The Review

March/April 2024

Volume 97, Number 2

The official magazine of the  
 michigan municipal league

Visit [mml.org](http://mml.org) for the electronic version of the magazine and past issues.



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December 14, 2023

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Pictured from left to right: Bob Clark, Lake Charter Township treasurer; Georgia Gipson, Bridgman councilmember; Julie Strating, co-founder, Changemaker Studio; Joan Hurray (holding trophy), Bridgman planning commissioner; Juan Ganum, Bridgman city manager; Tara Heiser, co-founder, Changemaker Studio; and Barb Clark, Lake Charter Township resident.



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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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# Looking Out for the Interests of Local Government

## Executive Director's Message

Most of us involved with government can sometimes get frustrated at how long the process takes to make legislative change.

What we have to remember is that the entire process—from initial draft to executive approval—is complicated *by design*. Debate, committee review, public input, legal and constitutional scrutiny, implementation planning . . . they're all designed to ensure proposed laws are thoroughly examined out in the light of day for everyone to see and consider *before* they become the 'Law of the Land.'

That doesn't always happen. We could probably all name our Top Ten Laws that we passionately believe were misguided, unfair, or confusing.

Hopefully, that's when the amendment process steps in to evaluate the law's effectiveness and propose any alterations needed to address unforeseen issues, or changes in the real-world circumstances in which the law was enacted in the first place.

This is precisely why it is so crucial to have the League's lobbying team hard at work in Lansing, diligently looking out for the interests of local government. They are the guardians, champions, and crusaders acting on your behalf to ensure that you can effectively govern, maintain, and sustain your communities for the benefit of the people who live there. They are there in the legislative trenches, keeping their ear to the ground and their shoulder to the wheel, so that *you* can keep *your* focus where it needs to be: right there at home.

Each year, we devote *The Review's* spring issue to all things legislative, and to our lobbying team in particular. Within these pages you'll find a wrap-up of 2023's most impactful legislation and an introduction to our caucus of former municipal officials who are now serving in the State Legislature.

We'll look at what lies ahead, such as the recent passage of HB 5120 and HB 5121, and their expected impact on local control over the siting of energy facilities. You'll also read about the Growing Michigan Together Council and its long-term vision to position Michigan for success in the 21st century.

And because knowledge is key to good governance, our membership column will remind you about an outstanding opportunity from Central Michigan University, offering tuition savings to elected officials and employees of League member municipalities.

Last but not least, we're proud to showcase the winner of the 2023 Community Excellence Award. The Bridgman Courtyard project transformed an underutilized parking lot into a vibrant gathering space in the city's downtown. It's a great example of building community wealth through placemaking projects that foster connection and celebrate a community's unique identity and character.

But a single magazine issue can only skim the surface of all the issues and affairs that can affect local government. The best place to learn about the latest programs and policies coming out of Lansing is at the League's annual CapCon, the legislative event of the year for local government.

We'll provide meaningful information and tangible tools to advocate, engage, and influence the legislative process to support and shape the future of our communities. The League's State and Federal Affairs team will be on hand with a breakdown of the League's legislative priorities for 2024, and an overview of Governor Whitmer's budget.

Hear a real-time focus group of Michigan residents discussing what makes a thriving community and listen in as political insiders share their insights into state and national politics and policy. Breakout sessions will offer solutions for everything from housing to health equity and collective bargaining.

Join us March 12-13 for CapCon 2024. We can make change happen. Together.



**Dan Gilmartin**

League Executive Director and CEO  
734-669-6302 | [dpg@mml.org](mailto:dpg@mml.org)

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# Strategic Advocacy Leads to Legislative Success

–By John LaMacchia

The League's legislative advocacy efforts continue to be a core function of the organization on behalf of our members. Over the last couple of years, we have had tremendous opportunity to leverage an abundance of financial resources, strategically engage with other organizations and individuals, and proactively highlight the importance of Michigan having thriving communities.

In our advocacy work, we express the League's belief that every community across Michigan offers unique experiences to the people and businesses that call them home. Collectively, these communities are on the leading edge of building community and individual assets which are essential components of a strong and robust economy. Working with the Legislature, we are able to proactively pursue policy and investments that support local services and infrastructure, create economic development opportunities, and expand access to attainable housing.

Vibrant communities that are attractive to people and business are critical to Michigan's success, which forms the basis of our policy priorities. To achieve this outcome, we believe state policy should focus on issues that:

- Protect Community Specific Solutions and Resources
- Modernize Local Governance and Structure
- Invest in Human Capital and Physical Infrastructure Built for the Future
- Generate Robust Housing and Economic Development Opportunities

Specific policy has been identified within each of these areas of focus, and we are using them to provide state leaders with strategies, and an opportunity for open dialog and partnership, on how we safeguard the people and places that host our families, neighbors, and livelihoods.

Currently, we are engaging on bills that impact the Open Meetings Act, Freedom of Information Act, and public notices. We intend to maintain our leadership role with the broadly supported Housing Michigan Coalition to promote additional local tools that will assist with the development of attainable workforce housing. On the municipal finance front, we continue to advocate for the creation of a revenue sharing trust fund and to reform the interaction between Headlee and Proposal A. Finally, our commitment to defend local control remains unwavering as we deal with issues like the preemption of local permitting of aggregate mines and short-term rentals.

## Local Policy Priorities Take Center Stage

The Legislature currently has more legislators with local government experience than at any point in recent history. The deep understanding they bring to the table about the challenges local governments throughout Michigan are facing is invaluable. The resulting policy that legislators are supporting reflects that knowledge and their desire to help fix the problems that they previously faced firsthand.

Working directly with these legislators, several policy proposals long championed by the League are seeing the light of day. Some have already been signed by the governor, and others have begun to receive significant bipartisan support. Key policy proposals include:

### Revenue Sharing Trust Fund

House Bills 4274 and 4275, in an incredible sign of bipartisan support, passed the House by vote of 106-4. These bills would dedicate 8 percent of the 4 percent sales tax and place those funds in a trust fund specifically for statutory revenue sharing. This legislation is the League's top priority and would go a long way to preserving resources that are currently being used to fund revenue sharing. We are hopeful that the Senate will act on this legislation in the first half of 2024.

### Public Safety and Violence Prevention Trust Fund

Legislation that would create a Public Safety and Violence prevention fund also passed the house with a significant majority prior to the end of 2023. Like the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund, House Bills 4605 and 4606 would dedicate 1.5 percent of the 4 percent sales tax to cities, villages, townships, and counties to provide resources to help reduce violent crime across Michigan.

When combined with the Revenue sharing Trust Fund, these four bills would secure over \$700M in protected funding for local government.



Betsy Richardson, Capital Office Coordinator

**Started at MML:** 2018

Betsy is responsible for assisting in the day-to-day operation of the Lansing office.

**Fun Fact:** I once received an award for rock climbing. Ok, so maybe the award was given to me because I made it halfway up the climbing route, panicked and had to come back down—but it still counts!

**Bio:** I am one of four siblings, and the only girl. I recently got married and live in East Lansing with my husband Mike. My favorite tv show is *The Office*—to the point that I had the theme song played at my wedding ceremony. My husband and I love traveling and trying new types of food whenever possible.

**Favorite Big Ten school:** Michigan State University, of course!

### Disabled Veterans Property Tax Exemption

House Bills 4894, 4895, and 4896 make up a three-bill package that will shift the cost of the disabled veterans property tax exemption from the municipality to the state. Addressing the cost burden this exemption has placed on locals is another top priority for the League. The bills have received bipartisan support, and we are working with legislative leaders to secure passage of this legislation.

### Housing

Senate Bill 129 allows housing development projects to be eligible for brownfield tax increment financing (TIF) by expanding the definition of “eligible activity” in the Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act to include housing development activities. This legislation was signed into law by Governor Whitmer last year and provides an additional tool to our communities as they work to address local housing needs.

### Personal Property Tax Small Taxpayer Exemption (big win!)

In 2021 as part of a budget supplemental, the state expanded the personal property tax small taxpayer exemption from \$80k to \$180K. This resulted in an approximate \$75M hit to local budgets. When this expansion took effect, there was a one-time \$75M appropriation to cover the cost to locals and an expectation that bills would be introduced to create a permanent fix. In May of 2023, three bills were introduced to codify a permanent reimbursement mechanism and revenue stream. They are Senate Bill 331, House Bills 4553, and 4554. These bills have now been signed by the governor and a permanent funding stream to reimburse local governments for lost revenue has been secured.



Jennifer Rigterink, Assistant Director of State & Federal Affairs

**Started at MML:** 2016

**Issue Areas:** economic development, zoning, and land use

**Fun Fact:** You spend a third of your life sleeping (so your mattress choice is very important!).

**Bio:** I'm a Michigan State University graduate with a bachelor's degree in urban and regional planning. I live in DeWitt with my husband and two children. My husband and I own a small business. On the weekend you'll usually find me out of town at a kid's sporting event (volleyball/soccer).

**Favorite Big Ten school:** Michigan State University. Go Green!



John LaMacchia, Director of State & Federal Affairs

**Started at MML:** 2013

**Issue Areas:** transportation, infrastructure, and municipal finance

**Fun Fact:** There are few things I enjoy more than sitting on my deck with a cold beverage listening to the Detroit Tigers on the radio.

