The Review

The official magazine of the michigan municipal league

Fall 2026

A Resiliency Roadmap

Embracing economic transitions with the Community Growth Academy



07 Challenges of Michigan's Aging Population

13 New Health Insurance Resource

16 Community Growth Academy

21 Neighbor 2 Neighbor Program

The Review

Fall 2026

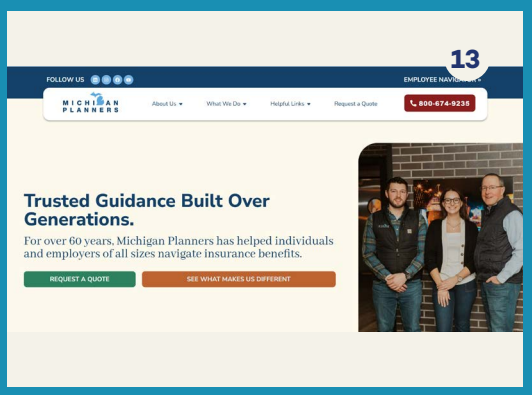
Volume 99, Number 4

The official magazine of the michigan municipal league

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













Features

07 Michigan's Aging Population Part One: What Are the Challenges?
By Richard Carlisle

11 Local Economies Initiative Heads to the Yoop
By Emily Pinsuwan

13 New Health Insurance Resource for League Members
By Tony Minghine

16 COVER STORY: The Community Growth Academy: A Local Approach to Handling Economic Change
By Emily Pinsuwan

21 Talking It Out, Neighbor 2 Neighbor
By Emily Pinsuwan

24 Employee Discipline Best Practices Can Improve Performance and Minimize Liability
By Erik G. Bradberry and Joshua J. Trombley

27 From Spark to Park: Standish Debuts Its New Nature Trail
By Emily Pinsuwan

Columns

05 Executive Director's Message

30 Legal Spotlight

32 Northern Field Report

35 Municipal Q&A

36 Municipal Finance

38 The Lab Report

On the Cover

Left to right: Community Growth Fellow Effie Alofoje-Carr and 100K Ideas Executive Director Brandee Cooke-Brown pose in downtown Flint.

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

Follow Us:



HEALTHCARE IS PERSONAL.
SO ARE ITS COSTS.

Perhaps no part of the economy affects each of us as personally as health care. It brings new life into the world. It cures diseases. It saves lives.

It's also expensive. Your ability to afford health care is essential — and affordable health insurance is a big part of that. As prices for medical services and prescription drugs continue to rise, so does the pressure on health insurance affordability. We want you to better understand why this is happening. We want you to know everything we are doing about it, including our efforts to lower the costs of running our company by $600 million while we maintain the quality services our members expect.

We want you to be engaged. Informed. Involved in the conversation. Because health care is personal — and we need to make it work for everyone.

Affordability matters.

Start here — **MIBlueDaily.com/Affordability**

MICHIGAN

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



We love where you live.

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



Board of Trustees

President: Joshua Atwood, Commissioner, Lapeer
Vice President: Jennifer Antel, Mayor, Wayland

Terms Expire in 2026

Stephen Kepley, Mayor, Kentwood

Khalfani Stephens, Trustee, League Board

Mark Washington, City Manager, Grand Rapids

Terms Expire in 2027

George Bosanic, City Manager, Greenville

Joe LaRussa, Mayor, Farmington

Scott McLennan, Mayor, Rogers City

David J. Tossava, Mayor, Hastings

Terms Expire in 2028

Michael D. Fritz, Councilmember, Grand Haven

Juan E. Ganum, Trustee, League Board

Dennis Hennen, Councilmember, Berkley

Karen Kovacs, City Manager, Marquette

Raylon Leaks-May, Mayor, Ferndale

Terms Expire in 2029

Fonda J. Brewer, Supervisor, Delta Township

Alexander Clos, Councilmember, Howell

Leann Davis, Councilmember, L'Anse

Nicole Miller, Councilmember, Portage

Tim Morales, City Manager, Saginaw

Magazine Staff

Editor – Ariel Ryan

Graphic Designer, Art Editor – Justina McCormick, Britt Curran

Copy Writer, Copy Editor – Emily Pinsuwan

Sub-editor – Kim Cekola, Monica Drukis, Tawny Pearson

Editorial Assistant – Agnes Krahn

To Submit Articles

The *Review* relies on contributions from municipal officials, consultants, legislators, League staff, and others to maintain the magazine's high quality editorial content. Please submit proposals by sending a 100-word summary and outline of the article to **Ariel Ryan**, aryan@mml.org.

Information is also available at: mml.org/programs-services/marketingkit

Advertising Information

Classified ads are available online at mml.org. Click on "Classifieds."

For information about all League marketing tools, visit mml.org/programs-services/marketingkit

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

When Democracy Works

Executive Director's Message

I'd like to start this column by celebrating a win.

In the summer issue of the *Review*, you read about the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act. The Act passed both houses with strong bipartisan majorities, and shortly after this magazine's summer issue was published, it became law on July 11. A wonderful gift for America's 250th birthday.

The brainchild of senators Tim Scott (R-SC) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)—an odd couple if there ever was one—the ROAD to Housing Act passed the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs with flying colors, although arguments were had and amendments were made. Disagreements happened, but everyone agreed on the issue: Something needs to be done about the housing crisis in this country.

Though they often disagreed on the details, everyone wanted it—and it got done.

The Act that is now the law of the land is a triumph. It respects local decision-making. It incentivizes, rather than punishes. Instead of answering the question of how to fix housing, it offers a set of tools that help communities find the housing solutions that make the most sense for them. It pushes communities to do better and rewards action.

Amid the acrimony at the federal level, the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act is an unambiguous example of democracy working.

You didn't read a lot about the Act in the national media. It passed, it got some headlines, and people moved on to sexier fights. When democracy works as intended, it doesn't always grab our attention. Insults are more entertaining than compromise. Anger and strife are more dramatic than trust and competence.

Let's narrow the focus a bit to our own state. The eyes of the rest of the country are on Michigan's gubernatorial and senatorial races, but there are hundreds of other issues that are important, too—and will likely have more impact on the day-to-day lives of Michiganders.

Mayors, councilmembers, and school boards will be elected. Ballot questions will be decided. Through democracy, the human and policy infrastructure of our state will be adjusted, and then it will continue forward.

Our local elected officials come from every background imaginable. Just as there's no one-size-fits-all for housing policy, there's no one-size-fits-all for what makes a good municipal leader. But they do have certain qualities in common: A competent understanding of their role. A willingness to move away from how things have always been done. A desire to hear all voices, not just the ones who agree with them or tell them what they want to hear.

When you, as a municipal leader, are competent, your constituents will trust you. They may not agree with you, but the people who live in your community know that if they come to council meetings, their concerns will be heard. Community members have a role in making things work, and you can be their champion—even when you don't see eye-to-eye.

Through you, democracy works as intended. But you have to get it right.

Now, the processes and fiddly details of local democracy aren't always intuitive. No one comes into elected leadership knowing the ins and outs of municipal finances, grant-giving organizations, and how to run an effective council meeting. Being a competent municipal leader requires a set of skills that needs to be learned (and sometimes re-learned).

That's where the League comes in. We're here to educate and to inspire.

While League staff are deeply versed in the abstract issues of law and policy, we're also getting boots on the ground in a practical way. We're coming to visit and learn about your local successes and challenges. We're championing your interests. We're going out and finding ideas for you to experiment with in your own little labs of democracy. You can read about some of them in this very issue.

We've got a lot of events coming up, from Convention and Newly Elected Officials training to always-available online learning modules. We hope you'll lean into what we have on offer, because it's designed specifically for you. Respectful, competent democracy can be a challenge these days, but it's worth it.

We're here for you—and we want to hear from you.



Dan Gilmartin

League Executive Director and CEO
734-669-6302 | dpg@mml.org

We love where you live.

michigan municipal league



Thriving Communities Don't Happen by Accident

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

- Charter Revisions
- Construction Agreements & Litigation
- Data Center Siting & Permitting
- Election Law & Regulatory Law
- Intergovernmental Agreements
- Labor & Employment Law
- OMA & FOIA
- Ordinance Drafting & Prosecutions
- Public Safety Liability
- Real Estate Law
- Motor Vehicle Liability
- Zoning, Planning & Land Use

CHARLES BOGREN
Direct: (616) 752-4606
cbogren@plunkettcooney.com

PLUNKETT COONEY
ATTORNEYS & COUNSELORS AT LAW

MICHAEL D. HANCHETT
Direct: (248) 594-8689
mhanchett@plunkettcooney.com

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

www.plunkettcooney.com



Michigan's Aging Population Part One: What Are the Challenges?

By Richard Carlisle, FAICP, PCP

michigan municipal league | business alliance program

Carlisle/Wortman Associates, Inc.

Carlisle | Wortman Associates, Inc. (CWA) has provided professional planning and community development services since 1988 to the public-sector clients across Michigan. Our team of highly experienced professionals is forward-thinking, solution-oriented, and skilled at developing creative, practical strategies tailored to each client's unique needs. Our core mission is to serve as an expert extension of the City, advancing the shared goal of building strong, attractive, and livable communities. Our continued success reflects the guiding philosophy to which we have remained steadfast: responsiveness, commitment, trust, and success.

Introduction

The aging of Michigan's population represents the most sustained demographic shift in its history. Michigan communities will be faced with significant economic and social issues to support an increasingly aging population, which is growing, as funding from state and federal sources decline. Are Michigan communities prepared to meet the challenges?

Demographic Trends

Longer life expectancies, declining birth rates, and the maturing of the baby boomer generation are fueling this rapid increase in the older population. In Michigan, the number of residents 65 and older has been continually on the rise. In 2000, Michigan residents over 65 made up 12.3 percent of the population; currently it is up to 19.6 percent—a 60 percent increase.

Geographic disparities paint an even more alarming picture. In Michigan's 83 counties, 70 exceed the statewide percentage of adults over 65. The Upper Peninsula and the northern half of lower Michigan contain the highest percentages of the aging population: Fifteen counties have a 65 and older population that exceeds 30 percent. Outside metropolitan areas, the aging population lives in less concentrated, more dispersed locations, making access to services more challenging.

The University of Michigan Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation reports in their survey of older residents that many seniors believe Michigan is an attractive place to age. However, data relating to access to healthcare, caregiving, transportation, and income paint a different picture. Plus, regional differences influence people's perceptions of how they are doing.

One factor challenging our aging population is income and the ability to support a household. The statewide median household income is just over $71,000 per year. However, the median household income for the over-65 population is around $54,000 per year.

United for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), a national database started by New Jersey United Way, provides a more comprehensive and realistic evaluation of what is needed (housing, food, healthcare, taxes, and

miscellaneous expenses) to support a household—called the Household Survival Budget. In Michigan, approximately 40 percent of households over 65 ranked below the minimum income needed to meet the Household Survival Budget.

With an increasing share of the population that is over 65, reductions and limitations in federal and state support, and regional disparities, the picture is not as rosy as some perceive. While Governor Whitmer has called for increases in state support, funding has not been commensurate with the looming crises of caring for our aging population.

