

MICHIGAN COUNTIES

Official Voice of the Michigan Association of Counties | December 2020



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Derek Melot, Director of Communications and Marketing

Jamie Pemberton, Director of Finance

Meghann Keit, Governmental Affairs Associate

Kristina Garner, Coordinator of Blue Cross and COBRA Services

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Peggy Cantu, MACSC Sponsored Program Liaison

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Hannah Sweeney, Governmental Affairs Assistant

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Richard Schmidt, Manistee County/Region II

Robert Showers, Clinton County/Region IV

Joe Stevens, Dickinson County/Region I

Jim Storey, Allegan County/Region III

One at-large seat currently vacant.

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MAC

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As we enter the new year, the prospect of vaccinations and the diligence of our frontline health workers have provided us with hope to end what has been a difficult and tragic year for so many. To add a tiny bit to the main themes of hopefulness in 2021, I'd like to go over what I see as hopeful for the Michigan Association of Counties and its members in the months ahead.

There is much to consider.

During the greatest crisis since the association took its present form in 1968, MAC was able to again hold the line on dues to our members and keep them at the level they've been since 2008. By doing so, this represents a savings of 20.87 percent to each county off of what dues would have been had they increased with base rate of inflation during this period.

MAC enters 2021 with a highly experienced staff who have been working throughout the crisis to give you the information and services you need. And we will be fully staffed for 2021, with the addition of Hannah Sweeney to our Governmental Affairs Team (read more on page 9).

It was my privilege in December to report to the MAC Board of Directors that the association's finances are rock solid, thanks to the ongoing support of our county members and the success of our various programs.

In 2021, we will be building on what we have learned of the advantages of technology in 2020. For example, we are looking into making a permanent shift to virtual-only sessions for our six policy-making committees. We think this move would allow more participation from commissioners who may have been constrained by time or travel in the past.

Our planning is under way for both of MAC's major conferences in 2021, headlined by our regular visit to the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island next September. Rest assured that we will be doing all we can to make the conferences safe, while allowing the maximum possible in-person interactions that are a highlight of MAC gatherings.

At our Legislative Conference in April, we will honor the first class of "graduates" of MAC's **County Commissioner Academy**, our continuing education program for commissioners eager to improve their skills and knowledge as public servants. We continue to work internally and with partners such as MSU Extension to make the academy's offerings both practical and accessible for commissioners around the state.

In other education news, we have signed a new partnership with the National Association of Counties to increase Michigan participation in NACo's High Performance Leadership Academy, a virtual training program aimed at county staffers. Learn more about **HPLA at its page on our website**.

Speaking of our website, we will be improving it in 2021 by making more areas directly accessible without entering your county username and password. We expect this will make the site more user-friendly.

Our **Service Corp.** expanded its offerings in 2020 and will continue to do so in 2021 as we welcome our latest sponsored program, HealthBridge, which helps county employees who choose to utilize high-deductible health insurance plans. And our procurement program, **CoPro+**, will have more



AFFILIATE MEMBERS

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 CCE Central Dispatch
 Community Economic Development Association of Michigan
 Community Mental Health Association of Michigan
 County Road Association of Michigan
 Health Care Association of Michigan
 Lean & Green Michigan
 Michigan Association for Local Public Health
 Michigan Association of County Administrative Officers
 Michigan Association of County Clerks
 Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners
 Michigan Association of County Park and Recreational Officials
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 Michigan Association of County Veterans Counselors
 Michigan County Medical Care Facilities Council
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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

2020 IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

I can hardly believe 2020 is almost history! For most of us, this is a year we will not miss.

We had two weddings in our family cancelled; I have not been able to see my parents who live in Montana for more than a year; I have had extremely limited contact with my only grandchild; and the Thanksgiving turkey with all the fixins was quite lonely with just three of us at the table. As gloomy as it has been, though, I have not, to this point, lost a loved one to COVID-19. My feelings about 2020 just can't compare to someone who has lost a loved one.



Our county workers have been stretched very thin, with the county being the primary distributor of anything and everything COVID-related. Many counties have had their budgets stretched even thinner with a larger workload than they have ever confronted before.

County commissioners have been fielding calls from business owners and residents who need help. Often, though, we have just not had the means to provide for their needs, which has added to our personal stress and frustration. We watched teenagers miss out on prom, graduation and all the unique experiences of high school. We have seen younger children struggle to pay attention "in class" while staring at a computer. Ugh! Goodbye 2020!

Now, here comes 2021, for which I'm optimistic but guarded.

Sometime in 2021, we will have the opportunity to get back to the normal life we had before. We will need that outlet, because our counties will play an important role in the storage and distribution of vaccines. County commissioners will probably get even more inquires than before. Our businesses will continue to struggle, and the future of our county finances is still a mystery to us.

I see frustration for several months to come, but I'm hoping that by this time next year (December 2021), we will all be celebrating how far we have come — and toasting the end of a pandemic.

This is a year we will never forget. It is also a year when we have been reminded of what is really important in our lives. We appreciate our family and friends a little more than we did in 2019. We don't take life for granted now. And we have learned how quickly everything can change.

