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WAYNE COUNTY

# MICHIGAN COUNTIES



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# Letter from the Executive Director



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Currie', written over a light blue horizontal line.

**STEPHAN W. CURRIE**  
MAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**“The topline, of course, is that the 83 counties here will receive about \$1.9 billion in direct funding from the U.S. Treasury.”**

As you read this, it’s been less than four months since President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan into law, bringing with it a historic investment in county government across the nation.

And since that signing on March 11, MAC has been focused on answering the key question: What does this all mean for Michigan’s counties?

The topline, of course, is that the 83 counties here will receive about \$1.9 billion in direct funding from the U.S. Treasury. But how?

MAC, working with our partner the National Association of Counties, engaged with Treasury to identify and distribute the links and steps that counties needed to take to ensure prompt receipt of the first wave of dollars.

At the same time, MAC began working with our CoPro+ subsidiary and Livingston County to develop and issue an RFP for consulting services on how to manage and report on ARP funding — a critical issue for smaller counties that are operating with the leanest staffs. As of this writing, those contracts are in their final stages of development, and we will be providing details as soon as possible (perhaps even before you receive this magazine at the end of June.)

Just know that MAC member counties will be able to utilize these services without having to develop and issue their own RFP — another huge savings in time and effort for many counties.

This is just one example of one of many CoPro+ programs that provide public entities the opportunity to procure valuable goods and services at competitive prices. (Check out what CoPro+ can do for your county at [www.coproplus.org](http://www.coproplus.org).)

MAC also is serving as a conduit of information back to Washington, D.C., to aid Treasury in developing its reporting standards for ARP spending based on a county’s daily operational challenges. This process fuels consistent updates to Treasury’s FAQ sheet, found at [home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRPFAQ.pdf](http://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRPFAQ.pdf).

Back here in Lansing, Governmental Affairs Director Deena Bosworth and I have been meeting with state officials and other government groups on a strategy to create matching programs so that local governments and the state can partner to leverage their ARP aid on a variety of fronts, ranging from broadband expansion to water infrastructure. Learn more about this financial “force multiplier” in Deena’s report on page 6.

And we continue to consult monthly with county administrators via Zoom to collect and convey information on ARP and any other issue that is confronting members.

Lastly, I’m pleased to report, as President Klinefelt notes in her letter this edition (page 4), we are seeing some return to normalcy around here. Staffers have returned to MAC’s offices, and we are preparing for the resumption of in-person MAC events such as our summer Regional Summits (see page 8) and the 2021 Annual Conference in September.

This will be a busy summer, but one that everyone here in MAC is looking forward to as we help our members recover from the pandemic. ♦

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To subscribe, send your name and mailing address to [melot@micounties.org](mailto:melot@micounties.org) with the email header of "MI Counties Subscription."

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# Letter from the President



**VERONICA KLINEFELT**  
PRESIDENT, MAC BOARD OF  
DIRECTORS

**“The biggest sense of relief I sense, though comes from watching many shuttered small businesses reopen and seeing the outpouring from residents eager to support them.”**

## Change is in the air

There is a change in the air swirling around Michigan counties lately. I sense a loss of tension and commissioners from around the state are talking about getting back to some sense of normalcy.

I recently walked into our county offices in Mt. Clemens without a mask. The November election brought eight new commissioners to our board, and I am just now starting to meet them in person.

I have to retrain myself; it feels a little weird to go into a store without a mask. I suppose that is why there are so many people still hesitant to shed them.

To add to the excitement, counties are getting money in from the federal American Rescue Plan (see more on page 6) and there is much discussion to be had on how to handle the funds. Badly needed infrastructure money may be on the horizon, too, and we in county government will be even busier than we were before.

The biggest sense of relief I sense, though comes from watching many shuttered small businesses reopen and seeing the outpouring from residents eager to support them. People are scheduling delayed appointments to their dentists and doctors, and everyone wants a professional haircut!

All of this change is not coming a moment too soon. We are social beings; we are not meant to be isolated. I find myself feeling appreciation for things in my life that I once took for granted.

For counties, the next phase will likely include dealing with many individuals who struggle to get back to where life was before the pandemic. We must watch property values closely, because there are many unknowns regarding office space after a year of people working from home. We do not know what the effect will be on the housing market when federal funds stop flowing in at the current rate.

While there is plenty to concern us in the coming days, I urge you all to take a moment right now to experience the falling stress levels in our communities. More people are smiling, summer is coming and things haven't been this good in such a long time. ♦

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# MAC working to leverage historic financial opportunity for counties

BY DEENA BOSWORTH/GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR

“By investing combined dollars in water infrastructure, broadband, housing and community development, economic development and public health and safety, we will be able to amplify the return on investment.”



With more than \$10 billion coming into our state, Michigan has a rare chance to make significant investments in our communities, businesses, citizens and infrastructure.

But we need to work together to maximize these benefits.

Michigan's 83 counties are slated to get \$1.9 billion in American Rescue Plan (ARP) dollars over the next two years. Cities and larger townships are slated to receive a total of \$1.8 billion and non-entitlement communities (smaller units) approximately \$640 million, all while the state of Michigan itself will receive more than \$6.5 billion.

With this huge influx of money, elected officials at all levels of government will have to make decisions on where and how they want to use the dollars, within the federal rules. Priorities will range from revenue recovery, savings and growing the interest on the funds, to infrastructure, business and

individual assistance programs and public safety. By working together with all levels of government, counties can stretch those dollars and invest in common goals.

