

the review

November / December 2018

the official magazine of the  michigan municipal league

**Fostering Inclusive
Communities**

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GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Melanie Piana Brings a World View to New
Role as League President



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The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

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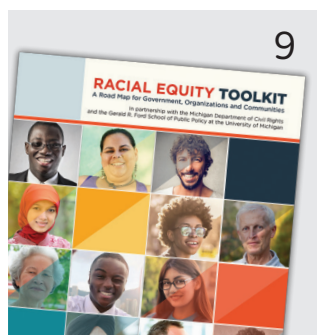
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New League President Melanie Piana has been a fan of cycling since her exchange student days in Sweden. Photo by Matt Bach





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the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

Volume 91, Number 6

We love where you live.

The Michigan Municipal League is dedicated to making Michigan's communities better by thoughtfully innovating programs, energetically connecting ideas and people, actively serving members with resources and services, and passionately inspiring positive change for Michigan's greatest centers of potential: its communities.

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Inclusivity Benefits All

First, congratulations to Ferndale Councilmember and former Vice President Melanie Piana, our new League president! With her numerous years on council, leadership skills, and extensive work in forging partnerships with Detroit and other communities, she will bring considerable knowledge and experience to her new role. In our feature story, you can learn much more about President Piana as she shares her ideas and goals for the coming year.

Michigan is in a global fight for talent. If we establish ourselves as an open and welcoming state, we can win. What do we need to do? Not only is it critical to continue creating great places to live, but we need to include diverse communities of people—those who possess different cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and social identities—in the conversations and decision-making process. This is vitally important to create stronger communities and promote a healthier economy. It will provide places where people want to live, and businesses want to set up shop. Here is the reality: Demographics are shifting rapidly to an increasingly diverse population. Statistics project that the U.S. will become “minority white” by 2045, comprising 49.9 percent of the population (Brookings, March 14, 2018). We need to recognize and harness the opportunities that a shift to a more diverse society will bring.

Many communities and regions in Michigan are already taking concrete steps to become more inclusive. An outstanding example of this is the city of Ferndale. President Piana joined me on the League’s podcast program to discuss how the City of Ferndale is navigating the concept of being an open and welcoming community. (Go to www.economicsofplace to hear the whole podcast.)

Embracing diversity and inclusion is something that Ferndale has been working toward for a long time and is now a tangible goal as part of their strategic vision. This is a city plan that has boldly sketched out objectives that will establish solid regional partnerships. The city recognizes the importance of working the “borders” on projects such as shared services, but cultural differences and lack of shared values necessitate open dialog. Although physical lines define a municipality’s legal boundaries, residents view where they live in a much broader scope. Ferndale wants to be part of a larger community by connecting neighborhoods that cross physical lines. One example is to break down the perceptions of 8 Mile—a physical and mental barrier between Detroit and surrounding suburbs. These regional barriers affect our economy and our quality of life.

Acknowledging the strong association between inclusive communities and the ability to attract talent, Ottawa County and Holland are also doing important work in this area. Ottawa County is developing strategies through a Cultural Intelligence Team represented by a wide range of departments and agencies. Their goal is to promote an environment where people will feel valued and welcomed. The City of Holland and its Human Relations Commission are hosting community feedback sessions to help define what it means for Holland to be an “inclusive city.” Once this is established, an action plan will be developed. You will be hearing much more about this important topic in the coming year.

As 2018 winds down, League staff and I are already thinking ahead about ways to strengthen our programs and services in the new year. I encourage you to check out our 2017-18 State of Your League report, which is available on our website. While it highlights the past, it speaks to exciting initiatives in the future, as well. We always welcome your ideas and comments!



Daniel P. Gilmartin
League executive director and CEO
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Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson helps cut the ribbon for ArtHouse: A Social Kitchen. Photo courtesy of ArtHouse: A Social Kitchen.

Fostering Inclusivity Through Civic Engagement

By Karen Freeman-Wilson

We have all heard the adage that “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.” But what about the wheels that don’t squeak as much or not at all? How do we ensure that the needs of all wheels are met? That is our job as local elected officials. The “wheels” are those people who look to us to deliver good government. Too often, people who live in these communities grapple with serious issues like poverty, crime, homelessness, blight, and hunger, and expect city officials to do something—anything—to better their circumstances and recognize the challenges they face. It is up to us as public servants to determine how to meet the needs of these citizens within the limited resources of local government. Highly collaborative public-private partnerships and a more inclusive approach to civic engagement are essential to achieving this goal.

The City of Gary, Indiana is a testament to this inclusive, collaborative approach to civic engagement as we work to meet the diverse needs of all of our citizens. We employ programs and strategies that leverage strategic partnerships as well as the hard work and advocacy of an array of community- and faith-based organizations. We are truly all in this together.

5X5X5 Revitalization Program

The sheer number of not just vacant but neglected and abandoned buildings lining Gary’s streets is one of the biggest issues we face as a city. Like other legacy cities, we have experienced a rapid decline in population, exacerbated by the subprime mortgage debacle in the late 2000s. This has resulted in a multitude of abandoned homes, businesses, and other structures that contribute to an enormous blight issue, create environmental concerns and hazards for residents, and compromise the safety of our citizens.

The City of Gary first implemented our 5X5X5 Revitalization Program in 2013. The program brings together local residents, business owners, civic organizations, faith groups, and other community stakeholders to revitalize long-neglected neighborhoods. We work in five-block areas over the course of five weeks, focusing on essential services delivered by the Building Department, Sanitary District, General Services Department, Demolition and Board Up, and the Police Department. The focus is on:

- Abandoned building identification, demolition, and board-up
- High grass and weeds and tree overgrowth

“...requires a more thoughtful, inclusive, and community-focused approach to solving the problems that impact our communities—even, and especially, the invisible ones.”



ArtHouse: A Social Kitchen does double duty as a culinary incubator and engaging public art.

- Dumpsite removal, trash and debris pick-up, and drainage
- Beautification efforts with the Parks Department
- Information and resources for residents

The difference the program is making is notable. Residents have a new sense of hope as they are finally starting to see their neighborhoods take a turn for the better. But translating hope into real progress requires the ongoing cooperation and support of local residents. That’s why it’s so important to include them at the outset of any revitalization effort by involving neighborhood block clubs or engaging the most active community members, as well as faith organizations.

Vacant-to-Vibrant Program

Launched with the assistance of the Cleveland Botanical Garden, the Vacant-to-Vibrant Program focuses on transforming vacant urban properties into vibrant, lush, and eco-friendly green spaces that improve our communities and preserve the quality of the Great Lakes.

The program represents a collaborative effort between the Great Lakes Alliance, National Recreation and Park Association, and Southwest Airlines—as well as local residents, city staff, landscape architects, ecologists, engineers, and others.

Leveraging local expertise and community input, Vacant-to-Vibrant works to identify areas suitable for transformation and converts these vacant areas into small, lot-sized public parks that not only beautify our neighborhoods, but also work to more effectively manage and control storm water.

ArtHouse: A Social Kitchen

Perhaps one of the most unique programs in our city, ArtHouse: A Social Kitchen, was developed with grants from Bloomberg Philanthropies and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. In a community that lacks many of the resources others take for granted, ArtHouse is showing how a successful program can help solve multiple problems at the same time.


Both a public art installation and a culinary incubator, ArtHouse is helping our community address the dearth of restaurants in our area. It’s also creating a nurturing space for artistic and other creative endeavors that help lift up, beautify, and breathe new life into our city. The program is helping the City of Gary create new, locally owned food businesses, support local jobs and increase tax revenue that we can put back into our communities.



Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson joined a big group of volunteers on Blight Buster Day.

It's on All of Us

As municipal leaders, it is easy to focus on the big picture impact of a specific project—whether it is related to infrastructure, health care, education, or any number of pressing issues. While these efforts certainly have a positive impact, we should also remember that average citizens—especially the invisible ones—are just as concerned, if not more so, with the smaller details that impact their daily lives. Things like the vacant lot next door, the cleanliness of a nearby alley, the condition of the streets and sidewalks, and the general safety of their neighborhood—these are the issues that we must consider even as we work toward larger goals. To do that, we need to focus on the big picture and the small details. We need to be problem solvers. We need to be advocates for all of our residents and communities. And perhaps most importantly, we need to actively involve our citizens through an inclusive, collaborative civic engagement process that is tailored to our communities' greatest needs and leverages their greatest assets—their people.

As public officials, challenging citizens to assume a greater sense of responsibility for the betterment of their community beyond simply voting is perhaps the most important part of civic engagement. However, it is just as critical that we continue to meet the needs and expectations of the citizens we've been entrusted to serve. Ultimately, that requires a more thoughtful, inclusive, and community-focused approach to solving the problems that impact our communities—even, and especially, the invisible ones. 

Karen Freeman-Wilson is the mayor of Gary, Indiana and first vice president of the National League of Cities, scheduled to become president in mid-November. You may contact her at 219.881.1301 or kfreemanwilson@ci.gary.in.us.

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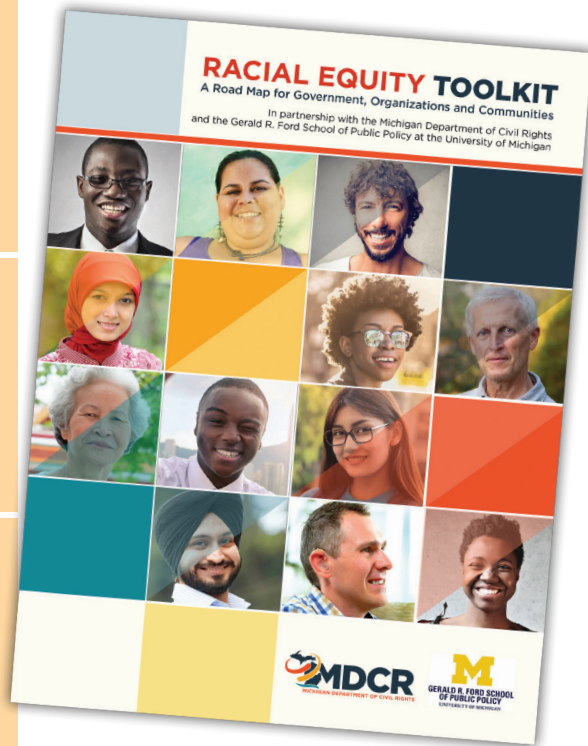
Racial Equity Toolkit

A Framework for Developing Inclusive Practices

By Todd Heywood

Racial inequity is part of our history and has driven much of America's development from colonial times to modern day.

