

# MICHIGAN COUNTIES

## Adapting for 21st century

Counties deploy new strategies to  
deal with new challenges



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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 that note, let me put in a plug for joining the National Association of Counties. A few days ago, I received an update from NACo on county membership in Michigan and I’m pleased to report 55 of our 83 counties are members now that St. Joseph County has joined those ranks.”**

As I write, preparations are accelerating here in MAC’s offices for the first big national event of the year — and no, I don’t mean the Super Bowl.

In mid-February, thousands of county leaders from across the country gather in Washington, D.C., for the National Association of Counties (NACo) Legislative Conference. For the MAC staff, this means a mountain of logistics: coordinating and drafting our annual federal policy priorities; reviewing conference materials; and arranging appointments with members of Congress on Capitol Hill for our visiting county officials.

Just getting to and from D.C. can be a challenge this time of year. About a decade ago, a massive winter storm disrupted air travel (a couple of staffers had to overnight in Philadelphia during what should have been a 2-hour flight from Michigan) and brought the capital to a veritable standstill.

All the trouble is more than worth it, though, as any attendee will tell you that a NACo conference is a firehose of policy information and networking nuggets.

On that note, let me put in a plug for joining the National Association of Counties. A few days ago, I received an update from NACo on county membership in Michigan and I’m pleased to report 55 of our 83 counties are members now that St. Joseph County has joined those ranks.

Of course, that means 28 counties are not members of NACo. If your county is not a member of NACo and you have questions, I’m happy to talk with you about the benefits ([scurrie@micounties.org](mailto:scurrie@micounties.org)) or connect you with someone at NACo today.

President Storey writes in this edition (page 5) about the value of building relationships with non-county officials. Of course, this applies to federal leaders, too. Never hesitate to invite your federal representatives or senators to a county board meeting. Schedules are tough for everyone, true, but sometimes the calendars work out — IF you issue the invitation.

Also, don’t miss another important update on the work MAC is doing for you on page 27. Amy Dolinky, our adviser on opioid settlement funds, reviews county progress on this front, particularly the surge in member interest in her services. In fact, she remarked to staff this week that she’s now “double- and triple-booked” with members eager to utilize her expertise and wisdom. That’s music to our ears here at MAC when members are reaching out and letting us partner with and help them in service to their constituents.

As always, if I or the staff can be of any assistance, give us a call at 517-372-5374. We are here for you. ♦



## 83 COUNTIES MANY MORE STORIES

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# Letter from the President



*Jim Storey*

**JIM STOREY**  
PRESIDENT, MAC BOARD OF  
DIRECTORS

**“If there are issues in our counties that need the attention of any of these bodies, speeding a solution may be helped along by inviting the pertinent commission to meet in your county.”**

A hangover from the COVID-19 contagion’s response that separated people from one another is the distance it created among governmental officials. With the slower than required speed of returning public servants to their offices where ordinary residents can see and speak with them, working together to solve issues has become more difficult and even strained.

It is even harder when there is an issue that directly affects any one of our eighty-three counties and needs to be addressed by the state government. Despite the advances with virtual platforms and video conferencing, there is no substitute for in person, on-the-scene engagement.

Such is the case, in my view, with the current drive to turn off the thirteen hydroelectric dam generators in the central and southern lower peninsula. The impact on the 8 county communities that grew up around these long-standing, reliable electric generators need to be seen and the residents heard by the regulators in Lansing and Washington D.C. who will share in the decision on the dams’ future.

In late November, senior Public Service Commission (PSC) staff visited with public and nonprofit officials representing the communities near the Calkins Street Hydro in Allegan County. The meeting was helpful for the local community to understand how decision-making works inside the PSC and for the staff to understand the serious decisions the agency will participate in developing. A second meeting in warmer weather is to be scheduled.

As you know, the Public Service Commission is one of many state agencies that operate under the direction of citizen-led commissions. These include the Natural Resources Commission, the Transportation Commission, the Agriculture Commission and the Liquor Control Commission, to name a few.

If there are issues in our counties that need the attention of any of these bodies, speeding a solution may be helped along by inviting the pertinent commission to meet in your county. In fact, prior to COVID, many commissions routinely held a considerable number of their meetings throughout the state. MAC staff can help make the case for an on-site meeting to the agency your county needs to address an issue.

As one judge told me, there is no substitute for judging a person’s demeanor than seeing that person in the courtroom.

Speaking of making contact, witnessing the annual phenomenon known as the governor’s State of the State address opened my eyes to the immense size of the lobbying army encamped in Lansing. A reception sponsored by the leaders of the House and Senate drew hundreds to the Capitol’s Heritage Hall in the hours immediately prior to the speech. It is easy to imagine the hundreds of requests that were made in that milieu. For me, it was a visible wake-up to the challenge we counties leaders have in getting attention for our needs.

So, what to do? If each of our 619 county commissioner colleagues contacted a legislator for one or more of our joint priorities, it would balance what legislators hear from the lobbying army in Lansing. We live in the same community as these legislators and, as Tip O’Neill, former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives famously said, “All politics is local.” ♦



**A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE LOBBYING “ARMY” IN LANSING IN HERITAGE HALL PRIOR TO THE 2024 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS.**

(PHOTO: JIM STOREY)

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# Academy graduates tout the value of MAC's educational offerings

MAC  
NEWS

BY AIDAN BINFORD/MAC COMMUNICATIONS INTERN

After 13 years on the Cass County Board of Commissioners, Roseann Marchetti has one major piece of advice for new — or just “newish” commissioners: “Take full advantage of MAC’s educational opportunities.”

