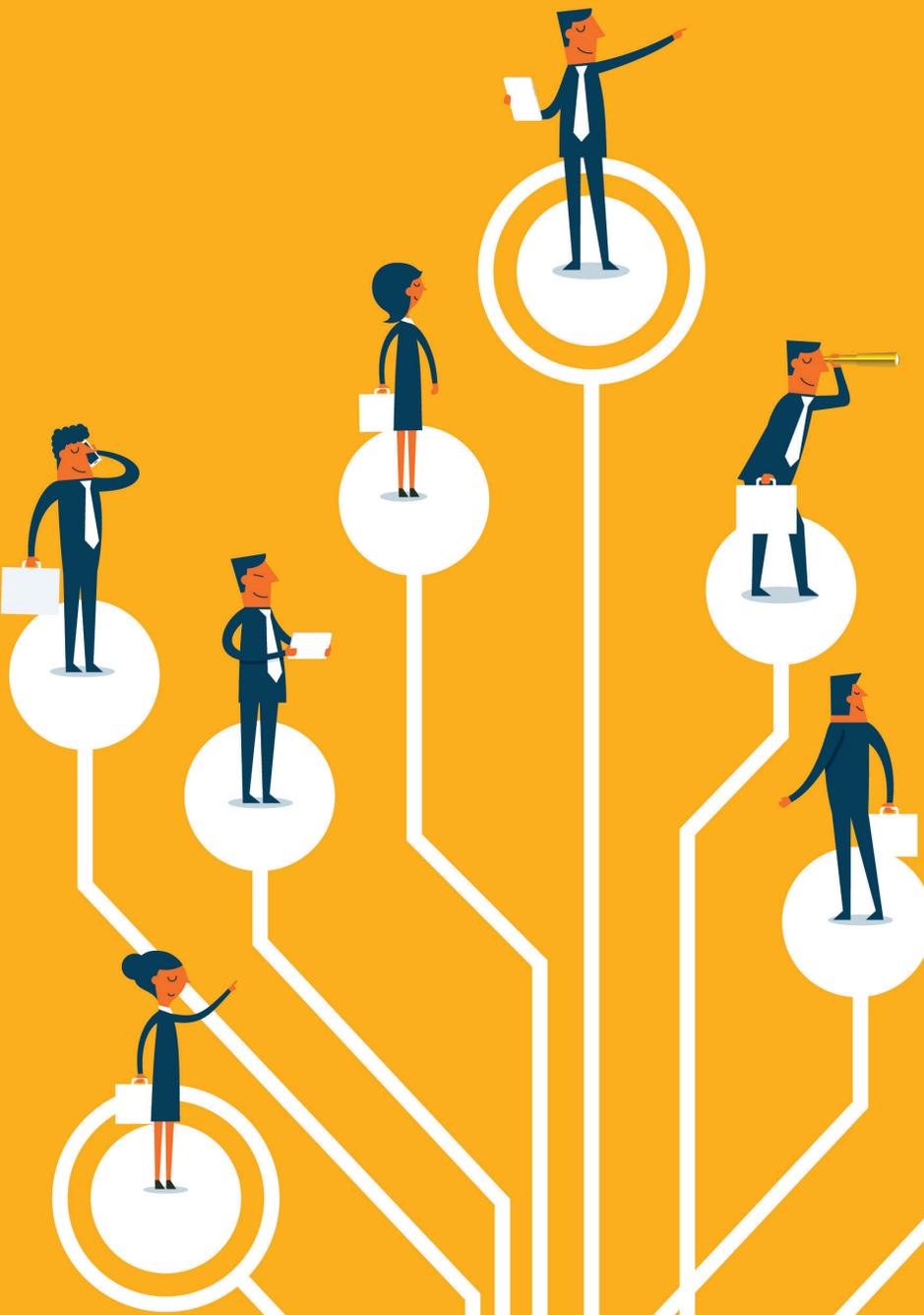


# MICHIGAN COUNTIES



**Cover Story:** Michigan counties are getting creative in pursuit of new employees as a hiring crisis bedevils local governments nationwide.

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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



**STEPHAN W. CURRIE**  
MAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**“On behalf of the entire staff of your association, please accept my best wishes to you and your families for a safe and happy holiday season.”**

The weeks of November and early December are for many a time of journeys – off to Grandma’s for Thanksgiving dinner, out to the deer stand in search of that 10-point buck or over to the mall to get a jump on Christmas shopping.

Here at MAC, this time of year is dominated by journeys, too – traveling across the state to meet with newly elected commissioners as part of our New Commissioner School.

With our partners at MSU Extension, we set up four in-person sites for this year’s school: Saginaw County (Frankenmuth), Barry County (Shelbyville), Marquette County (Marquette) and Crawford County (Grayling). Nearly 250 people showed up across these locations, one of the largest totals in recent memory for the school.

And at each location, we encountered an impressive group of eager new commissioners – joined by some veteran commissioners and administrators – who participated widely and asked excellent questions. We also received dozens of applications for service on one of MAC’s seven policy committees for 2023.

Those applications are particularly notable since they reflect a desire by these commissioner-elects to continue learning, which also will be a major theme for MAC in 2023. The growing complexity of county government, and of the relationship between counties and the state of Michigan, make it essential for county leaders to stay up to date. As your association, MAC is committed to helping commissioners do just that — a process that begins with New Commissioner School and continues with our policy committees, our two major conferences each year, our summer Policy Summit and more.

A couple of years ago, we created our County Commissioner Academy (CCA) because we thought it important to both recognize the increasing educational demands of the commissioner role AND the investment made by individual commissioners in such efforts. Those who attended the New Commissioner School took a first, and big, step toward their status as “certified” commissioners.