> *"In Michigan, approximately 40 percent of households over 65 ranked below the minimum income needed to meet the Household Survival Budget."*



Impact on Local Government

Local government has typically felt the brunt when sources of funding from higher levels of government fall short. This greater burden on local government and nonprofits providing support services for senior needs is especially prominent in:

Transportation: The ability to drive, especially at night, declines with age, thereby limiting access to medical appointments, groceries, and social interaction. When the aging population is spread out over a dispersed area, the cost of providing transportation services increases significantly.

Housing: While most of the aging population would like to age in place, most homes are not designed to accommodate people as they get older, especially when mobility becomes an issue. The lack of affordable, accessible alternatives with proximity to needed services is a problem throughout the state.

Caregiver Support: Coincident with an aging population is the reduction in the workforce that supplies caregivers. This is coupled with caregiving professions struggling to attract talent due to low wages. Availability of caregiver support is a major factor in deciding whether individuals will be able to remain in their homes.

Health Care: Although people are living longer, they are doing so with conditions requiring medical care. The National Emergency Medical Services Information System reports that one in three EMS responses are to an elderly resident.

In many parts of Michigan, EMS transport to a hospital is time consuming. Michigan has 64 hospitals serving rural areas. Six are at risk of closing, and 17 have had to cut services to remain open. Even hospitals in metropolitan areas face financial issues due to reduction in Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement.

For those seniors needing long-term care, there are additional financial obstacles. Michigan ranks 36th in the country in Medicaid-funded support for long-term care.

Food: Cuts to the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, further jeopardize the wellbeing of seniors. Michigan has lost $900 million in federal SNAP funding, placing pressure on local food programs that benefit seniors.

Aging in Place

Surveys conducted by AARP and others report that nearly 90 percent of people over 65 want to stay in their home as long as possible. Aging in place is generally defined as "the ability to live in one's home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level." Aging in place enables older people to remain independent in the familiar surroundings of their home and community.



The messaging behind aging in place has become so familiar that many people find it hard to imagine living elsewhere. Unfortunately, the desire to age in one's own home may overshadow key considerations that mean the true costs of aging in place are underestimated:

Can the home be modified to accommodate mobility challenges? Most older adults live in homes that were designed to accommodate their young families. Bedrooms are upstairs; doorways and bathrooms are of a standard design, neither capable of accommodating a walker or wheelchair. The cost of remodeling the home to accommodate aging in place can be considerable.

How will the home be maintained? Maintaining a house is a lot of work, even when physical and mobility issues are not factors. There is also meal preparation and making sure the bills are paid. The burden either falls on the aging individual, a family member, or a hired service.

Will a sense of belonging and purpose be maintained if mobility and cognitive skills decline? Most people who are perfectly healthy expect to stay that way as they age, statistical averages to the contrary. For those older people who thrive on relationships with friends, neighbors, and the community, age-related infirmities can lead to social isolation.

Are there transportation options that allow the individuals to safely travel to appointments, social engagements, worship, etc.? Transportation provides a degree of independence and the opportunity for social interaction. In areas lacking public transportation, the ability for older adults to travel safely to their destinations is extremely limited.

Aging in place may be touted as the only way to live a happy and independent life, but it is often in reaction to less desirable options such as nursing homes or assisted living. The dilemma for many older adults is whether they can remain in their community if they no longer want or are unable to live in their home.

"People need better choices," said Rodney Harrell, a housing expert at AARP's Public Policy Institute. "Too many homes and communities were designed in ways that run counter to an older person's needs, particularly in suburbs that were designed around the automobile. People of every age would benefit if public planners focused more on designing communities that combine walkability, accessibility to employment, grocery shopping, health care and other needs, and adequate housing at all price levels."

Should we continue to think in conventional terms, which, for many people and the communities they live in, is unsustainable? We need to design communities that embrace age-inclusive solutions—a process we'll explore in part two of this article in the winter issue.

Richard Carlisle, FAICP, is the past president of Carlisle Wortman Associates, Inc. of Ann Arbor. You may contact Dick at 734-662-2200 or rcarlisle@cwaplan.com.





Join us on Facebook Live!

Live with the League

Got questions? We've got answers. Participate in live Q&As with our legislative team.
Mark your calendar for the League's bi-monthly web meeting and hear all the latest news from Lansing.

michigan municipal league

michigan municipal league

Inside208 Blog

Michigan Legislative News

Follow the League's legislative blog for up-to-the-second updates on all the action in the Capitol.

Day or night—you've got a friend in Lansing.

Local Economies Initiative Heads to the Yoop

By Emily Pinsuwan



Richard Murphy, Emily Pinsuwan, and Shanna Draheim of the Michigan Municipal League; Helen D. Johnson of the MML Foundation; Victoria George of Schoolcraft Tourism & Commerce; Ashley Jankowski of McKenna; and Erica Huss of the Lake Superior Community Partnership ride a Schoolcraft County Transit Authority bus during their visit to Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

This past April, a team of staff from the League, MML Foundation, and McKenna—a community planning and engagement firm—traveled across the central Upper Peninsula to do some listening. The visits were part of the League's Local Economies initiative, which takes a microscope to the local and regional networks that support (or hinder) their local small business ecosystems. These can run the gamut from local policies and permitting processes to technical assistance, transportation infrastructure, and funding sources.

The Local Economies initiative is premised on the reality that thriving local economies don't spontaneously spring up of their own accord, like dandelions. They are nurtured by communities that intentionally create environments where small-scale entrepreneurs can succeed.

That relationship is mutually beneficial. "The success of community is directly tied to the success of its local economy," said Helen Davis Johnson, president of the MML Foundation, who was part of the tour. Rather than simply serving a regulatory, hall-monitor role, "municipal governments can [also] serve as strong, innovative partners for entrepreneurs and small businesses," she added.

Partnering with the Lake Superior Community Partnership's (LSCP) Small Business Support Hub, the team made daylong visits to the communities of Forsyth Township (comprised of Gwinn, New Swanzy, Little Lake, and K.I. Sawyer), Ishpeming, Gladstone, and Manistique, meeting with local entrepreneurs and nonprofits in relaxed, informal gatherings. Local business owners would drop in for the whole conversation, or for as long as their schedules allowed. Snacks were provided, often by those same local businesses. (Shout out to the incredible lemon sugar cookies at Doozers in downtown Ishpeming.) The whole affair culminated in a region-wide dialogue session in Marquette.

Each conversation asked the same basic questions. What's it like to start and grow a business here? What barriers are there? What kind of partners do you have in your local government? What role can your local government play in helping you thrive? Little things can simplify or irritate: How easy is it to apply for a permit? How often does the city manager check in and see how things are going? Can my customers find parking? Can my employees find transportation?

Communities, like people, have their own personalities, strengths, and challenges. Forsyth Township (home of Marquette Regional Airport) continues to write a new chapter following the closure of its Air Force base, gathering momentum through local organizations like Forsyth Forward. Ishpeming is finding renewed energy through a deeply engaged and energetic group of small business owners looking to revitalize its expansive downtown. Gladstone has made investments along its main drag of Delta Avenue and its waterfront. Manistique is building on the charm of its historic downtown and new Trader's Point commercial development.

Find the Microbusiness Essentials and Comprehensive Guides here.

LOCAL ECON U.P. TRIP

One of the most common issues facing U.P. communities is a highly seasonal tourism economy. Visitors flock to the U.P. in the summer for hiking, fishing, and other outdoor recreation, but things contract considerably in the winter, an asymmetry that can make it difficult for local businesses to operate and retain staff. The Local Economies team offered ideas for how to combat these winter blues, depending on the specific make-up of the community and its downtown: Invest in bright seasonal lighting and decorations to combat the winter darkness. Use wayfinding signage on winter trails to direct snowmobilers to local businesses. Create a calendar of seasonal programming (tree lightings, pop-up markets, winter carnivals) to keep residents engaged and attract visitors.

Every group the team met with was eager to share their thoughts. Often, that included the cathartic airing of frustrations and grievances. Business owners had opinions about their communities—and especially about their local governments—but those concerns were always rooted in a place of desiring partnership to improve the communities they care about.

"There was a common theme throughout the tour," said Rachel Raak, a Community Economic Development Coordinator for LCSP who joined the League team on the Forsyth and Ishpeming legs of the trip. "People are deeply committed to the future of their communities." Regardless of anyone's personal opinions or priorities, "there was a genuine willingness to collaborate and find solutions."

While the immediate point of the trip was to bring these various stakeholders to the table and listen to them (and for them to listen to each other), its longer-term goal was to help come up with potential solutions. For each of the four communities visited, the team produced a 10 page Opportunity Report, which outlines specific areas where each community can make improvements, with both short- and long-term actions as well as external resources and case studies. The work done in each community—every visit, every dialogue, every connection—has contributed to the growing body of knowledge the Local Economies initiative curates. League members can learn even more in the Local Economies: Microbusiness Best Practices course on the League's Online Learning platform.

A bonus of the Local Economies site visits was simply getting everyone into the room—drinking the same coffee, eating the same pastries. Busy schedules often mean people don't meet each other, even in smaller communities. Those connections have endured since the League's visit: In Gladstone, for example, informal small business get-togethers have now become a regular event.

"Overall, I left the tour optimistic," says Raak. "The Upper Peninsula is made up of resilient communities with incredible natural resources, innovative businesses, and people who care deeply about where they live."

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

> *"People are deeply committed to the future of their communities."*







Representatives from the Michigan Municipal League, MML Foundation, Schoolcraft Tourism & Commerce, McKenna, and the Lake Superior Community Partnership tour attractions in Schoolcraft and Delta counties, including Kitch-iti-kipi, Trader's Point, and the Gladstone Lighthouse.

New Health Insurance Resource for League Members

By Tony Minghine

Health benefits are some of the most significant expenditures in municipal budgets, and the costs can be highly volatile. We have all seen how dramatic these increases can be and the impact they can have on a local budget. In addition, the structure of health programs continues to evolve. Without a good understanding of industry changes and reliable guidance, a community can find themselves in a quandary trying to balance fiscal limitations with employee needs and expectations. A dilemma that is not fun for anyone involved.

We also know that healthcare benefits can be very complicated, and most of us probably get overwhelmed trying to effectively navigate the insurance landscape on our own. Too often, health insurance is treated as a once-a-year scramble, and without proper guidance it is very difficult to navigate.

It is with all that in mind that the League is excited to introduce the Michigan Municipal League's Benefits Program. To deliver this service, we have joined forces with Michigan Planners to help members navigate and demystify those insurance waters.

For more than 60 years, Michigan Planners has been a fixture in Michigan's business and municipal community, serving organizations across the state with their benefit needs. You have probably seen them at League events presenting on an aspect of health insurance, and they have also served as the League's health insurance broker for over 10 years.

We are excited to bring Michigan Planners' expertise directly to our members through expanded education offerings as well as the opportunity to work directly with them to help you deliver the insurance packages that meet your community's specific needs, including health, dental, vision, life and disability insurance, and other ancillary benefits.