With the first dollars already arriving in local accounts, county leaders are already under pressure to announce spending decisions. MAC, however, is advising all counties to hold off on immediate spending choices. Although revenue replacement is an eligible expenditure and a most obvious choice, the rest of the funds could be allocated toward long-term investments.

MAC is working on a plan to earmark close to \$4 billion in state ARP funds as matching funds to enhance local efforts. For this plan, the Whitmer administration and legislative leaders have asked for ideas that:

- will be transformational in nature;
- do not create new programs; and
- strategically invest the one-time dollars in areas of greatest need for improvement.

By investing combined dollars in water infrastructure, broadband, housing and community development, economic development and public health and safety, we will be able to amplify the return on investment. This comprehensive approach to stretch the ARP dollars will provide Michigan the opportunity for an unprecedented investment in drinking water, stormwater, public sewers and septic systems, broadband infrastructure, mental health services, capital improvements to facilities and jails, affordable housing and outdoor recreation.

MAC has been having conversations each week with the administration, legislative leaders, business and community leaders and other stakeholders on this idea. Our hope is to create a groundswell of support that bridges the political gap in Lansing and truly provides the resources and value needed for strategic investments in Michigan. As part of that effort, MAC has provided a resolution template (see our Legislative Update emails or visit [www.micounties.org](http://www.micounties.org)) that counties can use to express support for the matching funds concept.

Also, remember that in addition to ARP's direct aid to counties, there are other federal funds available to counties under ARP. These include \$1.5 billion for public land counties, disaster relief funds, economic development programs, emergency management performance grants, emergency food and shelter programs, behavior health, substance abuse, public health work force assistance, emergency rural development grants for rural health care, airport recovery assistance, homelessness and rental assistance, just to name a few.

To date, MAC has received overwhelmingly positive feedback on the ideas put forth for match programs with the state. Although it will take time to work out the details and launch the programs, we think this concept can succeed. In the meantime, we are hopeful counties can hold off on ARP fund allocations until that time.

For more information on this issue, contact Deena Bosworth at [bosworth@micounties.org](mailto:bosworth@micounties.org). ♦

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## Registration continues for 2021 Regional Summits

Commissioners and other county leaders can learn tips on how to utilize American Rescue Plans and be briefed on the affordable housing crisis and its effects on counties during MAC's 2021 Regional Summits in late July.

In light of COVID-19, some changes have been made to the event. All food and beverage will be boxed/packaged, for example. And networking time will be minimized. As usual, however, MAC will offer the summits at four sites across Michigan:

- July 19 – Grand Rapids
- July 22 – Frankenmuth
- July 26 – Escanaba
- July 29 – Gaylord

To register, visit [micounties.org/2021-mac-regional-summits](https://micounties.org/2021-mac-regional-summits).

The summit will run from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; a light breakfast and lunch will be included for the \$35 fee. ♦

## MAC Board elections set for September

At the 2021 Michigan Counties Annual Conference (Sept. 26-28 on Mackinac Island), MAC members will vote on five seats on the MAC Board of Directors. Commissioners wishing to serve on the Board, whether incumbents or new candidates, have until Aug. 26 to file official notice of their intent to run.

To get an application form, visit [micounties.org/wp-content/uploads/MAC-Board-Election-Application-Form-2021-fillable.pdf](https://micounties.org/wp-content/uploads/MAC-Board-Election-Application-Form-2021-fillable.pdf).

Seats representing regions are filled by a vote in regional caucuses at the conference. At-large seats are filled by the candidate that wins a majority of the six regional caucuses.

The MAC Board of Directors is the key body in guiding the legislative and organizational strategies of MAC. Board terms are three years in length and individuals may serve up to three terms.

2021 Board seats

- Region 1 – 1 seat
- Region 2 – 1 seat
- Region 3 – 1 seat
- Region 5 – 1 seat
- At-large — 1 seat



Any member wishing to run in the election must download the application form and return it by Aug. 26, 2021, at 5 p.m. to be eligible. Candidates are also encouraged to submit a statement of up to 400 words on why members should support them. These statements will be posted to the MAC website in late August.

If you have any questions about Board duties, please contact Executive Director Stephan W. Currie at 517-372-5374. ♦

## Legislative Conference highlights 4-year terms, federal COVID aid

The top official in the Michigan House of Representatives signaled support for four-year county commissioner terms and critical federal guidance on how to spend \$1.9 billion in COVID aid for Michigan counties is expected as early as next week were two of the highlights of the 2021 Michigan Counties Legislative Conference this week.



The gathering, held virtually for the second consecutive year, featured three plenary sessions plus more than a dozen



workshops for MAC members and members of the Michigan County Medical Care Facilities Council (MCMCFC).

House Speaker Jason Wentworth (R-Clare), speaking during a recorded Legislative Roundtable, said he would support four-year terms for county commissioners. Legislation to enact such terms are now in the Michigan Senate and are a MAC legislative priority for 2021.

During a Thursday plenary session, Matt Chase, executive director of the National Association of Counties (NACo), said the U.S. Treasury may release guidance as early as next week on how counties can spend direct investments from the federal American Rescue Plan (ARP). Chase and NACo President Judge Gary Moore of Boone County, Ky., urged counties to be sure to have **all of their technical requirements fulfilled** to receive their first allotment of ARP funds. ♦

## MAC marks milestone with all-woman Government Affairs team

**M**AC's Governmental Affairs team was the focus of a recent Gongwer News Service feature.



**BOSWORTH**

“For the first time, the Michigan Association of Counties government affairs team consists of only women who are no strangers to the Capitol community but have still faced challenges when advocating for their agenda in a field that has historically been dominated by men.

