

The Review

The official magazine of the  michigan municipal league

Fall 2024

2024 League Impact Report

**Championing
a Strong
Sense
of Place**



- 07** The Village of Deerfield Embraces Placemaking
- 10** Leveraging Your Community's History
- 32** Accessible and Age-Friendly Municipalities

The Review

Fall 2024

Volume 97, Number 5

The official magazine of the
 michigan municipal league

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of the magazine and past issues.



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On The Cover

Across four departments and three generations, "We Love Where You Live"—League staff and some of the places and festivals they love.

Bottom l-r:

Ann Arbor Summer Festival—
Millennial Margaret Mooney, membership associate;
Saline Celtic Festival—Gen X Kim Cekola,
research specialist/editor;
Cheeseburger in Caseville Festival—
Millennial Shelly Shields, finance director
for risk management services

Top l-r:

Great White Buffalo Brewing Company,
Northville—Baby Boomer Chris Johnson,
general counsel;
City of Traverse City—Millennial Josh Hartley,
user interface designer;
Pictured Rocks, Munising—
Millennial Sarah Martin, event planner

Special guest:

Coco Johnson, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel



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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.

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Year in Review

Executive Director's Message

Recently we wrapped up work on a book celebrating the League's 125th anniversary. Looking back on all those milestones gives one a unique sense of perspective. After all, a century and a quarter is a pretty long view. One lesson it teaches us is that sometimes the true consequences of our actions don't become evident for years, decades even. And consequences—both good and bad—can ripple out in unexpected ways.

Here at the League, the main question we have to answer is always this: have our actions helped to protect and strengthen our municipalities in ways that will stand the test of time? Have we pushed for positive, sustainable change that improves the quality of life for residents by improving the quality of their communities?

If we use that as our measure as we look back across 2024, then I'm proud to say the answer is a resounding YES.

Perhaps the biggest has been our ongoing quest to restore revenue sharing levels for local government and to secure those resources in a sustainable, long-term form.

After relentless advocacy by the League, next year's state budget will now invest over \$100 million in new revenue for cities, villages, townships, and counties. Just as critically, it sets up the framework for a revenue-sharing trust fund. It's a struggle that's far from over, of course. But I trust we are firmly on the way to restoring and safeguarding the stable, predictable funding necessary to keep our local governments healthy and whole.

We've also made strides in the quest to protect and strengthen home rule rights. We've finally crossed the finish line of a nearly seven-year journey for a new law revamping the way speed limits are set on Michigan roads. For the first time, local communities will have more flexibility and control over this critical safety issue, by allowing them to take safety hazards and other common sense factors into account when setting speed limits, rather than basing it solely on average vehicle speed.

We've also moved closer to resolving the thorny issue of short-term rentals with our support of HB 5438, which would protect local authority to reasonably regulate STRs while creating a statewide STR database and excise tax to help ease the local burden of accommodating them. It's a commonsense compromise balancing the need to protect quality of life in neighborhoods versus the rights of investors.

The new MI Funding Hub assists municipalities in capitalizing on state and federal funding opportunities, while a new League Portal makes it easier for members to interact with League services.

Plus, we're proud to say a record 63 local governments were lauded in this year's Michigan Green Communities Challenge for their sustainability efforts and environmental leadership.

And we hope you were part of the League's annual Convention on Mackinac Island in September, where we equipped local leaders with a huge array of new tools and ideas to activate, empower, innovate, and imagine a better future for us all.

You'll read about all that and more in this issue, and in far greater depth than I've been able to cover here. By the time you turn the last page, I think you'll agree that 2024 has indeed been a very good year.

Does that mean we've hit all our marks and succeeded in every goal? Of course not. Research shows troubling trends ahead for Michigan's population and economy. In the next ten years, we must grapple with significant challenges created by a decreasing number of working-age people and a continued shift in the global economy away from Michigan's auto industry.

That's why we've developed new tools and resources like our Creating Better Futures policy brief series, to help communities plan for critical challenges in housing, climate resilience, local economies, and small business support.

And it's why we're continuing to aggressively support several key pieces of legislation that would create a new ten-year economic development strategy for the State of Michigan, investing billions in housing, community revitalization, transit, and business attraction activities. It's a more holistic, longer-term approach than anything the state has ever enacted.

So, even as we look back on our accomplishments with pride, we know it's time to buckle up for the next year ahead. It's going to be a heckuva ride.



Dan Gilmartin

League Executive Director and CEO
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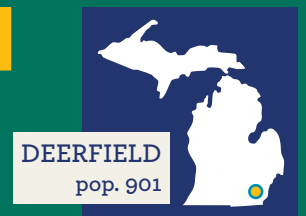
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DARING TO DREAM IN DEERFIELD



By Morgan Schwanky

The Michigan Municipal League strives to inspire and cultivate innovation. Our magazine is one way we share information, concepts, and successes. Placemaking is integral to much of the framework we use to discuss how we can best serve our communities. Recently, a member shared how she learned about creating a sense of place from reading the *Review* and how, over time, she has seen its impact in her own community.



Meet Denise Wylie

Denise Wylie joined the Village of Deerfield as treasurer in 2000 and became clerk in 2011. She has observed how changes in population demographics can cause an area to lose what made it special.

“There was a big shift in the community. Our community used to be a place where everybody knew everybody, and everybody knew everybody’s kids. There was just this family feel. Then things started changing. The older people started passing away. New people started moving in, and I could see a real struggle with blending again because people didn’t know each other,” Wylie said.

Wylie and her community have dared to dream: “If you don’t take time to dream, you’re going to miss what you could be.” She noted that the village council and Village Superintendent Josh Crots are very open to trying new things. They have taken the time to figure out the needs of their community and dreamt of how to fix and fill those needs. These are some of their stories.

Splash Pad

Deerfield gained a splash pad in 2018. Funding came from the Lenawee Foundation, which included donations from individuals and families in the community. Wylie recognizes this project as one of the first things to jumpstart a revival for connection, and it continues to have positive impacts.

“The best part about our splash pad is that the kids can play, and mom doesn’t have to worry, so it’s relaxing for mom

to sit there and read her book—or grandma or whoever is watching the kids when they are playing at the splash pad,” Wylie said.

The splash pad is conveniently located down the street from the municipal building, allowing Wylie to often stop by and see who is enjoying it.

“I was walking and there was a bunch of kids there. One of the women there said that their preschool children were missing each other. So, they just decided to all pack a lunch and meet at the splash pad,” Wylie said.

Food Trucks

Last year, the community celebrated its sesquicentennial, complete with four food trucks.

“I was standing there waiting for my food to get ready, and there were three other people waiting too. They were people I knew of from the community. We just started small talk. ‘Hey, how’s it going?’ ‘Pretty good.’ ‘What are you eating?’ It was people who you would never sit down and have a meal with. Our paths never crossed, but at the food truck we chatted and engaged with one another. It was like all of a sudden it clicked. That’s what creating place was about.”

All the food trucks ran out of food at the event, and after seeing what a success it was, Wylie and Crots had the idea of bringing in a food truck every week. There are not any restaurants in Deerfield, so its families enjoy the convenience this solution provides.

“We are creating places for people to connect and that’s what community is. Community isn’t just the buildings and the businesses downtown. It’s the people, and that’s the heart of Deerfield.”




Christmas Tree Lighting

This tradition began with a handful of people and a single tree outside the municipal building during Wylie's first year as treasurer. With growing engagement in the community, there was an opportunity to get more people involved.