**Bio:** I grew up in the Lansing area, attended Michigan State University, and reside in DeWitt with my wife and three children. I am an avid sports fan, extremely competitive, love spending time with my family, wish I played more golf, and am a connoisseur of smoked meats and cheeses. The past few years, I have worked hard at recreating my grandma’s meatball recipe, perfecting my homemade spaghetti sauce, and becoming an amateur pit boss.

**Favorite Big Ten school:** Michigan State University. Go White!

### State Budget

The success we are finding on the policy front is carrying over to the state budget. Last year the state found itself in the fortunate position of having a multi-billion-dollar surplus. Propped up by one-time money, this allowed legislators to invest significant resources in infrastructure, housing, and economic development.

Investments made through the budget align with many of the priority areas identified by the League. These resources will help replace lead pipes, improve access to transit options, invest in placemaking, and overall, help improve the quality of life in our communities. Highlights of the most recent budget include:

### Revenue Sharing

- \$36 million (7 percent increase) in revenue sharing to help counties, cities, villages, and townships. Two percent is specifically dedicated to funding for local public safety initiatives.
- \$62 million in additional funding through constitutional revenue sharing.

### Infrastructure

- \$416 million increase in funding to fix roads.
- \$80 million for the local bridge bundling program to help local government repair and replace aging bridges.
- Nearly \$600 million for water infrastructure.
- \$20 million for contaminated site cleanup to protect communities from impacts of former industrial sites.



Herasanna Richards, Legislative Associate

**Started at MML:** 2019

**Issue Areas:** energy, environment, and public safety

**Fun Fact:** Definitely the first and only “Herasanna” you have ever met. My name is a portmanteau created from my parents’ names. I can also play the clarinet.

**Bio:** I’m a Michigan transplant by way of Tennessee. I love travel and cool hospitality experiences! I’m happiest exploring new places, fun hotels, and unique restaurants with my husband. #justmarried. I come from a huge, tight-knit family with Caribbean roots. I love spending time with them and celebrating our Virgin Islands culture! My favorite TV shows are period dramas, especially with political themes. Saturday happy place is watching historical period dramas while Wiki-surfing for accuracy.

**Favorite Big Ten school:** My alma mater, Michigan State University!





Dave Hodgkins, Legislative Associate

**Started at MML:** 2023

**Issue Areas:** elections, labor issues, and parks and recreation

**Fun Fact:** My family has a pet gecko named Echo!

**Bio:** I'm from Ionia but lived in the Lansing area for 12 years after attending Central Michigan University. Recently, my family moved to Mt. Pleasant where we love to stay active through sports and getting out into the community.

**Favorite Big Ten school:** Not Ohio State.

**Transit**

- \$70 million to improve transit access.
- \$45 million for local bus operations: support affordable transportation options.
- \$3.5 million to invest in shared streets and spaces to help cities and transit agencies create options for pedestrians and bicyclists.

**Energy and Environment**

- \$30 million for renewable ready communities to help local governments install renewable energy at scale.
- \$21.3 million for electric vehicles and renewable energy charging infrastructure.
- \$20 million to enhance air quality and remediate contaminated sites in historically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities.

**Economic Development**

- \$50 million in sustainable, recurring funding for the Housing and Community Development Fund.
- \$50 million in sustainable, recurring funding for Revitalization and Placemaking Grants, used to make communities more attractive places to live and work.

Through strategic advocacy, the League's State and Federal Affairs team has been able to successfully support more investment into our communities and have the Legislature act on the organization's top priorities. As we move through the remaining months of 2024, we hope to build upon recent success, and take the opportunity in front of us to continue our pursuit of policy changes that will support thriving communities across Michigan. [L](#)

John LaMacchia is the director of state and federal affairs for the League. You may contact him at [jlamacchia@mml.org](mailto:jlamacchia@mml.org) or 517-908-0303.



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# MUNICIPAL CAUCUS: LOCAL TO LANSING

—By Dave Hodgkins

 michigan municipal league | 125th Anniversary

*Across three centuries and two peninsulas: One League*

## July 2005 House Local Government Caucus Formed

The League assisted with the formation of a bi-partisan Local Government Caucus. The idea came about after two freshman legislators expressed an interest in putting together such a group soon after they came to Lansing. League staff worked with them to identify legislators with local government experience (65 of the 110 House members). At its first meeting, the group determined “The purpose of the Caucus is to provide a forum for education, awareness, and discussion of issues impacting local units of government and their residents.”

As we enter the second year of the 2023-2024 Legislative Session, the Michigan Municipal League continues to work with a key group in the Michigan Legislature. Known as the Municipal Caucus, this bi-partisan effort was formed by the League’s State and Federal Affairs team three sessions ago. It comprises elected officials—representatives and senators—with prior experience serving in municipal government.

The underlying principle is that regardless of where and who a lawmaker represents, everyone in the Municipal Caucus shares the common bond of having served constituents at the village and city levels before arriving in Lansing. This background in local government and their time promoting our cities and villages makes the organization instrumental in forming—and achieving—solutions.

*“... everyone in the Municipal Caucus shares the common bond of having served constituents at the village and city levels before arriving in Lansing.”*

## Municipal Caucus Co-Chairs



Senator  
Jeremy Moss  
(D-Southfield)



Senator  
Mike Webber  
(R-Rochester Hills)



Representative  
Amos O'Neal  
(D-Saginaw)



Representative  
Mark Tisdell  
(R-Rochester Hills)

### Shifting from Education to Policy


Initially, the Municipal Caucus was intended as a medium for League staff to educate lawmakers on issues important to local governments. It has grown to 35 legislators, and League staff identified four individuals to co-chair the group: Senator Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield), Senator Mike Webber (R-Rochester Hills), Representative Amos O’Neal (D-Saginaw), and Representative Mark Tisdell (R-Rochester Hills). With more lawmakers having previous municipal experience now serving in the Michigan Legislature than in the past, the State and Federal Affairs team approached the group about shifting from education to pursuing policy changes.

This session, the lawmakers in the Municipal Caucus have taken a more active role in determining the issues prioritized within the group. With the Michigan Municipal League providing a framework of key objectives, the Caucus members selected the top policies based on their perceived importance. Following this, legislative sponsors and co-sponsors volunteered to lead these issues through the legislative process, with the State and Federal Affairs team offering support.

### Priorities

Some of the priorities identified this session include the disabled veteran property tax exemptions, dark stores, and addressing the constraints on municipal budgets due to the interaction between Headlee and Prop A. The top priority agreed upon within the Municipal Caucus is the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund, also a long-standing priority for the League. Demonstrating their commitment, all four chairs introduced legislation to establish the trust fund and have tirelessly advocated for its progression. Their collective efforts, backed by the entire Municipal Caucus, led to the Michigan House of Representatives passing this legislation by an overwhelming vote of 106-4 in late 2023. Their advocacy now shifts to the Michigan Senate to ensure the passage of the bills.

This is a prime example of the collective power the group can have when united by their common, bi-partisan interest in elevating the needs of our municipalities. The League has observed increased engagement from lawmakers on critical issues and has recognized the impact through our Legislator of the Year Award, which the League has given to several members of the Municipal Caucus.

The League appreciates our allies in the Municipal Caucus. It will continue to support their advocacy of key priorities in the future. 

Dave Hodgkins is a legislative associate for the League. You may contact him at 517-908-0304 or dhodgkins@mml.org.



  
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# From the League's history banks . . .



## Let Local Votes Count (LLVC)

Executive Director's Message,  
*Michigan Municipal Review*, May 2000:

"In one of the most dramatic moments in the League's 34-year history of holding legislative conferences, Don Stypula, coordinator of the LLVC ballot campaign, brought the over 700 municipal officials attending the luncheon to their feet for a standing ovation. It was an enthusiastic and demonstrative expression by mayors, councilmembers, village presidents, and administrators from throughout Michigan, speaking in unison: "Local Votes Do Count!"

LLVC was a campaign to preserve local autonomy, proposing an amendment to the Michigan Constitution to require a two-thirds vote in each chamber of the Legislature on any bill that would pre-empt, restrict, or eliminate local government authority.

Ironically, the struggle over the rights of local communities came at a time when many state leaders admonished officials in Washington for having usurped the rights of state government. The *Greenville Daily News* observed, "The paternalistic notion that the state knows better than local folks about how to conduct their affairs is repugnant to responsible government." [L](#)

an agreement with the university. The university also provided conference and committee rooms and secretarial support.

Initially, the activities of the Lansing office were confined to consultation and research on street and highway problems. Passage of several highway legislations in the previous session of the Legislature and stepped up federal and state highway programs prompted the League to place additional emphasis on this important phase of municipal development.

*Kalamazoo expands city limits*

1957 was a year of phenomenal growth for the City of Kalamazoo. The National Municipal League (now the National Civic League) and *Leak magazine* cited the city for "progress achieved through intelligent citizen action." This action helped Kalamazoo solve some of its urban fringe area problems through annexation.

