

# MICHIGAN COUNTIES

Wayne County officials have high hopes for two new development programs — one aimed at small businesses, the other at workforce development — using millions from American Rescue Plan funds.



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MICHIGAN COUNTIES (ISSN 0896-646)

**Published By:** Michigan Association of Counties  
110 W. Michigan Ave., Suite 200, Lansing, MI 48933

**Editor:** Derek Melot, [melot@micounties.org](mailto:melot@micounties.org)

**Design:** Tandem Studios, [www.gotandem.biz](http://www.gotandem.biz)

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# Letter from the Executive Director



A stylized black ink signature of Stephan W. Currie.

**STEPHAN W. CURRIE**  
MAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**“As executive director, I work for the MAC Board of Directors, a 16-member group of county commissioners who are selected by their fellow county commissioners for this role.”**

In just a couple of weeks from when you are reading this, MAC will hold its annual Board elections at the 2022 Annual Conference. These elections happen every year, of course, but circumstances have formed that make this year’s elections especially important.

First, allow me to go over the basics of how MAC is governed on a day-to-day basis.

As executive director, I work for the MAC Board of Directors, a 16-member group of county commissioners who are selected by their fellow county commissioners for this role.

For this purpose, MAC divides Michigan into six regions (see map at right). Each region is assigned two director slots to fill. There are also three at-large seats and a seat assigned to Wayne County.

Board members serve three-year terms and can have up to three of them, for a total period of service of nine years. In fact, Bob Showers of Clinton County (Region 4) will be finishing up his nine years of service at the end of the Annual Conference. Bob’s seat is one of six that will be filled in Port Huron in caucuses on Monday, Sept. 19. Yes, six seats, out of a total of 16. This election will have a big impact.

And the only way that you, as a county commissioner, can participate in these decisions is to register for and attend the Annual Conference.

Once there, you will, at the scheduled time, report to your regional caucus room for voting. If the seat is a regional one, each county represented casts a single vote. So, if, say, there are three of you from your county attending, the three of you discuss and decide which candidate will get your one vote. For at-large seats, each individual commissioner casts one vote in the caucus. Majority rules.

This year, Regions 4, 5 and 6 have the most work to do, with Regions 4 and 6 voting on both of their regional seats and Region 5 on one of their seats. All regions, though, will participate in filling the at-large seat.

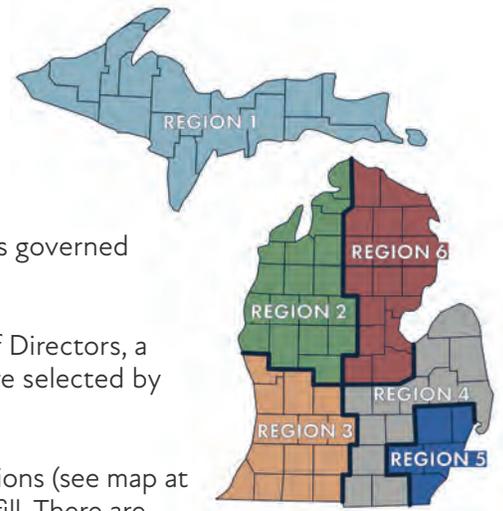
A few years ago, MAC members changed our by-laws so that candidates must file at least 30 days prior to the conference to be eligible. To see the candidates and information about them, please visit our website, [micounties.org](http://micounties.org).

And while you are there, please also review the policy platform drafts that members will also vote on at the Annual Conference.

These platforms are developed each year by our policy committees, then reviewed by the Board. After approval by members at the conference, they become our guiding documents for our advocacy work in Lansing and Washington, D.C.

So, with these two actions (Board elections and platform votes), the Annual Conference each year is truly the most important time for MAC, your membership association.

If you have registered to attend, thank you. If you haven’t, there’s still time. Just go to our website and follow the prompts and I, and the rest of the MAC team, will see you in St. Clair County! ♦



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# Letter from the President



*Phil Kuyers*

**PHIL KUYERS**  
PRESIDENT, MAC BOARD OF  
DIRECTORS

**“As I depart as your president next month, I also will issue you a challenge: Get involved. Apply for a committee. Make the MAC website and emails a regular part of your reading. Attend MAC events. Ask questions at them. Talk to your peers.”**

In my first address as president, I said we were in a singular moment as county commissioners because of such society-shaking events as the pandemic and the response to it, both in policy and financially. And I challenged us to commit to civility and unity to get things done.

I’m pleased to report some good news.

Over the last year, MAC has succeeded in:

- Getting four-year terms enacted for county commissioners, starting in the 2024 elections
- Gaining the largest revenue sharing boost (for FY23) in recent memory
- Returning to in-person events to enhance member education and networking
- Expanding our advocacy team to build upon recent accomplishments

Not too shabby.

