

**REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY COLLABORATION WORK GROUP  
TO THE  
COLLABORATION/COOPERATION SUBCOMMITTEE  
OF THE  
KENT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**



**GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN**

**MARCH 20, 2013**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community Collaboration Work Group (CCWG) was established in November 2011 as a subgroup of the Collaboration/Cooperation Subcommittee of the Kent County Board of Commissioners. Members of this work group include representatives from the Kent County Board of Commissioners, Grand Rapids City Commission, Kent County townships, Kent County cities, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, The Right Place, Inc., and the Non-Profit sector, plus experts in constitutional/municipal law and economics.

The work group was given the following charge:

“To determine (i) the best means to achieve effective and efficient government, and (ii) whether collaborative and/or consolidation efforts will help accomplish those goals for the citizens of Kent County. The subcommittee should consider what efforts have worked in the past, what opportunities are present today, and what consequences (good and bad) are likely to result.

Or, more simply:

To identify, evaluate and recommend opportunities for collaboration and consolidation of public services.

While the municipalities located in Kent County are, by all accounts, far ahead of other areas in Michigan in this area, the belief is that additional opportunities may exist and should be explored.

The 13-member group has been meeting regularly since January 2012. The Work Group spent time:

- Reviewing and understanding the general functions of historical underpinnings of our local government and understanding why Michigan local government is organized the way it is;
- Reviewing the major functions and services provided by cities, townships, and counties (judicial, community health, public safety, public infrastructure, parks and recreation, taxation, property assessment, clerking functions, administration, etc.), and determining what functions might overlap and where opportunities may exist for collaborative efforts or even consolidation; and
- Considering what other models of governance are in existence in other areas of the County, and evaluating the success of those models.

From this study, the Work Group developed a simple but effective test to consider any proposal for change: will one of the three C's (**collaboration, cooperation, or consolidation**) bring about the three E's **efficiency and effectiveness** in government, and **economic development** opportunities for the region).

## Findings

The work group reviewed the major functions and services provided by cities, villages, townships, and counties and developed the following findings:

- **Existing Collaboration:** Kent County and its cities, townships and villages have a commendable record of working together in a variety of cooperative endeavors over many years – a record that is more extensive than many other West Michigan counties and perhaps not equaled elsewhere in the state. More than 100 examples are listed in this report.
- **Like Units of Government:** There are statutory and constitutional provisions which delineate the services and functions that are provided by each level of government. As a result, collaboration and consolidation of services and functions will likely be more successful when the cooperating governmental units are of the same type and therefore provide similar services such as planning and zoning or fire services, which are primarily city and townships functions.
- **Cost Effective or Service Enhancement:** To be approved by community leaders and its citizens, a proposed collaboration needs to demonstrate cost-effectiveness for each of the jurisdictions or an improvement in the quality of public services to be delivered, or both.
- **Public Support:** Collaborations will have the greatest successes only when public support exists for the sharing of services. Even if political leaders demonstrate a potential cost saving from a proposed collaboration, if the proposal is viewed by the public as inconvenient, uncertain or otherwise a poor substitute for the current arrangement, the collaboration will fail.
- **Greatest Impact.** Collaborations will be more successful when efforts are focused on collaboration of public services that have the greatest levels of impact. Look at what services represent the largest parts of a budget and those are where the primary efforts to improve collaboration should be focused.
- **Consolidation of Governments:** Research conducted by national experts suggests that there is no meaningful certainty that the consolidated governments actually performed better economically as a result of the consolidation.
- **Trust and Transparency:** Even among local units of the same type, the accomplishment of partnerships and other cooperative arrangements requires significant time, effort, and trust by local leaders.

Overall, the findings of the work group conclude that that greater public benefits can be achieved more readily by continuing and expanding the already strong record of local government collaboration in the County. If consolidation of units of government is to be considered, then its best chances for success will be (i) in the consolidation of like units of government where functions and public services provided are the same or similar (township with township and city with city), and (ii) where the movement toward consolidation is generated

from within the affected jurisdictions rather than by outside forces, that may be viewed as attempts to force the issue, thus placing the jurisdictions and their constituents in a defensive and perhaps contentious position.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the above review, as well as a review of various literature regarding local government collaboration and consolidation, and presentations by local officials and subject matter experts, the Work Group offers the following observations and recommendations for review and consideration by the Kent County Board of Commissioners, as well as all local governments in Kent County:

- Communities in Kent County maintain an impressive reputation for collaboration and that additional efforts should focus on ventures with verifiable data that demonstrate to citizens how such efforts will bring about effectiveness, efficiency and/or enhanced economic development opportunities for the jurisdictions.
- The Municipal Partnership Act, which was adopted in 2012, is a valuable tool to develop additional service collaborations and/or consolidations. Local governments are encouraged to undertake collaborations within the framework of the Act, and to gain experience in those efforts, such as through joint endeavor agreements or other arrangements, before attempting to pursue the more difficult course of political consolidation.
- Providing law enforcement and fire protection services are perhaps the highest priorities of local governments. For these types of vital public services, there should be collaboration on a regional basis, based on community characteristics most relevant to the funding and efficiency of police and fire departments, such as similar populations to be served, frequency of emergency calls and similarities between existing departments. Adjacent cities may well be good candidates for police and/or fire combinations. Township fire departments could consider joint fire authorities or other cooperative means of pooling their available resources, given the high cost of fire suppression vehicles and apparatus. In addition, various departments can acquire and use standardized equipment and apparatus. Common purchasing procedures for costly fire and police vehicles and equipment can be developed. Training programs can be operated jointly by multiple communities. Standard operating procedures can be considered and adopted by multiple departments.
- As it relates to economic development, communities in Kent County communities should work to standardize policies and procedures, including forms, applications and related submissions, and to establish common definitions for land-use planning and zoning so as to support economic development initiatives.
- Intergovernmental agreements among municipalities can provide for the sharing of services involved in the property tax administration system, including real property assessment, in-field property inspections, and sharing by multiple taxing units in the common defense of Tax Tribunal cases. Further, local communities can continue to work

together to develop commonality in the information technology systems involved in the assessment and taxation of property.

- Establish a task force of subject matter experts in the area of the law, the administration of justice, and court operations convene to make recommendations to the legislature on possible statutory changes that would make the court system more efficient, and provide additional opportunities for collaboration that are currently not possible based on existing laws.

## **Conclusions**

The impressive record of local government collaboration among local units should continue and be expanded to include more of our local governments. These efforts have resulted in countless cost-savings to citizens and immeasurable service improvements. Through the leadership of our elected and appointed officials, the citizens continue to be aptly served by responsive and responsible government.

The County Board of Commissioners should support local units of government in their efforts to promote further collaborations and/or consolidations. Because many collaborative efforts may require Michigan statutory changes or other significant measures, County-wide discussion of the topic with local legislative leaders should develop. Also, appropriate private partners and groups (e.g., the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce) should be engaged to assist with carrying out the collaborative efforts that local governments are willing to explore and/or implement. This approach could lead to improved delivery of public services, greater success in cost-control and other benefits for constituents throughout the County.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In 2011, a group of private citizens made public their interest in pursuing a legislative change which would permit the merging of the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County into one governmental unit. This initiative became known as “One-Kent”. In February 2011, the “One-Kent” coalition presented their proposal to the Kent County Board of Commissioners.

Recognizing that there is public interest in understanding if a County/City merger was feasible, the County, under the leadership of former Board Chair Sandi Frost Steensma, created a Collaboration/Cooperation Subcommittee of County Commissioners to complete the following:

- *Analyze the draft legislation developed by the One Kent Coalition;*
- *Identify and research questions related to the One Kent proposal and their potential impact on Kent County and its citizens; and*
- *Meet with Kent County area legislators to discuss the issue.*

The Subcommittee met and subsequently determined the need to form a working group of the committee, known as the Community Collaboration Work Group (CCWG). The Work Group was comprised of more than just county governmental leaders. It also included governmental leaders from the other local units of government, subject matter experts, and major stakeholders from various sectors within the community. The CCWG was to engage in a broader discussion about the opportunities and consequences of collaborative and/or consolidation efforts. This Report is a summary of the work of the CCWG.

## **A. Background**

Kent County and the cities, townships and villages located in the County have long been leaders and innovators in Michigan in working together to promote and accomplish collaborative activities for better local government and effective public services. This lends itself well to West Michigan's culture of fiscal responsibility and accountability. However, there is a strong conviction that more can be done to promote collaboration and cooperation among our communities, particularly at a time when resources to fund government services have been diminishing.

With this background, members of the Kent County Board of Commissioners brought forward for discussion the question whether public services offered by cities, townships and villages in the County, as well as services provided by the County itself, could be more effectively accomplished through additional collaborative or consolidated arrangements among the various local governments. In their discussions, Board members agreed that it would be useful to review the collaborative arrangements that have already been undertaken among the local governments, and also to evaluate the opportunities for new or greater cooperative measures, with a view toward enhancing (i) effectiveness and efficiency in government, and (ii) promoting a climate favorable toward economic development within the greater West Michigan community.

These discussions led to the formation of a six-member subcommittee of the County Board of Commissioners – the Collaboration/Cooperation Subcommittee. The Subcommittee concluded that a community-based work group should be appointed, and should include elected officials from various governmental units, representatives of the community's business interests, legal and economic experts, and other important stakeholders. The Subcommittee anticipated that the work group would seek the counsel of local government officials, the business community, and other persons with experience and expertise in the subject matter, and devote the time and effort necessary to analyze current cooperative efforts, and develop recommendations for consideration by the County Board.

## **B. The Community Collaboration Work Group**

In November 2011, the Collaboration/Cooperation Subcommittee of the County Board of Commissioners appointed the following members to the Community Collaboration Work Group (CCWG):

Members of the Kent County Board of Commissioners:

- Carol Hennessy
- Dan Koorndyk
- Jim Saalfeld
- Michael Wawee, Jr.

City Commissioners of the City of Grand Rapids

- Rosalynn Bliss
- James White

Township Representative:

- Michael J. DeVries, Township Supervisor, Charter Township of Grand Rapids

Suburban City Representative

- Cathy Vander Meulen, City Manager, City of Walker

Greater Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce Representative:

- Rick Baker, President and CEO, Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce

Economic Expert:

- Dr. Paul Isely – Professor of Economics, Grand Valley State University

Constitutional/Municipal Law Expert:

- James R. Brown, Partner, Mika Meyers Beckett & Jones PLC, Attorneys at Law

Economic Development Representative:

- Birgit Klohs, President and CEO, The Right Place, Inc.

Non-Profit Organization Representative:

- Martha Gonzalez-Cortes – CEO, Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

Kent County Commissioner Jim Saalfeld was elected chairperson, and Grand Rapids City Commissioner Rosalynn Bliss was elected vice chair of the Work Group.

### **C. The Charge to the Work Group Members**

The Collaboration/Cooperation Subcommittee of the County Board of Commissioners charged the members of the Work Group to undertake the following:

“To determine (i) the best means to achieve effective and efficient government, and (ii) whether collaborative and/or consolidation efforts will help accomplish those goals for the citizens of Kent County. The subcommittee should consider what efforts have worked in the past, what opportunities are present today, and what consequences (good and bad) are likely to result.

Or, more simply:

To identify, evaluate and recommend opportunities for collaboration and consolidation of public services.”

As the Work Group performed its tasks and analysis, a simple test was developed to analyze the various public services: Can the “Three C’s” (collaboration, cooperation or consolidation) help bring about the “Three E’s” (effectiveness, efficiency, or economic development)?

### **D. Meetings of the Work Group**

The Community Collaboration Work Group met 16 times between January and December 2012. In addition, the Work Group met in March 2013 to review and finalize this report. The efforts of the Work Group were generally directed at the following topics:

- Understanding the various types and goals of local government collaboration.
- Reviewing and understanding the history and general functions, powers and duties of local governments, including the counties, cities, townships and villages.
- Examining collaborations that have already taken place among our local governments in Kent County.
- Reviewing and understanding the major public services provided by local governments and other public-service entities with a view toward the best opportunities to see more collaboration or consolidation. These core functions included:
  - ◆ Clerk Operations (Elections, Register of Deeds, Vital Records, Circuit Court Clerk)
  - ◆ Taxation (including property assessment and equalization)

- ◆ Public Safety
  - Patrol/investigation/corrections
  - Prosecution of violations
  - Fire suppression/investigation
  - Emergency calls; dispatch of services
  - Emergency medical response
  
- ◆ Judicial
  - District courts
  - Circuit court
  - Specialty courts
  
- ◆ Community Development and Planning
  - Planning and Zoning
  - Building inspection
  - Community development
  - Housing
  - Economic development
  
- ◆ Community Health services
  
- ◆ Parks and Recreation
  
- ◆ Public Infrastructure
  - Streets/traffic control/lighting
  - Sewage collection and treatment
  - Water supply, treatment and distribution
  - Refuse removal/collection
  - Storm water management
  - Cemeteries
  
- ◆ Administrative Services
  - Information technology
  - Legal services
  - Human resources/labor relations
  - Public employee benefits/retirement
  - Budgeting
  - Accounting/auditing
  - Purchasing
  - Facilities management
  - Vehicle maintenance/fleet management
  - Other administrative services

- Examining governmental consolidations that have been attempted in Michigan and undertaken in other states and communities to understand the results, and to evaluate whether the goals of consolidations were met.

- Considering the effect of recent Michigan statutory changes as they relate to collaborative efforts.
- Conclusions and recommendations.

Throughout the completion of its work, the Work Group solicited input and participation from local government officials, staff, and others with experience or expertise in the various subjects under discussion. Those individuals included:

- Daryl J. Delabbio, Administrator/Controller, County of Kent
- Mary Swanson, Assistant County Administrator, County of Kent
- Daniel Ophoff, Corporate Counsel, County of Kent
- Larry Stelma, Sheriff, County of Kent
- Bill Forsyth, Kent County Prosecutor
- Mary Hollinrake, Kent County Clerk/Register of Deeds
- Matthew Woolford, Director, Kent County Bureau of Equalization
- Gregory A. Sundstrom, City Manager, City of Grand Rapids
- Eric DeLong, Deputy City Manager, City of Grand Rapids
- Catherine Mish, City Attorney, City of Grand Rapids
- Kevin Belk, Chief of Police, City of Grand Rapids
- Suzanne Schultz, Planning Director, City of Grand Rapids
- Lauri Parks, City Clerk, City of Grand Rapids
- Brian Donovan, City Manager, City of East Grand Rapids
- Curtis Holt, City Manager, City of Wyoming
- Amy Banninga, State Business Ombudsman, Michigan Economic Development Corporation
- George A. Erickcek, W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research
- Kurt Thurmaier, Professor and Director, Division of Public Administration at Northern Illinois University and Editor, *City-County Consolidation: Promises Made, Promises Kept?*, Georgetown University Press (2010).

Many of the members of the Work Group also made presentations in their respective areas of experience and expertise.

## **E. Reports, Studies and Analyses**

Many reports, studies and analyses relating to the matters that the Work Group considered and discussed were made available during the year long study. This included (i) current examples of collaborative efforts by local governments in the County; (ii) summaries of the responsibilities of local governments and County departments; (iii) materials regarding City of Grand Rapids services; and (iv) a variety of other materials involving local government services in the County and current and potential areas of collaborative and consolidated measures. These included the following materials, among many others:

- *Summary of Mandated, Charter, Ordinance and Discretionary Public Services*, City of Grand Rapids (February 2012).
- *Summary of Major Functions and Services Provided by Local Units of Government in Kent County*, Kent County Administrator's Office and the City of Grand Rapids (February 2012).
- *Streamlining Functions and Services of Kent County and Metropolitan Grand Rapids Cities*, Report No. 357, Citizens Research Council of Michigan, October 2009.
- *Regional Service Delivery Conclusions and Recommendations*, West Michigan Strategic Alliance, November 2011.
- *Legal Barriers to Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreements in Michigan, Land Policy Institute and State and Local Government Programs*, Michigan State University, May 2007.
- *A Bird's Eye View of Michigan Local Government at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Report No. 326, Citizens Research Council of Michigan, August 1999.
- *Survey Report, Consolidation of Local Government Services, Business Leaders for Michigan*, September 2012.
- *Transformation Investment Plan*, City of Grand Rapids, Fiscal Years 2011 – 2016.
- *Summary of Building Inspection Services, Cities, Townships and Villages in Kent County* (2012).
- *Characteristics of Shared Local Government Services*, Kent County Administrator's Office (2012).
- *Memorandum on Planning Department Transformation*, City of Grand Rapids Planning Department, May 2011.
- *Memorandum on Current and Pending Transformations of City Departments and Services*, City of Grand Rapids (2012).
- *Summary of Distribution of District Court Fines*, Kent County Administrator's Office, June 2012.
- *Multi-Jurisdictional Parks Study*, Laycock and Associates for the Kent County Board of Commissioners, September 2012.
- *Correspondence Regarding Funding of Primary and Local Streets in Kent County*, Kent County Road Commission, February 2012.
- *Property Assessment Administration in Kent County*, Kent County Bureau of Equalization, 2010.
- *Memorandum on Issues Related to Regional Collaboration/Consolidation*, Kent County Administrator/Controller, March 2012.