"This last year, we've moved it down to the pavilion and the firemen sold or had people sponsor trees. There were fourteen trees with different people remembering their family members or whoever. We have hot chocolate and cookies, and it's just a place for people to talk and chat. It's grown now to where more people are included."

The local Girl Scouts decorated the tables at the pavilion with supplies from the village, and everyone joined in to sing carols.

"We are creating places for people to connect and that's what community is. Community isn't just the buildings and the businesses downtown. It's the people, and that's the heart of Deerfield. As we do these different events, we are supporting families and building the community, and that's the success that we're seeing from our efforts," Wylie said. 

Morgan Schwanky is a content writer for the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6320 or mschwanky@mml.org.



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LEVERAGING YOUR COMMUNITY'S HISTORY

By Robert Myers

Historians credit the Greek philosopher Heraclitus with the adage, "The only constant in life is change." The world around us does indeed change, often at a dizzying pace. Despite that, or perhaps because of it, we also desire consistency. When we seek out a business or organization, we look for those that have long-term track records. Communities proudly post their founding dates on their welcome signs. When we go house hunting, we ask about the neighborhood's stability. In an ever-changing world, we place a premium on longevity, steadiness, and dependability.

The Historical Society of Michigan (HSM) recognizes and celebrates consistency in our communities with two awards programs: Michigan Milestone Awards and the Michigan Heritage Home® Program.

HSM is itself an icon of longevity. Territorial Governor Lewis Cass and Explorer Henry Schoolcraft founded the society in 1828, nine years before Michigan became a state. The nonprofit, non-governmental organization, now approaching its bicentennial, is Michigan's oldest cultural organization and the state's official historical society. The Society helps to connect the stories of all Michigan's peoples to students, educators, historical organizations, and the public through education programs, conferences, publications, awards, workshops, referral services, networking opportunities, and support for local history organizations.

Awards programs that recognize achievements in Michigan history constitute one of the Society's most important functions. Its five awards categories include State History Awards, Upper Peninsula History Awards, the Michigan Centennial Farm program, Milestone Awards, and the Michigan Heritage Home® program.

Milestone Awards - Municipal

The Milestone Awards program began in 1975 and will celebrate its own golden anniversary next year. HSM confers Milestone Awards to businesses, organizations, or municipalities that have reached their 50th, 100th, 150th, or 200th anniversary. Award recipients receive a certificate and a cast-aluminum plaque to serve as a visible reminder of their long-term commitment, presence, and contributions to their community. Measuring 15 x 20 inches, the plaque is finished in navy blue for organizations, brown for businesses, or burgundy for municipalities and can be mounted either inside or outdoors. Upon request, HSM sends a representative from its board of trustees or staff to present the plaque at a dedication ceremony.



Farmington receives a Milestone Award in 2024 celebrating the city's bicentennial.



Milestone Award presentation for the Putnam District Library.

One of the most recent municipal Milestone Awards went to the City of Farmington in 2024 to commemorate the bicentennial of its founding. Historians documenting the community's origins determined that Arthur Power and several of his men traveled to Farmington Township from Ontario County, New York, in March 1824 and established a community on land that he had purchased the previous year. Residents dubbed the settlement "Powers"; in January 1826, the federal government established a post office there and named it Farmington. Farmington was incorporated as a village in 1867 and as a city in 1926.

Milestone Awards – Organizational

A recent organizational Milestone Award went to the Michigan State Grange in celebration of its sesquicentennial. It was organized on April 15, 1873, with 19 Subordinate (local) Granges to attend to the interests of Michigan farmers. Now more than 150 years old, the Michigan State Grange is the state's oldest rural American agricultural family, fraternal organization.

Milestone Awards – Business

As an example of a Milestone Award for a business, the Royal Oak law firm of Howard & Howard received its plaque in 2019 in honor of its sesquicentennial. William G. Howard opened his law office in 1869 after he was admitted to the Kalamazoo County Bar Association. He had earned his law degree from the University of Michigan earlier that year and opened a practice, Sullivan & Howard, in Dowagiac. In 1873, he formed the Balch, Howard & Balch law firm in Kalamazoo and later joined the law firm of Brown, Howard & Roos. In 1897, William's son, Harry C. Howard, joined the practice. They renamed it Howard & Howard in 1920. In the 1980s and 1990s, the office moved from Kalamazoo to Royal Oak. Although the firm's name and location changed over the years, it qualified for a sesquicentennial Milestone Award because it could trace its direct lineage all the way back to its founding in 1869.

“While many Michiganders own houses that might not qualify for a Michigan Historical Marker or the National Register of Historic Places, those homes still have significance in their communities.”

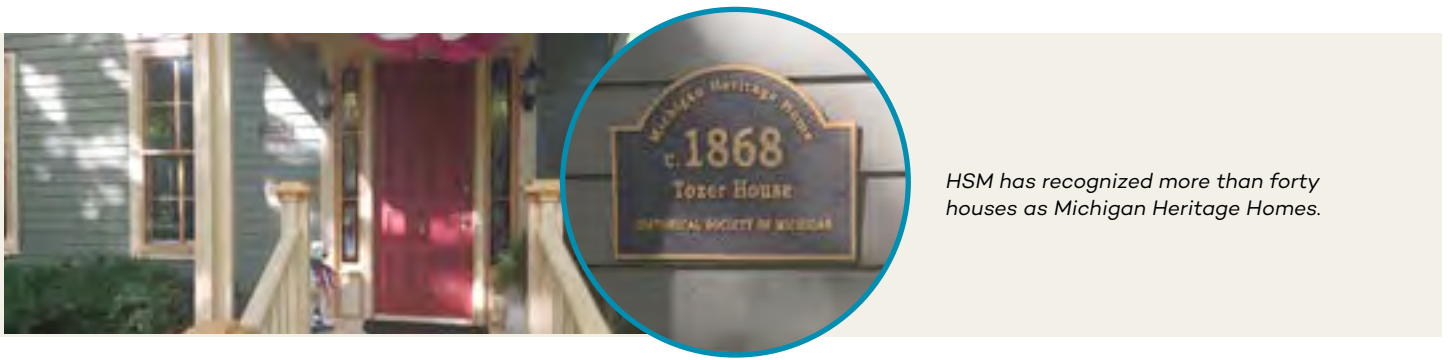
Michigan Heritage Homes

HSM established its Michigan Heritage Home® award program in 2021 to recognize the importance of our state's domestic architecture. The award honors houses that are at least a century old and remain in substantially original condition.

Most people are familiar with the Michigan Historical Marker Program, created in 1955 to denote historic sites throughout the state. Overseen by the Michigan Historical Commission and the Michigan History Center which are both part of state government, it has placed more than 1,800 of its green markers around Michigan and in several other states. People are also aware of the National Register of Historic Places, a federal program that recognizes sites of national significance.

While many Michiganders own houses that might not qualify for a Michigan Historical Marker or the National Register of Historic Places, those homes still have significance in their communities. In many cases they have spent years preserving and restoring these treasures and take enormous—and justifiable—pride in their accomplishment.

Recognition as a Michigan Heritage Home® comes with a certificate and a handsome custom-made aluminum plaque finished in brown and gold. The plaque bears the date of construction and the name of the original owner: for example, “1892” and “Smith House.” Recipients can attach it directly to their house or to a fence, signpost, or other publicly visible spot. To date, HSM has recognized more than forty houses as Michigan Heritage Homes.