More than 2,500 local citizens were active in the annexation campaign, plus many groups and associations. Their efforts increased Kalamazoo's geographic area by 15 percent and its population by 40 percent. Another immediate and important result of the annexation was the merging of the school systems of the suburbs involved with the Kalamazoo school system.

Other factors that prompted township citizens to seek the merger was a growing need for city services such as water and sewage facilities and greater police and fire protection.

1957 —  
**League opens Lansing office, offers added services**

With the opening of an office in Lansing in August 1957, the League fulfilled a longstanding desire of the Board of Trustees to provide additional services to member cities and villages. The office, directed by Highway Engineering Consultant Jack Schluhs, was located in Room 905 of the Bank of Lansing Building.

The office was adjacent to and part of the facilities of the Institute of Public Administration of the University of Michigan, and was provided through

**City and Village Officials Meet with Legislators**

First State Legislative Conference enthusiastically received

Mayor John George Thomas and Treasurer Katherine Anderson and several other city officials in attendance at joint session with House and Senate Finance Committees, along with the other League members, gathered in the Michigan State Capitol building in Lansing, Michigan, to discuss the proposed Revenue Sharing Act of 1971. The act would provide for the distribution of state funds to local governments. Other attendees included State Rep. William A. Ryan of Detroit, speaker of the House of Representatives, and Bath-Creek Mayor Frederick R. Bridges, immediate past president of the League.

1966  
**First Legislative Conference (now CapCon)**

*Revenue sharing*

The State Revenue Sharing Act of 1971 provided a new basis for distributing state-shared taxes to municipalities and added approximately \$28 million in new money to the revenue sharing stream. It also changed the basis for distribution, adding two criteria, determined by the Relative Tax Effort formula and the Relative Tax Burden formula, to the amount determined as a straight population base.

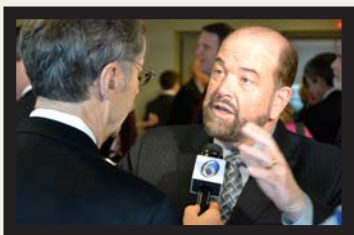
The act also required that revenue sharing money be distributed directly to the cities rather than through the counties.

On hand for the signing of the act were East Lansing Mayor Gordon L. Thomas, chairman of the League's Finance and Taxation Committee; Governor William G. Milliken; Hastings Woods Mayor Gordon R. Bryant, League president and chairman of its Legislative Committee that year; State Rep. William A. Ryan of Detroit, speaker of the House of Representatives; and Bath-Creek Mayor Frederick R. Bridges, immediate past president of the League.

1971  
**Revenue Sharing Becomes Law**



1994  
**Sen. Fred Dillingham (center) responded to the over 1,000 local officials who delivered the message: "Do not jeopardize local services to pay for school finance reform."**



2014  
**Personal Property Tax Press Conference**



2012  
**Replace Don't Erase Press Conference**



2009  
**Restore Revenue Sharing Rally**

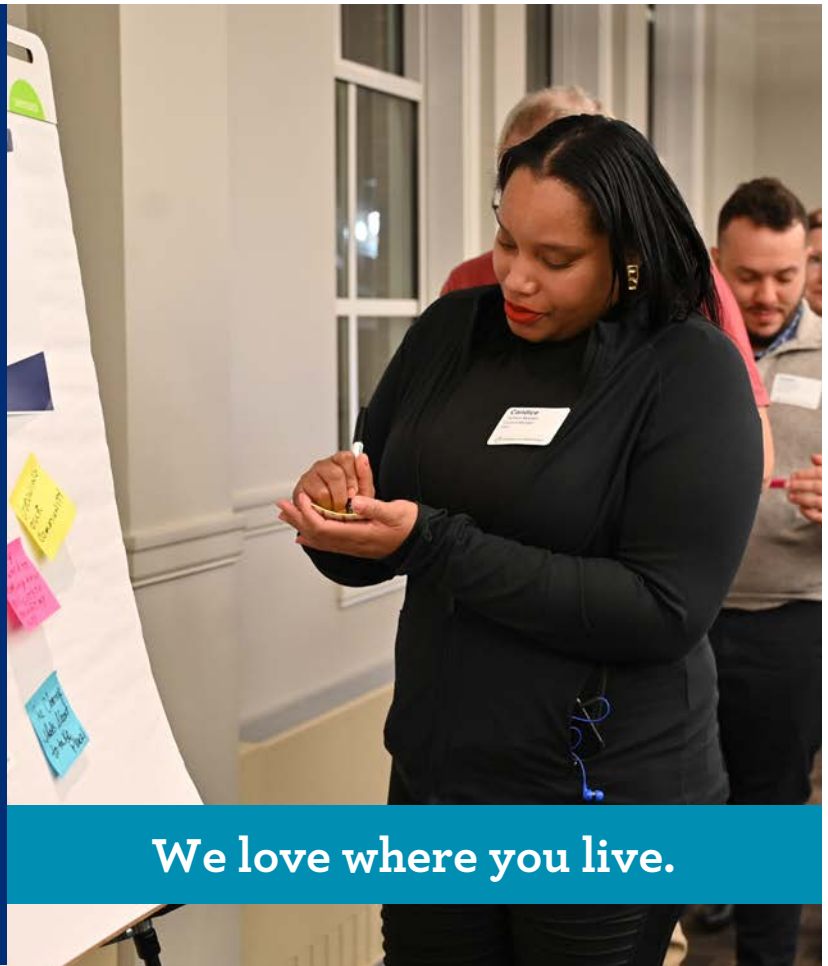


## Upcoming Trainings and Events

Newly Elected Officials Training  
April 6, 2024—Virtual

EOA Core & Advanced Summits  
May 17-18, 2024—In-Person  
Mount Pleasant

League Convention  
September 11-13, 2024—In-Person  
Mackinac Island



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

*Bridgman, Michigan  
Bridge Builders Microgrant Recipient*



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# What's Known about Michigan's **New** Renewable Energy Siting Policies

–By Dr. Sarah Mills and Madeleine Krol

**CREO = compatible renewable energy ordinance**  
**MSPC = Michigan Public Service Commission**

Public Act 233 of 2023, signed by Governor Whitmer on November 28, 2023, makes significant changes to the permitting process for utility-scale renewable energy facilities, including solar, wind, and energy storage. In collaboration with colleagues at the Michigan Association of Planning, Michigan Townships Association, MSU Extension, and Michigan Municipal League, we have created an online FAQ document of our best understanding of how this law will operate.

Following is an excerpt of what is available online (*Read the full article through the QR code*).



## **What does Public Act 233 of 2023 do?**

- The Act creates an option for developers to go directly to the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) to construct a utility-scale renewable energy facility if each affected local unit of government does not have a compatible renewable energy ordinance (CREO). In communities where the local units of government have adopted a CREO, the developer must first have its project reviewed at the local level. If the project is denied by any of the local units of government, then the developer may submit the application to the MPSC.
- The law will take effect November 29, 2024, and it applies to wind, solar, and energy storage projects above the size thresholds listed in the Act: 50 MW or more for solar, 100 MW or more for wind, and 50 MW and 200 MWh for energy storage. Any energy facility below these thresholds is subject to normal zoning.

*“Adopting a CREO [compatible renewable energy ordinance] is the only option that guarantees that the developer must first go through the local process.”*

### Where is PA 233 clear and where is there gray area, particularly about what communities seeking to have a Compatible Renewable Energy Ordinance (CREO) can and can't do?

- PA 233 compels regulations in CREOs to not be more restrictive than the provisions outlined in Section 226 (8) of the Act. This section includes setbacks and sound standards for each technology, plus some technology-specific standards, including height limits for wind and solar, fencing requirements for solar, and flicker standards for wind. The Act is clear that CREOs may not be stricter on these elements.
- It is not clear from the Act whether adding additional regulations common in existing renewable energy projects, such as landscaping and screening, or restrictions on geography (e.g. zoning districts, overlay zones), render an ordinance “too restrictive” and therefore non-compatible. [The online FAQs include a much lengthier discussion of this.]

### Are there only two pathways for permitting applicable projects: at the local level through a CREO, or at the state level through the MPSC?

- The short answer is probably not. This law gives developers the option to go through the state-level process. Developers may still choose to go through the local process, whether or not the local government has a CREO, and the law makes clear that local policies, including zoning, are in “full force and effect” for projects where the MPSC has not issued a certificate through this new state-level process. There is some uncertainty, however, about whether any developers will choose to go through a non-CREO but “workable” local ordinance.
- To be clear, the law does not refer to a “workable” ordinance; it’s a concept we’re using to help suggest what might be another option for municipalities. A “workable” zoning ordinance is one that doesn’t satisfy the definition of a CREO (i.e., it may have larger setback distances or lower noise levels than in PA 233) but is one that a developer finds allows them to build a viable project. Workable ordinances, though, hinge on “reasonableness.” The point at which such provisions become too burdensome in the opinion of an energy developer is the practical point at which the developer will apply to the MPSC for a certificate instead of seeking zoning approval at the local level.