But it is also a construct that can be dismantled as systematically as it was built. That's the lesson the Michigan Department of Civil Rights (MDCR) wants municipal leaders to embrace.



MDCR has created the Racial Equity Toolkit “to offer resources and strategies for creating and implementing inclusive practices through a racial equity lens that can serve as a model for government agencies and communities to create and sustain long-term change,” Director Dr. Agustin V. Arbulu writes in the introduction.

“Dismantling barriers to inclusion requires intention, attention, and time,” said Alfredo Hernandez, equity officer for MDCR. “We can all agree that history and culture have shaped structural inequities today, and we must work diligently to implement strategies that create equitable access for all. We must also acknowledge that although we did not create the systems that have shaped inequities, we all have a social responsibility to be a part of the solution.”

History Repeats Itself

Perhaps nowhere in Michigan has racial inequity been more clearly demonstrated than in the Flint water crisis. The Michigan Civil Rights Commission, in its groundbreaking February 2017 report *The Flint Water Crisis: Systemic Racism Through the Lens of Flint* identified the historic actions which led to the catastrophic poisoning of that city's public water supply. It wasn't, the Commission wrote, the result of racial animus, but rather the impact of a century of racial inequity compounded by indifferent public policies with no mechanism or strategy for creating equitable opportunities for all.



“Dismantling barriers to inclusion requires intention, attention, and time.”

Racial inequity is a reality in America that is rooted in more than a century of official and unofficial social and governmental policies which saw people of color as inferior. This historical construct continues today, fueling myths and misperceptions. Many of these biased and inaccurate concepts feed into our decision making, not consciously, but unconsciously. In turn, those decisions continue to have a disproportionately negative impact on communities of color. That’s what racial inequity is in a nutshell—the systematic othering, most often unconsciously, which widens the chasm between certain racial groups and various measures of success.

Developing Better Policies

To address those issues, the policies being implemented by today’s policy makers have to be viewed through this historic reality as opposed to a narrative based on a hierarchy of advantages. Viewing potential solutions through a racial equity lens offers policy makers the opportunity to ask deliberate questions on how policies will impact various communities served by a policy.

“It’s about a longer-term review and assessment than we may be used to in policy making,” Hernandez said. “For decades, decisions have been made without openly challenging the underlying choices and assumptions which put us where we are at a given moment. To get to equity, you have to challenge what was happening before—oftentimes for decades—when an issue is up for a policy decision today.”

Tools for Better Decision-Making

MDCR’s Toolkit is designed to walk community groups and policy leaders through a deliberate process, step-by-step, and create new, improved decision-making models designed to uproot historic racial inequity.


Here are some initial steps a municipality or community agency can take to begin this process:

- **Invite stakeholders to identify and discuss the historic issues that underpin racial inequity within a community.** For instance, in Flint, the Commission was able to thoroughly document the impact of real estate redlining and its impact on mortgages and the accumulation of wealth for people of color. While the policies originated in laws designed to keep people of color separated from white people, they morphed into an urban myth about the potential negative impacts on property values. Who within the community has a stake in addressing racial inequity? Include these key stakeholders in a small initial working group of no more than 10 individuals to allow for open, fair discussion and debate.
- **Reach out to the broader community.** Once the core group has begun the process of identifying the historical trends and policies which underpin racial inequity within the community, it’s time to reach out and engage more community partners. The experience and impact of racial inequity can be quite different from one group to the next. It is therefore important to expand the core group to

include additional voices. Remember people of faith, policy makers, department leads, and union members in the process. Getting input, review and buy-in on the process of creating a strategic plan to address racial inequity is essential to a successful plan and implementation throughout a community.

- **Identify specific issues related to racial inequity that require action, then determine a course of action to remedy the issue.** For instance, a community in the shadow of a coal fired power plant may experience significantly higher levels of asthma and other lung-related concerns. Those problems may also be combined with the available affordable housing being located within the zone with more particulates than other areas in a given municipality.
- **Follow through, evaluate, improve.** It might seem like common sense, but without consistent review and follow through on where you're at in implementing

your strategic plan, it becomes another well-meaning document gathering dust on a shelf. But follow through, including evaluating the efficacy of the action plan and raising the bar when each goal is reached, is the way the plan will remain a living document designed for continuous improvement.

The Racial Equity Toolkit is available free online at the MDCR Racial Equity webpage. MDCR also offers training, assessments, and support for communities interested in developing their own racial equity strategic plans. Local governments and other organizations interested in participating in a racial equity initiative can reach out to MDCR Equity Officer Alfredo Hernandez at Hernandez3@michigan.gov. 

Todd Heywood is the communications representative with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. You may contact him at 313.510.7178 or HeywoodT@michigan.gov.



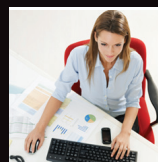
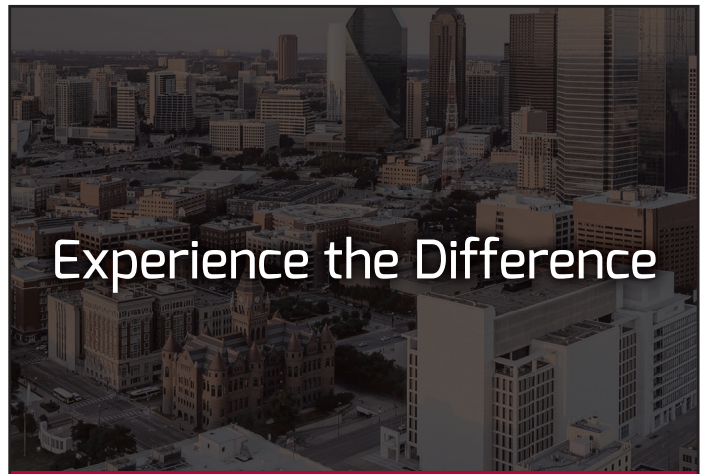
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“Our cities and villages are the heart and soul of our communities. They must stand shoulder to shoulder with other sectors to make our communities more welcoming and ensure that diversity issues do not get in the way of future prosperity.”

Ottawa County Tackles Diversity Issues

By Al Vanderberg

Children choose school supplies for the coming year. Photo courtesy of Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance.

Future Prosperity at Stake

Ottawa County began to see an end to the Great Recession in 2011. With essential objectives recently completed, county leadership pondered where to go next. How would we launch Ottawa County to the next level?

Following the legacy of prudent county leaders, the Board of Commissioners looked to the future. Instead of limiting their efforts to initiatives benefiting the political here and now, they sought to create future opportunity and to solve problems well before organizational damage occurred. Consequently, in 2012, the Board approved the Four Cs Organizational Improvement Initiative focusing on Customer Service, Communication, Creativity, and Cultural Intelligence.

The Business Case for Diversity

I hadn't thought much about the impact of diversity issues on business until I became a member of the CEO Advisory Committee of the Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance (LEDA). In that role, I listened to the early warnings of some of West Michigan's largest employers. Their message was clear. The ability to attract and retain a diverse workforce was the lifeblood of their sustainability.

Some employers were having employee recruitment problems. With little exception, however, more companies were having employee retention challenges. Workers who were "different" from the cultural norm were likely to leave their jobs after a short tenure. The major employers were brutally forthright about the future of their businesses. If our region did not become more welcoming, companies would relocate divisions and execute expansion plans elsewhere.

Although the anecdotes were compelling, the business case for diversity was supported by research as well. The McKinsey Global Institute published the *Why Diversity Matters* report in 2018, an expansion of its initial 2015 study. The new analysis included 2017 data gleaned from over 1,000 companies. The report showed that businesses embracing diversity at the employee and management levels had greater growth and profitability, and had an easier time recruiting and retaining diverse talent. According to experts, employers' diversity, equity and inclusion policies are a significant consideration among millennial job seekers. *Harvard Business Review* reported in 2013 that diversity had a strong correlation with increased innovation.

Earlier this year, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation released the updated *The Business Case for Racial Equity*. The report's prognosis of economic gain if the racial equity gap is closed by 2050 is a staggering \$8 trillion increase in Gross Domestic Product. This translates to huge annual increases in consumer spending: \$109 billion spent on food; \$286 billion on housing; \$30 billion on apparel, \$147 billion on transportation, \$4 billion on entertainment, and a whopping \$450 billion increase in state and local taxes.

Taking Action Toward Diversity

The relationship of diversity to future prosperity became clear and the county decided to fully engage. It was time to come alongside community stakeholders that have active diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. It was our responsibility to educate our organization about diversity and its link to future prosperity.

Ottawa County's Cultural Intelligence activities undertaken so far include:

- Ottawa County contracted with LEDA to develop an eight-hour training program tailored for specific service areas. Many employees said that it was the most "eye-opening" and "impactful" training that they had ever experienced. Some of the topics include implicit bias, institutional racism, intergenerational inequity, and white privilege.
- The Cultural Intelligence Committee was formed, consisting of employees from across the organization. The committee develops internal equity goals, volunteers at migrant camps, and hosts an annual Diversity Forum. To publicly demonstrate the commitment to diversity, the group ensures an Ottawa County presence at community diversity celebrations, awards banquets, fundraisers and other events.



- Ottawa County joined the Government Alliance to Race & Equity, which is headquartered at the Haas Institute at the University of California, Berkeley. The county was the eleventh government nationally and first east of the Mississippi to join. Other governmental entities including Grand Rapids and the Michigan Department of Civil Rights have since joined.
- The organization has conducted several blind hiring processes. When the Human Resources software was upgraded, this capability was included.

