

MICHIGAN COUNTIES



One of the more than 160 “Disney dogs” rescued in Grand Traverse County in an effort that eventually involved agencies across Michigan receives an examination at Cherryland Humane Society. *(Courtesy Photo)*



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Deena Bosworth, Director of Governmental Affairs
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Jamie Pemberton, Director of Finance
Hannah Sweeney, Governmental Affairs Associate
Gabriel Zawadzki, Grant Services Program Director



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Letter from the Executive Director



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Currie'.

STEPHAN W. CURRIE
MAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“Also looming on the horizon is our 2022 Michigan Counties Annual Conference, which will be Sept. 18-21 in Port Huron. In addition to being our first conference visit to St. Clair County (at least in living memory), the 2022 Annual will be a first schedule-wise, too.”

As an organization approaching its 125th anniversary (2023), MAC has plenty of tradition to fall back on.

But it’s my job, as your executive director, to make sure celebrating tradition doesn’t mean falling behind the times.

To that end, I want to highlight some significant changes we are making this year to MAC events; changes we think respond both to member needs and the ever-changing world around us.

First, get ready for the inaugural MAC “Policy Summit” on July 27.

For nearly a decade, we used the summer to schedule a series of “Regional Summits” across Michigan. These were one-day “mini conferences” designed to provide insight on trending issues to commissioners and others without the need for any overnight stays or dinner expenses.

Unfortunately, the logistics for the summits grew more difficult with each passing year. So, I made the decision last fall that we would try something new in 2022:

A single physical site here in downtown Lansing, with a digital participation option.

This “hybrid” format should reduce travel time and costs for staff and speakers alike, while giving members the choice on whether to attend in person or leave the car in the garage and join us via the web.

What will not change is the caliber and amount of policy content available to our members.

Also looming on the horizon is our 2022 Michigan Counties Annual Conference, which will be Sept. 18-21 in Port Huron.

In addition to being our first conference visit to St. Clair County (at least in living memory), the 2022 Annual will be a first schedule-wise, too.

Our traditional 2-night schedule had members arriving on Sunday afternoon and being asked to attend events through mid-day on a Tuesday. This, as regular conference-goers know, created two problems:

1. An overall lack of unstructured time for county leaders to socialize and network with each other.
2. A scheduling crunch that had attendees in conference events right before a venue’s check-out deadline.

So, as detailed on page 8, this year’s event will be different. We still will start on Sunday evening with check-in and social events. On Monday, we will have a full day of plenary sessions, policy breakouts and our traditional Exhibitor Show. Then, on Tuesday, we will have another day of sessions capped by the annual President’s Banquet that night. Attendees would then have the option to depart first thing Wednesday morning.

This broader schedule allows for more networking time and members will be able to head straight home on Wednesday morning, leaving well before any check-out deadline.

As always, we will be surveying members after each event to get your feedback and adjust accordingly. If you have any questions about this, or any of MAC’s other activities, just drop me a note at scurrie@micounties.org. ♦

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MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE

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**Special thanks to Jim Maike for his \$500 to kick off the 2022 campaign*



CORRECTION

Commissioner Carolyn Brummund of Alcona was left off the service graphic in the April 2022 edition. The corrected graphic is to the left. MAC regrets the error.



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Letter from the President



PHIL KUYERS
PRESIDENT, MAC BOARD OF
DIRECTORS

“The roles of state legislator and county commissioner are naturally complementary. Both jobs require attention to detail and process, yet also the ability to grasp the challenges on every aspect of daily life.”

My mind often has turned recently to the power of connections. Just a few days ago, in fact, MAC board directors were able to gather in Grand Haven for our summer session, which included opportunities for us to talk with each other outside the formal board setting. It was my pleasure to show off some of the sights of coastal Ottawa County, especially in the prime summer months when so many of our friends and neighbors flock to the waters of our great state.

And connection, of course, is at the heart of so many of our policy discussions in our home counties since the pandemic’s outbreak, particularly in the ever-growing, ever more important digital world.

High-quality digital access, or “broadband,” is to the 21st century what electric lines were to the 20th and water pipes were to the 19th — essential service. Yet, as we discovered in those early pandemic days, the scope of this essential service was less universal than thought — or needed.

Plenty of counties are at work on ideas to extend the best service to every nook and cranny of their communities, an example of which you can read about on page 24 of this edition. But, I fear, many of you may not be aware of another way we can connect our constituents.

The federal Affordable Connectivity Program helps connect families and households struggling to afford internet service. Using a \$14.2 billion pot of money, it provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward broadband service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer or tablet from participating providers.

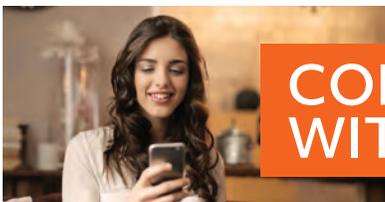
To check eligibility or submit a free no-risk application, your constituents can visit www.fcc.gov/ACP or call 1-877-384-2575.

In fact, a great time to mention this service might be when you are out knocking on doors and making connections with voters for the upcoming primary.

Of course, primary day is Aug. 2, but an equally important political day just passed: June 23.

That’s the day that absentee ballots must be available to Michigan voters, and boy are voters showing an appetite for them. In 2020, the first election after Michigan allowed “no-reason” absentee ballots, 57 percent of the votes cast statewide were absentees. There’s no reason to think that trend won’t continue, which, fellow commissioners/candidates, means you better be doing today what you can’t afford to put off to tomorrow: connecting with your voters.

Happy summer! ♦



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St. Clair County will host 2022 Annual Conference

Registration opens July 5 for the 2022 Michigan Counties Annual Conference, scheduled for Sept. 18-21 at the Blue Water Convention Center along the St. Clair River in St. Clair County's Port Huron.

The event will have two full days of plenary sessions and policy workshops, interspersed liberally with social and networking time for attendees.

