

The Review

The official magazine of the  michigan municipal league

Summer 2025

The Kids Are All Right

Petoskey Revives Its Youth Advisory Council



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Summer 2025

Volume 98, Number 3

The official magazine of the
 michigan municipal league

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- Arianna Maldonado, Petoskey Youth Advisory Councilmember
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- Ida Dwan, Petoskey Youth Advisory Councilmember
- Jillian Fabis, Petoskey Youth Advisory Councilmember
- Taylor Keiswetter, Petoskey Youth Advisory Councilmember
- Amelie Janssens, Petoskey Youth Advisory Councilmember
- Luke Washington, Petoskey Youth Advisory Councilmember
- Ayla Shiels, Petoskey Youth Advisory Councilmember
- Sam Ingalls, Petoskey Youth Advisory Councilmember
- Brady Olson, Petoskey Youth Advisory Councilmember
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Open Doors on Local Governance

Executive Director’s Message

Basketball legend Phil Jackson was arguably the most successful NBA coach in history. He won 13 NBA championships, two as a player and 11 as a head coach.

But he’d be the first one to tell you he didn’t do it alone.

"The strength of the team is each individual member," Jackson said. "The strength of each member is the team."

The same holds true for a community.

We are strongest when we are pulling together and in the same direction. That takes leadership. But the most effective leadership isn’t just from the top down. It comes from the bottom and sides, too. It’s not about power. It’s about empowerment. It’s about participation and contribution. It’s about making sure everyone has a stake in the future we’re trying to build.

It’s about civic leadership.

If a community exists to address the needs of its members, then we need to be sure we are hearing the voices of the whole community, not just the most vocal few. That can only happen when we create a sense of trust and belonging for everyone.

For example: Did you know that every day, an average of 380 Michiganders turn 65? Statewide, nearly one in five Michigan residents is 65 or older.

Michigan also has more than 2.3 million children under the age of 19, or roughly 21 percent of the population. Teens alone (ages 15 to 19) make up roughly seven percent of the total state population.

No matter who our residents are, it’s our job to make them all feel welcome, safe, and at home.

One of the best ways to do that is to open doors to participation in local governance. Civic leaders can come from every facet of our communities, and they can form a crucial bridge between government, our public institutions, and the people they serve.

They bring valuable insights and perspectives—unique talents and energies—that can inform and enhance our decision-making and make our services and policies more effective.

But if we want to take advantage of all that, we need to build the spaces (both physical and virtual), create the conversations, and forge the relationships that invite their participation and contributions.

Many of our members are already doing that in remarkable ways.

In this issue of *the Review*, you’ll read about the Petoskey Youth Advisory Council, the Holland Teen Court, and other ideas that encourage civic leadership from and for our youth.

You’ll learn about dementia-friendly cities and other ways to create trust and belonging for our aging community members.

We’ll also give you the latest update on the Nine Mile Corridor Task Force, and how civic leaders from multiple cities are working together to connect green spaces and core services for everyone in Oakland County’s upcoming 9Line linear park.

When addressing issues of trust and belonging, we also must think about how our ideas can be tailored to populations of various sizes. Some approaches are uniquely suited to small groups with lots of one-on-one interaction, while others are best implemented at scale. These case studies are all solutions that are proven to work in cities of millions—as well as communities of fewer than 10,000 residents.

It’s all about empowering our community members to step up and play an active role in improving the present and shaping the future of our cities, villages, and urban townships.

Every community is a team, and every resident is a member of that team. Let’s figure out how to get all of them out there on the court together.

That’s what championships—and success—are made of.



Dan Gilmartin

League Executive Director and CEO
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Saline's Guide to Becoming Dementia Friendly

SALINE
pop. 8,948



By Emily Landau

Jim and Kathleen Mangi were married for 49 years. Environmental scientists and college sweethearts, they lived and worked all over the country: Alabama, New York, North Carolina, Washington, and Virginia. When Kathleen was still in her 50s, she developed younger-onset Alzheimer's disease.

For a few years after her diagnosis, the Mangis remained active in their Northern Virginia community, facing mixed experiences when they went out into public. Eventually, they relocated to Saline, a city of about nine thousand in Washtenaw County, to be closer to their adult daughter, Charlene, who lives 10 miles north in Ann Arbor. In Saline, the Mangis lived in a supportive senior community and Kathleen transitioned to professional memory care. With more time and support, Jim Mangi turned his focus outward. "That gave me the bandwidth to look back and say, Okay, here I am. What can I do to help somebody else?"

To begin, Mangi offered a public lecture series about dementia and caregiving, free and open to all. "That ran for eight Wednesday nights, and got a consistent crowd of about 50 people," said Mangi. "That told us there was a lot of interest in this subject of dementia and caregiving."

The basics are worth noting: In Washtenaw County alone, there are over fifty thousand seniors. Ten percent of seniors have a form of dementia, including Alzheimer's. A person with dementia lives an average of eight years following their diagnosis. The vast majority of people with dementia live at home, either alone or with care partners.

Mangi had the sense that the interest generated at his lectures could be channeled into something. Drawing on his experience with Kathleen as well as national models from the D.C.-based nonprofit Dementia Friendly America, he initiated informal conversations with City officials, senior care workers, and his pastor. He presented a proposal, titled "Envisioning a Dementia Friendly Community," laying out the vision of what a dementia friendly community looks like. It included simple best practices for assisting people with dementia in a wide variety of contexts: libraries, home inspections, and policing.

Saline Mayor Brian Marl was there. "At the end of my presentation, Brian stood right up and said, 'Yes. We should do that,'" said Mangi, with a smile.

The City of Saline soon issued a formal proclamation and invited Mangi's group to provide dementia awareness training to Saline's municipal workforce. "I want everybody to feel embraced, comfortable, and safe in the Saline community," Marl said. "That's my standard since I was sworn in as mayor in January of 2013."

That early municipal support helped establish what would become Dementia Friendly Saline (DFS), now operating as Dementia Friendly Services ("to suggest that we are not just limited to the lovely city of Saline," says Mangi). DFS has grown from a volunteer-led initiative to a part-time staff of six, and now offers education and programming to a range of sectors in the Saline community. One of the original lecture titles has become something of a mantra for Mangi and DFS: It's a disease, not a disgrace.

"I want everybody to feel embraced, comfortable, and safe in the Saline community."

“We need to destigmatize it,” says Marl. “It’s nothing to be afraid of; these are human beings. They’re our loved ones, they’re our brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, moms and dads, dear friends who are struggling with a debilitating illness. But we can still provide comfort and care, give them the best quality of life possible.”

Chelsea Harvey joined as the organization’s first employee in 2022 and now serves as director of programming. “The disease itself is a problem, but we also have a cultural problem,” says Harvey. “That’s something we all have the power to do something about. It starts with awareness and education.”

Most people living with dementia remain in their homes, while still taking part in public life and relying on neighborhood services. That makes it critical, says Harvey, to train not just caregivers but also frontline workers in businesses, churches, banks, and restaurants. “We’re not going to ask a business to make expensive changes,” she said. “We’re going to ask them to slow down, be patient, and understand what people with dementia might need to feel safe.”

To date, the organization has trained about 50 businesses and agencies in Saline and neighboring communities. Training content is adapted to fit each setting—for example, addressing financial protection when working with banks and realtors, or hospitality considerations for restaurants and theaters.

One of the group’s most popular programs is the Memory Café, a twice-monthly social event held in a church, community center, or other accessible space, intended for individuals with dementia and their care partners. Coordinated by board member Lori Venable, the program began with six attendees—two of them Venable and her husband, Tom, who has dementia—and now draws between 60 and 70 people per session. “We want people to not feel isolated,” Venable said. “The number one objective is to have fun and to socialize. There’s no rules. Everybody can just come as they are. It’s not a respite program where you leave your loved one—it’s an opportunity for both of you to be together.”

The atmosphere of the Memory Café is friendly, casual, and supportive. The first hour typically features live music or a performer (when I attended, the entertainment was a magician), and the second hour includes interactive activities such as crafts, icebreakers, or chair yoga. “I like to structure it so the first hour is something engaging, and the second hour is more hands-on,” Venable said. “It gives people a chance to talk, to laugh, to connect.” The Memory Café also functions as a low-pressure entry point for information and resources. Refreshments are often provided by local senior care agencies, allowing attendees to casually interact with service providers.

Another part of the initiative is the Dementia Friendly Screening film series, held by DFS in partnership with the Saline location of Eimage Entertainment, a regional cinema chain based in Troy. These monthly matinees are intended for people with dementia and their caregivers and feature classic movies, particularly musicals (June’s selection is the 1952 Audrey Hepburn–Gregory Peck romp *Roman Holiday*) in a modified theater setting—lights up, sound down, and a relaxed atmosphere. “We tell people to forget the rules,” Mangi said. “Go ahead and talk during the movie, get up, move around, sing, even dance in the aisles.” The screenings are staffed by DFS volunteers, who help caregivers with check-in, seating, and restroom navigation. The program has since expanded to other Eimage theaters throughout Michigan. “They’re intensely proud of their participation in the Dementia Friendly movie initiative,” said Marl.