In his bimonthly report to you (page 3), Executive Director Stephan Currie discusses the final step in our annual policy platform process each year, the all-important member vote at the Annual Conference in September. And, by the way, if you haven’t registered, please do so ASAP.

I’m going to address the other end of that equation, which begins in a few short weeks: the work of MAC’s six policy committees and how you become a part of it.

One of my duties as your president has been to approve requests to serve on these policy committees, which meet generally between October and May. Each January, new members are added to committees based on applications you submit year-round. In other words, if you want to be on a committee, you have to apply.

And more of you need to do so. I had the MAC staff run some figures and, as of August, there was at least one person from 42 counties on one of the six policy committees. How can we help our staff understand all the perspectives of county government in Michigan if only half of us are in the room?

So, as I depart as your president next month, I also will issue you a challenge: Get involved. Apply for a committee. Make the MAC website and emails a regular part of your reading. Attend MAC events. Ask questions at them. Talk to your peers.

We are all in this together. So let’s get together and get to work. ♦



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## Comedian to entertain at 2022 President's Banquet

Chris Young, a comedian who has performed across Michigan and was a finalist in Dave Coulier's "Clean Guys of Comedy/Unbleepable Contest," will be the after-dinner entertainer at the 2022 President's Banquet on Sept. 20.



YOUNG

The banquet is the final event of the 2022 Michigan Counties Annual Conference, to be held Sept. 18-21 at the Blue Water Convention Center in Port Huron. Registration continues for the event, which will include:

- Four plenary sessions featuring key issues now before Michigan and a MAC Legislative Update
- 12 breakout sessions for MAC members and 6 workshops for MCMCFC members
- A Welcome Reception and Strolling Dinner on the evening of Sunday, Sept. 18
- A lavish President's Banquet on the night of Tuesday, Sept. 20
- Plenty of free time in the afternoons for attendees to enjoy sights and sounds of Port Huron, including the St. Clair River

Early-bird pricing of \$395 for members continues through Sept. 2, so act fast.

To register and for complete conference details, visit [micounties.org/2022-michigan-counties-annual-conference](https://micounties.org/2022-michigan-counties-annual-conference).

## MAC thanks members for payments

MAC began a new member year on July 1, 2022, with the issuance of annual dues statements. These dues to members help MAC provide event, educational and advocacy services to more than 600 county commissioners across Michigan.

MAC wishes to thank the following members who have sent in their dues for this member year (as of Aug. 19):

Alcona, Allegan, Alpena, Barry, Benzie, Calhoun, Cheboygan, Clare, Clinton, Dickinson, Eaton, Emmet, Gogebic, Grand Traverse, Gratiot, Hillsdale, Huron, Ionia, Iron, Isabella, Jackson, Lapeer, Leelanau, Lenawee, Livingston, Luce, Manistee, Mason, Menominee, Midland, Monroe, Montmorency, Oceana, Ogemaw, Osceola, Oscoda, Ottawa, Presque Isle, Roscommon, St. Clair, Tuscola, Van Buren, Washtenaw and Wexford.

For any questions about your dues invoice, contact Finance Director Jamie Pemberton at [pemberton@micounties.org](mailto:pemberton@micounties.org). If you have general questions about MAC's dues, contact Executive Director Stephan Currie at [scurrie@micounties.org](mailto:scurrie@micounties.org).

## MAC expands governmental affairs team

Looking to build on recent success in Lansing capped by the enactment of 4-year terms for county commissioners in 2021, MAC expanded its Governmental Affairs Team this week with the addition of two governmental affairs associates.



FATA

Madeline Fata comes to MAC from the offices of Rep. Ken Borton (R-Otsego), who is himself a former MAC Board president.

Madeline also worked in the offices of state Sens. Wayne Schmidt (R-Grand Traverse) and Dale Zorn (R-Monroe) and for Michigan Legislative Consultants, a Lansing-based lobbying firm.



GIBSON

She has a bachelor's degree in social science from Michigan State University, with a secondary degree in anthropology. Between Madeline and Governmental Affairs Director Deena Bosworth (anthropology, Western Michigan University), MAC may have the largest anthropology contingent of any advocacy office in the United States!

Madeline will staff MAC's **policy committees** on

Transportation and on Environmental, Natural Resources and Regulatory Affairs.

Samantha Gibson has even deeper ties to MAC, having served as an intern on our Governmental Affairs Team in 2019-20.

Sam was most recently the legislative director for Rep. Rodney Wakeman (R-Tuscola), where she focused on policy work for the House Families, Children and Seniors Committee.

Sam has a bachelor's degree in political science from Michigan State University.

Sam will staff MAC's policy committees on Health and Human Services and on Judiciary and Public Safety.