Ottawa County is establishing an Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion that will work with county departments and local units of government to develop equity plans and eliminate implicit bias in policies, procedures, practices, and service provision.


The Value of a Welcoming Community

Our cities and villages are the heart and soul of our communities. They must stand shoulder to shoulder with other sectors to make our communities more welcoming and ensure that diversity issues do not get in the way of future prosperity.

“To prosper in today’s global marketplace, companies and communities must attract and retain talented people and families. We must embrace an attitude that invites and engages smart, productive people of all kinds, harnessing those talents for the common good. We support and encourage local government and civic leaders to lead by example and adopt policies and programs that are welcoming to everyone,” said Brian Walker, former president/ CEO of Herman Miller.

Instead of “country” think of your city or village name in the following quote:

“This country will not be a permanently good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a reasonably good place for all of us to live in.” Theodore Roosevelt

As elected and appointed councilmembers and managers, it is incumbent on all of us to be concerned about the future. It is our obligation to ensure that our communities are good places for all to live regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual preference, and the entire range of human differences. 

Al Vanderberg is the county administrator for Ottawa County. You may contact him at 616.738.4068 or avanderberg@miottawa.org.



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For 20 years we have been assisting local governments with labor relations and employment issues. During this time founder Howard L. Shifman, has represented many cities, counties and townships. He has been involved in legislative initiatives including the drafting of Act 312 and other legislative reference, as well as being recognized by the Michigan Municipal League with a Special Award of Merit for his dedication to the cause of local government.

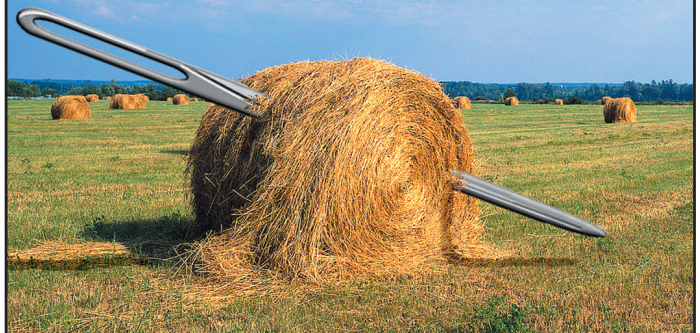
Mr. Shifman is aided by Brandon Fournier who has extensive experience in municipal operations, including both public safety and general municipal operations. Prior to joining the firm, Brandon served as the City Administrator for the City of Southgate.

Also with the firm is Attorney Robert J. Nyovich with over 30 years of experience in public sector labor and employment law. Prior to joining the firm, Mr. Nyovich also served previously as a public safety officer and as the Oakland County Undersheriff.

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Local Nondiscrimination ORDINANCES

Creating a Welcoming Environment for the LGBTQ Community

By Nathan Triplett

MICHIGAN COMMUNITIES WITH INCLUSIVE NONDISCRIMINATION ORDINANCES

Albion	Muskegon
Ann Arbor	Pleasant Ridge
Battle Creek	Portage
Chelsea	Royal Oak
Dearborn Heights	Saugatuck
Detroit	Southfield
East Grand Rapids	Traverse City
East Lansing	Trenton
Farmington Hills	Wayland
Fenton	Westland
Ferndale	Ypsilanti
Grand Rapids	Canton Township
Howell	Delhi Township
Huntington Woods	Delta Township
Jackson	Kalamazoo Township
Kalamazoo	Meridian Township
Lansing	Oshtemo Township
Lathrup Village	Saugatuck Township
Linden	Union Township
Marquette	Village of Douglas
Mt. Pleasant	Village of Lake Orion

Michigan communities have played a historic role in the advancement of civil rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Americans. In March 1972, less than three years after New York City's Stonewall Uprising ignited the contemporary LGBTQ civil rights movement in the United States, East Lansing became the first community in the country to legally prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In the 46 years since East Lansing's groundbreaking policy was adopted, 42 additional Michigan cities, villages, and townships have followed suit and approved ordinances prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, and public accommodations. Today, our communities are in a unique and important position to build on this legacy and take action to build more welcoming, more inclusive places.

It's not uncommon for municipal officials to question the need for local nondiscrimination ordinances in 2018. In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which recognized same-sex couples' fundamental right to marry nationwide, many assumed that legal equality for LGBTQ Americans had been achieved. Unfortunately, that's far from true. The Michigan Civil Rights Commission released a report in 2013 concluding that discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity "exists and is significant" and "has direct negative economic effects on Michigan." In this regard, our state is hardly unique. Twenty-eight states, including Michigan, still lack any explicit legal prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment and housing. Twenty-nine lack a prohibition of

“Building communities that are welcoming to all is essential to attracting and retaining an educated, talented workforce capable of competing in a global, 21st century economy.”

discrimination in public accommodations, like restaurants, theatres, and other businesses open to the general public.

Despite the fact that state legislatures and Congress have been debating the issue of anti-LGBTQ discrimination for decades, state and federal-level nondiscrimination protection for LGBTQ individuals remains elusive for most Americans. Here in Michigan, bills to amend the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to protect LGBTQ Michiganders from discrimination have been introduced in nearly every legislative session since 1983, but none has made it to the governor's desk to become law. Likewise, federal nondiscrimination legislation was introduced as far back as 1975, but without success. As a result, local governments have stepped forward to lead where the federal and state governments have failed. Such local leadership is as important and necessary today as ever.

Why Enact a Nondiscrimination Ordinance?

With the myriad challenges our communities face today, it's reasonable for local leaders to ask why they should commit their limited time and political capital to enacting a local nondiscrimination ordinance. The answer is simple: Building communities that are welcoming to all is essential to attracting and retaining an educated, talented workforce capable of competing in a global, 21st century economy. Port Huron City Manager James Freed said it well, shortly after he signed an administrative directive prohibiting anti-LGBTQ discrimination in municipal employment earlier this year: "We need to be able to find the best possible talent for our workforce and we believe we're unable to do that unless we're an inclusive environment."

Many communities that recognize the importance of local nondiscrimination ordinances (and the municipal attorneys who represent them) are nevertheless reluctant to venture into an area of public policy and law outside their expertise. That's understandable. Thankfully, there are organizations like Equality Michigan and the ACLU of Michigan that have decades of experience working on these ordinances and are able and willing to provide technical assistance with ordinance development and implementation.

It's not just civil rights organizations that stand ready to assist. Michigan communities pursuing a nondiscrimination ordinance often find strong allies in the business community. When the City of Jackson was debating their nondiscrimination ordinance, Consumers Energy CEO Patricia Poppe wrote to the city council in support, saying the ordinance was "the right thing to do—for our company, our customers, and the communities we serve." In Portage, the Kellogg Company argued that not passing a nondiscrimination ordinance "could hinder the ability of all businesses in West Michigan to recruit and retain a talented workforce." AT&T, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, Delta Airlines, Dow Chemical, Google, Herman Miller, PADNOS, Pfizer, Quicken Loans, Steelcase, Whirlpool, and more have all supported state and local efforts to legally prohibit anti-LGBTQ discrimination.

Beware of Preemption

Local officials considering a nondiscrimination ordinance should be aware that these policies, like far too many areas of municipal concern today, are not exempt from attempts at preemption by the state legislature. Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee have each enacted state statutes prohibiting local units of government from adopting LGBTQ-inclusive






nondiscrimination ordinances. Michigan nearly joined them in 2015 when the Local Government Labor Regulatory Limitation Act, MCL 123.1381 et seq, was proposed. As introduced, it would have preempted all of Michigan’s local nondiscrimination ordinances that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Thankfully, as enacted, the Act includes explicit language noting that it “does not prohibit a local governmental body from adopting or enforcing an ordinance, policy, or resolution prohibiting employment discrimination.” MCL 123.1394. Communities that have enacted nondiscrimination ordinances and those that seek to do so in the future will need to remain vigilant and fend off future preemption legislation.

Next Steps

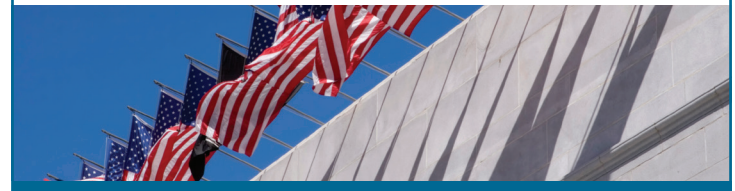
For those communities that have already adopted a nondiscrimination ordinance and are looking to distinguish themselves, the Human Rights Campaign’s Municipal Equality Index is an excellent resource. The index rates local policies based on how inclusive they are of LGBTQ people and provides a list of potential next steps for those cities, including transgender-inclusive healthcare benefits for municipal employees; contractor nondiscrimination ordinances; an LGBTQ police liaison or task force; and targeted services for LGBTQ youth, elders, or people living with HIV/AIDS.

Adopting a local nondiscrimination ordinance or other LGBTQ-inclusive policies says a great deal about our communities as they are and as we want them to be. Not only do these ordinances provide important legal protection for LGBTQ individuals, but they also position our communities as welcoming places for talented individuals to live, work, raise a family, and start a business. 

Nathan Triplett is democratic legal counsel for the Michigan House of Representatives, the former mayor of East Lansing, and a past president of the Michigan Municipal League. You may contact him at NTriplett@house.mi.gov.

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COMMON GROUND

Cultivating Respect and Collaboration with Michigan's Indian Tribes

By Lisa Donovan

Geography plays an important role in the physical development of a community, from rolling hills and valleys to beautiful waterfronts. Sometimes, geography places a municipality in a position with a unique cultural and governmental context.

Such is the case with Mt. Pleasant, Sault Ste. Marie, and Baraga. Each municipality is located within the boundaries of an Indian reservation, where the residents have distinct cultural traditions developed over hundreds of years. They also have their own form of government.

As federally recognized Indian tribes, they are not required to follow state and local laws. Instead, they are sovereign nations governed by their own Constitution, with oversight from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. But they work closely with units of government to ensure a positive relationship.