Veronica Klinefelt
 President, MAC Board of Directors



MACPAC 2020 MEMBERS

Platinum Level

Brian Cote Wexford County
 Jack Shattuck Ionia County
 Veronica Klinefelt Macomb County
 Kenneth Borton Otsego County

Gold Level

Stan Ponstein Kent County
 Vaughn Begick Bay County
 Joseph Garcia Eaton County
 Douglas Johnson Otsego County

Silver Level

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 Tom Matthew Branch County
 Robert Showers Clinton County
 Carol Griffith Livingston County
 Stephen Adamini Marquette County
 Randall Peat Van Buren County
 Donald McLean Chippewa County
 Poh David Clinton County
 Kam Washburn Clinton County

David Rivard Delta County
 Joseph Bonovetz Gogebic County
 James Moreno Isabella County
 Jim Talen Kent County
 John Lapham Lenawee County
 Nancy Morrison Luce County
 Gene Lagerquist Manistee County
 Brain Kolk Newaygo County
 Larry Emig Osceola County
 Roger Bergman Ottawa County
 Gregory Dejong Ottawa County
 Howard Heidemann St. Clair County
 Richard Godfrey Van Buren County

Members

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 Theresa Nelson Delta County
 Donald Arquette Lake County
 Karen Alholm Marquette County
 Robert Ricksgers Antrim County
 Ernie Krygier Bay County
 Roseann Marchetti Cass County

Ron Reinhardt Charlevoix County
 Charles Macinnis Emmet County
 Bruce Caswell Hillsdale County
 Nancy Jenkins-Arno Lenawee County
 Raymond Steinke Mecosta County
 Rillastine Wilkins Muskegon County
 Robert Hoffman Oakland County
 Eileen Kowall Oakland County
 Thomas Middleton Oakland County
 Shelley Taub Oakland County
 Doug Zylstra Ottawa County
 Dean Kapenga Allegan County
 Daniel Robilliard Baraga County
 Art Jeannot Benzie County
 Barbara Kramer Dickinson County
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 Richard Schmidt Manistee County
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CALENDAR

All meetings are virtual.

Jan. 8

Environmental and Natural Resources
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Jan. 22

Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Jan. 25

Health and Human Services Committee
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Jan. 25

Judiciary and Public Safety Committee
2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Feb. 5

Finance and General Government Committee
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Feb. 12

Environmental and Natural Resources
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Feb. 22

Health and Human Services Committee
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Feb. 22

Judiciary and Public Safety Committee
2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Feb. 26

Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

For latest event listings, click here.

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MEET THE STAFF JAMIE PEMBERTON

Staffer: Jamie Pemberton, Director of Finance

Joined MAC: August 2020



Pemberton

Jamie Pemberton is the newest addition to MAC's staff. Prior to becoming MAC's financial point person, Pemberton worked with a variety of nonprofits in Genesee County. She has a degree in accounting from the University of Michigan Flint and is a member of Beta Alpha Psi, the international honor organization for financial information students and professionals, and Phi Theta Kappa.

Briefly describe your daily duties at MAC:

I oversee the day-to-day financial operations and needs of MAC, its subsidiaries such as the Service Corp. and CoPro+ and partners.

What do you find most interesting/rewarding about working at MAC?

I love the work culture at MAC. We have a great staff. I enjoy working as a facilitator with the counties, helping to connect them to various services and learning more about how counties operate.

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

OMA, JAIL REFORMS HIGHLIGHT SUCCESSSES AT END OF CHALLENGING 2020

By Deena Bosworth/MAC Director of Governmental Affairs

The Michigan Legislature ended the pandemic year of 2020, and its 100th session, with a flurry of activity. Between the General Election on Nov. 3 and final adjournment in Lansing, legislators sent close to 200 bills to the governor for her consideration.

While, as of this writing, the governor still has time to sign bills from the 2019-20 session, the fate of some significant tax exemptions is not resolved.

What we do know for certain is Senate Bill 1246 to modify the Open Meetings Act is now law (PA 254 of 2020) and allows local boards to continue to meet remotely for any reason through March 31, 2021.

Another year-end success was enactment of bills spurred by the **Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration**. **Senate Bills 1046-51** were approved with last minute changes to safeguard victim protections and address the concerns of the Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence, while **House Bills 5844 and 5854-57** garnered unanimous support from both chambers to eliminate mandatory minimum jail sentences for certain offenses. **Various bills** eliminating license suspension for violations of the law unrelated to dangerous driving also gained legislative approval. MAC largely supported all these measures but was neutral on SBs 1046 and 1048.

MAC-supported bills to respond to a court decision that upended the tax foreclosure system on property also were signed into law in late December (PAs 255-256 of 2020). The bills implement changes forced after the Michigan Supreme Court, in *Rafaeli, LLC v Oakland County*, ruled surplus proceeds from the sale of foreclosed property belong to the former property owner, not to the foreclosing government. In 2021, MAC will be pursuing more legislation to grant counties the option to relinquish their foreclosure responsibilities to the state.

An extension of the poverty exemption also became law. PA 253 of 2020 allows local assessing units to extend a poverty-based tax exemption for a primary residence that was originally granted in 2019 or 2020 for three years. Full and partial exemptions may be granted and continued. The bill also allows poverty-based exemptions granted in 2021, 2022 and 2023 to be granted for 2024-26 if the owner of the principal residence is on a fixed income such as Social Security or a pension. Again, the local assessing unit can grant full or partial exemptions based on stated criteria.



The fate of some major tax changes is not yet determined, however.

Legislation to exempt solar equipment from ad valorem property taxes and replace the levy with a payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) system is not likely to get the governor's signature. Although a PILT system has its merits, MAC opposed the bills and urged the governor to reject them so the policy discussion can resume in 2021.

Another tax change not expected to get the governor's signature was a push by Meijer for an exemption on sales, use and Personal Property taxes for large retailers adopting automation equipment to assist with their distribution systems.