HSM has recognized more than forty houses as Michigan Heritage Homes.

One example, recognized in 2023, is a rare example of an Octagon House: the Gridley House in Albion, built about 1856. Orson Squire Fowler, a prominent lecturer, phrenologist, and abolitionist, touted the Octagon style as the ideal house form. They proved less practical than Fowler hoped, and the idea never caught on.

Abram and Eliza Jane Gridley, however, numbered among the few Michiganders who built an Octagon home. Abram Gridley fired bricks for the house on the site himself and used them to build their Octagon, where they lived for the rest of their lives. Today, the Gridley House remains in almost original condition.

HSM's partnership with organizations and families throughout the state through these awards programs helps to honor Michigan's unique heritage. In recognizing historical contributions to communities through these programs, we pay tribute to the work of past Michiganders and inspire current and future citizens to create their own impact in their communities. [L](#)

Application forms and full information about the Historical Society of Michigan's award programs are on the organization's website: <https://www.hsmichigan.org/awards>.

Robert Myers is the director of history programming at the Historical Society of Michigan. He can be reached at 517-324-1828 or myers@hsmichigan.org.



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From our archives . . . League Convention

1899—First Convention, Grand Rapids

The tentative program from the first convention announced that the following municipalities were expected to attend: Adrian, Albion, Battle Creek, Cadillac, Detroit, Eaton Rapids, Flint, Grand Ledge, Grand Rapids, Hillsdale, Ionia, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Ludington, Manistee, Marshall, Mason, Niles, Owosso, Pontiac, Saginaw, and Traverse City.



Delegates to the 1907 Annual Convention, held in Detroit

1907—Ninth Annual Convention, Detroit

Major issues concerning League members in the early 1900s included redistricting, with an eye toward securing better representation in Lansing; the evolution of nonpartisan nominations and elections; uniform accounting; local government organization; and constitutional home rule for cities and villages.

1999—100th Anniversary Convention, Grand Rapids

What better way to end a yearlong celebration of our centennial than with the unique perspective of keynote speaker Helen Thomas, UPI Bureau Chief, and longtime White House correspondent. Thomas urged attendees to maintain their values. "The hills are alive with strife," she said, "in ethnic, religious, and racial conflict. The past is still with us as we look towards a technological future. We must maintain our human values as we become more involved in a dehumanized, highly technological, future."



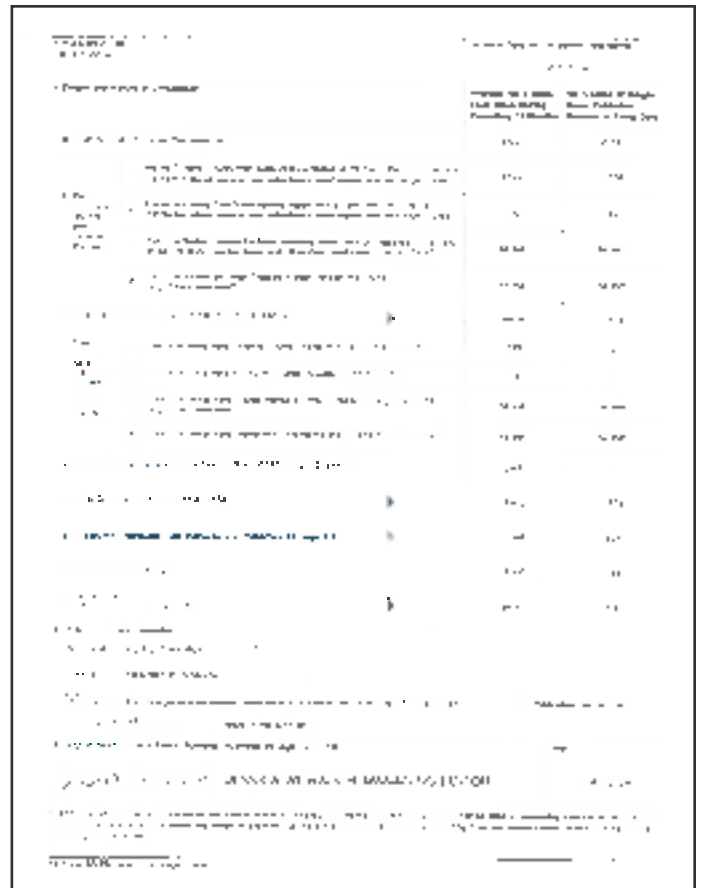
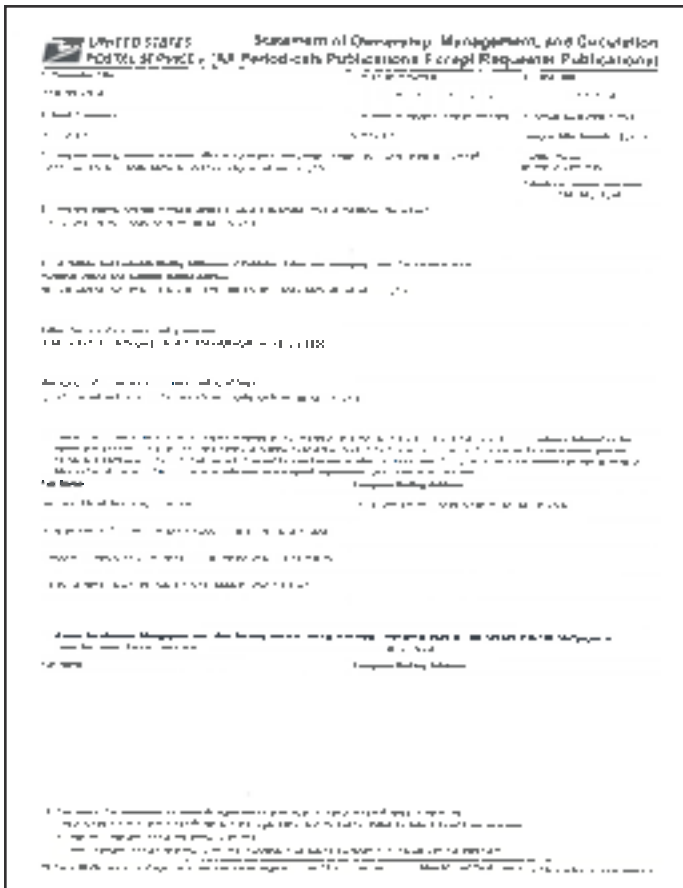
Newly elected League President Ingrid Sheldon, mayor of Ann Arbor, was near the front of the line to purchase Helen Thomas' newest book and have the author autograph it.



Youth delegates drew a mural about young people's involvement in and impact upon the future. The mural was displayed in the Amway Grand Hotel.