Our overarching goal with this program is to empower local leaders, human resources personnel, and elected officials so that managing benefits feels less like a guessing game. We intend to provide the resources to enable you to evaluate options and make an informed decision.

To achieve this, the program is built on several focus areas:

Bridging the Knowledge Gap: We will help members fill the knowledge gap around healthcare offerings through accessible, ongoing education; clear definitions; and expert breakdowns.

Strategic Alignment: We want to help members carefully align their plan designs with the actual health needs of their workforce to ensure employees receive quality healthcare without driving up municipal costs unnecessarily.

Proactive Defense: To be effective, we need to stay ahead of the challenges we face. We can help communities address healthcare inflation and shifting state and federal compliance standards. Rather than relying on reactive fixes when renewal time rolls around, communities will be equipped with proactive, forward-looking strategies.

The devil is in the details, and execution is everything when it comes to employee benefits. Having a trusted advisor with you as you address these challenges matters. This program is designed to help our members be well prepared to achieve the best result possible for their budget and their staff.

As a member-first organization, we don't partner with just anyone. We know all of the service providers we recommend to our members. And this program is no exception. We know how important health benefits are to all of you and our local government employees, so it is of paramount importance to work with a trusted benefits advisor that can truly deliver on the ideas we have expounded on, and we know from firsthand experience Michigan Planners can deliver on this promise.

Our municipal employees are the heartbeat of our communities. They keep our residents safe, the water flowing, and our parks clean and accessible. And we know that as a municipal leader, you have a strong desire to provide them with good benefits while at the same time balancing the responsibility to manage your community's financial resources. Doing so shouldn't require a master's degree in human resources and health insurance to successfully pull it off. That's where we can help.

By combining the statewide reach of the League with the decades of expertise that Michigan Planners brings to the table, we hope to make it easier for all our members to navigate these waters successfully.

We are excited to be able to offer this comprehensive resource to our members and look forward to working with you to provide greater clarity and peace of mind to you and your employees as you face the reality of healthcare today. Keep an eye out for upcoming webinars and League events as part of this program. If you have questions or want to set up a conversation about your benefits, email us at employeebenefits@mml.org.

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



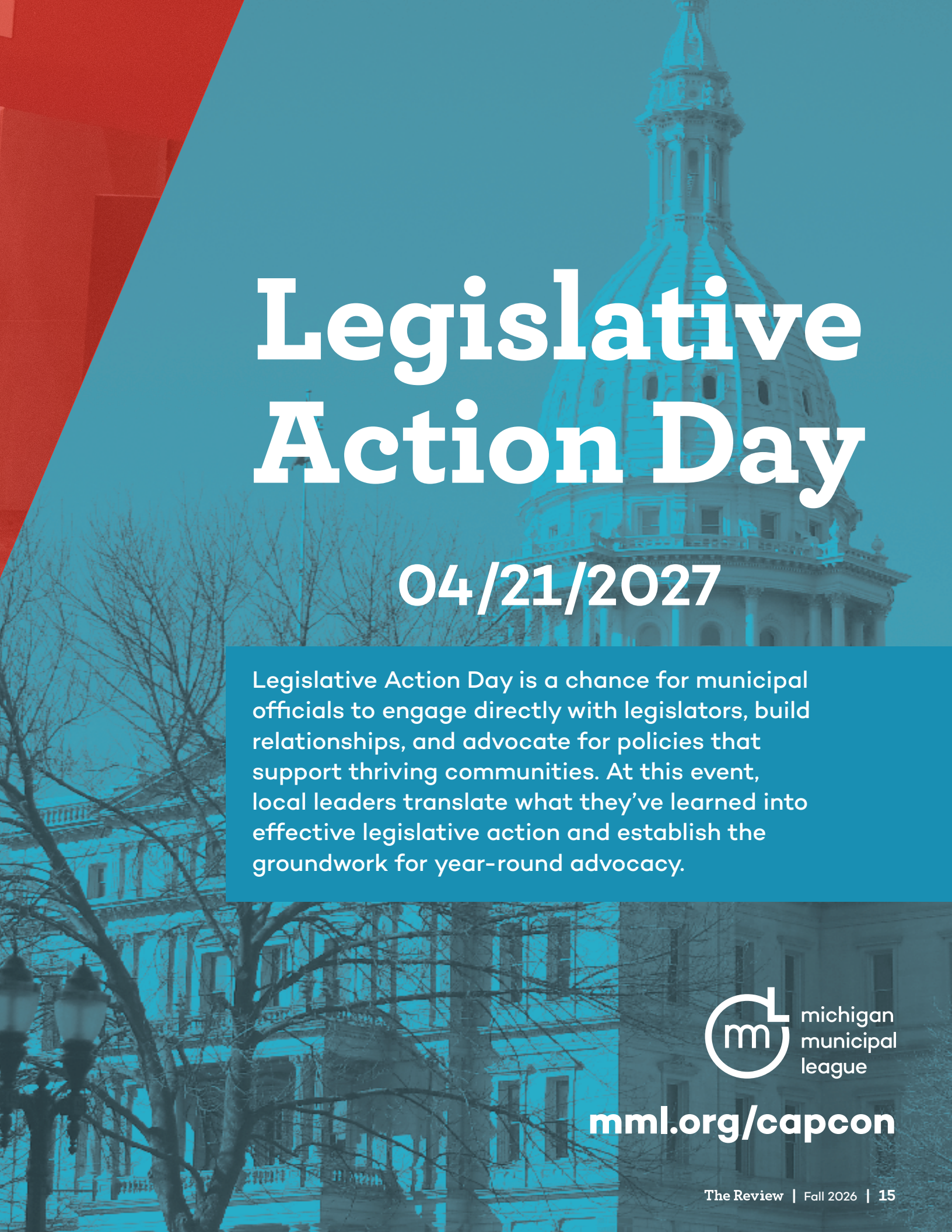
CAPCON 2027

04/20/2027

CapCon brings together Michigan's municipal officials to strengthen their effectiveness as advocates for their communities. The event equips attendees with timely state and federal policy insights, along with tactical legislative tools that strengthen local governance. CapCon provides municipal leaders with opportunities to broaden their perspectives, influence policy, and spark community impact.

CAPCON + LEGISLATIVE ACTION DAY

Attend the full CapCon experience on Tuesday, then join us on Wednesday to take what you've learned to the Capitol and apply it during scheduled meetings with legislators other advocacy activities.



Legislative Action Day

04/21/2027

Legislative Action Day is a chance for municipal officials to engage directly with legislators, build relationships, and advocate for policies that support thriving communities. At this event, local leaders translate what they've learned into effective legislative action and establish the groundwork for year-round advocacy.

michigan municipal league

mml.org/capcon



The Community Growth Academy: A Local Approach to Handling Economic Change

By Emily Pinsuwan

This year saw the inception of the Community Growth Academy, a new state program managed by Michigan's Community and Worker Economic Transition Office. A major part of the initiative is the Community Growth Fellowship, hosted by the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM).

But first, some history.

The Community and Worker Economic Transition Office, housed within the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO), was created in 2023, spurred in part by the renewable energy package signed by Governor Whitmer that year. While other states have focused on communities affected by power plant closures, Michigan's legislative mandate is much bigger, addressing impacts across industries that represent a significant share of the state's economy, sectors like automative manufacturing and construction.

"I joke that this is our gift and our curse—we have a broad scope of work," says Luke Forrest, director of the Community and Worker Economic Transition Office. "That allows us to partner with a diverse group of organizations and support solutions developed by local communities through programs like the community growth academy."

Funded by a grant from the Ballmer Group, the new team first produced a guide for surviving economic change: *The Community Transition Playbook*. The *Playbook* was developed through a series of regional roundtables in 2024 and was released earlier this summer. It organizes information and tools to help communities be proactive, getting ahead of events like plant closures, business buyouts, and other changes before they happen. The approach was intentionally modular. "[Communities] are always in one of the phases," says Forrest. "You're either preparing for or recovering from some sort of economic transition.

"We really wanted someone to test these ideas out [in the *Community Transition Playbook*]—to be our focus groups," he adds. And so, the next step was the creation of the Community Growth Academy, an 18-month program involving 10 local or regional coalitions. Assisted by the consulting firm Delivery Associates, the Community and Worker Economic Transition Office put out a call for applications to be a part of the Academy. They received about 40 responses from local governments, nonprofits, and chambers of commerce. Ten were chosen: Flint; Detroit; several Downriver communities; Huron County; Jackson County; Lake County; Delta and Marquette Counties; Macomb County; Clare, Isabella, and Osceola Counties; and Branch and St. Joseph Counties.

"[The selection process] was competitive," says Forrest. "It was tough."

Academy participants received a suite of assistance from CEDAM and Delivery Associates. Communities worked to develop a "resiliency roadmap" that sets a long-term goal and identifies possible projects to help them get there. The communities were put in touch with one another for peer-to-peer learning. There were facilitated gatherings, discussion groups, webinars, and meetings with organizations like LEO and MEDC.

Additionally, CEDAM provides $100,000 in grant funding per community to help realize their individual projects and initiatives. "Some have other funding that they've acquired through other sources," says Forrest. "If we see RFPs or opportunities that make sense for them, we try to help them with that as much as we can, too." Communities are always pointed towards MI Funding Hub, a searchable online "one-stop shop" for funding sources that was developed by the League with funding from LEO.

The Community Growth Academy immediately became a convener for many of the community stakeholders involved. "In some of these cases, these organizations didn't even really work together that much before," says Forrest. "We had people, literally, meeting each other for the first time in the meetings that we were facilitating, which was cool and rewarding."

Watch here.

michigan.gov/leo/bureaus-agencies/economic-transition

Enter the Community Growth Fellows

As part of the Community Growth Academy, each participant community receives a full-time fellow, employed by CEDAM but reporting to their local host organization. This year's fellows are a diverse group of professionals who range from early-career workers to people making a career change, with a mix of longtime Michiganders, newcomers, and "boomerangs." CEDAM and each host organization jointly select fellows through a customized matching process that considers the community's needs and applicants' experience, interests, and willingness to relocate.

"These are really smart, really talented folks who want to give back to our state," says Patrick Seick, who manages and supervises the 10 fellows across the 10 Academy sites. " That really is the common thread amongst our fellows. That is the unifier."

Fellows are placed at selected host organizations for 15 months (beginning three months in, after Academy communities have defined a work plan for them). Their role is to provide additional capacity and help implement strategies developed through the Academy, with specific assignments reflecting each community's priorities. They may serve at various times as a connector, resource finder, problem solver, and project manager. Throughout the fellowship, they remain connected to CEDAM—and to each other—through regular meetings, group chats, and monthly reports.

The projects of the various Academy coalitions are as varied as the communities themselves and reflect local priorities across different focus areas. They include workforce training, housing development, broadband access, entrepreneurship, and tourism.

In Flint, the hub organization is 100K Ideas, a small business development nonprofit that includes entrepreneurship education and support, a coworking space, and a retail storefront. "We are a coalition made up of multiple organizations throughout the community," says Brandee Cooke-Brown, the executive director of 100K Ideas. "We work in collaboration with multiple [organizations] that make up our small business entrepreneurial ecosystem, as well as coordinating with other organizations around workforce development.

