



# Local Success Stories



2013  
Michigan Association of Mayors  
Summer Workshop  
Frankenmuth

The Michigan Association of Mayors held its annual summer workshop not only to learn from each other but to explore innovation in local government. The stage was set with a discussion of the challenges local elected leaders face when trying to innovate and achieve transformative change. Chris Mueller from the University of Michigan Innovatrium helped mayors explore different styles of leadership and how those might influence decisions and innovation in the context of local government. League staff then shared examples of innovative programs and projects from around the state that can be scaled to any community. The day concluded with small break-out groups sharing real-life success stories of innovation at the local level, summarized below.

## Summaries—Local Success Stories

### Anchor Institutions

#### Port Huron

(pop. 30,184)

#### Convention Center

#### Saint Clair County; MML Region 5

When the Thomas Edison Inn, an iconic hotel in Port Huron was in danger of going bankrupt, it caused county-wide concern. The city and county got together to solve the problem and the result was a collaboration that will turn the hotel into a mixed-use development. The site will be upgraded to include a convention center, culinary school, dormitory, and restaurant. A national chain will own the hotel, the county will own the convention center, and Baker College will own the culinary school and dormitory. The project was funded with TIF money from the city, a \$9 million bond from the county, hotel tax funds from the entire county through the Tourism Bureau, and private investment.

Contact: Mayor Pauline Repp, reppp@porthuron.org



The Imaginarium Garden at Southfield Public Library

#### Southfield

(pop. 71,739)

#### Southfield Library

#### Oakland County; MML Region 1

Southfield wanted a library that would serve as a regional asset for all segments of the population. They also wanted something more than “books on a shelf.” They set out to create an anchor for the community that included space for eve-

ryone. They listened to youth and designed a space—a teen zone—that respects and includes them. They built a much beloved indoor treehouse for young children. The senior section has large print books. Each floor has a custom designed fireplace. There is a business center and an auditorium for general use. The library was built with a 6 mil voter approved millage, and is in constant use—3,000 people a day come through the door.

Contact: Mayor Brenda Lawrence, blawrence@cityofsouthfield.com

### Beautification

#### Clio

(pop. 2,646)

#### Spring Clean-up, Fix-up, Paint-up Day

#### Genesee County; MML Region 1

The city of Clio started a city-wide clean-up day to encourage residents to clean, paint, and generally fix up their home or business. As an incentive, items can be placed at the curb for free pick up. Simultaneously, volunteers from the city and township clean up the amphitheater, park, Historical Museum, and the downtown area and bump-outs. The volunteers pick up trash, paint benches, and master gardeners plant flowers paid for by the DDA. The city has been trying to keep the amphitheater going since 2005 when financial problems threatened to close it. The 3,000 seat venue features local acts, Clio High School’s graduation, and the U.S. Marine Corp Band. The day builds civic pride and small town quality of life.

Contact: Mayor Robert Smith, rbigbob50@comcast.net

#### Fremont

(pop. 4,081)

#### Yard of the Month

#### Newaygo County; MML Region 3

To encourage neighborhood pride and beauty through the upkeep of yards, a volunteer group of citizens (including the former Mayor Pro Tem, the current Mayor and volunteers under the oversight of the Director of Neighborhood and Economic Development), initiated a “Yard of the Month” program for the months of July, August, and September. Yards are nominated by citizens and the “Dead Heads” (volunteers responsible for weeding the four downtown blocks—often while listening to the Grateful Dead) choose a yard for each of the three months. The winner receives a Proclamation from city council, a high-quality bright orange and green sign metal sign

for their yard to display for the month, and a picture of the winning family is placed in the local paper. Families get involved and are delighted with the recognition. Cost for the program is minimal, which includes cost of the sign and shirts for the current eight “Dead Head” members.