Sooner than we think, it will be time to register for our 2023 Legislative Conference, to be held April 24-26 in Lansing. A new favorite segment of that event for me is when I get to hand out CCA certificates to “graduates” of the preceding year. So, as you begin to plan out your 2023, I hope you will make time to attend the Legislative Conference and continue the learning journey with MAC.

On behalf of the entire staff of your association, please accept my best wishes to you and your families for a safe and happy holiday season. ♦

## 83 COUNTIES MANY MORE STORIES

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# Letter from the President



**STAN PONSTEIN**  
PRESIDENT, MAC BOARD OF  
DIRECTORS

**“If we are to continue to work together, we will want a strong and intentional association with a strong statewide voice.”**

The leaves have fallen. The overnight temps are lower. Snowflakes are in the air. As the seasons change, so does the political landscape. Things change constantly and change can be difficult, but we survived another election cycle which will bring change to Lansing. Gov. Whitmer won re-election for another 4 years, Democrats won control of the State House and for the first time in 40 years the State Senate as well.

That kind of change could present challenges for us as an association. I feel the change will bring us some opportunities in Lansing. For the Legislature convening in 2023, we will have 24 former County Commissioners now serving in Lansing. With that as a starting point, we have a foundation to build upon.

So, where do we go from here? Do we want to be divided as counties or do we want to work together? If we are to continue to work together, we will want a strong and intentional association with a strong statewide voice. Our voice must allow us to build a forceful presence in the legislative process. If we grow with others, we have all the tools we need. We have a respected Executive Director, a strong governmental relations team and talented and professional staff, from top to bottom, the envy of many associations. If we set our minds to it, we will accomplish many great things.

Heading into 2023, our top MAC goals at the State Capitol are:

- Create a Revenue Sharing Trust Fund that reflects a true sharing of the state’s revenue
- Implement the recommendations from the Trial Court Funding Commission to ensure counties have reliable and sufficient revenue to operate courts
- Enact legislation restoring pre-pandemic flexibility in the Open Meetings Act to allow for remote participation

So, how do we start? We need to set an example for others so they can see what we can achieve when we work together. We don’t need to bring red or blue agendas or left or right policies. The only thing we need to bring forward are policies and ideas that will make our counties and communities a better place for those who live there.

The media will never see most of what we say or do as we continue to tell the stories of Michigan counties. So, if we are going to be successful, I will need your help. We all will need to be “Ambassadors for MAC,” just as we all are ambassadors for our own counties. We will silence our critics when they see us not as lobbyists or advocates but as government partners.

In order for the MAC to get there, I will need everyone to be ambassadors for the Michigan Association of Counties in the year ahead. ♦



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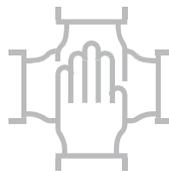
### LEAD:

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



### ORGANIZE:

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### COLLABORATE:

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# MAC stands ready to aid counties with planning on opioid funds

BY AMY DOLINKY/TECHNICAL ADVISER, OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS PLANNING AND CAPACITY BUILDING



**“MAC and numerous providers throughout the state and country are providing free technical assistance to counties that have interest in receiving support on anything from strategic planning, spending plan development, policy analysis, reporting and evaluation, program development, program implementation and countless other activities.”**

Opioid settlement funds are anticipated to be available to counties early in the new year. As counties begin considering how to spend dollars most effectively, there are numerous things to consider and resources to become familiar with.

National recommendations highlight key principles to consider throughout the planning process. It is highly recommended that a separate fund is created to house these specific dollars to ensure dollars are spent on opioid abatement and remediation and to assist with transparency ([jhsph.edu](https://www.jhsph.edu)). Consideration should also be given to the fact that the amount of funds received by each county will differ on an annual basis. Specific to the Johnson and Johnson and “Distributor” settlements, the Michigan State-Subdivision Agreement for Allocation of Distribution Settlement Agreement states, “A minimum of 70% of Settlement Payments must be used solely for future Opioid Remediation.” ([nationalopioidsettlement.com](https://www.nationalopioidsettlement.com))

Opioid Remediation is defined as,

*Care, treatment, and other programs and expenditures (including reimbursement for past such programs or expenditures) except where this Agreement restricts the use of*

*funds solely to future Opioid Remediation designed to (1) address the misuse and abuse of opioid products, (2) treat or mitigate opioid use or related disorders, or (3) mitigate other alleged effects of, including on those injured as a result of, the opioid epidemic. Exhibit E provides a non-exhaustive list of expenditures that qualify as being paid for Opioid Remediation. Qualifying expenditures may include reasonable related administrative expenses.*

Future settlements with other companies are expected to have different processes and requirements.

Local governments can combine funds through contracting or by voluntarily providing their allotted funds to another participating subdivision through the process outlined in the notice of payment.

Early in 2023, counties can expect to see a toolkit, reports and other documents released from MAC and other organizations. MAC, in partnership with Vital Strategies, will release a toolkit intended to serve as a roadmap for counties to utilize in their planning process. The toolkit will provide an overview of the settlements, data on the scope of the overdose crisis and information on accessing

local data, as well as principles, strategies and recommended steps for spending. The recommended steps for spending include stakeholder engagement, gather information, determine the process moving forward and reporting and evaluation.

Stakeholder engagement is the first step outlined to encourage the inclusion of those most directly impacted by the use of settlement dollars, including those with personal lived experience with substance use disorder, those that use drugs, those that work in the medical and behavioral health fields or fields related to the social determinants of health that impact overdose. MAC's toolkit will tie in with other reports and documents that will be released in the new year which will outline specific strategies,

strategy evidence base, gaps in services and recommended areas for spending.

MAC and numerous providers throughout the state and country are providing free technical assistance to counties that have interest in receiving support on anything from strategic planning, spending plan development, policy analysis, reporting and evaluation, program development, program implementation and countless other activities.