Long known for its major conferences, New Commissioner School and other collaborations, MAC took its educational commitment up a notch, though, with the creation of the County Commissioner Academy (CCA), a cohesive professional development program from which commissioners, like Marchetti, earn certification for their commitment to lifelong learning.

CCA operates on a two-year sequence, starting after an election. Participants earn continuing education “hours” by attending designated events and workshops. “Certification” is offered at two different levels: “Certified” is reached at 10 hours over a two-year cycle, while “Advanced” is reached with 20 hours over a four-year period.

In fact, more than 600 commissioners have earned at least 1 credit “hour” through CCA, and MAC has recognized more than 120 commissioners since the inaugural class in 2021.

“Education is a cornerstone mission for MAC,” said Executive Director Stephan Currie. “The development and expansion of CCA have exceeded all of our expectations, as reflected by the 42-member ‘class’ we honored with certificates at the Legislative Conference in 2023.”

One of those 2023 “grads” was Commissioner Mark DeYoung of Allegan.

“The new commissioner training is key,” said DeYoung, who along with just four colleagues is responsible for a nearly \$46 million General Fund in a county that has grown by 33 percent since 1990. “It teaches new commissioners where they need to go for information and how they can use it in their county.”

DeYoung further stressed the importance of continuous involvement in the CCA training process. “Continuous training helps solidify the information MAC provides and develops



**ROSEANN MARCHETTI OF CASS COUNTY RECEIVES HER COUNTY COMMISSIONER ACADEMY CERTIFICATE FROM BOARD PRESIDENT STAN PONSTEIN AT THE 2023 LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE IN LANSING.**

your network with commissioners from other counties,” said DeYoung.

Saginaw Commissioner Michael Webster is another regular at MAC’s educational events, earning his CCA certification in 2022.

“After the experience of being a commissioner, going through new commissioner training a second time was even more rewarding,” said Webster. “I was able to take my experiences and put them into context with the training. It allowed me to be a much more knowledgeable commissioner.”

“I always come back from MAC events with good information I can use to serve my county,” said Marchetti, who has earned a whopping 29 credit hours with CCA. “Even after being a commissioner for this many years, there are new things for me to learn every time.”

Marchetti cited MAC’s resources on handling the opioid crisis as an example of her continued learning experience. “Learning about the ways other counties have handled their opioid problems has allowed Cass County to better handle our own problems,” said Marchetti.

“All commissioners, both new and old, should take full advantage of MAC’s training opportunities,” said Marchetti. “Each time you go, you’ll come away with a better understanding of your job than before.” ♦



Check out the calendar 2024 learning opportunities under CCA by visiting the academy webpage at [micounties.org/county-commissioners-academy](https://micounties.org/county-commissioners-academy).

**“I always come back from MAC events with good information I can use to serve my county. Even after being a commissioner for this many years, there are new things for me to learn every time.”**

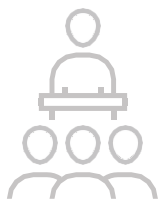


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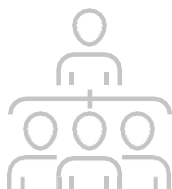
Counties affect the lives of residents every day. When our frontline staff are empowered as leaders, we deliver services more effectively. **The NACo High Performance Leadership Academy is a resource that connects your staff with practical leadership training.** HPLA uses an innovative, interactive online 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.

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The Academy enrollment fee is \$2,495 per participant. Enrollees from each Michigan County will receive a NACo scholarship of \$850, reducing the fee to \$1,645.

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



# Revenue sharing fund, jail policies headline 2024 priorities in Lansing

BY DEENA BOSWORTH/DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

LEGISLATIVE  
UPDATE

The Michigan Association of Counties (MAC) has set a robust legislative agenda for 2024. Addressing key issues such as revenue sharing, financial reimbursement for property tax exemptions, stable trial court funding, Medicaid for inmates prior to release and road and infrastructure funding, MAC's priorities aim to enhance the quality of life for residents across the state.

## Revenue Sharing Trust Fund

MAC places a high priority on securing a stable and growing revenue source to fund a Revenue Sharing Trust Fund. House Bills 4274-75 carve out 8 percent of the first 4 percentage points of the state sales tax and deposit those funds into a secure trust fund account solely for statutory revenue sharing disbursements. The bills passed the House in November with overwhelming and bipartisan support and now await action in the Senate. Adoption will ensure the state holds up its end of the bargain to share in the state's collected revenue and assist local governments in providing essential services.

## Disabled Veterans Property Tax Exemption Reimbursement

Counties across the state are seeing record numbers of property tax exemptions, which dilutes the funds we have available to support our veterans and the rest of our residents. The typical county, though, relies on property taxes for more than half of its budget. Since the enactment of the disabled veterans property tax exemption, countless veterans have seen financial relief, but the price tag to locals budgets have increased nearly tenfold. MAC wants the state to over that loss in property tax revenue. In addition, we seek measures to establish and streamline a reimbursement process, ensuring that disabled veterans retain their exemptions while also reimbursing counties for their losses.