MAC disagreed with proponents' claims about the bills' effects on jobs and urged the governor to reject them.

MAC monitors and works on close to 1,000 pieces of legislation in any given legislative session. Bills with significant interest from our membership that did not make it through the 2019-20 session include:

- MAC-led legislation to increase county commissioner terms to four years
- Legislation to usurp local control on aggregate mining sites, which MAC opposed
- Public notice reforms allowing posting on the internet
- Rewrites of the solid waste planning process
- Changes to the bottle deposit law
- Transportation-related issues, including the local option sales tax, local option registration fee and the two-year registration fee
- Veterans property tax exemption reform
- Dark Stores reform
- Extension of the local excise tax for coastal counties
- Changes to short-term rental regulations
- A heavy equipment exemption from the Personal Property Tax

The legislative year was challenging, to say the least. We started with a focus on a roads package, were plagued with significant line-item vetoes that affected all levels of local government, sought changes to many county government inequities including four-year terms and then confronted a pandemic.

We end the year with some wins and some losses, but we are looking forward to a more productive legislative session in 2021.

CRC ANALYSIS

2021 SHAPING UP AS YEAR OF BONDING OPPORTUNITIES

By Eric Lupher/President, Citizens Research Council

The holidays and new year are at hand. “Are you making a list and checking it twice?”

I refer not to a list for Santa, but one for the bonding plans for your county in 2021.

Bonding is most often undertaken for capital improvements. Projects on your list might be for buildings and office space. They might be for courts, jails, libraries, public works, parks and recreation or the drain and road commissions. Or they might include work that could be undertaken in cooperation with cities, villages and townships.

Other than state government, counties are the level of government best suited to bond financing for capital improvements. Several factors work in the favor of Michigan counties, as is reflected in their healthy credit ratings. For some counties, frequent participation in bond activity, as is made possible by serving as the conduit to bond markets for a number of internal and external entities, creates economies of scale.

A county’s broad geographic footprint includes wealthy and less wealthy communities that even out to give the counties strong, reliable tax bases. Notwithstanding the property value drops in the Great Recession a decade ago, county property values usually do not experience large drops.

Additionally, counties benefit from steady streams of state revenues. These include revenue sharing, court funding, public health and mental health services and road funding (for counties that have pulled this function back from their road commissions).

All of these provide assurances to investors that bonds sold with the full faith and credit of the counties will get repaid.

Now is the time to make that list and check it twice. After some disruption in the bond markets back in the spring because of the pandemic, interest rates have returned to favorably low levels. In August, municipal bond markets experienced record low interest rates, and they have not changed much since then. The historically low rates are likely to remain available as long as health and political uncertainty keep equity markets on edge and investors seek safe places to put their money.

It looks like many have already noticed the opportunities and taken advantage of them. Even with health and political turmoil all around us, 2020 has had the largest bond volume in recent history.



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.

For the rest of you, here are some things to consider regarding your capital improvements lists and the possibility of bonding.

First, you might ask whether there are sufficient skilled trades in your area to undertake the projects if the funding can be secured. Notwithstanding the high rates of unemployment caused by the pandemic, Michigan continues to struggle to attract and retain individuals capable of performing certain jobs, including skilled trades.

Have you prioritized projects? Lord knows Michigan has collectively underinvested in infrastructure, so any new investment is a positive. but funding to maintain existing infrastructure or to comply with regulatory requirements should come at the top of the lists.

Next, ask whether projects on your lists are suitable for borrowing. Like a mortgage or car loan for your personal finances, bonding allows the cost of building or obtaining capital assets to be spread over the life of those assets. This is a prudent approach to spreading the costs across different generations of taxpayers that all stand to benefit from the investment.

Borrowing has costs: the upfront costs of issuance and the long-term cost of interest. The purpose of this exercise is to align the length of the repayment schedules and total cost with each project.

Clearly, buildings, sewers and the like are expected to last for several generations and bonding is a wise strategy.

For projects with shorter projected lifespans or relatively lower costs, you might want to consider working with local commercial banks for the convenience in the length of the time to access funding.

Other projects, although seemingly capital in nature -

Continued on page 8

CRC ANALYSIS

2021 SHAPING UP AS YEAR OF BONDING OPPORTUNITIES from page 7

vehicles, HVAC and other equipment — might be best suited to a pay-as-you-go approach.

Finally, does your county have existing debt? Your county should consider the benefits of refinancing existing debt at the same time as taking on new debt. This can have the twofold benefits of lowering interest rates for existing debt and smoothing repayment schedules to avoid spikes or troughs. The **Government Finance Officers Association** offers sound guidance for those considering refinancing.

The recession will have some harm for property values – more foreclosures and devalued commercial properties. So, there is some downside risk, but nothing on the scale we saw with the Great Recession. This will play out unevenly across our 83 counties.



But unless your equalization directors see much greater risk than I foresee, my advice is to capitalize on the historically low interest rates while you can.

MAC

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MACNEWS SWEENEY JOINS MAC TEAM

Hannah Sweeney, an Ugly native with legislative staff experience and a public policy degree from Michigan State University, will join MAC in January as governmental affairs assistant.



Sweeney

“Hannah will be a great addition to our Governmental Affairs Team,” said Deena Bosworth, director of governmental affairs. “She has a background in education public policy and is looking forward to translating that into tackling the issues our counties face on a daily basis.”

“I am excited to join MAC and advocate for all 83 counties in Michigan,” Sweeney said. “I wanted to work with the organization to bridge the gap between the state and local governments to ensure every community receives the resources that are needed.”