To find the most appropriate technical assistance provider, please complete the support request form at [bit.ly/3HFFqRZ](https://bit.ly/3HFFqRZ) or contact me at [dolinky@micounties.org](mailto:dolinky@micounties.org). ♦



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## Genesee's Nolden passes

Bryant Nolden, a Genesee County commissioner and longtime community servant in Flint, passed away on Dec. 7. He was 57.



Nolden grew up in Flint and served 25 years in Flint schools as an elementary teacher after completing college. Before joining the Genesee County Board in the fall of 2014, he served several years on the Flint City Council. His community service included leadership roles for the Flint Institute of Arts, the Genesee County Land Bank, GST Michigan Works, Mass Transportation Authority, GCCARD, Flint and Genesee Group (Chamber of Commerce), Genesee County Health Board, the Investment Committee for the Ruth Mott Foundation and Genesee County Animal Control.

In 2014, he formed the Friends of Berston to keep open the city's historic Berston Field House as a community center for young people.

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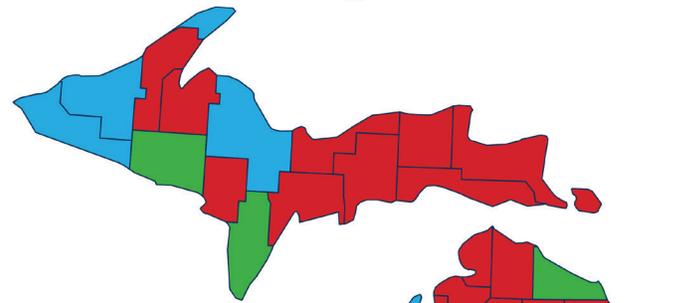
## MAC plans special elections at '23 Legislative Conference

The 2022 elections caused significant changes for the MAC Board of Directors for 2023, necessitating the holding of special elections at MAC's 2023 Legislative Conference in April, Executive Director Stephan Currie announced in December.

At the end of December, Phil Kuyers of Ottawa County, Eileen Kowall of Oakland County, Christian Marcus of Antrim County and Scott Noesen of Midland County will leave their county positions and thus the MAC Board. Their vacancies, in Regions 3, 5, 2 and 6, respectively, will be filled, along with a pre-existing vacancy in Region 4, in regional caucuses that are likely to be held on April 25, 2023.

The filing period for candidates will open 60 days prior to the conference: Feb. 23, 2023. For updates on board election news and deadlines, visit [www.micounties.org](http://www.micounties.org).

## Who runs Michigan's counties?



Republicans will control boards in 67 counties in 2023, compared to the Democrats' 13. Three counties will lack a majority of any single party.

- Republican majority on county board
- Democratic majority on county board
- No partisan majority

Commissioner Totals by Party\*

Republicans	444
Democrats	156
Independents	15
Vacant	4

\*As of Dec. 8, 2022

---

## Elections lead to slight tweak in partisan control

While Michigan will have about 200 new county commissioners serving on boards in 2023, the 2022 elections did not change much as far as partisan control across the state.

Data collected by MAC after election results were finalized show Republican majorities in 67 of the 83 counties, down from 68 in June 2022. Democrats will be the majority in 13 counties entering 2023, with the remaining three counties lacking a majority of any individual party.

---

## Big crowds attend New Commissioner sessions

More than 250 county leaders attended four in-person sessions of the 2022 New Commissioner School, a service MAC has provided in conjunction with MSU Extension

for more than 50 years.

Executive Director Stephan Currie briefed attendees on MAC's services and opportunities and led an interactive discussion between newly elected and veteran commissioners at all four locations.



MAC Board President Stan Ponstein of Kent, Second Vice President Jim Storey of Allegan and Board Directors Vaughn Begick of Bay and Richard Schmidt of Manistee also attended sessions to answer questions from new colleagues from around the state.



MAC BOARD DIRECTOR VAUGHN BEGICK OF BAY COUNTY HAD A BUSY WEEK IN LATE NOVEMBER. A DAY AFTER HELPING MAC BRIEF NEW COMMISSIONERS ON THEIR DUTIES IN FRANKENMUTH, HE JOINED OTHER COMMUNITY LEADERS IN WELCOMING PRESIDENT BIDEN TO A BAY COUNTY SEMICONDUCTOR PLANT FOR A CELEBRATION OF U.S. AND MICHIGAN MANUFACTURING.

(PHOTO COURTESY OF VAUGHN BEGICK)

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# Caught in national hiring challenge, Michigan counties get creative