- *Opinions on Intergovernmental Collaboration in Kent County*, Community Research Institute of Grand Valley State University, prepared for Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, September 2012.
- *Identification of the Common Salient Characteristics of Successful Intergovernmental Cooperation and Consolidation of Governmental Services in Kent County*, George A. Erickcek and Brad R. Watts, W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, September 2012.
- *Estimation of the Economic Impact of Government Consolidation in the Core Counties of Metropolitan Areas*, George A. Erickcek and Brian Pittelko, W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, December 2012.
- *Summary Presentation of City-County Consolidations: Promises Made, Promises Kept?*, Kurt Thurmaier, Division of Public Administration, Northern Illinois University, November 2012.
- *Reshaping County Government: A Look at City-County Consolidation*, National Association of Counties, February 2012.
- *Summary of Local Units of Government in Michigan; County Government Overview*, Corporate Counsel, County of Kent (2012).
- *Economic Development Collaboratives*, Michigan Economic Development Corporation (2012).
- *Summary of Kent County Collaborative Efforts – 2012 Update*, Kent County Administrator/Controller, December 2012.

## **F. The Goals of Local Government Collaboration**

Early in its meetings, the Work Group spent time reviewing and understanding the general functions of local governments (counties, cities, townships and villages), as well as the historical underpinnings that explain why Michigan local government is organized the way it is today. Unless these existing functions and historical background are understood, efforts to direct or recommend consolidation or collaboration may be misplaced or misguided.

As the Work Group reviewed successful collaborations among local governments in Kent County, it also developed a brief working hypothesis by which to test whether a proposed collaboration is likely to bring good and enduring results for the citizens of the participating communities: The three E's – efficiency, effectiveness, and economic development.

1. Will the proposed collaboration result in more efficient local government?
2. Will the proposed collaboration offer more effective governance and public services?
3. Will the proposed collaboration lead to gains in economic development for the communities and their citizens?

Using the three E's hypothesis as a starting-point, the Work Group developed some conclusions that illustrate the value of local government collaboration and which can be used to evaluate whether a proposed collaboration is likely to be worthwhile:

- Working Together for Better Local Government. The types and number of local governments in Kent County and throughout the State are a strength, not a weakness, for they have enabled the people to choose the form and extent of governance for the place where they decide to live, work and raise their families. But local governments cannot effectively carry out their duties without regard to others. County government affects city, township and village governments. Adjacent or nearby townships, villages and cities often have common concerns that should be addressed in similar ways. The cost of government has necessarily increased as State laws have assigned more responsibilities to county boards of commissioners and city councils/commissions, township boards and village councils. To meet these challenges, as well as to provide the services that citizens expect, local governments should work together whenever better government will result.
- Collaborating for Economy and Efficiency. Collaboration can result in more efficient local government. Government that is more efficient will cost less for taxpayers. If one community has the expertise and the resources to provide a public service for itself and two or three other communities, and if all of them can share the cost and the service can be provided efficiently, that creates an economy of scale that benefits all of them.
- Evaluating Current Services and Procedures. Efforts toward collaboration help communities evaluate their current costs, their efficiencies in operations and the quality of the services they provide. Communities can collectively ask themselves: Why do we do these things this way? Is there a better way to deliver this service to our citizens? Should we provide some additional service to our citizens, as our neighboring community does, and if so, how can we best accomplish this? Can we work out a joint or shared arrangement with our neighboring communities that will save the taxpayers' money and still provide good service – or even better service – to our citizens?
- Building Trust and Relationships. Collaborative efforts involve engagement with other communities. If successful, these efforts result in the development of trusting and continuing relationships that, over time, will pay greater and greater dividends in better government and more effective public services.
- Learning from Other Communities. Collaboration helps to educate each participant on how the others are addressing common problems or providing similar services. This can lead to improvement in the work and procedures of all parties.
- Sharing Information and Experiences. Collaboration leads to the sharing of information and experiences that perhaps would otherwise not be known to the other party. Knowing how another community has addressed and solved a problem is invaluable to a community faced with the same or similar problem.

- Confronting the Need to Change. Collaboration helps community leaders to confront the need to change the methods and approaches they have relied on in the past. If they learn that leaders in other communities have developed a different or better way of financing or delivering a service, they can take advantage of that knowledge and improve how they address the same service in their own community.
- Creating a Record of Success. Once established, habits of community collaboration will lead over time to more and more improvements in governance and public services, perhaps well beyond the scope of the initial efforts. Successful collaborations may take a long time to develop and be implemented, but as trust and confidence grow among community leaders, they will tend to keep working toward common solutions, rather than tiring of the effort. Success will promote success; some failures may occur, but if good working relationships have developed among the collaborating leaders, particular setbacks need not prevent further cooperation.
- Gaining in Economic Development. If local government collaboration leads to efficient governance and effective public services, gains in local economic development are more likely to arise. Business and industry tend to locate their facilities in communities in which local government policies and practices assist, rather than hinder, business and industry through uniform regulations, timely approval procedures, efficient resolution of problems and complaints and the like. New or expanded manufacturing facilities lead to greater employment which, in turn, benefits other sectors of the local economy, including housing and commercial development, and leads as well to increases in the property tax base.

## II. LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN MICHIGAN – SOME HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Kent County, like all of Michigan's 83 counties, includes three types of general-purpose local governments: cities, townships and villages. The County has nine cities, 21 townships and five villages.<sup>1</sup> In addition, there are a number of special-purpose public entities and public authorities including the Road Commission, network180 (community mental health agency), Kent District Library, etc. that provide specific public services.

Local government in Kent County follows the same pattern of city, township and village government that is the same in all counties in the state. Michigan was settled mostly by New Yorkers, Pennsylvanians and New Englanders, and local governments followed the patterns developed in those states and have been formalized in our constitutions and laws, beginning even before statehood. Throughout our state's history, Michigan residents have approved four constitutions, but the basic law has never departed from the tradition of a choice of local governments, each designed to provide the types and scope of public services most needed or desired by the people affected.<sup>2</sup>

Township government was established in Michigan, including in Kent County, even before statehood, as a result of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, whereby the U.S. Congress established the initial form of government for the territory that eventually became the states of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and part of Minnesota.<sup>3</sup> Michigan's first constitution, in 1835, provided for the continuance of "all county and township officers" until the Legislature adopted laws for the holding of elections.<sup>4</sup> The first laws of many to establish, expand and regulate the township form of local government were codified in the Michigan Revised Statutes of 1846.

Over time, as townships or portions of townships grew in population, citizens needing or wanting more comprehensive services from their local governments joined together to form cities and villages, much as residents of the Eastern Seaboard had done under similar

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<sup>1</sup> The cities are Cedar Springs, East Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Lowell, Rockford, Walker and Wyoming. The townships are Ada, Algoma, Alpine, Bowne, Byron, Caledonia, Cannon, Cascade, Courtland, Gaines, Grand Rapids, Grattan, Lowell, Nelson, Oakfield, Plainfield, Solon, Sparta, Spencer, Tyrone and Vergennes. The villages are Caledonia, Casnovia (partly in Muskegon County), Kent City, Sand Lake (partly in Montcalm County) and Sparta.

Some local residential and commercial areas in the County are sometimes called "villages," but they are not incorporated, and are governed by the township board of the township in which they are located. These include Ada, Alaska, Alto, Byron Center, Cannonsburg, Cascade, Comstock Park, Cutlerville, Dutton and Grattan.

<sup>2</sup> The people of Michigan adopted constitutions in 1835, 1850, 1908 and 1963.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the City of Grand Rapids began as a village in 1838, and was organized from part of the Township of Kent (after 1842, known as the Township of Grand Rapids) and part of the Township of Walker. Baxter, *History of the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan*, (1891).

<sup>4</sup> The 1835 constitution included provisions for the first election of state officers and in particular specified that the election returns "of the several townships in the district composed of the unorganized counties of Ottawa, Ionia, Kent and Clinton shall be made to the clerk of the township of Kent, in said district, and said township clerk shall perform the same duties, as by the existing laws of the territory devolve upon the clerks of the several counties and similar cases."

circumstances. For most of the 19th Century there were no Michigan laws mandating how cities and villages could be formed, so throughout that period a separate act of the State Legislature was required for the establishment of each city and village.

This somewhat inconvenient method of establishing cities and villages was remedied for villages by the adoption of the General Law Village Act in 1895 and the Home Rule Village Act in 1909.<sup>5</sup> For cities, statutes of general application were adopted as well, beginning with the Fourth Class Cities Act in 1895 and continuing with the Home Rule Cities Act in 1909.<sup>6</sup> In 1947, the Charter Township Act was adopted.<sup>7</sup>

The Constitution of 1963 continued and enlarged Michigan's fundamental law concerning counties, cities, townships and villages, but also authorized the Legislature to adopt laws providing for "additional forms" of local government and for a variety of arrangements whereby local governments might join together to render services, to share costs and responsibilities, to transfer functions and responsibilities, and to otherwise cooperate with one another. Section 27 of Article VII of the Constitution provides:

**§ 27. Metropolitan governments and authorities**

Sec. 27. Notwithstanding any other provisions of this constitution the legislature may establish in metropolitan areas additional forms of government or authorities with powers, duties and jurisdictions as the legislature shall provide. Wherever possible, such additional forms of government or authorities shall be designed to perform multipurpose functions rather than a single function.

Section 28 of Article VII of the Constitution provides in part:

**§ 28. Governmental functions and powers; joint administration, costs and credits, transfers**

Sec. 28. The legislature by general law shall authorize two or more counties, townships, cities, villages or districts, or any combination thereof among other things to: enter into contractual undertakings or agreements with one another or with the state or with any combination thereof for the joint administration of any of the functions or powers which each would have the power to perform separately; share the costs and responsibilities of functions and services with one another or with the state or with any combination thereof which each would have the power to perform separately; transfer functions or responsibilities to one another or any combination thereof upon the consent of each unit involved; cooperate with one another and with state government; lend their credit to one another or any combination thereof as provided by law in connection with any authorized publicly owned undertaking.

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<sup>5</sup> Michigan Compiled Laws (MCL) 61.1 et seq.; MCL 78.1 et seq.

<sup>6</sup> MCL 81.1 et seq.; 117.1 et seq.

<sup>7</sup> MCL 42.1 et seq.

### III. POWERS AND DUTIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN MICHIGAN

As noted in Part II, the division of municipal powers and responsibilities between counties, cities, townships and villages is long established in both the Constitution – the fundamental law of the state, – and in the laws as adopted and amended by the Legislature during the 175 years that Michigan has been a state. Yet, while local governments originally provided only the most basic public services (e.g., elections, property taxation, law enforcement and fire suppression), our state laws have evolved remarkably well over the years to provide for the type and scope of local government services that the people in their respective communities have found most appropriate for their circumstances.

The following are examples of the current division of authority among local governments regarding some basic public services:

- Assessment of real property for ad valorem property tax is mandated to be done by local units, but equalization, to confirm the accuracy of assessments, is mandated to be performed by counties.
- Fire protection and suppression is a non-mandated service that is provided by local units, but in Kent County, as permitted by statute, a Fire Commission has been established to allow the County to assist local units in acquiring fire suppression apparatus, and offers a centralized procurement system for the benefit of the 17 local fire departments which participate.
- The County Sheriff is mandated to patrol County roads and to perform other law enforcement services. Most cities and villages, have their own police departments. Townships can contract with the County Sheriff for a greater level of police protection within their territory.
- The County Sheriff is mandated to operate a jail to house violators of state laws. In Kent County, the Sheriff also houses individuals charged with violations of local ordinances – which is generally a local responsibility – pursuant to an agreement between the County and the local units.
- The County Prosecuting Attorney prosecutes violations of state laws; local units enforce and prosecute their own ordinances.
- In Kent County, 911-call taking has been consolidated through the efforts of the Kent County Dispatch Authority. While the dispatching of 911 calls has also been consolidated, it has been done so through intergovernmental agreement between the participating entities.
- The jurisdiction and territory of the courts, including the district courts and the circuit court, is mandated by state law. The County is mandated to fund and operate the Circuit and Probate Courts, whose jurisdiction is County-wide.
- City and Township Clerks are elected or appointed by statute and are responsible for administering elections and conducting other administrative duties such as serving as the official record keeper for a community. While similar in name, County Clerks perform different duties than City Clerks. Although County Clerks do serve as the official record keeper for the County, the Kent County Clerk is

also responsible for a number of public record duties including acting as the Register of Deeds, Maintaining Vital Records (including birth, death, and marriage certificates), and functioning as the Clerk of the Circuit Court. In addition, the County Clerk is responsible for creating the ballot and overseeing the election process in accordance with State law, a separate function than the election functions provided by City Clerks.

- Property tax billing and collection is a mandated service that is completed by the city or township treasurer. The County has established a delinquent tax revolving fund which is funded through interest, penalties and fees. As a result, local units do not have to pursue their delinquent taxpayers, since this is done by the County.
- Land use planning and zoning and enforcement of construction codes are carried out by cities, villages, and townships. All local units have the same construction code, which is established by state law. In Kent County, planning and zoning are not carried out at the county level, though some counties do so.
- Cities and villages carry out their own street construction and maintenance, though some contract with the County Road Commission for maintenance purposes. The County Road Commission constructs and maintains County and local roads in the townships; in Kent County, the cost of selected road construction and maintenance is sometimes shared between the Road Commission and the township involved.
- Sanitary sewage collection and treatment and water supply and distribution is carried out by the larger cities in the County, and they serve other units outside their boundaries. There is a multi-municipal sewer authority in the northern part of the County, and there are other, smaller sanitary sewer systems and water supply systems serving limited areas.
- Under the Water and Sanitary Sewer Service Agreements between the City of Grand Rapids and its water and sanitary sewer system customer communities (the Cities of Walker, Kentwood, East Grand Rapids, the Townships of Ada, Cascade, and Grand Rapids in Kent County and Wright and Tallmadge Townships in Ottawa County), a Utility Advisory Board is established, with members appointed by the City of each and the customer communities. The Board meets periodically to review operations of the Systems, proposed capital improvements, utility master plans and other matters pertaining to the operations, expansion and budgeting of the water and sanitary sewer systems.
- Cities, townships and villages adopt and enforce ordinances within the scope of their authority as granted by law and by charter, in the case of local units that have charters. The County has a limited number of ordinances, as permitted by state law, including those pertaining to County parks, the County Housing Commission, the County airport, the hotel/motel tax, solid waste management, animal control and other matters of County-wide regulation.
- The County Drain Commissioner, an elected official, establishes and regulates County drains and establishes and maintains inland lake levels, as authorized by state law. Cities and villages establish and maintain their own public drainage

facilities, except to the extent included in a drain within the jurisdiction of the County Drain Commissioner.

- The establishment and operation of parks and other recreation programming is a non-mandated service provided by many local units within the County. The County also maintains parks and recreational areas, and natural areas.
- Public health services are carried out by the County Health Department, as mandated by state law.

The above is only a very partial summary of some of the basic divisions of public services among Kent County and its local governments. As will be noted in the next Part of this Report, however, these and many other public services have been the subject of consolidation, collaboration and other cooperative efforts between the various local governments including Kent County.

#### **IV. SOME CURRENT COLLABORATIONS BY KENT COUNTY AND ITS CITIES, TOWNSHIPS AND VILLAGES**

In Part II of this Report, it was noted that the Michigan Constitution has already authorized the State Legislature to adopt laws that enable local governments to enter into cooperative arrangements to carry out any public endeavors or services that each unit could carry out separately. Even before this specific authorization in the current constitution, the Legislature adopted many statutes authorizing municipalities to act jointly, by contract or by establishing separate public authorities, to carry out a variety of public services. Among others, these statutes permit joint or cooperative endeavors for public parks and recreational facilities, water supply systems, sanitary sewer systems, solid waste management systems, public markets, mutual fire and police assistance, building authorities, pooling of investments, public transportation systems and many other types of specific public services.

There are also several general-purpose statutes, some adopted or amended only recently, which authorize Michigan local governments to join or act together in their municipal responsibilities and to provide services for their constituents. These statutes, which provide broad authority for municipal cooperation, include the following:

- Urban Cooperation Act, Public Act 7 of 1967, MCL 124.501, et seq.
- Intergovernmental Transfer of Functions and Responsibilities, Public Act 8 of 1967, as amended by Act 262 of 2011, MCL 124.531, et seq.
- Intergovernmental Contracts Between Municipal Corporations, Public Act 35 of 1951, MCL 124.1, et seq.
- Intermunicipality Committees Act, Public Act 200 of 1957, as amended by Act 236 of 2010, MCL 123.631, et seq.
- Conditional Transfer of Property Act, Public Act 425 of 1984, as amended by Act 114 of 2011, MCL 124.21, et seq.
- Municipal Emergency Services Act, Public Act 57 of 1988, as amended by Act 261 of 2011, MCL 124.601, et seq.
- Metropolitan Councils Act, Public Act 292 of 1989, MCL 124.651, et seq.
- Municipal Partnership Act, Public Act 258 of 2011, MCL 124.111, et seq.