"This was a natural program for us to slide into," she adds. "In spaces where we're typically siloed, I think this is a good opportunity for us as a community to come together and work towards the same goal, to really create something that could be lasting—rooted in something that we all can say, 'This is tangible. This is something we need.'"

Cooke-Brown was particularly excited about the fellowship aspect of the Community Growth Academy. "As with most nonprofits, we're asked to move mountains with not many resources to move said mountains. The fact that the fellow was also a part of this was really appealing because. . . it was an opportunity to have someone come and support, lead, and build it."

That fellow ended up being Effie Alofoje-Carr, who has a background in public health and has worked in legal advocacy and maternal infant health, and at a community development financial institute in Detroit.



Jazmine Danci, CEDAM host site supervisor; Mayra Pena, DCC fellow; Kambriana Crank, LEO community navigator; and Patrick Seick, CEDAM program manager, during a six-month check-in site visit to all 10 participating communities.



Ribbon cutting for the Downriver Community Conference's new building space.



Community Growth Fellows, left to right: Grace Knickerbocker, Alexie Milukhin, Brooke Hovenkamp, Chris Anderson, Mayra Pena, Brooklyn Bowman, Stefan Nielsen, Effie Alofoje-Carr, Heather Severance, Patrick Seick (CEDAM Program Manager), and Jeremiah Steen.

When Alofoje-Carr first learned of the Community Growth Fellowship, she says, "I jumped at it. Instinctively, I knew it was the right thing to do."

"Flint is a very special community," she adds. "They've weathered a lot of storms. When you consider the work of economic development and what Flint has gone through, things [like] COVID and the water crisis, there is a nice public health intersection."

As a Community Growth Fellow, Alofoje-Carr functions as an information gatherer, connector, introducer, and point person between 100K Ideas and the many other stakeholders involved in the Flint coalition, all supporting small business and workforce development. No two days are alike for her: "Oftentimes I'm doing research: Who should I be connecting with next? How should I approach them?"

While many of the stakeholders Alofoje-Carr speaks to are institutions, such as the City of Flint and her alma mater, Michigan State University, "I'm [also] talking to individuals who are just regular-degular old Flint residents," she says. "I run into somebody at the Flint Farmers Market: 'Do you have a bit of time to tell me what you think about what's going on in your community and what's going on with education, workforce, public health?'"

"Having that feedback from our community really strengthens the lens and view of what the Transition Office is doing," she adds. "We want our coalition to make sure our residents are front and center of any work that's happening."

A major aspect of Alofoje-Carr's work is ensuring that work doesn't get siloed or isolated across stakeholders. Many of the organizations she speaks to, she finds, hadn't realized the work was happening in Flint, even in offices that are right down the road from them. By serving as a connector representing CEDAM rather than any one local organization, she can ensure that the work of the Community Growth Academy is more than the sum of its parts.

"The more that I can bring people together—connect folks and have conversations—the better it's going to get for the citizens who are living and working and playing in the city," she says.

"For so long, Michigan communities have gone it alone, trying to learn how to respond to these transitions," says Seick. "What the Academy is hoping to do is put these communities in contact with each other for collaboration purposes, and then to combine that coalition-building with the resources and know-how of the state."

The fellows' terms are up in March, but LEO's involvement with the Community Growth Academy communities will continue. Each of the 10 fellows will prepare a final report outlining accomplishments, recommendations, and work that remains. Success will be measured against benchmarks tailored to each community's goals, including progress on specific initiatives and whether the partnerships, strategies, and organizational structures developed through the Academy have the stability and momentum to continue after the formal program ends.

The experience and feedback from Academy communities will also be used to refine the *Community Transition Playbook*. Forrest expects to update the *Playbook* regularly, initially about twice a year, while incorporating lessons into its annual reports to the Legislature and a required statewide economic transition strategy.

The Community and Worker Economic Transition Office hopes to see another cohort of the Community Growth Academy next year, with new communities and new fellows. Plans are currently to send out RFPs this winter, with the second "class" of the Academy beginning in the spring. Forrest wishes to see new communities taking part; ones that haven't yet been a part of these economic redevelopment conversations.

Alofoje-Carr, the Flint fellow, hopes that getting the word out will bring more stakeholders into the fold, so that resources can be pooled and augmented further: "The more we commune, the more [I hear], We're so glad that you're here at the table,'" she says.

"I feel tremendously privileged to work with the fellows," says Seick. "This is a new program. A lot of these folks have had to relocate. A lot of them have had to learn about these communities. They've stepped up to the challenge.

"It really does reflect the kind of spirit we're going to need if Michigan is going to continue to be on the upward trajectory."

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

Mika Meyers
Attorneys



MUNICIPAL LAW

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

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

mikameyers.com

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



We Know Local Government Matters

R S J A

ROSATI | SCHULTZ
JOPPICH | AMTSBUECHLER

Our team of 32 experienced municipal lawyers is ready to help you!

Municipal General Counsel
Civil Litigation & Appeals
Code Enforcement & Prosecution

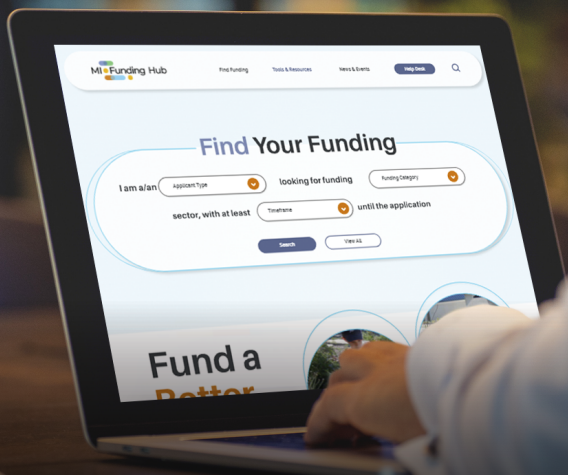
RSJALAW.COM
Farmington Hills: 248-489-4100
Lansing: 517-886-3800

MI Funding Hub

Fund a better way!

MI Funding Hub is a robust online resource that provides information on grants and funding opportunities, as well as tools for municipalities to successfully execute projects.

Learn more at mifundinghub.org



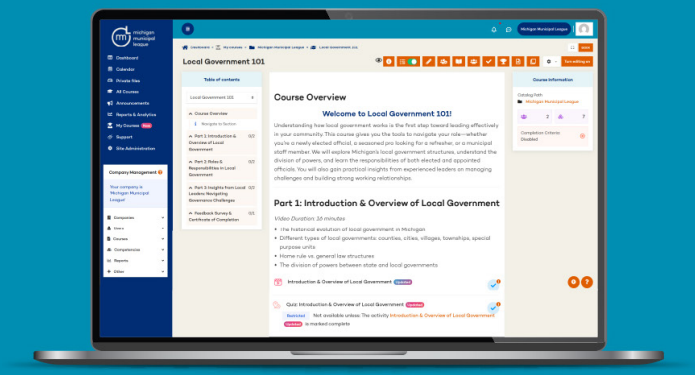
michigan municipal league

The MI Funding Hub is a joint venture of The Michigan Municipal League and The Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity.

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

michigan municipal league

Online Learning with the League



Online, on-demand courses designed to meet the busy schedules of local leaders in the places we love: our Michigan communities.

Our diverse course offerings—covering topics from local government basics to finance, ethics, lobbying, and more—are available 24/7 so you can access the training you need, exactly when you need it.

Each course is broken into bite-sized segments, allowing you to learn at your own pace and easily revisit content whenever you need a refresher.

PRICING

- $85 member / $135 non-member

CURRENT AVAILABLE COURSES

- Ethics, Civility, and Public Leadership
- FOIA & OMA Essentials
- Housing TIF Highlights with Allen Edwin Homes
- Lobbying for Local Leaders
- Local Economies: Microbusiness Best Practices
- Local Government 101
- Strategic Insights for Local Government Finance
- Thriving Communities 101
- Unlocking Michigan's Housing Potential: Adaptive Reuse and House Hacking Strategies

Sign up today or scan this QR code to learn more information.

We love where you live.



Neighbor 2 Neighbor program cases are managed through Citizens Mediation Service in St. Joseph.

Talking It Out, Neighbor 2 Neighbor



By Emily Pinsuwan

When people have an issue, sometimes the best solution is to just talk about it.

That's the idea behind the City of St. Joseph's Neighbor 2 Neighbor (N2N) program, which, for a $25 fee, works to help residents of Berrien County resolve neighborly disputes—ones not governed by zoning or city codes—before tensions escalate to an already busy court system.

The idea is to "put the resolution to the issue in the hands of the people who have the issue," says Jenny Miner, executive director at Citizens Mediation Service, a six-county nonprofit that administers the N2N program for Berrien County.

Mediation is a form of structured dispute resolution, moderated by a trained, impartial third party. It's often used in workplace disputes and family matters, such as divorce. The N2N practice takes that into everyday neighborhood conflicts. "People may be frustrated about noise or boundaries or fences," says Miner. "[Mediation can be an] appropriate format to try to resolve that issue without going into, 'What does the City say? What do attorneys say?' Instead, it's about, How. . . do you guys want to resolve this as neighbors?"

Every county in Michigan has a dispute resolution center funded through the Department of Justice. While the N2N program is specific to Berrien County, "I would say that if anybody called any one of them, they would help with a neighbor-to-neighbor dispute," says Miner.

Residents can call N2N directly, or they might be pointed in that direction by law enforcement or municipal officials. "We have little cards that our police carry around that can refer people to us," says Miner. If an irritated neighbor calls the police over a relatively minor issue like a dog barking or excessive noise next door, "it gives them something to leave with people rather than saying, 'Look, there's not a whole lot we can do about the dog,' which is a tough situation for them to be in."

"The biggest fit for us has been in our rental department," says Clint Levi, a building inspector for the City of St. Joseph, which has both a property maintenance and a residential rental program. "Especially for our small municipality—I think we're like four square miles, and we've got almost two thousand rentals. So, landlord-tenant disputes come up quite often."

While the City can respond if the issue involves an actual violation, he often hears about smaller issues, like tenants wanting to break their lease. "[They] want to know what we can do for them, and truthfully, the answer is very little. That's when I refer them to the Neighbor 2 Neighbor program. It's much easier than to tell someone who's renting here to hire a lawyer and pursue action that way."

Citizens Mediation handles about 20 N2N cases every year for the City of St. Joseph. Mediators are all volunteers who have received 40 hours of training approved by the State Court Administrator. "It's a really cool concept," says Miner. "You have local people from your local community helping to mediate and resolve those local disputes."

Different mediators run the process differently, but the overall role is to facilitate a conversation about the dispute. Both parties air their grievances, respectfully. "If it's a noise violation, it might be, 'How. . . does this noise at this time at night impact your day or your ability to do the things that are important to you?'" says Miner. "But really, it's about, 'How. . . would you like to resolve this? What would you like to see?'" Once each party can put that out onto the table, then we start to mold that, see if we can land on something that everybody can live with."