## Trial Court Funding Authorization

To maintain the effectiveness of the judicial system, MAC calls for an extension of the sunset on trial court funding authorization. This



legislative priority aims to provide stability and continuity in funding for trial courts, ensuring the seamless administration of justice. The current sunset on the ability of courts to charge fees that help fund their operations expires in May. MAC seeks a two-year extension on this authorization, giving the Legislature more time to adopt a comprehensive solution for funding our trial courts.

## Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy

MAC recognizes the need for a comprehensive approach to health care, even within jails. We support reform of the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy to allow eligible inmates to obtain Medicaid coverage prior to release from incarceration. This move would allow for a more seamless transition back into society and allow for uninterrupted health services for this population. By bridging gaps in health coverage for inmates, outcomes for public health and offender reintegration should improve.

## Infrastructure Funding

MAC's infrastructure proposals include sustainable and long-term solutions to maintain and improve the state's transportation grid. MAC envisions lengthy discussions this year on potential solutions to declining gas tax revenue that has traditionally funded roads. With counties owning 75 percent of the roads in Michigan, funding for the maintenance of those roads is critical.

MAC's priorities demonstrate a commitment to building stronger, more resilient communities. ♦

**“The current sunset on the ability of courts to charge fees that help fund their operations expires in May. MAC seeks a two-year extension on this authorization...”**







## Registration is now open for Legislative Conference in April

The 2024 edition of the Michigan Counties Legislative Conference, which will be held April 29-May 1 at the Lansing Center and DoubleTree Hotel (formerly Radisson) in downtown Lansing, which feature a dozen workshops designed to put county leaders on the cutting edge of policy.

Plenary sessions at the conference will feature the semi-annual MAC Legislative Update, and a special session on leadership lessons from the life of George Washington.

Workshop topics will include:

- An update on broadband funding and expansion
- A briefing on tools for counties from the Michigan Economic Development Corp.
- Michigan's growing deer herd and the challenges in managing it
- Options for infrastructure funding to address the expansion of electric vehicles

Registering for the conference is digital-only and can be done by visiting <https://bit.ly/MAC24events>.

### Conference rates

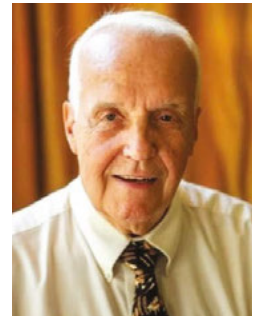
- Member\* – Full Conference Rate | \$425
- Member – Single Day Rate | \$260
- Non-Member – Full Conference Rate | \$500
- Non-Member – Single Day Rate | \$325
- Spouse/Guest Rate | \$220

*\*To qualify for a member rate, you must be an elected or appointed county official.*

The conference block at the DoubleTree Hotel (111 N. Grand Ave.) is \$142.95 per night.

## Kent's Mast, a former president of MAC, passes

Former Kent County Commissioner Harold Mast, who led the MAC Board of Directors as president in 2009, passed away on Dec. 20, 2023.



MAST

Mast served for two decades on the Kent County Board. In a statement, the county called Mast “a distinguished veteran and unwavering champion for veterans’ and senior issues, Commissioner Mast served our community with dedication.”

Mast joined the MAC Board in 2003 and advanced to the presidency in six years. “Harold was a hard-working man,” said Timothy McGuire, who served as MAC executive director at the time. “He took his role as MAC president seriously. However, he did not take himself too seriously. That in itself is a true virtue.”

## ‘Forward Together’ is theme of 2024 National County Government Month

National County Government Month (NCGM), held each April, is an annual celebration of county government.

Since 1991, the National Association of Counties (NACo) has encouraged counties to actively promote county roles and responsibilities in serving residents. Counties can schedule activities any time during the month. NCGM is an excellent opportunity for your county to highlight effective or innovative county programs and raise public awareness of services provided to the community.



This year's National County Government Month theme is consistent with NACo President Mary Jo McGuire's focus for the year, ForwardTogether.

ForwardTogether is about connecting, inspiring and leading – pillars of county government that build trust and drive towards solutions. Counties are encouraged to reflect on this theme as you choose how to celebrate NCGM. In particular, consider how NCGM is so intrinsically connected to the responsibility of county leaders to inspire our residents to take an interest in and engage with their communities, and how it presents an opportunity to lead in new and growing ways.

To download a toolkit from NACo for our NCGM activities, visit <https://www.naco.org/page/national-county-government-month#toolkit>.

## MAC caps anniversary year with gift to 83 members

Cutline: Stan Ponstein (right), Kent County commissioner and immediate past president of MAC, presents a 125th MAC anniversary gift this week to Kent County Board Chair Stan Stek (left) and Administrator Al Vanderberg in January.



To close out MAC's 125th Anniversary year, which concluded Jan. 31, the MAC Board signed off on a suggestion by Executive Director Stephan Currie to create a special gift: a framed collection of seals/logos from each county.

These posters are now being distributed by MAC staff as commissioners visit MAC's offices or as they travel the state. Counties also can wait to pick up their gift when commissioners attend the 2024 Legislative Conference in April.

If you have any questions about your county's poster, send an email to [melot@micounties.org](mailto:melot@micounties.org).

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# Oakland County bets ARPA dollars on Pontiac's revival

BY NANCY DERRINGER

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

**“The Phoenix Center has obstructed the city’s Main Street for over 40 years now. (Getting rid of it) will benefit the walkability and invite drivers through downtown.”**



Oakland County has no shortage of thriving, affluent communities, but its county seat has seen better days. Pontiac, a city of 60,000, lost its major employer (GM) and the county executive offices (to Waterford Township). While the county, as a whole, thrived, Pontiac struggled, losing population and prestige, falling under the oversight of an emergency manager in 2010.