"I am very excited to bring on both of these up-and-coming women to our staff," said Deena Bosworth, MAC's director of governmental affairs. "Each brings a level of expertise, personality and advocacy skills that will help shape and define the future of our organization."

## Wexford's Bengelink passes

Wexford County Commissioner Michael J. Bengelink died unexpectedly on July 15 at age 73.



**BENGLINK**

Bengelink had served several terms as a county commissioner, 1980 to 1982, 1994 to 1998 and 2016 to this year. He was serving as the board's vice chair at the time of his passing.

Bengelink, according to news reports, was particularly proud of his work on the Wexford County Veterans Memorial Wall Project. ♦

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# MAC works to protect court fee authority as expiration looms

BY DEENA BOSWORTH/MAC GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR

“The state commission issued its recommendations in September of 2019, identifying five major areas of reform to be phased in over time to address our inequitable court funding system.”

A key method in how Michigan funds its trial courts has faced many challenges over the past eight years — and faces another significant one in coming weeks.

MAC will be reaching out to you in coming days on ways to add your voice to our call to pass legislation to keep our trial courts operating.

But first, how did we get here?

In 2014, the Michigan Supreme Court upset decades of settled practice by ruling that trial courts could apply costs to those found guilty of a crime only if the costs were expressly authorized by the Legislature. MAC led a coalition to tackle this funding crisis, and within four months, the Legislature amended the law (**Public Act 352 of 2014**) to allow courts to impose costs that are “reasonably related” to certain costs of prosecution. In 2017, the Legislature **extended this authority** through Oct. 17, 2020, and a Trial Court Funding Commission was created simultaneously to recommend a sustainable funding model for courts.

In 2018, the state Supreme Court reviewed another case on costs. Though this challenge was turned away, the chief justice’s opinion warned that the court’s decision was limited to the specific challenges — and that the trial court funding system may still be constitutionally flawed.

The state commission issued its recommendations in September of 2019, identifying five major areas of reform to be phased in over time to address our inequitable court funding system. Early in 2020, discussion started within the Legislature to review and act on the recommendations, but that effort was derailed by the pandemic and the looming expiration of courts’ cost authority in October 2020.

MAC again led a coalition to address the crisis, moving the legislative “sunset” to Oct. 1, 2022, through legislation championed by Rep. Sarah Lightner (R-Jackson).

Now, with the deadline just weeks away, MAC is asking legislative leaders to act immediately on House Bill 5956, by Rep. Lightner, which would extend the cost authority to May 1, 2024. HB 5956 was voted out of the House Committee on Appropriations earlier this month, and awaits a vote on the House Floor.

Meanwhile, another court challenge has arisen that could upset everything.

In *People v. Travis Michael Johnson*, the Michigan Supreme Court is again considering the cost issue. A decision had been expected this summer, but now the situation is unclear.

At any rate, the clear and immediate work to do is getting HB 5956 passed to give our courts the funds they need AND give legislators time step up to the plate to help support Michigan’s “One Court of Justice” financially.

When such work begins, MAC will continue to support the creation of a uniform system case management system, run by the state, including hardware, software, infrastructure, training and ongoing technology support.

It should be noted that in the FY23 budget, the Legislature appropriated \$150 million to begin the process of creating a statewide case management system, thereby implementing one of the recommendations from the Trial Court Funding Commission.

But there remains so much work to be done. The state must begin to analyze the levels of staffing that exists at every trial court and begin to formulate costs to provide equitable funding to support court operations to serve the public. Once this is determined and uniform assessments and collection processes are applied, the ultimate goal to streamline court costs to one fund and provide an equitable distribution will happen. Michigan can then get our courts and judges out of being revenue generators, and provide for a predictable, sustainable and fair system. ♦

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# Wayne has big plans (for economic development) by building small (businesses)

BY NANCY DERRINGER

*Nancy Derringer is a writer and editor based in Metro Detroit.*

It's often said that small businesses, while vital to local, state and national economies, can be fragile things. No matter how long-established, many are only a bad quarter or two away from disaster. (Never mind a pandemic.)

Few mention a corollary: That while it doesn't take much to wreck a small business, it also doesn't take much to make one grow. The same tender plant that can be killed by a freeze can also flourish with just a little water and sunshine.

That's the idea behind a new small business hub, co-administered by Wayne County and the New Economy Initiative, to distribute \$54 million – gathered from American Rescue Plan Act and foundation sources – to help them start, grow and prosper. A second program, this one run by the county and the Southeast Michigan Community Alliance, is directed toward workforce development. Both were announced at this year's Mackinac Policy Conference in June.

The small business program will be modeled on a similar program limited to the city of Detroit, also with the New Economy Initiative. Wafa Dinaro, director of the NEI, said that program was successful in helping build a “support ecosystem” for entrepreneurs looking to start or grow their businesses.