Sweeney has a bachelor’s degree in political science from Saginaw Valley State University and a master’s in public policy from Michigan State University. She also served as a policy fellow at the Institute of Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University and has worked in two legislative offices.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR from page 2

vendors, more improvements and more savings — in time and money — for you in the coming year.

The year ahead offers hope for our communities and our association. Please let me know (scurrie@micounties.org) if you have any ideas on how we can better serve you in 2021 and beyond.

Stephan W. Currie
MAC Executive Director

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Michigan Association of Counties

MACNEWS

ELECTION BRINGS 138 NEW COMMISSIONERS, INCREASING GOP CONTROL

By Derek Melot/MAC Director of Communications

Michigan will have 138 new county commissioners on Jan. 1, 2021, thanks to the results of the November General Election and the filling of subsequent vacancies on the 83 county boards.

In a year that saw record turnout in Michigan of more than 5.5 million voters, the county results yielded slightly higher than average turnover among commissioners, with the total of 138 new public servants being about 10 percent above the average rate of 125 per election, according to MAC records.

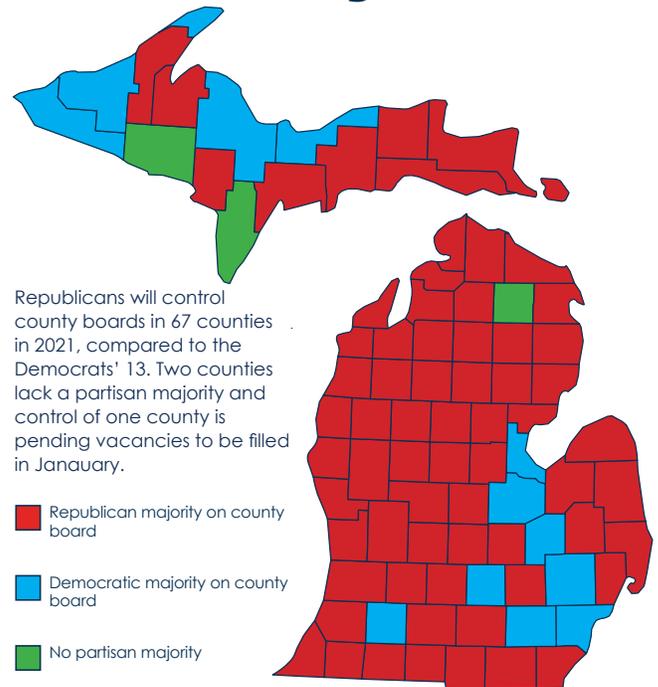
The 2020 county elections also led to an increasing consolidation of control by the Republican Party of county boards – with the GOP now the majority on 67 county boards (up from 64), pending the filling of two vacancies on the Montmorency Board in January. Democrats will be the majority in 13 counties, while two counties (Iron and Menominee) do not have a majority from any single party.

“We are seeing increased geographic polarization at all levels, with dense areas more Democratic,” said Matt Grossman of the **Institute of Public Policy and Social Research** at Michigan State University. “This appears to be continuing in Michigan counties.

“This also provides confirmation that Democratic gains in the presidential election did not extend down ballot, with Republicans making more gains in counties,” Grossman added.

Democrats now control seven of Michigan’s **10 largest counties by population** after Republicans flipped the Macomb County Board. By contrast, 50 counties, many

Who runs Michigan counties?



of them rural, have only a single Democrat or none at all serving on their boards in 2021.

Overall, MAC’s unofficial lists showed Republicans with 438 seats, Democrats with 169 and 13 commissioners listing themselves as Independent. (Again, these results don’t reflect the two vacancies in Montmorency.)

BARRY COUNTY COMMISSIONER PARKER PASSES

Barry County Commissioner Dan Parker died Dec. 11 after contracting COVID-19.



Parker

According to a report from WOODTV in Grand Rapids, “Fellow Commissioner Ben Geiger said Parker had just been elected Thornapple Township Supervisor. Geiger said Parker owned a publishing business and held public service positions in Thornapple Kellogg Schools and the village of Middleville.

‘Our hearts are broken in losing Dan Parker,’ Geiger said in a Monday statement. ‘But he wouldn’t want us to be sad. He would want us to find peace.’”

Heather Wing, chair of the Barry County Board of Commissioners, said, “It was such an honor to have been able to work with Dan Parker. He was perpetually looking for the compromise to settle uncomfortable situations for a win for both sides. He was passionate about Barry County and promoted every aspect of our great resources. Dan was one of a kind and his legacy will be difficult to duplicate.”

Parker first served on the Barry board from Jan. 1, 2011, to Dec. 31, 2012. He rejoined the board on Jan. 1, 2017.

MACNEWS

PANDEMIC ALTERS, BUT DOESN'T STOP, NEW COMMISSIONER SCHOOLS

By Gabrielle Kindig/Michigan Association of Counties

Like so much else during a challenging 2020, the New Commissioner Schools for newly elected (and veteran) county commissioners across Michigan could not proceed as originally planned.

But proceed they did, with an all-virtual format and more than 170 commissioners participating with MSU Extension educators and staff and experts from the Michigan Association of Counties in November and December.

A biennial project of MAC and MSU Extension since 1968, the schools traditionally consist of day-long sessions of presentations and discussions at sites scattered from Metro Detroit to the western Upper Peninsula. COVID-19's effects in Michigan made such gatherings impossible, however. MSUE and MAC staffers fell back on technology, marrying the live Zoom sessions that have become so common in this pandemic year with pre-recorded learning pods on MSU Extension's D2L platform.