### What are the advantages and disadvantages of adopting a CREO compared to instead adopting a “workable” ordinance?

- Adopting a CREO is the only option that guarantees that the developer must first go through the local process. What’s tricky, though, is that each “affected local unit” of government, defined by the Act as “a county, township, city, or village” must declare that they have a CREO in place if they wish to prevent the developer from going to the MPSC. Given that all land in Michigan is in both a county and either a city or township, and sometimes a county, township, and village, the CREO path only works if there’s collaboration among neighboring jurisdictions and with counties. Furthermore, if any of the local units with a CREO denies the renewable application, there may be some unpleasant consequences. [laid out in more detail online]
- A “workable” ordinance doesn’t necessarily require this collaboration with other units of government. However, choosing to create a “workable” ordinance means there’s no guarantee that a developer won’t instead opt for the MPSC process at some point in the local permitting process.

### Is there anything unique to cities or villages?

- Cities and villages do have a special mention within the law. The law does not apply (i.e., developers may not seek a permit from the MPSC) in cases where a project is located entirely within the boundaries of a city or a village AND one of the following applies: the municipality is the owner of the participating property in the project, is the developer of the facility, or owns an electric utility that would take service from the proposed facility.
- In all other cases—including where only a portion of the project is outside of the municipal borders—the developer may seek a certificate from the MPSC unless all of the local units have a CREO.
- Due to the large footprint of wind and solar facilities, it is rare that the project would be entirely within municipal limits, but there are exceptions. The City of Lapeer hosts one of the earliest solar projects. Further, storage projects that meet the 50MW/200MWh threshold in the law could be sited on as few as five acres, so may easily be located entirely within municipal boundaries.

**What should a community do right now?**

- At this moment, we see three options: adopting a CREO, having a “workable” ordinance in place, or not acting (which, in most cases, would mean projects would go to the MPSC). Each strategy has pros and cons and comes with different risks. [outlined more online]
- Regardless, the first thing that you should do is start a conversation with your county and neighboring local governments about how they plan to act. If your jurisdiction is interested in adopting a CREO but neighbors are not, you may want to consider a different option.
- If you choose a path that requires amending your zoning ordinance (i.e., CREO or “workable”), then you should figure out how soon you must act. Any amendments to the zoning ordinance will need to follow the procedures

of the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act. You will need to consider how frequently your planning commission and council meet to understand when you must start the process to be ready for when the law goes into effect on November 29, 2024.

Also, get your planner/lawyer on retainer now. Nearly every jurisdiction will be in the process of zoning for renewables this summer and fall, so if you share a planner or lawyer with other jurisdictions, you’ll want to talk to them soon [about their schedule.](#)

Dr. Sarah Mills is the director of the Center for EmPowering Communities at the University of Michigan. Madeleine Krol is a clean energy specialist at the Center of EmPowering Communities at the University of Michigan. You may contact them at 734-763-0061 or [krol@umich.edu](mailto:krol@umich.edu).



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# LOCAL GOVERNMENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROTECTING ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

—By Scott Slagor and Amy Krull

## Cultural Heritage

The past belongs to everyone, and we are all responsible for its stewardship. Cultural heritage provides us continuity with the past, both through the tangible (artifacts, cemeteries, buildings, etc.) and the intangible (knowledge, language, traditions, etc.). Cultural resources are critical to community identity and can be used as tools for placemaking and positive quality-of-life improvements. Certain cultural resources require special protection, particularly archaeological sites. Municipalities who retain archaeological information must ensure that site data is not readily available to the public.

Archaeological sites are nonrenewable resources, providing irreplaceable information about the past. Michigan has a rich and diverse archaeological history, dating from 50 years to several thousands of years ago, prior to the arrival of French explorers in the early 17th century. Archaeological sites are located throughout the state, in urban settings, rural areas, and underwater. In Michigan, many sites are imperiled by the effects of climate change and development. Yet, the most immediate threats are looting and vandalism. Throughout the country, nefarious activities have damaged or destroyed many sites.

## Cultural Resources and the Law

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) is a common place where municipalities intersect with cultural resource data. Section 106 requires federal agencies to consider historic properties prior to proposed projects. Historic properties are cultural resources eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, including archaeological sites, historic structures, shipwrecks, and traditional cultural places.

Compliance with Section 106 involves the identification of cultural resources around project areas. Federal agencies or their delegated authorities (sometimes municipalities) are required to consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO),

and other consulting parties when projects are either federally funded (grant, loan, direct monies), or require a federal permit/license, or are on federal land. Common funding sources for municipal projects include Community Block Development Grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and road improvement money from the Federal Highway Administration.

During the Section 106 process, records are created documenting agencies' compliance with the law. Typically, these records include Cultural Resources reports, which provide details about archaeological and architectural resources. Many municipal governments include documentation related to Section 106 in the public record. Although municipalities provide this information as a matter of transparency, many are unknowingly violating protections clauses of the NHPA and State of Michigan policy, as archaeological site locations and other sensitive information is considered privileged. The Archaeological Resources Protection Act and the National Environmental Policy Act also contain provisions to protect site data. The SHPO is the keeper of the State Archaeological Site File, and only shares this information with federally qualified archaeologists, THPOs, and tribal cultural specialists.

## Local Government Responsibilities to Protect Archaeological Sites

The responsibility to defend sites does not solely lie with Tribes, landowners, law enforcement officials, and professional archaeologists. Under federal law, municipal governments have a responsibility to withhold site information.

Local governments can take simple steps to protect sensitive data by restricting the dissemination of privileged information about archaeological sites, including locations, character, and ownership. Geospatial data, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Global Position Systems (GPS), and other mapping showing sites should not be publicly accessible. For Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, local governments must observe the Michigan Freedom



*“Under federal law, municipal governments have a responsibility to withhold [archaeological] site information.”*

*“Local governments can take simple steps to protect sensitive data by restricting the dissemination of privileged information about archaeological sites, including locations, character, and ownership.”*

of Information Act, which exempts the dissemination of archaeological site locations.

Archaeological reports, mapping, and other documents containing sensitive information should be filed with a cover sheet indicating that the document is “Confidential” or “Restricted.” Subsequent report pages should be watermarked or stamped to reflect their confidential nature. These documents should not be included in publicly distributed information, project bids, or in electronic retrieval systems without restricting access to specific users.

Additional proactive steps that local governments can take to balance community transparency and risk include initiating consultation with the SHPO and THPOs. Consult with the SHPO to develop an Unanticipated Discoveries Plan to ensure preparedness if archaeological sites are accidentally encountered. The SHPO has template plans to make this an easy process. Communities can also consult with the SHPO on internal measures to flag sensitive areas without exposing sensitive data. Additionally, forming a relationship with the THPO whose ancestral lands are in your community is an invaluable connection. To identify the appropriate THPOs to contact, reach out to the Michigan Anishinabek Cultural Preservation and Repatriation Alliance (MACPRA).

With these steps, the archaeological resources of a community can endure for future generations. For additional questions about cultural resources and archaeology, please contact the SHPO and visit <https://www.miplace.org/historic-preservation/>.

Scott Slagor is the cultural resource protection manager at the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office. You may contact him at 517-285-5120 or SlagorS2@michigan.gov.

Amy Krull is the federal projects archaeologist at the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office. You may contact her at 517-285-4211 or KrullaA@michigan.gov.



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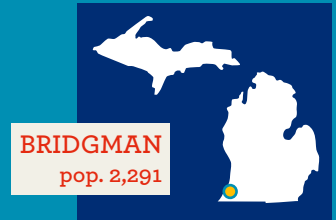
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# The Bridgman Courtyard:

From an Underutilized Space to a Vibrant Place

—By Morgan Schwanky

*“Receiving the Michigan Municipal League’s Community Excellence Award is a thrilling validation that our small but mighty community’s belief in itself can lead to meaningful change.”*

—City of Bridgman Manager Juan Ganum



The City of Bridgman’s Courtyard project was voted the 2023 Community Excellence Award by their peers at the League’s Convention in Traverse City this past October. The project transformed an underutilized parking lot in downtown Bridgman into a vibrant community gathering space. It was a true labor of love, and the passion behind the project had an immediate response from those in attendance.

Bridgman’s City Manager Juan Ganum recalled learning how the project was resonating with other local leaders: “One of the highlights for me at Convention was during one of the sessions; I had a woman who was a councilperson from Kalkaska. She was sitting behind me, and she leaned over, put her hand on my shoulder, and said ‘I’m voting for Bridgman’s project. I can see us doing something like that in our community.’”

The story of the project’s humble beginnings starts in the fall of 2020. Many businesses, especially restaurants, were unable to operate at full capacity because of social distancing requirements to fight the spread of COVID-19. The initial setup supported restaurants in Bridgman’s social district, including Lake Street Eats, Rochefort’s The Next Generation, Tapistry Brewing, China Café, Transient Artisan Ales, and more. There was no intention for the parking lot to remain as a makeshift seating area beyond the time of social distancing requirements, and its simplicity reflected that.

“It had functional, but unattractive cinder block dividers that we obtained for \$60 a piece down the road, which we painted moss green, and four picnic tables and umbrellas,” Ganum said.

In the spring of 2022, Julie Strating, a member of Bridgman’s Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA), brought ideas, concepts, and drawings for taking the project further to a CIA meeting. Her ideas jumpstarted the next phase for the project and inspired the CIA to think bigger.