“While the current team at MAC marks the first time that advocacy group has had an all-women team heading its government affairs, there’s also a multiclient firm with an all-women staff, RWC Advocacy.

“Those at the organizations spoke about the challenges they face in the lobbying world and what priorities they hold this year as the Capitol community begins moving toward normal operations following the coronavirus pandemic. ...”

To read the complete article, visit [micounties.org/mac-marks-milestone-with-all-woman-government-affairs-team/](https://micounties.org/mac-marks-milestone-with-all-woman-government-affairs-team/). ♦

## Leadership Academy class includes 11 from Michigan

**E**leven Michigan county officials and staff members recently completed the NACo Leadership Academy, a 12-week online program that empowers front-line county government employees with fundamental leadership skills. Across the country, 812 county employees participated in the most recent class, which began in January.

Among the 11 were Deena Bosworth, MAC’s governmental affairs director, Wayne County Commissioner Melissa Daub, Ottawa County Clerk Justin Roebuck and Houghton County Administrator Ben Larson.

The rest of the Michigan class was Sheila Peters of Alger, Ted Somers of Alpena, Shawna Walraven of Bay, Sue Buitenhuis of Cheboygan, Karl Hauser of Clare, Timothy Mitchell of Osceola and Scott Miller of Washtenaw.

MAC congratulates all the participants in the program. To learn more about the academy, visit [micounties.org/naco-high-performance-leadership-academy/](https://micounties.org/naco-high-performance-leadership-academy/). ♦

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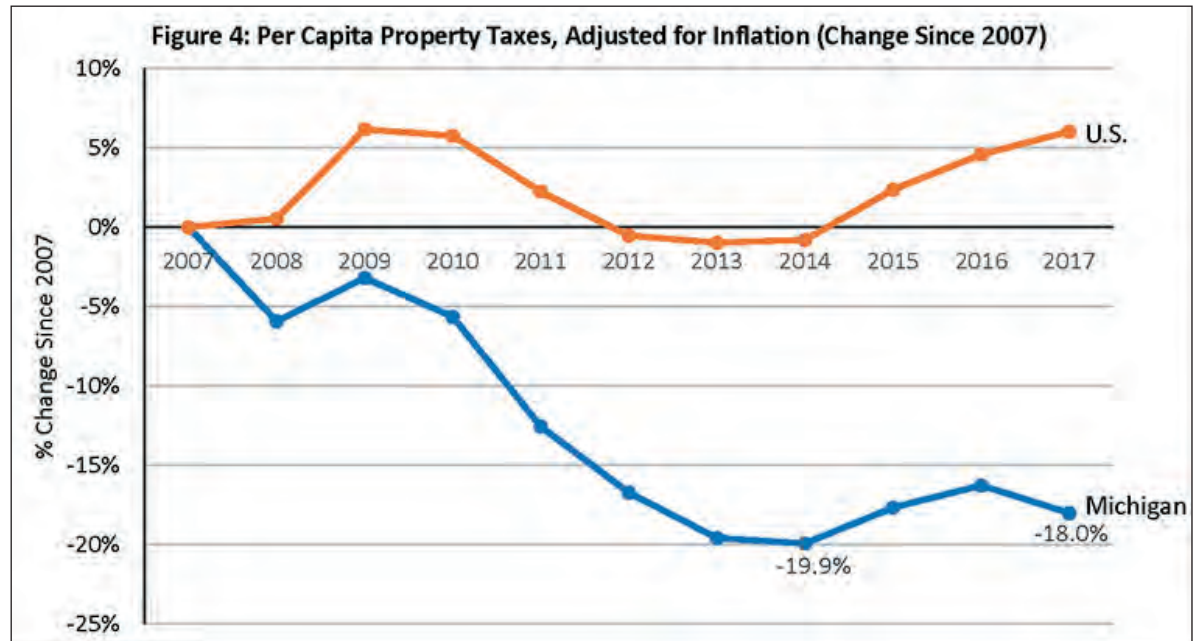
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# Property taxes: Some help from the Legislature would be great

BY STEPHAN CURRIE/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Stephan Currie is executive director of the Michigan Association of Counties, which represents Michigan's county governments and the 622 elected county commissioners who lead them.

Note: This commentary originally appeared in Crain's Detroit Business on May 24.



**“It took 11 years for nominal property tax collections to recover to their 2008 level. Worse, adjusting for inflation, counties are now collecting almost \$1 billion less than they did in 2008.”**

The citizens now serving in the Michigan Legislature did not create the fiscal crisis that now grips our 83 counties and other local governments. The crisis is so large, so complex, it took decades to create – decades of poor choices, often made with good, or at least not malicious, intentions.

Nevertheless, time after time, legislators eased their own financial challenges by deepening the hole that our 83 county governments are trapped in. Revenue sharing cuts. Unfunded mandates. Restrictions on raising and using revenue. The encroachments are many, the effects enormous.

Today, we are urging them to take the first step to better fiscal health: Stop making it worse.

Four years ago, state leaders briefly noticed the problem around them and convened a task force to study the pension and retiree health care pressures squeezing local governments. I was proud to sit on that panel, which produced a series of limited but practical recommendations to ease the strain. All the Legislature managed to do, unfortunately, was to require locals to generate more reports (i.e., more work for locals) for the state to look at.

And if you look at those reports, you will see an unsurprising fact: Counties are still squeezed. In fiscal 2019, for example, county governments had at least \$3.5 billion in unfunded liabilities for retiree pensions and health care coverage.

And what has the Legislature been doing in the meantime? Not helping.