This format had twofold benefits — protecting public health, of course, and allowing school attendees the option to learn at their own pace. Live virtual sessions were designed to answer questions stemming from the recorded segments. With so much change to Michigan's Open



NEW COMMISSIONER SCHOOL

Meetings Act due to COVID, segments with Matt Nordfjord of the law firm of Cohl, Stoker and Toskey were particularly lively.

"We were pleased that we were able to have Matt participate again in the school sessions," said MAC Executive Director Stephan Currie. "And, of course, we had concerns going in about how the new format would work, but I think the results were excellent and attendance was impressive."

Currie's assessment was echoed by MSU Extension's John Amrhein, who said, "This was a great effort by a lot of people to adapt the NCS program to a totally virtual format. ... We have received a number of positive comments about the flexibility of the online format. We are looking forward to hearing from participants in the evaluation and have already begun to think about ways to make it even better next time."

Another benefit of the virtual format is that those commissioners who could not attend in November and December can still contact MSUE and participate in the self-paced and recorded sessions. Those commissioners who are interested should reach out to Amrhein at amrhein@msu.edu for details.

JEWEL WARE, LONGTIME WAYNE COMMISSIONER, PASSES

Wayne County Commissioner Jewel Ware died unexpectedly this week from a heart attack.

"The Wayne County Commission family is devastated by the sudden passing of Jewel Ware this morning," Wayne Chair Alisha Bell said in a statement. "Commissioner Ware was a trusted member of the commission family and her experience in county government and knowledge of county issues were immeasurable. ... Residents of the Commission's 2nd District have lost a true champion and our heartfelt condolences go out to her loving family."



Ware

Ware was first elected to the Wayne County Commission in 1994 and served as chair of the panel from 2003 through 2008. Most recently, she served as the commission's vice chair pro tem. She represented District 2, which included much of the East Side of Detroit, downtown and the East Riverfront neighborhoods.

During her 2003-08 tenure as commission chair, she established the commission's Office of Policy Research and Analysis to provide in-depth review of county contracts and operations. Throughout her tenure on the commission, Ware was an advocate for improved health care for the uninsured and underserved, including improved mental health care, and an advocate for issues affecting senior citizens and young people.

In her district, Ware was involved in such initiatives as the Mittens and Socks Winter Drive for Children and cleanup programs sponsored by the Midtown Alliance. Ware received bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Detroit Mercy and was a certified social worker.

"Jewel Ware's service to her community and constituents, especially on behalf of her seniors to which she was devoted, were second to none," said Joe Palamara, Wayne vice chair and member of the MAC Board of Directors. "She was beloved by her friends and colleagues, and all who knew her. She always had a smile and something nice to say. Her caring compassion set her apart from all others. She will be dearly missed."

MACNEWS

NEW EFFORT AIMS TO CLOSE LEADERSHIP SKILLS GAP AT THE COUNTY LEVEL

Can you imagine what would happen if Gen. Colin Powell, Fortune 1000 CEOs and other executives came together with career coaches and professors from the most prestigious universities to mentor your frontline leaders? What if we could leverage such talent and expertise to advance excellence in county government?

Thanks to a new program co-sponsored by the Michigan Association of Counties and the National Association of Counties (NACo) program, we can.

The NACo Higher Performance Leadership Academy, a 12-week online program, was designed — in partnership with the Professional Development Academy — to enable frontline county staff to achieve their fullest potential, making them more capable, more effective leaders.

The Academy gives each participant the tools they need to accomplish their goals faster, build collaboration across departments and foster positive cultures within their teams.

Want to know Gen. Powell's 13 keys to leadership? He tells you. Want to know how to communicate and negotiate? He offers his secrets. Want to know how to best manage people? He drops stories that will give you confidence. And it's not just him. Leading industry executives, coaches, academics, and county professionals from around the country provide their insights, experience, and wisdom, too.

It's an incredible cast of experts who develop each participant's ability to lead and make decisions, plan and manage change, build and sustain strong relationships, simplify complexity to present data for decision-making, and leverage all of that to deliver higher levels of business value; the whole range of competencies needed to close the leadership skills gap at the frontline.

Additionally, and importantly, the Academy is designed to be non-disruptive to the busy schedules of county professionals. It requires four to five hours each week, and there's no travel away from the county required.

With increasing challenges of unfunded mandates, heightened community incivility and the constant struggle to achieve more with less, county frontline staff need the sharpest skills to deliver results for our residents.

MAC
MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES **NACo**




Powell

Many frontline managers are exactly the people we need to invest in and cannot afford to lose. The NACo High Performance Leadership Academy will help retain rising stars in county government and enable them to become better leaders.

To learn more about the programs planned for 2021 and enroll yourself and your county leaders, visit <http://www.naco.org/Skills>.

To date, nearly 3,000 county leaders (including **more than 30 from Michigan**) have experienced the NACo High Performance Leadership Academy and the feedback has

been noted as “unprecedented.”

“I have completed a variety of leadership programs over the years and this was one of the highest quality programs to date,” said MAC Executive Director Stephan Currie, who completed the program in late 2020. “The individuals who provide the training live virtually and prerecorded videos do a great job, and having the insight of Gen Colin Powell is extremely beneficial on such topics as inspiring your team members and making decisions.”