“Julie has a truly creative gift. She was the driving force behind the transformation of this makeshift seating area that we thought would only last for the duration of the pandemic to support the businesses and the community,” Ganum said.



## Before & After

Her vision led to the CIA partnering with the The Greater Bridgman Area Chamber and Growth Alliance (CGA) to create a more inviting space for the community. They brought live, local, acoustic music to the space on Sunday afternoons during the summer of 2022 to draw in the community and encourage support of the space by local businesses. Behind the scenes, they continued to think about how to further the evolution of the project and bring in more support.

As the next chapter for the project was beginning to gain momentum, the Bridgman community lost one of the project's earliest supporters: Planning Commission Chairperson Mark Hurray. His wife came to Ganum and explained that she wanted to donate to the project in honor of her late husband. This donation provided momentum for everyone involved with the project to expand their ideas.

"Dedicating the Courtyard to Mark Hurray added a deeply personal and sentimental value to the project. This dedication served as a meaningful way to honor Mark's memory and contributions to the community. It transformed the space into not just a physical location for gatherings and activities, but also a place of remembrance and reflection. Joan, Mark's wife, was involved throughout the project and was there with us, sharing in the joy at the ribbon cutting as well as when we received the Community Excellence Award," Ganum said.

Following the Hurray family's generous support, the project secured additional funding from two grants. These grants would help fund the Courtyard's wooden pergola structure, new concrete, bistro lights, seating options, additional concerts, its mural, and more. The project secured a Public Spaces Community Places grant from the Michigan Development Economic Corporation (MEDC), which is a matching grant program. Bridgman individuals, families, and businesses helped secure and surpass their fundraising goal. The project also received funding through a Bridge Builder's Main Street microgrant from the Michigan Municipal League Foundation, thanks to Julie Strating, who wrote the application.

"From the Bridge Builders microgrant that required online community voting to the MEDC's Public Spaces Community Places, which had over 150 donors, to enjoying concerts every week during the summer, our greater community engagement has been a key part of the Courtyard. When everyone is part of the process (and results), there's a deeper sense of ownership and commitment to the project's success. It's really neat to see all the donor bricks in the space—it's like a patchwork of community support and spirit. Every brick tells a story of someone's contribution, making the whole place feel like it's truly owned by everyone," Ganum said.

The construction of this final phase of the Courtyard was also a community effort. Craftsmen, professionals, and volunteers donated countless hours of their time to complete its final transformation. Together, they brought to life the structural and artistic elements of the space to make it what it is today: a permanent gathering place.

The Bridgman Courtyard project is a testament of what is possible with placemaking efforts in our communities. This project particularly showcases the importance of bringing together the people, businesses, and organizations in a community to share the talents and resources that exist. This applies to communities of every size and need.

"One of the most significant aspects of this project is how much local support there was. Not just in terms of time and talent from the people who volunteered to make it happen, like Julie and several others, but the folks who opened their pocketbook and donated a little bit of money to make it a reality. Receiving the League's Community Excellence Award is a thrilling validation that our small but mighty community's belief in itself can lead to meaningful change." Ganum said.

Ganum encourages communities wanting to do similar projects to take risks and challenge themselves to try things differently than they have always been done. You can learn more about the Bridgman Courtyard project at [cea.mml.org](http://cea.mml.org).

Morgan Schwanky is a content developer for the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6320 or [mschwanky@mml.org](mailto:mschwanky@mml.org).

# 2023 Runners-Up

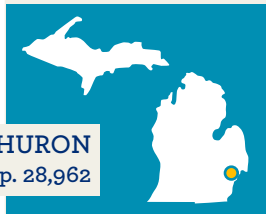
COLDWATER  
pop. 13,822



## Children's Museum

Early education. Downtown revitalization. Historic preservation. That's what we accomplished when the Coldwater Downtown Development Authority (DDA) helped expand the Children's Museum of Branch County (CMBC) and relocate it to a vacant downtown storefront. After a robust fundraising campaign that raised \$160,000 (including \$50,000 from MEDC's Public Spaces Community Places grant), and a \$350,000 loan from the city, the DDA and the CMBC renovated over 6,000 square feet in an iconic downtown building. In April of 2023, the CMBC reopened with new exhibits and the capacity to welcome even more students and families for hands-on learning in an engaging environment. The CMBC is now located within a 10-minute walk of half of Coldwater families.

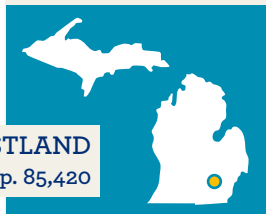
PORT HURON  
pop. 28,962



## McMorran Place Plaza

McMorran Place has long served as Port Huron's civic center. The city welcomed high-profile entertainment such as the international Silver Stick hockey tournament, Port Huron Town Hall, graduations, commencements, and even weddings and other special events. Despite all the exciting things happening inside, the outside plaza was dull, deteriorating, and deserted. With the once underutilized plaza now reenergized, downtown Port Huron sees live music all summer long, an outdoor skating rink during the winter, space to hold special events and festivals, and, most importantly, a gathering spot for families, friends, visitors, and residents to enjoy year-round. With this revitalization, McMorran Place once again serves as the beating heart of downtown Port Huron.

WESTLAND  
pop. 85,420



## Mission to Mars Playground

The city's mission was to create an awe-inspiring Mars-themed playground that ignites children's imaginations and fosters a sense of adventure and a love for science. With its futuristic design and space-themed elements, the playground will transport children to the Red Planet, allowing them to embark on their own interplanetary exploration. It features towering rocket ships, lunar rovers, slides, and play activities that create a zero-gravity experience. Children can experience the thrill of weightlessness on a space-themed swing set and slide down a slide representing a descent onto the Martian surface. The playground's design prioritizes inclusivity, ensuring that children of all abilities can participate and enjoy the Mars adventure.

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2007-2022 CEA Winners



2007 St. Joseph



2008 Jackson



2009 Lathrup Village



2010 Grand Haven



2011 Clare



2012 Grandville



2013 Ironwood



2014 Harbor Beach



2015 Westland



2016 Beaverton



2017 Hudsonville



2018 Fraser



2019 Bay City

2020 CEA COMPETITION CANCELED DUE TO COVID.



2021 Rochester Hills



2022 Cassopolis





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**For More Information:**  
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### CEA Contest 2024 *Timeline*

**3/12/24**

**Project Submission Opens**

**5/17/24**

**Deadline for Submissions**

**7/17/24**

**Four Finalists Announced**

**09/11/24**

**MML Convention, Mackinac Island  
*Voting & Winners Announced!***

# Growing Michigan Together Council: Cities Are at the Center of Population Growth Recommendations

—By Josh Hovey

Last summer, Governor Whitmer tasked a diverse group of Michigan leaders with the vital task of identifying how to tackle one of the single greatest threats to the state's future prosperity and well-being: reversing the state's declining population. In December of last year, the Growing Michigan Together Council (GMTC) unveiled a detailed final report to do just that, and their recommendations include many of the same policy priorities that municipal leaders have been advocating for years.

The council worked closely with more than 60 experts who gave their insight on four topic-oriented workgroups:

- preK–12 education;
- higher education;
- jobs, talent, and people; and
- infrastructure and places.

Together, they worked to identify the extent of Michigan's declining population issues and research the best solutions that will achieve the GMTC's ambitious goal of becoming a top 10 state for population growth by 2050.