Although a relatively small city, Saline’s approach is being felt throughout Southeast Michigan. DFS is consulting with leaders in Rochester Hills, Chelsea, Ann Arbor, and Grass Lake to help set up similar programming. The goal is for people with dementia to be welcome, not isolated, and accommodated everywhere any other resident would be: at city hall, in stores, at the post office. Says Mangi, “We want to help build communities where people walk toward someone with dementia, not away from them.”

Kathleen Mangi passed away in early 2025. “I have completed a 17-year caregiving journey with my wife,” says Jim Mangi with great fondness. The work is not yet done. With continued support from Mayor Marl and the City of Saline, DFS continues to refine its programs while helping other municipalities take their first steps. “Just the fact that we know that the City has our back,” says Mangi. “That’s sufficient—and it’s extremely valuable.”

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The 9Line: A Community Corridor Collaboration



By Emily Landau

The 9Line is a collaborative project between 10 Oakland County communities to improve and connect the stretch of Nine Mile Road that runs through all of them. Originally consisting of cities east of I-275 (Farmington, Farmington Hills, Ferndale, Hazel Park, Oak Park, and Southfield), the 9Line effort has expanded in its second phase to include four communities on the western side of the county: Lyon Township, Northville, Novi, and South Lyon.

Ultimately, the goal of the 9Line is to create a 30-mile pedestrian and cycling corridor spanning the whole of Oakland County, what Ferndale DDA Executive Director Jennie Beeker described as a “recreational interstate.” The plan envisions a fully walkable (or bikeable) network of trails, widened sidewalks, and bike paths, made more inviting by an array of placemaking projects, including public art, parks, and respite stations, as well as green stormwater infrastructure.

The spark happened a few years ago, when Oakland County Parks and Recreation received American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) funds to improve parks and trails in under-resourced communities that had been hit hard by the pandemic. As they spoke to community residents, “the concept of Nine Mile Road as a linear corridor for pedestrians and bikers came up a lot,” said Melissa Prowse, planning and development manager of Oakland County Parks and Recreation, who is coordinating the project. A feasibility study followed in the summer of 2023, funded by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments’ (SEMCOG) Planning Assistance Program, which gauged public interest and concerns about the project.

“We got a much more robust response than we had anticipated, which showed the demand,” said Prowse. “We reached out to the communities along Nine Mile, did a few pop-up events, heard areas of concern, what amenities people wanted . . . getting folks to work across their jurisdictional lines is a role a county is equipped to play, so it makes sense for us to be the convener.”

Since 2023, representatives of the Nine Mile Road municipalities have met quarterly as a task force. In a friendly, hierarchy-free environment, they track progress, pool resources—Southfield Director of Planning Terry Croad has proposed a group “library” of funding sources, potential collaborators, letters of support, and construction estimates—and just float ideas, including everything from where to place respite stations to how to most effectively map the corridor for those using it. This collaborative, regional approach allowed the communities to focus on their individual strengths and identities, avoid redundancy, and present a stronger case for support from residents and for funding.

A major inspiration for the 9Line has been the City of Oak Park, whose Nine Mile Redesign Project was a finalist for the League’s 2024 Community Excellence Award. “The genesis for that project was an easement along Nine Mile Road that every city has,” said Erik Tungate, city manager of Oak Park. “DPW was constantly mowing, picking up trash and dilapidated fencing. One day, 13 years ago, my DPW director and I were driving down the road, and I said, ‘Enough is enough.’”

Oak Park’s Nine Mile Redesign Project took 10 years to complete and features public art installations by local artists, a linear park, bike lanes, a walking path, and a road diet. “We’re loyal to good ideas, and we’re going to fearlessly pursue [them],” says Tungate.

Oakland County hired CRIMSON Agency to do branding, with the 9Line name and design eventually emerging as the result. “9Line resonated with everyone. There was some back and forth, and in the end, everyone was happy,” said Prowse. “We’re very fortunate that we got 10 communities to agree on things.” The municipalities are free to use the 9Line branding and adapt it to their own local identities and branding campaigns as they see fit.

Each municipality handles improvements in its own section of the corridor, recognizing that there should not be a “one size fits all” approach given the diversity of the communities involved, as well as the state of Nine Mile itself. In South Lyon, it’s a dirt road, with bike paths and sidewalks still unconnected to the eastern municipalities. “Maybe we could call our section Nine Lyon for now,” remarked Paul Zelenak, South Lyon city manager.



Seneca Pocket Park, located on Nine Mile in Oak Park, features a large climbing recreation structure for children to enjoy and a variety of seating options.

Meanwhile, on the other end of the corridor, Hazel Park was challenged by a busy, intimidating interchange with I-75. “Our portion of Nine Mile—specifically that intersection—is just not really the most bike- or pedestrian-friendly, and we didn’t want to create something that wasn’t going to get used,” said Jim Finkley, planning and community development director of the City of Hazel Park. “So, we ended up kind of bypassing [that] intersection altogether and then taking Woodruff, which is a nice residential street.”

Progress of the 9Line has benefited from great minds thinking alike. Since 2021, the City of Farmington had been exploring expanding its non-car infrastructure via its Pathways Committee. A focus of the City’s upcoming master plan development is enhancing bike and pedestrian trail access, both to the regional I-275 trail and to its downtown. They recently broke ground on a new fitness court along the proposed trail. Farmington is currently identifying opportunities for implementing its stretch of the 9Line, including redevelopment of brownfield sites on the east side. “We’re really excited to be opening up our downtown to non-motorized traffic,” says Assistant City Manager Chris Weber.

Likewise, at the time of the feasibility study, Southfield had begun expanding its trail system to improve pedestrian and cycling connectivity. The City was focused on building new pathways along Nine Mile, including a road diet between Evergreen and Lahser that made space for a 10-foot-wide trail. They added bike lanes, improved bus stops in partnership with the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) and Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), and began linking parks and trail networks. Funding came from multiple Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grants, the city’s Metro Fund account, and a \$100,000 Access to Transit Grant for preliminary engineering on a pedestrian bridge across M-10 and M-39.

LINE MILE CORRIDOR

“When I started doing recreation planning 30 years ago, trails were just looked [at] as a recreational opportunity,” says Croad, Southfield’s director of planning. “Now we see the multiple benefits, the physical and mental health benefits of being outside in nature, the economic development benefits, the social interaction benefits, the property values benefits. That’s why it’s so important to continue to work on these things.”

“We were building out our system when Oakland County contacted us and said, ‘Hey, we’re forming a consortium of your adjacent communities to connect I-75 to I-275,’” said Croad. “The timing couldn’t have been better. We jumped with enthusiasm at [the prospect of] working with the other partners to support each other on a mutual goal.”

The communities all agreed that the collaborative, cross-municipal nature of the project has been a great asset to their planning. “It’s been great. All the communities involved have been so supportive from the start, with everyone getting a chance to weigh in,” says Weber. “Oakland County’s done a great job getting everyone involved, keeping everyone on task.”

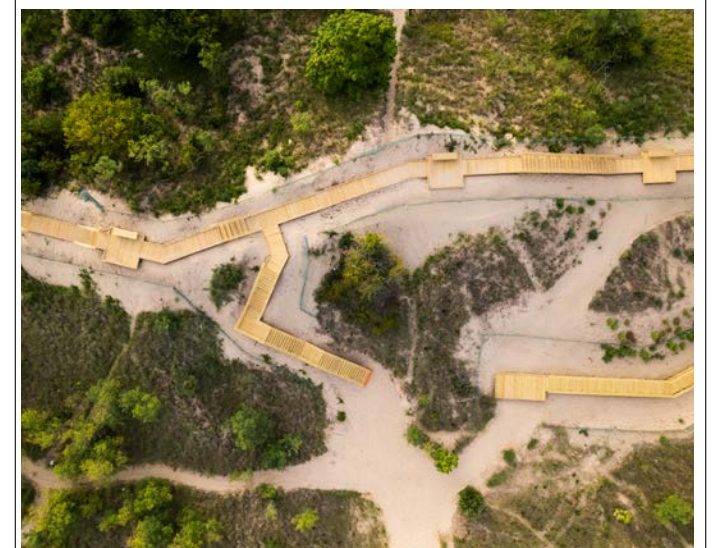
“All credit to Oakland County for getting this all started,” agrees Tungate.

Prowse smiles. “It’s been a love fest.”

Emily Landau is a content writer for the League. You may contact Emily at 734-669-6320 or elandau@mml.org.

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“We’re loyal to good ideas, and we’re going to fearlessly pursue [them].”