But today Oakland County’s seat is looking toward a new era, made possible with funding from the state and, crucially, a portion of the city’s \$37.7 million allotment from the American Rescue Plan Act, for recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

County leaders are planning a renovation of downtown Pontiac, with the relocation of as many as 500 county employees to the area, in hopes of sparking economic development and a revitalization of its core.

“I think it’s important that our county seat has the support of the county,” said County Executive Dave Coulter. “More and more young people are looking for vibrant, walkable, urban experiences. It’s an important part of our economic strategy going forward, to be a place that can offer that.”

The \$130 million project is ambitious and

wide-ranging, and starts with the county purchasing two office buildings, several parcels of vacant land, and the blighted, crumbling Phoenix Center garage and amphitheater. That structure will be demolished, removing a literal roadblock to the opening of Saginaw Street through downtown. Adding 500 county workers will bring an influx of bodies looking for street-level dining and entertainment, and potentially relocation to an area with affordable housing, officials said.

“The Phoenix Center has obstructed the city’s Main Street for over 40 years now,” said Mayor Tim Greimel. “(Getting rid of it) will benefit the walkability and invite drivers through downtown.”

The financing for the project started with \$10 million of ARPA money from Pontiac, which was an important ante, Coulter said. That enabled the county to approach the state legislature and show “we had skin in the game. We always knew the county alone couldn’t do (the whole project). But making that kind of commitment from the county could be a signal to the legislature.”

Oakland went to Lansing asking for \$85 million, “eye-popping numbers,” Coulter acknowledges, but the \$50 million the state countered with was worth the ask. The rest of the financing will be obtained through



HOW COUNTIES ARE TURNING  
CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

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**melot@micounties.org**  
and you may be the next highlight.



Michigan Economic Development Corporation Transformational Brownfield Plans, various federal programs and public-private partnerships, Coulter said.

Other ARPA funds have already been spent on programs to benefit Pontiac's infrastructure and residents, said County Commissioner William Miller, including a skate park built, a sewer rehab, a community-center redevelopment and money to the school district for mental-health programs.

"Between the executive office and the commissioners, we were always talking about how we could bring Pontiac



**MILLER**

back," said Miller. "The ARPA dollars were an opportunity to do that. And it was a question of how can we do this and do it smart."

The Phoenix Center's name alone suggests this isn't the city's first attempt at a comeback, and indeed, the garage/entertainment structure was built as part of a 1970s revitalization plan. But that was half a century ago, and residents want more than wide swaths of concrete for easy parking.

"It was an awkward arrangement," said Greimel. "It's not an inviting space with all those stairs." (The amphitheater sits atop the garage.) "These two acres will be returned to the city for the purpose of creating a city-owned public square, at ground level. This project puts us on a trajectory to a vibrant, walkable and inclusive downtown." ♦

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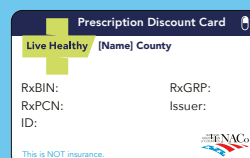
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# How does commissioner compensation work with 4-year terms?

BY MATT NORDFJORD/COHL, STOKER AND TOSKEY P.C.

Matt Nordfjord is a principal with the firm of Cohl, Stoker and Toskey P.C. and speaks regularly at MAC events on the legal details of the Open Meetings Act and Freedom of Information Act.



**“That is because commissioner compensation for the term commencing Jan. 1, 2025, and ending Dec. 31, 2028, must be established before Dec. 31, 2024, and cannot be changed during that entire four-year period...”**

As provided by 2021 PA 122, the term of office for county commissioners is increased from two years to four years beginning with the November 2024 general election, i.e., for the term commencing Jan. 1, 2025. See MCL 46.410(2). This raises concerns as to the timing of setting compensation for County Commissioners, and changes to compensation over the course of a four-year term of office.

Compensation for commissioners is governed by MCL 46.415, which states, in part:

(1) A member of the county board of commissioners shall receive the compensation and mileage reimbursement fixed by resolution of the county board of commissioners or for a county which has a county officers compensation commission, fixed by a determination of the county officers compensation commission which is not rejected.

(2) The per mile mileage reimbursement fixed by the county board of commissioners or the county officers compensation commission shall not exceed the mileage reimbursement

set for state officers as determined by the state officers compensation commission.

The term “compensation” as used in MCL 46.415(1) **includes** fringe benefits such as retirement benefits (unlike the term “salary” used in the statutes relating to other County elected officials). Per diem payments are also included in the term “compensation.” However, “compensation” does not include mileage reimbursement. MCL 46.415(6).

Therefore, according to MCL 46.415(1), if there is no county officers compensation commission, the County Board of Commissioners has the exclusive authority to fix the compensation of the members of the Board of Commissioners, including the per diem payments, under the following requirements.

Changes in compensation of County Commissioners are also governed by MCL 46.415, which provides in relevant part:

(3) Except as provided under subsection (5), changes in compensation shall become effective only after the time members of the county board of commissioners commence their terms of office after a

general election, provided that it is voted upon before the commencement of the new terms of office, or for a county which has a county officers compensation commission, after the beginning of the first odd numbered year after the determination is made by the county officers compensation commission and is not rejected.