BY NANCY DERRINGER

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

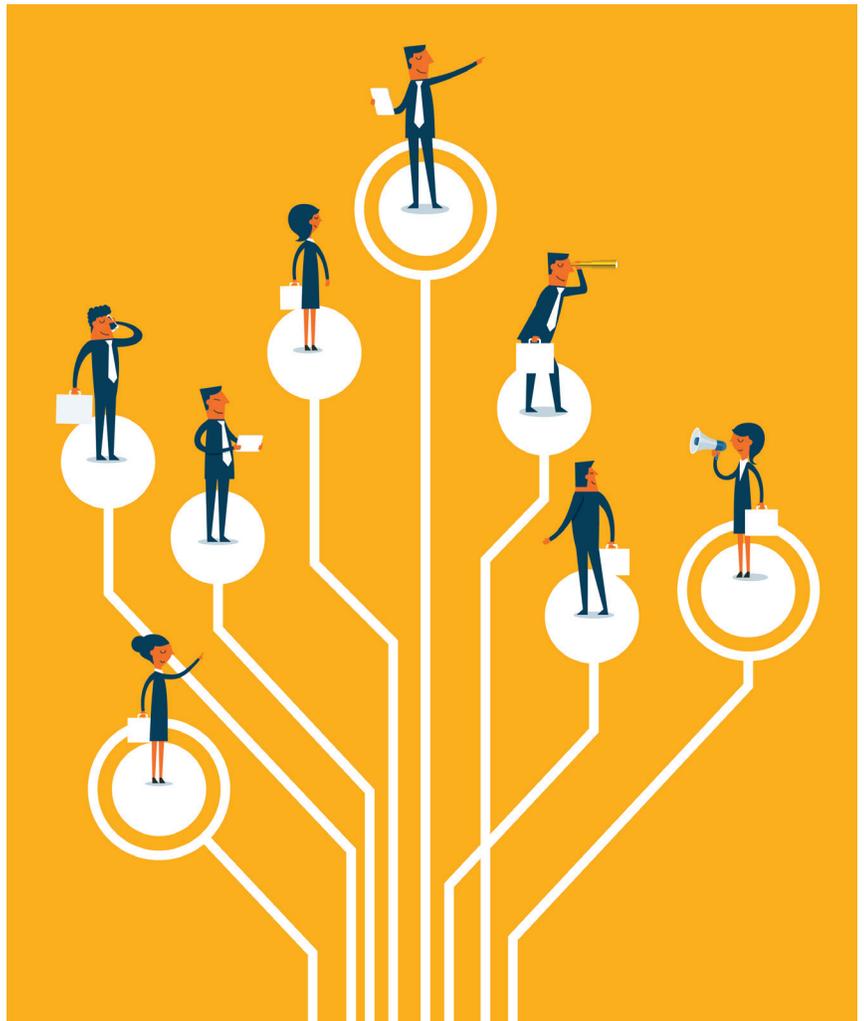
**“Hiring anyone with a degree — public defenders, nurses, finance specialists and others — is often difficult, particularly in rural Michigan, Hannah and her counterparts elsewhere say.”**

Marketing campaigns. “Career paths” rather than jobs. Continuing education. Retention and signing bonuses. Job flexibility designed to keep workers happy — remote work, open-concept workspaces, child-care perks. All of these strategies are common in the private sector. And in a nationwide labor shortage, they’re becoming more commonplace in county workforces as well.

Nearly three years after COVID-19 upended the world, the hiring and retention playing field has tilted to the advantage of workers. What’s more, it’s clear that the bottom-line deal for public service for generations, i.e., accepting less money for better benefits and a fair amount of job security, is no longer enough to keep positions filled.

“We’re still able to hire good people for the jobs we have available,” said Hannah Al Vandenberg, Kent County administrator. “But both the total pool and eligible applicants have dropped dramatically.”

Consequently, people in Vandenberg’s job around the state have had to change strategies, including one of the hardest for public-sector work to support: More money.



HANNAH

At least 23 Michigan counties have reported offering pay increases in 2022, in amounts ranging from 2 percent to 5 percent (see chart).

Many of the hiring conditions Michigan administrators are dealing with are reflected in national trends, according to a survey of state and local workforces by Mission Square Research Institute (<https://slge.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022workforce.pdf>). Governments are increasingly finding themselves offering signing bonuses for new employees, as workers ask for higher salaries, employee assistance programs or even simple recognition of good work.

When Mary Catherine Hannah took the administrator’s post in Alpena County in September 2021, that was the first problem

on her to-do list. The county was trying to staff a new, expanded jail. However, paying under \$13 an hour for entry-level corrections officers was making it hard to even attract applicants. Union negotiations bumped that wage to \$18, and the situation improved, but new hires no longer can join the pension system, to which the county is paying \$600,000 a year (on a 10-year plan) to make up an unfunded liability.

Hiring anyone with a degree — public defenders, nurses, finance specialists and others — is often difficult, particularly in rural Michigan, Hannah and her counterparts elsewhere say.

Scott Erbisch, administrator/controller in Marquette County, said the wage problem was there even before the pandemic, but private-sector increases are forcing counties to adapt or lose workers. With limited latitude to raise pay, administrators in a similar position (and nearly all of them are) have had to be creative. Erbisch and others say they're looking harder at retaining existing employees, as open positions become harder to fill.



**ERBISCH**

"I emphasize and offer opportunities for professional development as often as I can," said Tracy Cordes, in Gratiot County. "I get people involved in their professional organizations, learn what their interests are, and try to keep them as happy and fulfilled as I can."

Being proactive when recruiting is equally important, Cordes said.

"I tell (human relations) staff that recruiting is an active process, not a post-and-wait process," she said. "What are we looking for, and where do those people go when they're job-hunting? We have to think about these things now."

Christopher Wren, administrator in Newaygo County, advises selling your assets to applicants. In Newaygo, that includes no-cost-to-employee health-care plans, which is attractive to young families who might be factoring cost of living into relocation plans. Wren, who used to work in Oakland County, said northern Michigan's slower pace and less expensive housing helped attract him and his wife; they can afford for her to stay home with their young son.

Administrators have also had to adapt to lures like remote

and hybrid remote/in-office work, which is fast becoming common in the private sector and a perk for employees. Cordes, in Gratiot County, keeps a home in Grand Rapids, 90 minutes away, living in an apartment in Ithaca during the week.

"What COVID did was convince my commissioners that people can work remotely and are not just goofing off all day. COVID taught us a lot, and if we don't learn what lessons there are, then that's a wasted pandemic," she said.

Finally, Hannah puts in a word for small gestures of appreciation that make workers feel valued. Even an office "Friendsgiving" can make a difference, she noted. In Marquette County, Erbisch said, a new strategic plan is, for the first time, incorporating employee feedback: "something we should have done years earlier."

Vanderberg said lower birth rates mean the problem won't go away anytime soon: "There are some macro things going on that we don't have any control over. We're all being forced to think differently about a lot of things." ♦

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# Counties can play bigger roles in remediating blight

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.