Alma Navigates Water Infrastructure Funding



By Emily Landau

Thanks to the MI Water Navigator program (whose services are now part of MI Funding Hub), communities like Alma have been able to access funding from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy's (EGLE) State Revolving Fund (SRF). This came at a historic time when EGLE was to receive American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) dollars. Given as grants, the ARP funds were paired with EGLE's low interest loans. Along with the assistance of the MI Water Navigator helpdesk, Alma was able to apply for, and eventually received, \$9.7 million in ARP grant funds.

"This is by far a historical amount of grant funding. We've had some but not really on the order of magnitude that we have given out recently," said Kris Donaldson, Clean Water Public Advocate at EGLE. "I'd say this feels like it's a once-in-a-career [event] for me. I haven't seen anything like it in the last 20 years of drinking water, and I don't know if I'm going to continue to see it."

Alma is the largest city in Gratiot County, with a population of just over 9,400. It's home to Alma College, a small liberal arts school, as well as Michigan Health's regional hospital, which recently saw over \$40 million in upgrades. Alma has a vibrant arts scene, including a community theater and visual arts center. Its industry includes automotive suppliers and Avalon, one of the nation's top pontoon boat manufacturers. Despite its rural setting, Alma boasts renewable energy projects—including over 700 windmills and a 450-acre solar field—and a historic downtown.

The City is also rare in that it relies on local taxes to build and maintain local streets, with a voted-on Local Street Program millage of 3.5 mills (increased in 2022 from 2.5 mills) that goes through every six years for the reconstruction of neighborhood streets. "I want to say it was 1997 or 1998, when we were rebuilding the road surface, we started thinking, 'Let's put in a new water line,'" said Aeric Ripley, Alma city manager. "We started doing that, and then we found ourselves saying, 'Why aren't we doing the sewer?' And so, a few summers in, we started replacing sewer mains. When we develop that six-year list, the determination with streets to rehab is what the infrastructure is like underneath. But we really didn't have the funds on hand to replace all the water mains."

The state covered the cost of hiring an engineer (typically \$50,000 to \$60,000) from the ARP funds, easing the financial burden for all communities that submitted applications, which no longer needed to come up with those funds. "[The] engineers that work with these communities were really excited to hear about this opportunity," said Donaldson. "They know what's going on with these communities and how hard they're trying to wear all those hats and do all the things [EGLE] tells them to do. To be able to go out and meet with those communities and have a resource to give them is golden."

Initially, Alma's application was not approved. "We didn't score high enough," said Ripley. "We're disadvantaged. The term used now is significantly disadvantaged and we were just disadvantaged, not significantly disadvantaged. I had to break the news to the Road Commission that we didn't receive the funding. But less than a month later . . . those funds came back, and they reached out to us. I was able to go back to the Road Commission saying, 'They need us to say yes, but I'm assuming you all want to say yes—let's move forward.'"

Alma's was one of many cases during this first round of SRF applications where initial scoring did not reflect actual assets. As with many first drafts, some items on the new application needed rewording and clarification. Due to the way certain questions were phrased, many communities received lower scores than they should have. The MI Water Navigator team flagged this issue and—through a collaborative relationship with EGLE—was able to renegotiate scoring based on community assets for overburdened communities. As a result, Alma was extended an offer for \$9.7 million in grants.

"We had so many disadvantaged or overburdened communities get funding. That tells me the program was a huge help," said Donaldson. "It really got a lot of these communities in the door when they would have been kind of pushed out by the other communities that have more resources to get that work done."

Alma has used these funds to implement water infrastructure improvements at a scale that would not otherwise have been possible. Engineering bids and approval from the municipality and EGLE occurred in the summer of 2024. The work includes repair and replacement of a variety of water infrastructure, including substantial main line replacement and a total refurbishment of Alma's water tower, which was nearing the end of its lifespan. "We certainly wouldn't be able to move forward as quickly as we are right now without those funds," said Ripley.

Construction began in earnest last fall, starting with Moyer Avenue. Crews installed new water and sewer lines and prepped the road for resurfacing before winter. In March, work began on Pine Avenue, a high-traffic area due to nearby schools. "People have adapted—not happily, but they've adapted," remarked Ripley. Charles Avenue construction was scheduled to begin mid-April. Later this summer, work on Richmond Street and other neighborhood roads will begin. Alma is also preparing to replace approximately 350 galvanized service lines, as EGLE requires removal if they may have ever been connected to lead.

Assuming all goes as planned, the City aims to complete all SRF-funded and related infrastructure work by the end of the 2026 construction season. "This is by far the largest infrastructure replacement that we've done since 2005, I believe," said Ripley. "I've been here 25 years, and previous to that, I can't think of any projects that are at this level that we've done."

"It makes a huge impact on these disadvantaged communities who are also struggling with maintaining their infrastructure and with water affordability issues," said Donaldson. "Being able to get them planning documents, getting them additional grant money, or getting them lined up for these low interest loans that they wouldn't have been able to do before this program—it's another thing that kind of chips away at the burden."

Emily Landau is a content writer for the League. You may contact Emily at 734-669-6320 or elandau@mml.org.

"We had so many disadvantaged or overburdened communities get funding. That tells me the program was a huge help."

"This is by far a historical amount of grant funding."



Petoskey Welcomes the Intersection of Youth and Local Governance

By Emily Landau

At CapCon this year, the League had the honor of hosting a group of high school students from Petoskey, accompanied by Ward 1 Councilmember and Mayor Pro Tem Tina DeMoore. These were representatives from the Petoskey Youth Advisory Council (PYAC), re-established in 2024 to involve the city's young people in local governance.

Promoting youth voices was not a new concept to Petoskey. In 2005, Mayor Ted Pall enlisted Anne Srigley, who was then retired from a 40-year teaching career, to organize a group of young people interested in influencing City matters. "The focus was, what can the City do for high school students to have more involvement?" recalls Srigley. The initial group, called the Mayor's Youth Council, consisted of 10 Petoskey High students. They surveyed their peers about a youth-oriented project they'd like to see in Petoskey, with consensus landing on a skate park. The students put together a slideshow and delivered a presentation to Petoskey City Council. "A lot of students turned out in support," says Srigley. A few years later, the skate park was built. "I think it planted the seed."

The Mayor's Youth Council didn't continue beyond 2006, but the idea was not forgotten. DeMoore had previously served as a school board member for nine years and had been a debate coach at Petoskey schools. She trained as a teacher before going to law school. "I was always interested in offering meaningful, experiential opportunities to students, particularly at the intersection of law and education," she says. When running for Petoskey City Council in 2021, "I always had it in the back of my mind that I wanted to [restart PYAC]."

In summer of 2023, DeMoore heard through the superintendent that students at Petoskey High School had expressed interest in learning more about local governance. She met with three graduating seniors, who then helped organize a listening and brainstorming session at the Petoskey District Library. Fifteen or so students whom the seniors had identified as being especially interested attended the session.

"What I learned was—yes, there was great interest in opportunities to have youth voices involved in governance."

"What I learned was—yes, there was great interest in opportunities to have youth voices involved in governance," says DeMoore. "When I asked them what issues they were interested in driving, I got a very wise response: 'We don't know enough about the City. We'd have to start at the ground level to learn our options before we could respond.'"

The students looked at the policies of the 2005–2006 PYAC and suggested revisions. Originally, it included students in grades 8–12 and had a residency requirement for the City of Petoskey. Due to differences of maturity and development, the students recommended raising the minimum grade to 10, and expanding the residency requirements to students who either reside in Petoskey or attend Petoskey schools.

DeMoore brought the students' suggestions before Mayor John Murphy and the Petoskey City Council. They approved the revised application in March 2024, and DeMoore was designated as the City Council's liaison to the now-resurrected PYAC. In publicizing the re-formation of PYAC, DeMoore reached out to not just Petoskey High School but also the local charter school, a Catholic school, the homeschooling community, and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.

The four-person applications committee, which includes DeMoore and Srigley, met in May 2024 and emerged with a group of 12 highly motivated young people. While the committee utilizes a blind application process in order to minimize bias, this new PYAC was almost evenly divided between sexes and grades and included one homeschooler and one tribal member.

From the beginning, DeMoore was committed to PYAC providing a "meaningful, experiential" education for its members. Per their "very wise" comment at the brainstorming meeting about lacking foundational knowledge on how the City functions, she decided to initiate a crash course. Every month for the remainder of 2024, students took part in a deep dive into one aspect of Petoskey's operations.

It began in late August 2023, when City Manager Shane Horn and Director of Parks and Recreation Kendall Klingelsmith loaded the kids aboard a Petoskey Downtown Trolley to see Petoskey's parks and outdoor opportunities. Later departmental overviews included trips to public works facilities, public safety demonstrations from police and EMTs, and a presentation by Eric Hemenway, Director of Repatriation, Archives, and Records for the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians of Waganakising, on local Indigenous history.