In 2013, it enacted an exemption on property taxes to help Michigan veterans – a laudable goal. But they did it without compensating local governments. That exemption has carved \$1.7 billion in taxable value off local accounts.

In the last three legislative sessions, 2015-2020, legislators filed no fewer than 140 separate bills involving exemptions to the property tax, the central revenue source for Michigan counties. Many of these bills were motivated by noble purposes (job creation) or targeted for worthy groups (disabled veterans, charitable groups), but what they all lacked was any recognition of, or response for, the resulting cuts to local resources and local services.

And consider, a recent analysis by the nonpartisan Lincoln Institute of Land

Policy found that not only is Michigan “unique in the restrictiveness of the state’s property tax limits,” but “the property tax is particularly important for local governments’ fiscal health in Michigan because they have little access to other types of taxes to raise revenue.”

Our crisis only worsened in the aftermath of the Great Recession a decade ago. As the state’s economy and resources bounced back, Michigan’s local governments, trapped underneath two interlocking state restrictions on property taxes (Proposal A and the Headlee Amendment), saw their resources plunge and never really return.

It took 11 years for nominal property tax collections to recover to their 2008 level. Worse, adjusting for inflation, counties are now collecting almost \$1 billion less than they did in 2008.

Then, of course, COVID hits.

Across the state, county leaders worked to ensure the continued delivery of public services while doing their best to protect the health of residents and county employees. The strains have been severe, but counties have met the challenge – so far.

But we’ve all seen what COVID has done to local economies, with empty storefronts and unutilized office buildings a common sight. Those images will, at some point, translate into lower property values and lower property taxes (used to pay for those local services and cover those local liabilities to public servants).

Despite this, some legislators are backing more ideas that will create more problems.

They are pointing to the historic investment to counties in the American Rescue Plan as proof the state can further reduce its commitment – even though the ARP funds cannot, by law, be used to address pension or retiree health care needs.

And they continue to file and tout property tax exemptions (10 bills so far in 2021). With each of these special breaks, more of the burden for public services shifts to everyone else, the small businesses and households that constitute the majority of the state’s taxpayers.

So, until the Legislature can engage in a good faith discussion on how to address the local government fiscal crisis, we have one simple request to the Legislature: Stop making it worse. ♦

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# Revenue sharing: How the state ‘found’ \$1 billion for itself

BY ERIC LUPHER/PRESIDENT, CITIZENS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN

**“In 2004, 36 of the 83 county tax levies yielded per capita collections less than state average. This is significant because these counties would be the first to deplete their reserves.”**

When governments hit a budget problem, you can expect the response will take these forms: cut spending, raise revenue or use what many might call “gimmicks.” Popular budgetary gimmicks have included shifting expenditures into a different fiscal year, funding programs from different temporary sources, changing accounting processes or otherwise obfuscating the budget imbalance.

Early in the 21st century, Michigan’s county revenue sharing program fell prey to a state gimmick, with consequences that still reverberate today.

The nation went into a recession in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. However, what became an eight-month national recession grew into a six-year downturn for Michigan, placing considerable ongoing stress on the state budget.

The recently elected Granholm administration was often at odds with the Republican Legislature in dealing with the structural and cyclical imbalances of the state budget. So, budget solutions most often focused on blanket, across-the-board expenditure reductions, supplemented with a variety of one-time budget fixes.

Revenue sharing was an early and easy target for these cuts. By fiscal year 2004 (Oct. 1, 2004-Sept. 30, 2005) more than \$275 million (30 percent) of statutory revenue sharing for all local governments was being diverted to other state purposes.

After these cuts came the gimmick: The state shifted the timing of the county property tax levy. This shift from the winter to the summer tax bills was phased in over three years. In 2005, one-third of the allocated mills were levied as a summer tax, and the remaining two-thirds were levied in the winter. This process was repeated in 2006 and 2007, with another one-third of the millage moved forward each year to the summer bills.

This tax shift accelerated the payment

of county taxes within a calendar year, resulting in more revenues than counties needed to operate on an annual basis. It also moved the receipt of taxes sooner in a county’s fiscal year. The “excess” revenue was deposited into revenue sharing “reserve funds,” with the aggregate amount equaling the December 2004 property tax levy.

Once this shift was completed, the state payment of county revenue sharing stopped, and counties instead withdrew from their reserve funds amounts equal to what they would have gotten in state payments. In short, the cancelled county revenue sharing payments helped fix the state’s budget hole, and the timing gimmick ensured county revenues were maintained on a fiscal year basis.

Once counties depleted these temporary reserve funds, state revenue sharing payments were restored; but because the initial reserve fund balances varied by county, they exhausted their balances in different years.

In 2004, 36 of the 83 county tax levies yielded per capita collections less than state average. This is significant because these counties would be the first to deplete their reserves. Tuscola County was the first to deplete its reserve fund in FY09, followed by Gratiot, Houghton, Montcalm, Saginaw and St. Joseph counties in FY10.

Those with greater than average per capita tax yields maintained their reserve funds longer. Leelanau County only exhausted its reserve fund in FY20, while Emmet won’t do so until FY23.

Overall, the tax-switch gimmick diverted \$182 million a year (with inflationary adjustments) from FY2004 to FY2009 and diminishing amounts in each year since from county revenue sharing to other state purposes. This gimmick provided minimal state budget relief each year (just 0.02 percent of the \$8.9 billion FY04 state General Fund budget), but cumulatively the state was able to divert



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.

more than \$1 billion to other purposes through this action.