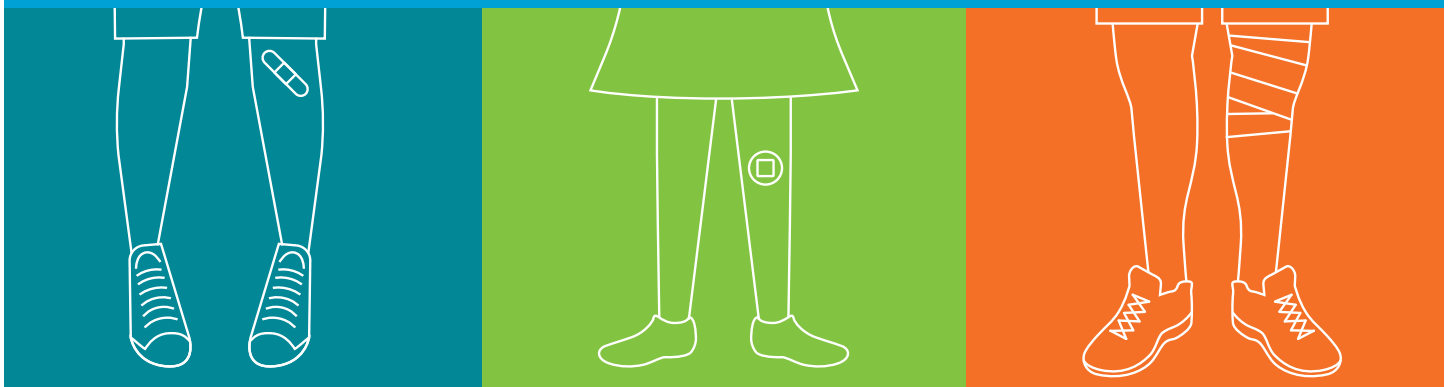
Nearly 100 cities and villages were represented in a parade of flags, which was part of the stirring opening ceremony.



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Message from Dan Gilmartin

In the Michigan Municipal League's 125th year, the heart and spirit of our work hasn't changed. And despite a year of national election apprehension, concerns over state population growth, clean energy and solar development debates, and questions about our future with AI, we saw our members haven't lost their energy or grit to do good, hard work for their residents.

I'm proud to say the League matched that energy in our training and services. This Impact Report spotlights the evolution of our programs and the new spaces the League entered to meet members where they are.

We showed up to learn about and make connections with the local business economies of smaller communities; we took the *Live with the League* show on the road; we launched the online League Portal; and we transitioned and expanded our funding helpdesk services, among many other things.

League Board of Trustees and staff led the charge in spaces old and new, whether that was forging cross-sector partnerships or advocating in Lansing. Every year I'm proud of their ingenuity, and 2024 was no different. I look forward to Michigan continuing to be the host of the party when it comes to championing a strong sense of place and trust and belonging in communities, inviting others to partake in the placemaking movement and then showing them the way.



Daniel P. Gilmartin

League Executive Director and CEO

Who Makes Up the League?

524 Total Members

280 Cities

239 Villages

5 Townships

52 Full Associate Members

29 Affiliate Organizations

52 Business Alliance Program Participants

Commemorative Senate Resolution for Our 125th Anniversary!

The Michigan Senate created a commemorative resolution to honor our organization's founding—Senate Resolution 125 of 2024.



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the resolution.



Across three centuries and two peninsulas: One League; a book detailing the history of the League, updated for the organization's 125th anniversary.

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League Staff Around the State

Policy Research Labs and State & Federal Affairs

League staff has presented or will present at more than 40 conferences on a variety of topics in 2024, including:

- Pattern Book Homes
- Michigan Housing Data Portal
- MI Funding Hub
- Michigan Green Communities
- Climate Catalyst Communities
- State Housing Policy
- Green Infrastructure
- Sustainability Planning
- Redevelopment Ready Communities Pre-Development Assistance
- Retrofitting Existing Buildings
- Thriving Communities
- Microbusiness Ready Communities

Live with the League

We took *Live with the League* on the road to visit communities around the state: Alpena, Bay City, Grand Ledge, and Pontiac.



Elected Officials Academy

“Being an effective leader means being a lifelong learner,” said Dennis Hennen, Elected Officials Academy Advisory Board Vice President and Berkley Councilmember.

“There’s always something new to discover. The Elected Officials Academy has been instrumental in providing a robust framework upon which I can build to gain the essential knowledge and skills I need to best serve my constituents.”

The Elected Officials Academy presented:

10

Level 1
Education Awards

5

Level 2
Leadership Awards

6

Level 3
Governance Awards

3

Level 4
Ambassador Awards (most ever)

Foundation

The MML Foundation, along with its Board of Directors, has continued to develop the LIFT campaign, focused on empowering local leaders to position communities for the future. The MML Foundation is currently handling 16 grants totaling \$5,706,600.

LIFT funds support pilots and programs that focus on strengthening community collaboration, resourcing local leaders, and laying the foundation for repeatable, reliable, and equitable approaches to community development. These initiatives include a focus on new approaches to building local economies, funding for water quality issues, subnational diplomacy, and the connection between housing, placemaking, and population growth.

Through pilots, the MML Foundation seeks to design and execute collaborative processes that position municipalities, residents, and other engaged partners to inform and build place-based successes that can then be replicated elsewhere. The work strives to identify and test new approaches to the persistent barriers that municipalities face when dealing with complex and systemic issues.

Global Partnerships & State Diplomacy Initiative

As a part of their ongoing work in global partnerships, led by Senior Fellow Julie Egan, the MML Foundation invited the Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, Jose W. Fernandez, to take part in the 2024 Mackinac Policy Conference. During this trip, Under Secretary Fernandez signed a Letter of Cooperation on behalf of the State Department for the MML Foundation’s “Michigan City State Diplomacy Initiative” and spoke with Governor Whitmer and Lieutenant Governor Gilchrist about the initiative and global partnerships in Michigan.

Additionally, the MML Foundation hosted a Michigan Subnational Diplomacy roundtable discussion with Under Secretary Fernandez and a group of Michigan leaders to learn more about subnational diplomacy and share efforts and challenges with global engagement.

Advocacy

The League’s legislative work in Lansing continues to successfully advocate on behalf of our members, helping secure new resources and pass proactive policies for local governments, while continuing to hold off attempts to preempt local control. This has resulted in double digit increases in revenue sharing and over \$100 million in funding for placemaking projects. Housing is one of the most critical issues facing our members, and we secured the passage of legislation and hundreds of millions in funding to help address our workforce housing needs. Additionally, we have held off attempts to reduce local tax revenue and erode local control of short-term rentals and aggregate mining.

Outside of our direct advocacy efforts at the Capitol, our State and Federal Affairs team continues to deliver important and timely information to our members through our virtual *Live with the League* show. Whether it is a discussion on the state budget, highlighting the latest shift in political winds, or breaking down newly introduced legislation, we utilize this platform to communicate the latest news to members in every corner of the state. This year, we’ve taken the show on the road, recording live and on location in several member communities in celebration of the League’s 125th anniversary.



Women’s Elected Leadership Intensive (WELI)

The Women’s Elected Leadership Intensive (WELI) is a new, groundbreaking program dedicated to equipping elected women with the essential resources, tools, and skills needed for impactful leadership. Over five weeks, participants foster a supportive environment and build a robust network that ensures they will excel in their local elected positions. The inaugural class of 30 completed the program in August and was recognized at Convention 2024.

Engagement by the Numbers

Number of people trained in person and virtually at conferences and trainings:	1,450
Inquires assisted:	312
Communities in attendance virtually or in person:	232
Onsite trainings completed in communities:	23
Executive Searches completed this year:	10
Average <i>Live with the League</i> viewers:	102

The League Portal

The League Portal was launched in April 2024, allowing members to quickly access directories, register for events, update their municipal rosters, and more, all in one place. This improved, efficient self-service model gives members more time to focus on their communities.