Petoskey Youth Advisory Council (PYAC) Co-Chair Charles Olson introducing the PYAC Year in Review presentation to the Petoskey City Council on May 19, 2025. At the dais, from left to right are City Clerk & Executive Assistant to the City Manager Sarah Bek; City Manager Shane Horn; Mayor John Murphy; Ward 1 City Councilmember/Mayor Pro Tem Tina DeMoore; Ward 2 City Councilmember Derek Shiels; and Ward 3 City Councilmember Joe Nachtrab. Pictured to the far right is City of Petoskey Finance Director & Treasurer Audrey Plath.

“It’s less intimidating and more meaningful than I imagined.”

The overview completed, PYAC meetings began in earnest in February 2025, when the members voted on officers (two co-chairs and a secretary) and set goals for the year. These included enhancing the City’s communication with its youth population, expanding the information on the City’s website, and increasing student involvement in city activities and volunteering.

The next task was to get the word out that PYAC was happening and recruit new member applications. Aided by teachers, staff, and administrators, councilmembers worked the lunch periods at Petoskey High School and reached out to student-run organizations like the Key Club. Outreach also occurred to the homeschooling and Indigenous populations, via the members who were part of those communities. “In order for it to be meaningful, it needs to be driven by the students,” says DeMoore.

PYAC meetings are held monthly in the evenings in city council chambers. DeMoore solicited input from school counseling staff in coming up with a meeting schedule that is healthy and realistic for high school students. Open to the public, these meetings are consciously modeled on those of a city council, in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. Times, dates, and agendas are published online and include public comment. Minutes are kept and signed. Officers have their own meetings, outside of the regular sessions, to prepare for regular meetings. (DeMoore reviews all agendas and minutes and offers constructive feedback before they’re published on a to-be-constructed website.) The mayor, other city council members, and administrators, including Klingelsmith, have come to meetings to listen and offer their thoughts.

PYAC’s schedule also included special events, including opportunities to sit in on city council meetings, volunteering at community picnics, and a Sister City welcoming event where PYAC members were on hand to receive delegates from the Japanese city of Takashima.

Eight PYAC members attended CapCon in March, with funding from the City of Petoskey and a grant from the Hestia Women’s Giving Circle, a Charlevoix-based nonprofit. DeMoore and Petoskey City Councilmember Derek Shiels served as chaperones. All agreed that the experience was moving. “[At] CapCon, I’ve learned that it’s our common goal to help others,” said Brynn Jonker, PYAC’s secretary. “Meeting on the middle ground with people of different ideologies, co-signing on bills—that’s how we get things done.”

“I feel that national news has consumed a lot of our lives,” said Jillian Fabis, a senior. “Stepping back to look at smaller pieces of the country—how they’re working to improve our lives, no matter what—has made me feel more grateful to be playing a role in our community.”

“It’s less intimidating and more meaningful than I imagined,” added Ida Dwan, a junior.

For communities interested in starting up their own youth advisory council, DeMoore has some recommendations. Biggest of all? Make the time commitment clear. “One challenge is that, in my experience, the young people interested in this type of opportunity have very busy schedules. Have a very consistent schedule set out for the year. Have special events be optional.”

DeMoore hopes that PYAC will serve as a model for other municipalities looking to impart the transformative power of respectful dialogue and showcase the strength of differences among community leaders to their youth. “It’s been nothing but a full-throated support of this adventure,” she says. “Everybody has seen the value of the involvement of young people, and City government staff have been incredibly generous with their time. This is not an endeavor that any one person could do on their own.”

“I admire the people that give their time and effort to make our community stronger,” said Arianna Maldonado, a sophomore. “One day, I hope I can be one of those people, [making] the decisions that improve the city I love.”

Emily Landau is a content writer for the League. You may contact Emily at 734-669-6320 or elandau@mml.org.



Preservation Meets Revitalization on Main Street

By Emily Landau

The 25th Annual Oakland County Main Street Awards were held this June. At an optimistic, convivial, and at times raucous silver anniversary-themed event at The Roxy (a music hall in downtown Rochester), an array of elected and appointed local officials, DDA members, and other leaders from across Oakland County celebrated the past year’s successes and recognized achievements in downtown development, placemaking, revitalization, municipal events, and more.

Main Street Oakland County is an affiliate of the 40-plus-year-old Main Street America, which supports preservation-based downtown revitalization. A nonprofit initiative of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Main Street America (headquartered in Chicago) has helped more than 2,000 historic districts across the country through training, research, advocacy, and technical assistance. These efforts have led to the rehabilitation of over 246,000 buildings, \$59.6 billion in new investment, and the creation of more than 500,000 jobs and 115,000 businesses. On average, every \$1 invested locally generates \$18 in additional investment.



The winners of the 2025 Oakland County Main Street Awards gather for a group photo following the award ceremony.



The Village of Oxford receives a \$2,000 cash prize from Genisys Credit Union in recognition of winning the top honor at the 2025 Main Street Awards.

Established in 2000, Main Street Oakland County is the first and only countywide program in the United States, and one of two officially designated Main Street Programs serving Michigan. The organization boasts membership from 29 communities (adding Beverly Hills this year) throughout Oakland County, notable for being the largest county in the United States without a city of 100,000 people.

“A few years ago, when you Googled ‘tourism in Oakland County,’ the number one thing that came up in the Google search was how to visit the jail,” deadpanned John Bry, Main Street Oakland County Program Coordinator, at the event. “We saw that as a problem.” Times have changed: Since the founding of Main Street Oakland County, member communities have attracted over a billion dollars in public and private investment, creating over 8,000 jobs and opening more than 1,500 new businesses.

A notable success this past year was Andy’s Place, a beloved family-run restaurant in downtown Holly, which was gutted by a fire in 2022. Owner Andy Chapin lost her business and home, located on the building’s second floor. As a result of Main Street Oakland County working with Chapin and the leaders of Holly, connecting Chapin to business resources and providing technical assistance with applications, the building has been saved and stabilized, and Chapin has secured a grant of over \$400,000 from Michigan’s Revitalization and Placemaking program. Andy’s Place will be rebuilt.

The top honors at this year’s Main Street Awards (which includes a \$2,000 cash prize from Genisys Credit Union) were captured by the Village of Oxford, winning recognition for its video, titled *We Are Community*, which highlights the village’s commitment to its historic roots while fostering an inclusive, modern, and lively community in the 21st century.

Other Oakland County Main Street awards, comprising 50 nominations from 12 member communities, include:

- **Legacy of Main Street Excellence:** Ortonville (Hamilton’s of Ortonville)
- **Main Street Jubilee:** Wixom (Promotion Power Unite)
- **Business Innovation & Entrepreneurship:** Rochester (Home Bakery)
- **District Placemaking:** Farmington (Masons Corner)
- **Small Business Retention and Attraction:** Pontiac (Make It To Scale Incubator Kitchen)
- **Main Street Leader:** Farmington (Kate Knight)
- **Achievement in Community Character or Historic Preservation:** Highland (Odds & Ins Historic Restoration)
- **Community Event of the Year:** Rochester (Kris Kringle Market Expansion)
- **Main Street Resilience:** Lyon Township (Whole Hearted Winery)
- **Outstanding Partnership:** Wixom, South Lyon, Lyon Township, and Highland (Burger Battle)
- **Volunteer of the Year:** Rochester (Ben Giovanelli)

“Our strength is our communities. Our strength is [Oakland County’s] 62 cities, villages, and townships.”

“Our strength is our communities. Our strength is [Oakland County’s] 62 cities, villages, and townships,” said Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter. “We’re at a time in our country where things seem more polarized than ever; people seem crankier than ever. Our downtowns are a place where people can come together, to meet each other, have dinner together, have a glass of wine together. . . I want this to be a place where everyone feels welcome to be themselves in their communities. It’s because of the work that you’re doing that people want to come to this county.”

Emily Landau is a content writer for the League. You may contact Emily at 734-669-6320 or elandau@mml.org.

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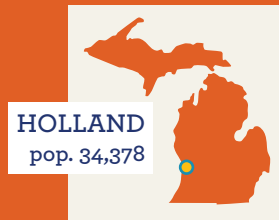
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Holland Teen Court students
Back row: Grace Dattadeen
Front row (left to right): Giselle Torres,
Lydia Brown, Jackson Voss



A Jury of Their Peers

By Emily Landau

Since 1991, the City of Holland has run an innovative youth justice initiative, the Holland Teen Court (HTC). Inspired by similar programs in Texas, a local task force was formed in 1989 to explore the idea. After months of deliberation, the Holland City Council approved a resolution establishing a Teen Court Advisory Board, made up of task force members and student representatives from Holland schools. "We think it's important for young people to get involved in the process," said Esther Fifelski, Director of Holland's Human Relations Department, which administers the program.