Fences and trees are other common friction points for residents. "We get disputes over fences all the time: It's in the wrong place, or it's too tall, or I don't want a fence," says Levi. "There's not much I can do about that. Neighbor 2 Neighbor is the name of the program—and you guys are neighbors."

One incident involved a tree that was very close to the property line. The more it matured, the more it became a nuisance for the neighbor next door, with low hanging branches and roots growing into the garage, disturbing the foundation. "Before someone does something silly and cuts it down and gets in trouble," says Levi, "this is another good time where they can sit down, neighbor to neighbor, and come up with a resolution."

Once a resolution is reached, both parties sign a mediation agreement. Everything that is said during mediation is confidential and cannot be used against either party, even if the agreement were to fall through and the matter taken to court.

Sometimes, mediation can only achieve a partial agreement. "That's always nice, because at least there's some part that we can agree on," says Miner. "There's always a starting point there: Well, hey, we agreed on this. Let's see what else we can find."

And if there is no agreement? "We always reserve that right to allow you to come back to mediation if that's something you want to do," says Miner. N2N will also inform the City of St. Joseph of the ongoing issue. "I will say," she adds, "We find that once people can come to a table and talk together, sometimes that dispute—whether we have an agreement or not—tends to release a little bit."

Levi, the building inspector with the City, agrees. "I've had a few people call me back and say, 'Hey, that was really helpful,'" he says. "It's been really nice. It just gives people in the area here a sense that there is something that they can do."

Such is the heart of mediation, and the heart of the N2N program: Face-to-face dialogue that acknowledges the human. "Once someone hears what somebody else is thinking," says Miner, "We might be able to be a little more sensitive to it."

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



FROM ASSESSMENT TO ACTION

Wightman is your proven partner for long-term success.

Managing facilities means balancing today's needs with tomorrow's plans. A facility condition assessment (FCA) from Wightman provides you with a clear, objective understanding of the current state of your buildings and infrastructure so you can move forward with confidence.





The Law Firm For
MUNICIPALITIES

CAPITAL PROJECTS & INFRASTRUCTURE
CONSTRUCTION AGREEMENTS & LITIGATION
DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/INCENTIVES
ELECTIONS
ENVIRONMENTAL & REGULATORY LAW
HOSPITALS & HOUSING
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENTS
LABOR & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS
LOCAL, STATE & FEDERAL TAX
OMA/FOIA
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS
REAL ESTATE
STATE/FEDERAL GRANT PROGRAMS
TAX INCREMENT FINANCING

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

DETROIT ANN ARBOR TROY LANSING KALAMAZOO GRAND RAPIDS TRAVERSE CITY CHICAGO

MILLER CANFIELD

millercanfield.com/PublicLaw

Employee Discipline Best Practices Can Improve Performance and Minimize Liability

By Erik G. Bradberry and Joshua J. Trombley

michigan municipal league | business alliance program

Plunkett Cooney

Plunkett Cooney, PC is a full-service law firm with more than 113 years of experience providing municipalities with successful legal representation and quality client service.

Elected and appointed officials play important roles in their communities. One role that often receives little attention until a pressing need arises involves overseeing how the public entity functions as an employer, including how it addresses employee performance and conduct. Getting this right promotes a fair workplace, builds public trust, and protects the community from costly lawsuits.

Understanding At-Will Employment in Michigan

Michigan is an "at-will" employment state, meaning either the employer or employee can generally end the employment relationship at any time, for any lawful reason. But even in an at-will state, employers must be mindful of important limitations on that flexibility.

First, federal and state anti-discrimination statutes—including Title VII, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act—prohibit employment decisions based on race, religion, sex, disability, and other protected classes.

Second, laws such as the Whistleblower Protection Act shield employees from retaliation when they engage in protected activities, like reporting suspected legal violations. Judicial constructs similarly protect employees from discharge that violates public policy.

Third, contractual protections might alter an at-will relationship. Employees in a bargaining unit may be governed by a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) that requires "just cause" for termination and dictates the disciplinary steps that must occur beforehand. Likewise, appointed officials might have a contract specifying the grounds for termination.

Because these limits on at-will employment frequently generate litigation, understanding how to avoid claims through best practices is among an employer's strongest defenses.

Building a Strong Foundation with Policies and Handbooks

Every effective discipline program starts with clear, written policies. Your employee handbook should address attendance, anti-harassment and anti-discrimination rules, safety, performance standards, complaint procedures, progressive discipline, and anti-retaliation protections. Every employee should receive a copy and sign an acknowledgment that they have read it.

A critical point: handbook language must be drafted carefully to avoid creating an implied contract. If your handbook states that employees will only be terminated for "just cause" or uses mandatory language like "shall" when describing discipline steps, a court may find the employer has surrendered its at-will flexibility. Best practice is to include an express at-will disclaimer, use permissive language such as "may" rather than "shall," and reserve the employer's right to skip steps when circumstances warrant.

Once drafted and adopted, employment policies should be reviewed on a regular basis and updated as necessary.

> *"The goal is to change conduct, not simply to punish, by communicating expectations clearly and enforcing them consistently."*

The Progressive Discipline Process

Progressive discipline is a structured approach that gives employees the opportunity to correct behavior before facing severe consequences. The goal is to change conduct, not simply to punish, by communicating expectations clearly and enforcing them consistently. By documenting these opportunities as they occur, employers create evidence they may need later to defend an employment decision.

A typical progression starts with verbal counseling, then proceeds to a written warning, a final written warning or suspension, and ultimately termination if improvement does not occur. Each step—even verbal counseling—should be documented.

For ongoing performance issues, a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) can be valuable. A PIP identifies the specific deficiency, outlines an action plan, sets measurable goals with a timeframe for improvement (commonly 30, 60, or 90 days), and establishes a schedule for progress reviews. Supervisors should document each review and gather sufficient data to determine whether the employee has met the PIP's goals.

Of course, progressive discipline is not appropriate in every case. Sometimes misconduct—such as violence, theft, or other intolerable conduct—warrants immediate discharge. Employers should ensure their policies afford the latitude needed to address such circumstances.

Documentation: An Employer's Best Defense

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of documentation to support employment decisions. Matters that end up in litigation often take years to resolve, and during that time, memories fade and decision makers move on. Documentation endures, and when it is specific, objective, and timely, it is among an employer's best defenses.

Documentation can also backfire if not done properly. Employers should avoid subjectivity. Consider the difference between "Mr. Smith failed to submit required reports on March 4th and March 11th," and "Mr. Smith is lazy and unmotivated." The first is objectively defensible while the second one invites debate.

Untimely records can backfire too. When an employer discharges an employee and then fills the personnel file with records of misconduct, the employee might argue that the records are pretextual—misrepresentations intended to mask discrimination or another unlawful motive. But where documentation is recorded in real time, employers can credibly point to it as a legitimate, non-discriminatory justification for their decision.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Inconsistency: Treating similar employees differently is one of the most significant sources of legal exposure because it can support claims of discrimination or disparate treatment. Require human resources or legal review before imposing serious discipline and document legitimate reasons for any differences in treatment.

Delays: Waiting too long to address problems often makes them worse and can lead to "stacking" multiple write-ups immediately before termination—a pattern that looks retaliatory or pretextual to a judge or jury.

Glossing over performance issues: Too often, performance evaluations will reflect that an employee is meeting expectations when, in fact, that isn't the case. Performance reviews should provide an accurate snapshot of an employee's performance, even when the truth leads to difficult conversations.

ABONMARCHE
ENGINEERING • ARCHITECTURE • LAND SURVEYING



Grand Rapids | Benton Harbor | Grand Haven | Kalamazoo
South Bend | Goshen | Hobart | Lafayette | Valparaiso | Fort Wayne

Learn More at:
abonmarche.com



Practical Steps for Elected Officials

Elected officials are unlikely to discipline employees or monitor their performance. However, as leaders and policymakers, they can take steps to set their communities up for success:

- Direct your HR staff or attorney to review and update employee handbooks regularly, ensuring proper at-will disclaimers and compliance with current Michigan law.
- Support a flexible discipline framework that empowers supervisors to respond proportionally rather than locking them into rigid, one-size-fits-all steps.
- Budget for regular supervisor training on consistent discipline, thorough documentation, and legal boundaries.
- Insist that every disciplinary action is documented promptly and thoroughly.
- Require consultation with employment counsel before terminations, particularly where protected activity, accommodation issues, or elevated legal risk is present.
- Ask for periodic reports on complaint trends, termination rationales, and manager consistency so problems are caught early.

Employee discipline may not be the most glamorous part of public service, but it is one of the most consequential. A thoughtful, well-documented, and consistently applied discipline process protects employees, shields your community from liability, and reflects the kind of fair governance the public expects from its leaders.

Erik G. Bradberry is a senior attorney with Plunkett Cooney. You may reach Erik at 248-433-7172 or ebradberry@plunkettcooney.com.

Joshua J. Trombley is a senior attorney with Plunkett Cooney. You may reach Joshua at 616-752-4617 or jtrombley@plunkettcooney.com.



PLANNING
DESIGN
BUILDING

MCKENNA

Your community has a vision. McKenna helps you make it real.

We work with local leaders, residents, and stakeholders to shape places where people truly thrive. We listen first, then bring the planning expertise, design insight, and building code discipline to turn your community's vision into lasting progress.

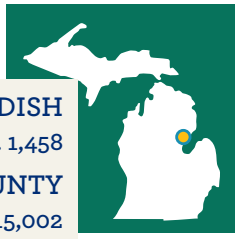
Communities built for real life start here.

MCKA.COM · 888.226.4326

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



From Spark to Park: Standish Debuts Its New Nature Trail



STANDISH
pop. 1,458
ARENAC COUNTY
pop. 15,002

By Emily Pinsuwan

It all started with a Spark (Grant).

In 2023, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reached out to 35 designated "opportunity communities," with—naturally—an opportunity.

Thanks to the Building Michigan Together Plan, signed by the governor in 2022, the Spark Grant program offered $30 million for "projects that provide safe, accessible, public recreation facilities and spaces to improve people's health, introduce new recreation experiences, build on existing park infrastructure and make it easier for people to enjoy both indoor and outdoor recreation," according to the DNR website. It is administered by the Council of Michigan Foundations.

One of those opportunity communities was the City of Standish. "We were singled out as not being 'patted on the back' in the past," says City Manager Brad Mason. "We were an underserved area in their eyes for their projects.

"So, they put us all at the front of the line."

A farming town and the seat of Arenac County, Standish is something of a pass-through for Michigan tourists, located at an intersection of roads leading to popular vacation towns like Tawas, Oscoda, and West Branch. "When you go off to college and tell people you're from Standish, they go, 'I drive through there,'" laughs Mason.

"Everybody drives through Standish."

The City didn't own any undeveloped land for which it could take advantage of the DNR's offer. However, Arenac County did: A 53-acre parcel, formerly a farm in the mid-20th century, off US-23, which it had originally purchased to relocate its fairgrounds. Because a subsequent Department of Energy, Great Lakes, and the Environment (EGLE) survey had shown a large quantity of wetlands on the site, development had been declared a no-go.

And so, the County agreed to sell the site to the City to develop a nature park and walking trail, courtesy of what would eventually be a $983,500 Spark Grant.