Having considered powers and duties of local government, the Work Group next reviewed what collaborative efforts have worked in the Kent County communities in the past, in order to better understand what has worked in the past so as to assist in making recommendations for additional collaborative opportunities.

More than other areas of the state, Kent County, as well as the cities, townships and villages within the County, has a history of taking advantage of existing laws and opportunities to work together to provide more effective or efficient public services, and to promote economic development, by informal cooperation, by intergovernmental contract, or by establishing joint authorities and other cooperative entities. The Work Group reviewed these past efforts, and particularly the successful ones, to be able to identify and make recommendations for additional projects

To that end, the Work Group received information on many examples of existing local government collaboration and cooperation, including the following, among others:

- Kent County and the cities of Grand Rapids, Wyoming, Walker and Grandville established the County Dispatch Authority, which seeks to improve the delivery of 911 emergency dispatch services throughout the County.
- The Kent County Sheriff's Department collaborates with local units of government and local police departments to share the cost and use of various law enforcement, investigative and crime prevention programs. The Sheriff has agreements with several townships and school districts to provide enhanced patrol services. A portion of the Gaines Township Hall is leased for the sheriff's department south substation. In addition, the Sheriff, working with three townships (Ada, Cascade and Grand Rapids Township), formed the East Precinct whereby the Sheriff provides consolidated police coverage for the three townships.
- Kent County and Grand Rapids Charter Township collaborated on the location and design of the new 63rd District courthouse, located in a local governmental center which includes the Township Hall, fire station and a Township park.
- The Kent County Clerk prepares primary and general election ballots for all municipalities and assists the clerks of local units in the bulk purchasing of election supplies.
- The Kent County Fire Commission assists many local fire departments in the purchase of fire suppression apparatus and vehicles. The Commission coordinates the joint purchasing of insurance, supplies and other needs of the participating local fire departments.
- Kent County established and operates an online reverse auction bidding process for many commodities being purchased by the County. To date a total of 18 local governmental units have participated.
- Cascade Township provides building inspection services by agreement with several other communities including Grand Rapids Charter Township, Lowell Township, Ada Township, Vergennes Township and the City of East Grand Rapids, among others.
- The North Kent Sewer Authority was established by Plainfield, Cannon, Alpine and Courtland Townships and the City of Rockford to provide sanitary sewage treatment for those communities.
- Byron Township and Gaines Township jointly established and operate the Byron-Gaines Utility Authority.
- The Cutlerville Fire Department is a joint fire department established and operated by Byron Township and Gaines Township.
- Grand Valley Metropolitan Council was established in 1990 as the first and only metropolitan council in Michigan. The metro council was originally formed by 13 members, including Kent County, the City of Grand Rapids and other Kent County local governments, and is now comprised of 34 units of local government in Kent, Ottawa, Allegan, Barry, Ionia and Montcalm Counties. The Council participates in

transportation planning and serves as a forum for the discussion of regional issues of importance to the participating units.

- The Kent County Treasurer has established and operates a pooled investment program whereby local units can pool their funds with funds of the County, to obtain more favorable rates of return. Approximately 20 local units and several separate authorities participate in the investment pool, including the City of Grand Rapids.
- The Kent County Parks Department regularly collaborates with local units of government and outside organizations in the development of park and recreation facilities throughout the County. Recent acquisitions of park and recreation lands have been accomplished in Alpine Township, Caledonia Township, Cannon Township, Gaines Township and Grand Rapids Charter Township.
- Grand Rapids Charter Township and Plainfield Charter Township have established a Corridor Improvement Authority for that part of Plainfield Avenue located in those townships.
- Byron Township and Gaines Township have established a Corridor Improvement Authority covering that part of Division Avenue located in those townships.
- Virtually all of the local fire departments in Kent County have entered into agreements providing for mutual assistance to each other in the case of fire emergencies.
- Several Kent County communities have established joint fire departments. Among others, these include Nelson Township and the Village of Sand Lake and the Village of Sparta and the Township of Sparta. The Caledonia Township Fire Department serves the Village of Caledonia as well.
- Several local units have engaged private firms to carry out construction code inspections, either for all or some of the required inspections. These include the Cities of Cedar Springs, Grandville, Walker and Rockford, the Townships of Bowne, Byron, Algoma, Cannon and Courtland and the Villages of Caledonia and Casnovia.
- Several local units arrange with each other for construction code inspections or share the services of part time inspectors. These include the Villages of Sand Lake and Sparta and the Townships of Byron, Courtland, Gaines, Grattan, Nelson, Solon, Sparta, Spencer and Tyrone, either for certain types of inspections (including plumbing, mechanical and electrical) or for all required building inspections.
- Kent County has established a Purchase of Development Rights Program, to make possible the purchase of development rights as a means of preserving farmland. The County funds the program administration, and has also appropriated some funding toward the purchases. In addition to the County, other communities participate in funding as well, including the townships of Ada, Alpine, Bowne, Caledonia, Grattan, Nelson, Sparta and Vergennes.
- The cities of Grand Rapids, Wyoming and Kentwood, Cascade Township, Kent County, Muskegon County, the City of Muskegon and Muskegon Township entered into an interlocal agreement in 2012 to establish the West Michigan Economic

Partnership, an economic development authority for the marketing and economic development of the region.

- The City of Grand Rapids and Kent County established and have operated for many years a City-County Building Authority. The Authority serves as a financing mechanism for many significant public improvement projects, including the DeVos Place Convention Center, the VanAndel Museum Center, parking structures and other facilities.
- The City of Grand Rapids, Kent County and the Public Museum of Grand Rapids jointly established the Community Archives and Research Center, located in the former Grand Rapids Public Museum building.
- The 63rd District Court and the chiefs of police of the Cities of Rockford and Cedar Springs and the Villages of Sparta and Sand Lake jointly developed procedures for the more efficient handling of citations, appearance tickets, police reports and other required documents used in criminal proceedings in the district court.
- Kent County operates a municipal solid waste landfill, the South Kent Landfill, located in Byron Township. Through its Department of Public Works, the County has agreements with adjacent counties for the disposal of solid waste.
- Several communities, including the Cities of Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Walker and Wyoming and several of the townships and villages in the County have entered into so-called Act 425 agreements, whereby one unit of government transfers specific parcels of land to an adjacent local unit, for selective purposes, such as for the providing of utilities, zoning for particular projects and the like.
- The County Bureau of Equalization assisted Alpine Township and Grand Rapids Charter Township in reappraisal of all commercial and industrial property in the townships in 2008 and 2009.
- The Kent County Drain Commissioner has worked with several local units to update the storm water master plans, and Kent County has participated in the cost thereof. Thus far, the townships of Algoma, Alpine, Byron, Caledonia, Cannon, Cascade, Gaines, Grand Rapids and Plainfield and the Cities of Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Walker and Wyoming have had their storm water master plans updated through this cooperative program.
- Kent County sponsored the preparation of a model storm water ordinance, through the auspices of the County Drain Commissioner. To date, 25 local units of government within the County have adopted storm water control ordinances based on the model ordinance.
- Kent County provides emergency management services for all of the cities, townships and villages within the County. Such services include planning and training for region-wide and other emergencies, citizen preparedness, communications facilities and other aspects of emergencies involving area-wide security.
- Kent County, through its central services division, provides printing services for the cities of Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Grandville and Rockford, the Village of Sparta,

the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority and other local units and authorities.

- Kent County and the cities of Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Wyoming, Grandville, Kentwood and Walker created a partnership for the waste-to-energy facility. Refuse from these and other communities is burned to produce steam for electricity sold to Consumers Energy Company.
- The Interurban Transit Partnership, also known as The Rapid, is an independent authority that provides bus services for the major urban areas of the County, including the Cities of Grand Rapids, Wyoming, Kentwood, Grandville and Walker. The municipalities in the service area are represented on a 15-member Board of Directors.
- Kent County developed the Kent Trails non-motorized trail system in cooperation with the Cities of Grand Rapids, Walker and Wyoming and Byron Township. Recently, further funding has been approved for the continued improvement and development of the Kent Trails system.
- Grand Rapids Charter Township and East Grand Rapids share the funding and maintenance for the Reeds Lake Bike Trail.
- The Kent District Library provides public library services for nearly all of the local governments in the County, except the Cities of Grand Rapids and Cedar Springs, the Townships of Solon and Sparta and the Village of Sparta.
- Emergency management by the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County has now been consolidated entirely with Kent County.
- The City of Grand Rapids has established and maintains a sanitary sewer collection and treatment system and a water supply system and, by contract, the City provides sanitary sewer service and water supply service to the Cities of Walker, Kentwood and East Grand Rapids and the Townships of Ada, Cascade and Grand Rapids, and also Tallmadge Township in Ottawa County.
- Kent County cooperates with the taxing units in the County by reimbursing them annually for all of their delinquent real property taxes. The County also benefits by collecting the accumulated interest and penalties on the delinquent amounts and ultimately recovers a high percentage of delinquent taxes from the taxpayers.
- Several communities have worked together to adopt uniform ordinances on particular matters. The Townships of Ada, Cascade and Grand Rapids recently adopted an identical ordinance regulating door-to-door solicitations.
- The City of Grand Rapids and the Cities of Lansing and Flint have entered into agreements whereby a third party processes the paper city income tax returns received by each community. This collaboration by agreement demonstrates that successful local government collaboration need not necessarily be limited to communities that are adjacent to each other, nor even in the same county.

A comprehensive list of local government collaborations, recently compiled by the office of the Kent County Administrator/Controller is attached as an Appendix to this Report.

## **V. SOME PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL LOCAL GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION**

After reviewing the many examples of local government collaboration in Kent County, and on evaluating several studies and analyses made available to us, the Work Group distilled some principles it deemed important for successful and enduring collaborations among local governments.

### **A. Local Governments Working Together in Kent County**

Kent County and its cities, townships and villages have a commendable record of working together in a variety of cooperative endeavors over many years – a record that is more extensive than many other West Michigan counties and perhaps not equaled elsewhere in the state. We are fortunate that many of our local legislative leaders – county commissioners, city commissioners, township board members and village council members – have developed the trust and working relationships that have enabled them and their municipal staffs to develop better ways of delivering public services, by joining together to accomplish objectives for their constituents that could not be separately carried out as well. In addition, many of our professional administrators/managers have long-standing professional relationships as a result of their historically stable tenures in our communities. As demonstrated in Section IV, some of these cooperative efforts have been formalized through agreements or separate authorities, while others have developed only informally over time, but most of the attempts seem to have turned out well, and many have continued for years, even decades.

### **B. Local Governmental Structures**

1. Collaborations will likely be more successful when the cooperating governmental units are of the same type, or at least have some commonality in their funding sources for the types of services that they provide. In general, townships can collaborate more easily with other townships, rather than with cities; villages and the townships in which they are located can often collaborate; and adjacent cities can best cooperate with each other when providing similar services to their joint populations. In fact, as the Work Group reviewed the core public services, it became apparent that the services provided by one type of unit of government (e.g. a city, township or county) are often very different from the services provided by another unit of government. A good example was the comparison of the Grand Rapids City Clerk to the Kent County Clerk. Despite the similarity in name, the functions of these two positions are vastly different (e.g., most of the County Clerk's functions involved court clerk functions and management and vital records – none of which are performed by the City Clerk). The major area of commonality was elections. But even there, differences were noted. While both the City and County Clerk have responsibilities for elections, the City Clerk has administrative and oversight responsibilities for only City elections, whereas the County Clerk does not administer local elections (which are administered by the respective township clerks), but the County Clerk prepares ballots used in the townships for county, state and national elections, canvasses and certifies, through the County Election Commission, all local election results and cooperates with

local units in purchasing election supplies and assisting in the training of election workers. Finally, in Kent County, the Clerk also serves as the Register of Deeds. As a result, the functions proposed to be combined are very different and the opportunities for collaboration or consolidation are very likely to be unavailing.

2. Kent County has been a leader in developing cooperative arrangements between itself and the cities (especially Grand Rapids) and townships within its borders. The consolidation of functions into the Central Dispatch Authority is a good example, for it involves a service that is equally important throughout the county, and benefitted all units of government by replacing multiple dispatch systems with a single provider.

3. Collaborations will generally be more successful if the local units already have some commonality in the way each currently provides the service at issue. For example, if each of two cities provides fire protection with a dedicated fire department, then a combined fire department is more likely to be accomplished than if one city has a dedicated fire department while the other city has combined its police and fire departments into a single “public service” department. The same principle applies to similarity of internal municipal operations, such as accounting procedures, information technology and computer systems.

### **C. Specific Public Services and Projects**

1. It is generally easier to combine internal or “back-room” functions rather than services rendered directly to the public. These include such things as joint personnel training programs, shared purchasing arrangements, shared building and site maintenance, multiple municipal offices in a jointly-owned building and many others.

2. One advantage of a cooperative venture is that it may provide a level of expertise not otherwise available to one or more of the parties, or at least not available at reasonable cost. Cascade Township provides building inspection services, by contract, for several other municipalities. In doing so, Cascade Township employs more building inspectors than it would need for its own inspection needs, but the additional cost is covered by the fees received from the contracting municipalities, and those units find the cost and approach to be more feasible than if each jurisdiction had to separately establish and fund its own staff of building inspectors.

3. A collaborative venture may also be accomplished if the activity would involve capital investment greater than could be undertaken by the parties individually. The Interurban Transit Partnership (“The Rapid”) is an example of such a project.

4. To be approved by community leaders and its citizens, a proposed collaboration needs to demonstrate cost-effectiveness for each of the jurisdictions or an improvement in the quality of public services to be delivered, or both. One study has reported that, based on a

review of collaborations in Kent County, the benefit of improved services to constituents seems more important to community leaders than projected cost savings.<sup>8</sup>

#### **D. Leadership, Communication, Transparency and Trust**

1. Even among local units of the same type, the accomplishment of partnerships and other cooperative arrangements requires significant time, effort, and trust by local leaders. Many discussions and meetings are needed. Much information, clearly defined objectives, and expected results need to be shared. Collaborative efforts do not come easy, but the effort involved tends to make the parties work hard to achieve success, and often leads to other collaborative opportunities due to the trust that is fostered and the appreciation of common goals.

2. It is important that local leaders appreciate the need to serve the residents of areas that are not necessarily limited by their own municipal boundaries. Thus, some township boards and village councils have worked together to build and occupy a single building for their governmental offices, fire stations, libraries or the like. The City of Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Charter Township and Plainfield Charter Township each adopted the same special zoning provisions for a portion of the lands in their respective communities on either side of East Beltline Avenue (the North East Beltline Overlay District).

3. Once a cooperative arrangement has worked successfully, the local units are likely to explore other partnerships or joint arrangements. On the contrary, a hastily developed collaboration that has not produced the hoped-for benefits is likely to slow or prevent other cooperative attempts.

4. Strong yet inclusive leadership by one of the governmental partners is often essential in order to keep a project moving forward and to assist others in appreciating the value and benefits of the undertaking.

5. Public support is an essential element for a successful collaboration that involves the sharing of a service or some other governmental function that directly impacts a community's citizens. Even if political leaders can demonstrate a potential cost saving from a proposed collaboration, if the resulting method or procedures for providing the service are viewed by the public as more inconvenient, less certain or otherwise a poor substitute for the current arrangements, the collaboration may prove to be problematic; if a public vote is required, the proposal may fail.

6. Successful collaborations promote consistency and transparency among the municipal partners. Procedures, policies and ordinance provisions can become more similar, even uniform, among local units. This, in turn, makes local government more transparent and predictable. When multiple units adopt similar procedures and regulations, potential applicants

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<sup>8</sup> Erickcek and Watts, *Identification of the Common Salient Characteristics of Successful Intergovernmental Cooperation and Consolidation of Governmental Services in Kent County* (2012).

can, for example, more easily adapt to local approval requirements when seeking locations for new or expanded facilities.

7. As the costs of local government increase, local government leaders must initiate discussions with their counterparts in other local units to explore ways to continue providing services to their constituents, but in cooperative arrangements. For example, as land and building development has declined in recent years, the volume of staff work in some communities has declined, such as in zoning administration, building inspection and the like. These situations present opportunities for the sharing of zoning and inspection personnel and development of economies of scale.

## **VI. CONSOLIDATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS**

### **A. Types of Consolidations Considered**

In its charge to our Work Group, the Board of Commissioners included a request that it consider the question whether “consolidation” of local governments would “help accomplish... the goals [of] effective and efficient government... for the citizens of Kent County.” The Work Group was also asked to consider whether, and to what extent, local government consolidation has “worked in the past” and “what consequences (good and bad) are likely to result” from consolidation.