Rather than putting first-time juvenile offenders into the traditional court system, HTC gives them a chance to explain their actions to a group of people their own age. "The purpose of the jury is not to find them guilty or not guilty," says Vern Helder, Magistrate of the 58th District Court. "It's only to impose the appropriate sentence for the offense. As the law says, you get to be judged by a jury of your peers. That's the thing that I really like about Teen Court: It truly is a jury of their peers."

The peer jury is composed of about 15 students from Holland High School. They are part of a yearlong advisory class taught by Police Liaison Officer Nicole Hamberg. "We go over in detail the eligible offenses, the rules, what is expected of the jurors," says Hamberg. "They're sworn to confidence. They aren't to talk with their fellow students or [discuss] details with their families. That's a huge part of it that we make clear."

"A lot of these students have an interest in becoming an attorney, having some sort of career in political science."



Holland Teen Court convenes on November 15, 2022, in Holland, Michigan, with Magistrate Helder collaborating with lead juror Grace Dattadeen (far right).

Eligible participants in HTC are first-time offenders, ages 10–17, who have admitted guilt to certain misdemeanors, including shoplifting, possession of nicotine or cannabis, and curfew violations. Many recent cases have involved vaping. The process begins with pre-hearing meetings, involving the offender and their parents or guardians—first with Hamberg, then with Helder—who explain the process and expectations. Instead of facing formal charges, the offender will stand before the court.

HTC trials are held after hours in the 58th District Courthouse, with Helder, Hamberg, and Veronica Salazar, Associate Dean of Students at Holland High, supervising. One of the student participants serves as judge; another, the bailiff. The rest are jurors. "What they're trying to do is find out more about the student, what caused them to do it," says Helder. "They ask good questions of the parents: 'Do you approve of your son or daughter's friends? Do you know who they are, did you know they were hanging out with this person?'"

HTC jurors learn proper questioning procedures in their advisory class with Hamberg. The questions they ask of both offenders and parents are divided into five topics: what happened, family, social, school, and parents. "We do a couple mock trials in class to get them prepared, but then they're good at working with each other, working as a team," says Hamberg.

Questioning completed, the HTC jury is then responsible for sentencing, which always includes community service hours. Other consequences may consist of written apologies, essays, or restitution (for example, paying the store back for stolen items). "They take into consideration grades, extracurriculars—they really try to find out more about the student," says Helder. "Are they bored? Do they need some other outlet?" The offender must complete their sentence by a specified date. Successful completion leads to the dismissal of formal charges by the Juvenile Court.

"I think one of the unique things in this program—what I love seeing—is the collaboration between the school, our public safety department, our magistrate, and how it all just comes together," says Fifelski. "The students are the glue that keeps it together, and they do an amazing job. They are the unsung heroes in this whole process."

Added Hamberg: "I've seen a lot of cases, and a majority of these students are not getting into trouble again."

Emily Landau is a content writer for the League. You may contact Emily at 734-669-6320 or elandau@mml.org.



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The League's Best Kept Secret

By Anthony Minghine

Trivia question: What League program provides more budget certainty, relieves a huge administrative burden, and offers specialized professional expertise, but is utilized by less than 40 percent of our members?

Well, we have two of the state of Michigan's most successful insurance pools that provide workers' compensation coverage to 950 entities and provide property and liability coverage to 450 communities. Our lobbying team has been ranked the best in the state for several years, our educational offerings provide specialized topics you can't find anywhere else, and our inquiry service is always there with answers to your questions.

But none of those are the answer to our trivia question.

It's the League's Unemployment Compensation Group Fund. This program has been in existence for over 20 years, but most members don't take advantage of this service, despite the many benefits of participation. While this service is offered through the League, we have retained Equifax Workforce Solutions to ensure the highest level of claims management for participating communities.

Administration of claims can be a huge headache for staff tasked with managing unemployment claims, but this program helps alleviate those challenges. As a participant, your community receives:

- Claims processing
- Consultation and representation at unemployment hearings
- Verification of benefits paid and charged to your employer account
- Quarterly activity reports on claims for unemployment benefits
- Unemployment cost control training for supervisors and managers

Perhaps most significantly, this program provides members with more budget certainty. By pooling our members, we are able to smooth a community's claims by averaging them over a five-year period, rather than paying actual claims as they are incurred. This cost smoothing can prove invaluable when unexpected layoffs occur that would otherwise disrupt a local budget.

Fenton City Manager Lynn Markland has this to say: "The MML Unemployment Compensation Group Fund offers a well-defined approach to claims processing and funding of benefits. Participating in the group account streamlines the reporting process and mitigates the risk of processing claims. It allows municipalities to budget for unemployment costs and spread out the cost of claims to the responsible departments and over a period of time. MML unemployment experts provide exceptional claim management assistance. The City of Fenton has been a member of the League's Unemployment Compensation Group Fund for many years, and we wouldn't consider any other option."

Program members begin by making an initial deposit into their League unemployment account, followed by quarterly contributions based on their individual merit rate. These deposits are calculated to ensure each member's account remains adequately funded to cover both current and future unemployment claims. Merit rates are determined annually based on the member's five-year average claim activity and payroll levels, and can be as low as 0.06 percent of total taxable wages (for unemployment purposes). This structure allows members to spread the cost of unemployment claims over time, supporting more accurate budgeting and financial planning.

While rare, members who choose to leave the program can do so after the required two-year commitment and will be refunded their remaining available member balance at the close of the termination period.

Would you like to learn more about this program? Email unemploymentfund@mml.org to learn how the League's unemployment program can benefit your municipality.

Anthony Minghine is the deputy executive director, external strategies for the League. You may contact Tony at 734-669-6360 or amminghine@mml.org.

But Where to Build?

By Melissa Milton-Pung

Michigan communities are facing a housing crisis. Less than one percent of the housing stock in the state is vacant, and while the vacancy rate for rentals is somewhat better, more than half of all Michiganders who rent are spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Census data show that our population has remained fairly steady over the past decade, hovering at just over 10 million residents; however, the average household size has dropped to only 2.43 people. Meanwhile, only 27 percent of Michigan households have children, and our share of senior citizens continues to climb.

So there's a growing need for more doors and less square footage—more starter homes, in-law apartments, and granny flats. We need them to be connected to existing networks to fight against the rising tide of loneliness. And we need them to be attractive, desirable, and true to the character of Michigan's historic neighborhoods.

But where should we build these homes? How can development costs be controlled so that these homes are attainable? And can these homes be added to our communities while using the infrastructure we are already paying for?

That's where the League comes in. *Pattern Book Homes for 21st Century Michigan*, developed in 2022, is a two-volume set of how-to guides and copyright-free construction plans created by the League in partnership with East Arbor Architecture and funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Our target audience is small- to medium-sized developers who are trying to enter the housing market, as well as local municipalities seeking to line up pre-reviewed plans with fewer barriers to build.



Multi-unit housing used to be the norm in Michigan—see Big Rapids' Mechanic Street, Grand Rapids' Heritage Hill, or Lansing's Westside. These early 20th century neighborhoods were made up of “pattern book homes,” which were simple, customizable construction templates. Often, they included multifamily designs, allowing owners to live in one unit and rent out the other, or provide room for multiple generations of the same family. *Pattern Book Homes for 21st Century Michigan* honors that history.

These guides are intended to be clear, direct resources to speed up new housing development while helping lower construction costs. The home plans in these guides are specifically designed to be built on vacant lots in existing neighborhoods or large empty parcels within Michigan cities—not out on the fringes, forcing municipalities to bring new infrastructure (water, sewer, communications, transit, etc.) to a location on the edge of town.

Pattern Book Homes for 21st Century Michigan recognizes the various aspects of construction that contribute to the final cost, and seeks to address these issues by sectioning them into what we at the League call “the Five Ls”:

- **Labor:** These pre-approved plans can streamline code approval, allowing builders to avoid the time-consuming and expensive process of commissioning new designs, and leading to faster project starts and more efficient use of their employees.
- **Lumber:** Materials are suggested at a grade that will not adversely affect the attainable cost approach, but are nevertheless durable, repairable, longer lasting, and a better investment over time.
- **Land:** These efficient designs are intended to utilize land leveraged from municipal ownership, a landbank portfolio, or simply underutilized parcels within a village or city.
- **Laws:** Good policy can address the cost gap in any new construction. Municipalities should update zoning to allow for infill construction to add to housing stock and help normalize the incorporation of Universal Design.
- **Lending:** Leveraging new development incentives such as Housing TIF, revolving loan funds, and other financing instruments can help bridge the gap in complex capital stacks and get developers closer to building what we need.



Enabling new construction is not advocating demolition. Instead, *Pattern Book Homes for 21st Century Michigan* promotes a pragmatic approach to reclaiming vacant lots or creating new homes on never-developed land. This type of construction is respectful of and compatible with the landscape characteristics already in place.