"Much of the credit for making this conference happen in Port Huron goes to (former commissioner) Howard Heidemann," said MAC Executive Director Stephan Currie. "Whenever he was at a MAC meeting or event, he never failed to lobby for his county and its facilities, such as the Blue Water Convention Center."

The early-bird member price for the conference is \$395. Included in that fee are a strolling welcome dinner on Sunday evening and the annual President's Banquet on Tuesday night, plus breakfast and lunch on Monday and Tuesday.

In a new twist, MAC will be using multiple hotels for the event. Rooms at the Doubletree Hotel, adjacent to the Blue Water Center, are \$149 per night. Rooms at the nearby Comfort Inn are \$129. The conference will provide a free shuttle between the Comfort Inn and the convention center, plus there is ample parking at the center.

As always, MAC will hold board elections and membership votes on its annual policy platforms at the conference. Watch micounties.org and the weekly Legislative Update for details on reviewing platform drafts and filing for board seats.

Conference details and registration links can be found at www.micounties.org/conferences-2/.

Registration opens for Policy Summit on July 27

County leaders are invited to attend, in person or via Zoom, the 2022 MAC Policy Summit on July 27 in Lansing.

The Policy Summit replaces MAC's Regional Summits, which were held in June, July and August.

Registration is now open at www.micounties.org/conferences-2/. The price to attend is \$50 for either in-person or digital access.

The summit will include presentations on such issues as workforce housing options, trail connectivity for recreation, maximizing your infrastructure dollars and more. The day will begin at 8:30 a.m. with check-in and a continental breakfast. Policy presentations will continue until 3 p.m., with lunch provided and compliments of Enbridge.

Those who register to attend digitally will be provided a link and access codes on the day prior to the summit.

For registration questions or issues, send an email to conference@micounties.org.

Houghton County chairman passes

Albert Koskela, a veteran member and chair of the Houghton County Board of Commissioners, passed away in April at the age of 81.

Koskela, who took office on Jan. 1, 2013, served Houghton's District 2, which includes Franklin, Osceola, Schoolcraft and Torch Lake Townships.



KOSKELA

Koskela, who had not filed to run for re-election in 2022,

also had served on the Lake Linden Hubbell Board of Education and the Copper Country Intermediate School District Board of Education.

Hammel, former MAC president, passes

Richard A. Hammel, who served as president of the MAC Board of Directors in 1977-78, recently passed at the age of 85.



HAMMEL

Hammel served as a commissioner and board chair for Genesee County. He then served for several years as managing director of the Genesee County Road Commission.

His son, Richard E. Hammel, told MLive.com that he was not certain what spurred his father to become active in area politics but that he focused special attention on the county's Parks and Recreation Commission and the establishment of the Genesee County 911 system.

Clare, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw, Wayne claim NACo Achievement Awards

Five Michigan counties were among those honored recently by the National Association of Counties in its 2022 Achievement Awards. The Achievement Awards program is a non-competitive awards program that seeks to recognize innovative county government programs. One outstanding program from each category will be selected as the "Best of Category."

Macomb County led with 12 citations, including seven in the criminal justice field alone.

Oakland County received 11 citations in six different categories for work that included vaccination promotional efforts, a school nurse program and a "Blueprint for Successful Aging."

Clare and Wayne counties were honored for their work in community and economic development, while Washtenaw County was cited for financial management via its "sustainable investments to preserve natural areas."

To see descriptions of Best of Category winners nationally and a searchable database of this year's winners, [click here](#). ♦

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Where are we halfway into 2022 legislative year?

BY DEENA BOSWORTH/MAC GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR

“Pursuit of these goals requires diligence, policy knowledge, hours of education, advocacy, collaboration, workgroups, testimony and communication.”

Each year, MAC establishes legislative priorities to advance the needs and goals of county government. In 2022, that list had seven priorities, ranging from fair revenue sharing funding to protecting local control of mental health and maximizing the impact of federal COVID aid on local services.

Pursuit of these goals requires diligence, policy knowledge, hours of education, advocacy, collaboration, workgroups, testimony and communication. And in addition to these policies, we also monitor 400 other pieces of legislation to ensure the county voice is heard.

So, halfway into 2022, where are we?

Open Meetings Act: MAC is seeking to allow for remote participation and, at minimum, allow for the meeting participation options that existed prior to changes made during the pandemic. This has proven challenging, as legislators have presented overwhelming opposition to remote participation. MAC has formed a coalition of other interest groups to move the conversation away from allegations of governing from a vacation home to the need to allow more citizen and elected official participation via online tools. We have met with leadership in both chambers, leadership staff, individual legislators and legal counsel to draft language. Several bills have been introduced, but prospects for progress are still uncertain.

Funding for Local Courts: Legal authority for local trial courts to impose reasonable costs on criminal defendants expires in October. In addition, a case now before the Michigan Supreme Court could disrupt such authority at any moment. Rep. Sarah Lightner’s House Bills 5956-57, now in the House Appropriations Committee, would



provide immediate solutions. The bills allow for a three-year extension and a backup plan if court costs are disallowed by court, appropriating state dollars to fill the gap if necessary. While, the courts timeline is obscure, at a minimum, the legislation will move in early fall to ensure continued court funding.

Mental Health: For six months, MAC has delayed a bid by Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey to privatize the local mental health system. We appreciate the more than 50 counties that have utilized our advocacy tools to express opposition to lawmakers. The fight here, however, is not over. We will be asking members to speak up again, particularly in the “lame duck” session, to protect local control and block these ill-advised changes to a vital local service.

Revenue Sharing: MAC’s perennial priority. In 2022, we asked to fund revenue sharing based on a percentage of the state’s sales tax. If successful, counties would see an increase of at least 8 percent (but some would see boosts up to 50%). MAC is pursuing a revenue sharing trust fund, with dedicated state sales tax dollars to support regular increases. Bills have been introduced in the House, and corresponding bills with larger dollar amounts are being drafted for Senate consideration. MAC has secured legislative champions in the House and the Senate to advance this priority.