Contact: Mayor James Rynberg; mayor@cityoffremont.net

### **Fremont**

(pop. 4,081)

#### **Adopt a Block**

#### **Newaygo County; MML Region 3**

Fremont city leaders came up with an idea to gently aid homeowners who needed minor improvements to their home by offering to clean and paint homes through a group of volunteers. The city staff does a neighborhood-by-neighborhood review, and a block is designated to work on. When approached, the owners or renters were at times embarrassed to be chosen, but appreciated the help and consideration with which it was done. Over 50 volunteers helped out. The city approached church groups, the Lions Club, and schools for help, and raised \$500 to buy paint and supplies for the good of the community.

Contact: Mayor James Rynberg; mayor@cityoffremont.net

### **Scottville**

(pop. 1,214)

#### **Peer Pressure Property Maintenance**

#### **Mason County; MML Region 3**

The city of Scottville decided to handle citizen complaints about vacant and blighted properties with peer pressure instead of tickets. When city hall receives a complaint about a property, the city commission, as a whole, visits the property. The violations are documented, and a “Letter of Concern” is sent to property owners describing the violations. There is no ticketing. The process has resulted in great responses from property owners. The peer pressure, rather than immediate ticketing, is getting results.

Contact: Mayor Richard Maki, ww8u@rocketmail.com

### **Wayland**

(pop. 4,079)

#### **Main Street Building Revitalization**

#### **Allegan County; MML Region 2**

The city of Wayland benefitted from an innovative partnership with Michigan Works, the Michigan Mains Street Program, and the owner of a deteriorated downtown building. Through Michigan’s Workforce Investment Act (WIA), low-income 16-21 year-olds get practical experience while learning the construction trade. The crew renovated a building in downtown Wayland with roof repairs, interior repairs, paint job, and handicap accessible bathroom. The young adults earn money and learn construction skills, and the city benefits from the improvements. The building owners paid for the repair costs, and the WIA paid the workers’ wages.

Contact: Mayor Tim Bala, tbala@cityofwayland.org

## **Creative Re-Use of Property**



### **Durand Repurposed Senior Apartments**

#### **Durand**

(pop. 3,446)

#### **Sycamore House (Junior High/High School to Senior Housing)**

#### **Shiawassee County; MML Region 4**

The Durand community was lacking senior housing. The former Junior High School, built in 1920, had been empty since 1996 and was deteriorating rapidly. Seeing its potential, a developer adapted the school into housing by turning classrooms into apartments. The building was on the National Register of Historical Places and the developer was able to get historic tax credits. The original material was reused as much as possible—for example, the wooden classroom doors were restored and the classroom numbers kept intact. The project was completed and the units opened in 2010. There are now 40 units of affordable senior housing, and a community room in the gymnasium (for use by the entire community). Best of all, the proximity to downtown makes a walkable life for seniors.

Contact: Mayor Deb Doyle, duranddoyle@aol.com

#### **Eastpointe**

(pop. 32,442)

#### **Oakwood Manor (Middle School to Senior Housing)**

#### **Macomb County; MML Region 1**

A vacant Middle School was converted into senior housing and opened to 75 percent capacity. The city paid nothing—the project was funded by Neighborhood Stabilization Program grants. City planners were able to save the gymnasium and locker room portion of the middle school, which is expected to be adapted into a community center for the entire city. Through the process, city leaders learned that HUD approval is difficult to get, and want others to anticipate let-downs. However, project can still happen through perseverance and making alternate plans.

Contact: Mayor Suzanne Pixley, pix41@aol.com

**Ferrysburg**  
(pop. 2,892)  
**Dog Park**

**Ottawa County; MML Region 3**

The Coast Guard donated land to the city of Ferrysburg in 1972, which the city turned into a park. The park contained an unattractive concrete bunker at the back (previously a firing range for the Coast Guard) and the city transformed it into a dog park and added art. Volunteers from the Coast Guard, Walden Green Montessori, and the West Michigan Academy of Arts and Academics painted a mural on the bunker. The dog park was inspired by dog owners, and features a pet waste disposal system with a glove dispenser and a doggie drinking fountain. The dog park cost \$24,800 to construct, and was paid for out of the general fund. The park is widely used by residents and others in the region. City leaders have a message for other municipalities when it comes to innovative projects: The first step is to get started. Just do it!