Risk Management Programs

Pool member contributions:
\$27.5 million

Workers' Compensation Fund contributions:
\$37 million

Unemployment Fund contributions:
\$300,000

Dividends returned to members since 1978:
Almost \$300 million

Pool annual new claims:
1,170

Workers' Comp Fund annual new claims:
1,500

Unemployment Fund annual claims:
1,500

Pool assets:
\$93 million

Workers' Comp Fund assets:
\$192 million

Unemployment Fund assets:
\$7.75 million

Pool member equity:
\$55 million

Workers' Comp Fund member equity:
\$103 million

Unemployment Fund member equity:
\$7.1 million

League Focus Areas



Housing

- Michigan Housing Data Portal
- Pattern Book Homes for 21st Century Michigan 2.0



Sustainability

- MI Green Communities
- Creating Better Futures Policy Brief Series: Climate and Demographics



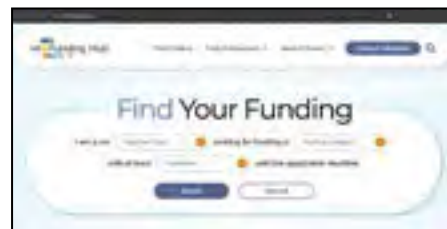
Small Business

- Creating Better Futures Policy Brief Series: Making Space for Every Entrepreneur



Infrastructure

- MI Funding Hub
- MI Water Navigator



ServeMICity to MIFunding Hub

ServeMICity, the League's program connecting member communities with federal and state funding sources through the CARES Act and other federal programs, transformed into the larger initiative MIFunding Hub. Through the Hub, members can access free technical assistance from the Help Desk, track and apply for funding, and find other tools to become more grant savvy, all with support from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity.

Legal Defense Fund (LDF)

- 41** Active Years
- 82** Percent participation among League members (from 2021)
- 7** Cases this year for which the Supreme Court specifically requested a Municipal League amicus brief
- 12** Amicus briefs filed in the Michigan Supreme Court and Court of Appeals this year



1,518 Followers



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6,019 Followers



3,946 Followers

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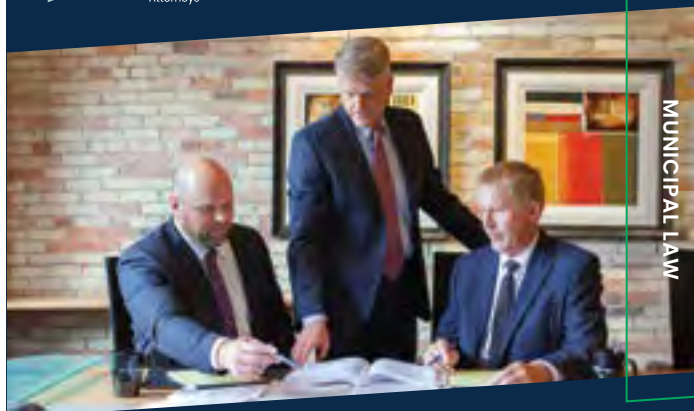
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MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE CONVENTION 2024

Highlights

From networking on the historic Grand Hotel Front Porch to discussions on the nuts and bolts of successful council-manager relationships, Convention 2024 on Mackinac Island delivered the inspirational and the candid.

Big questions were asked in the Opening General Session for attendees to consider throughout the event—*What will it take for Michigan and its communities to remain placemaking leaders in the nation?*—and challenges were made—*We must stop using the limited conventional indicators of prosperity, which only look at economy, to measure a community's overall success.*

A thriving community embodies connection, accessibility, and opportunity for its residents. It fosters a mindset of inspiration and optimism among leaders, prioritizing trust and belonging in everyday municipal decisions.

Breakout sessions showed what this can look like in that everyday work: harnessing philanthropic support to bridge the gap in capital for housing projects; embracing energy efficiency as a strategy for keeping your fiscal house in order; and exploring how AI can improve the efficiency, quality, and sustainability of municipal services. Event attendees also had the chance to test prototype tools that the League is developing to help municipalities make the connections and set the course to be thriving communities for all residents.

This work will continue over the next year, with more to discuss and celebrate at Convention 2025 in Grand Rapids, September 17–19.



2024 AWARDS

Emilie LaGrow

Community Builder Award

Honoring individuals whose leadership creates positive community change. Through efforts such as encouraging civic engagement, supporting up-and-coming leaders, fostering good working relationships, and thinking strategically, they make their community a place where people truly love to live and work.



Gary Heidel

Distinguished Service Award

The Distinguished Service Award celebrates an individual who exhibits meritorious service to the League and its member communities.

Bryan K. Barnett

Michael A. Guido Leadership and Public Service Award

Celebrating a chief elected official who personifies professionalism and leadership, is an active League member, is dedicated to the citizens in their community and advocates on their behalf in Lansing and Washington, DC.



Barbara A. Ziarko

Jim Sinclair Exceptional Service Award

Celebrating a person dedicated to public service who has shown passion and commitment to the League, enthusiastically supporting its mission and promoting its purpose.

Not pictured, **Catherine Bostick-Tullius**, Honorary Life Membership Award recipient

community excellence award



Thank You!

2024 FINALISTS



City of Brighton

The Brighton Main Street
Streetscape Project



City of Grandville

Placemaking and Building
Community in Downtown Grandville:
The Commons & Market Pavilion



City of Oak Park

City of Oak Park Nine Mile
Redesign Project

Congratulations!



2024 WINNER

City of Houghton

Connecting Houghton

After more than 50 years of developing its waterfront, Houghton invested in three major projects to connect its downtown and waterfront. The transformative Pier Placemaking Project created a large space for gathering and celebrating in the heart of downtown. There are clear, walkable, and inviting ways for people to move about between the water and main street.





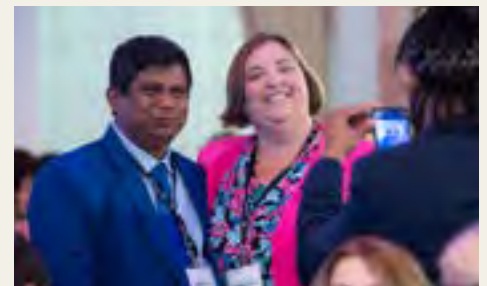
MBC-LEO celebrates their 20-year anniversary with a commemorative bookmark.



The MML Foundation raised over \$3,000 with the 2024 commemorative MML Convention pin fundraiser.



Inaugural Women's Elected Leadership Intensive 2024 graduates.



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Is an internal police policy confidential under FOIA?

By Bill Mathewson

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.

With the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), there is always a tension between privacy/confidentiality and transparency, including as related to local law enforcement. The City of Sault Ste. Marie, soon after the death of George Floyd in May 2020, received a request for the police department's use-of-force policy. The city ultimately provided a redacted copy of the policy. The requestor filed suit under the FOIA to get an unredacted copy.

The trial court agreed with the city's claim that the redacted sections could be withheld and dismissed the complaint, "... concluding that the unredacted policy was exempt from disclosure because it (1) was a record of law enforcement communication codes or plans for deployment; (2) disclosed law enforcement operational instructions; (3) would endanger the safety of law enforcement officers; and (4) the public's interest in disclosure did not outweigh the public's interest in nondisclosure."

The plaintiff (requestor) appealed to the Court of Appeals (COA), arguing that public access to use-of-force policies is critical to robust debate about policing, and that the FOIA was intended to make precisely this type of information available.