Veterans Property Tax Reimbursement:

Legislation built from years of negotiations resulted this year in passage of reform bills, Senate Bills 783-784. Unfortunately, they were tied to a larger tax cut plan that the governor is going to veto. MAC has asked the original bills' sponsor, Sen. John Bumstead to introduce SB 1024, so we can advance the reimbursement plan. The Whitmer administration, however, is still opposed to our idea due to costs and burdens placed on state government. Work will continue on this issue through 2022.

Personal Property Tax (PPT) Reimbursement:

MAC wants \$75 million annually to make up for the anticipated losses once expansion of PPT exemptions go into effect in 2023. Senate Bills 1060-62 have cleared the Senate Finance Committee and would create a reimbursement using dedicated state use tax funds. We anticipate enactment of this reform by the close of 2022.

Federal Stimulus: MAC has worked diligently to ensure billions of dollars are made available to locals for basic services. To date, \$3.852 billion from the American Rescue Plan has been allocated for infrastructure, housing, public safety and health care. However, another \$2 billion has yet to be allocated and MAC will be working the rest of 2022 to ensure those funds are properly deployed.

As always, we stand ready to answer your policy questions and field your ideas. Just drop us a note at sweeney@micounties.org. And be sure to read your weekly Legislative Update emails!

See MAC's 2022 priorities list at <https://micounties.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-MAC-State-Priorities-Final.pdf>. ♦

83 COUNTIES MANY MORE STORIES



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Tragedy spurs bid for happy endings for neglected ‘Disney dogs’

BY WILL HANSEN/COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING INTERN

“This extremely negative situation was quickly turned into a positive one by the outpouring of help and donations from our community and other surrounding communities.”

From “101 Dalmatians” to “Lady and the Tramp” and “Bolt,” the dogs in Disney films have dodged danger, risen above indifference and cruelty and started new, brighter lives for themselves.

So, when Grand Traverse County Animal Control was confronted with an unprecedented canine crisis, a very Disney-like tale with the usual large cast of interesting characters began to unfold.

The story begins when more than 160 dogs were seized from an East Bay Township home in late January by Grand Traverse staffers and eventually encompasses animal control and adoption agencies from across Michigan, all trying to bring the animals a happy ending.

It was Cherryland Humane Society in Traverse City, which provides sheltering services for dogs rescued by the county, that first applied the “Disney Dogs” label because, “They deserve a happy ending,” said Naomi Washburn, Cherryland communications and marketing manager.

The county and Cherryland spearheaded the early rescue operation, one that quickly had its share of sadness, as 32 of the animals were found dead upon arrival at what has been described as a “large-scale” breeding operation.

This news only spurred on the rescue teams, though.

“This extremely negative situation was quickly turned into a positive one by the outpouring of help and donations from our community and other surrounding communities,” said Jaime Bemiss, Grand Traverse County animal control supervisor. “This positive response really shows how much our community cares about animals and the needs for agencies like Animal Control.”



A FEW OF THE COUNTLESS VOLUNTEERS WHO ASSEMBLED IN SUPPORT OF THE “DISNEY DOGS” POSE WITH A FEW OF THEIR CHARGES IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY. (COURTESY PHOTO)

“It’s almost indescribable the feeling of everybody coming together to care for these animals and just the sheer number of them was overwhelming in itself, and emotional and heartbreaking,” added Washburn, “It was really incredible working with a large number of animal control and adoption agencies to give these dogs the best care.”

The county was investigating the property because the owner had failed to comply with a junk ordinance. But then the dogs were found. Many of them were malnourished and had frozen paws, suffering in deplorable conditions, with little access to food, clean water and medical attention. Due to the huge number of dogs, Grand Traverse County and Cherryland Humane Society knew this was something they could not handle alone.

At the time of the seizure, for example, Cherryland was housing fewer than six dogs. “We’re very lucky to have that extra space in our shelter,” said Washburn. “We have had a broad spectrum of assistance and help. There are many different veterinarians that have reached out. The Bissell Foundation paid for all the vaccinations. Several different groomers came in because some of these dogs were in boxes and crates hidden in a truck. You can only imagine that kind of abuse.

Their fur was very bad, so we had to have all the different realms of our community come together to take care of them,” she added.

Additional allies arrived, including Little Traverse Bay Humane Society, Kalkaska County Animal Shelter, Otsego County Animal Shelter, Charlevoix Area Humane Society, Humane Society of Huron Valley, Ingham County Animal Control & Shelter, Wexford Animal Control, Eva Burrell Animal Shelter and H.A.N.D.D.S. To The Rescue.

The owner of the residence recently was sentenced to six months in jail for failing to provide adequate care to animals, an all-too-common story in our country. As many as 5,000 new cases of animal hoardings are reported each year in the U.S., involving 250,000 animals. Most such cases involve fewer than 50 animals, however, so the Grand Traverse situation was an extreme one — requiring a unique response.

Dogs were rehomed as far away as the Upper Peninsula and Lansing. Only one dog with some challenging needs is still at Cherryland to be adopted.