In the context of the County Board’s charge, the Work Group interpreted the consolidation of local governments to mean (1) the combining, merger or other amalgamation of two or more local units of government into a new unit of government, either of the same type as one of the combining units, or into a form different from either of them; or (2) the dissolution of one community into another existing community, thus resulting in the elimination of one unit of government in favor of another.<sup>9</sup> These changes in municipal form are to be distinguished from “collaboration,” in which local governments share or transfer the responsibility to provide certain public services, but do not cease to exist or alter their form of governance.

### **B. Local Government Consolidation in Michigan**

Perhaps because of the long continuance of incorporated villages and cities in the state, there have been very few attempts to consolidate or dissolve units of government, despite the availability of legal procedures to do so.<sup>10</sup> In Kent County, there have been no proceedings for

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<sup>9</sup> In Kent County, the incorporated local governments date from the 19th Century, including the five villages (Caledonia, Kent City, Ravenna, Sand Lake and Sparta). Five of the nine cities in the County were established originally as villages: Grand Rapids in 1850; Lowell in 1861; Rockford in 1866; Cedar Springs in 1871; and East Grand Rapids in 1891. The other four cities were incorporated more recently, directly from the surrounding townships: Grandville in 1933; Wyoming in 1959; Walker in 1962; and Kentwood in 1967.

<sup>10</sup> A general law village, for example, may be dissolved and thereby be governed by the township board of its surrounding township, by a petition and local election procedure. A petition for dissolution, signed by at least 15% of the registered electors of the village, is submitted to the clerk of the surrounding township. If the petition is found sufficient, a public vote on the question of dissolution is held; for dissolution to occur, there must be an affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of the electors voting on the question. MCL 74.18a. Under the Home Rule Village Act, two or more home rule villages may be consolidated into one village by, first, a petition signed by at least 1% of the population of the affected units, but at least 100 persons. The petition is submitted to the County Board of Commissioners; if it is sufficient, an election on the consolidation is held, and the vote thereon must pass by a majority of the electors voting thereon. MCL 78.5. Proceedings to consolidate cities and townships and/or cities and villages are initiated by a petition to the State Boundary Commission, signed by at least five percent of the residents of the affected municipalities. After a public hearing, the Commission may approve or deny the petition or may revise the territory proposed to be consolidated. An order of the Commission approving the consolidation is final after 45 days unless within that time a petition is submitted for a referendum on the consolidation, signed by at least five percent of the registered electors of the municipalities proposed to be consolidated. If a referendum is

the dissolution of a city or for the consolidation of a city with some other governmental unit. To our knowledge, there have been only two attempts to dissolve a Kent County village, both of which were defeated by the electorate. In the 1990s, the electors of Caledonia, a general law village, voted on a proposal to dissolve the Village government and thereby cause the Village to become a part of the surrounding Caledonia Township for all purposes, under the governance of the Township Board. The proposal failed to pass by the required two-thirds vote. In August of 2010, the electors of Sand Lake, also a general law village, voted on a proposal to dissolve the village into the surrounding Nelson Township. In this instance also, the proposal failed to pass by the necessary two-thirds majority.

The most recent attempt to consolidate local units of government is still in progress. A sufficient petition was submitted to the State Boundary Commission for the consolidation of Saugatuck Township, the City of Saugatuck and the adjacent City of the Village of Douglas, in Allegan County, whereby the two cities would be consolidated into Saugatuck Township. In December 2012, the Boundary Commission entered an order approving the consolidation of the two cities but rejecting the inclusion of Saugatuck Township. In mid-February of 2013, a petition with more than the required number of signatures of residents of both Saugatuck and Douglas was submitted, calling for a referendum on whether the communities should be consolidated. Once the signatures are verified by the local clerks, it is expected that the State Boundary Commission will order a referendum election in August or November, 2013. The result of the referendum election will determine whether Saugatuck and Douglas will be consolidated into a single city.<sup>11</sup>

It seems significant that so few municipal consolidations have occurred in Michigan, and that even fewer have succeeded. The legal procedures for such consolidations have been available since at least 1895, for general law villages, and since 1909 for cities and home rule villages. The consolidation procedures under the State Boundary Commission Act have been available since 1968. Perhaps the public-cost savings sometimes advanced as grounds for consolidation have, upon further investigation, proved to be not significant or even illusory. Indeed, the mayors of both Saugatuck and Douglas have expressed doubts that the pending consolidation of these cities would save as much money as proponents claim.<sup>12</sup> Or perhaps the residents of local communities, when offered the opportunity to vote, have preferred to retain their established community identities. Other concerns often expressed include the fear of bigger and more bureaucratic and less responsive local government, a loss of control in determining how limited tax dollars are spent, and the significant initial costs to replace existing units of government with a new consolidated structure.

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held, the consolidation is approved if the question passes by majority vote in each of the municipalities proposed to be consolidated. MCL 123.1012a.

<sup>11</sup> The only instance of a three-community consolidation in Michigan occurred in 2000, with the successful consolidation of three communities in the Upper Peninsula, the City of Iron River, the City of Stambaugh and the Village of Mineral Hills, in Iron County. A recent, unsuccessful, effort to dissolve the Village of Onekama into the surrounding Onekama Township, in Manistee County, occurred in August 2012. The proposal to dissolve the Village failed to pass by the necessary two-thirds majority.

<sup>12</sup> Grand Rapids Press, *Saugatuck, Douglas Mayors Not Sold on Consolidation*, January 3, 2013.

### C. Local Government Consolidations in Other States

Perhaps the most far-reaching type of local government consolidation is the combining of a city government with the government of the county in which the city is located. This type of consolidation is unknown in Michigan, and there are no Michigan statutes which authorize it. City-county consolidations have been attempted, and some have been accomplished, in other states, and the Work Group was presented with some of the case studies that have evaluated the results of these undertakings. Interestingly, almost none of the city-county consolidations reported in the various case studies have occurred in the states of the Midwest, which, like Michigan, evolved on the basis of township, city and village government rather than county and city government. One study reports only about 30 completed city-county consolidations throughout the United States in the last 100 years, and these are primarily in the states of the South and West (Alaska, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina and Tennessee).<sup>13</sup>

One of the leading national researchers on local government collaboration and consolidation is Professor Kurt Thurmaier, of Northern Illinois University. Dr. Thurmaier presented his research to the Work Group and other interested local officials on November 30, 2012. In that presentation, Dr. Thurmaier reviewed and updated the conclusions in his 2010 book, *City-County Consolidation: Promises Made, Promises Kept?* In that book, he and his team reviewed more than 30 city-county consolidations, including analysis of economic and population data for periods of years both before and after consolidation. He analyzed consolidation on the basis of three factors: (1) Consolidated governments operate more efficiently than unconsolidated governments due to technical efficiency gains; (2) Consolidated governments operate more effectively for economic development than similar non-consolidated communities; and, (3) Consolidated governments deliver on additional promises in the pro-consolidation campaign.

Some of Professor Thurmaier's conclusions, set forth in his presentation include the following:

- Evidence on efficiency is mixed and the data do not suggest that consolidation improves efficiency.
- The argument that efficiencies are to be gained through consolidations does not resonate with voters because of a lack of strong evidence.
- While there is some evidence that communities which consolidated demonstrated somewhat stronger economic performance than the comparison communities which had not consolidated, there are many other factors that impact the economic performance that need to be considered.
- In order for collaboration between local units of government, there must be a true openness to sharing, a common view of service delivery goals, trust among local

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<sup>13</sup> Thurmaier and Leland, Eds., *City-County Consolidation: Promises Made, Promises Kept?* (2010)

agencies, equitable decision making and cost sharing, and an ability to finance the ongoing costs as well as the costs associated with transitioning the services.

A study by the W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, *Estimation of the Economic Impact of Government Consolidation in the Core Counties of Metropolitan Areas*, was commissioned for the Work Group. The study analyzed resulting economic performance in nine city-county consolidations in Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana and Oregon, between 1971 and 2003.<sup>14</sup> The municipalities and counties examined presented a variety of types of consolidations. Two were fully or substantially unified consolidations, in which the city or county assumed all or nearly all services (Athens/Clark County, Georgia; Lafayette/Lafayette Parish, Louisiana [which retained local police departments]). Among the other consolidations, the cities continued to perform some services, but the county performed others. Cities tended to remain responsible for law enforcement, fire protection, streets and public utilities. Counties tended to be responsible for parks and recreation, community development, elections, solid waste recycling and the local prison system. Successful consolidations tended to be those in which the respective county did not include incorporated communities, such as townships and villages, outside of the respective city, most notably including the consolidations involving Indianapolis and Louisville.

The study analyzed various aspects of economic performance in the consolidated communities for a ten-year period after consolidation. The factors examined included average annual employment growth in the county, the percent of employees working in manufacturing and other factors, but applied statistical controls to attempt to account for variables in the average level of education represented in the county population, the extent to which governmental services were in fact consolidated and other factors.

The consolidated counties were then compared to a group of counties with similar characteristics, but which had not consolidated (the “core” or “control” counties). The study found that the apparent 10-year annualized economic growth for the consolidated counties, since consolidation, ranged from a low of 0.3 percent to a high of 2.3 percent.<sup>15</sup>

Comparing the “economic performance of the [consolidated] counties... with the average growth rate of all core [non-consolidated] counties in our sample for the same time period,” the authors concluded:

Indianapolis grew at an annual rate of 1.2% in the 10 years after it consolidated much of its governmental services in 1969. In comparison, all core [non-consolidated] counties in our sample grew at a higher 2.1% annualized rate in the same time period.... [T]he employment growth rates achieved after the

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<sup>14</sup> Athens/Clarke County, Georgia; Lexington/Fayette County, Kentucky; Louisville/Jefferson County, Kentucky; Lafayette/Lafayette Parish, Louisiana; Indianapolis/Marion County, Indiana; Portland/Multnomah County, Oregon; Columbus/Muscogee County, Georgia; Augusta/Richmond County, Georgia; Thibodaux/Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana

<sup>15</sup> Athens/Clarke County: 1.6%; Lexington/Fayette County: 1.9%; Louisville/Jefferson County: 0.3%; Lafayette/Lafayette Parish: 1.6%; Indianapolis/Marion County: 2.1%; Portland/Multnomah County: 1.8%; Columbus/Muscogee County: 2.3%; Augusta/Richmond County: 1.4%; Thibodaux/Terrebonne Parish: 1.7%.

consolidation are highly influenced by national factors that impact most core cities.”<sup>16</sup>

“In all four models [described in the study], the consolidation of government services was found to have a negative association with later employment growth; however, it was not statistically significant.... Not surprisingly, the only variable that was statistically significant was education achievement.

The findings of this analysis should not be unexpected. Many factors impact the economic performance of a core metropolitan county, including the make-up, health, and outlook of its industrial base..... In addition, the quality of its housing stock, strength of its central business district, and the level of poverty all play a part. More efficient government services are a worthy goal; however, on their own, they are not likely to move the economic performance dial by very much. Unfortunately, many are guilty of using one measuring stick, economic performance, to measure the worth of too many activities. Clearly, changes in government structure should be measured on the improvement of level and quality of services and its impact on the cost of providing these services.”<sup>17</sup>

During their presentation, the authors of the Upjohn Institute study cautioned that regardless of their attempt to control for variables among the consolidated communities, they could not conclude with any meaningful certainty that the consolidated governments actually performed better economically as a result of the consolidation. Addressing indications in some other studies that the consolidations involving Indianapolis, Louisville and Nashville resulted in better economic gains, the authors concluded that this was no more than a “perception... which weighs heavier than actual results.” Last, the authors observed that the trust and working relationships among the leaders of collaborating local governments are vitally important factors in successful collaborations, but really cannot be measured in any objective sense.

#### **D. Conclusions on City-County Consolidation**

For the reasons noted in this Section VI, the Work Group does not recommend a city-county consolidation for Kent County. The possibilities of significant public benefits resulting from this type of consolidation, such as cost-savings, economic development and better delivery of public services, are by no means assured. Well-considered studies have concluded that the expected gains in economy and public services do not always occur, or at least not to the extent originally contemplated. Even if the necessary state law changes were adopted, we believe that significant political controversy would be involved in any attempt to seek the approval of the city and county electorate. It seems to us that the political costs involved would inevitably outweigh the predicted benefits that might result from the combining of two major governmental bodies

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<sup>16</sup> Erickcek and Pittelko, W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, *Estimation of the Economic Impact of Government Consolidation in the Core County of Metropolitan Areas* (January, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

into a unified government. We believe that greater public benefits can be achieved more readily by continuing and expanding the already strong record of local government collaboration in the County. We recognize that other interested citizens or groups may wish to undertake their own study and analysis of these or related issues bearing on city-county consolidation, and we do not discourage any such efforts.

On a broader scale, the Work Group supports efforts that local units of government may undertake to consolidate, but believes there must be verifiable data to show how the consolidation efforts will bring about effectiveness, efficiency and/or enhanced economic development opportunities. The Work Group concluded it would make most sense to focus first on the consolidation of public services, rather than political consolidation. But if consolidation of units of government is to be considered, then the best chances for success will be (i) in the consolidation of like units of government where functions and public services provided are the same or similar (township with township and city with city), and (ii) where the movement toward consolidation is generated from within the affected jurisdictions rather than by outside forces, that may be viewed as attempts to force the issue, thus placing the jurisdictions and their constituents in a defensive and perhaps contentious position.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our investigations, review of literature on local government collaboration and consolidation, presentations by local officials and subject matter experts, together with our own discussions and other efforts over the past year, The Work Group offers the following recommendations for review and consideration by the Kent County Board of Commissioners, as well as all local governments in Kent County:

### A. Support Current Collaborations; Encourage New Collaborative Efforts

1. The impressive record of local government collaboration among local units within the County, addressed more fully in Part IV of this Report, should continue and be expanded to include all of our local governments.

2. Local governments should regularly compile and update a report or summary of their current collaborations with other communities. Such reports should be posted on the websites of the collaborating units and be noted in local community newsletters and other publications. These efforts will help to increase public awareness of the importance of community collaborations in bringing greater efficiency and effectiveness to local government and public services.

3. Collaborative efforts should focus on ventures with verifiable data that demonstrate to citizens how such efforts will bring about effectiveness, efficiency and/or enhanced economic development opportunities for the jurisdictions at issue. In addition, efforts should focus on those public services where the greatest levels of impact are possible. For example, because public safety services represent the largest expenditure in local government budgets, collaborative efforts should focus on these services rather than on prosecutorial functions where existing collaboration already exists and further changes would likely have only minimal impact.

4. The County Board of Commissioners should support local units of government in their efforts to promote further collaborations and/or consolidations. Because many collaborative efforts may require Michigan statutory changes or other significant measures, County-wide discussion of the topic with local legislative leaders must regularly take place. Also, appropriate private partners and groups (e.g., the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce) should be charged to assist with carrying out the collaborative efforts that local governments are willing to explore and/or implement. This approach could lead to improved delivery of public services, greater success in cost-control and other benefits for constituents throughout the County.

5. If possible, mutual aid agreements and other agreements between local governments should be the first means considered to carry out collaborative efforts. The time, effort and cost involved in negotiating and executing collaborative agreements is significantly less than attempting statutory change or county-wide referendum to achieve the same result.

## **B. Utilize the Municipal Partnership Act**

1. In December of 2011, the State Legislature adopted Act 258, the Municipal Partnership Act. This statute provides a feasible legal authority for collaborative ventures by local governments. It grants extensive authority for the joint providing of public services, and extensive flexibility for local units in developing the best methods and arrangements for working together on a common project or the joint providing and financing of public services.

The powers granted by the statute are available to any county, city, township or village. The statute grants municipalities the power to contract with each other to form a “joint endeavor” whereby they may perform or exercise any “function, service, power or privilege” that each of them could exercise separately. The joint endeavor contract can provide for the creation of a separate authority; the use of existing tax revenues already dedicated to pay for the performance of a proposed function or service; the levy of a tax if approved by the electorate; and other significant powers. Such a contract is not subject to referendum, irrespective of a local charter provision or ordinance. The authority to enter into such a contract cannot generally be affected by any existing limitation under a local charter or ordinance.

The Act limits the extent to which a proposed joint endeavor agreement can be the subject of collective bargaining between a local government and its employees. Among other provisions, a decision as to whether a local government will enter into a joint endeavor contract cannot be the subject of collective bargaining, though the language of a proposed contract under the Act is a permissive subject of collective bargaining.

2. The Work Group commends the Act to the consideration of all local governments in the County. In particular, the Work Group urges local governments to undertake collaborations within the framework of the Act, and to gain experience in those efforts, such as through joint endeavor agreements or other arrangements, before attempting to pursue the more difficult course of political consolidation.

## **C. Promote Economic Development**

1. The economic development organization in Kent County and in nearby counties is The Right Place, Inc., a nonprofit organization supported by local businesses, financial institutions, foundations, local governments and a variety of other institutions. The Right Place has been extraordinarily successful in assisting manufacturers and other businesses in attracting and retaining businesses in this area and thereby increasing local employment. Among governmental entities, The Right Place is financially supported by Kent County, and most of the cities and townships in the County. Moreover, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation has designated The Right Place as its partner-organization for promoting and assisting economic development in the West Michigan area. All local units of government in Kent County should be encouraged to support this private/public partnership for local economic development as they all share in the benefits. The Right Place’s most recent annual report can be viewed at [www.rightplace.org/about-the-right-place.aspx](http://www.rightplace.org/about-the-right-place.aspx).