While this gimmick allowed counties in aggregate to maintain a revenue source totaling \$182 million plus inflation, it did so by using their own tax dollars. It is impossible to know how funding of county revenue sharing would have changed without this gimmick, as the state remained in a fiscally retrenched mode for several years after the shift. But we do know this tax shift created cashflow challenges that continue for some counties even to this day. ♦

## BACKGROUND

Michigan's revenue-sharing program began in the early 1930s and through numerous changes has evolved into the current system.

- In the 1930s the state began taxing enterprises holding licenses to sell alcoholic beverages; 85 percent of the revenue was returned to cities, villages, and townships. Later a portion of the intangibles tax revenue was added to the revenue-sharing pot.
- In 1946 a portion of the state sales tax revenue also was earmarked (dedicated) for local government.
- The 1963 state constitution (Article IX, section 10) expanded the locals' share of state sales tax revenue, dedicating one-eighth of it to cities, villages, and townships.
- In 1967 the state income tax was enacted and 11.5 percent of the gross receipts allocated to local governments: 50 percent to county governments (the first significant unrestricted state aid to counties) and 50 percent to cities, villages, and townships. This and all the above were distributed on a per capita basis.

PUBLIC SECTOR CONSULTANTS REPORT #49

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# Utilize the considerable resources offered to counties to boost cybersecurity

BY JEFF LAWSON/CHEBOYGAN COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

*Jeff Lawson is vice president of the Michigan Association of County Administrative Officers (MACAO).*

**“By continuing to make cybersecurity a key component of organizational planning and emergency response efforts, we can take measures to prevent certain type of attacks and mitigate the impact of others.”**

**A**nother beginning to a workday, with several virtual meetings scheduled, deadlines to maintain project timelines and then the phone rings. It’s IT calling to tell you, “I think we have a problem.”

Unfortunately, cyber-attacks are occurring with more frequency on governmental organizations. It is not a matter of if it will occur, but when and to what degree. By continuing to make cyber security a key component of organizational planning and emergency response efforts, we can take measures to prevent certain type of attacks and mitigate the impact of others.

The federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) offers resources to state, local and tribal governments to help combat and plan for cyber-threats. The state of Michigan in 2017 participated in a federal case study that identified the foundation of cybersecurity for an organization is developing a “Strategy and Plan” concerning cyber security that integrates this process into the strategic “Budgeting and Acquisition” process of your organization; takes steps to conduct “Risk Identification and Mitigation” sessions; develops an “Incident Response” plan; participates in “Information Sharing”

between organizations; and implements “Workforce Education” concerning cybersecurity. CISA provides a “SLTT Tool Kit” to help governmental agencies to recognize and address cybersecurity risks. The kit includes:

- Cyber Resilience Review (CRR) program, which is a no-cost, voluntary, interview-based assessment to evaluate an organization’s operational resilience and cybersecurity practices.
- External Dependencies Management Assessment Description, assessment, which is a no-cost, voluntary, interview-based assessment to evaluate an organization’s management of their dependencies on external computer infrastructure resources.
- Cyber Infrastructure Survey Description, which is a no-cost, voluntary survey that evaluates the effectiveness of organizational security controls, cybersecurity preparedness, and overall resilience.
- Vulnerability Scanning service of Internet-accessible systems used by governmental agencies.
- Phishing Campaign Assessment program which is a no-cost, six-week engagement



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Michigan Association of County Administrative Officers

## LEARN MORE

[micounties.org/macao-michigan-association-of-county-administrative-officers](http://micounties.org/macao-michigan-association-of-county-administrative-officers)

**For six decades, the Michigan Association of County Administrative Officers (MACAO) has been a trusted resource to county administrative officers as they continuously improve their abilities in serving county boards of commissioners by:**

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offered to federal, state, local, tribal and territorial (SLTT) governments, as well as critical infrastructure and private sector companies, that evaluates an organization’s susceptibility and reaction to phishing emails.

- Validated Architecture Design Review. The Validated Architecture Design Review (VADR) is a voluntary, no-cost assessment based on standards, guidelines, and best practices related to the design of government computer infrastructure.

Information concerning these free cyber protection resources provided by CISA can be found by visiting [us-cert.cisa.gov/resources/sltt#identify](https://us-cert.cisa.gov/resources/sltt#identify).

The Michigan State Police Michigan Cyber Command System MC3 is another resource to help your organization. This State agency is responsible for coordination efforts of cyber emergency response during critical cyber incidents in Michigan. MC3 provides resources to local units of government as well as businesses and citizens at [michigan.gov/msp/0,4643,7-123-72297\\_72370\\_72379\\_99838---,00.html](https://michigan.gov/msp/0,4643,7-123-72297_72370_72379_99838---,00.html). The site provides publications on cyber-related issues that can be beneficial to an organization’s planning and response measures.

And the National Association of Counties provides an Enterprise Cybersecurity Leadership Program, 1 12-week online session conducted with curriculum developed by the Professional Development Academy. For more information visit [naco.org/resources/education-and-training/naco-enterprise-cybersecurity-leadership-academy](https://naco.org/resources/education-and-training/naco-enterprise-cybersecurity-leadership-academy).

Remember, by continuing to make cybersecurity a key component of organizational planning and emergency response efforts, we can take measures to prevent certain type of attacks and mitigate the impact of others. ♦

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# DTE sets the pace on a cleaner energy future for Michigan

BY CARLA GRIBBS/DTE ENERGY



Carla Gribbs is a regional manager for DTE Energy, which was the 2020-21 sponsor for MAC's Podcast 83.