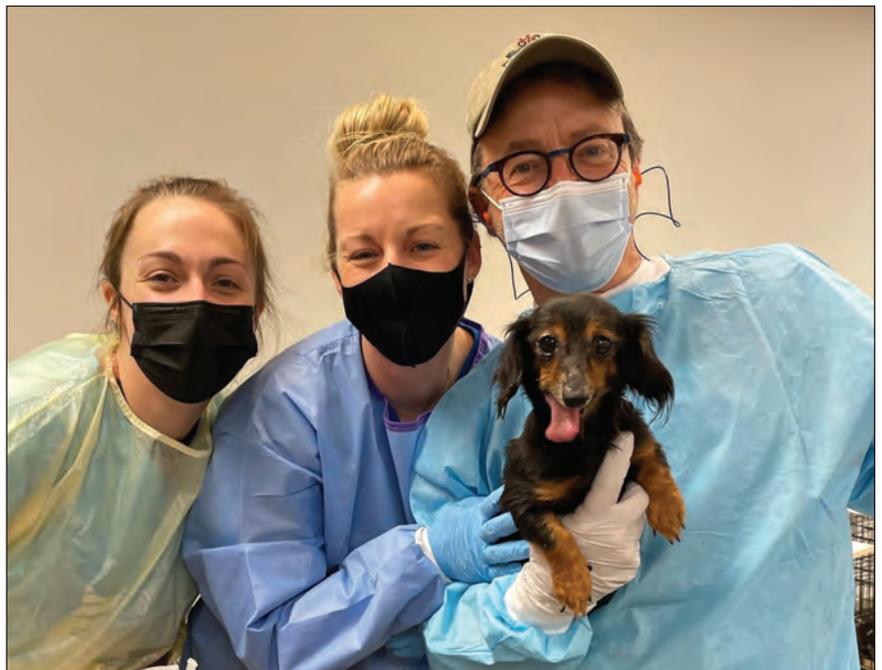
“We learned quite a few lessons throughout this situation,” said Grand Traverse’s Bemiss. “One of the most important being that if we band together as one, we can accomplish most anything.

“We need to take a closer look at our county ordinances and state laws surrounding animals so these situations can be dealt with prior to becoming this dire,” she added. “Most Animal Control agencies are small programs that aren’t always funded as they should be. Communities can make a huge difference by supporting their local agencies through helping spread awareness messages, volunteering and donating.”

“From this operation, we have learned that our community is incredible,” added Washburn. “These dogs now have a second chance at a better life, and it took a village to make it happen.” ♦



KRONK (NOW HANK) POSES ON HIS ADOPTION DAY WITH HIS NEW FAMILY. “WE ADOPTED HANK AND IT FEELS LIKE WE HAVE KNOWN HIM FOREVER. HE IS SUCH A JOY TO HAVE IN OUR LIVES. HE JUST WANTS LOVE WHICH WE GIVE HIM A TON OF THAT,” SAID GAIL TRASKOS DONETH, HANK’S NEW MOM. (COURTESY PHOTO)



MABEL SUFFERED HORRIBLE ABUSE AND WAS DISCOVERED WITHOUT HER LOWER JAW AT THE TIME OF RESCUE. THAT DIDN’T STOP HER FROM SHARING A SMILE AS SHE POSES WITH HER HELPERS (RIGHT TO LEFT), DR. DAVE DURHAM, RYANN VANDERHEIDE, LICENSED VET TECH, AND CHRISTA TRUDO, MEDICAL COORDINATOR FOR CHERRYLAND HUMANE SOCIETY. MABEL WAS ADOPTED AND NOW “IS LIVING A HAPPY LIFE BEING SPOILED ROTTEN,” SAID NAOMI WASHBURN OF CHERRYLAND. (COURTESY PHOTO)

Fine-tuning your budget process

BY ERIC LUPHER/PRESIDENT, CITIZENS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN



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

“Budgets are, by their nature, planning documents and statements of political priorities. Nonetheless, it is important to begin the process in an apolitical manner.”

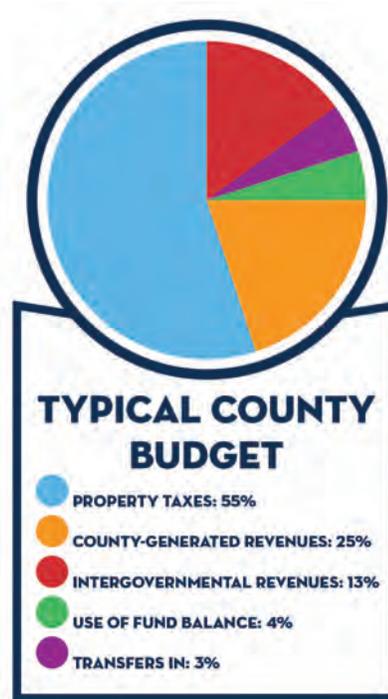
What can counties learn from the state’s budget practices? Some state practices are helpful, worthy of emulation. Others should be avoided.

Starting the budget process with a single unitary plan is important. Many years ago, it was an innovative reform to empower the governor with unitary control over what had been many independent departments and agencies, including responsibility to craft an executive budget. Doing so created a process that balanced and prioritized the needs of the various departments for services they deliver.

Counties have varying capacity to build on this practice. The elected executives in home rule and optional-unified counties are responsible for carrying out this responsibility, as are appointed county administrators. Counties that still rely on the chairs of the county boards to serve in a de facto executive role may find it more difficult to emulate this practice. These board chairs must serve two masters in their executive and legislative capacities.

Budgets are, by their nature, planning documents and statements of political priorities. Nonetheless, it is important to begin the process in an apolitical manner. The state begins each phase of its process (executive budget, final legislative approval) with a revenue estimating conference to provide updates on the economy, revenue projections and estimates of caseloads. These estimates are developed by nonpartisan state economists, fiscal analysts and civil servants.

Counties should start with neutral, unbiased estimates of expected revenues. Provide your county equalization director with the autonomy to realistically quantify changes in the property tax base, the primary source of county revenues. Likewise, the finance department should have the autonomy to project other revenues, such



as those from county accommodations and marijuana taxes.

Neutral estimations of spending growth related to caseloads or continuation of current service levels are also important.

Counties also can learn from the state’s weaknesses in using oversight as part of the budgeting process.

Although the state is positioned to create a feedback loop, legislative oversight has not been a strength here. This is not for the lack of resources. Lawmakers have access to the independent Auditor

General’s Office, various Legislative Council agencies, fiscal agency staff and their own full-time staff.