We have heard from developers and builders all over the state who would like to get projects like these started in their communities. By concentrating investment on vacant lots already connected to infrastructure, we can increase the economic stability of our cities and villages. By keeping designs flexible and customizable, we can ensure that the unique aesthetic character of our communities is preserved or help it evolve. In doing so, we can deepen our residents' connections to their homes and their sense of belonging.

You can find both *Pattern Book Homes* publications on mml.org.

Melissa Milton-Pung is a policy research labs program manager for the League. You may contact Melissa at 734-669-6328 or mmiltonpung@mml.org.

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Join us for three days of learning, collaboration, and camaraderie in Grand Rapids, the urban jewel of West Michigan! Here are just a few of the conversations you'll be a part of:



Jon Jon Wesolowski, AKA “The Happy Urbanist,” explores practical strategies, rooted in optimism and neighborhood engagement, to make your community a place where everyone can live, grow, and thrive.



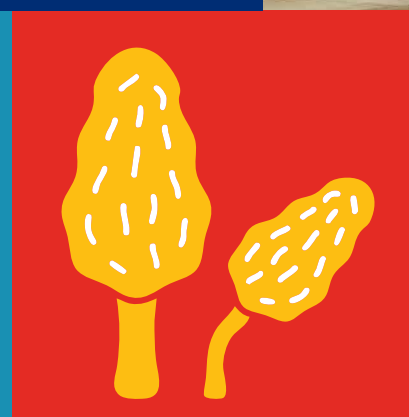
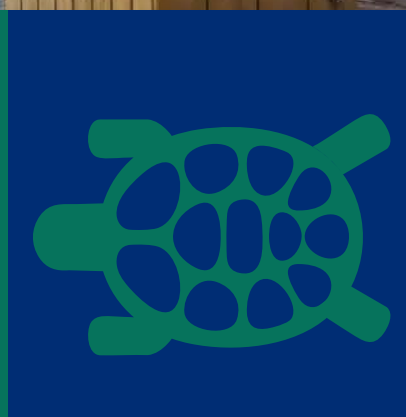
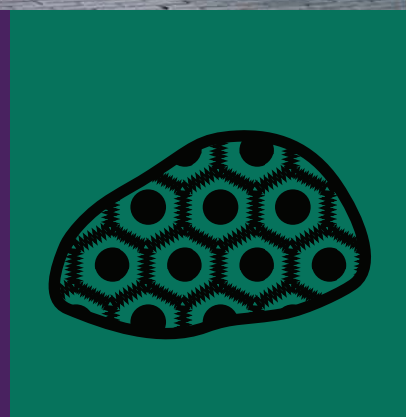
“Local government whisperer” Allyson Brunette discusses how we can fix our tattered social fabric and restore public trust by developing communities around people, place, and purpose.

- A Legislative Update from Our State and Federal Affairs Team
- A.I., Access, and the Future of Governance
- Crowdfunding 101
- Planning for Trees: Forestry in a Municipal Context
- Making Your Community “Child Care Ready”
- Municipal Food Policy in Michigan
- Civility in Your Community—Should We Agree to Disagree?
- Thriving Communities for a Thriving Michigan

Step outside and enjoy one of our education tours of Grand Rapids:

- Rollin’ on the (Grand) River
- Community-Led Design with Amplify GR
- Frederik Meijer Gardens Tour
- A Greener Grand Rapids
- There's a New Use for That: Building Conversions That Create Housing

#MMLCONV



Michigan's Whistleblowers' Protection Broadened

By Bill Mathewson

A recent decision of the Michigan Supreme Court is likely to have an impact on employment law in Michigan by broadening the protection afforded under the state's Whistleblowers' Protection Act (WPA). The WPA prohibits an employer from taking adverse employment actions against an employee under certain circumstances:

"An employer shall not discharge, threaten, or otherwise discriminate against an employee regarding the employee's compensation, terms, conditions, location, or privileges of employment because the employee, or a person acting on behalf of the employee, reports or is about to report, verbally or in writing, a violation or a suspected violation of a law or regulation or rule promulgated pursuant to law of this state, a political subdivision of this state, or the United States to a public body, unless the employee knows that the report is false, or because an employee is requested by a public body to participate in an investigation, hearing, or inquiry held by that public body, or a court action."

In *Stefanski v. Saginaw County 911 Communications Center Authority*, a dispatcher (Mr. Stefanski, the plaintiff) alleged that in July 2021 his supervisor made a mistake in how a 911 call was coded. When a caller reported that shots had been fired and possibly a woman had been shot, the supervisor, reportedly after asking three times if the caller was certain the woman had been shot, ultimately coded the call "1010J." Under this code, EMS is not dispatched. Later the caller called again to say the police had not arrived and the woman may not be breathing. EMS was dispatched but ultimately the woman died. Stefanski said the supervisor should have coded the initial call as "40J," which indicates someone has been shot and EMS is needed at the scene. Stefanski and others pressured a supervisor to review the audio recording of the call; he did so and concluded it was not out of the ordinary.

When Stefanski questioned the supervisor's conclusion, the supervisor allegedly became angry and told him and others to "let it go." Later, an internal investigation concluded that the coding was a "judgement call" and the actions weren't negligent. Stefanski spoke with the director of the county 911, who also told him the coding was a judgement call and wouldn't question the supervisor's decision. In late July, Stefanski missed several days, then received two nonscheduled absence (NSA) notices. When he spoke with the director again, the director told him he didn't "want him to revert to his 'old ways' regarding accumulation of NSAs."

Stefanski said he told the director that he was having medical issues regarding the incident, that the coding of the call had been gross negligence and that he had thought of going to the County Board about the coding of the call. Subsequently, Stefanski alleges he was treated differently at work, in many negative respects.

In October, Stefanski went on a medical leave of absence. "Stefanski remained in this position until November 2021 when he resigned after being suspended without pay for 90 days. The reason given for this suspension was that Stefanski had a pattern of excessive nonscheduled absences (NSAs). Stefanski believed this reason was pretextual and the actual reason for the suspension was his disagreement with his supervisors regarding the July 911 call."

The trial court and Court of Appeals (COA) held for the defendant county. The COA held that reporting a violation of the common law (here gross negligence) is not sufficient for protection under the WPA. The Supreme Court held otherwise and remanded the case to the COA, noting that the courts must construe the WPA liberally to effectuate the purpose of the WPA.

Protection is to be afforded not only for violated statutes or regulations, but also for the common law (law derived from court case decisions). This would be an expansion of the scope of the WPA. However, the case was remanded "... for consideration of whether gross negligence is a violation of 'a' law and whether plaintiff's actions constituted a 'report' under the WPA." It may be significant that the Supreme Court's decision contained as much detail as it did regarding Stefanski's work performance. And it may be that the COA decides the facts in the County's favor, and ultimately that there will be a narrowing of the standard the Supreme Court has seemingly articulated. [L](#)

Stefanski v. Saginaw County 911 Communications Center Authority, No.166663 Mich. Sup. Ct. Apr. 14, 2025.

The information in this column should not be considered a legal opinion or constitute legal advice.

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

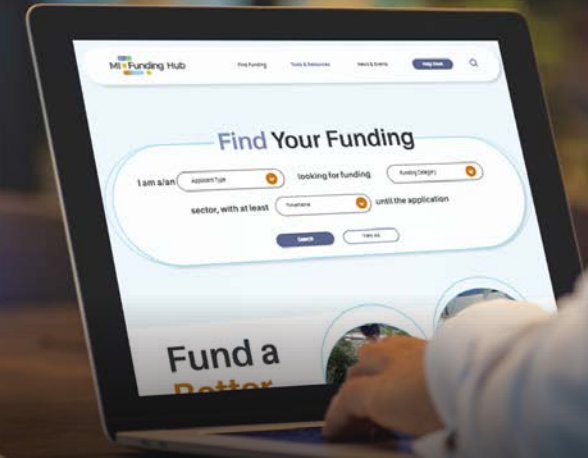
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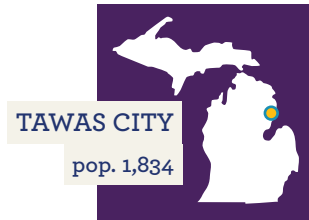
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Tawas City Firefighter Cadet Program

By Kim Cekola

Through his connections with other fire chiefs, Tawas City Fire Chief Steve Masich knew a lot of fire departments were having trouble attracting firefighters. He learned about a cadet program that introduces high school students to firefighting and allows them to train side-by-side with certified firefighters. He presented the idea to city council, who approved it unanimously. “We’re a small, rural, on-demand fire department and understand the struggles communities have with finding firefighters. Since its inception, we’ve had 15 students through the program. Several received their Firefighter I-II certifications, and four are either currently or were on the Tawas City Fire Department as full-fledged firefighters.” The City accepts three students to the program per year, and no advertising is needed—it operates entirely through word of mouth.