Contact: Mayor Daniel Ruitter, dsruiter@gmail.com

## Events

**Adrian**  
(pop. 21,133)  
**First Fridays**

**Lenawee County; MML Region 2**

This monthly event was launched in 2012 to get businesses in downtown Adrian hopping. A collaboration of artists, musicians, performers, businesses, organizations, and volunteers gather to host an artist, or musician/entertainer, and each month has a theme. Twenty-five to thirty businesses stay open late—there is a surge in activity downtown. The cost to the city was minimal to non-existent—the businesses sponsor the event. The city is responsible for communication and marketing, and the Chamber of Commerce and the DDA also participate.

Contact: Mayor Gregory DuMars, gdumars@adrianmi.gov



**Adrian First Fridays**

**Battle Creek**  
(pop. 52,347)  
**Stache Bash/Leilapolooza Music Fest**  
**Calhoun County; MML Region 2**

In the name of fun and fundraising, the Battle Creek Metropolitan Area Moustache Society holds an annual “Stache Bash.” The bash raises money with a sense of humor “changing the face of charity right under your nose.” The Bash is held in tandem with Leilapolooza, the Leila Arboretum Music Festival. The Stache Bash includes moustache contests (such as longest, pretties, and most patriotic), and a homemade raft race (the raft has to float and be able to carry someone). The event raises money for the Arboretum and brings the community out in force.

Contact: Mayor Susan Baldwin, susanbaldwinbc@gmail.com

**Huntington Woods**  
(pop. 6,238)  
**Run/Walk, BOOM!!!**  
**Oakland County; MML Region 1**

The fourth of July fireworks were getting too expensive for the city of Huntington Woods to host, so the Men’s Club stepped in and came up with a fundraiser: the Run/Walk BOOM!!! It’s a fun event that assures thousands of community members—young and old, alike—can continue to enjoy 4th of July fireworks. The event features a one mile kids/seniors walk, a two mile walk, and a 5k run. The fireworks cost \$14,000, and the event just about covered the cost, raising \$13,900. The 5k run is the draw—runners really love timed races and t-shirts and prizes.

Contact: Mayor Ron Gillham, rgillham@comcast.net

**Leslie**  
(pop. 1,851)  
**Downtown street dances/Sports tournaments**  
**Ingham County; MML Region 2**

Activity in downtown Leslie had faded and waned—people just weren’t coming in. The city was reinvigorated by a series of activities and events that drew in lots of volunteers, used local musicians, and brought the community out mixing and mingling in the downtown. The softball tournament has been going strong for 10 years, and the Gus Macker now attracts 170 teams. The activities have built a sense of pride in the city that has been lacking for a while.

Contact: Mayor Pete Zamora, pete\_zamora@hotmail.com

**Mount Pleasant**  
(pop. 26,016)  
**Le Tour de Mont Pleasant**  
**Isabella County; MML Region 4**

Le Tour de Mont Pleasant, the largest professional bicycle race in Michigan, goes through the city and every township in the county. The ultimate in town-gown cooperation, Mount Pleasant lends DPW staff and helps plan and implement the race, and CMU hosts one event of the three-day race (with event planning students). The Saginaw Chippewa Indian tribe, hospital, and Chamber of Commerce are also involved. Thou-

sands have attended the event, the local bike shop is flourishing, and the bike club is 324 members strong. Together sponsors have provided \$65,000 and the city offers in-kind help. At first, the event met with some community resistance. But with the commitment of major champion in the business community, and the passion of over 500 volunteers, the whole community embraces it. Asset-based community development, with a focus on creating long-term social capital, was key to early success and will ensure sustainability going forward. The CVB estimates \$2.80 returned for every \$1 invested in this event, well over \$250,000 in total. Over 100 hotel rooms are booked and restaurants report positive impacts as well.