Counties, by contrast, have fewer oversight tools, but they still can create processes for public input, investigations of service delivery methods and other methods to hold departments accountable.

However, do not follow the state’s example in the level of detail in the budget.

Counties may benefit from budgeting practices that specify budget objectives but avoid fine levels of detail. Budgets that are less stringent about line-item details will best serve the autonomy of the county sheriff, prosecuting attorney, courts, and other arms of county government to meet the needs of the public. Boards can then focus on evaluating results when deliberating on budget requests.

Counties of all sizes can employ budgeting best practices. Trust county employees for neutral estimations of revenue and spending growth. Use the autonomy inherent in many aspects of county departments to constructively use the budget to set broad performance goals, monitor departmental performance and use that information for future budgets. ♦

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Point of Contact: Sheena Horton

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Website: www.mgtconsulting.com

Visit us at MGTConsulting.com/contact



Clerks need your help to ensure free, fair and secure elections

BY BARB BYRUM/INGHAM COUNTY CLERK

Barb Byrum is Ingham County clerk and Legislative Committee co-chair for the Michigan Association of County Clerks. Learn more about the association at www.michigancountyclerks.us/.

“Election administration is not a partisan issue, despite what the talking heads may be trying to tell half of this country.”

I do not mean to alarm you, but the fabric of our democracy is fraying.

In the aftermath of the last presidential election, election administrators at every level came under intense attack by those who were displeased with the results. Michigan’s secretary of state had armed protesters outside her house. A county clerk from the Upper Peninsula was told by an anonymous caller that they had seen the inside of her house. A local clerk in Oakland County received vile and threatening voicemails.

It is no wonder, then, that elections administrators are heading for the hills. The Michigan Association of County Clerks was just made aware of another county clerk who intends to retire, mid-term, this July. Nearly two dozen county clerks have retired or decided not to seek re-election since the November 2020 election. That’s to say nothing of the dozens of local clerks who have decided to leave as well. They are not waiting around for the cake at the retirement party; they are getting out as fast as possible.

Election administration is not a partisan issue, despite what the talking heads may be trying to tell half of this country. Local and county clerks are your neighbors: you see us at the grocery store and your kids probably play soccer with our kids. Our mandate is simple: We will hold safe, secure elections, so that our democracy can continue to flourish.

Unfortunately, as more and more time passes, these election experts are leaving our field. For those of us who remain and those who join our ranks in the coming years, we have a few simple asks of our fellow county elected officials.



We ask for your support for free, fair, safe and secure elections. We ask that you provide us adequate funding to ensure that this goal is possible. And we ask that you come to us if you have questions or concerns about how our elections are run in Michigan.

We are always happy to help you to educate and engage your constituents to help fight back against the blatant misinformation that you may see and hear. We are also happy to encourage participation by urging them to join the process as precinct workers to help them to learn even more about our process. We live and breathe this every day, not just on Election Day or when campaign finance filings are due.

Today, more than ever, it is important to support election officials. These committed citizens are selfless individuals who dedicate their lives to making sure every qualified, registered voter is afforded the opportunity to exercise their right to vote.

If we do not support our elections administrators, we risk having them replaced by the very conspiracy-believing harassers who have been lobbing grenades at the foundation of our democracy since 2020.

Ok, I did mean to alarm you a little bit. ♦



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Opioid epidemic: What Americans are saying about the crisis

BY NOAM RABINOVICH, ZENCITY RESEARCH INSIGHTS LEAD

“The prevalence of fentanyl in overdose cases and its heavy presence in narcotics sold in the US is not reflected in resident discourse at this time...”

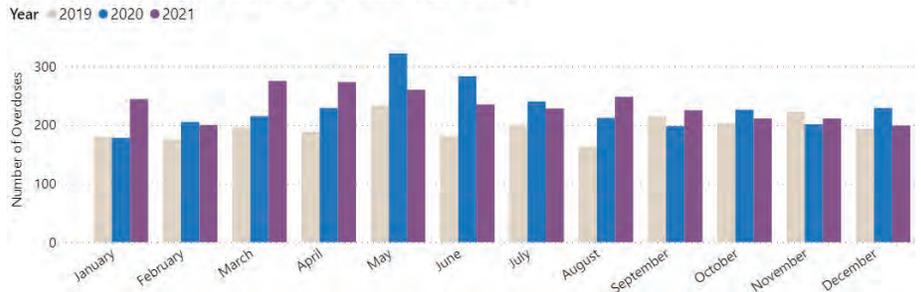
In November 2021, a grim milestone was reached, as more than 100,000 people died over a 12-month period from fatal drug overdoses for the first time in U.S. history. A major culprit was fentanyl, which has been laced into illegal drugs and whose involvement can be detected in most of these deaths. Local governments, health professionals, and police departments are increasingly viewing fentanyl as a top concern and are acutely aware of the need to raise awareness about the dangers of this narcotic and, hopefully, save lives.

As a first step, Zencity clients turn to Zencity Organic to understand whether their residents are aware and concerned about the presence and impact of fentanyl in their community, how they discuss this narcotic, and what they are asking their representatives to do.

The prevalence of fentanyl in overdose cases and its heavy presence in narcotics sold in the US is not reflected in resident discourse at this time — with only about a quarter of opioids and overdose discourse referencing fentanyl. Although there is some awareness of the dangers of fentanyl and its involvement in overdose cases, it also suggests a lack of attention dedicated to its pervasiveness and adverse impact.

The relative lack of interest elicited by fentanyl can be partially attributed to the level of attention shown by city and county officials, including elected officials and the police. On average, only 21 percent of official communication on opioids and overdoses referenced fentanyl. By contrast, local news across the country dedicated an average of 33 percent of their opioids and overdoses

Overdose Deaths in Michigan, Month-by-Month Comparison



STATE OF MICHIGAN OPIOIDS DATA

coverage to fentanyl. News reports about fentanyl show a strong focus on arrests and drug seizures as part of the broader efforts to combat drug-related crime.