(4) This section shall not be construed to prohibit a structured change in compensation implemented in phases over the term of office. (Emphasis added)

Thus, state law provides that changes in compensation for county commissioners can only become effective **after** the commissioners commence a new term of office after a general election (i.e., Jan. 1 of an odd-numbered year after a general election). However, the change must be voted upon **before** the commencement of the new term (i.e., on or before Dec. 31).

In 2005, this restriction on changes to commissioner compensation during a two-year term was alleviated by the

addition of MCL 46.415(4), which allowed for a structured change in compensation to be implemented in phases over the term of office. With the recent statutory amendment increasing the county commissioner term of office to four years, consideration of a structured compensation schedule becomes more important.

That is because commissioner compensation for the term commencing Jan. 1, 2025, and ending Dec. 31, 2028, must be established before Dec. 31, 2024, and cannot be changed during that entire four-year period; including but not limited to linking a future change to a matter the Board of Commissioners would approve during their current four-year term (e.g., a “me too” with employee cost of living increases is not permitted if the employee increase is approved by the Board of Commissioners during their current four year term). However, by employing a structured compensation schedule that is fixed, salaries and fringe benefits for Commissioners may be scheduled for increases in phases over the course of the four-year term, e.g., annually or biannually. ♦

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NRM-12870M5 (01/15)



# Holding on to talent: Key strategies that won't break the bank

BY KERREEN CONLEY/HUMAN RESOURCE SOLUTIONS, REHMANN

*Rehmann is a Premier Corporate Partner of the Michigan Association of Counties. Learn more at [www.rehmann.com](http://www.rehmann.com).*

Following another year of dismal recruiting and retention numbers for local government entities across the state, 68 percent of Michigan local governments reported they planned to increase wages and salaries in the 2022-2023 fiscal year — a record-high percentage in a decade-long trend of jurisdiction pay increases tracked in the annual Michigan Public Policy Survey. This is great news for workers and is one factor that influences retention.

In today's highly competitive job market, however, compensation alone won't attract or retain talent. The cultivation of great work environments that not only engage employees but also facilitate their growth and development is key. Attracting and retaining talent hinges on the establishment of such environments. Create an engaging environment by focusing on three key areas:

According to a study by HR Analytics company Effectory, employees who have clarity about their roles don't only feel more empowered and motivated than those with role ambiguity; they're 53 percent more efficient, 27 percent more effective, feel "significantly more passionate" about their job, report higher levels of job satisfaction and are more likely to stay with the organization.

Ask yourself:

- Does each team member have clear goals?
- Does each team member understand which tasks take priority?
- Does each person also understand the roles and responsibilities of their team members?
- Where there is overlap in tasks, are individual responsibilities clear?



- Does each person understand not only how best to fulfill their role and responsibilities but also why?

Research proves the old trope that people don't leave their jobs, they leave their managers. According to Gallup, a manager's support influences 70 percent of an employee's engagement at work. How well are your managers meeting today's employees' needs, such as:

- Regular (daily) communications and 1:1 meetings
- Frequent feedback and recognition
- Listening — asking and actively listening to concerns, struggles and challenges
- Strong relationships built on a foundation of trust, care and well-being
- Encouragement and planning of growth and development

Today's work environment has produced unprecedented challenges for managers. According to a 2023 survey by Gallup, only 48 percent of managers strongly agree they have the skills to be exceptional at their job. They need our support.

Devoting time and resources to developing managers is a game-changer. Great managers

retain workers. Formal training and roundtable discussions focused on communication, giving feedback, performance management, and development planning can be instrumental in creating engaging work environments to retain top talent.

Workers want a work environment where they feel like they matter and what they do makes a difference. They want to feel connected to the mission of the organization and the people they work alongside.

Build a strong sense of community and belonging for your employees by:

- Creating opportunities for frequent sincere interactions for employees to connect.
- Providing regular feedback and acknowledgment.

- Holding events, roundtables, town hall meetings, and community service opportunities
- Training managers to build strong relationships with team members.
- Communicating regularly how results impact citizens and the community.

In the race to retain top talent, remember that building an exceptional workplace isn't just a strategy – it's a commitment to fostering growth, creating a sense of belonging and meeting the fundamental needs of your employees. By prioritizing clear expectations, robust manager support and meaningful connections, alongside fair compensation, your organization will not only survive but thrive. ♦

**“According to a 2023 survey by Gallup, only 48 percent of managers strongly agree they have the skills to be exceptional at their job. They need our support.”**

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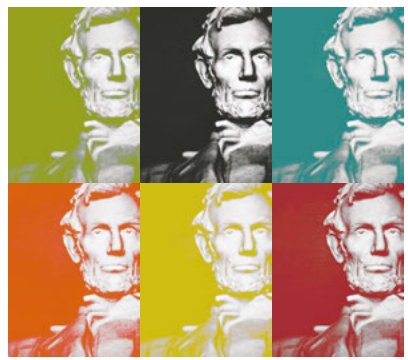
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# Invasive trees and shrubs pose real threat to Michigan

BY ERIC PAUL DENNIS/CITIZENS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN

*Eric Paul Dennis is the infrastructure research associate for CRC Michigan.*

**“Michigan’s Invasive Species Program now receives only \$5 million per year to cover research and management of all invasive species.”**



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.

Northern Michigan’s forests are special. They attract tourists and provide recreational opportunities and an improved quality of life for residents.

Forested areas and green spaces are found in Southern Michigan, too, but they often do not hold the same allure. These forests, particularly in and around urbanized areas, frequently appear cluttered, messy and uninviting. An understory of shrubs and small trees often grows so dense that it is impossible to walk through it because they are often inundated with invasive trees and shrubs.