In February 2023 the COA, noting that "Michigan has a strong public policy favoring public access to government information ..." held, in a published decision, that the city's claimed exemptions did not apply, and that it must produce the unredacted policy. In the opinion of the Court of Appeals: "It was the city's burden to produce particularized evidence that disclosure would endanger law enforcement personnel." The COA held the city did not do so. "The trial court clearly erred by finding that the redacted material 'would or could in fact impact the officer's [sic] ability to protect the public and/or themselves.' Because we find that the city failed to meet its burden to prove that officer endangerment necessarily 'would' result from disclosure of the unredacted policy, it is unnecessary for us to consider the balancing test ..."

The COA decision was appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court. On December 1, 2023, the Supreme Court issued

an order remanding the case (via the COA) to the trial court for consideration of the issue raised by the city—the applicability of the staff manual exception to the FOIA.


The trial court ruled on March 20 that "... a Police 'staff manual' can certainly be described as a book or set of policies (i.e., 'contents') that tell the law enforcement officers how to do something and as such, the Policy in this case certainly falls within that exception ... Such being the case, the matter rests with whether the public interest is outweighed in the nondisclosure of the Policy."

"After careful review of the Policy and the plain language of the statute, together with the testimony of the former and current Chiefs of Police that disclosure would or could in fact impact the officer's ability to protect the public and/or themselves, the use of Force Policy qualifies for the staff manual exemption. As such, the City's decision to provide Plaintiff with a redacted copy of the policy is supported by law and fits within the exemption ..."

The COA issued another opinion in August. It held that the use-of-force policy was a stand-alone order and there was no evidence in the record that the policy was in a staff manual or handbook that was disseminated to officers.

Importantly, because the COA reached the conclusion that, "... the redacted portions of the use-of-force policy are not part of a staff manual, it is unnecessary for us to consider the balancing test" in the FOIA. The balancing test is whether the public interest in nondisclosure outweighs the public interest in disclosure ... here of the city's use-of-force policy. In a footnote, the COA added that it doubted the city could prevail on the balancing test, given the "public's compelling interest in understanding when and how police officers are authorized to use force ... and in that the "evidence did not establish that any meaningful risk would be posed to the safety of the police by disclosure."

The COA ordered the trial court to disclose the entire policy, award the plaintiff reasonable attorney fees, and determine if the plaintiff is entitled to punitive damages.

Legal counsel for the city has expressed serious misgivings about the decision including that it's "ridiculous" to assume the city would draft a policy to govern its police officers and then not give it to them. The city intends to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court. 

Hjerstedt v. City of Sault Ste. Marie (On Remand), Court of Appeals Docket No. 358803 (August 22, 2024)

Bill Mathewson is a legal consultant to the League. You may contact him at wmathewson@mml.org.



Tawas City Police Autism Awareness Campaign

Chief Matthew Klosowski-Lorenz

TAWAS CITY
pop. 1,834



In April of 2021, the Tawas City Police Department and the Tawas Police Officers Association conducted an Autism Awareness campaign and fundraiser. Officers wore custom Autism Awareness police patches on their uniforms and the patrol cars sported very colorful puzzle piece graphics to show their support of Autism Awareness.

The project utilized the existing Tawas City Police uniform patch but recreated it to embrace the Autism Awareness puzzle piece insignias. Chief Matthew Klosowski-Lorenz made the puzzle piece graphics for the patrol cars on his Cricut machine and applied them to the patrol cars himself.

When the department researched the issue, they found police agencies that support autism awareness and order specialty patches; however, they did not find many that embrace autism awareness in the field. Officers wore Autism Awareness patches and pins for the month of April. The department made vinyl graphics to additionally show our support while out on patrol. Officers were touched, "To see kids on the autism spectrum reactions when they saw our cars was absolutely amazing—truly a life changing project."

Community Impact

Chief Klosowski-Lorenz reports that the city received an overwhelming amount of support from not only the community, but vacationers. The department received daily voicemails, knocks on the police station door, and emails telling them how happy they were to see the police department support. There are a lot of autistic children

in the jurisdiction and the positive impact officers have had interacting with them on calls because of our unique uniforms has been tremendous. In addition, local area businesses helped the police department sell Autism Awareness police patches to help support autism awareness in the community. Approximately \$1,500 was raised for Acorn Health Autism Center.

First Responder C.A.R.E. Program

In 2024, through the efforts of the city manager and police and fire chiefs, the program was expanded into the First Responder C.A.R.E. Program—an acronym for "Creating Appropriate Response Environments." It is being rolled out in the community to help address potential communication barriers. Stickers have been designed for people to place on their vehicles and/or the doors of their homes, to indicate to law enforcement, firefighters, and other first responders that someone inside has autism and may need to be approached in a different manner. The program will also lead to additional autism awareness training opportunities for local public safety personnel. It was unveiled during the April 1 city council meeting, which fittingly also marked the start of Autism Awareness Month. Stickers measure 2" x 3" for vehicles and 3" x 5" for house entrance doors. Stickers are available through Tawas City Hall, Tawas City Police Department, Tawas City Fire Department, and Acorn Health, and are strictly voluntary. [L](#)

For more information contact Chief Matthew Klosowski-Lorenz at 989-362-8680 or policechief@tawascity.org.

"There are a lot of autistic children in the jurisdiction and the positive impact officers have had interacting with them on calls because of our unique uniforms has been tremendous."

—Chief Klosowski-Lorenz



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—Thom Harnett, Former State Legislator and Mayor, Gardiner, Maine

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Accessible and Age-Friendly Municipalities

By Rick Haglund

Michigan has among the oldest populations in the country, prompting policymakers to focus on attracting more young people to the state and growing the working-age population. About 19 percent of people living in Michigan are 65 years and older, a figure that's expected to grow to 30 percent by 2050, according to a University of Michigan estimate. It's the only age segment in the state expected to see significant growth. Another 2.2 million Michigan adults have a disability, or 29 percent of the state's adult population, according to federal government statistics.

But seniors and those with disabilities are far from being ignored. Communities around Michigan and the state government are enacting a variety of initiatives to improve accessibility and quality of life for those populations. Among those efforts are removing barriers in municipal parks, installing more sidewalk ramps, providing aid to upgrade housing, and establishing more opportunities for social interaction to reduce loneliness among these more vulnerable populations.

AARP Age-Friendly Cities

In Jackson, for example, the city has paved walking paths in parks and recreation areas, making them more accessible; constructed a multigenerational playground in Loomis Park; and built an accessible boat ramp on the Grand River in Ella Sharp Park. "It's part of every decision we make," Kelli Hoover, Jackson's director of parks, recreation, and grounds, said about including the needs of older residents

and those with disabilities in the city's capital expenditure plans. Twelve percent of Jackson residents are 65 years and older, and another 13.2 percent under 65 have a disability, according to census figures.

Jackson is one of nine communities in Michigan designated by AARP as "age-friendly" cities. The others are Auburn Hills, Detroit, East Lansing, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Novi, Royal Oak, and Southfield. In addition, Michigan is one of 10 states considered age-friendly by AARP, which advocates for those over age 50. The state received the designation in 2019 and spent several years developing an action plan, which was approved by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and AARP in 2022.