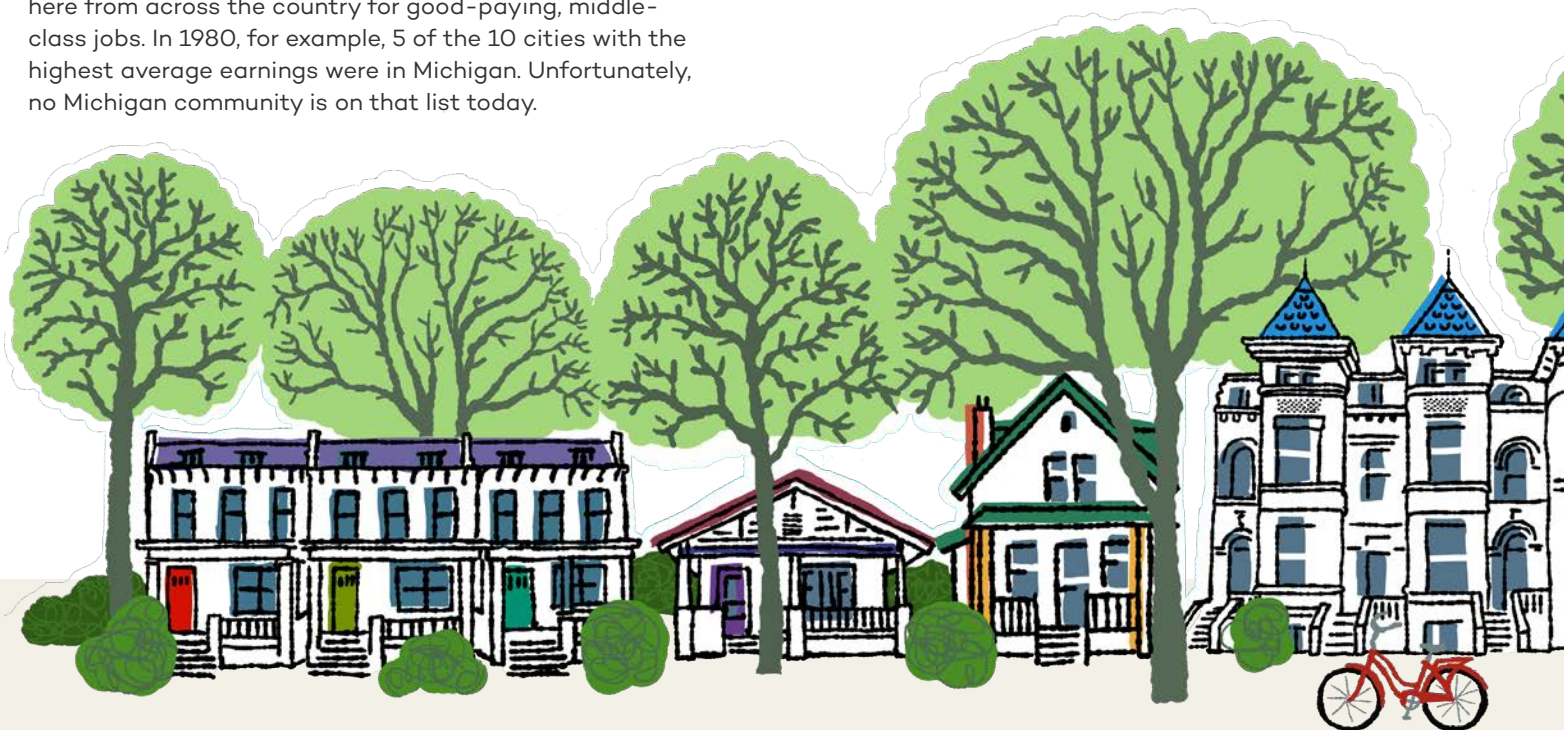
The GMTC found that Michigan's population grew in line with the nation's for nearly 100 years, with people moving here from across the country for good-paying, middle-class jobs. In 1980, for example, 5 of the 10 cities with the highest average earnings were in Michigan. Unfortunately, no Michigan community is on that list today.

What's more, Michigan's median income was once 114 percent of the national average but today ranks 34th in the U.S. We are also second to last in population growth since 2000.

Michigan's stagnant population means that we're losing out on talented people who fuel our local economies and whose wages form the foundation of the tax base that supports public services and schools. Beyond finances, every region of this state is dependent on an engaged and active citizenry to contribute to the culture and quality of life of their community.

The GMTC report also points out that our lack of growth compared to other states has also resulted in less political representation in Congress. This makes it more difficult for our communities to have their priorities included in federal budget and policy discussions.

Herasanna Richards, legislative associate with the Michigan Municipal League, served on the Infrastructure and Place workgroup for the GMTC and says that, while there is much work to do, community leaders can be encouraged by the fact that the GMTC's proposed solutions are centered around investing in strong communities.



*“As local leaders, we have a unique first-hand perspective on the needs of our communities. It’s up to each of us to be vocal advocates and serve as resources for our state and federal officials to ensure that they incorporate our insights and keep this collective effort to revitalize Michigan on track and moving forward.”*

–Michigan Municipal League Board President,  
Monroe Mayor Robert E. Clark

“The Growing Michigan Together Council report makes clear that vibrant communities are the glue that holds our state together and that regions that provide quality amenities to suit a variety of lifestyles are the ones that succeed,” said Richards. “Every recommendation made in the report is based on the premise that if Michigan leaders can get the fundamentals right, like housing, transit, and resilient infrastructure, then we will have a foundation to build from that will help us attract businesses and talent that will drive further investment.”

### Recommendations

The growth strategies recommended by the GMTC can be summarized in three main categories:

- establish Michigan as the innovation hub of the Midwest and America’s scale-up state;
- build a lifelong learning system focused on future-ready skills and competencies; and
- create thriving, resilient communities that are magnets for young talent.

### Key Highlights for Local Government

With research showing that a growing number of young people prefer public or nonmotorized transportation over the cost of car ownership, one of the key recommendations in the GMTC report is to develop robust public transit networks. The report encourages regional cooperation between transit authorities, local governments, local road agencies, and MDOT to ensure transit options are tailored to meet the unique needs of the community, employers, and residents in that region. Improved rail services are also identified, with the GMTC advocating for MDOT to work closely with passenger rail providers to better connect regional population centers and increase the frequency of service.

The report also notes that while Michigan already has a competitive advantage relative to other states when it comes to our relatively low cost of living, we cannot effectively grow our population without addressing our housing crisis. We need to both revitalize the existing housing stock while also encouraging more new construction. Among the GMTC’s recommendations are providing support to local governments to modernize their zoning codes and master plans;

- incentivizing new housing development for low- to middle-income households; and
- expanding equitable down-payment assistance programs.

Of course, attracting more people to and building more homes in our communities will also necessitate upgrading the physical infrastructure that supports them. The GMTC calls for alternative dedicated funding sources to support our roads as a way to address declining gas tax revenues caused by improved fuel efficiency and electric vehicles. Beyond roads, the report encourages leaders to identify opportunities for federal investments and state-federal partnerships to overhaul our aging stormwater infrastructure and address other issues driven by climate change.



### Putting Recommendations into Action

While the council was able to identify some of the key foundational issues that Michigan must address to attract and retain residents, the report notes that there was not enough time to conduct a thorough analysis of how to implement and fund the transformational changes recommended. General funding and implementation strategies detailed in the report include:

- optimizing government spending;
- maximizing federal resources;
- public-private sector collaboration;
- reassessing tax policies; and
- new revenue generation.


League State and Federal Affairs Director John LaMacchia notes that his team is already working on several proposals that align with the GMTC report and would provide more resources for local governments.

“It’s encouraging that so many of the League’s core issues have been elevated by the Council. This provides another example of why we need to secure local resources and address structural issues like interaction between Headlee and Proposal A to help Michigan communities make the investments they need to provide the services and quality

of life that people demand,” said LaMacchia. “In fact, there are already several bills introduced in the state Legislature that directly connect back to the GMTC recommendations.”

LaMacchia cited House Bills 4274 and 4275, as just one example. That bill package would create a “revenue sharing trust fund” by dedicating a portion of general sales tax revenue to a restricted fund for the purposes of local government revenue sharing.

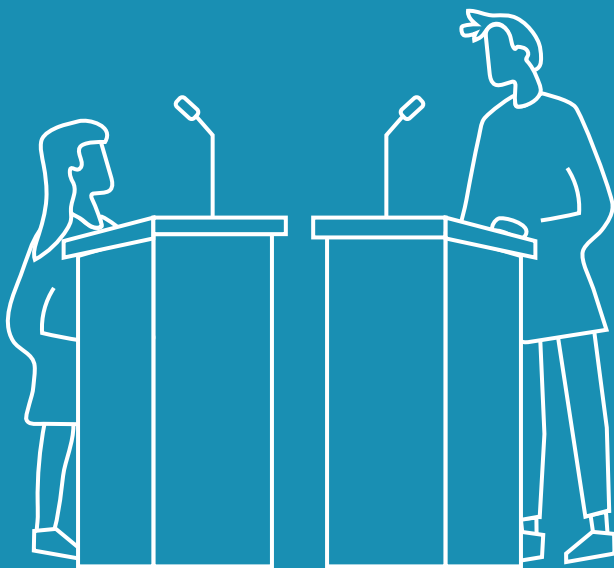
League Board President Robert E. Clark believes it is incumbent on organizations like the League to work closely with state and federal policymakers to ensure our collective expertise is leveraged and the best ideas in the report are acted upon.

“As local leaders, we have a unique first-hand perspective on the needs of our communities. It’s up to each of us to be vocal advocates and serve as resources for our state and federal officials to ensure that they incorporate our insights and keep this collective effort to revitalize Michigan on track and moving forward,” said Clark, who has served as mayor of the City of Monroe for the past 14 years. 

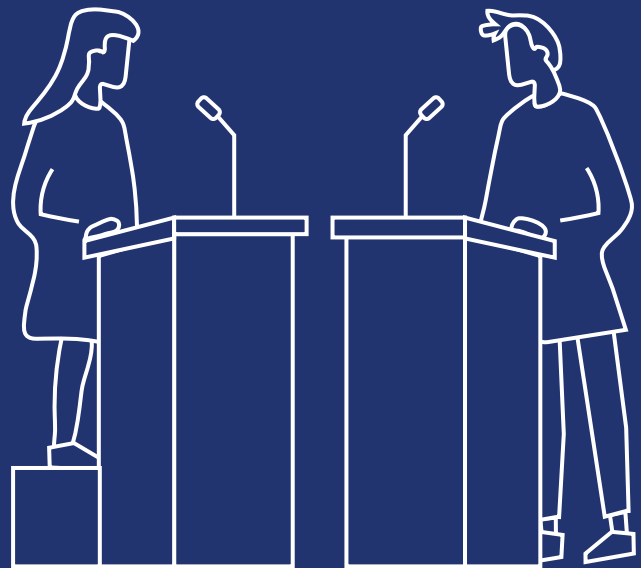
For more information about the Growing Michigan Together Council and its recommendations to make Michigan a top 10 state for population growth by 2050, please visit [GrowingMichigan.org](http://GrowingMichigan.org).