That ecosystem “runs the gamut,” Dinaro said, offering a variety of services, depending on the individuals' needs.

“Some might have a home business, baking cupcakes, say,” she said. “And they're doing well enough to expand but can't get their documents in order to open a brick-and-mortar. So, we walk them through the process to get their financials in order, learn QuickBooks, write a business plan, etc. Or maybe they just need a lawyer to review their lease.”

Support was given in services, not cash. But sometimes that is all a would-be business owner needs. The owners of Baobab Fare in



**BAOBAB FARE, A RESTAURANT OWNED BY NADIA NIJIMBERE AND HER HUSBAND, HAMISSI MAMBA, HAS BENEFITTED FROM THE NEW ECONOMY INITIATIVE OF THE CITY OF DETROIT, A PROGRAM WAYNE COUNTY IS USING AS A MODEL FOR A BROADER EFFORT BACKED BY AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN DOLLARS.**

Detroit, Dinaro said, “went through a couple of NEI programs, and have been incredibly successful.” So much so that the restaurant, which serves the East African cuisine of its owners' native Burundi, was named 2022's Best New Restaurant of the Year by the Detroit Free Press.

Juan Carlos Dueweke-Perez went through one of the programs seven years ago. At the time, he wanted to launch a one-man photography business. But learning about business plans and growth opportunities sent him in a new direction, he said. He started out doing photography, but today his business, Featherstone, has expanded into digital marketing, public relations and business communications, with 10 employees and multilingual services in Spanish and Arabic.



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Dueweke-Perez was an undocumented immigrant at the time, a Dreamer, and lacked the resources to get the financial aid he would have needed for higher education to learn these skills. But the NEI program amounts to a form of speeded-up business school for people like him, Dinero said.

“I found it very helpful,” Dueweke-Perez said. “It was what I needed at the very beginning. Once I had my business plan done, I was able to apply for microloans and other services.”

The second Wayne County program focuses on workforce development. It’s a familiar problem around the state, but particularly in places like southeast Michigan: How to remove the obstacles standing between workers and employers.

A \$50 million investment, also from ARP funds, is projected to last three to four years and will help close gaps between parts of the workforce-development space – training programs, community colleges, etc. – and the employers hiring their graduates, said Luz Meza, director of economic development for the county.

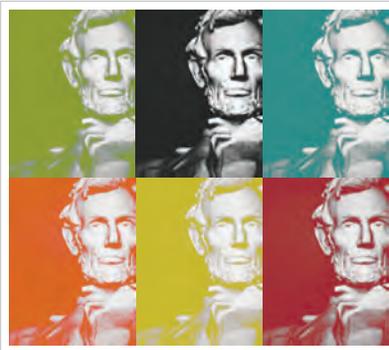
“There are people who want to work but have problems that keep them from success,” Meza said, ticking off just a few: Transportation, child care, disabilities, criminal records and more.

The program will have four parts:

- A subsidized training and employment program to fund paid skills training and employment opportunities to increase educational attainment, pathways to key industries, and supply of workers with in-demand skills.
- An underrepresented worker assistance grant designed to fund specialized workforce assistance services for underrepresented groups such as returning citizens, immigrants and refugees, and individuals with disabilities.
- A return-to-work program to provide cash transfers for transportation and childcare-related expenses. This is aimed at individuals whose employment statuses were negatively impacted by COVID-19.
- And a career navigator program to increase existing navigation services that connect participants with employment, service, and training opportunities.

Both Wayne County initiatives are still in the planning stages and haven’t formally debuted yet. But, Meza said, once implemented, will go far to break the poverty cycle too many residents find themselves in.

“The goal is simple: To improve the quality of life around the county,” she said. ♦



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# Build efficiency with ‘dig once’ policies

BY ERIC LUPHER/PRESIDENT, CITIZENS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN



MAC strongly supports the work of the **Citizens Research Council of Michigan**, a nonpartisan, independent public policy research organization. MAC Executive Director Stephan Currie currently sits on the CRC Board.

**“In recent years, the phrase “dig once” has been used to capture the idea of coordinating across agencies to improve project design and reduce construction costs.”**

Sometimes the right hand of government doesn't appear to know what the left hand is doing. With counties involved in many services, often headed by independently elected officials or autonomous governing boards, the perception can be that one department is not aware of what other departments are doing.

This problem becomes more pronounced when we expand the focus to state and local governments in general and other government-regulated entities such as utilities.