**M**ichigan has a blight problem. It isn't just a city issue; blight exists in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Community decline is cyclical in nature. If local governments do not have the funds to address blight and work to prevent it at the community level, then businesses and residents with the means to do so leave. This, in turn, diminishes tax revenue and more abandoned properties for already struggling communities. The “broken window theory” of blight posits that vacant and abandoned properties with boarded doors, broken windows, and unkempt lawns can create a haven for criminal activity and attract more blight. As each small problem remains unfixed, it affects people’s attitudes towards the environment and encourages more problems.

All states have blighted places, but the blight problem in Michigan is particularly acute because of our stagnant population growth, deindustrialization, urban sprawl, tax policies and lax code enforcement in some places.

Counties could play a bigger role in mitigating Michigan’s blight problems.

Thus far, the approach has been to tell cities, villages and townships that their policies contributed to the creation of blight, so it is their responsibility to clean it up. This has failed.

Michigan’s blight remediation tools do not come with dedicated funding sources. Because of this, local governments must fight blight with either general fund dollars or find state and federal grants. State and federal grants do not provide consistent funding. That leaves many local governments relying on their own strained general fund budgets.

This is where counties can play a larger role. Most local governments are limited to property taxes as their only own-source tax revenue. Therefore, most blight funding comes from property taxes. Furthermore, many local governments with concentrations of blight are already levying high property tax rates (and income taxes in many cases). Blighted places tend to be fiscally constrained, so directing more resources for blight often comes at the cost of fewer dollars for other needs.

Furthermore, while cities and townships have significant legal authority to deal with blight, only land banks are empowered to assemble land and clear titles to properties in a coordinated manner to facilitate the use and development of certain properties. Other than Detroit’s land bank, the other 45 land banks are county entities (notwithstanding the state land bank).

However, land banks do not possess taxing

authority. Building on the success of land banks will occur with funding streams to become more fully engaged.

Successful blight management requires partnership between all levels of government. Cities and townships are better at identifying properties in need of remediation and can assess community needs. Counties are more effective at working towards long-term goals, leveraging their funding to accomplish large scale projects, and maintaining consistency among areas within their jurisdictions.

Levying taxes at the city or township level can introduce economic distortions by making it easier for residents and businesses to leave the area to avoid the tax. It can also intensify socioeconomic disparities across local governments.

These types of concerns can be addressed, however, by funding remediation at the county level where the result generally is less competition and fewer negative externalities. Socioeconomic and income inequalities are decreased at the county level and levying local taxes at the county level promotes a form of tax-base sharing that benefits the entire state.

Counties are only as strong as their weakest communities. Dedicating county resources from general funds or specific levies to fight blight may cause some political pain but the result will be worth it. ♦

**“Thus far, the approach has been to tell cities, villages and townships that their policies contributed to the creation of blight, so it is their responsibility to clean it up. This has failed.”**

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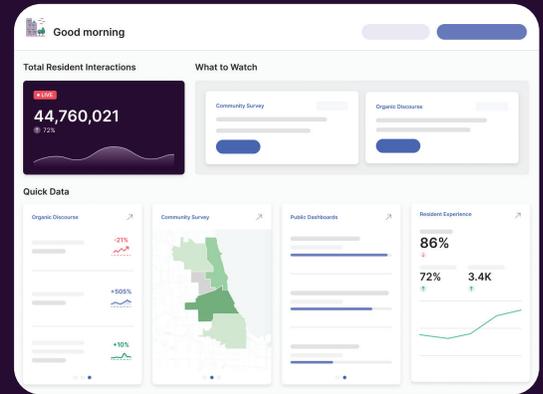


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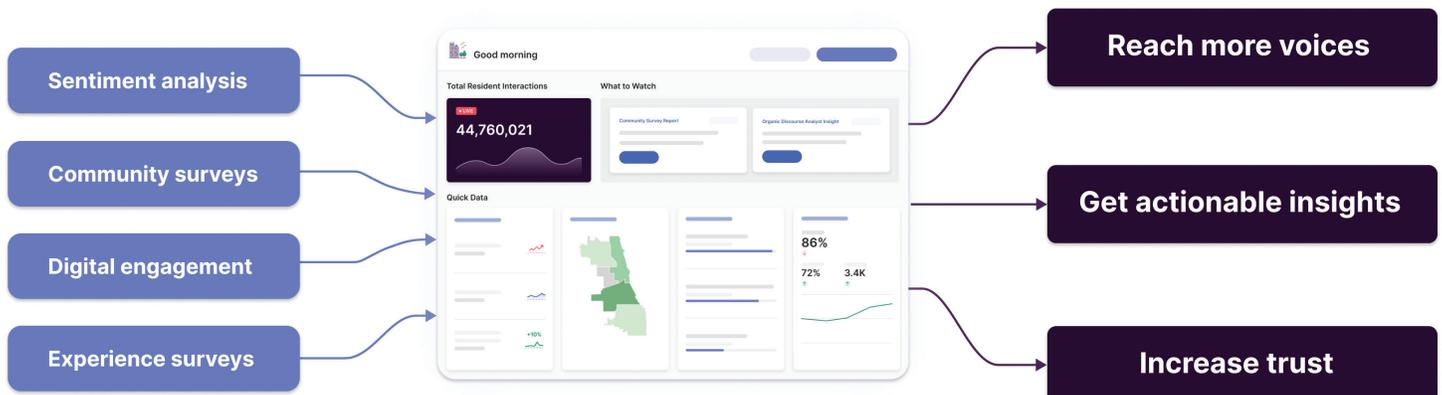
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# Registers play central role in Michigan's economic life

BRANDON DENBY/LIVINGSTON COUNTY REGISTER OF DEEDS

Registers of deeds have existed in Michigan since Congress approved our state's first constitution in 1835. Registers became the official recording office for all legal instruments pertaining to the transfer and encumbrances of properties in each of Michigan's 83 counties.