Fostering Good Relationships

The municipalities and the Indian tribes view a good working relationship as mutually beneficial, so they make it a high priority. In Mt. Pleasant, the city sets the table

*Aaron Payment, Tribal Chairperson,
Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians*



Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe members perform drum ceremony at Mt. Pleasant City Commission.



“We have a great relationship with the city of Mt. Pleasant... It makes us feel like we have a voice and we’re working together on initiatives that benefit the community as a whole.”

for good communication and partnerships with the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe and the surrounding area with an annual leadership luncheon hosted by the city and Isabella County. They invite elected officials and the executive administrator from the city and county as well as the tribe, a nearby township, and Central Michigan University to eat lunch together and get to know each other as people.

“Developing these relationships has allowed us to do a lot of cooperative things,” said Mt. Pleasant City Manager Nancy Ridley. “If you don’t have a good relationship, it’s hard to work together for the collective good of the community.”

Promoting Cultural Awareness

One of the areas where the municipalities and tribes work together is in recognizing Indian history and culture. In Baraga, the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community hosts the annual Maawanji’iding Pow Wow, the largest pow wow in Michigan. Hundreds of dancers and spectators come to town for this major celebration of Indian culture. To help the event go smoothly, the village provides traffic management and other services.

In Sault Ste. Marie, the history and culture of the Sault Ste. Marie Chippewa Indians has been an integral part of a major event this year. The city and the tribe have been collaborating on a year-long celebration of the 350th anniversary of the city’s founding. The event planners were even successful in getting a \$25,000 legislative grant from the State of Michigan to help recognize tribal culture.

“Collaboration is woven into our fabric,” said Oliver Turner, Sault Ste. Marie city manager. “This is an important area to collaborate on because the Anishinaabeg were here long before the French settled the area.”

Mt. Pleasant also recognizes the longevity of the local Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe in the area. In 2014, the city began recognizing the second Monday of October as Indigenous Peoples’ Day. Indigenous people don’t consider Columbus Day a holiday as they were here long before Columbus came to America in 1492. For Mt. Pleasant’s Indigenous Peoples Day celebration, the tribal chief and other tribe members come to a city commission meeting and perform a traditional drum ceremony, which is later broadcast on local cable TV.

“The city commission has been wonderful about recognizing why we choose to celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day instead of Columbus Day,” said Erik Rodriguez, interim public relations director for the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. “It’s a great chance to provide outreach and cultural awareness to the wider community.”

The former Indian Industrial Boarding School property is another area where Mt. Pleasant and the tribe have worked together to honor Indian culture. From 1893 until 1934, the 300-acre site housed the Indian boarding school. Eventually, the state took ownership of the property and in 2010 offered the site to the city and the tribe. The tribe took ownership of the 15 acres that include the former boarding school buildings and a cemetery, and the city took ownership of the remaining acreage.

“We work closely on many fronts to make sure we’re being good neighbors to each other and respectful of what each wants to do with the land,” said Ridley.

That work led to a partnership between the city, the tribe, and Central Michigan University archaeologists, who conducted field schools at the site. This collaboration to honor and research the history of the site garnered the team a 2016 Governor’s Award for Historic Preservation.

The city and tribe are still working on plans for their respective sections of the property, and every year the tribe invites members of the city administration and commission to their Honoring, Healing, Remembering event. The event is held to honor the closing of the school and the student lives lost due to misguided efforts at assimilation.

“The city has helped us recognize the students and the significance of the property,” said Rodriguez. “We can’t do it alone. We need the support of the city and partners to promote understanding of our culture.”

Cooperating on Government Services

The governments of the municipalities and tribes may be separate, but they come together on numerous governmental activities. One of the largest projects that they work on together is the two-percent program. Every year, the tribes that signed the 1993 Tribal-State Gaming Compact are required to pay two percent of their net win to local units of government in the immediate vicinity. The gaming revenue is distributed to local governments through a grant process. Since 1994, the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe has given \$242 million to local communities, often for road and infrastructure projects. “We work closely with the City of Mt. Pleasant on applications,” said Rodriguez. “Our Tribal Council selects the ones that work best for both sides.”

Public safety and the environment are other areas of shared service in Mt. Pleasant. The city and tribe cross-deputize police officers and tribal officers so both have police powers in the city and the reservation. They also have mutual aid with their fire departments. And they work closely together to protect the Chippewa River.

“We have a great relationship with the City of Mt. Pleasant,” said Rodriguez. “It could be a model. It makes us feel like we have a voice and we’re working together on initiatives that benefit the community as a whole.”


In Sault Ste. Marie, a 1998 agreement between the city and the tribe regarding trust land laid the foundation for future collaborations. Today, mutual activities include Trident—a local drug enforcement task force—a standing liaison committee, and the Economic Resources Alliance.

“That was a unique agreement regarding municipal-tribe relationships,” said Turner. “It has produced a lot of stability for the liaison committee and resulted in a number of road projects.”

In Baraga, a major collaborative project goes back 20 years. That’s when the village and the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community formed the Joint Waste Water Authority. A combination of village residents and tribe members serve on the board.

“The authority has its own funding and is responsible for maintaining the waste water system,” said Baraga Village President Wendell Dompier. “It has been working great.”

The village has also been working with the tribe on creating a 10-12-mile walking trail along Keweenaw Bay and reducing the speed limit on U.S. 41, which runs through the village. Chris Swartz, president of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, said the tribe was as concerned as the village about the number of crashes and lives being lost on that stretch of highway. Since the road runs through reservation land, the tribe was able to pass a law to reduce the speed.

“We really appreciate our relationship with Baraga,” said Swartz. “We’re two good governments working together for the good of our people.” 

Lisa Donovan is the communications specialist and editor for the League. You may contact her at 734.669.6318 or ldonovan@mml.org.



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HOLLAND'S INCLUSIVITY INITIATIVE

MAKING ROOM FOR EVERYONE AT THE TABLE

By Rene Wheaton



What does it mean to be an inclusive city? Well, it depends on whom you ask. The City of Holland has spent most of the summer asking residents that very question and the answers have, at times, been surprising.

Holland has a history of being concerned about diversity and inclusiveness. In 1966, they created the Holland Human Relations Commission because, as the city website describes, “The City of Holland recognizes the inherent right of its inhabitants to strive to fulfill their goals and aspirations unhindered by discrimination based on or resulting from considerations of race, creed, handicap, educational association, color, sex, age, marital status, national origin or association.”

The Holland Human Relations Commission is made up of nine residents and a liaison from the city council.

“We like to make sure the commission is diverse and includes people from each ward as well as being diverse in ethnicity and experience,” said Esther Fifelski, the city’s human/international relations coordinator.

The commission also includes a representative from the local high school.

“I think it says a lot about the City of Holland that they had and continue to have a heart for removing barriers for people,” Fifelski said. “Our Human Relations Commission seeks to make sure we are doing right by all our residents.”

While the Human Relations Commission operates similar to most municipal councils—meeting monthly, working through an agenda, and seeking to clarify ordinance language—it also seeks to be as accessible as possible. Starting last spring, the Human Relations Commission and Holland City Council have been reaching out to residents as part of their Inclusive City Initiative. Government officials made the move after watching political discourse become more divisive both nationally and locally.

“There is a lot of fear out there with segments of our community,” Fifelski said. “We wanted to look for ways to address that. We are a welcoming city, we welcome visitors here for our festivals, but being welcoming is different than being inclusive.”

While Holland may be known for its Dutch roots, it has grown in diversity when it comes to demographics, including a large Hispanic community. Just over 24 percent of Holland’s population was estimated to be Hispanic, according to a July 2017 U.S. Census Bureau estimate.



Residents provide feedback on Holland's inclusivity initiative.

Holland resident Judy Parr attended a feedback session. “Holland would be a more inclusive city if Latinx and people of color were more evenly distributed in the community,” said Parr, who serves as secretary of the local PFLAG chapter, the nation’s largest family and ally organization for the LGBTQ community. “A shortage of affordable homes and the tendency for people to associate and live with others like themselves means that inclusion is something that we need to work at.”

The Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, which studies and researches how to make communities more inclusive, frames the ambiguous concept of inclusiveness as “targeted universalism.”

“We share a universal goal—such as a healthy well-educated family—but have different means of achieving that goal to our economic, cultural, social, and physical situations,” the Institute’s website details. “This idea enables us to recognize differences while exploring commonality, to seek to eliminate roadblocks to full and equitable participation, and to leave no one behind in pursuing universal goals.”

In her experience as the human relations coordinator, Fifelski said that giving people a place where they feel safe to express their concerns can go a long way in addressing problems.

“The Human Relations Commission handles a variety of issues,” Fifelski said. “A broad scope of topics brings people to city hall. It can be something simple like needing a handicap tag or, in the last couple of years, forms for becoming a citizen. I think the most important thing we can do is maintain dialogue and mediate when needed.”

Holland has held several feedback sessions throughout the city, trying to hear directly from residents on what it means to be an inclusive city and where Holland could improve when it comes to inclusiveness. The feedback sessions have been held in a variety of locations in the city including local nonprofits and churches.

“We’ve had excellent support from our faith community because equity and inclusion are very important to them,” Fifelski said. “We have a lot of churches here and they are considered to be safe places.”

Residents attending the feedback sessions have been open about expressing their concerns, Fifelski said.

“I think the feedback session was beneficial because it encouraged folks like me, who may think they already know what inclusive means, to probe deeper into what it looks like and how to make it more evident in our community,” said Parr.

Issues raised were affordable housing, access to transportation, more cultural events celebrating diversity, and even the condition of the city’s sidewalks.

“

It's important that you don't just hear from one group of people and that you are intentional in reaching out to all segments of your community.

”

“We heard issues about our sidewalks,” Fifelski said. “I wasn't expecting that because they look fine to me, but if you are using a walker or cane, it is a different story.”

Information gathered from these feedback sessions will be presented to the Holland City Council, which will consider ways to implement the ideas.