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HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY



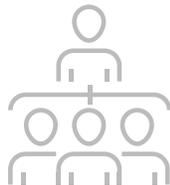
Counties affect the lives of residents every day. When our frontline staff are empowered as leaders, we deliver services more effectively. **The NACo High Performance Leadership Academy is a resource that connects your staff with practical leadership training.** HPLA uses an innovative, interactive online learning platform that combines real-time webinars, recorded sessions and small group discussions to deliver effective training without traveling away from the county – saving money and maximizing time.

THE ACADEMY FOCUSES ON FIVE ESSENTIAL SKILLS:



LEAD:

Engage teams and stakeholders to foster positive climates and exceed common expectations



ORGANIZE:

Plan, lead and execute organizational change more effectively and consistently



COLLABORATE:

Establish alignment and strong partnerships through building stronger relationships



DELIVER:

Measure projects and processes to deliver results aligned with county and community priorities



COMMUNICATE:

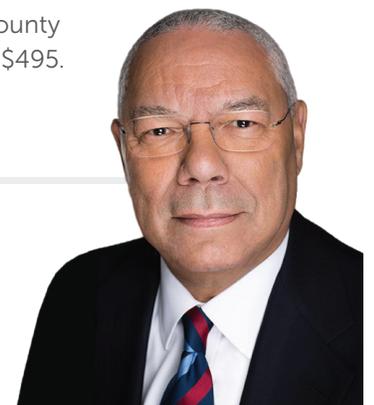
Create clarity, confidence and community

The NACo High Performance Leadership Academy empowers frontline county government professionals with fundamental, practical leadership skills to deliver results for counties and residents.

HPLA's enrollment fee is \$1,995 per participant. The first enrollee from each NACo member county will receive a one-time NACo scholarship of \$1,000 and a \$500 discount, reducing the fee to \$495. Additional enrollees receive a discount based on the number of enrollees per county.

With a curriculum developed by *General Colin Powell* and public and private sector leaders, NACo High Performance Leadership Academy gives students the opportunity to learn from world-class faculty. All content is guided by an expert facilitator.

Find out more at [NACo.org/Skills](https://www.naco.org/Skills)



BEST PRACTICES

OTTAWA'S DIVERSITY FORUM HIGHLIGHTS ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN EQUITY

By Gabrielle Kindig/Michigan Association of Counties

On Oct. 20, Ottawa County's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office, along with the Cultural Intelligence Committee and the City of Holland, held their fifth annual Diversity Forum, entitled "Journeys to Equity." The all-day online event featured two presentations about the role of government in achieving racial and healthcare equity. The event also featured the presentation of this year's Equity Award winner. Ottawa is one of several counties pushing for greater inclusivity and equity; Oakland County just announced a new 31-member Oakland County Equity Council, headed by Robin Carter-Cooper, which will help create a culture of respect, as well as create policies to promote equity and inclusion within the county government.

The Diversity Forum, created by Ottawa County's Cultural Intelligence Committee in 2015, is a way for county employees to learn and engage on diversity, equity and inclusion. While the forum was open to the public, it was geared towards those in public service, especially county, city, village and township employees.

This year's program was special, because it was designed specifically to meet the needs and interests of this year's participants, based on survey data from past participants. "We didn't want to assume, and we understand that everyone is dealing with multiple compounded realities, so we wanted to really hear what would be most valuable and focus our efforts on that," said Robyn Afrik, Ottawa County's director of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Ottawa Administrator Al Vanderberg was especially impressed with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity's (GARE) presentation, "Advancing Racial Equity, the Role of Government," which constituted the majority of the day's programming. He said he had never seen such an engaging virtual presentation before, noting "the chat was always really full." The presentation focused on understanding equity, as well as the differences between institutional, structural and individual racism; how to combat bias individually and through government; and how to shift from a blame mindset to a solution-based progress mindset.

Also included was a presentation by experts from the Ottawa County Department of Public Health on how the department uses data to make decisions and addresses health inequities before, during and after the age of COVID-19.

Between presentations, it was revealed that this year's Equity Award Winner was Esther Fifelski, who serves as the human relations director for the city of Holland. She's currently creating a racial equity toolkit for the city, to help decision-making processes. She's also worked on issues of civil rights and fair housing matters and has promoted cross-cultural activities to raise awareness of Latin heritage and culture.



Ottawa County Diversity Forum

Big or small, technical or simple, we want to hear how you have found a new way to serve your constituents.

Please send a brief description and contact information for the point person of your "Best Practice" to Derek Melot, melot@micounties.org.

For questions, call Melot at 517-372-5374.



HOW COUNTIES ARE TURNING
CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

For Vanderberg, interventions on the county level are incredibly important for racial equity work: "Government had a huge hand in creating these issues, so it seems to me only right that government should have a hand in resolving these issues. Plenty of things come our way for resolution. This is the time to figure it out and take action."

County Commissioner Roger Bergman echoed the sentiment: "It can take courage and leadership to be able to move forward with this, however, it is the right thing to do. We need to set an example for the whole of Ottawa County, so that in the end the feeling of "where you belong" [Ottawa County's vision statement] is the same throughout the county."

The forum not only provided tools to work on racial equity on the county level but provided inspiration as well. "The forum left me with a really strong sense of hope that the events of the past year have brought people together in a way we've never seen before. I think the door is wide open for governments to work in this space in a way that governments have been hesitant to do in the past. I ended the day with the sense though, that wow, things can really happen here," said Vanderberg.

The success of the effort also drew the notice of MSU Extension educators, who asked Bergman and Afrik to present on Ottawa's activities during the 2020 New Commissioner Schools in November and December.