Since that time, the Register of Deeds Office (ROD) has evolved into the most important office regarding real property, making possible the searchability and insurability of those properties. Your ROD offices are constantly working to build on efficiencies and effectiveness for the benefit of all landowners.

In the last 10 years, we have guided our offices into the electronic era. Recording is transitioning from physical paper to electronic submissions. Signatures (including the notary) have also turned to electronic platforms. This transition allows attorneys, title companies and other industry partners the opportunity to go paperless and become more expedient and efficient with closings and recordings.

The Michigan Association of Registers of Deeds (MARD) educates and helps implement many changes in counties across our state. MARD also works to protect our offices by testifying before the Michigan legislature throughout the year. MARD has provided input on bills that affect record-ability, search-ability, and efficiencies of our ROD offices.

Ann Manning-Clayton of Gladwin County, incoming president for MARD, stated, "There are many legislative pieces on the horizon to look out for. One of those being HR 7900, which is the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The purpose of this bill is to allow judges and other select professions to request that their information be removed from county websites. If this legislation is passed,



Brandon Denby is president of the Michigan Association of Registers of Deeds (MARD).

**“The Michigan Association of Registers of Deeds (MARD) educates and helps implement many changes in counties across our state.”**

it will require any county office to ‘shield’ a requested party’s information from county websites for five years. This isn’t a simple redaction, but a complete removal of a record from the Register of Deed’s viewable database and/or website.”

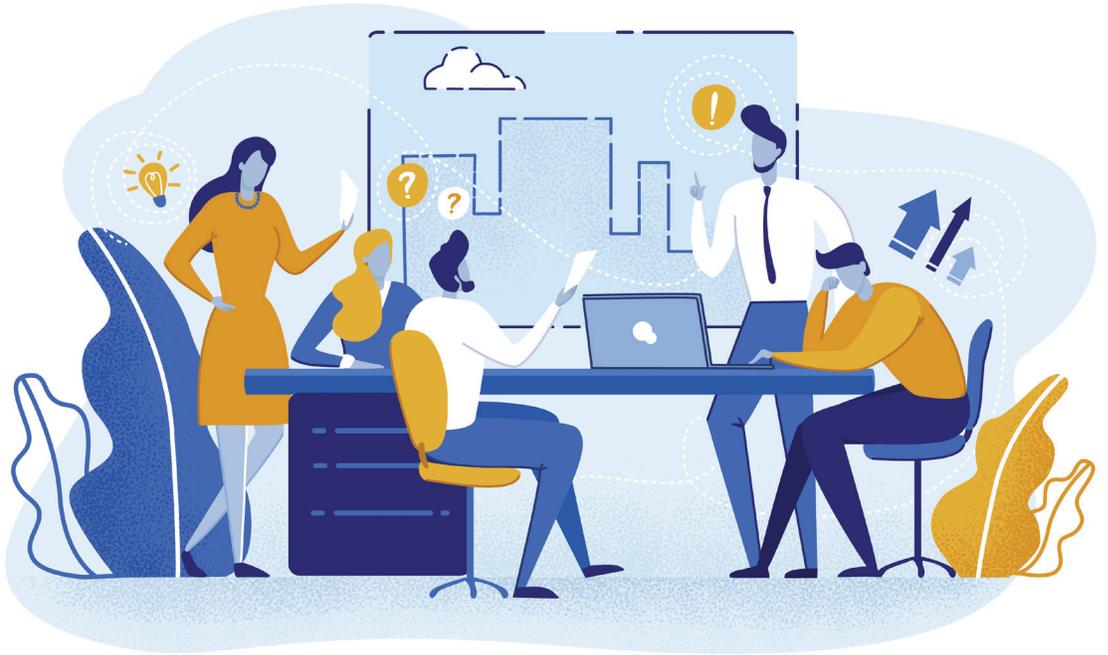
At the state level, House Bill 4416, the Discharge of Prohibited Restrictive Covenants Act, would prohibit the recording of deeds or other instruments that contain certain restrictive covenants or conditions while also providing a process through which prohibited restrictions can be removed from an original document already recorded with the ROD. That bill is awaiting the governor’s signature as I write this.

Additionally, Senate Bill 1133 would extend the current practice of using \$4 from the ROD recording fee to fund the state Survey and Remonumentation Program. This extension would move the program’s new sunset through Jan. 1, 2043. This bill also is awaiting the governor’s signature.

Your local Register of Deeds and MARD members are continually working to stay apprised of the changing laws and technological changes that affect our industry. Should you have any questions or concerns, you are always able to reach out to us at [www.MARDMI.org](http://www.MARDMI.org). ♦

# Three strategies are vital to good public design

BY VINCE NOVAK, AIA/TOWERPINKSTER



*Vince Novak, AIA is a director and project manager for TowerPinkster, a multidiscipline design firm with offices in Michigan, Indiana and Kentucky (towerpinkster.com).*

**B**alancing “what we need” with “what we can afford” is a universal problem when it comes to design and construction. For public entities, the challenge can be even greater. Responsible use of public funding is vitally important when it comes to serving your community. So how do you prioritize the needs of the public while managing your budgets? Though we certainly can’t touch on everything here, here are three strategies we’ve seen work year after year with varied community sizes.

## **Strategy 1: Make a plan**

A long-term plan, or Master Plan, is an essential roadmap for any county. Having such a plan ensures clarity when it comes to budgeting and prioritization of capital projects. Additionally, studies such as a Space Utilization Study, Facility Assessment or Renovation/New Build Study can provide documentation and data to support your Master Plan.