EGLE's delineation of the site took about four months in the spring of 2025, carefully guiding the plans for a mile-long loop of paved walking paths through elevated areas that didn't encroach upon any marshes. "A walking trail is a little less invasive," says Mason. "It's a lot less impactful on the area. So, I think they were all in favor of the idea." Plans were completed in November, and when things finally dried up in the spring, construction began.

"The crux of this grant is [the DNR] wanted the community involved," says Mason. "They wanted the community's thoughts and desires to be reflected in what we did." City staff wrote up surveys, mailing and emailing them out to every mailing list they had.

For his part, Mason brought a few dozen donuts to a Saturday morning basketball activity at one of the local schools, where his grandchildren were playing. "I set up a table, and I had my surveys there, and I just sat there as parents were coming in with their kids for basketball," he says. "I told them we were looking at building a park and wondered what kind of things they might like to see in it."



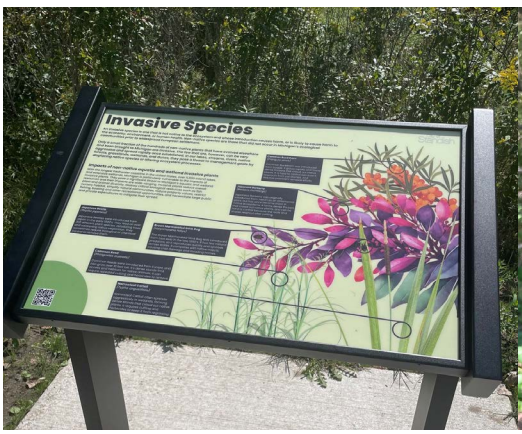
Standish Nature Trail and Park ribbon-cutting ceremony. Pictured left to right are Justin Fleszar, council member; Dennis Whitney, president of the Chamber of Commerce; Brad Mason, city manager; Kevin King, mayor; Melody Lincoln, city council member; and Jeff Link, mayor pro tem.



One of the most requested amenities for the upcoming park was a sledding hill for the winter months—something flat, farmland-heavy Standish lacked. Mason and Mayor Kevin King decided to concentrate all the dirt that had been moved to build the walking trails into a 20-foot-high pile just off the south side of the walking loop. In the winter, snow that's been removed from the walking trails will be packed on top of it for kids and families to use. The excavation worker in charge of it, from Beaverton-based Wilcox Contracting, collaborated with a friend who runs the ski hill Snow Snake to properly build and level the hill.

The City and EGLE erected educational signage along the walking trails discussing the ecology of wetlands, invasive species, and the different birds of prey that might be spotted circling above. Diane Morley of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe was heavily involved in promoting the park. "They want to do some more signage, some more stuff for the native plants, native species and stuff like that," says Mason. "[Morley is] very, very involved in our community, fundraising—you name it, Diane's involved in it."

"They're unbelievably supportive of our area—the Chippewa tribe," he adds. "They really are fantastic."







At the entrance to the park is a small pavilion and a bike tune-up station. “Our engineer came up with that,” says Mason. “I had never heard of such a thing, but it makes sense. I think it’s going to be active in the summer when we get people with bikes coming.” Planned developments include bathrooms, more trashcans and dog waste stations, an electrified gate to allow plows and emergency vehicles, and perhaps a second, larger pavilion towards the rear of the park.

The City also has an easement on the north side of the park and hopes to eventually construct a nonmotorized path straight to downtown. “We’d like to be able to tie in so that you’d be able to walk around the city and then walk all the way to the park,” says Mason.

After all the planning and construction, the Standish Nature Trail and Park had its ribbon-cutting ceremony in the waning days of August. The park is a quiet, peaceful place, surrounded by tall goldenrod, quaking aspen, and American burnweed. On a nice day, there will be plenty of residents walking their dogs, jogging, biking, or just sitting on the benches or leaning on the bridges, taking nature in.

“It’s funny—for three years, I’ve been talking about this thing everywhere you go, talking about this park,” says Mason. “The plan was for it to be a mile loop. Every time I gave that speech, I would say, ‘This is our starting point. It’s just a mile.’ It just seemed like we were building this little, tiny park.

“And then this spring once the asphalt started getting done and I got to walk back there . . . I was stunned. I had convinced myself that this thing was small. And then I saw how big it really was.”

Mason hopes seasonal travelers passing through Standish, heading to the beach or ski hill, will notice it too. “I can see people stopping, walking the dog, getting out of the car for a little bit on the way up to Oscoda or whatever,” he says.

In the meantime, the Standish Nature Trail and Park is already a huge hit with residents. “Every time I drive by, there’s two or three cars there,” says Mason. “It’s really neat doing something that made an impact for people—they’re happy about something that [the City] did.

“Standish is a small town. There’s not a ton of things to do. So just something like that—a little something nice in our community—it goes a long way with our folks.”

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



Can the City Manager Be a Public Body Subject to the OMA?

By Bill Mathewson

As is often said, the wheels of justice turn slowly. Fortunately, in a recent decision of the Michigan Supreme Court, when the wheels came to a rest, the outcome was favorable to League member communities.

In the spring 2025 *Review*, this column covered a 2024 decision of the Court of Appeals (COA) that could have been a troubling precedent, re the role of a city or village manager and the Open Meetings Act (OMA). The case, *Exclusive Capital Partners, LLC v. City of Royal Oak*, involved the Michigan Regulation and Taxation of Marihuana Act (MRTMA). The plaintiffs were two unsuccessful license applicants who argued that the City's process, involving the city manager, violated the Open Meetings Act (OMA).

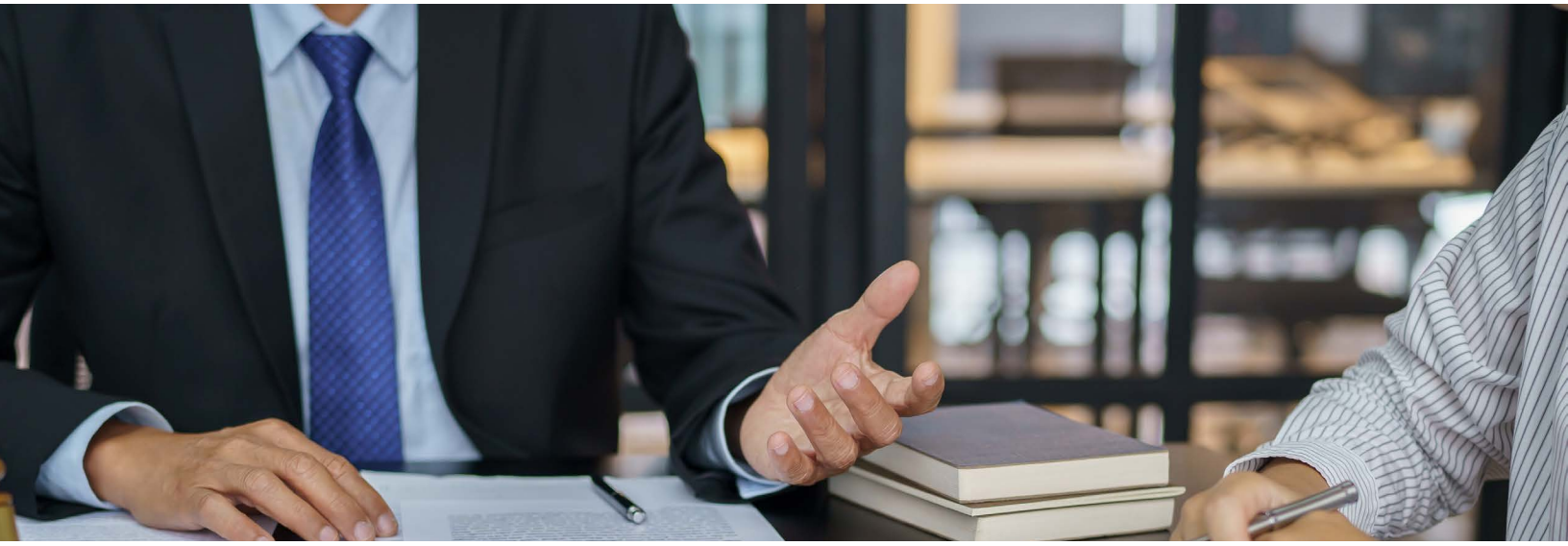
The manager applied the ordinance, with input from a workgroup. He reviewed all applications, based on 10 competitive criteria, and independently ranked the applicants.

The COA said the ordinance did not grant the city manager the authority to make the final decisions on who would be granted licenses. However, "[i]n practice. . . the city manager's role was not limited to administering the applications process and scoring the applicants: whichever applicants made it through the city manager's process received licenses. . . The minutes of the City Commission meeting. . . do not reflect any discussion of other applicants. Consequently, the city manager effectively selected who would receive the two recreational marijuana licenses." And thus, the COA determined that the manager's role met the definition of a "governing body," so was subject to the OMA, and the manager's workgroup meetings should have been open meetings.

On appeal to the Supreme Court, the City was supported by an amicus brief jointly filed by the MML Legal Defense Fund and the Government Law Section of the State Bar of Michigan. LDF briefs can make a critical difference in the reasoning of the Court as they bring the perspective of all cities and villages.

The amicus brief (prepared by Kerr, Russell and Weber, PLC) forcefully stated the problem created by the COA decision in such MRTMA cases: "What initially appeared to be benign rulings in the overall context of MRTMA litigation, has placed municipalities and their administrative officials in a precarious situation of running afoul of the OMA. Tasked with tending to the day-to-day operations of a municipality, individual executives and administrators require certainty that they may execute their daily duties without the constraints that the OMA places on public bodies charged with setting policy. The ruling by the Court of Appeals that an executive or administrative individual such as city manager can constitute a 'public body' for purposes of the OMA upends the balance between the public's right to be informed of policy decisions made by public bodies and the need for administrative officials to carry out those directives."

The Supreme Court, in a unanimous ruling written by Justice Zahra, provided a comprehensive analysis. It held, under these circumstances, the city manager did not have to comply with the OMA. "The city manager was acting in accordance with ordinance-based authority when ranking marijuana retail license applicants to receive license slots, and the marijuana ordinance does not itself qualify as a delegation of authority subject to the OMA." (This and following quotes are from the Court Syllabus.)



The Court further held that the city manager does not qualify as a "public body" under the OMA. The opinion explains that a governmental entity can qualify as a public body for OMA purposes through two pathways, including by falling within the statutory definition. Citing its 2000 decision in *Herold Co v. Bay City* (in which the MML LDF filed a brief), which was favorable to municipal interests, the Court states ". . .'public body' as used in the OMA connotes a collective entity and does not encompass individuals."

The second pathway is by being delegated authority from another public body. The Court again said the manager was not a public body. "In concluding otherwise, the Court of Appeals presumed that the city commission held original authority under the ordinance to decide among license applicants, but that the city manager was the de facto decision-maker in determining which applicants received licenses. However, the ordinance gives the city manager the power to decide among applicants, and the city commission has no role under the ordinance in ranking applicants. The Court of Appeals erred by concluding that the city commission delegated its authority under the marijuana ordinance to the city manager, thereby rendering him a 'public body'; instead, the city manager was acting alone in his official work capacity pursuant to an independent grant of authority and, therefore, was not subject to the OMA."