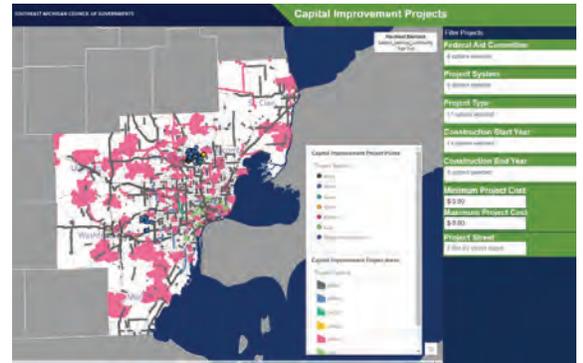
Nowhere is this a bigger issue than in the provision of infrastructure where the inefficiency and waste created by the lack of cohesion is often visible.

Road closures for construction often have nothing to do with the roads but are to repair, replace, or install some utilities under the road. For example, it is not unusual for a road to be repaved, only to tear it up for water main or sewer work a year or two later. Obviously, this is disruptive and inefficient.

In recent years, the phrase “dig once” has been used to capture the idea of coordinating across agencies to improve project design and reduce construction costs. Dig once concepts can be applied to all infrastructure and utilities that share the right-of-way (ROW). The cost savings on construction alone may be multiple times over the cost of the collaborative effort.

Timing may be the biggest obstacle to dig once implementation. The timing of public infrastructure projects often is dictated by the availability of funding. With a scarcity of resources across most infrastructure types, asset managers usually have little latitude to ignore the greatest needs to align work with other infrastructure work.

Because each agency operates in isolation, the benefits of coordination are not clear. A holistic analysis of the cost and disruption caused by construction makes the benefits more obvious. Many successful “dig once” projects have resulted from individuals going above and beyond their job descriptions to build relationships.



Identifying subsurface conditions and locating utility runs can facilitate the coordination with utility owners needed to reconstruct the ROW such that all deficiencies are addressed at once. Unfortunately, the location of underground pipes and wires were not always well documented. And when they were, that information typically has not been shared with others with ROW assets.

Various efforts have been undertaken to create cross-industry asset management databases. The Grand Valley Metropolitan Council oversees the Regional Geographic Information System (REGIS), a consortium of communities and utility providers that includes a common database and suite of applications and interfaces to satisfy its members' spatial data management needs.

REGIS, which has been active for over 20 years, served as the template for the “Dig Once Project Portal,” a statewide effort overseen by the Michigan Infrastructure Council (MIC) that allows public and private asset owners to document future construction locations/dates across transportation, water, utilities, and communications infrastructure.

The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments recently established the Capital Improvement Project Coordination Tool. (See above.) This geodatabase allows all types of infrastructure and utility owners to share their capital improvement plans to enhance collaboration with other infrastructure owners.

These platforms are not a complete solution but can facilitate such efforts. ♦

# Secondary Road Patrol needs your help

BY MATT SAXTON/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MICHIGAN SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

The Secondary Road Patrol program was established by the Legislature under Public Act 416 of 1978, and since that time it has helped fund sheriff deputy road patrol on roads other than M-roads and interstate highways. This traffic enforcement tamps down dangerous driving, crashes and drunk/drugged driving, in addition to providing quicker response times to aid in crashes and calls for aid.



Unfortunately, the program is now financed by \$10 fees on traffic citations, and due to many factors, that revenue has been declining since 2009. It peaked at a high of \$13.5 million in 2008 and has dwindled to an estimated \$4.8 million this year. In 1978, the fund paid for 283 deputies statewide, but that number has decreased to 115 in FY21, and it falls each year, even as our partner county boards have put more into the program to fight inflationary FTE loss.

Generous contributions to the fund from state General Fund dollars over the past several years are unsustainable in the long term and unpredictable from year to year. Sustainable reliable funding is what is needed to maintain this program. Solving these needs will result in a safer motoring public on secondary roads where most traffic crashes occur.

The Michigan Sheriffs' Association is supporting a solution embodied in House Bills 5569 and 5732 (by Rep. Tommy Brann, R-Kent), and 5772 (by Rep. David Martin, R-Genesee), and 5773 (Rep. Mike Mueller, R-Genesee). The bills would eliminate the \$10 fee on tickets in favor of restricting \$15 million per year from the unallocated portion of the liquor tax that currently goes to the state General Fund. Again, this is unallocated and does not gore anyone else's ox. For the difference of a few million dollars, the state assures stability, eliminates a variable cost to its own General Fund in favor of a known cost and makes staffing predictable for the sheriff and the county board of commissioners. In addition, it will provide a small increase in Secondary Road Patrol Deputies statewide.

The bills would also provide for a "reboot" of the county Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirement for a handful of counties so that the Legislature does not have to waive it for hardship every year — a practice that began with force losses resulting in cuts during the Great Recession.

Finally, every year, the \$15 million would be adjusted for inflation, eliminating the predicament found today that has resulted in the loss of more than 150 deputies since the program's inception. In short, this common-sense solution has been a long-time coming, and deserves to be adopted. The bills passed the state House overwhelmingly and are now on the floor of Senate awaiting a final vote. MAC has been kind enough to support these bills, and we are grateful for your voice.