2. While outside companies seeking to locate in the County have sometimes commented on the differing ordinances and other regulations that they encounter among the various local units, this situation is improving. Michigan now has a state-wide construction code, and so the building, mechanical, plumbing, electrical and other construction regulations are exactly the same in all the cities, townships and villages in the County. A company proposing to build a facility in West Michigan will encounter the same construction regulations wherever it decides to build.

3. Even though there is a uniform state construction code, it is inevitable that local building officials may interpret or apply the provisions of the code in slightly different ways. The same would be true of multiple inspection officials in a single unified government. However, these disparities can be overcome or moderated through uniform training and regular communication among building officials. Local units should combine to sponsor training programs for their building officials. Over time, this will lead to consistency in interpretation of code requirements.

4. Policies and procedures, including forms, applications and related submissions, should be standardized across the County.

5. Recently, several Kent County townships adopted uniform procedures for consideration and approval of industrial property-tax abatement applications. These efforts to establish uniform procedures among local units should be encouraged among all governments.

#### **D. Encourage Zoning and Land Use Plans that are Consistent with Economic Development**

1. Until very recently, each type of local government in Michigan – counties, cities, townships and villages – had its own zoning statute, and the authorized powers and procedures varied greatly among the different types of communities.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, and also until recently, counties, cities, townships and villages were subject to differing land use planning statutes. Inconsistent provisions resulted, which impeded or failed to promote, zoning and land use cooperation across municipal boundaries. Fortunately, in 2006 the State Legislature adopted the Zoning Enabling Act, which regulates zoning for all types of local government.<sup>19</sup> In 2008, the Legislature adopted the Planning Enabling Act to the same effect.<sup>20</sup> Today, each city, township and village in Michigan now carries out its zoning and land use responsibilities under the same statutes, with only some minor variations.

2. These new statutes present opportunities for municipal cooperation on zoning and land use planning issues. Counties, cities and certain townships may now include adjacent lands outside their boundaries in their land use master plans. Local planning commissions are

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<sup>18</sup> Kent County, however, has never adopted or enforced zoning regulations.

<sup>19</sup> MCL 125.3101, *et seq.*

<sup>20</sup> MCL 125.3801, *et seq.*

encouraged to meet with the planning commissions of other communities, as they develop zoning ordinances and master plans. A copy of a proposed municipal master plan must be circulated to the contiguous municipalities for review and comment, before the plan can proceed toward adoption. Likewise, proposed amendments and revisions in local master plans are to be circulated to the contiguous communities for review and comment.

The Planning Enabling Act authorizes local master plans to include various aspects of land use that are significant for industrial projects and other major economic developments, such as various types of transportation facilities, including not only streets and public transit, but also freight facilities and routes, railroad facilities, airports and public utility installations. The Zoning Enabling Act improves previously granted authority for planned unit developments, which can be an effective and creative means of zoning land for major projects, such as industrial parks, research facilities, corporate headquarters and campuses and the like.

3. Local communities have many opportunities to adopt similar or even identical zoning provisions and classifications/designations, even though they have separate zoning ordinances. Communities that are adjacent to each other, for example, should be encouraged to develop identical zoning provisions, especially for commercial and industrial areas that present the greatest economic development opportunities. Likewise, villages and their respective surrounding townships should develop some identical provisions, especially covering lands along their common boundaries. Finally, all units of government should consider adopting the same zoning classifications/designations – especially for industrial areas.

4. Local planning commissions should meet periodically to discuss common zoning and land use concerns and the recommendations noted above. This has been done on an infrequent basis, and then only when some major land use issue has arisen. Planning commissions in nearby municipalities should schedule joint meetings, with a jointly-developed agenda, for discussion and possible action, on a regular (e.g., semi-annual) basis.

#### **E. Promote Regional Public Safety Services**

1. Providing law enforcement and fire protection services are perhaps the highest priorities of local governments, but they are costly, and most community leaders have concluded that traditional approaches for providing police and fire departments are no longer sustainable at current service levels without significant revenue increases. For these types of vital public services, there should be collaboration on a regional basis. Such collaboration should be based on the community characteristics most relevant to the funding and efficiency of police and fire departments, such as similar populations to be served, frequency of emergency calls and basic similarities between existing departments. The proximity of potential collaborating communities is not necessarily a realistic factor in determining the success of police and/or fire collaboration. A city fire department and a township fire department may have little in common, even though their communities have a common boundary. On the other hand, adjacent cities may well be good candidates for police and/or fire combinations.

2. Grand Rapids, Kentwood and Wyoming have their own fire departments, but they recently shared in the funding of a professional study by the International City/County

Management Association, evaluating the possibilities of merging their fire departments, or otherwise developing cooperative arrangements for more cost-effective fire protection services among the three communities. The recommendations of the study are currently in the process of being reviewed by the three cities.

3. Township fire departments should consider joint fire authorities or other cooperative means of pooling their available resources, given the high cost of fire suppression vehicles, apparatus, staffing and training.

4. Several townships have contracted with the Kent County Sheriff's Department for enhanced law enforcement within their boundaries. Other communities, including cities, could seek such formal arrangements with the County Sheriff, as a means of replacing or augmenting their own general law enforcement activities.

5. Specialized public safety services, unlike general policing and fire protection, should best be undertaken by a particular community with the appropriate expertise and resources to provide such services for many other communities. This is already occurring in Kent County. The City of Grand Rapids serves all communities in the county when the services of its Specialized Teams (e.g., bomb squad, swat team and hazmat team) are required. Another city has an urban search and rescue team that operates throughout the county. As a result of collaboration, emergency management services of Kent County and the City of Grand Rapids have now been consolidated to serve all local communities in Kent County.

6. Local fire departments and police departments can undertake a variety of measures that promote cooperation and eliminate barriers to a regional approach for these vital services. Various departments can acquire and use standardized equipment and apparatus. Common purchasing procedures for costly fire and police vehicles and equipment can be developed. Training programs can be operated jointly by multiple communities. Standard operating procedures can be considered and adopted by multiple departments.

## **F. Encourage Collaboration in Assessment of Real Property**

1. As noted in Part III, the assessment of the value of real property for purposes of levy and collection of the property tax is carried out by each city and township (assessment of village property is done by the township assessor). Equalization of local property assessments is the legal responsibility of the County Board of Commissioners, through the County's Bureau of Equalization. Under the Property Tax Act, the County Board is to "examine the assessment rolls of the townships or cities and ascertain whether real and personal property in their respective townships or cities has been equally and uniformly assessed at true cash value." MCL 211.34.

2. Some municipalities, especially townships and smaller cities, already share the services of a State-certified assessor. These arrangements are a cost-effective way of carrying out property assessment in the communities which do not need a full-time assessor.

3. Periodically, city and township assessors undertake a re-appraisal, or some other more thorough review of property values than would be possible each year. For these efforts, at

least in the smaller communities, it is necessary to engage additional property-value appraisers. The County Bureau of Equalization has assisted local units in these efforts. In 2008 and 2009 the Bureau of Equalization assisted on the reappraisal of all commercial and industrial properties in Alpine Township and Grand Rapids Charter Township. The Bureau carried out a similar reappraisal in Algoma Township in 2010 and 2011. Other collaborations between the County Bureau of Equalization and local units should continue.

4. Intergovernmental agreements among municipalities can provide for the sharing of services involved in the property tax administration system, including real property assessment, in-field property inspections, and sharing by multiple taxing units in the common defense of Tax Tribunal cases. Further, local communities can continue to work together to develop commonality in the information technology systems involved in the assessment and taxation of property.

### **G. Improve Judicial Administration**

1. All the citizens of Kent County rely not only on the fairness of the courts, but on the timeliness of their procedures and efficiency in operations. The circuit court and the district courts could seek the guidance of third-party experts in the administrative aspects of the court system, which could assist in the development of more effective procedures, the reduction of case backlogs, the combining of record-keeping and similar office functions and the like.

2. Jurisdictions should explore opportunities to combine separate court facilities into a single building. This was accomplished recently by the construction and operation of the 63rd District Court building on East Beltline Avenue in Grand Rapids Charter Township. The new building was a project jointly undertaken by Kent County and the Township. As a result, the former separate locations of the two divisions of the district court were combined into one building at a more central location.

3. It is recognized that significant modifications in the court system could create improvements in efficiency and cost savings, but all would require state law changes. It is recommended that a task force of subject matter experts in the area of the law, the administration of justice, and court operations convene to make recommendations to the legislature on possible statutory changes that would make the court system more efficient, and provide additional opportunities for collaboration that are currently not possible based on existing laws.

## VIII. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As noted in Part I, we devoted many meetings to our assigned tasks and had the opportunity to read many studies and reports about Michigan local government, current collaborations in Kent County and the experiences in other states as to city-county consolidation.

We were greatly assisted by the willingness of many local government officials and staff persons to attend our meetings and to address us within their areas of expertise in local government, legal provisions, specialized public services, current local collaborations and many other topics.

We thank the County Board and the Collaboration/Cooperation Subcommittee for this opportunity to explore these important topics and to assist Board members in their further consideration of whether additional collaborative undertakings will achieve better local government and improve the delivery and economy of public services to the citizens of the County.

We hope this Report and our recommendations will prove useful as you consider these important issues. If we can serve you further in these matters, please call upon us.

For the Members of the Work Group:

Jim Saalfeld, Chairperson

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## X. APPENDIX

### Summary of Kent County Collaborative Efforts – 2012 Update, Kent County Administrator/Controller, December 2012

There are numerous examples of how Kent County interacts and works with local units of government within its boundaries, including its largest city, Grand Rapids, as well as other local and regional partners.

#### Regional (Local Government) Efforts

1. **Animal Control and Local Police:** Local police agencies throughout Kent County often encounter urgent situations where animals are involved. In some instances, the animal is the cause of the problem and an active threat; in other cases, abandoned animals require care in the aftermath of criminal activity. Police agencies are not readily equipped to capture and/or care for animals in these situations. During the past year, the Animal Shelter (Animal Control) responded to 258 calls from police agencies requesting assistance.
2. **Assessing:** In 2006 and 2007, the County entered into two agreements to provide appraisal services for commercial/industrial properties and deed-splitting services for the City of Grand Rapids. The deed-splitting services contract continues. In 2008 and 2009, the Bureau of Equalization completed work on the reappraisal of all commercial/industrial property in Alpine and Grand Rapids townships. In 2010 and 2011, the Bureau completed a commercial/industrial property reappraisal for Algoma Township. The Bureau is exploring several options to collaborate with local assessors seeking to achieve greater efficiency in their mapping and assessing related duties. Using LEAN principles, the Bureau is working with locals to streamline name/address changes, MTT appeals assistance, data sharing arrangements, and is working toward better systems integration between the county and the local units for assessing.
3. **Assisted Debt Financing:** In 1997, and again in 2000, the County issued \$12.4 million of debt to assist the City of Grand Rapids in financing of certain floodwall improvements utilizing the County's AAA credit rating providing the City of Grand Rapids (lower credit rating) with an interest rate savings of over (0.25% interest rate reduction) \$400,000 over the life of these bond issuances. In September 2008, the County refinanced \$7.87 million of this indebtedness achieving a gross interest savings of \$291,000 over the remaining life of this indebtedness. Without the application of the County's AAA credit rating, the City would not have been able to achieve the interest savings noted above.
4. **Body Art Facility Enforcement:** In an effort to improve the enforcement component of the Michigan Body Art law, the Health Department has strengthened its relationship with the Community Policing Section of the Grand Rapids Police Department. Through this relationship, the KCHD has effectively worked on five occasions either directly with a Body Art Facility or with complainants alleging the illegal operation of a body art facility in an unlicensed facility.
5. **Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention:** The Health Department works in collaboration with the City of Grand Rapids Code Compliance Division, Community Development Department and the Housing Rehabilitation Office, along with the Rental Property Owners Association, the local non-profit Healthy Homes Coalition and five City neighborhood associations on lead-based paint hazard control of homes in the City of Grand Rapids. This partnership started in 2001 through the community collaborative, Get the Lead Out! and has succeeded in bringing 14 million dollars into the City of Grand Rapids, eliminating lead hazards in 1,100 homes, creating construction-related jobs and helping to reduce the number of lead poisoning cases by 87%.

6. ***Children's Assessment Center:*** A facility/program providing multi-disciplinary response to allegations of child sexual abuse. The Center is located at 901 Michigan NE and provides office space for two Sheriff deputies, three Grand Rapids police officers, four DHS protective service workers, counselors and doctors/nurses. The County and cities of Grand Rapids, Wyoming, Grandville, and Walker provide financial support for operations of the Center.
7. ***Clandestine Drug Laboratory Response:*** Illegal drug manufacturing is a problem which has plagued law enforcement and public health for many years. The number of clandestine drug laboratories reported to the Kent County Health Department has risen in recent years. These labs generally manufacture methamphetamines, LSD, or methcathinone; and these operations leave toxic residues throughout a property which can be extremely harmful to subsequent residents. Michigan state law designates local health departments as the lead enforcing agency during the clean-up phase of clandestine drug operations, however, an effective response involves a partnership between local and county officials. During 2012, the Kent County Health Department worked closely with the Kentwood Police Department, Wyoming Police Department, Grand Rapids Police Department, and the Metropolitan Enforcement Task Force in response to 9 clandestine drug labs.
8. ***Community Collaboration Work Group:*** In January 2012, the County created a new Committee (the Community Collaboration Work Group or CCWG) which includes the following individuals: County Commissioners Jim Saalfeld (Chair), Carol Hennessy, Dan Koorndyk, and Michael Wawee Jr., City Commissioners Rosalynn Bliss and James White; Grand Rapids Township Supervisor Michael DeVries, Walker City Manager Cathy VanderMeulen, Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce President/CEO Rick Baker, The Right Place, Inc., President/CEO Birgit Klohs, Hispanic Center of West Michigan CEO Martha Gonzalez-Cortes, municipal attorney James Brown, and GVSU Professor Dr. Paul Isely. The CCWG met regularly in 2012 and reviewed the many functions of local government and developed some concepts for consideration. The group also reviewed two reports from Dr. George Erickcek, Upjohn Institute economist, related to collaboration activities and potential economic impact of consolidations, and heard from a national expert (Dr. Kurt Thurmaier). A final report will be issued sometime during the first quarter of 2013.
9. ***Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program:*** The Community Development and Housing Department works with 32 local units of government, public and non-profit agencies to develop strategies to improve the quality of life throughout the County. The Department acts as a conduit to bring "Entitlement" grant funds and Section 8 funds to the County to expand opportunities for low and moderate income residents. The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) is part of the CDBG program and began in 2008 with a \$3.9 million federal grant. The program is designed to rehabilitate existing housing stock and make it available for low-moderate income individuals for purchase or rent. Property has been rehabilitated in Wyoming, Kentwood and Grandville. In addition, the County has been awarded a grant through the State of Michigan's Competitive Grant Assistance Program to study the potential consolidation of community development offices with the cities of Grand Rapids and Wyoming. The study will begin in early 2013.
10. ***Community Health Needs Assessment:*** In 2011, the Health Department worked with more than 60 partners, including the area's major hospitals and mental health providers to collect data for a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). The results from the CHNA will be used to formulate a Community Health Improvement Plan which will address the issues identified in the CHNA. Community input for the CHNA included 12 focus groups with nearly 120 participants and 395 Intercept Interviews. Input was received from a racially and ethnically diverse group of individuals throughout Kent County with a broad range of life experiences and economic backgrounds. The CHNA identified more than 40 strategic issues that community stakeholders would like addressed.