“Just saying you want to be inclusive speaks volumes to the kind of community you want to be,” Fifelski said. “It's important that you don't just hear from one group of people and that you are intentional in reaching out to all segments of your community. We found great comfort in doing this because, as we talked to different groups and organizations, we found that we are all aspiring toward becoming a more perfect community.”

Rene Wheaton is a freelance writer. You may contact her at 810.444.3827 or renewheatanne@gmail.com.





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GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Melanie Piana Brings a World View to New Role as League President

By Matt Bach

Melanie Piana was a maid in Germany. She went kangaroo hunting in Tasmania. She's waterskied in the Baltic Sea; learned about the power of a smile in Bangladesh; and realized that sea sickness is real while spending a week on a trolling fishing boat in New Zealand. Oh... and she played the oboe.

It goes without saying that the Michigan Municipal League's recently elected 2018-19 Board President is a well-rounded, world-traveled individual. One of her many life goals is to visit 100 countries. With six continents and 35 countries in the books, she's more than a third of the way there.

Her many travels and experiences give her a world view. They also define who she is and why she strives to make a difference in all that she does as a member of the Ferndale City Council, League Board of Trustees, and deputy director at Jefferson East, Inc. in Detroit. And seeing the world first-hand makes her appreciate home—Michigan—so much that it has become her ongoing mission to make her hometown area of Detroit a regionally connected, vital community.

"I saw that my place in the world was small, but it mattered. And that understanding how other people think of Americans—good and bad—was important for me," Piana said. "It helped me understand how to interact in the world myself and how to be a global citizen. It taught me that decisions made in America impact the world."

Her adventures as an American traveling the world weren't always pleasant. Her travels began when she was a foreign exchange student in Tasmania in the late 1980s. At age 14, she was the youngest individual in her Youth for Understanding student-exchange program. She learned what it's like to be harshly treated just because of where she was born.

“How can we as an organization adapt to these rapidly changing environments? That’s a question I hope we can form a plan around.”





ABOUT MELANIE PIANA

The beginnings:

She grew up outside Brighton, Michigan, in Genoa Township on Big Crooked Lake and spent much of her youth on the water — fishing, boating and skiing. She has one sister and their parents are Doug and Clarice Brown, who still live on Big Crooked Lake.

Public service inspiration:

Her parents. Her dad served on the Genoa Township Board when she was a teenager and continues to serve on the township planning commission. Her mother was an entrepreneur and created her own physical therapy clinic.

Recent accomplishment:

Selected by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) as one of two Michigan Taubman Fellows at the Harvard Kennedy School Executive Leadership Training for Local and State Government. She completed the three-week program this summer.

Who do you most admire?

“Wonder Woman. I have the Wonder Woman theme on my phone. It’s one of the power songs I play to power up. I like her because she’s bad ass. She sees herself as an equal. She’s a strong woman and she’s always fighting for justice.”



"I used to get harassed when I was an exchange student by students in Tasmania who would say, 'Go back to America. You don't belong here. All you care about is war,'" said Piana.

"I don't know what was happening in 1988 politically for them to say that. Politics wasn't part of my purview when I was 14. But, of course, it hurt and confused me.

"Fortunately, a second, more positive experience as a foreign exchange student in Sweden at age 17 communicated to her a more accepting world-view.

It also inspired a passion that continues today—a love of biking and the outdoors.

"That was the first time I did a 100-mile bike ride," she said of her time in Sweden. "I was learning what I was capable of—that I could do something like a 100-mile bike ride. Plus, the best way to explore a city and a community is on a bike."

Today, Piana and her husband, Jim, are avid cyclists, outdoors people and travelers. She's been to many parts of the world including Switzerland, Germany, South Africa, New Zealand, and a couple trips with her husband to southeast Asia.

Finding Her Passion

Her love of an active lifestyle evolved into a passion for urban planning, the value of public transit, placemaking, and creating communities around people instead of cars. She attended Albion College on a partial music scholarship for her oboe playing ability, and studied German and communications. After graduation, she worked for many years in the auto industry, following in the footsteps of her father

(a long-time Ford executive) doing marketing and project management. But she felt unfulfilled.

"My best friend left the Detroit area for Chicago because she hated to drive, and she no longer wanted to live in a region that didn't have public transit," Piana said. "She gave me a book and said this is why I left, read this and you'll understand."

The life-changing book was *Suburban Nation* by Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck. It led to a career change for Piana from a project manager in the auto industry to an urban planner. It was 2003 and she went back to college—this time to get a master's degree in urban planning at Wayne State University in Detroit. "I left Ford and took a massive pay cut to start this new life focusing on regionalism and governmental collaboration," Piana said.

Her life changes in the early to mid-2000s included a new career as an urban planner at the then-newly formed Michigan Suburbs Alliance, marrying her husband, and buying a home in the City of Ferndale.

After nearly a decade at the Suburbs Alliance helping incubate and pilot redevelopment ready communities, she went to the Downtown Detroit Partnership to support the revitalization of the Motor City.



Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss, then-League Vice President Melanie Piana, and League President Catherine Bostick-Tullius at the League's 2017 Convention.

“The Suburbs Alliance taught me that a vibrant healthy core city means a vibrant healthy core region,” Piana said. “The suburbs grew on the back of Detroit’s decline. My generation has no experience of a healthy, vibrant City of Detroit. My grandparents tell me of their shopping experiences and taking public transit. They remember a vibrant Detroit. I feel like investment is coming back into the City of Detroit, and while the neighborhoods still have work to do, the shift and the focus is there.”

Reving up Regionalism

Her world travels also showed her that revitalizing Detroit must be a regional effort and that a racial divide is hurting that effort.

“Regions are the global economic competitive markets, not just the cities within that region. Oakland County cannot stand alone without Wayne County and Detroit working together,” she said. “Regions that are working more collaboratively together are going to have more prosperity than our region. I think our race issues are a fundamental underlying challenge that we need to continually change and address.”

Piana is currently deputy director of the nonprofit Jefferson East, Inc. in Detroit. The organization aims to create inclusive neighborhoods so that the development taking place benefits the existing residents in a way that prevents displacement.

Venturing into Politics

Her journey into urban planning coincided with a sense of community service inspired by watching her parents being involved in their community. And all this led into an unexpected, yet rewarding journey into local politics, first as a volunteer on the business development committee of the Ferndale Downtown Development Authority, then later running and getting elected in 2009 to the Ferndale City


Council, where she has now served for the past nine years.

Her support of regionalism has her constantly thinking outside of Ferndale’s city borders and led her to the Michigan Municipal League. She has attended the League’s Elected Officials Academy trainings as well as other League programs, events, and conferences. In 2015, she was appointed to the League Board, selected as vice president in 2017, and named president during the League’s 2018 Convention in September.



Presidential Mission

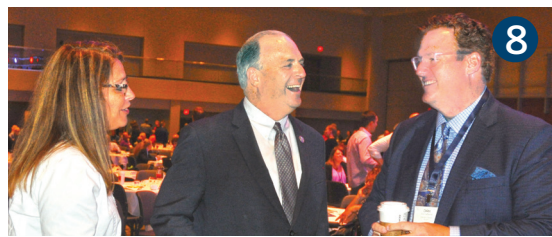
As president, she plans to help sustain the League’s ongoing SaveMICity initiative that aims to reform the state’s broken system for funding municipalities and continue the League’s 16/50 effort to have more women involved in local government. She also plans to drive the League Board’s strategic planning work that started over the summer and includes focus on the issue of inclusivity.

“The Michigan Municipal League has long been one of the stronger municipal leagues in the nation,” Piana said. “The Board is now working on our vision from now through 2028 so we can continue to be the best municipal league while also continuing to serve the communities with adaptive changing environments. How can we as an organization adapt to these rapidly changing environments? That’s a question I hope we can form a plan around.” 

Matt Bach is the communications director for the League. You may reach him at 734.669.6317 or mbach@mml.org.



GRAND RAPIDS 2018 CONVENTION



1. Keynote speaker Karen Freeman-Wilson, Mayor, Gary, Indiana, 2. League CEO Dan Gilmartin with author Bruce Katz 3. ArtPrize mobile tour 4. MME President Patrick Sullivan presents Jack Duso with Patriarche Award 5. U.S. Senator Gary Peters with Muskegon Heights Mayor Kimberley Sims and Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss 6. Carla Gribbs, DTE Regional Manager, addresses the crowd at MML Foundation Reception as Foundation Chair Patricia Lockwood looks on 7. Host City Reception at Grand Rapids Downtown Market 8. Congressman Dan Kildee talks with Spring Lake Village Manager Christine Burns and League CEO Dan Gilmartin, 9. 2018-19 MWIMG Board members Theresa Rich, Maria Willett, Monica Galloway, and Valerie Kindle 10. Michigan Association of Planning Executive Director Andrea Brown 11. Elected Officials Academy Award recipients 12. 2017 ArtPrize winner 13. New League Board President Melanie Piana at New Members Meet-Up 14. New League Board members Diane Brown Wilhelm, Nancy De Boer, Dr. Deirdre Waterman, and Michael Cain, 15. Attendees fill the huge General Session room at DeVos Place, 16. Michigan Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials annual meeting 17. Patrice Frey, President and CEO, National Main Street Center

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Sue Jeffers is a legal consultant to the League. You may contact her at sjeffers@mml.org.

Who is an “Aggrieved Party” Entitled to Appeal a Zoning Decision?

FACTS:

In 1957, a subdivision containing 17 lots was platted in Chikaming Township near Lake Michigan. Lot 6 of the subdivision has a total area of 9,676 square feet. The township enacted its first zoning ordinances in 1964. Lot 6 was rendered nonconforming under its 1981 zoning ordinance, which required a minimum area of 20,000 square feet for buildability. Wanting to build a residential cottage on Lot 6, the owner (a purchaser at tax sale) filed an application with the township for a variance of its square footage and rear setback requirements. The township sent notice to property owners within a 300-foot radius of Lot 6 of the hearing to be held before the township’s Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). Following the hearing, the ZBA approved the variance request.