Contact: Mayor Kathleen Ling, [kling914@gmail.com](mailto:kling914@gmail.com)

### **Oak Park**

(pop 29,319)

#### **Summer Splash/Art Fair**

#### **Oakland County; MML Region 1**

Oak Park residents were nostalgic for events of years past, but the city grappled with how to offer events to residents while battling budget cuts. The city, through its recreation department and arts and cultural commission, worked with the Ferndale Area Chamber of Commerce, and got businesses involved that hadn't been involved before to offer a day of affordable family fun at the community pool. The city expended no money—it all came from business sponsors. The city used water bills to advertising the event. The city learned the importance of communication—with both businesses and residents.

Contact: Mayor Marian McClellan, [mmclellan@ci.oak-park.mi.us](mailto:mmclellan@ci.oak-park.mi.us)



**Oak Park Summer Splash**

### **Sebewaing**

(pop. 1,759)

#### **Surf and Turf**

#### **Huron County; MML Region 5**

Inspired by the term "Surf n Turf," the Sebewaing Chamber of Commerce created a unique social outing. For \$40, participants enjoy a fish and steak dinner and a sunset cruise on the Sebewaing River. Volunteers with boats take people for ride on the Sebewaing river (the surf) and the Chamber buys the steaks

(turf) and supplies pop and water. This fun, once a year event, not only offers a chance to meet new people, but builds community. BYOAB. (Bring Your Own Adult Beverage).

Contact: President Sami Khoury, [samikhoury2000@yahoo.com](mailto:samikhoury2000@yahoo.com)

### **Zeeland**

(pop. 5,504)

#### **Farmers Market/Zeelmania**

#### **Ottawa County; MML Region 3**

Zeeland's farmers market was dying. In an effort to revive it, the city expanded the traditional farmers market to include a craft sale. There is a small fee to participate, and sellers bring their own tables. In addition, nonprofits use the expanded farmers market as an opportunity to sell items and for public outreach. The farmers market coincides with the eight-week Zeelmania healthy street fair. Zeelmania is a downtown attraction offering family-friendly fitness activities and demonstrations. Each week during the summer, a different event is featured—the first week included a balloon drop off a city fire truck.

Contact: Mayor Kevin Klynstra, [kklynstra@ci.zeeland.mi.us](mailto:kklynstra@ci.zeeland.mi.us)

## **Operational Efficiencies**

### **Hudsonville**

(pop. 7,116)

#### **Contract with County for Police Services; Shared Employee**

#### **Ottawa County; MML Region 3**

Over the last few years, the city of Hudsonville made two significant changes in its operation that both enhanced its efficiencies and saved tax dollars. First, the city dissolved its police department and contracted with the Ottawa County Sheriff Department. Secondly, the city joined forces with the Chamber of Commerce and shared a new position which became the executive director of the Chamber and marketing coordinator/events planner for the city.

Before the police department was dissolved, the city manager and the mayor held discussions with the Sheriff Department that lasted for about one year. All the details were worked out before the proposal was made public. It was important to the city that no employees lose their job because of this new arrangement. All the employees were hired by the County Sheriff Department, except for one employee who decided to retire. This move has saved the city close to \$208,000 per year over the last four years. It has also increased the city's policing coverage because the city now has county detective and K-9 unit services. The city's police department is now occupied by county officers and therefore many patrol vehicles are going in and out of the city on a daily basis. The feedback from the business community and citizens has been very positive.

The second efficiency was created when the city and the chamber agreed to hire a single employee and split the cost 50/50. The city was looking to hire a new marketing person and the chamber a new executive director. At this same time the city offered to house the chamber offices at city hall. The city community room is now used by the chamber for its membership and special events meetings. The city saves \$31,000-\$35,000 annually and the chamber saves because they no longer need to rent office space. The cost of maintaining an office, such as

phone, supplies, and copying needs are reimbursed by the chamber to the city. This new arrangement has resulted in greater cooperation and collaboration, and improved communications and understanding between the city and area businesses.