A good Master Plan establishes immediate and long-term needs for your county. It includes all building assets, provides a budget, and looks ahead at future capital improvement projects. On the other hand, a Space Utilization Study

focuses on specific facilities to determine whether they have outgrown their capacity or could be reconfigured to fulfill a different need. Determining whether to renovate an existing building or build new is often a conversation that happens after a Facility Assessment or Space Utilization Study. Depending on the depth of renovation needed, building new can be the better long-term investment. Weighing these costs will help ensure responsible use of public funding and the appropriate care and maintenance of public spaces.

## **Strategy 2: Ask for public feedback, then ask again**

If good planning is your metaphorical roadmap, then public feedback is the fuel that drives you. It’s hard to overstate the importance of including the public in your design and planning phases. Community forums, presentations, focus groups, and surveys are just pieces of a successful public planning process. Not only can these steps shed light on areas that need improvement, but they also create buy-in, build excitement and reconfirm priorities. A consistent and multi-pronged communications strategy is an important part of getting public

feedback. Make sure people are aware of the planning process and the need for input through traditional and digital methods. This might include mailings, social media, advertisements, tables at community events, newsletters, road signs and any other methods you have at your disposal. Get creative and get that feedback!

### **Strategy 3: Make investments now for employee well-being**

Your employees are the heart and soul of county operations. Every day, they are responsible for delivering critical services to your community. Prioritizing their wellbeing is one of the best long-term investments you can make. Focusing on improving Indoor Environmental Quality, including elements such as ergonomics, thermal comfort, access to natural light, air quality, acoustics and others can create a more

comfortable working environment. Another area of focus is the importance of flexibility in the workplace. Flexible workstations give employees the ability to choose different ways to work depending on their needs and specific tasks. Sit-to-stand workstations, workstation accessories like monitor arms and fully adjustable task chairs, noise-reducing phone booths and collaboration spaces are all key components to supporting employee wellbeing.

Need help or have questions? Let us know.

Even though the task may seem daunting, it is possible to provide well-designed, community-centric buildings that stay within budget. We know because we've delivered them firsthand. Long-term planning, community input and prioritizing employee wellness are three strategies we've seen work time and again. ♦

**“A good Master Plan establishes immediate and long-term needs for your county. It includes all building assets, provides a budget, and looks ahead at future capital improvement projects.”**





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# Mandated fees can transform your telecom bill — for the worse

BY DAN AYLWARD/ABILITA

**O**n almost all telecom bills, there's a section called something like "fees, taxes, and surcharges," which customers pay in addition to the services that they are contracted for. These fees are rarely (if ever) discussed during negotiations for new services with telecom vendors. But these additional fees are an important and significant part to be considered during the overall cost analysis. These taxes and fees can add an additional 50 percent or more to the cost of the contracted services and can be variable over time. When negotiating for new services, ask the vendor to provide a sample bill that includes taxes and surcharges. This total is what you need to budget for.

Taxes are levied by various government entities at all levels of government. The most notable fee to look at in any telecom bill is the Federal Universal Service Fund (USF) fee. This is a fee charged to the telecom service providers by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), an agency of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

The USF rate is calculated and adjusted quarterly based on the needs of the USAC to fund the various programs at that time. The rate for the quarter of July-September 2022 was 33 percent of eligible services (up from 23.8% the previous quarter). This is the highest rate since the beginning of the program. The rate for the fourth quarter of 2022 is 28.9 percent.

All service providers of telecommunications must contribute to the Federal USF based on a percentage of their interstate and international end-user telecommunications revenues. It is possible for organizations to request to be

exempt from the FUSF, but if you go that route, be prepared for a lengthy and time-consuming effort. The exemption process needs to start before the contract is signed by the customer, and the contract needs to be specific, stating that the customer is exempt.

It is also important to note that not all telecom services are subject to the USF. In general, if more than 10 percent of the traffic is interstate (including internet and international traffic), then the USF will be applied.



States can also impose similar fees on telecom vendors. These also get passed on to the end user. Texas has recently initiated a Universal Service Fund fee of 24 percent on eligible services (up from 3%).

Here's an example of how additional fees affect your monthly communications costs. If your county is evaluating a new voice service that includes 500 VoIP seats at \$30 per seat, the monthly recurring cost

will be \$15,000. The USF fee will be \$4950, and state and local taxes could be an additional \$3000 or more (a lot more if you are in Texas). So, the total cost would be at least \$22,950 a month, or 53 percent over the \$15,000 monthly recurring cost. Telecom managers should plan on and budget 50 percent of the services for taxes, fees, and surcharges. Future changes in the USF are unknown, and the trend is that it will continue to increase. Although there is little that can be done about these charges, it is worthwhile to monitor them and budget for increases in the future.

When the USF was in the 5 percent area, it was a nuisance. Now that it has increased to 33 percent (and is expected to continue to increase), it is a significant element in your telecom expense. ♦

*Dan Aylward works for Abilita, a MACSC-sponsored program. Learn more at [micounties.org/abilita](https://micounties.org/abilita).*

**“It is possible for organizations to request to be exempt from the FUSF, but if you go that route, be prepared for a lengthy and time-consuming effort.”**

# Quick reminder offered on legal requirements for electing board chairs and vice chairs

BY MATT NORDFJORD, ESQ.

**“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.”**

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.