11. **Community Probation:** Five local communities have pooled Juvenile Accountability Block Grant dollars, required local funding and other resources into a Juvenile Community Probation Program offered by the 17<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court Family Division. Juvenile Probation Officers and Surveillance Officers team up with Community Policing Officers in the communities to provide greater coordination and closer monitoring of juvenile offenders.
12. **Corridor Improvement Districts:** In 2008, the County worked with the Townships of Plainfield and Grand Rapids on an intergovernmental agreement to participate in a Corridor Improvement District (CID) on Plainfield Avenue. This is the first such agreement reached based upon the County's Economic Development Policy. In 2009, a similar agreement was entered into with the Townships of Byron and Gaines for its CID.
13. **County 911 Dispatch:** The County has been working with local units of government since 2001 to make improvements to the emergency 911 system. While this has been in the discussion stage for the past decade, over the past several years a significant amount of progress has been made. The County, along with the cities of Grand Rapids, Wyoming, Walker, and Grandville, formed a dispatch authority comprised of representatives from police, fire, and the EMS agencies as well as managers and supervisors from participating communities. In July 2007, the Authority adopted a Strategic Plan that consolidates the call-taking function by reducing the number of Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in Kent County from five to two. In December 2009, the Authority entered into a contract for a new \$2.8 million Computer Aided Dispatch system which will provide the technology to simultaneously dispatch police, fire, and EMS personnel. In 2010, the Authority began contracting for call-taking services with the Sheriff's Department and the City of Grand Rapids; all 911 calls are now routed to one of the two PSAPs, which reduce the number of times a call may be transferred. As the Authority continues to improve the delivery of emergency 911 services, work is now beginning to improve radio communications capabilities.
14. **Cooperative Law Enforcement Programs:** The Sheriff's Office collaborates with local units of government and local police departments to share the cost and use of various enforcement, investigative, and crime prevention programs. In June 2006, the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Law Enforcement Partnership was established, including the State Police, cities of Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Wyoming and Kentwood. This partnership formally established several cooperative teams including: Metropolitan Area Cold Case Team, Metropolitan Area Major Case Task Force, Metropolitan Fraud and Identity Theft Team, Metropolitan Crime Analysis Project Team, Metropolitan Major Case Accident Investigation, and the Metropolitan Policy/Procedure Development Committee. In addition, the Sheriff's department provides a variety of services to local communities as a part of mutual aid which could include the K-9 unit, Mounted unit, and other investigative/enforcement services. The Sheriff's Office also participates in numerous other local and regional initiatives recognizing that crime is not restricted to the boundary of any city, village, or township. The Sheriff's Department has underwater search and recovery capabilities, computer forensic services, and an indoor firearms training facility, all of which are shared with local governments. In addition, the Sheriff provides mobile command service to local units. The Sheriff's Office led the way to share law enforcement incident records, first with all local law enforcement agencies, then with a large block of West Michigan counties (and their local units), and is leading the way to share data statewide and nationally. The County has entered into agreements with several townships and school districts to provide enhanced patrol services. The County also worked with Gaines Charter Township to lease a portion of its township hall for the Sheriff's Department South Substation, which serves the southern tier of townships in the County. In addition, the Sheriff Department provides dispatch services for several local units of government.
15. **District Courthouse:** In 2008, the County, working with Grand Rapids Charter Township, identified a location for the new co-located 63<sup>rd</sup> District Courthouse. As envisioned, the new Courthouse is part of a municipal center in Grand Rapids Township which includes the Township Hall, the Township fire station, and a township park. The design of the Courthouse and the common

area was done in collaboration with the Township so as to generate a municipal center that will be a notable asset to the community for many years to come. The Courthouse was completed and became operational in November 2009. Related to this is an agreement that was entered into with the City of Rockford, turning the building that formerly housed a division of the 63<sup>rd</sup> District Court over to the City. The County is leasing a portion of the facility for use by the County and District Court.

16. ***Dog Licensing:*** State and local laws require dogs to obtain rabies vaccination and an annual license from the county in which they live. These requirements are in place in order to help ensure animal welfare and public safety. Animal control services, which are provided by the Kent County Animal Shelter, are funded in part by license revenues and benefit all citizens of Kent County. Twenty-one townships and nine cities/villages collaborate with Kent County by selling dog licenses during the annual licensing season. In return, the county reimburses those local units \$0.80 per license sold and provides a service that the local units are not otherwise equipped to handle. Each year, these 30 local units sell approximately 10,000 dog licenses.
17. ***Drain Plan Updates:*** For a number of years the Drain Commission worked with local units in Kent County to update their respective drain master plans, with the County paying one-half the cost of the updates. To date, the following communities have had their master plans updated through this program: The townships of Algoma, Alpine, Byron, Caledonia, Cannon, Cascade, Gaines, Grand Rapids and Plainfield; and the cities of Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Walker and Wyoming.
18. ***Elections:*** The County Clerk programs the school, primary and general elections for all locales, and creates the over 280 ballot styles needed for each election and works with local unit Clerks to coordinate bulk purchasing of election supplies.
19. ***Emergency Management:*** Kent County Emergency Management is an active part of the Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board. Since 2007, Homeland Security Funding has been administered on a regional basis. The Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board is comprised of the counties of: Clare, Isabella, Ionia, Lake, Kent, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa, the cities of Grand Rapids and Ionia, Public Health agencies, and Region 6 Bioterrorism Defense Committee. The activities at the regional level consist of planning, training, exercising, equipment, interoperable communications, law enforcement efforts, and citizen preparedness. Kent County has representation on all seven regional committees as well as a leadership role on the Regional Planning Board. We have collaborated with the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, as well as local and regional resources and agencies to provide Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training and team formation in an effort to enhance citizen preparedness. On July 1, 2012, the City of Grand Rapids contracted with Kent County Emergency Management for services. The County now provides those services for all cities, villages and townships within Kent County. In addition, the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County's Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC) merged in 2012.
20. ***Equalization Collaboration:*** In March, 2011, the Bureau of Equalization entered into a collaborative effort with Montcalm County. Through the agreement, Kent County's Director, Matt Woolford, also became the director of record for Montcalm County's equalization department. Kent County now oversees the work of the existing Montcalm County staff, with Matt Woolford or Deputy Director Steve Rickers spending one day a week, on average, at Montcalm County's offices in Stanton. The first year of the agreement was viewed as a pilot and is recommended for extension for one year to complete an annual assessment cycle. This collaboration has worked well thus far, with Kent County's general fund receiving additional revenue while Montcalm is saving money on Equalization Director services.
21. ***Family Self Sufficiency (FSS):*** The Kent County Housing Commission, through its Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS), co-sponsored events with Huntington Bank and the Department of Human Services (DHS) to help boost employment and savings for certain recipients of federal housing assistance. By law, residents living in public housing or receiving Section 8 vouchers are

required to pay 30 percent of their adjusted income for rent and utilities. While this rule keeps rents relatively low, increases in income are siphoned off by higher rents, creating a work disincentive. FSS creates a structure for residents to save the money that would otherwise go toward increased rents and to become independent of public assistance. In 2011 Huntington Bank provided mortgage underwriting training for the Housing Commission Home Ownership programs for Kent County, Wyoming, Grand Rapids and area non-profits. Additionally the Housing Commission hosted an informational session presented by DHS for area agencies regarding the reduction in cash assistance and changes in DHS policies and procedures that impact clients at the Grand Rapids Charter Township Hall. A Resource Fair was also conducted by Grand Rapids Community College, the Kent County, Wyoming and Grand Rapids Family Self Sufficiency programs. Over 48 organizations and community partners provided information and services to participating clients

22. ***Fiber Optic Data Network:*** The County has been working with a group of partners on two separate projects. The first involves GVMC, Kent Intermediate School District (KISD), various local public school districts, and the City of Grand Rapids. As a result, the County will be able to offer a faster, more reliable data network connection to some outlying County facilities, including Health Department clinics, John Ball Zoo, and the Parks department administration building. In the second project, the County has partnered with Grand Rapids and KISD in extending our high-speed data network to the new 63rd District Courthouse at Knapp and the East Beltline.
23. ***Fire Commission:*** Numerous local units participate with the County on joint purchasing of insurance, fire equipment, and fire/emergency vehicles, taking advantage of cost savings realized with the “bulk” purchase of goods and services.
24. ***Fiscal Services/Central Services Printing:*** The Central Services Division currently provides printing services for the City of Grand Rapids and a few other participating municipalities & organizations (the cities of Kentwood, Grandville, and Rockford, the Village of Sparta, the Rapid, the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority, etc.). Approximately 400 print orders per year come from these outside agencies.
25. ***Fiscal Services – Purchasing: Reverse Auction:*** A) In 2009, the Purchasing Office developed a “Reverse Auction” process that enables live online bidding for numerous commodities that the County’s departments purchase. The County has realized savings of more than 15 percent on commodity purchases. In 2010, the program was expanded to enable other local units of government the opportunity to “piggy-back” onto the County’s process. To date, a total of 18 local units have participated in the process. The Purchasing Office is also working with Allegan and Ottawa Counties on pilot projects to implement a similar system. B) In 2012, the Purchasing Office has assisted in publishing bids and evaluating the responses for local units in addition to hosting two procurement user forums with the local units to exchange ideas on procurement collaboration opportunities.
26. ***GIS:*** While the County is no longer a formal member of the Regional GIS (REGIS) consortium, it continues to contribute certain data it maintains, such as parcels, to REGIS at no cost. The County further maintains street centerline data on the REGIS system to the benefit of all local units, as this information is used by the Kent County Dispatch Authority. Finally, the County has built a special version of its internal web-based GIS data viewing application which it intends to share with local units at no charge.
27. ***Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC):*** In 1990, the County became one of thirteen original (charter) members of the State’s first, and only, Metropolitan Council (Grand Valley Metro Council). The Metro Council is now comprised of 34 units of government from the Grand Rapids/Kent County area. GVMC has developed competencies in transportation planning (MPO) and as a forum for discussing regional issues. County Administrator/Controller Daryl Delabbio serves on the Executive Committee as Secretary. A staff member from Kent/MSU Extension serves on the GVMC Public Information and Education Committee which plans GVMC’s annual Growing

Communities Conference. Over the past fourteen months, the GVMC has been challenged to become a more relevant organization and provide more value to its members. A new Strategic Initiatives document has been adopted and a subcommittee is looking at governance issues related to the GVMC.

28. **Grand Valley Regional Biosolid Authority (City of Grand Rapids, City of Wyoming):** The Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board, through the Purchase of Development Rights Program, has a partnership with the Grand Valley Regional Biosolid Authority to develop and implement a Biosolid/PDR Pilot program.
29. **Hazard Mitigation Plan:** As a result of the Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, local units of government were required to prepare a hazard mitigation plan by November 2004. While the County is mandated by state law to provide for countywide emergency management through a designated coordinator, as well as administering a planning committee to conduct activities relating to the clean up and disposal of hazardous material spills, Kent County has gone above and beyond these functions by joining forces (and resources) with the City of Grand Rapids and Ottawa County to prepare a regional hazard mitigation plan.
30. **Household Hazardous Waste:** The Department of Public Works purchased and placed a hazardous waste containment system at the City of Wyoming Clean Water Plant. The City of Wyoming and DPW jointly carryout the collection of household hazardous waste from the community. The DPW also manages three other household hazardous waste sites for County residents of Grand Rapids, Kentwood and Plainfield Charter Township.
31. **Human Services Complex:** Since 1974, the County has leased the 415 Franklin facility to the State of Michigan's Department of Human Services for the cost of operations and maintenance. After multiple attempts to find a new location, in 2005 the County, the City and the State began discussing the possible relocation of the DHS to a new, County-owned facility. Land was acquired, in cooperation with the City and the Grand Rapids Public Schools to develop a new Human Services Complex on the site of a building housing County (Health Clinic) and ACSET services, located on Sheldon Street in Grand Rapids. In early 2007, the County and the State signed a lease agreement to construct a new \$27 million consolidated facility, which now houses the State DHS, ACSET and a County Health Clinic. Construction began in early 2008 and the 137,000 square foot facility was completed and opened in June 2009.
32. **Investment Pool:** The County Treasurer has implemented a pooled investment program whereby local units of government can participate and have funds invested with the County's funds to obtain the best possible rate of return. Approximately 20 local units within the County, as well as several authorities, participate. In October 2011, the City of Grand Rapids joined the investment pool.
33. **Joint Committee on NPDES Phase II Stormwater Permitting:** To date, 25 local units of government within Kent County have adopted a stormwater control ordinance using the Model Stormwater Ordinance developed by the teams which worked under the umbrella of the County Drain Commissioner. A number of other counties have requested a copy of the model ordinance to use as a basis for a model ordinance in their county. The Drain Commissioner is serving with representatives from Ottawa County and numerous local units of government on several committees of the Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW) with the goal of meeting NPDES Phase II requirements.
34. **Kent Trails:** In 1992, Kent County and the communities of Grand Rapids, Grandville, Wyoming, Walker and Byron Township entered into an agreement to develop and maintain Kent Trails. A unique component of the agreement resulted in the communities collectively depositing \$12,500 annually into a fund to ensure that sufficient funds would be available when the time came to rebuild or do significant repairs to the trail. This fund was used to match and secure an MDOT grant which the Parks Department used to rebuild Kent Trails in 2009. In 2011, all partners agreed to extend the

inter-local agreement for another 20-year period. The Sheriff also operates a volunteer trail patrol for safety and assistance.

35. ***Local Units Law Enforcement In-Service Training System:*** The Sheriff's Department, along with the police and fire departments of Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Walker, Wyoming, and Grandville now has the ability to login and view the schedule of all in-service training sessions county-wide. At a glance, the user is able to sort the schedule by title, category, location or date/time, and determine if a class is open to registration. The user is able to view the class description, hours, cost, training location, prerequisites, and what materials, equipment and uniform to bring to the class. Training coordinators are able to register staff members electronically, with email reminders and other notifications sent automatically to class participants. The system allows each training coordinator to store their staff's training history by person and run year-end reports. Each department can view training opportunities available and whether that training is open for all police departments (interdepartmental) or exclusive to the particular police department sponsoring the training.
36. ***Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS):*** Over the past ten years, the County has worked with Grand Rapids, Wyoming, and Kentwood, and administrators from the three major medical facilities (Spectrum, St. Mary's and Metropolitan Hospital) within the County on an Executive Committee to facilitate and prepare private and public sector organizations throughout the County for response to mass casualty incidents.
37. ***Millennium Park:*** This is a 1,500 acre park along the Grand River located within the cities of Grand Rapids, Wyoming, Walker, and Grandville. This \$30 million-plus park is the crown jewel of parks in Kent County and one of the largest urban parks in the country. The Parks Department has worked with the City of Walker to cross roads with pedestrian bridges and crosswalks as the trail system in the park expands, and has partnered with the cities of Walker and Grand Rapids to construct a water main to serve a portion of the park.
38. ***Parks Department:*** The Kent County Parks Department regularly seeks and develops collaborations with outside organizations and units of government. Many local units of government are strong partners in park projects within their borders, including the funding of acquisition or development projects: Alpine Township (Wahlfield Park), Caledonia Township (Ruehs, Riverbend, Two Rivers), Cannon Township (Luton), Gaines Township (Creekside, Brewer Park), Grand Rapids Township (Knapp Valley Forest). The department has also assisted many local jurisdictions with master planning and design or development of a local jurisdiction's facilities: Ada (trail easement and layout assistance, Covered Bridge/riverfront design development), Algoma (design/development of Camp Lake and Fonger Park), Alpine (design assistance for Westgate and Alpine Sports Complex, master plan assistance), Cannon (trail easement and trail maintenance), Casnovia (design and development of ballfield and parking), Grand Rapids Township (prepared Park Master Plans, provided design and development for park at Township Hall, grant writing assistance), Lowell Township (design assistance for Lowell Twp Park), Nelson (trail development funds for Gordon Park/White Pine trail connection), Oakfield Township (design assistance township hall ballfield), Plainfield Township (design assistance for township properties and 10 Mile landfill property, worked with township of Comstock Park library), and Sparta Village (design service for community park). In addition, the department plays a significant role in the development of major non-motorized off-road trails in the community which invite collaboration due to their multi-jurisdictional nature. Since 1991, Byron Township, Kent County, Grand Rapids, Grandville, Walker, and Wyoming have been collaboratively managing the 15-mile Kent Trails through a 20-year Interlocal Agreement. This agreement provides for shared expenses between the partners at fixed percentages with Kent County performing the actual management services for the trail. The Department worked with Kentwood, Gaines Township and Caledonia Village and Township in developing the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail and with Gaines and Byron Townships as well as the Road Commission and the Michigan Department of Transportation in the development of the M-6

Trail. Development of a trail connecting the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park to the Musketawa Trail was created via a partnership with the DNR, MDOT, the City of Walker and the Meijer Foundation. The Parks Department played key roles in the planning and establishment of the Lowell to Greenville Trail, the Lowell to Ionia trail as well as the North Country Trail corridor south of Lowell. Finally, the department's Volunteer Services Program regularly works with many community organizations and units of government on multiple projects annually

39. **Planning Assistance:** Kent/MSU Extension Office provides local officials from all units of government in Kent County land use information and educational opportunities on land use issues. Educational opportunities include Citizen Planner programs, as well as local and state conferences
40. **Plainfield Township/Mountain Biking:** The West Michigan Mountain Biking Association has laid out five miles of mountain biking trails on the 10 Mile Road Property that has been leased to Plainfield Township. The County, Department of Public Works, West Michigan Sports Commission, and Kent County Road Commission have reviewed and approved a contour map layout of the course and amended leases are in the process of being prepared to accommodate the course.
41. **Personal Property Tax:** During 2012, representatives from County Administration, Fiscal Services, and Bureau of Equalization met with representatives from Ottawa County, the cities of Grand Rapids and Wyoming, and the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council to work with Lt. Governor Brian Calley to develop a methodology for eliminating the personal property tax and funding replacement for local units of government. West Michigan's work group and input were critical components to the resulting legislation adopted in December 2012.
42. **Preliminary Examination Subpoenas:** As a result of collaboration between the Prosecutor and the various district courts, a new process has been implemented whereby only the investigating detective and victim are subpoenaed for the preliminary examination since most of these hearings are waived and testimony is not needed. There are some exceptions, depending on the charges. The benefits are significant: civilian and police witnesses are not brought into court unnecessarily and the County and courts save on witness and parking fees. In addition, police agencies, including the Kent County Sheriff's Department, benefit by 1) not having to pay off-duty officers for up to three hours of overtime for a court appearance, and 2) freeing on-duty officers to remain "on the job" in lieu of having to sit in a courtroom.
43. **Purchase of Development Rights:** The Kent County Purchase of Development Rights Program has been supported through a variety of public and private partnerships. Current funding partnerships in support of this program. Current funding partners include Grand Rapids Community Foundation, Frey Foundation, Wege Foundation, Kent County Farm Bureau, and the following townships: Ada, Alpine, Bowne, Caledonia, Grattan, Nelson, Sparta, and Vergennes. Additionally, the Grand Valley Metro Council provides some limited staffing support for the PDR program.
44. **Recovery Zone Facility Bonds:** In February 2009, Congress adopted legislation entitled "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009" (ARRA). Among other provisions, it defines the authority under which local units of government might issue Recovery Zone Facility (RZF) bonds. Kent County received its "allotment" for authority to issue bonds in an amount not to exceed \$54.857 million. The Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution designating the entire geographic area of Kent County as a "Recovery Zone," allowing the County to consider projects within the County. RZF bonds are tax exempt, private activity bonds which may be issued to assist local businesses with the construction, renovation or acquisition of property used in the conduct of most trades or businesses. The County acts as a "conduit" in the allocation of this bonding authority to private interests. The City of Grand Rapids and the County provided \$12.5 million each of bonding authority toward a \$25 million project involving the renovation and reuse of the former Federal Building (148 Ionia, NW). This project involves The Christman Capital Investment Group leasing the building from the City of Grand Rapids, renovating it, and subleasing it to Ferris State

University for exclusive use of Ferris State and the Kendall College of Art and Design. An additional \$28.5 million in RZF bonds was allocated to the Michigan Economic Development Corporation for the Avatar Park re-use project for the acquisition, construction, and installation of a music and film studio.