Josh Hovey, APR, is a partner at Martin Waymire. You may contact him at 517-485-6600 or [jhovey@martinwaymire.com](mailto:jhovey@martinwaymire.com).

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# Two Perspectives: The Role of a Municipal Attorney

—Bill Mathewson coordinated this special column by two authors from the City of Traverse City



## **Lauren Tribble-Laucht, attorney for the City of Traverse City:**

I have been asked to give my perspective on the role of the city attorney. Having spent the last 15 years in this role, I took this request as a challenging opportunity for self-reflection. The role of the city attorney is commonly established in a city's charter with some version of the following: "The City Attorney is appointed by, and serves at the pleasure of, the City Commission. The City Attorney is the chief legal advisor to the City Commission, City Manager, and all its officers and employees in matters relating to their offices and official duties." Other descriptions include counselor, representative, protector of the city's interests, advisor, team builder, consensus builder, negotiator, problem solver, interpreter, and leader. The city attorney's client is the city as a corporate entity. As with any corporation, a city must operate within a legal framework. That framework requires city attorneys to assume many roles.

Once the elected officials have identified a goal, my philosophy is, "how do we get to 'yes'?" Figuring out the answer to that question sometimes feels like navigating a maze of considerations: U.S. and Michigan Constitutions, federal and state statutes, rules, and regulations; case law, charter, and ordinances; as well as practical, political, and ethical factors. These considerations put the city attorney in the role of translator, making sure that legal considerations are understandable to elected officials, staff, and the public.

If there is no legal path to "yes," the city attorney takes on the role of messenger, tasked with communicating why the identified goal is not possible and identifying alternatives. If we can get to "yes," the city attorney takes on the role of advisor and guide—navigating the path to get to the goal while avoiding pitfalls. As a guide, the city attorney must be flexible and able to think on their feet. Sometimes the path changes along the way in response to unforeseen factors. Sometimes the goal changes mid-journey due to something unexpected or even with changes in the make-up of the elected board. The city attorney's role is to keep the client's—the city's—best interest in mind throughout the journey.

There are times when the city attorney's role is to be a warrior, defending the city's position in actions brought by or against the city or against city officials in their official capacity. Sometimes the role is as listener. There are many occasions when elected officials or staff just need a listening ear. All attorneys are counselors and city attorneys are no exception.

The city attorney's role can change several times in a single day. It can come with tremendous pressure—from elected officials, the public, the media, and others. The nature of the work requires city attorneys to be dedicated, resourceful, and tough. For those who take on this challenging work, life is never boring, and every day is an opportunity to learn and hopefully help our clients achieve their community's vision.

## **Richard Lewis, former mayor, city commissioner, and city manager for the City of Traverse City**


I have had the pleasure of serving in Michigan municipal government for 29 years in the roles of city manager, elected official, and DDA board member. I have been requested to provide my perspective regarding the relationship between the chief appointed official (city, township, board manager) and its attorney. From my experience, it comes down to one word: trust.

Across three centuries and two peninsulas: One League

For most, if not all, units of municipal government, the governing body is responsible for hiring two individuals: its manager and its attorney. Both are held responsible to work toward the health, safety, and welfare of the community/ entity they are appointed to serve, and each has specific responsibilities in making that happen. I have always felt the governing body has the expectation that its two primary employees will work together to bring forth the best option(s) for its consideration.

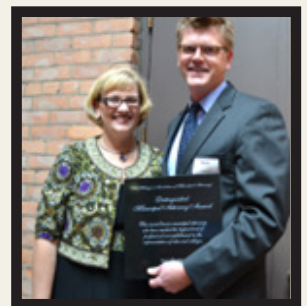
Sounds easy, doesn't it? I have been blessed to have worked with four municipal attorneys during my Michigan career. Two were in place upon my start as city manager/ elected office; the other two were hired during my tenure. With each of these four fantastic attorneys, we strove to develop a trusting relationship which helped in defining our roles and responsibilities, working through difficult topics, and providing a unified proposal for consideration to the governing body and the community. We worked to assist each other to be the best attorney/manager possible. We worked toward never surprising each other and never surprising our governing body.

Sounds easy. When everything runs smoothly, yes. What about those times we don't come to full agreement? Through building trust, we worked to provide options to the governing body for discussion. Through trust—letting go of our egos, listening to each other, and looking to the bigger picture—the health, safety, and welfare of the community, that common goal we both shared, a better decision usually was the outcome.

It is about relationships, and we all know how hard that can be in both our personal and professional lives. A quote I have used in the last number of years has been: "Relationships are primary; all else is derivative." I heard this line from Dr. Ron David in 2005 while at the John F. Kennedy School at Harvard. It struck a nerve; and believe me, it is easier to say or write than to practice at times. But when practiced, the results are amazing. 

Bill Mathewson is a legal consultant to the League. You may contact him at [wmathewson@mml.org](mailto:wmathewson@mml.org).

## From the League's history banks...



(left) Lori Grigg Bluhm, 2013-15 president of the Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys and (right) Mark Nettleton, recipient of the 2013 Distinguished Municipal Attorney Award.



(left) Lauren Tribble-Laucht, 20221-23 president of the Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys; (right) Tom Schultz, 2019-21 president of the Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys.



# HARRISON: Accommodating Tourism

Whether one enjoys relaxing on the water, getting close to nature on campgrounds, competing in friendly golf matches, or hitting the slopes during the snowy winter season, all are possible in the City of Harrison.

Harrison takes pride in being a part of Clare County—“Where the North Begins”—and being home to “20 lakes in 20 minutes.” While it’s a large city within the county, Harrison is a small town that offers a certain lifestyle for those who want to get away from the hustle and bustle that comes with metropolitan living.

Despite its small-town size, Harrison offers a long list of activities. The endless water sports on Budd Lake’s 175 acres, the Clare County Fair in July, the Frostbite Winter Festival, and the Harrison’s Memorial Day Car and Bike Show are among the many year-round events and activities in Harrison that keep residents engaged. However, these are also points of interest that could appeal to and attract visitors throughout Michigan, or even across the core Midwestern states.

Growing tourism in Harrison is an essential goal for City Manager Justin Cavanaugh, as it will stimulate growth and prosperity in the community. The only dilemma? Tourism requires accommodations—something this small town has long desired, and it’s a desire Cavanaugh hopes to fulfill. Developing a hotel is a massive undertaking, requiring buy-in from city officials and associations as well as finding investors to support and finance the endeavor. This is something Harrison has struggled with, but it hasn’t deterred Cavanaugh.

With help from the predevelopment assistance partnership, Harrison had a hotel feasibility study completed by the Core Distinction Group, a hospitality consulting firm that specializes in comprehensive hotel feasibility market studies. This study revealed that Harrison has the capacity to support a 49-room hotel—a big win for Cavanaugh in proving the city’s case to get investors on board and receive community support to undertake the development of a new hotel.

A hotel is just the beginning of Harrison’s economic development.

*“The primary challenge [we’ve faced] has been the difficulty in finding investors who are genuinely excited about the opportunity. However, by refusing to give up, maintaining ongoing conversations with potential individuals, refining the project proposal, and seeking external support, we remain committed to finding a path forward and realizing the vision of economic development in the City of Harrison.”*

—Justin Cavanaugh, Harrison City Manager





**OPPORTUNITY:** Grow tourism and provide local amenities to attract those who come to the region to visit.

**OBSTACLE:** Finding investors who were interested in and excited about developing a new hotel in a smaller town.

**PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:** Provided a project feasibility study to understand the best development strategy based on what the community could realistically support.

**COMMUNITY PROGRESS:** Data-backed vision boosts buy-in, propels economic development, and advances the city as a travel destination.

“The benefits of a hotel in Harrison are manifold,” Cavanaugh said. “It would generate tax revenue that could be reinvested in improving infrastructure, enhancing public services, and supporting community development projects. Furthermore, a hotel in Harrison would stimulate the growth of ancillary businesses, such as restaurants, cafes, and retail shops, which would cater to the needs and preferences of hotel guests and visitors.”

Cavanaugh’s vision is to enhance the community’s pride in Harrison, improve the quality of life, and promote the city as a vibrant destination anyone could appreciate. Harrison has a rich heritage with a variety of cultural offerings and possesses natural beauty. A new hotel to welcome tourists to experience this distinct identity puts Harrison on the right path to see this vision through to fruition—a path they are now on, thanks to the predevelopment assistance partnership. [L](#)

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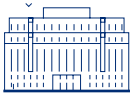
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# MI COMMUNITY DASHBOARD

—By Rick Haglund



Local government officials can access a wealth of easily digestible financial information about their communities and compare it with that of their neighbors using just a few mouse clicks at a Michigan Department of Treasury webpage. But many might not be aware that the site even exists.