As a result, residents discuss fentanyl in the context of crime and a police issue, mainly focusing on policies and laws that could remove it from the streets. The most common response by residents was gratitude and appreciation for law enforcement for their efforts to get fentanyl off the streets and keep the community safe. Support for harsher penalties for drug dealers, such as longer sentences and no bail, were also prevalent, as was criticism of the national immigration policy that made it easier for drugs to pass through the border.

Residents are strongly invested in seeing law enforcement address the opioid epidemic, yet the focus on crime reduction means that most mentions of fentanyl are made in the context of arrests and drug seizures - merging the fentanyl discourse into the larger conversation about the opioid epidemic.

By contrast, information about harm reduction and mitigation, such as support for addicts or factual information about the specific dangers of fentanyl, are less prominent in the discourse - a gap that can be filled by official awareness-raising education and messaging.

There is a clear gap in official messaging on fentanyl that focuses on mitigation and

reducing harm in the here and now. PSAs by local governments about the health risk posed by fentanyl and substance abuse are often received with many “likes” and “shares” — and are instrumental in educating the public about fentanyl — yet they are few and far between.

Updates about arrests bring the opioid epidemic, and the role fentanyl plays in it, to the forefront — raising awareness about the existence of the drug and its prevalence. However, the lack of focus on mitigation means lesser awareness of available resources and best practices on how to communicate about the dangers of fentanyl or avoid overdoses.

Learn more about Zencity’s community engagement tools at <https://zencity.io/>. ♦



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Ogemaw County participates in UM pilot project to modernize financial transparency

BY STEPHANIE LEISER/MICHIGAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT FISCAL HEALTH PROJECT

“CLOSUP and XBRL are designing an open data reporting system for Michigan local governments so they can report their audited financial statements in a fully digital and open format.”

Ogemaw County has partnered with the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan on a project to improve local government financial transparency. The county will be among the first local governments in the country to create an open data “machine-readable” version of its financial statements.



that community leaders and stakeholders can't more easily access the data because it's locked up in an outdated format," says Tom Ivacko, executive director of CLOSUP.

With support from the C.S. Mott Foundation and the University of Michigan Center for Academic Innovation, CLOSUP has partnered with XBRL, the global leading nonprofit in

open data standards for financial reporting around the world. XBRL local government data systems are already in place in Italy, Spain, and Brazil, and similar work is underway in Florida. They are also widely used in the private sector for regulatory reporting to the federal government.

CLOSUP and XBRL are designing an open data reporting system for Michigan local governments so they can report their audited financial statements in a fully digital and open format. The system will be designed to streamline financial reporting to the Michigan Department of Treasury, with the goal of replacing the current F-65, Form 5572 and other reporting requirements.

Ogemaw County is the project's newest pilot location. "We want to ensure that the system we develop is straightforward and easy to use not just for the state's larger urban communities like Flint but also for smaller, rural communities like Ogemaw County," said Stephanie Leiser, who leads the project for CLOSUP.

To learn more about the project, please visit <https://closup.umich.edu/research-projects/modernizing-michigan-local-government-fiscal-transparency>. ♦

"I am convinced this project will result in an affordable tool that will categorically improve efficiency and accuracy of municipal financial reporting," said Timothy Dolehanty, Ogemaw County administrator. "Elimination of multiple, redundant keystrokes will certainly save time. But public administrators will also gain the ability to compare and contrast financial trends in real time, which provides an early opportunity to take necessary corrective actions."

Currently, local governments' financial statements are formatted as PDF documents, so making use of the data requires manually copying and re-entering it into a spreadsheet or reporting form, such as the state F-65 report or the pension and retiree health care report (Form 5572). This process creates duplicate work and is prone to error.

The PDF documents, which are usually hundreds of pages long, also make it difficult for policymakers and community members to find financial information to use for decision-making or peer benchmarking. For example, counties may wish to track and compare their fund balances, property tax revenues, or sheriff office expenditures.

"Communities pay a lot of money to get their finances audited, and it's a shame



HOW COUNTIES ARE TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

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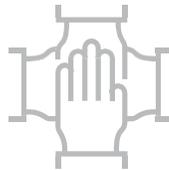
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Reality of grants: There's nothing 'free' about them

BY GABRIEL ZAWADZKI/MAC GRANT SERVICES DIRECTOR

MAC's Grant Services Program stands ready to assist members with any question about grant opportunities. Just reach out to 517-482-5999 or zawadzki@micounties.org.

“While significant sums are available through the state and federal government each year, this is not the easily accessed pot of “free” money some people imagine.”

Few things make me wince more than sitting at a public meeting and hearing someone say, “we’ll just get a grant for that; let’s hire a grant writer.”

While significant sums are available through the state and federal government each year, this is not the easily accessed pot of “free” money some people imagine. The reality is it takes a lot of time and effort to get the funds, and most of the work takes place well before the first word is written on a proposal.

It starts with taking inventory of the grants you already have. Take note of the people who are writing successful applications. These employees are your experts and can point out barriers to applying for other grants: time, expertise or financial and regulatory management.

Find out who your partners are, what services they provide and what grants are they getting. These can include planning regions, community action agencies, conservation districts, housing nonprofits, economic development authorities and MSU Extension. A potential partner could be running a program for the project you want to find funding for, so building relationships that improve the strength of existing applications makes more sense than applying for the same pool of money. This is also the time to find out what other counties are doing. As an example, if you hear a fire department in another county was just awarded funding for advanced radios, call and ask them for details. Find out if the organization of their emergency management is like yours. How much preparation and staff time were involved? What matching funds were required? Who did they partner with? Ask if they are willing to share their application.