45. **Residential Recycling:** The Department of Public Works has a number of collaborative efforts in the area of residential recycling services, including the following. *A) Kentwood Recycling Drop-Off Center:* The County collaborates with the City of Kentwood and a private company to provide a drop-off center for recycling. The City of Kentwood provides the land, a private company and the County's DPW provide funding, and the DPW operates the facility. *B) Community Events:* The DPW provides recycling drop-off collection stations that are loaned to municipal events (e.g., Festival of the Arts). *C) Residential Recycling Operations:* The DPW owns and operates a residential recycling facility. The existing facility accepts recyclable materials from locations within and outside of the County for processing. The DPW contracted with Rockford Construction to design and build a single stream recycling facility located at 977 Wealthy Street, SW, Grand Rapids. The Recycling and Education Center construction was completed and the facility opened in July 2010. The facility has contracted with the City of Grand Rapids and several private waste companies in the area for the delivery of recyclable materials. *D) Residential Recycling Delivery and Carts:* The Department of Public Works entered into an agreement with the City of Grand Rapids that provides for delivery of recyclable materials to the Recycling and Education Center for processing. In addition, this agreement provided a loan to the City for the purchase and distribution of recycle carts to all City residents participating in the recycling program.
46. **Waste-to-Energy Facility:** Kent County created this partnership with the cities of Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Wyoming, Grandville, Kentwood and Walker to finance and operate the Waste-to-Energy Facility (WTE). Refuse from the communities is burned to produce steam for electricity sold to Consumers Energy. The WTE also serves regional and local law enforcement and other governmental agencies to destroy illegal drugs and other unwanted material. The waste-to-energy facility bonds were fully paid in 2010.
45. **West Michigan Economic Partnership:** In April 2012, the County entered into an interlocal agreement with the cities of Grand Rapids, Wyoming, and Kentwood and Cascade Township, as well as Muskegon County, the City of Muskegon, and Muskegon Township to create the West Michigan Economic Partnership, an economic development authority designed to advance the marketing and development of a region that is served by two or more modes of transportation infrastructure (i.e., air, rail, road and water-port facilities and infrastructures).
47. **West Michigan Take Back Meds Program:** The traditional ways of managing unwanted household pharmaceuticals, such as flushing them down the toilet, pouring them down the drain, or throwing them into the trash, may be harming the environment and threatening public health. The City of Wyoming Clean Water Plant, City of Grand Rapids Waste Water System, North Kent Sewer Authority, Sheriff's Department and the Department of Public Works have jointly developed a regional unwanted pharmaceutical program: West Michigan Take Back Meds. A web page has been designed and is being implemented. Cities outside of Kent County have joined the program.
48. **Wyoming CDBG:** The County's Community Development department, working with City of Wyoming Community Development office established, a service sharing agreement for monitoring of the City of Wyoming's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) sub-recipients: the Fair Housing Center; Home Repair Services; and Compassion This Way. A memorandum of Understanding has been created which includes a mutually acceptable fee arrangement that was approved in November by the Board of Commissioners and the Wyoming City Council.
49. **63<sup>rd</sup> District Court and Area Police Chiefs:** the Chiefs of Police of the north County cities (Rockford, Sparta, Cedar Springs and Sand Lake), requested that a system be developed that would allow these agencies to deliver their original citations, appearance tickets, police reports and other

pertinent paperwork – required by statute to be in their “original” state when used in Court proceedings – to the 63<sup>rd</sup> District Court in a timely manner and at the same time minimize the time the police vehicles needed to be out of their jurisdiction. After some checking, the County’s Purchasing Division determined that a private courier firm could add a Rockford-to-Grand Rapids Township run into its schedule twice a week at a cost of \$8-10 per run. As a result, Sand Lake, Cedar Springs, Sparta, and Rockford Police Departments now “pool” their citations at the Rockford Police Department, where the courier picks them up and delivers them to the Court twice weekly. District Court pays for the courier service (approximately \$900 annually) from its existing budget.

### **City of Grand Rapids**

50. ***Area Community Services, Employment and Training (ACSET) Council:*** In 1985, the City of Grand Rapids and the County partnered, via an Urban Cooperation Act, to establish ACSET. The Council was established to administer state, federal and local funds to provide job training, foster self-sufficiency, and to advocate for a reduction in the causes of poverty.
51. ***City-County Building Authority:*** Many years ago, the City and County created a City-County Building Authority as a financing mechanism for many public improvement projects, including a parking structure at the former Grand Center, the Van Andel Public Museum facility, and most recently, the DeVos Place Convention Center.
52. ***Community Archives and Research Center:*** In 1999 the County committed to participation in the construction of a community archives and research center to be located on the site of the old public museum in Grand Rapids. This is a joint venture with the City of Grand Rapids and the Public Museum of Grand Rapids. Its vision is to bring together under one roof the off-exhibit collections of the museum, the archives of the City, and the public records of the County so that researchers, students, and the general public may access all of them in a “one-stop shopping” setting. The County has contributed \$3.5 million to the project along with significant staff time. Maintenance of the facility was assumed by the City Facilities Management Department in July 2006, and the County and City work together on facility maintenance/operational programs.
53. ***Coordinated School Health Project:*** Since 1999, Kent/MSU Extension and the Kent County Health Department have partnered with other community agencies and local school districts to increase the health of students in Kent County related to nutrition and physical fitness. Using USDA funds to provide primary support for these efforts, the focus of this work has been on low-income school buildings with more than 50% of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. Partners include several local school districts (Grand Rapids, Wyoming, Godfrey Lee, Godwin), the YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids, Spectrum Health, and United Dairy Industries of Michigan. Kent Intermediate School District, Campfire USA, and ACCESS.
54. ***Courthouse:*** The City of Grand Rapids and the County worked to finance jointly the construction of a \$60 million Courthouse, which houses the County’s judiciary and some ancillary services as well as the City’s 61<sup>st</sup> District Court. Once bonds are retired, the County and City will be co-owners of the facility (County –68.65%; City – 31.35%).
55. ***Grand Rapids Smart Zone:*** A Smart Zone has been established with medical, university and governmental partners to focus on medical research and biotech development. Partners include the City of Grand Rapids, Grand Valley State University (GVSU), Grand Rapids Community College, and the State of Michigan. It is centered on Michigan Hill where the Smart Zone funds a wet laboratory incubator in the GVSU Health Sciences Building and also includes the Monroe North District. A second Smart Zone area has been added to facilitate retention of Siemens’ Grand Rapids campus.
56. ***Joint Maintenance Agreement:*** The City and County share the same lobby and parking structure for the City Hall and County Administration Building. The City is responsible for maintenance of

both facilities, and a joint maintenance agreement has been in effect for a number of years and was most recently reviewed and updated in 2007.

57. **Remonumentation Surveyor:** The Bureau of Equalization is responsible for administering the remonumentation program in Kent County. This program requires the services of a registered Land Surveyor. Upon the retirement of long time county representative to the program, Harv Hubers, the Bureau of Equalization reached out to the City of Grand Rapids and has contracted with the City Engineering department to perform this service. John Wiles serves as the City Surveyor and is now contractually serving as the County Representative to the Remonumentation Program. This collaboration has worded very well and is expected to continue in the coming year.
58. **Wealthy Street Extension/Butterworth Street Realignment Project:** When the Millennium Park Master Plan was updated in 2006, it identified the extension of Wealthy Street and realignment of Butterworth Street near the east end of the Park as having the potential to provide improved access and gateway appearance. These infrastructure improvements would also be important to support the full development of the Master Plan for the park, which includes a potential amphitheater near the east end. The roads are actually under the jurisdiction of the City of Grand Rapids, with a small part in the City of Walker. In support of the plan, the CAA applied for and received a HUD Economic Development Initiative Special Projects grant of \$142,500 for preliminary design and survey work on the project. Subsequently, the City of Grand also applied for and received a \$500,000 grant from MDOT for the realignment and reconfiguration of Butterworth from Veteran’s Memorial Drive to the Wealthy Street Extension area, and continues to seek funding for the project. Both the City of Walker and Kent County staff have been part of the planning team on these projects.
59. **415 Franklin Property Exchange:** Following the move of the Department of Human Services to the new Human Services Complex in 2009, the County and City of Grand Rapids entered into an agreement for the transfer of the former properties that housed the DHS to the City of Grand Rapids in exchange for six properties near the new Human Services Complex that will be converted into additional parking for the facility.
60. **61st District Court Information Technology Services:** Since 2006, the County has provided the City of Grand Rapids’ 61<sup>st</sup> District Court certain information technology services. Transition of the information technology services took place in mid-August 2006, and continues to this day.

### **The County and Others**

61. **Aeronautics:** The Department of Aeronautics hosts, on a biennial basis, a maintenance seminar for numerous airport staff from Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio and participates in a cooperative purchasing plan with the Michigan Department of Transportation and Wayne County Airport Authority.
62. **Aeronautics/The Rapid:** As part of the Terminal Area and Parking Improvement Program, GFIA built one air-conditioned, heated inter-modal shelter for use by the The Rapid (under its former name, the Interurban Transit Partnership or ITP) at a cost of \$260,250. The shelter opened in November 2009.
63. **Coalition to End Homelessness:** For a number of years, the County—through the Unmet Needs Fund of the Department of Human Services—has partnered with the City of Grand Rapids and Salvation Army to fund a Housing Continuum of Care Coordinator position to provide increased support for the vision to end homelessness. The “Vision to End Homelessness” strategy was adopted in 2006 to ensure a permanent residence for every citizen by 2014.
64. **Convention/Arena Authority:** The County, along with the City of Grand Rapids, State of Michigan, and the private sector joined forces through the creation of a convention/arena authority to own and operate the Van Andel Arena and DeVos Place Convention Center. The County is the major funding unit for the Convention Center (\$95 million), along with the State (\$65 million), private

sector (\$33 million), and City of Grand Rapids DDA (\$10 million). The County appoints two representatives to serve on the seven-member CAA Board, and several staff members of the County serve on the Finance Committee and Operations Committee of the Authority.

65. ***Dietetic Interns:*** Western Michigan, Michigan State, Andrews and Eastern Michigan Universities are among the schools that send dietetic students to the Kent County Health Departments WIC program as part of a dietetic internship rotation. Students spend between 6-8 weeks within the WIC clinics applying their classroom education and learning valuable hands on experience in a community health setting. Students are mentored by Registered Dietitians within the WIC program.
66. ***Drug Enforcement:*** Kent County partners with three different drug enforcement initiatives. The local office of the Federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Walker, Grandville, East Grand Rapids and Kent County with the Kent Area Narcotics Enforcement Team (KANET); Grand Rapids, Michigan State Police, Wyoming, Kentwood, and Kent County with the Metropolitan Enforcement Team (MET), and Sheriff Stelma is a board member of a consortium of State and Federal partners in the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). These groups work in concert with each other on different aspects of the drug problem in our community. Collectively, they bring hundreds of thousands of enforcement dollars into the area and account for hundreds of arrests from street dealers to those involved in national drug expertise.
67. ***Essential Needs Task Force (ENTF):*** Since 1982, the County, City of Grand Rapids, other governmental agencies, the United Way, along with 100 non-profit and faith-based organizations have worked collaboratively to address basic food, shelter, utility, and transportation needs within the community. A number of County staff serve on various committees and subcommittees of the ENTF.
68. ***Emergency Preparedness Coordinators Collaboration Committee (EPC3):*** In an effort to ensure the consistency of preparedness plans to successfully meet the increasing demands of public health preparedness with dwindling resources, and avoid duplication of efforts by local health departments across the state, the local Emergency Preparedness Coordinators (EPCs) in several preparedness regions selected representatives to form the EPC3. The EPC representatives from each region examine the grant work plan each year and determine which activities should be completed collaboratively. Each region is assigned tasks to complete and subsequently share with EPCs statewide. Tasks include plan development, exercise development & execution, and quality improvement activities. Additionally, the EPC3 serves as the communication body between local EPCs and the state. This ensures that information is shared and received uniformly. The Kent County Health Department EPC serves as the Region 6 representative to the EPC3.
69. ***Experience Grand Rapids (formerly the Convention & Visitors Bureau):*** The County is the single largest contributing partner in Experience Grand Rapids through the Lodging Excise (Hotel/Motel) Tax and participates in the organization's affairs. The County is formally represented on the Board of Directors. Experience Grand Rapids markets tourism and lodging in Kent County and also serves as the marketing arm of the Convention/Arena Authority and has had significant success marketing convention dates at DeVos Place. In November 2012, the Board of Commissioners approved a three-year agreement with Experience Grand Rapids, which provides that the County will pay 16.75 percent of the collected Hotel/Motel Tax revenues to Experience Grand Rapids for destination marketing services.
70. ***Fallasburg Dam:*** The Fallasburg Dam was constructed in 1903 by the Grand Rapids Edison Company for the purpose of generating hydroelectric power. In 1906, the Dam's ownership was transferred to what later became Consumers Power, who operated it until 1965, when it was "retired." The Dam was transferred to Kent County in 1968 (probably because it was within the Park). Between 1968 and 1972 there were minor repairs, and in 1979, the Michigan Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers cited it as an engineering and historical landmark as one of the first hydroelectric facilities built in the State. In the early 1980s, the County conducted a feasibility

study to see if the hydroelectric power generation function should be revived but decided not to do so because of the upfront capital investment needed. In 1983, the County entered into a 35-year lease with a Wisconsin consulting firm whereby it would make the capital investment, operate it, and pay the County (\$29,000/year + a portion of the gross revenues). According to the lease, the County has to set aside at least \$4,000/year from the rental payments for repairs when the need for such arises. As of December 2012, the County has “netted” approximately \$800,000 from the lease. The lease has an automatic renewal option for another 35 years.