Various property owners appealed the decision to the circuit court. The ZBA argued that the property owners lacked standing to challenge its decision since they were not “aggrieved parties” within the meaning of the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA). In 2006, the state Legislature consolidated three previous zoning enabling acts for local units of government into the MZEA. The MZEA provides for judicial review of a local unit of government’s zoning decision. In particular, section 605 of the MZEA provides that a party “aggrieved” by the ZBA decision may appeal to the circuit court. The circuit court is authorized to review a ZBA’s decision to determine if the decision was based on the Michigan constitution and laws, was based on proper procedure, and was supported by evidence.

QUESTION:

The circuit court held that those property owners within 300 feet of Lot 6 had standing to qualify as an aggrieved party for purposes of an appeal to the circuit court. The circuit court also found that the ZBA did not have the authority to grant the variance since the specific conditions of the section authorizing the township to grant a variance were not satisfied.

ANSWER:

On appeal, the Court of Appeals held that, under MCL 125.3605, an aggrieved party must allege and prove that he or she has suffered special damages not common to other property owners similarly situated. Incidental inconveniences and mere ownership of adjoining parcels are insufficient. Furthermore, the court of appeals held that the township notice requirement to property owners within a 300-foot radius does not confer “aggrieved party” status. “Aesthetic, ecological, and practical harms are insufficient to show ‘special damages not common to other property owners similarly situated.’” The court noted that since the MZEA (adopted in 2006) incorporated the “aggrieved person” threshold, its decision interpreting the language in the MZEA aligns with the body of case law interpreting the “aggrieved person” threshold.

The Court of Appeals did not address other issues raised by the appellants since they were not properly able to invoke the jurisdiction of the court.

Olsen v Chikaming Township, Nos. 337724 and 337726 (July 3, 2018)

Note: Application for leave to appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court has been filed.

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New Councils Get Serious about Addressing Infrastructure Issues

By Rick Haglund

Crumbling roads. Unsafe drinking water. Collapsing water and sewer mains. Beach closures from contaminated storm water runoff. Michigan's infrastructure is an aging mess, a result of years of neglect and underinvestment.

A 2016 report by the state's 21st Century Infrastructure Commission found that Michigan needs to increase spending by \$4 billion a year over the next 20 years to maintain its transportation, water, and telecommunications infrastructure. The state was given a D+ grade this year in the quality of its infrastructure by the American Society of Civil Engineers. Michigan ranks 40th in the nation in the condition of its infrastructure, according to the McKinsey & Co. consulting firm.

But the state, prompted by the Flint drinking water crisis and major underground failures like the 2016 collapse of a major sewer line in Fraser serving 500,000 residents, is getting serious about fixing its woeful infrastructure. And none too soon. Over 85 percent of Michigan's infrastructure was built between 30 and 70 years ago and was designed to last—you guessed it—between 30 and 70 years.

“Infrastructure isn't sexy, but it's critical in promoting the economic vitality and public health of Michigan and its communities.”

Establishing New Infrastructure Councils

A pilot project by Gov. Rick Snyder's Infrastructure Commission earlier this year established a roadmap on how the state can better coordinate, manage, and fund roads and underground utilities. That infrastructure is owned and managed by more than 3,350 entities in the state. There is little coordination of those assets and no plan to efficiently pay for maintaining them.

Recommendations from the pilot project led to the July creation of the Michigan Infrastructure Council, a nine-member body that will create a database of the state's infrastructure and produce a 30-year management and investment strategy for the state. A second council, the Water Infrastructure Council, will advise the Michigan Infrastructure Council on a statewide water asset management strategy. Snyder said Michigan is the first state in the nation to implement a coordinated effort to manage the state's drinking water, wastewater, storm water, transportation, and private utility infrastructure.

“We want to help communities better understand what they have and where they have it,” said Council Chairman John Weiss. “We're really interested in ways we can help communities work together to bring about cost sharing and resource pooling.” Weiss is the executive director of the Grand Valley Metro Council, a council of 38 local governments in West Michigan.

Taking Inventory

But first, the council must undertake the daunting task of figuring out where all the water pipes, sewer lines, and other infrastructure assets are located, as well as determining the owners and managers of this massive, loosely linked system. “The state wants to bring all of the planning into one place and have a statewide asset management plan in place in three years,” said Council Vice Chairperson Kathleen Lomako, who also is the executive director of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

The council has the support of the Michigan Municipal League and the Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association, a statewide construction trade group. “The bottom line is that asset management is not only here and now, it’s the future,” said John LaMacchia, the League’s assistant director of state and federal affairs. “This puts us in the position to develop accurate, up-to-date information about where the infrastructure is and determine its condition.”

Weiss said the council’s work could be especially valuable in helping smaller communities inventory their infrastructure assets. Governments in major metro areas have documented where a lot of their infrastructure exists, but that’s less true in many smaller communities. In some cases, only the public works director in a small town might know where all the water and sewer lines are located, he said.


One of the council’s aims, Weiss said, is to become a center of excellence for data that communities can access to determine when preventative maintenance and total replacement of infrastructure is best performed. That will also help communities develop a “return on investment” mentality in infrastructure spending, he said. For example, the data might indicate that it’s best to replace underlying utilities when rebuilding a street this year rather than tear up the street in a couple of years to replace water and sewer lines.

Making Wise Investments

Infrastructure isn’t sexy, but it’s critical in promoting the economic vitality and public health of Michigan and its communities. “An infrastructure failure can be a big public health problem in a small town,” Weiss said. “If a 10-inch pipe breaks in a larger city, it might be an inconvenience, but it can be a big public health problem in a small town. It might mean no water for its residents.”

Having a strong infrastructure, which includes readily available high-speed Internet, is critical for Michigan to prosper in a knowledge-based economy. “Clearly infrastructure is not just about new development,” Lomako said. “It’s about setting the foundation for state and regional economic prosperity. We need to have a bigger view about why this is so important.”

Sharing costs and pooling resources to maintain and replace infrastructure only goes so far for cities that are struggling to provide basic services while the state restricts their ability to boost tax revenue. Infrastructure Council members acknowledge that billions of dollars in new spending is needed to fix roads, bridges, and underground utilities.

But there is no guarantee that the new governor and Legislature will appropriate the funds needed to upgrade the state’s infrastructure. Lomako said the Infrastructure Council’s goal is to convince lawmakers to address those financial needs. “It’s not just about data and asset management. It’s about how we invest in better infrastructure and pay for it. It’s how can we use this data to make the case to the Legislature for more investment?” 

Rick Haglund is a freelance writer. You may contact him at 248.761.4594 or haglund.rick@gmail.com.

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NORTHERN MICHIGAN COMMUNITIES ENCOURAGE YOU TO “EXPLORE 131 NORTH”

By John Sych



Eight northern Michigan communities located along the US-131 highway—stretching from Cadillac up to Petoskey—are teaming up to collaborate on tourism promotion, branding, and economic development in the hopes of bringing more visitors and business opportunities to the corridor. Explore 131 North is a grassroots initiative spearheaded by government and community leaders from several key communities along US-131, including Cadillac, Manton, Fife Lake, Kalkaska, Mancelona, Boyne Valley, Walloon Lake, and Petoskey. They have teamed up with the regional planning agency Networks Northwest for planning and facilitation assistance.

As a backbone of the region, US-131 struggles with a lack of economic opportunity in many of its smaller rural communities—particularly compared to larger waterfront cities along the coast. What brings these communities together is that they see the opportunity to lift each other up by working together. They’re in the same boat and experiencing some of the same issues, and so they’re realizing they should work together instead of competing with each other.

“We all have unique characteristics that make us who we are,” said Linda Forwerck, Fife Lake Township supervisor, “and I’m glad that we can work together to highlight those assets as a group.”

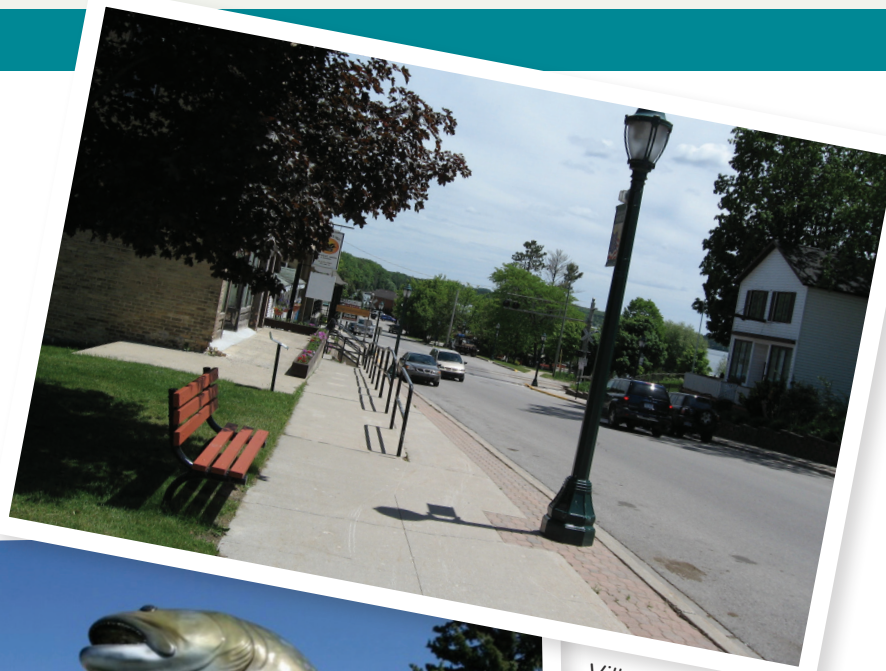
Economic Development Strategy

The Explore 131 North initiative arose out of the US-131 economic development strategy, “A Framework for Growth & Investment along the US-131 Corridor,” a process which convened representatives from the communities to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, and economic opportunities for the US-131 region. Created in 2016, the report states, “Communities along this important corridor boast strong manufacturing economies and big retail markets, together contributing 20,000 jobs to the region’s economy and generating over \$615 million annually in local retail spending. What’s more, the scenic beauty, recreation and cultural assets, and outdoor paradise bring tens of thousands of tourists to the region year-round, with a \$111 million impact. The mix of manufacturing and tourism industries within the region provides opportunities for a thriving year-round economy that leverages a high quality of place to attract new industry. Yet, US-131 communities must overcome both local and regional economic challenges to best capitalize on their individual strengths.”