For more information, and to see GARE's presentation slides, visit www.miottawa.org/CI/diversity-forum.htm.

Gabrielle Kindig is MAC's communications intern for the 2020-21 academic year.

AFFILIATE CORNER

PARTNERSHIPS, INVESTMENTS PROPEL PROGRESS IN MENTAL HEALTH POLICY, OFFERINGS

By Robert Sheehan/Community Mental Health Association of Michigan

Just a few short months ago, the debate around the relationships between law enforcement, mental health systems, and communities of color raged across the country and across Michigan. Today, the landscape is certainly quieter, but the issues remain — and if left unaddressed, we could see events of this past summer repeat themselves.



While this debate was getting headlines, Michigan's law enforcement and mental health organizations continued their work, as they have for years, partnering with the goal of improving public safety and fostering healthy communities, but they have had to make do without meaningful policy engagement or funding. This past November, the Community Mental Health Association of Michigan and the state's major law enforcement associations issued a **joint statement** to all of Michigan's elected officials and policy makers to highlight proven best practices and partnerships that need more attention and more funding.

Joining with the Community Mental Health Association of Michigan, the letter was co-signed by the Michigan Sheriffs' Association, the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police, the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standard, the Michigan State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police, and the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan. It outlined the vital and productive partnerships between mental health professionals and law enforcement — partnerships that often go unnoticed yet represent some of the most innovative partnerships in the country.

The mission of law enforcement officers is to preserve peace, address criminal activity and protect the constitutional rights of all citizens while ensuring safe communities. However, law enforcement has been called to address several growing mental health challenges — homelessness, engaging and assessing persons with mental health challenges, resolving domestic disputes, and assisting persons with substance use disorders — that go far beyond law enforcement capacity and training.

The issue at hand is that today's extensive range of community needs burdens law enforcement with an ever-

growing and unfair list of expectations. These expectations far exceed their core responsibilities. By recognizing and fully funding the partnerships of local mental health and law enforcement professionals in communities across the state, Michigan has the ability to lead the nation in addressing these fundamental issues. We have an opportunity to build on critical partnerships and programs whose promise has been repeatedly undercut by underfunding. With difficult budget decisions on the horizon, this is a message that must be heard and acted upon for the sake of all Michigan citizens.

Existing initiatives between mental health professionals, law enforcement professionals, prosecuting attorneys and community mental health systems throughout Michigan include:

- More than 50 mobile mental health crisis teams with skilled clinicians, or persons with lived mental health experiences, working in tandem with law enforcement agencies
- Co-responder initiatives — skilled clinicians from the community mental health system participating in local road patrols for immediate and community crises response
- Advanced training for law enforcement and medical personnel on how to recognize and interact with persons facing mental health challenges (tactics covering verbal de-escalation, crisis intervention training for adults and youth, responding to mental health emergencies) — endorsed by the Michigan Mental Health Diversion Council
- Mental health and substance use disorder courts, sobriety courts, in-jail mental health and reentry programs

These initiatives use nationally recognized evidence-based practices and aim to build effective community partnerships while encouraging public safety, mental health support and crisis prevention — and they are not the only ones. During the coronavirus pandemic, public mental health partners continue to pivot to serve community members best and with costs savings. Easy access to high quality, community-based mental health integration and sound law enforcement practices — via innovative partnerships must be at the forefront of public discussion.

It is absolutely essential for leaders to take a closer look at what is working and invest in proven approaches to public safety and mental health services.

Robert Sheehan is the CEO of the Community Mental Health Association of Michigan

EXPERT CORNER**QUICK REMINDER OFFERED ON LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ELECTING BOARD CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS**

By Matt Nordfjord, Esq.

With a new year comes the responsibility for county boards to elect chairs and vice chairs. This process is governed by Michigan Compiled Laws (MCL) 46.3.

The county board of commissioners is required to elect one of its members as chair and one member as vice chair, per MCL 46.3(4).

The chair shall be elected each odd-numbered year for a 2-year term, unless the board provides by resolution or board rule that the chair shall be elected annually, for a 1-year term. The vice chair is required to be elected annually for a 1-year term.

The election of a chair or vice chair must occur at the first meeting of the county board of commissioners in a year in which a chair or vice chair is to be elected. The term of a chair or vice chair begins upon their election.

The board does not have the option of electing a vice chair for a 2-year term. Rather, the election of the vice chair must occur annually at the first meeting of the board, regardless whether the election of the board chair occurs annually. The election of a chair and vice chair is determined by a majority vote of the county board members elected and serving, as per MCL 46.3(2).



A unique aspect of an election for a board chair (but not the vice chair) is that state law allows for a secret ballot. (See MCL 46.3a.) The law does not mandate a secret ballot, but it allows for one in this specific circumstance. If the board chooses to conduct the election of the board chair by secret ballot, a majority of the board must vote to authorize this mechanism.

Matt Nordfjord is a shareholder with the law firm of Cohl, Stoker & Toskey, P.C.



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EXPERTCORNER

MAKE USDA YOUR HOUSING PARTNER

By Jason Allen/USDA Office of Rural Development

One of the challenges many rural communities face is securing adequate housing for new residents. For many years Michigan saw considerable 'out-migration' from townships and villages towards the cities and as that flow reverses, the falloff in new construction can lead to difficulties.

At the same time, there is also concern about providing existing rural residents, particularly the elderly and disabled, with safe, affordable housing. USDA Rural Development can help solve both of these problems.