71. ***First Steps/Great Start Collaborative:*** Spun off from the Kent County Family and Children’s Coordinating Council, an organization made up of representatives from a variety of organizations, including but not limited to, United Way, Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Family Resources, Arbor Circle, Grand Rapids Community College, Kent ISD, Kent 4C Childcare, Aquinas College, Children’s Commission, Child and Family Resource Council, and Creative Learning Center. The Great Start Collaborative worked together to launch First Steps Partnership which is a partnership of parents, community, agencies, business leaders, healthcare providers, educators, foundations, faith leaders and individuals who are investing in our youngest children to ensure a better future for all of us. The vision is that every young child in Kent County will be ready to succeed in school and in life. Funders have included the Frey Foundation, Steelcase Foundation, Heart of West Michigan United Way, and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation. The four key pillars within the theory of change is that each child in Kent County will have a medical home (Community Health Access Program); each first born child in Kent County will receive a newborn home visit to link it to the existing home visiting services (Welcome Home Baby); the quality of Friends, Family & Neighbor Child Care will improve (FFN); and the community will understand the importance of the early years in a child’s life. More information can be found at [www.firststepskent.org](http://www.firststepskent.org).
72. ***Gerald R. Ford Job Corp Center:*** Kent/MSU Extension nutrition instructors taught 8-week nutrition series of classes to all Health Occupation as well as Culinary Arts students at the G. R. Ford Job Corp training programs. In 2012, 120 students ages 18-26 completed this instruction. MSUE staff then link these students to be Guest Chefs when we teach the “Cooking Matters” nutrition classes to high risk youth who are aging out of foster care, enrolled at the Youth Builders program offered by Habitat and Bethany Christian Services.
73. ***Goodwill Industries:*** Kent/MSU Extension nutrition instructors delivered 8-week nutrition series to all participants enrolled in the Goodwill Achieve program. This work training program focuses on skills development. The skills learned in the nutrition classes include meeting basic nutritional needs on a budget, food safety, and basic cooking.
74. ***Grand Rapids Community College:*** A) Kent/MSU Extension: The GRCC Media Center works in partnership with Kent/MSU Extension staff to record and air various educational presentations, including the monthly “Lunch and Learn” series on the Kent/MSUE portal through YouTube and on GRTV. This series is directed to local agency, pantry and housing staff who work with clients new to food assistance. It is designed for professionals, para-professionals and volunteers who would like to be able to share sound nutrition information with their clients but do not have the time or resource to do their own research and materials development; B) Diversity Initiatives: The GRCC Diversity Learning Center makes diversity training resources available to the County.
75. ***Grand Rapids Public Schools:*** Each year, 60 students from Grand Rapids Public Schools make John Ball Zoo their classroom for the entire year. Their teachers and students utilize the zoo every day and interact with the staff of the zoo in various projects to enhance their educational experience. All subjects are taught with a strong emphasis on environmental science. This is a once in a lifetime educational experience for these students.

76. ***Guiding Light Mission:*** Kent/MSU Extension nutrition instructors delivered 8-week nutrition series to participants at the Guiding Light Mission. These classes, offered to participating men at the mission, were incorporated into the Guiding Light wellness program.
77. ***GVSU Nursing Students:*** For well over a decade, the Health Department and Grand Valley State University have been working together to enhance the public health education of nursing students. This partnership includes providing a public health rotation for approximately seven students per semester, which includes hands-on experience serving lower-risk clients. After graduation, some students have been hired as Public Health Nurses in the department.
78. ***Homeland Security Project IGNITE.*** Since March 2007, members of the Sheriff's Office, Information Technology Department and other participants from Michigan Homeland Security's Region 6 have served on the steering committee for Project IGNITE (Information Gathering Network & Intelligence / Technology Exchange). The goal of this project is to expand and enhance the sharing of criminal intelligence, crime analysis, and investigative information between law enforcement agencies in Region 6, the State of Michigan Fusion Centers, and other investigative partners. Project IGNITE has been divided into two areas: Information Sharing and Information Publication. Information Sharing involves sharing of records management data, provides a crime analysis tool, and enhances criminal investigations. At this time, crime information databases for each county in Region 6 can be created and shared by law enforcement agencies in Michigan. Going into the next year, we anticipate there will be new features and additional database resources. Region 3 has also joined this project. Information Publication will allow for timely, centralized publication of investigative information. The publication area of the project is currently undergoing testing by representatives from each member, and training for the Region began in mid-2009.
79. ***Kent/MSU Extension Agreement:*** Since 1912, Michigan State University has partnered with counties throughout Michigan to provide extension services. The exact services to be delivered and funded have been formalized in various Memorandums of Agreement. In 2010, MSUE began the process of standardizing the services they offer as well as the manner in which they negotiated with counties for specific services. Under the new format, Counties have been asked to enter into a five-year agreement with annual work plans which will be developed concurrently with the County budget. Under the terms of the new agreement, counties will pay a standardized assessment based on a formula which includes a base amount and population-based formula. The County approved the agreement in November 2011.
80. ***Kent County Juvenile Detention:*** Kent/MSU Extension staff taught a 6-week series of nutrition classes to youth housed at the Kent County Juvenile Detention. These 11-17 year old youth learned about basic nutrition, the importance of fruits and vegetables, and food safety. They also participated in a 3-week training taught by a Kent/MSU Extension educator on alternatives to anger and on safe dates. Other community agencies that referred participants for MSUE parenting classes and alternatives to anger training include D.A. Blodgett, Bethany Christian Services and Lutheran Family Services.
81. ***Kent County LEPC:*** In 1989 Kent County formed the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) to develop plans on how to respond to a chemical spill as well as to educate the community about hazardous chemicals. The LEPC consists of representatives from 13 different groups as designated by the Federal Government. These groups include industry, agriculture, human service groups, fire, law enforcement, EMS, public officials, environmental groups, hospitals, media, education, emergency management and hazmat response teams. Originally the LEPC Coordinator was at the Health Department, but in 1999 the organization moved to the Kent County Sheriff Department, office of Emergency Management. The LEPC covers all communities within the County.
82. ***Kent County Tax Credit Coalition (KCTCC):*** The Kent County Tax Credit Coalition is a collaboration of the Heart of West Michigan United Way, Kent County Department of Human

Services, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the County and many other partners in the public, private and nonprofit sectors. The KCTCC helps individuals in Kent County whose income is \$55,000 or less to become aware of Earned Income Tax Credits and other federal and state tax credit opportunities that can help make life easier. It offers free tax preparation services at Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites in Kent County throughout the tax season. There were over 5,600 individuals and families served and \$6.5 million dollars returned to Kent County in 2012 for this effort.

83. ***Kent County “Working Together for a Healthier Tomorrow”***: The Health Department is partnering with Spectrum Health, St. Mary’s Hospital, Pine Rest and Mary Free Bed in a community health assessment and improvement planning process designed to identify priority health issues and develop a plan to strategically and collaboratively improve community health. This initiative brings together a broad group of partners concerned about health in the community and working in partnership to achieve a shared vision for high quality of life, health, and well-being for all people in Kent County. The coalition working on this initiative is made up of over 80 organizations that represent a broadly-defined public health system in the County.
84. ***Kent Health Plan***: Kent/MSU Extension delivered 8-week series of nutrition lessons to more than 40 people with chronic disease through the Kent Health Plan. These classes in basic nutrition were offered in both English and Spanish
85. ***Kent School Services Network (KSSN)***: After two years of research and discussion, the Kent School Services Network was launched in September 2006 with leadership from the Kent County Family and Children’s Coordinating Council (KCFCCC) and the County Administrator’s Office. After six years of service, the initiative has identified several positive outcomes, most notably a decrease in chronic absenteeism which affects the ability for students to learn. This is related due to the realignment of services provided by the Network. Currently, KSSN Network serves 21 schools in seven districts with the purpose of providing responsive and effective, seamless, integrated service delivery to families and students through Kent County public schools by all service providers (nonprofit, state, and county) to ensure that all kids are healthy and learning. The Network is a partnership among Cedar Springs Public Schools, Grand Rapids Public Schools, Godfrey Lee Public Schools, Godwin Heights Public Schools, Kelloggsville Public Schools, Kentwood Public Schools, and Wyoming Public Schools, Kent County and its Health Department, Kent Intermediate School District, Kent Department of Human Services, network180, and Spectrum Health. Funding has been provided by the above entities and the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation, Steelcase Foundation, Frey Foundation, United Way, Keller Foundation and the Institute for Systematic Change and the Kellogg Foundation. The Governor and the Michigan Department of Human Services is modeling the KSSN effort on the East side of the state (Detroit, Saginaw, Flint, Pontiac) through the Pathways to Potentials Initiative (<http://www.michigan.gov/snyder/0,4668,7-277-60279-284025--,00.html>)
86. ***Legal Assistance Center***: Located on the fifth floor in the Courthouse, this non-profit agency works with community partners to provide assistance to the public in the resolution of legal problems. The Center provides this service to persons appearing before the Circuit Court and the Grand Rapids 61st District Court. Financial assistance in support of Center programs is provided by Kent County, the Bar Association, all local law firms and other private contributors. The County provides the office space and currently contributes funding toward operations (\$45,000 in 2011).
87. ***Mel Trotter Ministries***: Kent/MSU Extension nutrition instructors delivered 8-week nutrition series to participating men and women at Mel Trotter Ministries in downtown Grand Rapids. Participants learned basic nutrition, food safety, and food dollar management skills.
88. ***MSU College of Human Medicine***: Dr. Jeffrey Dwyer, Principal Investigator for a grant to the Geriatric Education Center of Michigan, is facilitating the development of multidisciplinary teams of health professionals throughout the state to recognize early signs of dementia in their patients.

Staff from the Kent/MSU Extension office serves on the planning and implementation team for this grant in Kent County. To date, two trainings have been held in Grand Rapids with 350 health care professionals in attendance.

89. **Michigan Veterans' Trust Fund:** The Michigan Veterans' Trust Fund central office requested that the County's Department of Veterans' Affairs enter into a service agreement for administration of the trust fund. This arrangement enables a single point of access at 82 Ionia for veterans experiencing financial emergencies or those interested in receiving benefits for their military service.
90. **network180:** Since the 1990s, the Sheriff's Department and network180 (or its predecessor Kent County CMH) have partnered to provide mental health services to inmates at the Correctional Facility. This partnership, in both services and funding, has led to many achievements, including the development of a mental health unit, the Sober Living Unit, and a number of other assessments and programs. In 2009, the State attempted to prohibit network180 from financially partnering with the County to provide these services and as a result County staff has worked with our State Legislators and network180 to ensure that we are not prohibited from collaborating.
91. **Parking:** Since 2001, the County has been part of a condominium association (with Ellis Parking) that owns a parking structure on Lyon Street. The County "owns" approximately 100 parking spaces used by employees who work at the Courthouse. And in 2008, the County entered into an agreement with the Gerald R. Ford Foundation to lease parking spaces for jurors at the Courthouse.
92. **Prevention Initiative:** In 2000, Kent County made a long-term commitment to improving the well-being of children and families through the Kent County Prevention Initiative (KCPI). In 2003, the KCPI began providing expanded funding to four programs: two primary prevention family support programs, Healthy Start and Bright Beginnings; one child abuse and neglect program, Early Impact; and one family-focused substance abuse prevention program, Family Engagement Program. Programs are delivered through Family Futures, the Kent Intermediate School District (KISD), the Department of Human Services (DHS), and network180, respectively. These programs impact approximately 4,000 children each year. The County, via the Kent County Family and Children's Coordinating Council and the Health Department, works with local hospitals, KISD, Juvenile Justice System, juvenile and adult courts, the Sheriff's Department, to evaluate the short-term and long-term impact of the programs on families across Kent County. The most recent report concluded that program participants are less likely to be involved with the formal Child Protection System than their comparison groups and that each program had a positive cost/benefit ratio.
93. **Project Rehab:** Kent/MSU Extension nutrition instructors deliver an 8-week series of classes to Project Rehab participants, men in recovery who are getting ready to reenter the community. In 2012, more than 150 participants completed this nutrition education, learning how to stretch limited dollars and eat a more nutritious diet.
94. **Public Law Clinic:** In collaboration with the Cooley Law School, the County is participating in its Public Sector Law Project (PSLP). Law school students serve, under the direction of a Cooley faculty member and the County's Corporate Counsel, "internships" and provide legal research to County departments, elected offices, authorities, agencies, boards and commissions. In the past students in the PSLP kept busy with a variety of projects, including assessment of a Headlee challenge concerning the Children's Rights Agreement, assessment of the impact of expanded disability language in the ADA and FMLA, legal implications of countywide disaster preparedness planning and policy development, development of presentations on various legal topics for Kent County Correctional Facility inmates preparing for community reentry, development of FOIA training and electronic availability of FOIA request materials, and development of an e-discovery policy for the County. Various County officials have made presentations to the students that included the Chair of the Board of Commissioners, County Clerk/Register of Deeds, Sheriff, County Administrator, Corporate Counsel, IT Director and a Health Department Division Director.

95. ***The Right Place, Inc.***: Kent County has been a major public partner in The Right Place, Inc., since its inception over 25 years ago. The County Administrator/Controller serves on the Board of Directors of The Right Place, Inc., and the County contributes \$85,000 annually toward this regional economic development effort for West Michigan.
96. ***Saint Mary's and Metro Health Residency Programs***: The Health Department developed a public health rotation for Metro Health and the St. Mary's Hospital Family Practice Residency. This program, started August 1, 2011 for St. Mary's Residents, includes education and exposure to Health Department activities including management and care of tuberculosis, Refugee Health, Immunizations, and the Women, Infant & Children's (WIC) program. The doctors-in-training also work directly with Health Department educators to provide programs to specific audiences. Metro Health Residents were added to the program in late 2011.
97. ***SafeDATES***: Started in October 2010, the Health Department is collaborating with Kent County probation to provide the SafeDATES program to youth currently on probation. SafeDATES is an adolescent dating abuse prevention program that deals with attitudes and behaviors associated with dating abuse and violence. The program strives to raise youth awareness of what constitutes healthy and abusive dating relationships, teach positive communication, anger management, and conflict resolution.
98. ***Silent Observer***: The County, City of Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, and many private business partners fund a Silent Observer program which results in dozens of crimes being solved on an annual basis.
99. ***State of Michigan IT Connections***: The County worked with the State of Michigan to consolidate multiple leased line connections onto a single connection with higher bandwidth. Since the State of Michigan's building and the County's downtown data center are next to each other, it was a relatively easy and low cost matter to connect to the high-speed leased line the State uses from Grand Rapids to Lansing. This eliminated separate County connections currently used to support activities such as Friend of the Court and hook-up to "LEIN" – Law Enforcement Information Network. The County recently entered into an agreement with the Michigan Department of Transportation to share a Fiber Optic network. MDOT has agreed to provide the County with access to the I-96, I-196, and M-6 Intelligent Traffic System fiber ring around the City of Grand Rapids with an irrevocable right to use the System. With the latter project, the County is expected to reduce costs by \$12,000 annually.
100. ***South Kent Landfill***: Kent County owns and operates a municipal solid waste landfill. The County through its Department of Public Works has long standing agreements with adjacent counties for the import and export of solid waste. Additionally, the County has an agreement through its approved solid waste management plan to expand the South Kent Landfill into Dorr Township, Allegan County. DPW has already purchased several properties in the proposed landfill expansion area. Allegan County does not have a landfill.
101. ***Waste-to-Energy***: The County (through the Department of Public Works) and Granger Energy, LLC (Granger Electric of Byron Center) entered into a 20-year lease that allows Granger the right to use the gas produced by the landfill for the production of electricity. The facility began operation in June 2010.
102. ***West Michigan Sports Commission (WMSC)***: This is a private-public cooperative venture to provide for a variety of sports activities and venues in the Kent County and West Michigan area. Its express purpose is to bring visitors into the area. The County provided initial staff work for almost one year researching the establishment of a sports commission and is contributing \$200,000 annually (2007-2011) toward funding its activities. Other funding partners include the Convention & Arena Authority (CAA), Experience Grand Rapids, and the private sector. The Board of Commissioners approved a \$100,000 appropriation to the Sports Commission in the County's 2012 Budget and recently amended the 2011 Budget to include an additional appropriation of \$50,000.

Through 2012, the County's investment in the West Michigan Sports Commission will amount to \$1,150,000. The County is no longer providing direct financial support to the WMSC, but is actively engaged on its Board, with Commissioners Dick VanderMolen, who serves as Chair of the Board, Harold Voorhees, and Assistant Administrator Wayman Britt.

103. ***West Michigan Cyber Security Consortium.*** This group was started two years ago by Kent County employees. It now includes 150 members from public and private entities that meet quarterly. Their purpose is to enhance the prevention, protection, response and recovery to cyber security threats, disruptions, and degradation to critical information technology functions. They have used regional Homeland Security funds to assist critical infrastructure facilities with cyber projects; and to allow regional businesses access to Security-focused Conferences.
104. **Zoo:** A) Great Lakes Piping Plover Recovery Project – In collaboration with the following zoos: Brookfield, Detroit, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Milwaukee County, Sea World Orlando, San Diego and Toledo – John Ball Zoo provided staff assistance with incubation, hatching, raising and release of endangered Great Lakes Piping Plovers as part of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service recovery efforts. Zoo staff has participated in this program since 2004. B) Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnakes Study – In cooperation with the American Zoological Association, (AZA) Eastern Massasauga Species Survival Plan (SSP) and The Edward Lowe Foundation, regional field research projects have been developed to study habitat use, behavior, range, and other factors impacting population change for Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnakes. This project began in spring 2009 and is continuing for a minimum of five years, collecting mark/recapture data. With data collected over the years, the study will begin to quantify survival and reproductive information which is important for understanding current changes in the population and for projecting future change. John Ball Zoo provides staffing assistance for the study annually in the spring. C) Annual Kirtland's Warbler Census: John Ball Zoo collaborated with the Audubon Society, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to train individuals in identification and census methods. Participants in the study will eventually mentor others in these methods in the future so this important annual census will be carried on into the future. John Ball Zoo provided staffing support for the project.