Finally, I would like to leave you with some stats on the effectiveness of the Secondary Road Patrol Program. Just think of the effectiveness that could be achieved with year-over-year stability. This data is from FY20:

- 846 impaired drivers were removed from the road
- 36,208 traffic citations were issued on 59,224 vehicle stops
- 4,348 criminal arrests were made
- 18,569 assists to other officers were made
- 10,166 traffic crashes were investigated, 6,906 on secondary roads, 2,871 on state trunklines, and 388 in municipalities
- 272 Community Training Sessions conducted, with 7,523 citizens instructed
- \$2.5 million in funds contributed by county boards to help avoid cutting SRP deputies ♦

**“For the difference of a few million dollars, the state assures stability, eliminates a variable cost to its own General Fund in favor of a known cost and makes staffing predictable for the sheriff and the county board of commissioners.”**

# County overcomes geographic challenge with cloud-based engagement tool

BY HALEY SKLAR/ZENCITY

“Their lack of a centralized, overarching IT office, however, meant that coordinating a joint digital response would prove challenging without the right toolset.”

As the second-most populated county in Wyoming, Natrona County comprises 26 cities, towns and communities. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the county felt an immediate impact on daily lives — ranging from disruption of local business to school closures and potential civic impacts heightened by the isolated nature of Wyoming.

The Natrona County government’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is a collective of municipal and law enforcement agencies that lead the County’s COVID-19 response. Early into briefings and strategy sessions, they realized that their typical approach of using individual communication platforms, separate websites, and individual management processes weren’t going to give the County’s citizens what they needed from their government. Their lack of a centralized, overarching IT office, however, meant that coordinating a joint digital response would prove challenging without the right toolset.

Through their ongoing partnership with CivicPlus, the County identified Zencity Engage (formerly Civil Space) as a cloud-hosted tool that would not just provide a unified resource hub, but also give the EOC a suite of powerful, user-friendly tools to connect with their communities in a time of crisis.

Once Zencity Engage implementation specialists and members of the County response team connected, they had their full EOC site up-and-running in a matter of days. In preparing their Zencity Engage site, the EOC knew that many of the County’s citizens hadn’t heard of the response team, and that they needed to leverage their new tools to foster credibility.

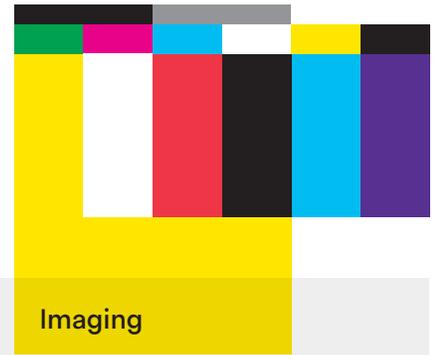


By leveraging the branding capabilities and unified messaging empowered through Zencity Engage’s design, the County was able to present a consistent, user-friendly, accessible digital service on behalf of the EOC.

“We want our community members to perceive that our organization is legitimate, even if they have never heard from us before, and trust that what we are doing is a professional response,” said Rebekah Ladd, public information officer for the Casper Police Department.

With their EOC hub launched, the County then turned to holding continued public sessions three times per week and leveraging Zencity Engage to be a home base for citizens to recall session information, see updated links and statistics and bring together global, national, and locals updates to one trusted place.

Learn more about how Zencity can transform your community engagement by visiting <https://zencity.io/>. ♦



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## Want more information?

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# ARP: Your challenges *and* solutions

BY PENNY SAITES/COPROPLUS

“The majority of Michigan local governments plan to use ARP funds on capital improvements, followed by roads, water and sewer infrastructure and public safety.”

A recent Policy Brief published by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy\* highlights some interesting statistics surrounding the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) and how local government jurisdictions in Michigan are utilizing ARP funds. The Brief also reports on some of the challenges experienced by these jurisdictions. We are sharing some key points here, along with some of our own experiences in coming up with solutions for the counties in Michigan.

## Spending priorities

The majority of Michigan local governments plan to use ARP funds on capital improvements (public buildings, public parks, etc.), followed by roads, water and sewer infrastructure and public safety:

- 52% - Capital Improvements
- 39% - Roads
- 35% - Water and Sewer Infrastructure
- 29% - Public Safety

It is interesting that the priorities change based on the size of the jurisdiction, with smaller jurisdictions (5,000 or fewer residents) focused on roads; while water and sewer infrastructure is tops for mid-size jurisdictions (5,001-30,000 residents); and public safety spending is the focus for the largest jurisdictions (30,001+ residents).