**“Like all big transformations, the shift to cleaner energy won't happen overnight and we can't do it alone.”**

Climate change is one of the defining issues of our era. Here at DTE Energy, we know that it's our duty to act — and we're making fundamental changes to the way we produce energy in our state. Across our company, we're taking steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with the goal of achieving net zero carbon emissions in our electric and gas utilities by 2050. We firmly believe this is the right thing to do for our customers, business and the communities we serve.

Like all big transformations, the shift to cleaner energy won't happen overnight and we can't do it alone. That's why DTE is providing options for our suppliers, communities and customers to get involved. Here are four steps you can take now:

## 1. Embrace energy efficiency

At DTE, we like to say that the cleanest, least expensive kilowatt of energy is the one you don't use. We can all take

steps to save energy and save ourselves some money at the same time. Consider things like recycling old appliances and investing in new ones that are ENERGY STAR® certified. Sealing air leaks and adding insulation to your home or business can also reduce annual energy bills. If you haven't done so already, make the switch to LED light bulbs. You can purchase LEDs and other energy-saving products at our DTE Marketplace for instant rebates. You can also schedule a free home energy consultation to have an energy specialist come out and identify opportunities where you can save on your energy bill and install FREE energy-saving products. To learn more ways to save, homeowners can go to [dteenergy.com/saveenergy](https://dteenergy.com/saveenergy) and business owners can go to [dteenergy.com/savenow](https://dteenergy.com/savenow).

## 2. Drive an electric vehicle

Did you know that you can reduce your



carbon emissions by 60 percent by driving an EV? DTE can help residential and business customers get on the road to electrification with **Charging Forward**, our EV charger incentive program that provides EV owners and businesses with thousands in incentives when they install qualified chargers.

**3. Join DTE's CleanVision MIGreenPower program**

MIGreenPower is a voluntary renewable energy program that enables DTE Electric customers to attribute a percentage of their energy use to our wind and solar projects, adding more clean energy to the grid. The program provides customers with a flexible, affordable way to support clean energy without installing new equipment or making any home modifications. In less than four years, MIGreenPower subscribers have supported 100 million kilowatt hours of clean energy, which is equivalent to the greenhouse gas emissions from 15,400 passenger cars driven for a year. MIGreenPower is open to all DTE Electric customers and you can learn more at [migreenpower.com](http://migreenpower.com).

**4. Enroll in DTE's CleanVision Natural Gas Balance**

Earlier this year, DTE introduced our Natural Gas Balance program, giving customers an easy, affordable way to reduce the environmental impact of natural gas usage in water heaters, heating and other home uses. Through a combination of renewable natural gas and carbon offsets, customers can neutralize 25 percent to 100 percent of the emissions from their natural gas use. The carbon offset program protects 24,000 acres of Michigan forests that naturally absorb greenhouse gases. Renewable natural gas will be sourced by transforming agricultural waste, landfill emissions and wastewater treatment plant by-products into renewable natural gas (RNG). DTE Gas customers can learn more about CleanVision Natural Gas Balance and enroll at [dteenergy.com/naturalgasbalance](http://dteenergy.com/naturalgasbalance).

Small changes add up. Everyone can help protect the environment for families, communities and generations to come. Start now. Join us on the journey to a cleaner Michigan at [dtecleanenergy.com](http://dtecleanenergy.com). ♦

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# Midland County uses map tech to help honor veterans

BY NATHAN FAZER/MIDLAND COUNTY GIS TECHNICIAN

“Midland County has expanded how GIS technology is used. It has become part of the fabric of our operations in a multitude of departments and programs in ways we never would have imagined.”



As technology advances, local governments often find new and innovative ways to utilize that technology to improve a service or provide access to something that was not thought of before. The Midland County GIS Department actively seeks out new and challenging ways to utilize the County’s mapping technology. Midland County has expanded how GIS technology is used. It has become part of the fabric of our operations in a multitude of departments and programs in ways we never would have imagined.

In 2011, the GIS Department worked with the Midland County Veterans’ Service Office on a project to honor veterans that have served our Country. The Veteran’s Services Office provides services to veterans and their families by helping with federal, state and county veterans programs. The project mapped the locations of veteran burials in all the cemeteries within the county and providing that information in an online search tool. This project was two-fold: to provide a tool to volunteers to use each Memorial Day to place flags at the burial sites of veterans, and to allow families and loved ones of these veterans to search for them online and find their burial location on a map.

In mid-2020, the GIS Department explored other ways to once again use the technology available to show its appreciation to the veterans of the area. Using a sUAS (small unmanned system, or drone), the GIS Department collected aerial imagery of the

Midland County Veterans Memorial next to the County courthouse. The memorial is an approximately 30’x50’ area with paver bricks and a memorial wall. The paver bricks contain messages from families, friends, area organizations, and others honoring and remembering veterans from the area. Using the aerial imagery from the drone, the GIS department mapped each individual brick at the memorial – over 3,000 paver bricks. Then using a combination of the imagery and an iPad (to field check the bricks), added the text of each brick into the GIS. The bricks, along with the drone imagery, were put into an online GIS application. This application allows users to search the text and messages on the bricks. Once a name or message is found, the online map zooms to the brick.

Once the project at the Midland memorial was completed and shown to the Veterans’ Service Office, the GIS Department was asked to complete the same type of project for the memorial in Coleman.