Single Family Housing Guaranteed Home Loans are limited to low- and moderate-income households in rural areas. Qualified applicants may build, rehabilitate, or improve a dwelling in an eligible rural area. The program provides a 90 percent loan note guarantee to approved lenders in order to reduce the risk of extending 100 percent loans to eligible rural home buyers.

This would be a good place to clarify what the program defines as "rural." Generally, this term applies to small towns and communities. Places like Lansing, Jackson, Grand Rapids, Flint and Detroit (and their suburbs) are not considered to be rural, but most of the places between them are.

All of Michigan north of Mount Pleasant counts as rural, including Traverse City, Alpena and the Upper Peninsula. So, the program has a lot of real estate to work with.

The loan funds can be used to purchase a new or existing residential property to be used as a permanent residence. Closing costs and reasonable/customary expenses associated with the purchase may be included in the transaction. Other eligible uses include repairs and rehabilitation when associated with the purchase of an existing dwelling; home refinancing; special design features or permanently installed equipment to accommodate a household member who has a physical disability; or essential household equipment such as carpeting, ovens, ranges, refrigerators, washers, dryers, heating and cooling equipment as long as the equipment is conveyed with the dwelling.

Since its inception in 1991, more than 105,000 rural Michigan families have benefitted from this program.

The Section 502 Direct Loan Program assists low- and very-low-income applicants obtain decent, safe and sanitary housing in eligible rural areas by providing payment assistance to increase an applicant's repayment ability. Payment assistance is a type of subsidy that reduces the mortgage payment for a short time. The amount of assistance is determined by the adjusted family income.

At a minimum, applicants interested in obtaining a direct loan must have an adjusted income that is at or below the

applicable low-income limit for the area where they wish to buy a house and they must demonstrate a willingness and ability to repay debt. To keep payments low, the payback period can be as long as 33 to 38 years for very low income applicants who cannot afford the 33-year loan term.

Finally, we also have a home repair program, and grants for very-low-income seniors, to help homeowners protect and preserve their most precious asset. This provides loans to very-low-income homeowners to repair, improve or modernize their homes or grants to elderly very-low-income homeowners to remove health and safety hazards.

Eligible applicants must own the home, have a family income below 50 percent of the area median income and, in the case of grants, be age 62 or older and not be able to repay a repair loan. The maximum loan is \$20,000 and the maximum grant is \$7,500. These can be combined for up to \$27,500 in assistance.

Simply put, the thousands of rural homebuyers assisted through USDA are strengthening the rural economy and helping small-town, rural Michigan remain vital and vibrant. If you would like to learn more about our housing programs, contact us at mi.rd-sfh@usda.gov.

Jason Allen is USDA Rural Development state director for Michigan.



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MEET YOUR MAC BOARD

VERONICA KLINEFELT AND RICHARD SCHMIDT



Name: Veronica Klinefelt

County/MAC Region: Macomb/Region V

Position: President

County Service: Macomb Commissioner, 2013-present; chair of Finance, Audit and Budget Committee; member of the 8 ½ Mile drainage district board

Previous Public Service: Mayor pro tem, Eastpointe City Council, 8 years; Trustee, East Detroit School Board, 6 years

Describe a recent event that illustrated the importance of county government in your community:

One of the areas I have really seen the necessity of county government is with respect to underground infrastructure. In our county, the sewer pipes and county drains were neglected for years. We have had a long history of sewage spills into Lake St. Clair that have resulted in beach closures and foul smelling areas of sediment and algae that made the lake impossible to enjoy.

We decided to map out and inspect every drain in Macomb County. We discovered a “fatberg” that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to remove. It consisted of solidified fat, baby wipes, and other debris. We have found submerged vehicles in some of our open drains, and we discovered illegal dumping of oil in others and have been able to trace the spills back to the offending party.

Recently, we invested 17 million dollars in designing and building a device that will let us store combination rainwater/sewage in one of our larger drains instead of having to treat and dump it into the lake. We are in the early stages of building it. To separate the drains would cost over 500 million, so using innovation, we are saving hundreds of millions.

We have also found dangerous cracks in some of our larger drains and are addressing them before they become a big sinkhole similar to the one that occurred four years ago on Christmas Eve. That catastrophe cost the county 70 million dollars. For 28 million, we are lining the rest of that interceptor. The rest of the drains are being caulked and the cracks are being repaired.

The bottom line is, neglecting underground infrastructure can be very costly; and our investments now will save the county for years to come. Counties are vital to things as trivial as being able to flush our toilets and enjoy our environment.



Name: Richard Schmidt

County/MAC Region: Manistee/Region II

Position: Director

County Service: Manistee County Commissioner, 2011 to present

Profession: Purchasing agent

Previous Public Service: Maple Grove Township Board of Review

Describe a recent event that illustrated the importance of county government in your community:

County government is very important due to what we can do and how we can get it done. County governance varies from one county to another, but we all are in charge of financing our individual county’s budget and services.

All counties have certain services that are mandated to them. Of course, we do provide other services because our citizens demand them. Recently, we signed contracts for services to our townships, villages and cities. These services range from zoning administration and land division, to floodplain administration and code enforcement.

All of our municipalities are at different stages of development. In order to have a signed contract by our county government, they must first complete and have a master plan approved that details their request. Contracts were recently signed in our county government taking this into consideration all with a goal to help our citizens by providing these services.

Contracts are signed and approved by our Planning Department and Board of Commissioners. For our municipalities, this resulted in savings for them and revenue for the county. This also leads to uniformity between our townships, villages and cities.

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For all the latest news and events, visit
www.micounties.org