## Challenges

MAC's CoPro+ Program ([www.coproplus.org](http://www.coproplus.org)) provides solutions to some of the most challenging traits of the ARP process. Navigating state and federal bureaucracies was cited in the Policy Brief as the most challenging aspect, especially for smaller jurisdictions, with 59 percent indicating it was somewhat of a problem (39%) or a significant problem (20%). Among the largest jurisdictions, 68 percent report that procurement problems are the largest concern.

## Solutions

Through CoPro+, consulting contracts have been competitively bid and awarded to four firms that can assist Michigan counties and other public

entities in managing ARP funds. These contracts were executed to address the most challenging task of dealing with ARP as mentioned above — navigating the state and federal bureaucracies. The contractors were selected based on their extensive experience and expertise in dealing with these challenges. Click on the ARP Consultants link at [coproplus.org](http://coproplus.org) for additional information on these contracts.

Our contractors report some of the services that have been provided to a variety of municipalities for use of their ARP funds include:

- Strategic planning for use of funds
- Driving resident engagement through communications, forums, and surveys
- Facilitating citizen committees and municipal board meetings regarding use of funds
- Implementing and managing small business grant programs
- Delivering impact analysis to promote equitable distribution of funds
- Providing project management services for approved projects in areas such as affordable housing
- Broadband expansion

CoPro+ provides procurement assistance to counties in Michigan, and can help with the most common problem reported by larger jurisdictions - procurement. CoPro+ will work with your county to determine the level of procurement assistance needed. The relationships established with many of the counties to date range from complete staffing of the procurement operation to assisting on an as-needed basis. In addition, rather than utilizing staffing services, many counties simply purchase commodities and services from CoPro+ contracts, saving the time and effort of handling the bid process on their own while satisfying competitive bid requirements. For more information visit [coproplus.org](http://coproplus.org) or send an email to [info@coproplus.org](mailto:info@coproplus.org). ♦

\*Find the survey at <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/102/mpps-policy-brief-survey-michigan-local-government-leaders-american-rescue-plan-act>

## Richard Schmidt



**Name:** Richard Schmidt

**County/MAC Region:** Manistee/Region 2

**Position:** Director

**County Service:** 2011 to present

**Profession:** Retired purchasing officer

**Previous Public Service:** Manistee Recreation Board, member; Maple Grove Township Board of Review, member

**The 2022 Annual Conference is just weeks away. What would you say to a fellow county commissioner who is still deciding on whether to attend this, or another, MAC event?**

The 2022 Annual Conference is an opportunity and experience that is important for any individual interested in attending. Attending a MAC conference will give you the ability to meet other commissioners and share ideas as

you network with one another. Personally, I attended my first MAC conference in 2011, where it I was able to meet so many other county officials in just a couple of days.

You can learn how to prepare budgets and what could be an accepted expense or not. You will learn that some counties have larger budgets than you and some have smaller budgets. This will help when making decisions because they can give you some ideas on what works and what will not.

Another recommendation I have would be to sit with other counties in unstructured time such as meals. This helps others learn who you are as you share situations from your own area. Also, they may have questions for you on how your county handles problems.

A final thought I have is to make yourself available and pass out your business cards. ♦

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## Christian Marcus



**Name:** Christian Marcus

**County/MAC Region:** Antrim/Region 2

**Position:** Director

**County Service:** 2013-present

**Profession:** Account manager in beer, wine and spirits industry

**Previous Public Service:** Star Township Board of Trustees, member; North Country Community Mental Health Board, member and chair of its finance committee; Health Department of Northwest Michigan Board, member; National Association of Counties Public Safety Steering Committee, member and vice chair of law enforcement subcommittee; Community Corrections Board, member

**The 2022 Annual Conference is just weeks away. What would you say to a fellow county commissioner who is still deciding on whether to attend this, or another, MAC event?**

I have echoed the same statements to my board at the county. I strongly encourage involvement in your state association. The collaboration of best practices from county to county, commissioner to commissioner, program to program is invaluable to both urban and rural counties. Being part of MAC provides up-to-date information on what's going on in our state's legislature. Serving on a MAC committee allows you to have a direct voice on Legislation that could impact your ability to serve the people of your community. ♦

# Now's the time to invest in brownfields

BY JEFF HAWKINS/ENVIROLOGIC

Jeff Hawkins is CEO and co-owner of Envirologic Technologies, a full-service environmental consulting firm based in Kalamazoo.

**“Their lack of a centralized, overarching IT office, however, meant that coordinating a joint digital response would prove challenging without the right toolset.”**

In December 2021, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the bipartisan infrastructure law would provide \$1.5 billion in funding through their Brownfields Program. This program brings direct grants and technical assistance to communities, states, tribes and nonprofits to assess and clean up contaminated land through a competitive application process.