Contact: Mayor Donald VanDoeselaar, [dvandoes@hudsonville.org](mailto:dvandoes@hudsonville.org)

## Utica

(pop. 4,757)

### Expedited Business Licensing Macomb County; MML Region 1

Utica streamlined its process for those interested in opening a business in the city. The mayor, building inspector, and planner set up meetings with prospective business people to explain fees, regulations, requirements, and zoning—up front. The process is now wrapped up within 45-90 days. If there are potentially contentious or complicated issues, a joint meeting of the planning commission and the council is set up, and the developer is requested to make a presentation.

Contact: Mayor Jacqueline K. Noonan, [noonanj@comcast.net](mailto:noonanj@comcast.net)

## Parks/Trails

### Baraga

(pop. 2,053)

#### Boardwalk

##### Baraga County; MML Region 7

The village of Baraga built a special boardwalk connecting its downtown to the Lake Superior shoreline. In addition, the village is installing distinct lighting, a few fixtures at a time, as the budget allows. The boardwalk was paid for by the DDA and a DNR trust fund that had been unsuccessfully applied for in the past. They didn't give up—after discovering what they had been doing improperly, they reapplied. The boardwalk now connects the village's downtown to its most important asset, Lake Superior.

Contact: President Wendell Dompier, [wdompier@chartermi.net](mailto:wdompier@chartermi.net)

### Hastings

(pop. 7,350)

#### Riverwalk/Downtown Sculpture Tour/Spray Plaza Barry County; MML Region 2

The city of Hastings has a placemaking and walkability strategy. The city constructed a downtown trail, incorporated sculpture into its downtown streetscape, and put a splash pad in a downtown plaza creating a wonderful, active public space. The trail, art, and public plaza space are interconnected and build a healthier community and quality of life. The DDA and the Thornapple Arts Commission hosted their fourth sculpture tour this summer, featuring 23 unique sculptures selected by an advisory committee of residents, artists, art enthusiasts, and art instructors. Two of the sculptures are on lease from local artists, 14 have been purchased and gifted back to the city for permanent display, and seven are on lease from the MidWest Sculpture Initiative. The Spray Plaza is a downtown public space right next to the theater and

was built with 85 percent private funds. The Spray Plaza features its own sculpture and mural.

Contact: Mayor Frank Campbell, [fcampbell@hastingsmi.org](mailto:fcampbell@hastingsmi.org)



Hastings Spray Plaza

### Marine City

(pop. 4,248)

#### Dog Beach

##### Saint Clair County; MML Region 5

A city-owned street ends at the beach on the Saint Clair River. The city can't sell the property because it ends at a body of water, and they must maintain it, which costs \$2,500 a year. City leaders came up with the idea to start the first dog beach in Michigan. Concerned about public opinion, city employees knocked on neighbors' doors, and everyone who lived in the vicinity of the future dog beach was in favor of it. There is a kayak launch at the site, which the Saint Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission gifted to the city. Now kayakers can take their dogs with them on the lake.

Contact: Mayor Charles Browne, [cbrowne@marinecity-mi.org](mailto:cbrowne@marinecity-mi.org)

### New Baltimore

(pop. 12,084)

#### Walk/Bike Path

##### Macomb County; MML Region 1

In 2009, New Baltimore began its quest to create a regional trail system. Rather than wait for the whole project to be planned and funded, the city started with a one-mile path constructed to enhance safety on County Line Road—there was no room on the side of the road for walkers/joggers/bikers and kids routinely walked along the side of the road to school. The day it opened, it was packed with joggers, dog walkers, and moms with strollers. The project was a multi-jurisdictional collaboration between Ira Township, the school system, and Macomb County. Next came the second mile and eventually the trail will connect regionally in a 70-mile loop throughout the county. The city was relentless in its pursuit of this project—it received \$250,000 in federal funding and contributions of \$115,000 from the schools, \$50,000 from Ira Township, and \$50,000 from the county. Their ability to find creative solutions—like creating culverts rather than costly bridges—and their willingness to pursue small victories over time, keeps the momentum going.