Recently, local officials, business owners, and residents from along the corridor gathered at the group’s annual summit. Downtowns were this year’s focus. Discussions centered on the characteristics that create a successful downtown and the importance of being ready for development. The purpose of the summit was to look at what impact you can make right now.



Village of Mancelona



Village of Fife Lake




Village of Kalkaska

Many of these communities are smaller and don't have full-time staff, or the capacity to do things larger communities can do. Something simple, like a new restaurant or store, could have a major impact on these communities. Village of Kalkaska Downtown Development Authority Director Cash Cook, who chairs the Explore 131 North Committee, says he's hopeful each US-131 hub has identified "at least one really good idea they can try out in their community to better their community."

Broadening Our Reach

Explore 131 North is also moving forward on a collaborative effort to market the corridor for tourism. While some communities have chambers of commerce or visitor bureaus, others lack those resources. The committee is working on launching a social media presence and getting something out like a travel blog, which highlights the great places to visit that are typically known only to locals. The first step is promoting travel tourism, and then working more collaboratively on economic development. Some economic development happens when people come up for leisure activities, then think of moving their business to the area or opening another location for their business.

Mike Allison, Mancelona village president and vice-chair of the Explore 131 North Committee, recognizes the advantage of its pass-through location on the highway to expand roadside offerings for travelers and the large groups of off-road vehicle riders and snowmobilers hitting up nearby trails. However, he adds, "We also have a lot more to offer. Our proximity to regional hubs like Traverse City and Gaylord also makes us a great place to live. And for businesses, we have water, sewer, fiber optic internet and a federal highway with year-round transportation. So, we're in a position logistically to be able to attract and support businesses."

"We're trying to get all the communities to create a destination that goes from Cadillac to Petoskey and push out on social media all of the assets that the communities have along the way, so you get a chance to stop and explore what's actually in the smaller communities," said Cook. 

John Sych is a community planner with Networks Northwest. You may contact him at 231.929.5083 or john.sych@networksnorthwest.org.

Developing Great Places

By Luke Forrest, Richard Murphy, and Melissa Milton-Pung



Priming sites for the spotlight! That's the goal of the League's new *Developing Great Places* program.

We know that, despite great investment in placemaking, community engagement, and ambitious visions for the future, many Michigan communities haven't seen the real estate investment they desire in recent years. They need the help of private developers to move their public-sector efforts forward.

Enter *Developing Great Places*. This program tackles individual sites, priming them for the spotlight and connecting them to the developers whose investments will benefit from, and contribute to, great quality of place.

Developing Great Places builds on our past work, with support from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). We've already worked with over a dozen cities on advancing the redevelopment potential of prime sites in their community. In addition to those pilot efforts, we have developed resources that can be used by any local government to focus its efforts and attract investment. These include how-to guides, template documents, and examples from other communities. They are collected in one place on our website at placemaking.mml.org/great-places/.

Strong Foundations

Michigan is recognized around the world as a placemaking leader, thanks to grassroots neighborhood initiatives, citywide policies, and statewide programs. Whether through Public Spaces, Community Places; PlacePlans; the MIplace Partnership; or homegrown initiatives, communities around the state have embraced these approaches to their downtowns and neighborhoods. Learn more at placemaking.mml.org.

Simultaneously, the Redevelopment Ready Communities® program (RRC) has engaged hundreds of communities in connecting their development policies and processes to their visions and values. The RRC certification is a formal recognition

that your community has a vision for the future—and the fundamental practices in place to get there. Learn more at miplace.org.

While RRC covers a range of community planning topics that do not necessarily fall under the placemaking umbrella, the two schools of thought share one common goal: to make Michigan's communities—especially those with traditional mixed-use, walkable downtowns—more attractive for investment. This includes investment from private sector entities like banks and businesses; nonprofit institutions like community foundations and school systems; and community members at the block and individual property level, all working in parallel to the local government.

Taking Great Places from Vision to Development

Despite the strong foundation laid by placemaking initiatives and programs like RRC, something is still missing in many Michigan communities. League staff has researched the reasons behind this and found a number of culprits, from high construction costs to a shortage of real estate developers and builders, to a lack of knowledge about investment tools and opportunities. Our Civic Innovation Labs team has focused on communities' engagement of private developers as a key step in the "placemaking implementation" process: bringing attention to the development of individual sites as the places where these programs overlap and are implemented. We are working with local partners to identify communities' priority sites, understand their potential to support local goals through development, focus on the critical path to development of a selected site, and connect the community to expertise and resources that help them down that path.

In 2016, spurred on by financial support from MEDC and MSHDA, the League embarked on a project to bring the best of RRC and placemaking together and overcome the obstacles to investment. This work builds upon our existing partnerships with state agencies and professional associations, and on the work our local members have already done. In most cases,

where the community in question is Redevelopment Ready—or “RRC Certified,” in MEDC parlance—we are collaborating directly with MEDC’s Redevelopment Services Team, a newly formed group that is dedicated to helping cities put into action the work they planned while becoming RRC Certified.

Some of the highlights of the *Developing Great Places* program include:


- Successful developer attraction processes—In the first phase of the Developing Great Places program, League staff researched various approaches used by local governments to package and market their priority sites. We settled on the RFQ approach for several reasons, including:
 - a) it allows for an optimal balance of control and flexibility for both the community and the developer and b) it can be pursued relatively cheaply. We studied other RFQ documents, good and bad, and tried to create a template that utilized the best elements without breaking the bank or requiring a professional graphic artist. We tested this approach in partnership with MSHDA, consulting firm Beckett & Raeder, Inc. and four cities: Flint, Kalamazoo, Muskegon and Ypsilanti. In each case, the city found success in attracting new interest to a site that had previously been overlooked. Their stories are documented on the project page.
- In-progress site prioritization and visioning—With financial and technical support from MEDC’s Redevelopment Services Team, we have engaged four cities in a process to envision what optimal development would look like on a vacant site in their downtown and develop a product to market that concept to potential investors. Allegan, Escanaba, Middleville and Roseville have prioritized redevelopment opportunities



through the RRC certification process but, like many of their peer communities, initially lacked a consensus view of what the market would bear and what they specifically wanted.

MEDC and the League hired a consultant team, led by Seamless Collaborative, to help community stakeholders answer those questions and develop a site marketing package. Although their stories are still being told, you can follow along with updates on the project page.

- Do-It-Yourself Guidance—Recognizing that not every city and village will receive hands-on assistance from the League or MEDC, but many could benefit from these approaches, we compiled the lessons into several “DIY” resources available on the Developing Great Places website at placemaking.mml.org/great-places.
 - A guide to identifying and prioritizing potential redevelopment sites.
 - Template documents and instructions for compiling and releasing an RFQ.

- A guide to essential changes to zoning and other ordinances to support investment, courtesy of a collaboration with the Congress for the New Urbanism’s Project for Code Reform and MEDC’s RRC program. A future issue of *The Review* will feature more details on this project.
- Work products from other communities’ experience that can be reused or built on. 

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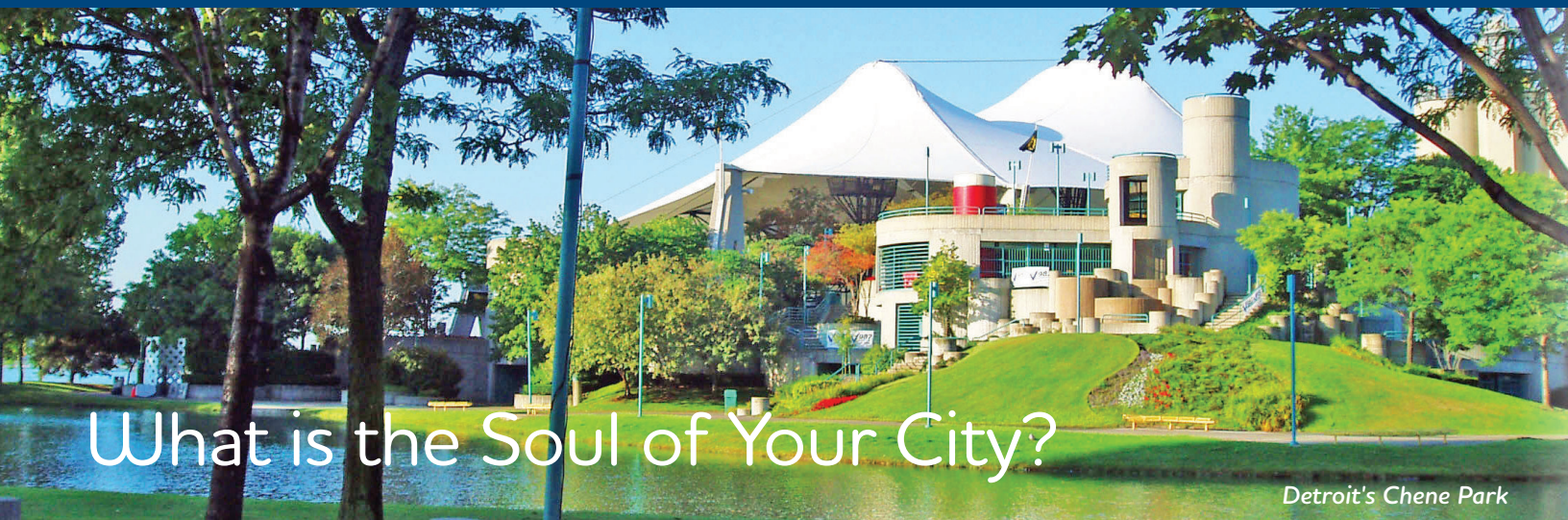
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What is the Soul of Your City?