The MI Community Dashboard allows local government officials and residents to quickly view data including total taxable property value, unfunded pension liabilities, and general fund revenues and expenditures. The site also provides historical trendlines of that data, utilizing maps, graphs, and pie charts. “It really is a critical component of the work that we do in our area, which is to access that fiscal health,” said Jessica Thomas, director of the Treasury’s Bureau of Local Government and School Services. “It’s a good tool for locals to utilize when they are taking a quick look at the fiscal health of their communities.”

Thomas said the dashboard was created in 2017 as state officials were becoming increasingly concerned about the financial condition of local governments while the state and nation plunged into the Great Recession. The housing and financial markets crashed, resulting in a historic decline in property values in many communities. That, combined with caps on Michigan property tax rates when property values began to recover, crippled the budgets of many municipalities. “We considered the dashboard as a tool and resource for our local governments,” Thomas said. “There was a lot of conversation around fiscal health.”

The dashboard essentially takes data from financial information local governments are required to submit annually to Treasury, called F-65 reports, and organizes it into a more visual presentation. “I think it’s a really, really great resource,” said Luke Londo, a Hazel Park councilmember. “I’m a visual guy. Numbers on a spreadsheet don’t do it for me.” Londo said the data was an eye-opener for him when he was appointed to the council in 2021. “I think the percentiles surprised me,” he said. “You tend to exist in a silo. How your city exists in the context of how the state is doing is particularly interesting.”

Hazel Park, an older, inner-ring Detroit suburb, sits among the lowest percentile tiers of cities in the state in a variety of fiscal health measures. But in recent years, the city has experienced an economic bounce. Its business district is growing, and new housing is being built. That growth can be quickly seen in the Treasury dashboard. Hazel Park’s total taxable property value has jumped from \$167.1 million in 2014 to \$291.4 million in 2022, a 74 percent increase. In the same time period, taxable property value per capita has nearly doubled, from \$10,064 to \$19,841.

But some say the dashboard could be more widely utilized. “As far as the traffic that it gets, it’s certainly not our most utilized webpage,” said Nick Brousseau, manager of Treasury’s Analytics and Outreach Section. One reason could be the significant number of new mayors and city councilmembers voted into office in every election cycle. “I think the dashboard is probably not known by a lot of them,” said Richard Murphy, the Michigan Municipal League’s Policy Research Labs program manager. Brousseau said Treasury officials “make sure we’re publicizing this as a resource for local governments to utilize” through regional Treasury conferences throughout the state and other events.

Mike Radtke, a Sterling Heights councilmember, said it’s somewhat difficult to benchmark against other communities using the dashboard. For example, comparing what various cities spend on public services is problematic because of differences in the kind of services different cities offer. But it’s helpful in the sense that all the data is in one place, he said. “The downside is you’ve got to know what you’re looking for. But anything the state can do for transparency is good.”

The Treasury dashboard also, perhaps inadvertently, points out inequities in the state’s municipal financing system, Radtke said. Those are caused by the Headlee Amendment

“*I’m a big fan. This is something every elected official should be using.*”

– Luke Londo, Hazel Park Councilmember


and Proposal A school finance law that favors newer, growing communities over older, built-out municipalities. Sterling Heights and neighboring Warren, two cities with similar populations, offer an example of those inequities, according to Radtke. Sterling Heights has a population of about 132,500 while about 137,100 people live in Warren. But newer Sterling Heights can raise more tax revenue than Warren because of more existing home sales and new housing construction. Sterling Heights has a total property tax value per capita of \$37,651, compared to \$29,615 in Warren, according to the Treasury dashboard. “Sixteen mills (of a tax levy) in Sterling Heights is different than 16 mills in Warren,” Radtke said.

Treasury officials say they periodically tweak the dashboard to provide local governments and citizens with the best data available to make informed financial decisions. Future improvements are planned, for instance, in providing more

pertinent data culled from local pension funding reports required under the 2017 Protecting Local Government Retirement and Benefits Act. Thomas said she believes Michigan is a leader in creating a comprehensive, easy to digest, local government financial dashboard.

“Our goal really is to allow local units of government to make great decisions,” she said. The data comes from local governments’ audited financial statements, which make them uniform and reliable, she said. “Having that uniformity really has provided a lot of value so you can trust the data” on the dashboard. Londo, the Hazel Park councilmember, said he finds the dashboard invaluable in his representation of Hazel Park residents. “I’m a big fan,” he said. “This is something every elected official should be using.”






Rick Haglund is a freelance writer. You may contact him at 248-761-4594 or haglund.rick@gmail.com.



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*Updated in 2024*

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**Topics covered include:**

- Structure and Function of Local Government in Michigan
- Roles and Responsibilities of Municipal Officials
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- 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. What are the publishing requirements for ordinances?

A. Ordinance publishing requirements are dependent on the type of local government. There are minimum statutory requirements for each type. In home rule cities and home rule villages, the charter must be consulted for possible additional requirements.

## Statutory Ordinance Publication Requirements by Form of Government

### Home Rule Cities (Home Rule City Act)

MCL 117.3 Mandatory charter provisions.

Each city charter shall provide for ... the following: Adopting, continuing, amending, and repealing the city ordinances and for the publication of each ordinance before it becomes operative. Whether or not provided in its charter, instead of publishing a true copy of an ordinance before it becomes operative, the city may publish a summary of the ordinance. If the city publishes a summary of the ordinance, the city shall include in the publication the designation of a location in the city where a true copy of the ordinance can be inspected or obtained.

### Home Rule Villages (Home Rule Village Act) MCL 78.23 Village charter; mandatory provisions,

Each village charter shall provide for ... the following: The publication of an ordinance or a synopsis of an ordinance before the ordinance becomes operative.

### General Law Villages (General Law Village Act) MCL 66.4 Publication of ordinance or synopsis; certification.

Within 15 days after an ordinance is passed, the clerk shall publish the ordinance or a synopsis of the ordinance in a newspaper circulated in the village. Immediately after the ordinance or synopsis of the ordinance is published, the clerk shall enter in the record of ordinances, in a blank space to be left for that purpose under the record of the ordinance, a signed certificate, stating the date on which and the name of the newspaper in which the ordinance was published. The certificate is prima facie evidence of the publication of the ordinance or the synopsis.

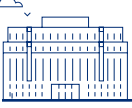
### Fourth Class Cities (Fourth Class Cities Act) MCL 89.6 Approved ordinances; publication; certificate; plumbing, electric, building codes, adoption; publication

Within 1 week after the passage of any ordinance the same shall be published in some newspaper printed and circulated within the city, and the clerk shall immediately after such publication enter upon the record of ordinances, in a blank space to be left for such purpose under the recorded ordinance, a certificate stating in what newspaper and of what date such publication was made, and sign the same officially, and such certificate shall be prima facie evidence that legal publication of such ordinance has been made: Provided, however, That each city shall have power to adopt any plumbing code, electrical code, or building code which has been promulgated by the state of Michigan, or by any department, board, or other agency thereof, or by any organization or association which is organized and conducted for the purpose of developing any such code or codes by reference thereto in an adopting ordinance and without publishing any such code in full: Provided, That said code is clearly identified in said ordinance and that the purpose of said code shall be published with the adopting ordinance and that printed copies thereof are kept in the office of the city clerk, available for inspection by and distribution to the public at all times, and that the publication shall contain a notice to the effect that a complete copy of said code is available for public use and inspection at the office of the city clerk.

Q. What do municipalities do when the council receives a letter—do they make it a part of the minutes, or read it aloud during meetings?

A. How municipalities react to letters they receive is a local custom or rule. A common practice is to make the letter part of the council packet, but not to read it aloud at the council meeting. However, some municipalities do read letters aloud during council meetings—at the discretion of the council.

The League’s Information Service provides member officials with answers to questions on a vast array of municipal topics. Call 1-800-653-2483 or email [info@mml.org](mailto:info@mml.org).



# CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY OFFERS TUITION SAVINGS TO LEAGUE MEMBERS


If you've been thinking about returning to school or starting an advanced degree, now is the time! Central Michigan University and the Michigan Municipal League's Membership Engagement Team are pleased to announce the renewal of their education partnership. This partnership entitles employees of municipalities with full League membership, their elected officials, League staff, and dependents (under the age of 24), and spouses of these groups to a 15 percent discount on tuition rates for online degree and certificate programs.\*

The Michigan Municipal League encourages its members and staff to prioritize education as it contributes to the growth of knowledge, fosters innovation, and provides resources that benefit municipalities across the state. As a fully accredited, public, state university, CMU has a legacy of more than 130 years of helping individuals achieve personal and professional goals.

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To take advantage of this opportunity, visit [online.cmich.edu/MML](https://online.cmich.edu/MML) today. For any questions, reach out to CMU's Online Student Services at [onlineprograms@cmich.edu](mailto:onlineprograms@cmich.edu) or 989-774-4371.

\*This tuition savings does not apply to Mount Pleasant on-campus courses, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program, or closed cohort programs. 

For more information, contact Alyse Munishamaiah, the associate director of business & community outreach for Central Michigan University, at 810-278-1113 or [johns4ad@cmich.edu](mailto:johns4ad@cmich.edu).



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- Housing
- Collective bargaining
- Health equity