The hope is the GIS application will be used in several ways. First, to allow those that cannot travel to the actual sites the opportunity to browse and search the paver bricks online. And second, to be used at the memorials by visitors. Visitors will scan a QR code with their smartphone and the GIS application will open. They can search for the name or message they came to see, and the map will help guide them to the correct spot. ♦



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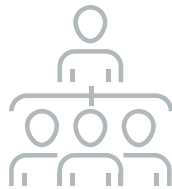
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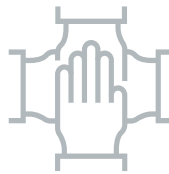
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# Parks and recreation: An essential service

BY JAMES DUNLEAVY/OAKLAND COUNTY CHIEF OF PARKS



*James Dunleavy is president of the Michigan Association of County Park and Recreational Officials. Learn more about the group at [micountyparks.org](http://micountyparks.org).*

**“Here in Ingham County, with our 1,200 FTEs, we decided it was important to provide immersive supervisor training in all things Ingham.”**

When the COVID-19 world health crisis struck, Oakland County Parks and Recreation immediately acted to mitigate the spread of the virus by closing facilities and cancelling programs at the recommendation of the Oakland County Health Division.

Day-use parks remained open, however, welcoming visitors to hike and bike the 80 miles of trails, fish, and relax in 7,000 acres of natural surroundings.

And free entrance to parks was offered March 20-June 1, 2020, as the Oakland County Board of Commissioners and the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission agreed it was critical for county residents to have free access.

Even during the “Stay at Home” order, we still had dedicated employees opening and closing parks, handling trash, cleaning and sanitizing — keeping day-use parks open to guests who were desperate for normalcy and a place to go when almost everything was closed.

The Oakland County Farmers Market was deemed an essential business and remained open. The market evolved into a community hub for residents and businesses to drop off donations of personal protection equipment (in one drop alone, DTE Energy delivered 80,000 N95 masks for medical professionals and first responders).

To keep the community nourished, the market hosted Gleaners Community Food Bank’s drive-thru food distributions and offered curbside pickup and delivery options. Up to 500 families at a time were served through this program.

Procedures for enhanced cleaning and remote work were instituted. Virtual programming was created. Partnerships were developed to provide programs and greater access. One partnership was with the Oakland County Health Division to help distribute “Safe reopening” kits for community-based small businesses. Our parks staff helped distribute the kits to local business owners. These kits included items such as masks, wipes, digital thermometers, employee check-in sheets and workplace safety posters.

Record numbers were recorded for trails use at day-use parks. Golf courses reported sold-out tee times. The campgrounds were filled with families looking for a close-to-home getaway. As a parks system, we have many parks that have vehicle counters. In those early months, it was not uncommon to have three or four times as many guests daily as normal. The parks were literally packed with people trying to find a place to recreate and escape their home-bound lives.

Providing an essential service during the pandemic restored a sense of normalcy for our residents. Staff reimagined how to operate a 14-park system, limited in-person programs and constantly changing COVID orders. Communication to staff and the public was critical.

One of the greatest challenges was keeping staff updated and trained on the constantly changing regulations. In Michigan there were weekly updates which often included changes in mandates for health and safety concerns. For example, golf carts had to be sanitized after every use and a special area had to be created to house this cleaning and sanitizing operation. The hard work brought smiles when guests commented on how safe they felt at our course and their gratitude for the cleanliness of our park and restrooms.

The culture of how we manage our parks system has forever been impacted. It’s been rewarding to see how governmental agencies can work together during a difficult time.

The pandemic reinforced the fact parks and recreation are most certainly essential services. ♦

# Eileen Kowall and Joe Stevens

**MEET YOUR  
MAC BOARD**



**EILEEN KOWALL**

**Name:** Eileen Kowall

**County/MAC Region:** Oakland/Region V

**Position:** Director

**County Service:** Oakland County Board of Commissioners, 2003-2008 & 2015-present (currently serving on Finance Committee, Airport & Healthy Aging ad-hoc committees, Human Trafficking Task Force)

**Profession:** EMTK Consulting

**Previous Public Service:** House of Representatives, 2009-2014

## What are your county's most pressing needs/projects as you emerge from the COVID pandemic?

We need to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the county. What challenges still need to be addressed? What unmet needs did the pandemic uncover? What did we learn from the pandemic and how can we be better prepared, if possible, for future events?

As we determine how best to utilize ARP funds, we must maintain fiscal responsibility

while helping those still in need throughout the county. I'm looking forward to working with the (Oakland County Executive Dave) Coulter administration and the Economic Recovery Task Force on a plan that will make the best use of this one-time funding. We need to focus on economic viability and sustainability with funding & programs geared towards business recovery. I believe we should use key performance indicators to measure results.

Also, how do we get people back to work? No amount of funding can help if businesses can't get employees!

We need to help individuals and families recover by addressing health, economic, social and other lingering needs. I believe ARP funds can have a sizable impact on senior needs and mental health services, for examples.

We have some broadband needs in Oakland County and water/sewer/drain infrastructure improvements are also much needed. Public Safety would be well served by promoting a world-class training facility for our first responders. ♦



**JOE STEVENS**

**Name:** Joe Stevens

**County/MAC Region:** Dickinson/Region I

**Position:** Director

**County Service:** 1994-present

**Profession:** Retired

**Previous Public Service:** Kingsford City Council, 12 years

## What are your county's most pressing needs/projects as you emerge from the COVID pandemic?

I believe the most pressing issue right now in Dickinson County is not being able to fill jobs. Dickinson County is a manufacturing hub in the Upper Peninsula and many positions aren't being filled. The extra \$300 a week in unemployment benefits must stop. People need to go back to work.