To qualify for the program, the cadet firefighter must be working toward a high school diploma, secure a work permit with their school, and be between 16 and 18 years of age. Within two years of hire, they must certify in Michigan as Firefighter I and II and/or as a Medical First Responder. To become Firefighter I and II certified, individuals typically need to complete a training academy and pass the corresponding exams through the Michigan Firefighter Training Council. The cadet firefighter must conduct themselves in accordance with the Tawas City Fire Department's (TCFD) Code of Conduct and display the attributes of a firefighter with integrity while on and off duty.

Under the supervision of fire officers and firefighters, the cadet firefighter:

- concentrates heavily on firefighter training and practice scenarios;
- studies emergency response techniques and fire science;
- helps maintain the equipment and facilities of the fire department;
- engages in limited fire suppression, emergency medical service, rescue, and fire prevention activities to protect life and property;
- may set up hoses, ladders, and equipment to help mitigate emergency situations (within their allowed capacity through training and MIOSHA); and
- is responsible for knowing and following the TCFD manual of procedures and all department directives.

“This program allows us to create our own succession plan, while giving our youth experience working in the public sector.”



Chief Steve Masich (left) is seen speaking with then-cadet Thomas Bruning (right) while the Tawas City Fire Department (TCFD) assisted with a structure fire in Grant Township a few years ago. Bruning went on to complete his state certifications and has since joined the TCFD as an official firefighter.



Pictured from left to right: Lieutenant Don Hanson; former cadets and current firefighters, Lukas Herrick and Thomas Bruning; Cadet Maximus Herrick; full-time firefighter and the program's first-ever cadet, Jacob Ulman; Cadets Joel Ulman and Ellie Hanson; Lieutenant Dean Ulman; Chief Steve Masich; and Assistant Chief Jeff Seyfried. Photo courtesy of Jenny Haglund/Iosco County News-Herald


"I love seeing the communication between the cadets and our veteran firefighters," beamed Chief Masich. "The way the cadets look up to the veterans, and the cadets soak up all [their] knowledge . . . this gives us the best side of our youth, and positivity for the Tawas City fire department's future."

The program has been implemented at no additional cost to the City. The existing firefighters provide the training, and funds for special gear for the cadets were donated by a citizen. It is overseen by the TCFD and the city manager. "This program allows us to create our own succession plan,

while giving our youth experience working in the public sector. We're excited about the success of our program and would like to share it with others," said City Manager Annge Horning.

January 2025 marked the 10-year anniversary of the Tawas City Firefighter Cadet program. [L](#)


Kim Cekola is a research specialist/editor for the League. You may contact Kim at 734-669-6321 or kcekola@mmml.org.




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On the Road Again with the U.P. Roadshow

By Anthony Minghine

One of the best things about the Michigan Municipal League is that we have the privilege of serving members all across the great state of Michigan. This can also be one of our biggest challenges—reaching members spread across a big state. In recent years, we’ve been taking regular trips to the U.P. to meet with members on their home turf. These trips are always enlightening. It is a reminder that wherever you go in Michigan, our communities always find ways to innovate and succeed through challenges.

This past May, the U.P. Roadshow was back in action. League Vice President Joshua Atwood, League CEO and Executive Director Dan Gilmartin, and I ventured north to join League President and proud Yooper Don Gerrie in his hometown of Sault Ste. Marie. That evening we connected with members of the city council and got greater insight into local happenings, perhaps most significant is the massive work being done on the Soo Sault Locks.

This was just the opening act as we headed west, with President Don Gerrie joining the action, to do a loop around the U.P. Our journey would have stops in Negaunee, Houghton, Bessemer, and Iron Mountain. All told, we met with more than 50 local officials from 16 communities—even encountering 80-degree temperatures and snow in the same day.

Next was Negaunee, where we met for lunch at a local eatery with elected and appointed officials from the area. We heard much from them about local issues. Following lunch, we were given a tour of their downtown by City Manager Nate Heffron to show off the amazing work they have done. If you haven’t been to Negaunee, it’s worth the trip to see the placemaking projects they have undertaken.

After our tour, we were back on the road headed to Houghton. There we connected with officials from the Keweenaw Peninsula and beyond. Our venue had an interesting history—not to mention a great view of the water. It had been the village hall, fire station, stable, and the Michigan Mining School, which is now Michigan Technological University. The event was well attended, with lots of spirited conversation and time to catch up with members from the area. Houghton doesn’t disappoint; it has the energy of a college town, historical buildings, and great synergy with neighboring Hancock—well worth the drive!

Following a spectacular waterfront breakfast, we were southbound to Bessemer. Our schedule afforded us the opportunity for a little self-guided tour before meeting members for lunch, which included the neighboring cities of Ironwood and Wakefield. Oh, and the neighboring state of Wisconsin, because don’t you just have to go when you are that far west? The proximity of the three communities to each other makes for a vibrant social and economic connection. We had a great turnout at our lunch and were able to make new connections with members while reuniting with old friends.



Featured are photos from Negaunee's Downtown Enhancement Project, completed in 2024, including the new statue honoring volunteer firefighters at Firefighters Square.



Pictured from left to right: Negaunee City Manager Nate Heffron; Marquette City Manager Karen Kovacs; Ishpeming Mayor Pro Tem Kurt Kipling; Ishpeming Councilmember Ben Argall; Ishpeming City Manager Randy Scholz; Marquette Commissioner Michael Larson; Marquette Mayor Jessica Hanley; League Deputy Executive Director, External Strategies Tony Minghine; League Executive Director and CEO Dan Gilmartin; Lapeer Mayor Pro Tem and League Vice President Joshua Atwood; Negaunee Councilmember David Kangas; Ishpeming Mayor Pat Scanlon; League Executive Search Recruiter Glenn Anderson; Sault Ste. Marie Mayor and League President Don Gerrie; Negaunee Mayor Craig Ilomen.

Our last official stop was Iron Mountain. There we had the opportunity to dine with members at the historic Chippewa Club. Josh Jones from Menominee won the greatest distance traveled award for this meal, driving over 90 minutes to join in the conversation! It was a pleasure engaging in robust dialogue all about the challenges they face and, equally important, their successes.

Reflecting upon our many meetings and conversations, League President Don Gerrie said, “I am always impressed by the collaboration that takes place in all Michigan communities, and it is especially obvious in the U.P. With often-scarcer resources, communities work together to help each other out. You could see and feel the passion and fierce sense of pride with all the members that we spoke to—and that reinforces the need for all the work that the League does to help make communities better.”

“It was exciting to see firsthand the improvements, energy, and pride in these communities, especially in their beautifully preserved and revitalized historic downtowns.”

That sentiment was echoed by League Vice President Joshua Atwood: “It was an honor to meet with our awesome U.P. members. It was exciting to see firsthand the improvements, energy, and pride in these communities, especially in their beautifully preserved and revitalized historic downtowns. We learned of the challenges they face, which provided some insight on how we can help. I encourage everyone to take a trip north. You’ll find small-town charm, innovation, and a strong sense of community that’s truly inspiring.”

That’s a wrap . . . 1,387 miles later. Thank you to all the members who were able to take time to meet with us. These trips are invaluable for the insight they provide as we work to serve you better. To those we missed, we hope to see you at Convention or the next time we head across the bridge. [L](#)

Anthony Minghine is the deputy executive director, external strategies for the League. You may contact Tony at 734-669-6360 or aminghine@mml.org.



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Municipal Finance Column

By Rick Haglund

Lawmakers in the Michigan Legislature are backing important measures addressing public safety and local government finance. The House voted decisively earlier this year in favor of legislation that would, for the first time, send more than \$100 million to local governments to aid crime-fighting efforts. It's also moving to create a trust fund that would protect revenue sharing for local units of government.

"There has been overwhelming bipartisanship in taking these major steps to show strong support for local government services," said John LaMacchia, the League's director of state and federal affairs. The Public Safety and Violence Prevention Trust Fund would allocate \$115 million from state sales tax revenue to help local governments hire more police officers and supplement community violence intervention efforts. The two-bill package passed the House in April with a 104-4 vote. At press time, the bills were pending in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Rep. Mike Harris (R-Waterford) is the main sponsor of the proposed Public Safety and Violence Prevention Trust Fund. Harris, a former police officer for 25 years, said the fund is needed to help local agencies protect against what he said is growing crime across the state. Harris cited FBI data that he said shows violent crime in Michigan between 2019 and 2023 was seven percent higher than in the preceding five years, and homicides were up 17 percent over the same timeframe.

"When I served as a police officer, I saw firsthand the tragic consequences of crime on people's lives," Harris said in announcing the legislation. "For the first time, our state will dedicate resources to law enforcement and violence prevention every year so local communities can make their neighborhoods safer places to live."