Make use of free funding search tools — such as [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) — that let you filter for county-eligible grants. When you find a grant that looks promising, read the full guidance document to make sure you can meet all



the eligibility criteria. Then closely read the ranking criteria section. Your application’s score depends on how well you meet the criteria. These often include requirements for planning, community engagement and partnership-building, and it is better to wait a year or two to work on those requirements until you meet or exceed them to get all possible points.

Ask the granting agency questions and for guidance. Ask them about free training and assistance programs. Whether a consultant offers to write the grant for free or you decide to hire a grant writer for the application, talk to the granting agency about it to make sure you don’t break any rules – such as promising work to the consultant if the application is successful.

If a temporary grant writer is a better fit, make sure they have expertise with the grant you are applying for, and get references from previous clients. They should describe your role in developing the application narrative; and you will need to be involved in all steps of the writing process to make sure they are reflecting the details of your community and its needs, not just filling in a template application.

You, as the applicant, are ultimately responsible for the final application, so read and understand the details before submitting it. Getting a grant is not easy or quick, but thorough preparation makes writing one easier and improves your chances of success. ♦

Jim Storey

MEET YOUR MAC BOARD



Name: Jim Storey

County/MAC Region: Allegan/Region 3

Position: Director

County Service: Allegan County commissioner, Jan. 1, 2013–present

Profession: Public relations consultant

Previous Public Service: West Michigan Regional Airport Board, member and chair; Michigan Liquor Control Commission, commissioner; Holland Board of Public Works Board of Directors, member

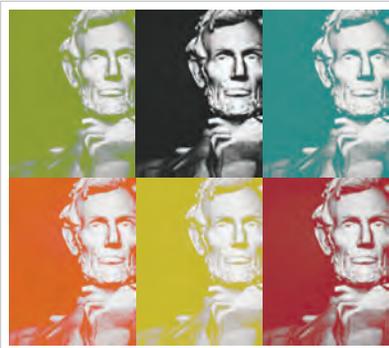
With MAC Board elections coming up in September, what would you say to someone who is considering a run for the board?

Unless you are a previously elected official, please be prepared to be a sponge to learn from the excellent staff and committee work that is rendered to MAC.

Belief in the future effectiveness of county government is key to Michigan’s future. There are more public officials in most counties than there are members of Congress. When Michigan was growing as fast as new highways could be built, electric lines raised and gas pipelines installed, the number of public officials, each supported by taxes, and the extreme number of local governments might have been necessary.

As our state continues to lose population relative to other states and employers leave for other locales, we need to make local government more efficient, thus reducing taxpayer burden.

Counties are the perfect structure to do that important economizing task. Keeping an eye on that goal should be a priority going forward, not just for the future of counties, but to keep Michigan as a leader in the economic, world game.



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In Lapeer, it's full speed ahead on internet services

BY QUENTIN BISHOP/LAPEER COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR-CONTROLLER

Quentin Bishop is a member of the Michigan County Administrative Officers Association. For more information on MACAO, visit <https://micounties.org/macao-michigan-association-of-county-administrative-officers/>

To some degree, every state, county and municipality has questioned its high-speed internet capabilities in recent years — and for good reason. High-speed internet is the tool to preserve and better your community. A community that can provide high-speed internet will sustain its population, provide educational opportunities, create jobs, enhance senior services and support law enforcement.

And that is why Lapeer County aims to support such a countywide service.

Projects of this magnitude require money, which, in some respects, is not the problem. Michigan counties have unprecedented federal and state funding options for internet development. The problem lies with all the inherent challenges that come with large projects: feasibility, labor, sustainability.

Lapeer County received \$17.2 million through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP). A great chunk of that award will go to high-speed internet. Lapeer's population of 88,513 equates to roughly 34,000 family households and



another 2,000 businesses to serve. We will not know exact numbers until our feasibility study is complete, but we do know that high-speed internet is essential to a wide variety of other initiatives. The data is driving our decisions.

In my role as county administrator/controller, I'm serving as chair of the Broadband Committee in its economic development agency, Lapeer Development Corp. The partnership serves as an efficient medium between government, business and residents. As we engage in an independent feasibility



MACAO

Michigan Association of County Administrative Officers

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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:

- Providing forums for information exchange and experiences while delivering solutions to common challenges
- Offering guidance and best practices from educational, governmental and professional organizations to members searching for leading edge practices in public administration
- Promoting and advancing high ethical standards and values as a foundation of managing Michigan public organizations

study and pre-engineering plan, this group serves as a sounding board and advocacy group. A newly created community channel via social media outlets will serve as a medium for ongoing updates.

There's not a moment to lose. In Lapeer, the death rate is outpacing our birth rate. And, if housing starts over the last two years are any indicator or future growth, senior housing development will overshadow the construction of single-family homes. Nearly half our current population (49.3%) is age 45 or older. Less than a quarter (22%), by contrast, are in the age range (25 to 44) typically associated with developing careers and starting families. Having the state's sixth-lowest millage rate, Lapeer recognizes the importance of making the right investments so that we continue to serve our current residents and attract new ones.

What are the next steps? Extremely helpful for the cause would be if the state's newly minted Michigan High-Speed Internet Office could cross-reference and matrix funding programs, which would help counties make decisions. A well-defined funding options plan would help counties understand what funding options

exists, if they are eligible to apply themselves or if they need to partner and, most importantly, which type of partners with which they should be seeking collaboration.

Determining funding is the only priority to rival the other immediate need: labor. Lapeer County's partnership with the Intermediate School District's Educational Technology Center and our region's Michigan Works office, GST Michigan Works, is assessing options to position graduates and transition workers into technology fields that will be critical for deployment and maintenance of high-speed internet infrastructure.