Michigan's plan focuses on increasing awareness of services, promoting social interaction and inclusion, improving community and health services, reducing elder abuse and exploitation, and enhancing transportation services. Since winning the age-friendly designation, Whitmer has created a Health and Aging Services Administration to better coordinate senior services in the Department of Health and Human Services. The governor recently released a list of more than a dozen measures the state has taken to enhance seniors' lives, including a tax rollback on retirement income, a law to protect seniors and vulnerable adults from financial abuse and legislation designed to lower the cost of prescription drugs. "Older residents earn money, pay taxes and purchase many goods and services, particularly locally. An age-friendly state sustains not only the individual but our communities," AARP Michigan Director Paula Cunningham said about Michigan's plan in 2022.

Like state government, many cities designated as age-friendly by AARP spent years engaging residents to develop senior- and disability-friendly plans. Grand Rapids won the

"Accessibility is included in the city's core values. Everyone needs to understand that disability is included in DEI. It's not just gender and race."

—Civil Rights, Inclusion and Opportunity Department Director
Christopher Samp, City of Detroit



designation in 2018 but didn't get its action plan approved by AARP until earlier this year. It crafted its plan following input from a 23-stop road tour that included community meetings at schools, churches, and other nonprofits. People with disabilities "had a seat at the table" in developing the city's plan, said assistant planning director Jay Steffen. Grand Rapids' plan focuses on enacting fair rental practices for seniors, increasing pedestrian access and safety, upgrading transportation services, and improving how the city publicizes and carries out senior services. Grand Rapids also has created a one-stop center where developers can meet with officials of various city departments to ensure new housing and other building projects are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Although it's not an AARP-designated community, Ann Arbor recently approved a \$19 million plan to make its sprawling parks and recreation system ADA-compliant. The ADA Transition Plan was crafted after a city consultant identified 2,000 barriers to access in Ann Arbor's 163 parks and nature areas. "It's not just ability based. Age plays a factor in accessibility," said Adam Fercho, a city park planner and landscape architect. "Accessibility is so important. It needs to be for everyone."


But the improvements won't happen overnight. It could take 30 years for Ann Arbor's parks and recreation system to become fully ADA compliant, according to the plan. And the city hasn't yet allocated funding to it, although it says it is committed to doing so. It also recently hired Tracy Byrd as city parks ADA coordinator to lead implementation of the plan.

Making communities more accessible for older adults and those with disabilities is increasingly being seen through a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. Byrd, for example, works out of Ann Arbor's Office of Organizational Equity. And Detroit's Office of Disability Affairs is a division of the city's Civil Rights, Inclusion and Opportunity Department. Its director is Christopher Samp, who said he "built it from scratch" after the office was created by Mayor Mike Duggan in 2021. "Accessibility is included in the city's core values," he said. "Everyone needs to understand that disability is included in DEI. It's not just gender and race."

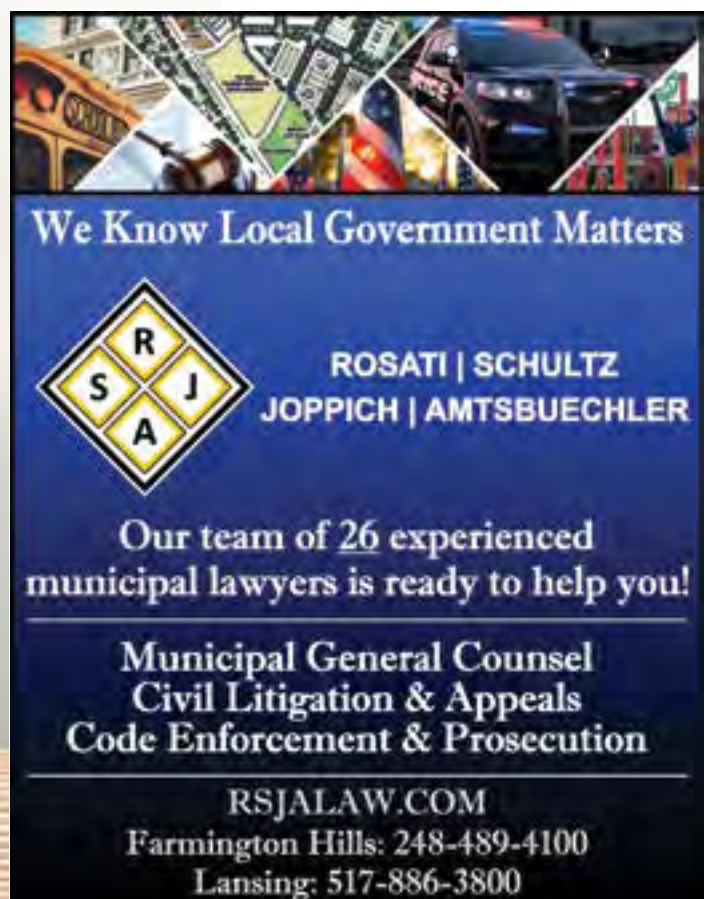
Samp said his office focused its first three years primarily on finding accessible housing for those with disabilities. Detroit has 119,000 residents with disabilities, or about 19 percent of its total population. It created Detroit Connect, a search tool that helps people find accessible, affordable housing, and the Detroit Home Accessibility Program, which provides accessibility grants for wheelchair ramps and other

aids to eligible homeowners. Samp's office is now focusing on educating landlords, builders, housing inspectors, and residents of their rights and responsibilities under the ADA.

It also sponsors events raising awareness of disability issues, including a disability pride celebration this year commemorating the signing of the ADA into law on July 26, 1990. And Detroit became the latest city this year to be named by the AARP as an age-friendly city. Duggan said the city's senior services and programming will be spearheaded by Detroit's Civil Rights, Inclusion and Opportunity Department. "It's the seniors, many who stuck and stayed through the city's hard times, who are the backbone of our community. They are our block club leaders, our elders, and we owe them a debt of gratitude," Duggan said.

There's no doubt Michigan needs to attract more younger residents to boost its workforce and prosperity as older people retire. But local officials say making their cities more accessible to seniors and those with disabilities improves their communities' overall quality of life, which can attract and retain younger people, as well. "Our philosophy is what's good for older folks is good for younger people, too," said Steffen, the Grand Rapids assistant planning director. 

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



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- 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





Polling Place Q&As from the State of Michigan Secretary of State

Q. Are campaign materials, clothing, or accessories allowed in a polling place?

A. No. Michigan law prohibits the following within 100 feet of a polling place:

- Campaigning for a candidate or ballot measure
- Wearing or bringing election- or campaign-related clothing or accessories
- Displaying or wearing candidate or election-related signage
- Bringing election, campaign, or partisan materials into a polling place
- Requesting signatures for or signing petitions

Q. Are firearms allowed in polling places?

A. The open carry of firearms is prohibited by law in certain places that may be used for election purposes, including school buildings and places of worship.¹ The exception to this rule is (1) if the person has express permission from school officials or the owner of the place of worship to possess a firearm on the premises,² or (2) the person possesses a valid, concealed pistol license,³ and no other building policy prohibits firearms possession by a concealed pistol license holder.⁴ If neither exception applies, a person cannot openly possess a firearm in these places, and law enforcement should be contacted to assist election officials as necessary. The concealed carry of firearms is generally prohibited in school buildings and places of worship unless a specific exception applies to the concealed pistol license holder.⁵ If no exception applies, a person cannot carry a concealed firearm in these places, and law enforcement should be contacted to assist election officials as necessary. Further, it is generally understood that private property owners have the right to exclude possession of firearms in buildings they own or control and in which polling places or other election-related activities may be held on election day.⁶


Firearms Offenses

It is unlawful for a person to brandish, waive, or display a firearm in a threatening manner in public, unless acting in self-defense.⁷ It is also unlawful for a person to intentionally point or aim a firearm towards another person.⁸ If an election official observes or is notified of this kind of activity occurring in a place where elections are conducted, law enforcement should be contacted immediately to assist election officials as necessary.