On another note: Line 5 needs to stay open, and the tunnel needs to be built. All of Michigan cannot afford to see Line 5 shut down. ♦

# Sen. Jeremy Moss



**Name:** Sen. Jeremy Moss

**District/counties:** 11th/Oakland County

**Committees:** Regulatory Reform, Vice Chair; Local Government, Economic and Small Business Development

**Term #:** 1st

**Previous public service:** Southfield City Council, 2011-2014); Michigan House of Representatives, 2015-2018

## What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan now?

We must examine the economic impact of the pandemic and provide support to the vulnerable Michigan communities that need it most. The pandemic exposed a lot of societal ills that many people in our communities suffer through silently, namely job insecurity and housing instability.

We have a lot of opportunity to address some of the root problems of these issues with the federal support that was appropriated to our state budget, and state lawmakers must partner with our local units of government — especially our counties, which took a leading role to help us weather the pandemic — to effectively deliver to our constituents.

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

The pandemic displayed to everyone in the state the essential services that our counties provide. Throughout this crisis, I've been in constant communication with our county health department — from the rollout of the first testing sites to the establishment of vaccine clinics.

As a former local official, I've been a loud voice in the Legislature to boost revenue sharing. Our constituents are best served when Lansing invests in the needs of our local communities.

## Thank you for sponsoring Senate Bill 245, which is part of the package to enact four-year county commissioner terms. What are some of the main reasons you sponsored and championed this legislation?

The scope of county commissioners has increased since two-year terms were set decades ago. County commissioners consider detailed and comprehensive proposals that impact economic development, public health and safety and critical infrastructure. Our bills bring Michigan county commissioner terms more in line with counties throughout the country that recognize these critical issues deserve robust analysis and deliberation before the next campaign cycle arrives.

## During your time in the Legislature, you have been a leader on the need to increase government transparency in Michigan. Do you think this could be the year in which bipartisan legislation to address government integrity will pass and if so, please briefly explain how your legislation will help increase transparency and place trust in state government?

Michigan ranks dead last among all 50 states in government ethics, according to a study by the Center for Public Integrity. Their report measured 13 functions of government and Michigan failed 10 of them.

Part of the reason distrust in government is so high is because Michigan is one of only two states that does not subject the governor or state legislators to the Freedom of Information Act. Just as county officials are subjected to basic scrutiny from constituents, so too should all of state government.

Sen. Ed McBroom and I have been on this mission since our tenure in the House to lift Michigan from our last-in-the-nation ranking. In previous sessions, the Senate had been the roadblock, but now we are here as senators to usher these bipartisan bills to the governor's desk.

## How have your constituents been affected by the lack of affordable housing and what are some ways the state and counties can partner to address the needs of residents around the state?

Housing stability impacts all of us — working families seeking affordable homes, local employers recruiting new talent and Michigan communities maintaining safe neighborhoods. I've been working with partners on a bipartisan package of bills to address this crisis. My bill would expand the successful Neighborhood Enterprise Zone Act to provide tax relief for homeowners who make needed investments to rehabilitate their homes and contribute to thriving neighborhoods. ♦



**Name:** Rep. Thomas Albert

**District/counties:** District 86/Kent and Ionia counties

**Committees:** Chair, House Appropriations Committee

**Term #:** 3rd

**Previous public service:** Former Marine Corps officer; investor with the State of Michigan Retirement Systems

## What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan now?

To fully transition from the COVID pandemic into a brighter future with a fully reopened state. While there has been significant progress recently, the return to normal has been too slow. This is concerning on many levels, but the most concerning issue has been the impact on our kids. Many students went the better part of a year without seeing the inside of a classroom. We can't even begin to gauge how much of a toll this past year has taken on them academically, socially and emotionally. That is why I have focused on developing plans to help kids catch up on lost learning.

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

Counties are particularly important when it makes financial sense for public services to be delivered regionally or collaboratively. Public safety, road commissions, elections — these are just a few examples that come to mind where counties can and should play an important role. It saves money and makes service delivery more consistent and effective.

## In your first year as chair of the House Appropriations Committee, what practices have you implemented to ease the process and have there been any challenges in which you have learned to overcome?

Over the past year, Michiganders have not had input into the decisions that affect their daily lives. Too much has been dictated by executive order. That's why the Appropriations Committee has focused on reining in government overreach and restoring legislative oversight of state government through the budget process. To me, this is a matter of restoring the balance of power as outlined in the Michigan Constitution.

## As more federal guidance becomes available related to the billions of

## dollars allocated to the State from the American Rescue Plan, what are some of your priorities for use of the funds and what sort of timeline do you anticipate for appropriation of the money?

We worked hard in the House to have the first and most comprehensive plan related to American Rescue Plan resources. The House version of this plan was approved in mid-May and will drive the conversation as the Legislature works toward a final package. Our plan is specifically designed to help Michigan bounce back from the pandemic and take advantage of the opportunity to make one-time investments that will help our state well into the future. The supplemental budget plan includes \$4.8 billion for education because, as I stated earlier, kids need help catching up on lost learning. Child care is also a huge area of focus with \$1.4 billion. We include \$686 million in COVID relief for local governments, and \$80 million specifically focused on law enforcement training, retention and relationship building with communities. We also take steps to make state government accountable and ensure this money is spent as intended. It's a great start and it moves the process forward. I am hopeful a plan will be finalized in the Legislature very soon.

## Counties may face future financial challenges caused by the pandemic due to declining revenues from commercial and residential property. Do you support a long-term fix to local government financing and creating a more stable fund source for county revenue sharing?

The budget plan recently approved by the House basically maintains funding, with a 1 percent increase for county revenue sharing. The House also is proposing many infrastructure improvements that could help county budgets indirectly. I recognize the funding model for local governments may not be optimal, and I am always open to new ideas to improve on the status quo. ♦

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