Finally, the Court also rejected Plaintiffs' alternative argument, that the ordinance itself constitutes a delegation of the city commission's general licensing authority given to it in the city charter.

The Court held that "[t]he OMA contemplates that some entities empowered by ordinance will be subject to the OMA" but that it is not an automatic delegation of authority subject to the OMA. "The OMA accommodates at least some entities empowered by ordinance that do not meet the definition of 'public body' subject to the OMA. . . Under plaintiffs' interpretation, every ordinance-based grant of authority would import the requirements of the OMA; the OMA should not be interpreted so broadly.

"While a delegation by ordinance might in some circumstances qualify as an OMA-subject delegation under the second pathway, according to *Booth Newspapers, Inc. v. Univ of Mich Bd of Regents* (1993) [again, the LDF filed an amicus brief], courts must analyze an empowering ordinance in the context of the OMA by asking whether the primary government entity has delegated any functions that it is required by law to do, whether the primary government entity's actions have the primary purpose of permitting that entity to evade the requirements of the OMA, and whether the public body has provided authority to a sub-quorum of its own members. . ." (As a cautionary note, municipalities should pay close attention to the details of both evasive intent in Booth Newspapers and the MRTMA procedure used by the city in *Pinebrook Warren, LLC v. City of Warren*.)

Now a half century old, Michigan's OMA (along with the Freedom of Information Act) continues to be a force for transparency in government. And courts continue to forcefully uphold its intent. Yet there is a balance to be struck. The Court here does this well, based on important precedent and a practical appreciation of local government operations. One nuanced step at a time, the decision reaches a conclusion. A conclusion that will be instructive to municipal attorneys and their clients in how government operations can best be conducted, how decisions should be made and by whom, and how to maintain adherence to the Open Meetings Act.

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

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.

"The principles and staff of Shifman Fournier are not only committed to addressing your legal needs; they work to see that your community succeeds as well."

Joseph Kuspa - Mayor City of Southgate



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

NOT JUST LEGAL ADVICE, THE RIGHT ADVICE

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

shifman fournier

In Delta & Schoolcraft Counties, High Schoolers Get Career-Ready



DELTA COUNTY
pop. 36,903
SCHOOLCRAFT COUNTY
pop. 8,047

By Emily Pinsuwan

High school projects can take a lot of forms: Community service, a school musical, a research paper. For some students in the Delta and Schoolcraft Counties' Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, that work might extend to helping construct a market-rate home.

Vocational and technical education has been a part of the districts' curriculum since the 1960s. About 367 students are expected at the Delta County Independent School District program this year, with roughly 120 participating in Schoolcraft County. Ninth graders tour the programs and take part in hands-on activities before deciding whether CTE might fit their interests.



Delta-Schoolcraft Intermediate School District Health Occupations students learn the art of suturing from local industry experts.

"It's all hands-on, so the teachers and the students do activities with the kids so they can see what it is," says Trent Bellinger, director of career and technical education for both Delta and Schoolcraft Counties.

"We try to get these kids early and [show] that there's a number of different paths for success after high school," says Andy Jacques, principal of Gladstone High School, which has facilities including a full wood shop, CNC machine shop, and spaces for automotive, small engine, and agriculture science classes. "We encourage them to dig in a little bit: 'Is this something that I want to do?'"



Automotive and Machining students build a race car each year and take it to Road America in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin, for the Formula High School racing competition.

The career tracks students can study in both counties include automotive technology, building trades, machining, welding, product design and development, IT essentials, and careers in education and health occupations. Students sometimes approach early in their high school careers with ideas of what they'd like to do after high school, and Bellinger tries to make it happen.

Bellinger uses the Japanese visual theory of *ikigai* (literally, "reason for being") to help students develop a sense of what they love, and how that overlaps with what they could do as a career. "We use that to help kids like, 'Okay, you're really good at these things, but those things probably aren't going to pay you money. So, what are the skills that you have that will pay you money?'"

These days, the Delta and Schoolcraft CTE programs are more or less equally split between boys and girls. "Twenty-five years ago, it was a little bit different, but now there's no real 'male or female' jobs anymore," says Jacques. "Everything is open to everybody. We really try to push that."

The curricula are guided by competencies established through the Michigan Office of Career and Technical Education. Students involved in the CTE programs can graduate with industry credentials. Gladstone schools include mock interviews



Students gather outside their newly completed student-built home in Escanaba.

Photo by Sophie Vogelmann, *The Daily Press*.

> *"We try to get these kids early and [show] that there's a number of different paths for success after high school."*

with employers through the Michigan College Access Network. "We tell [students], 'This is your chance to make mistakes,'" says Bellinger.

Even while still enrolled in their regular high school classes like English and chemistry, CTE students can get out into their communities for (sometimes paid) work placement. For a CNA student, this might mean shadowing or assisting at a hospital or rehab center. Automotive students might be changing oil or tires at a local body shop.

And, of course, building trades students do their part to help the local housing market. Jacques himself is an alum of Gladstone High's CTE program. "I graduated high school and immediately got a job offer building houses," he says. He continued working for his employer, Aaberg Contracting, throughout his college summer breaks.

Building trades students constructed roughly one house per year for decades before the housing downturn halted new home construction in 2008. That program just started back up again last year. "[During the downturn,] we couldn't continue to leverage the cost of building a home with, maybe, not selling it," says Bellinger. "But now there's such a want for new construction." CTE students completed their first new home in Escanaba at the end of May, and the district just signed a full price offer that will close in October.

"It's a good time to be building houses again," adds Bellinger.

When he was still a student, Jacques himself helped build a local two-story, three-bedroom, two-bathroom home. With teacher supervision, "We laid the cement, put the roof on, put the windows in." The home is still there and still occupied.

In addition to simply helping young people in Gladstone and Schoolcraft Counties find jobs, the districts have found that CTE programs can address student burnout and attendance issues. "We want to make sure they find something that connects them to our school, where they feel some pride; that gives them a sense of purpose and belonging; and is future-oriented," says Jacques.

"They learn about careers they maybe weren't aware of; it sparks their interest, and now they want to come to school."

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

michigan municipal league

People & Place Blog

Stories connecting where we are and where we wish to be, from Michigan's local officials and League staff.

Behind the scenes with people who are reimagining the possible and taking on transformative work because they love where they live.

Your Local Leaders Are Your Neighbors



From technical assistance in communities to training for local elected officials, your donation helps local leaders grow and give back. Because when they thrive, we all do.

Donate Today.

Municipal Q&A

By Kim Cekola

Q. Our city charter says our newly elected councilmembers take office on the first Tuesday following the election. Is this still true?

A. Michigan Public Acts 17–20 have been enacted in response to changes in voting laws requiring an extra six days after an election for overseas ballots to be counted. Thus, many charter provisions don't have a long enough gap after the election for the election to be certified. The new Act changes the earliest a city official can be sworn in to 12 p.m. on the first Tuesday of the month following the election (December 1 for everyone with an election in November). Officials that take office on January 1 according to their city charter, are not affected.

For villages, the same thing applies—the earliest a village official can be sworn in is 12 p.m. on December 1.

Q. Who can administer the oath of office to local government officials?

A. These are the positions that can administer oaths of office to all government officials:

City clerk, village clerk, county clerk, township clerk, clerk of the Court, judge, Supreme Court Justice, notary public, and State Senator or Representative.

Q. What is the oath of office?

A. The oath of office comes from the MI Constitution:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the constitution of this state, and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of . . . according to the best of my ability."

Q. What is a consent agenda?

A. A consent agenda is a parliamentary tool. It is a portion of a meeting agenda that contains routine items that do not need discussion. The whole group of items is approved in one motion and one roll call vote. In the minutes, the actions passed on the consent agenda are recorded individually and in full. If discussion of an item is desired, it can be removed from the consent agenda and discussed immediately after approval of the consent agenda or in its normal sequence on the agenda.

A consent agenda provision should be added to your municipality's rules of procedure if it is to be used to expedite business during a council meeting.

For example:

The mayor or a councilmember may request that an item be removed from the Consent Agenda to be acted upon separately as such item appears in order on the agenda. Items remaining on the Consent Agenda shall be approved, adopted, accepted, referred, etc. by motion of the council and a voice vote. Those items so approved under the heading Consent Agenda will appear in the council minutes in their proper form, e.g., resolution accepting grant deed or easement, approval or reports of departments or committees and related items.

Q. What is the League's RFP Sharing Service?

A. League members can use the League's Business Alliance Program (BAP) to help get their RFPs to more prospective bidders. The BAP is a collection of companies that specialize in serving the municipal marketplace. To get your RFP distributed, email a PDF version of the RFP or bid specifications to rpfsharing@mml.org and we'll include your RFP in the next email update to BAP participants.

DPW Directors Forum

The League has started something new—an online forum for DPW directors. This discussion space is available only to League member public works/public services directors. Looking for advice? New perspectives? Just want to connect with fellow Department of Public Works/Public Services professionals throughout Michigan? The DPW Directors Forum is the place to stay engaged. The DPW Directors Forum can be accessed via the League Portal at my.mml.org.

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.

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



Municipal Finance

By Anthony Minghine

You have been elected to serve in your community.

Congratulations! Now you find yourself on the governing body, or maybe the chief elected official, of a multifaceted, multimillion-dollar organization. Even if you are accustomed to corporate accounting for business, the same rules do not apply for governmental accounting and budgeting. Trying to sort this all out in a magazine article can be difficult, but we will try to give you a foundation to build on. Your best resources are the management, finance, and audit professionals in your local government. They will have a deep understanding of your particular circumstance. What follows won't make you a municipal finance expert, but it will give you insight into the types of issues you will be faced with in your role.

Success Is Different Than in a Business

First, understand the business of the city or village.

A municipality is a nonprofit service-based industry, and profit-based manufacturing techniques rarely apply. Success or failure of a program isn't measured in income or return on investment but more likely on service levels or residents served. Running government like a business may be a great catch phrase, but it can be a formula for disaster if you misapply that mindset. Looking for efficiencies like a business is appropriate; using income as a service evaluator typically is not.

Adopting the Budget

Adopting a budget for your general fund and special revenue funds is required to be done every year by Public Act 2 of 1968, the Uniform Budgeting and Accounting Act, and there are a few things to be cognizant of when doing so. First, you may not adopt a budget that is in deficit; a budget is deemed to be in deficit if the annual expenditures exceed the revenues for that year, plus the projected ending fund balance. Second, the budget creates the legal financial authority to operate. Without a properly adopted budget, the operations of the municipality shut down.