A few of Michigan’s most widespread woody invasives hold their green leaves longer into the fall than native species. Invasives also tend to leaf-out earlier in the spring than many natives. This extended leafy period is one of the features that allows these invasives to outcompete native species and amplifies their disruption to the ecosystem.

Invasive trees and shrubs tend to overwhelm native species and create monocultures, leading to reduced biodiversity. They also shade out grasses and herbaceous plants that protect soil, leading to soil erosion and watershed pollution. Additionally, the thick woody growth may amplify the risk of wildfires. These ecosystem impacts are rarely noticed unless to observe that they’re ugly.

The failure to manage invasive trees and shrubs has transformed many of Michigan’s green spaces, especially in Michigan’s urban regions, into “green blight.” Without a coherent plan and adequately funded response, woody invasive species will continue to spread, further impacting the aesthetic, recreational, and economic value of Michigan’s natural resources.

Michiganders place a high value on undeveloped “natural areas.” However, due to factors such as fire control, loss of wetlands, and, especially, invasive species, it is no longer possible for many green spaces to approximate “natural areas” without human intervention. Green spaces require maintenance.

Roadsides, natural areas, preserves, parks and dedicated green spaces have been set aside for the benefit of the public but provide none because of the lack of vegetation management, especially pertaining to woody invasive species.

Michigan’s environment and natural amenities could be a core asset to attract new residents and investments. Given the history of prior waves of invasive species that have already caused substantial ecological and economic damage to the state, it is alarming how little attention is dedicated to preventing future harm.

It is not possible to eradicate woody invasive species, but they can be managed. Management requires ongoing funding. Michigan’s Invasive Species Program now receives only \$5 million per year to cover research and management of all invasive species. Most of the efforts are targeted at aquatic invasives, exotic insects and blights that threaten native tree species. Woody invasives are given very little attention in state policy.

State agencies are beginning to recognize the threats posed by invasive vegetation. Nonprofits also have stepped up efforts to increase awareness and conduct limited mitigation projects. However, without dependable funding backed by state policy, these efforts are fragmented and mostly volunteer-based. This approach is no substitute for a coherent statewide strategy and management plan.

Michigan must dedicate more resources to understanding the impacts and threats from woody invasive species. Funding should be used to understand the extent and severity of woody invasive species, as well as impacts and threats to Michigan’s economy and natural resources. Once the problem is better understood, we can evaluate the costs and benefits of a woody invasive species management plan.

Without such an effort, Michigan’s forests and the state’s future remain at risk. ♦



# In cyber chaos, .gov is trusted digital home

BY KATELYN ZEITS/BENZIE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Since beginning my time in Benzie County, I have focused on increased security for our networks and online platforms — and improved credibility in our community. Top on my priority list to accomplish this was switching from a “.net” domain to a “.gov” domain for our website and our email.

Switching our county platforms to a “.gov” domain offers several important advantages, including demonstrating a commitment to accessibility standards and data privacy regulations, as well as bolstering our credibility and trust. As some may know, a “.gov” domain is reserved for government and other public entities. At one time, it was costly to obtain, but in 2021 the domains were made available at no cost to qualifying organizations, including local governments, upon a move of the DOTGOV registrar to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

By transitioning, a local government organization can establish its official status, signaling to the public that it is a legitimate and authorized government agency. When the public sees a “.gov” domain, they tend to have greater confidence in the information and services provided by the governmental organization. This trust is essential for disseminating important information, public notices and service availability to the community. This was a priority for the Benzie Board of Commissioners when I accepted the role as county administrator.

As we continue to evolve in local government, we rely on technology to improve and increase our effectiveness and service to the community. Governments at all levels understand the importance of keeping their systems and information safe, and this is one more way for local government to do just that. What I’ve learned as a public official is that government organizations are prime targets for impersonation and phishing attempts. By using a “.gov” domain, Benzie has demonstrated the steps necessary to reduce the risk of fraudulent websites attempting to impersonate our organization,



strengthening the community’s reliance in our organization.

As a local government, we are subject to various legal and regulatory requirements: accessibility standards, data privacy regulations and transparency mandates, for example. Switching domains gives Benzie the ability to demonstrate its commitment to compliance with these regulations, which is crucial to improving relationships and trust with our constituents.

Finally, Benzie County, like many in Northern Michigan, relies heavily on tourism. Search engines and online directories often prioritize “.gov” websites in results, leading to better visibility and easier access for users searching for government-sponsored information and local community attractions.

If your website does not currently use a “.gov” domain, consider making the switch to help build trust with your residents, enhance your online presence and strengthen your online security. While there are clear benefits to switching, it’s important to carefully plan the transition, update all online and offline materials to reflect the new domain and communicate the change to the public and stakeholders in a timely fashion. It is also important to continue to maintain your current or previous domain and have it forward to your new one during a transitional phase set by your transition team. ♦

**“As a local government, we are subject to various legal and regulatory requirements: accessibility standards, data privacy regulations and transparency mandates, for example.”**

# AI tools can help Michigan navigate fiscal challenges

BY ADAM BONAREK/MICHIGAN GOVERNMENT FINANCE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION



*Adam Bonarek is finance director for the Charter Township of Redford and vice president of the Michigan Government Finance Officers Association, a MAC affiliate.*

Michigan, a state rich in history and industry, finds itself at a critical juncture in its fiscal journey. Recent trends highlighted in a report by the Pew Charitable Trusts underscore the complexities of Michigan's fiscal landscape.