Contact: Mayor Larry Smith, [mayor@cityofnewbaltimore.org](mailto:mayor@cityofnewbaltimore.org)

## Waterfront

### Grand Haven

(pop. 10,412)

#### Ottawa County; MML Region 3

Grand Haven city leaders concluded that people will pay for the things they care about. And in Grand Haven, people care about the lighthouses and the city's one-of-a-kind musical fountain. The lighthouses and fountain needed repairs and restoration—so volunteers and local businesses stepped up. The Grand Haven Lighthouse Conservancy raised over \$450,000 in restoration costs for the project. And, in honor its 50th birthday, the musical fountain was the beneficiary of a 50-day fundraiser, which raised an the estimated \$150,000 for repairs to the fountain. No tax dollars are being used. The community is investing in the restoration of its signature landmarks.

Contact: Mayor Geri McCaleb, gmccaleb@grandhaven.org

### Monroe

(pop. 20,733)

#### River Restoration

#### Monroe County; MML Region 1

In the 1930s, a series of dams were constructed to carry sanitary sewer across the River Raisin's bedrock bottom. As a result, the dams have blocked boats and fish from travelling back up the Raisin from Lake Erie. A local/state/federal partnership was formed to remove the dams, thereby restoring the natural habitat and encouraging greater utilization of the river. Of the 3 million dollar project, the city paid a miniscule \$16,000 up front—the remaining 90 percent of the funds were from federal sources. The DNR, DEQ, and EPA were all involved. In addition, Sterling Island (within the river), had been deteriorating. It has now been stabilized and an education center for children was added.

Contact: Mayor Robert Clark, robert.clark@monroemi.gov

### Saint Ignace

(pop. 2,452)

#### Historic Huron Boardwalk

#### Mackinac County; MML Region 7

The historic city of Saint Ignace, the second most continuously inhabited city in Michigan (after Sault Ste. Marie), wanted to capitalize on the fantastic waterfront location of its downtown. The city put in a fishing pad, splash pad, a walkway to the lighthouse (the city didn't have a lighthouse, so they bought one and had it shipped in), benches, and a boardwalk. Interpretive signs portray the history, lifestyles and industries of the Straits of Mackinac. Open air displays include a rudder from a 1212 ton wooden steamer sunk in the Straits in the spring of 1894, a windlass from the wreckage of a ship which sank off the coast in 1891 and an original Mackinaw boat built in the St. Ignace area around 1899.

Contact: Mayor Paul Grondin, pcg49781@aol.com



Utica's Riverwalk

### Utica

(pop. 4,757)

#### Riverwalk

#### Macomb County; MML Region 1

Utica's downtown is the only one on the Clinton River for a 22-mile stretch. The city wanted to draw attention to its downtown and become a recreation destination. The project includes a hiking/biking trail connecting Memorial Park, the centerpiece of its historic Main Street, with Auburn Road and its unique riverfront; a canoe livery, rain garden, "green" drains, and park enhancements. The overall quality of life is enhanced; children, parents, cyclists, and other groups wrote hundreds of letters in support of the trail. It is part of the 70-mile trail loop in Macomb County. The river used to be a bother; now it is the most important asset the city has. Now people can eat a peaceful lunch by the river, surrounded by nature, and not even know they are in metro-Detroit.

Contact: Mayor Jacqueline K. Noonan, noonanj@comcast.net



## Michigan Association of Mayors

The Michigan Association of Mayors (MAM) is the official nonpartisan organization of Michigan's chief elected officials. Representing over 100 Michigan communities, MAM works to assist the chief elected officials of cities, townships and villages; advance the various interests and operations of communities represented by its members and all Michigan communities; promote cooperation among communities statewide; and advocate local interests at the state and federal level.



**2012-2013**

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