Setting Tax Rates

During this same time, the council will be asked to set tax rates. The two biggest influences on this process are Headlee and Proposal A, which were passed as separate constitutional amendments. They both enact tax limitations but do so in different and conflicted ways. Headlee requires local governments to "roll back" a community's maximum millage rates if tax growth exceeds inflation. It does not impact the levy unless a community is at its max (see chart), and many communities are, so be aware. Prop A limits tax revenues by limiting the value of growth on individual parcels to inflation or five percent, whichever is less. Ironically, the combination

FORM OF GOV'T	MILLAGE	AUTHORITY	LIMITATIONS
Home Rule City	General Operating	**Home Rule City Act, 1909 PA 279, MCL 117.3g** Each city charter shall provide for: The annual laying and collecting taxes in a sum, except as otherwise provided by law, not to exceed 2% of the taxable value of the real and personal property in the city. Unless the charter provides for a different tax rate limitation, the governing body of a city may levy and collect taxes for municipal purposes in a sum not to exceed 1% of the taxable value of the real and personal property in the city.	Charter (charter sets the limit—either at the statutory limit of 20 mills or a lesser number)
Fourth Class City	General Operating	**Fourth Class City Act, 1895 PA 215, MCL 110.5** The aggregate amount which the council may raise by general tax upon the taxable real and personal property in the city for the purpose of defraying the general expenses and liabilities of the corporation, and for all purposes for which the several general funds mentioned in section 3 of this chapter are constituted (exclusive of taxes for schools and school house purposes) shall not, except as herein otherwise provided, exceed in 1 year 1 1/2%.	15.0 mills
Home Rule Village	General Operating	**Home Rule Village Act, 1909 PA 278, MCL 78.26Gi** A village shall not do any of the following: (i) Lay or collect taxes for municipal purposes except as otherwise provided by law, at a rate in excess of 2% of the assessed value of all real and personal property in the village.	Charter (charter sets the limit—either at the statutory limit of 20 mills or a lesser number)
General Law Village	General Operating Highway and Street Cemetery Maintenance	**General Law Village Act, 1895 PA 3, MCL 69.1(2)** **General Law Village Act, 1895 PA 3, MCL 69.2** **General Law Village Act, 1895 PA 3, MCL 69.4**	• 12.5 mills • 5.0 mills for general street and highway purposes • 1.0 mill for general maintenance of

of Headlee and Prop A can result in less than inflationary tax growth. To better understand this important issue, check out the fact sheet on Headlee Rollback and Headlee Override on mml.org.

Be sure to understand the additional legal requirements that exist in your community for things like adopting and amending a budget, making large purchases, setting millage rates, setting water and sewer rates, etc. For a home rule city or home rule village, you will have to comply with both state law and your charter. This can be further impacted by local ordinance requirements or bond covenants. Not understanding these limitations can put you afoul of the law, despite best intentions.

Utility Rates

If your community has a water and sewer system, setting water and sewer rates is one of the more important actions that you will need to undertake. Keep in mind that this is a utility, and properly setting rates to cover the real cost of the system is absolutely necessary. While not adjusting rates may seem politically expedient, it is critically important. If rates aren't set appropriately, you are potentially undercharging, overcharging, charging the wrong user group, negatively impacting the general fund, or possibly all of the above. Understanding the real cost of service delivery and setting correct rates and charges is vital to your community's financial health.

Governmental Accounting

It is also important to understand that local government uses a different basis of accounting than you might see in a corporate environment. Local government follows the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) rules, and uses fund accounting, which breaks the financial record into different areas based on several factors. Most municipality and village operations will be found in the general fund, where general tax revenues are recognized and general operation expenditures are charged. It has the fewest restrictions on how funds can be used. You will also encounter special revenue funds, which, as the name implies, has a special revenue source, and funds are used for a special purpose. Your major and local road funds are an example of a special revenue fund. Enterprise funds are used for more business-type activities, like your water and sewer system. Understanding the differences is important to effectively manage your community's finances. As you can see, there are numerous factors to be considered when plotting a financial course for your community.

No one comes into office knowing all the things they need to. The best advice I can give is to avail yourself of training opportunities through the League and others. A good place to start is our Newly Elected Officials training, Elected Officials Academy program, or online learning. All three address a variety of topics to aid elected officials in carrying out their duties. I hope this helped to shed a little light on a complicated subject. If you have specific questions, you can always direct them to our inquiry service at info@mml.org.

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

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE®

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)

1. Publication Title	2. Publication Number	3. Filing Date
THE REVIEW	3 4 5 - 4 0 0	10/01/2026
4. Issue Frequency	5. Number of Issues Published Annually	6. Annual Subscription Price
QUARTERLY	4 ISSUES	League Mbr Benefit - $24.00

7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication *(Not printer) (Street, city, county, state, and ZIP+4®)*
1675 GREEN RD. ANN ARBOR, WASHTENAW, MI 48105-2530
Contact Person: MONICA DRUKIS
Telephone *(Include area code)*: (734) 662-3246

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher *(Not printer)*
1675 GREEN RD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2530

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor *(Do not leave blank)*
Publisher *(Name and complete mailing address)*
MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE 1675 GREEN RD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2530

Editor *(Name and complete mailing address)*
ARIEL RYAN 1675 GREEN RD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2530

Managing Editor *(Name and complete mailing address)*
JESSICA WEIRAUCH 1675 GREEN RD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2530

10. Owner *(Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.)*

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE	1675 GREEN RD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2530
A NON-PROFIT CORP OF MICHIGAN CITIES, VILLAGES, AND	
URBAN TOWNSHIPS OF WHICH THE PRINCIPAL OFFICER IS	
JENNIFER ANTEL, MAYOR, WAYLAND; PRESIDENT	

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box → ☑ None

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address

12. Tax Status *(For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates) (Check one)*
The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes:
☑ Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months
☐ Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months *(Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)*

PS Form **3526**, July 2014 *(Page 1 of 4 (see instructions page 4))* PSN: 7530-01-000-9931 **PRIVACY NOTICE:** See our privacy policy on *www.usps.com*.

13. Publication Title: THE REVIEW	14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: 10/01/2026	
15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	**Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months**	**No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date**
a. Total Number of Copies *(Net press run)*	1850	1800
b. Paid Circulation *(By Mail and Outside the Mail)* (1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	1441	1643
(2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 *(Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)*	30	41
(3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®	NONE	NONE
(4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)	NONE	NONE
c. Total Paid Distribution *[Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4)]* ▶	1471	1684
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution *(By Mail and Outside the Mail)* (1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	138	0
(2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541	12	0
(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)	NONE	NONE
(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail *(Carriers or other means)*	NONE	NONE
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution *(Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3) and (4))*	150	0
f. Total Distribution *(Sum of 15c and 15e)* ▶	1621	1684
g. Copies not Distributed *(See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page #3))* ▶	229	116
h. Total *(Sum of 15f and g)*	1850	1800
i. Percent Paid *(15c divided by 15f times 100)* ▶	90.75	100

16. Electronic Copy Circulation
NO PAID ELECTRONIC COPIES
☑ **I certify that 50% of all my distributed copies (electronic and print) are paid above a nominal price.**

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership
☑ If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed ☐ Publication not required.
In the 11/01/2026 issue of this publication.

18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: JESSICA WEIRAUCH, MANAGING EDITOR — Jessica Weirauch — Date: 10/01/2026

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

PS Form **3526**, July 2014 *(Page 2 of 4)*

MI Funding Hub: Investing in Michigan's Grant Access Infrastructure

By Shanna Draheim

Every year, billions of dollars in state and federal funding resources are available to support local infrastructure, parks and trails, technology, community revitalization and more. But many Michigan local governments, particularly small and rural communities, routinely tell us that they lack the staff capacity and technical expertise needed to identify, track, and pursue those opportunities.

The MI Funding Hub was created to address this challenge.

Launched in 2024 through a partnership between the Michigan Municipal League and the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, MI Funding Hub is one of only a very few statewide grant portals in the country that combine both state and federal funding opportunities in one platform. Gone are the days of searching dozens of individual agency websites to find what funding opportunities they might have available—MI Funding Hub has it all in one place for free.

Today, it serves as Michigan's centralized grant access infrastructure, helping communities find, understand, and pursue funding opportunities more effectively. Through the MI Funding Hub program, the League is ensuring that every Michigan community, regardless of size, staffing, or geography, has a fair opportunity to compete for the resources needed to thrive.

Proven Demand. Growing Impact.

Since launching, we have continued to make improvements to the MI Funding Hub portal, partnering with a small Michigan business to use their AI tool to populate the funding database, adding resources to help communities become "grant ready," and keeping you up to date with relevant events and funding announcements. In just two years, use of MI Funding Hub has surged.

Number of monthly users	***+200% since 2024***
Monthly site views	***+97% since 2024***
Total click throughs to individual grant opportunities	***+389% since AI automation of grants in mid-2025***
Total site users	***>75,000 since launch in mid-2024***

> *"The MI Funding Hub has been an invaluable tool for our city, showing us three separate grants in 2025 that we were able to pursue immediately. I'm not sure we would have even found these opportunities if not for the Funding Hub."* - *Ben Wieland, City of Saginaw*

At any given time, users can access information on hundreds of active, locally relevant grant opportunities, all updated regularly and presented through an intuitive, user-friendly interface. Local leaders consistently describe the platform as a critical resource, particularly for communities with limited staffing and grant-writing capacity. Almost three-quarters of surveyed site users said the MIFundinghub.org website has been helpful to them in their grant search!

The MFH program also offers a short bi-monthly newsletter that highlights current and upcoming grant opportunities and a bi-monthly webinar series that hosts state and other partners to share information and answer questions about their grant programs.

Now is the time.

Are you ready to get beyond just wishing you could build that new trail, upgrade your public infrastructure, or invest in community placemaking? It's time to visit (or revisit) MIFundingHub.org to help make those projects a reality!

MI Funding Hub is not just helping communities find grants—it's helping Michigan capture opportunity! Now is the time to use it.

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





Microgrants with Unlimited Potential

Bridge Builders Microgrants offer small, one-time grants to people or organizations within Michigan Municipal League communities. These microgrants fund collaborative, creative projects that bring people out of their homes and into their communities!

Does your downtown have a vacant lot, a story to celebrate, or a local artist ready to transform storefronts? Apply for a Bridge Builders Microgrant and make it happen!

foundation michigan municipal league | BRIDGE BUILDERS

LCCF LAPEER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION 30 YEARS 1996-2026
Give today. Impact tomorrow.

mmlfoundation.org

Michigan Municipal League
1675 Green Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

michigan municipal league

Upcoming League & Affiliate Trainings

Ongoing
League Online Learning Courses
Virtual

October 15, 2026
MI Funding Hub October Webinar
Virtual

November 18, 2026
Filling in the Gaps: The Ins and Outs of Infill Housing Development Webinar
Virtual

December 3, 2026
Newly Elected Officials (NEO) Training
Lansing

January 21, 2027
Newly Elected Officials (NEO)
Virtual

January 26–29, 2027
MME Winter Institute
Kalamazoo

February 13, 2027
Newly Elected Officials (NEO)
Virtual

February 26–27, 2027
EOA Winter Core & Advanced Summit
Virtual

March 9, 2027
MAMA Advanced Institute
Lansing

April 20–21, 2027
CapCon & Legislative Action Day
Lansing

May 7–8, 2027
EOA Spring Core & Advanced Summit
Bay City

June 25–26, 2027
MAMA/GLS Joint Education Event
Holland

Find a full list of trainings and events at mml.org/events.