While the state has witnessed economic recovery in recent years, it continues to grapple with structural budget deficits and legacy costs. The COVID-19 pandemic further compounded these challenges. Despite these hurdles, Michigan remains resilient, poised to capitalize on its strengths and chart a course toward fiscal stability.

The Pew report (<https://pew.org/3TTwA9A>) identifies several pressing challenges. Revenue volatility, stemming from reliance on volatile revenue sources like income and sales taxes, poses a significant risk to Michigan's fiscal stability. Additionally, rising health care costs, driven by an aging population, strain state and local budgets. The state's infrastructure needs require substantial investment to ensure long-term viability.

Despite these challenges, local governments remain resilient, adapting to changing circumstances and finding innovative ways to deliver essential services to residents.

To navigate these challenges, Michigan can leverage innovative approaches, including the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technology. AI tools offer opportunities to enhance data analysis and forecasting, enabling policymakers to make informed decisions based on accurate and timely information. Moreover, AI can help optimize costs, improve revenue collection processes, enhance citizen engagement, and mitigate fiscal risks. By embracing AI alongside traditional fiscal management practices, Michigan can position itself for long-term success and resilience.

**1. Data Analysis and Forecasting:** AI tools can analyze vast amounts of financial data to provide insights into revenue patterns, expenditure trends, and potential areas of fiscal stress. By leveraging predictive analytics, Michigan can enhance its budget forecasting capabilities, enabling more accurate long-term planning and risk mitigation.

**2. Cost Optimization:** AI-driven algorithms can identify inefficiencies and cost-saving opportunities within government operations. Whether it's streamlining procurement processes, optimizing workforce management, or identifying areas for service consolidation, AI can help Michigan identify and implement cost-saving measures without compromising service quality.

**3. Revenue Enhancement:** AI-powered solutions can aid in revenue optimization by identifying tax compliance issues, detecting fraudulent activities, and improving revenue collection processes. By leveraging advanced analytics and machine learning algorithms, Michigan can enhance its revenue forecasting accuracy and identify untapped revenue streams.

**4. Citizen Engagement and Service Delivery:** AI-driven chatbots, similar to ChatGPT, can enhance citizen engagement by providing personalized assistance, answering inquiries, and guiding residents through government services. By leveraging AI-powered virtual assistants, Michigan can improve service delivery, streamline citizen

interactions, and reduce administrative burdens on government staff.

**5. Risk Management:** AI technologies can assist Michigan in identifying and mitigating fiscal risks, such as economic downturns, revenue volatility, and unexpected expenditure spikes. By continuously monitoring key financial indicators and external factors, AI systems can provide early warnings of potential fiscal challenges, allowing policymakers to take proactive measures to mitigate their impact.

**6. Policy Analysis and Decision Support:** AI-powered tools can analyze policy proposals and simulate their potential impacts on Michigan's fiscal health. By utilizing scenario modeling and predictive analytics, policymakers can make more informed decisions and assess the long-term implications of policy choices before implementation.

By acknowledging the current fiscal realities, embracing innovation and adopting proactive strategies for mitigation, Michigan can navigate these challenges and emerge stronger than ever. ♦

**“AI tools offer opportunities to enhance data analysis and forecasting, enabling policymakers to make informed decisions based on accurate and timely information.”**



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# Rep. Jim Haadsma

LEGISLATOR  
Q&A

## What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan?

The most pressing issue facing Michigan is undoubtedly our state's economic recovery and how we are going to build an economy of the future. In the wake of crises and hardship, Michigan has emerged as a key competitor. We have the opportunity to keep shaping Michigan into a center for innovation and diversification. There is no doubt that there are many, many stakeholders within the state who deserve a say in what this economy will look like, and there will be much debate on how exactly we can keep Michigan competitive in the future. In my role as Chair of the House Committee on Labor I plan to continue elevating policies that make Michigan more attractive for employers and employees alike.

## Based on your experience, how important are counties to the effective delivery of public services?

In my experience, counties are essential for the delivery of public services. Counties provide health services, road maintenance, law enforcement, county jails, indigent defense, and so much more. Many of these services are especially important in rural areas where there is no other form of government to provide them. Counties are intimately connected with the needs of their communities, allowing for tailored and responsive service delivery. Collaborative efforts between state and county entities are essential to address the unique challenges faced by different regions across Michigan.

## How do you feel your experience as a county commissioner impacts your policy decisions in the Legislature?

My time as a county commissioner has given me valuable insights into the role of county government in the execution of policy on a local level. When it comes to implementing state law, county government is often at the forefront. When we are creating policy that is meant to effect real change, I consider how it would have affected my job as a county commissioner and ensure that policies are practical, responsive, and beneficial to our constituents.

## There has been a great emphasis on labor issues in this legislative term. As the chair of the House Labor Committee, how do you see counties benefiting from the various proposals moving through your committee?

My focus is on promoting policies that support a thriving workforce and foster a fair and productive labor environment. The proposals emanating from the committee aim to strengthen workers' rights, enhance workplace safety, and improve overall labor conditions. We contribute to the economic vitality of counties by prioritizing the well-being of our workforce. Fostering environments where businesses can thrive, where workers are protected, will undoubtedly lead to the success of our counties in Michigan.