Under the legislation, the trust fund would distribute \$72 million to cities, villages, and townships based on their share of statewide violent crime. Another \$40 million would go to county sheriffs' offices, distributed according to the size of each county's police force. The remaining \$3 million would be split evenly between the state Crime Victims' Rights Fund and grants for community violence intervention programs. "This is pretty significant money," Harris said, money that could help strapped local governments attract more police officers. A smaller version of the trust fund was passed last year by the House and Senate but wasn't presented to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer before the lame duck session ended.

Saginaw Police Chief Robert Ruth said he strongly supports the legislation, which would allow his department to acquire more officers, vehicles, and equipment "to keep the citizens of Saginaw safe. This would help us tremendously." The Saginaw Police Department had 225 police officers in the 1970s; now it's down to 65. Saginaw's population has shrunk

as well, but Ruth said crime has risen because of the city's economic decline. "We were a GM town, but all those plants closed," he said. "We have a lot of violent crime, and it's hard to combat it without enough officers."

Another two-bill package recently introduced by a bipartisan group of lawmakers would create a Revenue Sharing Trust Fund to stabilize appropriations for local governments. The bills, cosponsored by Rep. Amos O'Neal (D-Saginaw) and Rep. Mark Tisdell (R-Rochester Hills), would require the Treasury Department to "deposit 8.7 percent of the money received and collected from the (sales) tax imposed at a rate of 4 percent into the newly created fund," according to the League. There's about \$625 million a year in statutory revenue sharing currently going to the state's 1,856 local governments. That money would be placed in the trust fund, "protected from the political whims of the legislative process," O'Neal and Tisdell said.

The Revenue Sharing Trust Fund passed the House in 2023 on a 106-4 vote but wasn't taken up by the Senate before the end of last year's legislative session. O'Neal and Tisdell say that although the legislature has been boosting statutory revenue sharing funding for local governments in recent years, a mechanism is needed to protect them during inevitable future economic downturns. Lawmakers are expected to have \$320 million less than anticipated in crafting the 2025-2026 fiscal year budget because of a slowing economy stressed by federal trade and tax policies.

"Every single time a local elected leader comes to Lansing, they tell us that local governments function best when they have a predictable and stable source of revenue they can plan around," O'Neal and Tisdell wrote in a *Bridge Michigan* guest commentary. "It's extremely difficult for community leaders to announce a new building improvement program, infrastructure project, or public safety initiative when they don't know if they will have the same state investments to continue those investments the following year."

LaMacchia said the two trust fund proposals appear to point to a new appreciation in Lansing for the needs of local government. "Overall, you have a legislative body (the House) and a legislature in general that seems to be very committed to investing in local government, even in the broader chaos of budget negotiations."

He also said many current lawmakers are former local officials whose communities struggled through a difficult period of budget cuts. "When you lived through that and recognize how hard it was, you don't want to go back and put local governments in that position again."

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



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Q. Our council meetings often last for three hours. A neighboring municipality suggested we use consent agendas. Can you explain what they are and how they are used? Are they controversial?

A. A consent agenda contains routine items (not controversial) that do not need further discussion, all listed and voted on under one agenda item. The use of consent agendas can shorten a meeting. Some items typically included in the consent agenda are the approval of minutes and payments, appointments and resignations, and setting dates for hearings. Consent agendas are flexible: items can be pulled off the consent agenda for discussion if desired.

Q. It seems like roll call votes take a lot of time to execute—are they required? Can't the council just vote all at once and if it is unclear if there is a majority then take a roll call vote?

A. Some items of municipal governance require roll call votes by statute; others have been instituted by the municipality. For instance, every municipality adopts its own rules for meetings—yours may require them. Some charters or rules only require roll call votes for particular items, such as adopting ordinances and resolutions or selling or leasing land. It is worth looking at your rules and charter to see where roll call votes are required. You can amend your charter or change your council rules (much simpler than amending the charter) to remove this practice, if you desire.

It is important to state that the Open Meetings Act has roll call vote requirements for MCL 15.267(1):

“A 2/3 roll call vote of members elected or appointed and serving is required to call a closed session, except for the closed sessions permitted under section 8(a), (b), (c), (g), (i), and (j). The roll call vote and the purpose or purposes for calling the closed session shall be entered into the minutes of the meeting at which the vote is taken.”

See our *Fact Sheet: Calling Closed Meetings*, available at mml.org.

Q. How do we correct a mistake in the minutes?

A. According to the Open Meetings Act MCL 15.269(1), “The public body shall make any corrections in the minutes at the next meeting after the meeting to which the minutes refer. The public body shall make corrected minutes available at or before the next subsequent meeting after correction. The corrected minutes shall show both the original entry and the correction.”


Q. What is a public record?

A. The Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (MCL 15.231-15.246) defines public records as recorded information “prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a public body in the performance of an official function, from the time it is created.”

Q. Are all municipal records considered to be “official” records?

A. No. The State of Michigan Archives, in General Schedule #1, addresses the retention of “nonrecord” materials. These documents are broadly defined as drafts, duplicates, convenience copies, publications, and other materials that do not document agency activities. These materials can be disposed of when they have served their intended purpose. Government agencies need to identify the “office of record” when multiple offices possess copies of the same record. The “office of record” is responsible for following the retention period that is specified; duplicates do not need to be retained. A more comprehensive definition can be found in the approved schedule available online at <http://bit.ly/4lJEeh4>

Q. Are the retention periods listed on general schedules minimum amounts of time that a record should be kept?

A. Yes. General schedules authorize, but do not require, public officials to dispose of records after the expiration of the assigned retention period. Local situations may require retention beyond the periods listed, and nothing prevents a government agency from retaining records longer than the specified period of time. If records are kept for less than the amount of time listed, the agency can be penalized for unlawful destruction of records. In addition, if records are kept too long, they can waste valuable storage space, and they can become a liability to the agency if it receives a FOIA request or if it becomes involved in litigation. 

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A New Era of Learning at the League

By Emily Kieliszewski

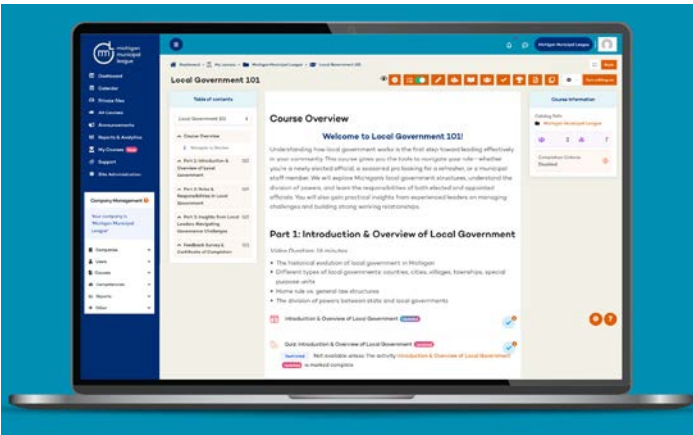
Professional development is key to leading well, whether you're a newly elected official trying to find your footing, or an experienced city manager looking for fresh ideas. But between council meetings, budget deadlines, resident concerns—not to mention the demands of personal and family life—finding the time to focus on professional growth can be a challenge.

That's why we're excited to introduce the League's new online learning platform, launching this summer.

This platform has been designed with one goal in mind: Meeting our members where they are, whether in the office, at home, or on the go—at the exact moment they need it. We're expanding access to learning that fits your schedule and giving members 24/7 access to curated courses built around their unique needs as Michigan's local leaders.

Seven new on-demand courses cover our most popular and requested topics:

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Courses range in length from 45 to 75 minutes, and each is broken up into short video segments with interactive knowledge checks and additional resources to support deeper learning. You can power through an entire course in one sitting or take it one video at a time and return later. Want to go back and review a segment as a refresher? You can do that, too. And because these courses were developed by the League with Michigan communities in mind, they're grounded in real-world examples and designed specifically for our members, led by experts and peers who get it.



We believe in the power of human connection. We continue to invest in personal, curated learning experiences through our in-person workshops, conferences, and leadership intensives, as well as live virtual events. These moments of shared learning and relationship-building remain central to who we are. Our live, human-to-human programming is not going anywhere—this digital platform is simply another resource for our members. It isn't an "either/or." It's a "yes, and." Yes to greater flexibility and accessibility, and yes to the meaningful, in-person experiences that spark the collaboration and support we all know and love.

To access the platform, visit learn.mml.org. Courses can be taken individually or bundled, and best yet: they all count for credit in the Elected Officials Academy.

This is just the beginning. We'll continue to build and adapt our offerings based on your needs, because supporting local leaders is at the heart of what we do. We're excited to grow alongside you—on screen and in person. 

Emily Kieliszewski is the assistant director of member experience and learning for the League. You may contact Emily at 517-908-0302 or emilyk@mml.org.

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