Voter Intimidation

It is unlawful for a person to attempt through menace or other means to influence another person in how to vote, or to deter or interrupt another person in voting at an election.⁹ Voter intimidation may occur in a number of forms. Depending upon the circumstances, the presence of an openly carried firearm in a place where voting is occurring, even without brandishing, may intimidate voters and deter or hinder them from voting. If an election official observes or is notified of activity that is deterring or hindering voters in the act of voting, law enforcement should be contacted immediately to assist election officials as necessary.

Disturbing the Peace

It is also unlawful for a person to make a disturbance at a place where elections are being conducted by interrupting peace and quiet, violating public order or decorum, or hindering other persons in the pursuit of their rights.¹⁰ If an election official observes or is notified of this kind of activity occurring in a place where elections are conducted, law enforcement should be contacted to assist election officials as necessary. 

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.

¹ MCL 750.237a, MCL 750.234d. Other prohibited places include a bank, "court," theater, sports arena, day care, hospital, or bar. MCL 750.234d.

² MCL 750.234d(2)(d), MCL 750.237a(5)(e).

³ MCL 750.234d(2)(c), MCL 750.237a(5)(c).

⁴ See *Michigan Gun Owners, Inc v. Ann Arbor Public Schools*, 502 Mich 695 (2018).

⁵ MCL 28.425o(1). Exceptions include current and retired law enforcement, security guards, private investigators, current and retired corrections/parole/probation officers, and current or retired state court judges. MCL 28.425o(5).

⁶ The right of a private property owner to exclude a person possessing firearms is enforceable through criminal trespass provisions. See, e.g., *Adams v Cleveland-Cliffs Iron Co.*, 237 Mich App 51 (1999); *Dressler v Rice*, 739 Fed Appx 814 (CA 6, 2018).

⁷ MCL 750.234e.

⁸ MCL 750.233.

⁹ MCL 168.932(1)(a). Federal law includes a similar offense. See 18 USC 594.

¹⁰ MCL 750.170.

Strengthening Small Business Ecosystems in Michigan

By Jada Tillison-Love Porter

The League's dedicated efforts to bolster thriving Michigan communities and help build community wealth continue to be a priority of the organization as we engage with our members to understand the needs of their local small business environments. Over the past two years, the League, and the Michigan Municipal League Foundation, with support from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, have been exploring the ways in which communities are working to attract and retain small business, create and provide equitable support systems, and assess the needs of their micro and small business owners. The purpose of these engagements is to identify how to further support our members in these efforts, share strategies and resources for consideration, and strengthen connections to potential partnerships.

Local Economies Initiative

Since kicking off this initiative, the League and MML Foundation have collaborated with these municipalities within the seven southeast Michigan counties that the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation serves: Belleville, Brighton, Chelsea, Howell, Milan, Monroe, and Ortonville. These engagements have consisted of initial convenings with local government leaders to discuss what equitable entrepreneurship looks like in their communities; one-day meetings with local business owners, stakeholders, and local leaders that take a deep dive into defining their priorities and identifying potential gaps and limitations, and roundtable discussions to build connections within these economic development networks and identify the types of support needed to fill those gaps.

While the geographic location of these communities varies and many of the identified opportunities are unique to their areas, our initial discussions revealed a few similar themes related to the needs and resources of these entrepreneurial ecosystems, including:

1. Entrepreneurs need transparent access to financial capital on appropriate terms.
2. Entrepreneurs need support in building networks and accessing resources.
3. Entrepreneurs face numerous hurdles that are unrelated to their core business activity.

Municipalities often tackle several priorities at once and through these conversations, it was apparent that capacity is a challenge for all of these communities. This highlighted the importance of providing access to adequate and equitable support that meets communities where they are and relationship building between local, regional, and state organizations as a critical part to sustainable community success. These learnings allowed the League and MML Foundation to provide tailored feedback regarding potential partnerships, tools, and resources to help advance the community efforts.

City of Monroe—St. Mary Academy

As this is a multi-year, multi-pillar initiative, this work does not end with these discussions and our engagements have been very effective in helping us shape the next phases. Access to available space is a shared challenge for municipalities and entrepreneurs. Many municipalities are tapping into their economic development toolboxes to determine how to approach existing vacant or underutilized space. In addition to direct resource and relationship building, we are also collaborating with a subset of these communities to provide site-specific support for projects that support local small businesses. One example of this is the St. Mary Academy in the City of Monroe. The 200-acre Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary campus is a top economic development priority for the City of Monroe—specifically, the academy building. While the building has not been in use since the mid-1990s, its five-story structure and interior have been kept in good shape and the city envisions a mixed-use development that includes the redevelopment of the first two floors to devote space for incubating local businesses with an entrepreneurship center, and attainable housing units on the upper floors.

Through this partnership, the League, with the support of the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, will be directly focused on supporting the development of spaces for the entrepreneurship center and additional small businesses. The League has also helped connect the city to Quinn Evans Architects, the architectural firm that worked closely with Ford Motor Company to transform the Michigan Central Station, to help the city and stakeholders visualize the complete redevelopment of the building. This will include conceptual site designs and a conditions assessment.

Microbusiness Best Practices Playbook

Simultaneously, the League and MML Foundation are creating a Microbusiness Best Practices Playbook. During the roundtable discussions, we heard from municipalities and business support organizations who helped us build upon the identified themes and further our understanding of the complexities that municipalities and small businesses are facing. We also gathered insight from financial institutions who shared feedback on the professional services most sought out by small business owners and advice on how business owners can be prepared and supported at the local level. The playbook is the culmination of the outputs of these local engagements coupled with a literature review of related national resources and guidance. It will highlight five best practice categories: friendly town hall experience, policy, relationship building, education, and placemaking and promotion; and will contain sub-categories and implementation tasks along with resources,

case studies, and additional supplemental material for municipalities to utilize in their efforts to implement and improve strategies for inclusive and thriving local economies.

This collaborative effort between the League, MML Foundation, and Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is in direct alignment with the League's longstanding placemaking work and continued commitment to encouraging community wealth building within Michigan communities. We recognize that connection, accessibility, and opportunity are vital to creating thriving communities and fosters trust and belonging amongst a municipality, its residents, and locally owned small businesses. mml.org/resources-research/local-economies/

For more information, visit mml.org/resources-research/local-economies/.

Jada Tillison-Love Porter is a policy research labs program coordinator for the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6327 or jtlporter@mml.org.

The City of Monroe envisions a mixed-use development on the St. Mary Academy campus that includes the redevelopment of the first two floors to devote space for incubating local businesses with an entrepreneurship center, and attainable housing units on the upper floors.





Upcoming Trainings and Events

NOV 14, 2024 Virtual	Central Michigan University Partnership Infosession
NOV 21, 2024 Virtual	Newly Elected Officials Training
DEC 12, 2024 Lansing	Newly Elected Officials Training
DEC 13, 2024 Virtual	Empowering Well-Being for Women in Local Government Webinar
JAN 23, 2025 Farmington Hills	Newly Elected Officials Training
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