Detroit's Chene Park

By Kelly Warren

In early 2016, the League's then-general counsel, Bill Mathewson, excitedly told me about the Aretha Franklin concert that he and his wife had just attended in Windsor, Ontario. I said, "That's cool, I'm pleasantly surprised that you are a fan, I'm not a huge fan." He looked at me like I had two heads and said, "Well you should be."

That made me pause to consider why I wasn't a huge fan. I certainly knew her work and I knew, even as a child, that she deserved much respect and admiration. And I knew she was a big deal in the Civil Rights arena. After some reflection, I concluded that I had just been overexposed to some of her more popular songs and had become immune to them.

As fate would have it, several months after Bill and I had this conversation, I had the opportunity to meet the Queen of Soul herself. My best friend, DJ Mechi Mixx, deejayed a Christmas party for her, and I attended to assist her. We had a chance to speak with Ms. Franklin and she was very down to earth. There were no airs about her. At all. This star-studded event was attended by the who's who of Detroit... and beyond. It was an amazing experience that I will cherish forever. Guess what? Something happened. I was no longer immune to her music and I rediscovered songs of hers that I loved and had forgotten about.

Upon her passing in August, I was one of the thousands of people that paid my respects by attending the public

viewing at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit. The line to get into the museum was around the block, but it only took us about thirty minutes to get through it. People were selling t-shirts and CDs, and handing out cold bottled water. There was a radio station there playing Ms. Franklin's hits, and news trucks and newscasters were everywhere. Even though we were there to pay our respects, there was such an outpouring of love that the energy was positive, comforting, and upbeat.

PLACEMAKING

Capitalizing on the distinctive assets of a community to integrate a mixture of uses that connect people and places on a human scale. It is a scalable strategy to create adaptable, economically competitive 21st century communities worth caring about.

The Park That Touched Aretha's Soul

During her funeral, which I recorded and later watched, we heard repeatedly how much Ms. Franklin LOVED the city of Detroit, its people, and everything about it. When Mayor Duggan spoke, he talked about her love for the Detroit River, and how Chene Park was one of her favorite places in the world.

In the 1980s, Chene Park was an abandoned barge dock site that Mayor Coleman Young turned into an outdoor concert venue that seats 6,000 people. This music venue on the river is my absolute favorite concert locale. There is nothing like listening to your favorite artist performing live music on a warm summer night with the Detroit River as the backdrop. I think it's awesome that the city is planning to rename this amazing venue Aretha Franklin Park after the Queen of Soul.

PLACEMAKING RESOURCES

To learn more about what makes great places, check out the following sites:

economicsofplace.com

- **Economics of Place** podcast—insightful interviews on city innovations
- **Groundbreaking books on placemaking**—*Economics of Place: The Art of Building Great Communities* and *Economics of Place: Building Communities Around People*

placemaking.mml.org

- **PlacePlans**—Examples of communities around the state developing placemaking plans with assistance from the League (click on the “Plan” icon at the top)
- **NEW! Developing Great Places**—Examples of tackling individual sites, priming them for the spotlight, and connecting them to developers (click on the “Build” icon at the top)

patronicity.com

- **Crowdfunding**—Information and guidance on crowdfunding projects in your community.



First Flight sculpture in memory of Bob May, Hastings, MI


Share Your Soul

What's the soul of your community? What's the place that people flock to, or want to tell others about? When someone says they love your community, what are they describing?

When I'm at home in Belleville, I enjoy going to Horizon Park on Belleville Lake. What are the favorite spots in your community? Where do your citizens play? What draws people in your community? Or, why do they choose to stay? Is it the concerts in the park, like I attended this summer in Bay City? Is it art sculptures like I recently experienced in Hastings? Is it a gathering place with an old-fashioned soda fountain like at Cakes and Shakes in historic downtown Blissfield? Is it a history

museum like the quaint Lake County Historical Museum that I visited in Baldwin? Or is it a natural resource like the Detroit River? Every community has that special place.

In a recent "Economics of Place" podcast, urban designer Mark Nickita said there is always something of value in a community, and sometimes it could be hiding in plain sight.

I'd love to hear from you about that special place in your community. 

Kelly Warren is the director of membership and affiliate engagement for the League. You may contact her at 734.669.6310 or kwarren@mml.org.



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Municipal News

Changes to the Chart of Accounts

The state of Michigan released an updated Uniform Chart of Accounts. Compliance by local units of government is required beginning January 2019. Municipalities should evaluate the new chart of accounts to determine what changes will be necessary. It is posted on the League's website at: www.mml.org/resources/information/finance.htm#Treasury

Q. Our city is considering passing a human rights or nondiscrimination ordinance. Does the MML have samples we can look at?

A. Yes, the League has sample ordinances from other municipalities. The ordinances tend to cover housing, hiring practices, public accommodation, and municipal contracts. In 1972, the city of East Lansing became the first city in the nation to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in hiring practices. Go to http://www.mml.org/resources/sample_docs/ordinances/human_rights_ordinances.html.

Q. Our city charter says our councilmembers receive \$5 per council meeting attended. How do we increase the per meeting amount?

A. By either amending your charter or instituting a Local Officer's Compensation Commission (LOCC). If you amend the charter, you could change the provision so that compensation is set by Resolution or ordinance so that the amount will not need to be changed again in the future. Or, you could do as a lot of cities have done and set up an LOCC. The LOCC is a body that sets the compensation for elected officials that overrides charter limits. The LOCC must be set up by ordinance. The authority for such a body comes from the Home Rule City Act (MCL 117.5c):

In place of a charter provision existing on December 31, 1972 establishing the salaries or the procedure for determining salaries of elected officials, the governing body may establish, by ordinance, the procedure described in this section, in which case the restriction contained in a charter provision with respect to changing salaries during term shall be inapplicable.

There are some limits on the LOCC process—such as citizens can file a petition for a referendum on the ordinance 60 days after it is passed, and the governing body can reject the recommended compensation by a 2/3 vote.

Q. How do I know where to send the village's RFP for engineering services?

A. League members can use the League's Business Alliance Program (BAP) to help get their community's RFPs to more prospective bidders. The League's BAP is a collection of companies that specialize in serving the municipal marketplace. To get your RFP distributed to the right companies in our BAP program, simply email a PDF version of the RFP or bid specifications to rfpsharing@mml.org and we will do the rest. We'll email your RFP to the primary contact at all of the Alliance-participating companies offering the service you need. You will also receive a list of the companies that received your RFP, with complete contact information so you can follow up. To enhance this new service, we also have a webpage full of sample RFPs at: www.mml.org/resources/information/rfp-samples.html.

Q. In the June 2017 issue of *The Review*, you talked about a new court case that changed the response time to FOIA requests—that granting and fulfilling a request were two different things.

A. The case was *Cramer v Village of Oakley*, a Court of Appeals case when that Q&A was written. The case was then heard by the Michigan Supreme Court, which vacated that portion of the opinion of the Court of Appeals. This means that portion of the Court of Appeals decision no longer stands as precedent. However, in December the Michigan Attorney General's Office issued an opinion that addressed the same question.

In responding to FOIA requests, FOIA Coordinators should consider the Michigan Attorney General's 2017 opinion No. 7300. A municipality should be guided by a "best efforts estimate" under subsection 4(8), MCL 15.234(8), as to the time it will take to fulfill a request for public records. The calculation contemplates the public body working diligently to fulfill its obligation to produce the records to the requestor. The estimate must be comparable to what a reasonable person in the same circumstances as the public body would provide for fulfilling a similar public records request. In addition, under subsection 4(8), MCL 15.234(8), the "best efforts estimate" must be made in "good faith," that is, it must be made honestly and without the intention to defraud or delay the requestor.

In calculating its "best efforts estimate" for fulfilling a request for public records under MCL 15.234(8), a public body may take into consideration events or factors affecting its ability to produce requested records.

The League's Information Service provides member officials with answers to questions on a vast array of municipal topics. Call 1.800.653.2483 or email info@mml.org or inquiry@mml.org.



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COMMUNITY
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2017 CEA FINALIST The Plaza at Cadillac Commons



Cadillac's downtown suffered when the US-131 bypass opened, and big-box retailers built near its interchange at Boon Road. Cadillac Commons is a game-changer for downtown Cadillac. MML sponsored an MSU placemaking study recommending The Plaza as the third of five phases to create Cadillac Commons.

The Plaza transformed an ordinary parking lot into a year-round destination overlooking Lake Cadillac and a city park. It features new parking areas and a mixed, multi-season space for public events and gatherings, including a splash pad, misting post, drinking fountains, benches, a sound system, large gathering and seating areas, beautiful landscaping, an outdoor gas fireplace, and a synthetic ice rink.

The Plaza is now a vibrant hub connecting downtown businesses and Lake Cadillac. With seasonal events and attractive amenities, it draws both visitors and residents year-round. Other elements in Cadillac Commons are a city park, the Rotary pavilion, a market, and the White Pine Trail trailhead.

Replicability

Our project can be replicated in a variety of ways, whether it is the rebranding of an area and the creation of several new community gathering places, or something significantly smaller (or larger) is possible with the following:

1, a shared vision 2, clear and direct communication between community stakeholders 3, energy and endurance to see the project through.

Creativity and Originality

Our project started as a "blank slate," a blighted public parking lot adjacent to a park, the back of downtown businesses, and an alleyway. Through the incredible PlacePlans process over the course of several months working with professionals that facilitated community discussions, a flame was ignited that shined a light on several paths of opportunity to create something truly special that everyone could enjoy, and that Cadillac could be proud of for generations to come! Partnering with a local engineering firm, Prein&Newhof and architect DK Design, Cadillac created a new destination location.

Impact

Our community has seen significant new private investment since the construction of Cadillac Commons, but especially The Plaza. From new façades on downtown storefronts, to the acquisition of nearly two city blocks by a developer who became interested in Cadillac after seeing our public investment. The developer is in the process of bringing in several new commercial businesses into our core downtown area.