## Michigan counties face the significant cost burden of health care for county jail inmates, and incarcerated individuals are up against increased recidivism rates when released from jail without Medicaid benefits. With precedent established for states receiving a 1115 Re-entry Waiver from the federal government to allow these inmates to have Medicaid benefits reinstated prior to release, do you support the state applying for this waiver?

Yes. It is crucial to address the significant healthcare costs borne by counties for jail inmates and simultaneously work towards reducing recidivism rates. This waiver would not only alleviate the financial burden on counties but also contribute to a more sustainable and effective criminal justice system. Ensuring that individuals have access to Medicaid benefits upon release is a critical step toward supporting their successful reintegration into society and reducing the likelihood of reoffending. Michigan's corrections system is already in dire need of additional resources to relieve staffing issues and a litany of other concerns. This program would help relieve pressure on Michigan's already under-resourced jails and prisons by helping to reduce recidivism. ♦



### Name:

Rep. Jim Haadsma

### District/Counties:

44th/Calhoun

### Committees:

Labor, Chair; Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, Chair; Health Policy

### Term:

Third

### Previous

### public service:

Member, Calhoun County Board of Commissioners, 2009-16



## Ken Mitchell

**Name:** Ken Mitchell

**County/MAC Region:** Clinton/Region IV

**Position:** Director

**County Service:** 2014 to present

**Profession:** Chief financial officer, Jungle Jane Promotions

**Previous Public Service:** Trustee, Watertown Charter Township, 18 years; director, Looking Glass Regional Fire Authority

### What do you see as the biggest challenge for your county, or all counties, in 2024?

Across the entire state, we grapple with a significant mental health crisis, presenting a formidable challenge to address.

Interconnected issues complicate the search for effective solutions, with each attempted remedy often triggering new challenges. Escalating costs, spanning benefits, labor, and materials, compel difficult decisions to maintain fiscal responsibility towards our citizens.

Strikingly, the state has prioritized funding for the defense side of the courts, inadvertently neglecting the prosecution side. Consequently, counties find themselves striving to restore equilibrium in the face of this discrepancy.

The perpetual burden of unfunded mandates handed down by the state further compounds the challenges that counties must navigate.



## Melissa Daub

**Name:** Melissa Daub

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

**Position:** First Vice President

**County Service:** Jan. 1, 2019, to present

**Profession:** Full-time commissioner

**Previous Public Service:** N/A

### What do you see as the biggest challenge for your county, or all counties, in 2024?

One of the greatest challenges we face in Wayne County is maintaining adequate staffing in all departments. Without county employees, we cannot provide services to our residents in a timely and effective manner.

In response to this challenge, a Staffing and Benefits Task Force was established by Wayne Board Chair Alisha Bell in 2023. Task force members met with representatives from the County Executive's Office to examine issues relating to salaries, benefits and other factors that might increase attraction and retention of county employees. We also heard comments from employees in various departments.

The Task Force made several recommendations to the County Executive's Office regarding compensation and benefits packages and free employee parking. Addressing this challenge in 2024 will require ongoing efforts and consistent follow-up.



# Counties scaling up efforts to aid communities with opioid dollars

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

In January, we passed the one-year mark from the first payments to counties from the opioid settlements with manufacturers, distributors and pharmacies. In preparation for this situation, MAC launched no-cost technical assistance to counties related to planning.

Technical assistance requests and county engagement have drastically increased and highlights some incredible work.

More than 160 support requests have come in from 63 counties, ranging from administrative support to facilitation of strategic planning. While counties are at different points in the planning process, a few examples of progress are highlighted here.

Most counties across the state have developed, or are in the process of developing, steering committees of county departments and local stakeholders to create recommendations for use of settlement funds. One quarter of counties have also engaged with additional technical assistance for support of community assessments to further gauge needs of the public and identify opportunities for where to focus planning efforts and funding initiatives.

Regional work is under way in the Upper Peninsula, led by Houghton and Marquette counties, to explore increasing access to behavioral health crisis support. This work is aimed at addressing county transport to state psychiatric facilities, jail diversion and the ability to treat co-occurring substance use and mental health conditions within the community. Many UP counties have inquired about the potential of pooling funds for a joint effort to increase access to the care. Conversations are under way to determine the most appropriate models of care and how to fund and implement a project of this scale.



**“Regional work is under way in the Upper Peninsula, led by Houghton and Marquette counties, to explore increasing access to behavioral health crisis support.”**

To the south, Monroe, Kent, Calhoun and Washtenaw counties, among others, are working closely with existing task forces and coalitions aimed at addressing the drug overdose crisis to ensure development of strategies and spending plans aimed at addressing the most critical needs in their communities. Eaton County and their local health department are working with MAC to engage their community in a county-wide strategic planning process to address substance use. Berrien and Saginaw Counties have also extensively engaged their local health departments in planning efforts.

Many counties have committed to complete transparency in their planning process, allowing the public to attend meetings; posting meeting notes on a dedicated opioid settlement county website; working towards rolling out requests for proposals that will be open to all organizations in the county; and exhibiting a desire to highlight spending plans on their websites.

One year in, we see great progress in addressing the drug overdose crisis, with great focus on gaining insight and understanding of the experience and impact of the crisis on each specific community.

If you have any questions about MAC’s opioid settlement services, contact Amy Dolinky at [dolinky@micounties.org](mailto:dolinky@micounties.org). ♦

[micounties.org](http://micounties.org)

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