To rethink our future, we're rethinking our strategies. To achieve countywide service, our strategies will include public/private partnerships, an open middle mile and transmission through multiple technologies. How do we get it done? What tactics do we deploy? Those are to be determined by investing in our own data and partnering with those that can deliver on our objective. The data we use to make these decisions must be clear, uninhibited and disaggregated. We owe it to our constituents. ♦

“What are the next steps? Extremely helpful for the cause would be if the state's newly minted Michigan High-Speed Internet Office could cross-reference and matrix funding programs ...”



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Kalamazoo County Downtown Justice Facility

Sen. Kevin Daley



Name:
Sen. Kevin Daley

District/counties:
31st/Bay, Lapeer and
Tuscola

Committees:
Agriculture, Finance,
Education, Local
Government and
Appropriations

Term #: 1

**Previous public
service:**
State representative,
township official

What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan right now?

Inflation. The government needs to live within its means, which means we must cut taxes, not increase spending. It is more important than ever to get the hard-earned money back in the pockets of hard-working families. I feel the way to do that is to find ways to lessen the tax burden on Michigan's families and small businesses.

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

Based on my experience at the local level from 1985 to 2008 and as a legislator during the COVID-19 pandemic, I feel counties and local governments are vital to the effective delivery of public services. Counties and local governments deliver services that most Michiganders depend on every day and include hundreds of critical occupations. The pandemic has shown how important these services are and what can happen when they do not work, which is why supporting local control and government is more critical than ever.

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?

Yes, I fully support revenue sharing and do support a long-term fix to local government financing and creating a more stable fund source for county revenue sharing. This year's budget featured a 10 percent increase in revenue sharing and represented \$1.2 billion in total revenue sharing.

County commissioners around the state are working to improve access to broadband in their communities. What are some ways state and county governments can partner to ensure all

residents in Michigan have access to high-speed internet?

It is critical to work with Michigan rural communities to make sure they have the resources they need to make necessary infrastructure improvements. In order to do so, lawmakers need to make critical investments in our infrastructure. Improving access to broadband is not a one size fit all approach. It is also important to utilize and build upon the existing model of broadband deployment programs through local libraries and schools already implemented in communities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Local planning efforts can help communities identify their needs and goals and make meaningful progress toward ensuring all residents in Michigan have access to reliable high-speed internet. I remain committed to understanding the issues facing the individuals and families of the 31st District and finding solutions.

As a senator and an agricultural producer, you are keenly aware of the challenges faced by our agricultural industry. What are you working on that can assist them and what actions should counties across the state take to address some of those challenges?

The bills that come to mind that I have worked on to address the challenges faced by the agricultural industry are Senate Resolution 139, Senate Bill 977 and Senate Bill 814. SR 139 allowed farmers to petition the U.S. International Trade Commission to temporarily waive tariffs on imports of fertilizer. SB 977 relieved auditing requirements and keeps money in the pockets of commodity groups such as onion and asparagus farmers. And SB 814 made a tax credit for gas stations that offer ethanol, which provides a cleaner option to traditional gas and helps our farmers and corn producers by providing another revenue stream. ♦

Rep. Christine Morse

LEGISLATOR
Q&A

What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan now?

The most pressing issue facing Michigan now is the workforce shortage. The most concerning shortage is the lack of accessible mental health care providers. For the better part of 30 years, our public mental health system was dismantled. In the wake of a global pandemic, there are record numbers of people trying to access our mental health system, and we simply do not have the capacity to provide care. We must find ways to support those that are looking to enter the profession and keep those in state who are already on the path.

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

As a former county commissioner, I have personal experience on the vital importance of counties in the provision of public services. From health care to parks to criminal justice to elections, and so many other services, counties provide services that improve our quality of life and serve the functions of government that our residents depend upon every day. 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?

Kalamazoo County has certainly experienced the challenge of ever-reducing state revenue sharing resulting in cuts to staffing and services during the most recent great recession. The anticipation of declining revenues due to the pandemic means that counties may again be in the difficult decision of cutting staff and services. The state should ensure consistent, reliable revenue sharing and I look forward to working toward a long-term solution to provide that funding.

There's been a significant amount of concern surrounding workforce shortages across many sectors—including in county government. As a former commissioner and current legislator, what do you think needs to

happen at both the state and county levels for the state to succeed in attracting and retaining more workers?

I think the most important action we can take as the government is to provide ample opportunities for training and re-training. The state of Michigan has invested heavily in Futures for Frontliners and the Going Pro Talent Fund which both provide opportunities for workers to advance their skills. We must also continue our historic investments in public education. Prior to the Whitmer Administration, Michigan had been reducing spending on public education to the extreme detriment of our students. A study conducted by Michigan State University in 2018 showed Michigan was at the very bottom of the country in reading and revenue growth. In order to be attractive to workers, we must show we are committed to providing a quality education, as required by our Michigan Constitution.

Water management and quality have long been issues of importance to you. What are you working on that reflects this interest and what actions should counties across the State take to address some of those issues?

Michigan has already taken an important step forward in 2022 by appropriating \$1.7 billion for water infrastructure from state surplus and federal funding toward drinking water and wastewater system improvements. It is incredibly important for counties to be actively involved in the planning around this historic investment so we can use the funding wisely and where the needs are greatest. I will continue to advocate for additional funding in modernizing our water infrastructure. We must also be more proactive at protecting our fresh water, our greatest natural resource, and I will continue to work toward actions that will do that with my colleagues. I have also introduced House Bill 5330, which would provide a fund for counties and municipalities to access where they have infrastructure needs as a result of climate change. This bill would require the establishment of a climate resiliency plan. This bill idea arose from the flooding my District experienced in Texas Township from 2018-2021. Our local governments need tools to respond to the impacts of climate change and this would be one way for the state to assist. ♦



Name:
Rep. Christine Morse

District/counties:
61st/Kalamazoo

Committees:
Health Policy and Energy

Term #: 1

Previous public service:
Kalamazoo County commissioner, 2019-2020

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