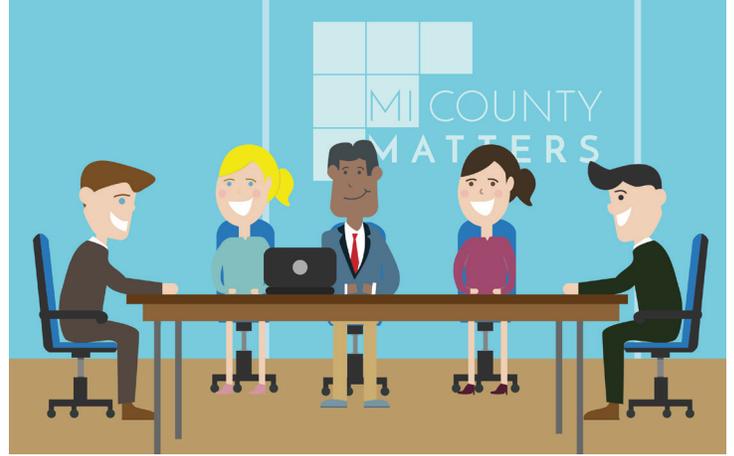
The county board of commissioners is required to elect one of its members as chair and one member as vice chair, per MCL 46.3(4).

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.

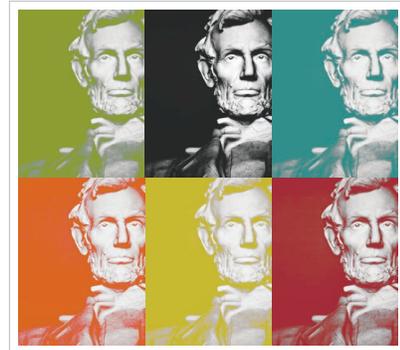
The election of a chair or vice chair must occur at the first meeting of the county board of commissioners in a year in which a chair or vice chair is to be elected. The term of a chair or vice chair begins upon their election.

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 allow 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. ♦



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## William Miller

**Name:** William Miller

**County/MAC Region:** Oakland/At-large

**Position:** Director

**County Service:** 2019-present

**Profession:** Political Director, International Union of Operating Engineers 324

**Previous Public Service:** Parks and Recreation Commissioner, city of Farmington Hills

### What is your no. 1 issue to pursue as part of the MAC Board?

Work to protect and serve working families and the underserved.



## Antoinette Wallace

**Name:** Antoinette Wallace

**County/MAC Region:** Macomb/Region 5

**Position:** Director

**County Service:** 2021-present

**Profession:** Realtor

**Previous Public Service:** N/A

### What is your no. 1 issue to pursue as part of the MAC Board?

This position is so valuable because you can directly with people in your neighborhood making life better for them directly. In this term I want to:

- Work more with our unions to see how I can be a voice for them
- Continue to ensure small businesses are given a chance to partner with the County and educate them on grants and other opportunities they may not know about
- Continue to serve our schools, our youth and our seniors to give them more of a partnership with the County and resources they need

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To pay, visit MAC's digital payment center at [micounties.org/macsc](http://micounties.org/macsc).

# Mecosta County's 'sudden' big news was anything but

BY PAUL BULLOCK/MECOSTA COUNTY CONTROLLER-ADMINISTRATOR

**“I can’t emphasize enough the importance of a professional economic development agency being involved from the outset.”**

**G**ov. Whitmer announces new battery component manufacturing facility in Big Rapids, creating 2,350 jobs and an investment of more than \$2.3 billion”

That’s the surprising headline Mecosta County and the Big Rapids rare awake to on Oct. 5, 2022.

It would seem to many this arrangement sprung into being in a matter of weeks. The behind-the-scenes reality was much different.

The project started nearly 18 months earlier, when the Big Rapids Township supervisor took a cold call from a Gotion, Inc. vice president inquiring about a recently expired Renaissance Zone along U.S. 131 north of Big Rapids. The supervisor immediately brought in The Right Place Inc. (RPI), a Grand Rapids-based economic development nonprofit, to help. That was the first critical step, but many more would be taken.

RPI brought the experience, connections and knowledge to coordinate a response to what soon became our “Project Elephant.” Without that coordination and guidance, I’m sure the project would have stalled.



What followed, though was a series of discussions and meetings of the “one step forward, two steps back” variety that involved the Big Rapids supervisor, representatives of RPI, representatives of Ferris State University, staff from the Michigan Economic Development Corp. (MEDC) and Gotion.

Confidentiality was required for anyone attending those meetings. As with most large projects, Gotion Inc. was not interested in the news breaking that they were even looking here. This back and forth went on for several months as Gotion, RPI and the MEDC did their diligence. In the meantime, Gotion narrowed its initial field of 40 site candidates.

Fast forward to late August of 2022. The



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company is suddenly signing an incentive offer from MEDC. At that meeting, I learned for the first time the name of the company and that coordination was going to be required between two township boards (as the project straddles a township boundary) and the County Board of Commissioners, which would have to approve the townships' request to the MEDC for a 30-year Renaissance Zone designation.

On Sept. 26, a joint meeting was held of the boards for the townships of Big Rapids and Green and Mecosta County. Following a presentation from Gotion, significant project public comment and a Q&A session between the Boards and presenters, each board unanimously approved the Renaissance Zone request. Another critical step, but not the last one.

That decision, one that could have derailed the project, came from the MEDC and the Michigan Strategic Fund approved significant financial incentives from the State as well as the requested Renaissance Zone. We are now eagerly awaiting the finalization of the land purchases and the first groundbreaking.

What are my takeaways from this experience:

- Be prepared to drop what you are doing and devote most, if not all, of your time to such a project when it gets close to fruition.
- Cultivate good working relationships with the local units that may allow the County to act as a coordinating and calming influence through the rush once the project hits the press.
- Don't hesitate to utilize a media consultant to help shape your message. We found the services of RPI invaluable in this area. The MAC Annual Conference session on media relations also proved very valuable, as I had attended it hours before the story broke.

Lastly, I can't emphasize enough the importance of a professional economic development agency being involved from the outset. They were able to provide information on local resources to the candidate company and to conduct due diligence for local governments, all while maintaining the confidentiality demanded by many corporations. ♦

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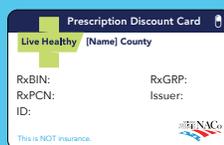
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