The EPA provides annual funding to these entities to support brownfield redevelopment through a combination of Brownfield Assessment, Cleanup, Multipurpose, and Revolving Loan Fund Grants. The influx of funding from the Infrastructure Law will increase this program from an annual appropriation of approximately \$62 million to \$370 million for five years (a combination of appropriation and infrastructure law funds).

Municipalities could access these funds through Brownfield Redevelopment Authorities or other eligible entities. Depending on the grant, funds can be used to conduct Phase I and II Environmental Site Assessments, Baseline Environmental Assessments, Due Care and Cleanup Planning, Brownfield Plans, site cleanup, and planning activities related to brownfield sites.

With the increased funding provided to the EPA through the infrastructure law, now is the time to consider applying for and bringing these funds to your community. The grant funds can be a catalyst for the redevelopment of difficult sites, areas of blight or contamination, or redevelopment planning in areas that require extra attention and assistance.

One of the criticisms often heard is: “If we only had some funding to get started.” Applying for



EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant funds takes an investment of time and is very competitive. However, the infrastructure law has opened the door to a significant increase in funding that enhances your odds of an award exponentially over the next four years.

According to the EPA, the money in the Infrastructure Law will transform countless lives and spur life-changing revitalization in communities, all with the same desire to keep their neighborhoods healthy, sustainable, and reflective of the people who call them home. These funds provide an opportunity to capitalize on the efforts of local Brownfield Redevelopment Authorities and other entities that have limited resources to promote and encourage redevelopment in their communities.

It is anticipated that in September another round of EPA Brownfield Grants funding will become available, allowing for applications to be submitted. Planning for an application should begin as soon as possible. It is important to develop a compelling narrative that will accurately reflect the needs of your community and satisfy the requirements, goals, and objectives of EPA's award strategies and priorities.

For more information about these grants, you can view a helpful infographic [here](#). Additionally, open solicitations can be found on the Brownfields page of the EPA website. ♦



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# Meeting the county HR challenge

BY AL VANDERBERG/KENT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR-CONTROLLER

**“Many of our employees serve in government to make a difference and to improve the lives of those in our communities — and that has always been the case.”**

I recently participated on a panel presented by the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) in partnership with the University of Georgia on the talent recruitment and retention challenges currently experienced by local governments (including counties). A very similar conversation was had in late July during the NACo conference in Colorado at the National Association of County Administrators (NACA) Nuts-n-Bolts session.

Interest in public service jobs was trending lower prior to the onset of the pandemic and the Great Resignation where millions quit their jobs each month, not only in the United States but worldwide, resulting in a situation where there are now approximately two jobs for every job applicant. Counties across the nation are seeing job searches that once netted hundreds of applicants now net dozens. All aspects of the recruitment, onboarding, compensation, and retention processes are being reviewed.



The value proposition of county government service is immense. Many of our employees serve in government to make a difference and to improve the lives of those in our communities — and that has always been the case. However, making a difference is much more important to the millennial and “Gen Z” generations of workers, who make up a large and increasing portion of our workforces, and they will make job and career decisions based on this factor.

One county shared that they plan to engage potential future county employees beginning at the middle school level. Others discussed utilizing atypical (for county government) methods to communicate organization purpose/



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vision/job openings via tv ads, billboards, and streaming on social media platforms. Another county relayed that they are streamlining their hiring processes. While counties will likely not be able to achieve same day hiring like some private companies are, several can reduce timelines for some hires.

Many stories have been shared of finalists who don't show for the interview, newly hired employees not showing up for the first day of work or employees who quit shortly after assuming their new duties. Quality employee engagement is no longer a nice feature; it is mandatory to build the type of culture that will make new employees want to apply and stay.

Some counties have implemented ambassador programs where each new hire is paired with an existing employee who takes them under their wing and helps them assimilate to the organization. "Stay Here" interviews are utilized by some counties to check in with new employees periodically to make sure that all is going well and that they are engaged and positive about their employment experience. Employee engagement surveys are used by many counties to gauge overall employment engagement and satisfaction over longer periods of time.

Surveys show that professional development is increasingly important to our changing workforce. Educational and training opportunities that lead to professional and personal growth are highly valued by all but even more intensely by our younger generations in the workforce.

Another key to building culture and high employment engagement is making sure that every employee knows their role and how their specific role ties into the overall purpose, vision, and mission of the county.

Counties with a culture that develop a reputation for providing employees psychological safety will be more competitive and will retain talent. For all the polarized political thinking raging around inclusion and "DEI" it really boils down to whether we have an organizational culture where everyone feels welcome regardless of their differences in age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., and face no invisible barriers to growth and prosperity. Employees feel like they belong! Human differences fuel much of bullying and "micro-aggressions" in today's workplace and to truly have a great culture these must be eliminated. ♦



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