

December 11, 2001

Mark Grebner, Chairperson
Ingham County Board of Commissioners
P.O. Box 319
Mason, MI 48854

Dear Chairperson Grebner,

I am pleased to provide you with an update on many of the issues addressed by the Board of Commissioners in 2001. Several projects underway for the past few years have been completed, and significant progress has been made on several other issues.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without the hard work and cooperative efforts of the entire Board of Commissioners, county wide elected officials, judges, department heads, staff, appointees to the many Boards and Commissions, and, of course, the dedicated and capable employees.

I look forward to working with the Board and others in the county government to continue addressing the challenges before us.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Gerald W. Ambrose
Controller

GWA/njh

2001 Issues Update December, 2001

Ingham County government provides many services to its 279,000 residents. Services are provided in the areas of health and other human services; law enforcement and judicial administration; recreation; economic development; the recording of personal and property records, and others.

On any day, many residents access county government by:

*Utilizing the many public health, sanitation, or disease control services provided by the Health Department, the support services of Veteran Affairs, or the residential services of the Medical Care Facility and the Housing Commission;

*Utilizing the many other County supported human service programs in mental health, substance abuse, aging, special transportation, or youth violence prevention;

*Utilizing the services of the Prosecutor, Sheriff, or the courts, or anticipating the arrival of law enforcement, fire or emergency medical service personnel dispatched by county supported 911 Centers;

*Obtaining birth, death, tax or property information from the offices of the County Clerk, Treasurer, or Register of Deeds, participating in elections; receiving assistance in drainage-related problems from the Drain Commissioner; or traveling on county-built or maintained roads in non-urban areas of the county; or

*Attending educational events sponsored by MSU Cooperative Extension, visiting one of the many county parks, or visiting the county fairgrounds.

County services are provided by dedicated employees under the leadership of elected officials, department heads and agency boards. Ingham County has a history of excellent labor relations which was typified again this year by the peaceful negotiation of several labor contracts, by the stability of our workforce, and by the cooperative approach taken by labor and management to address rapidly rising health care costs. The County also has a history of dedication to strong financial management, which was again recognized with an upgrade in the county's credit rating associated with the sale of bonds on behalf of the Alaedon Township sewer issue, and by the development of the 2002 budget which maintains vital county services in areas of importance to our citizens in times of economic uncertainty. County buildings and facilities continue to be maintained in good repair, while investments in technology are continued, enabling our work to be more productive and our services more accessible.

Priorities for county services and directions for county staff are set by the Board of Commissioners. Priorities identified over the past several years include expanding access to health care; expanding recreational opportunities; and increasing the continuum of sanctions and placements for youth and

adults. Internal priorities continued to be developing and equipping the county workforce and enhancing the county's management information services capabilities. Additional priorities identified this year included encouraging the participation of youth in county government, assuring an appropriate level of services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, exploring ways to expand and improve services for seniors, improving the overall jury selection system, exploring more equitable ways of financing the Capital Region Airport, assessing the county's responsibilities for Phase II of the Federal Clean Water Act, examining the implications of regional land use on the region's future, and preparing the Board of Commissioners' room to reflect changes necessary due to redistricting.

In 2001, services for our residents were continued at the high level our residents have come to expect. In spite of weak economic conditions and reductions in some state sources of revenue, the 2002 budget recently adopted by the Board of Commissioners assures that these services will continue at the same level at the same time that some significant enhancements to services are being made.

Some of the accomplishments of note this year include:

- Continuing to increase access to health care for the uninsured in our county through support of the Ingham Health Plan, where nearly 13,000 residents now have access to primary physician care and speciality care; through the Capital Area Prescription Plan where some 2,000 residents have access to medication at reduced costs; and by financially supporting implementation of a subsidized health insurance program on a pilot basis for small employers, which is to be offered by the Ingham Health Plan in 2002;
- Continuing to expand recreational opportunities for all county residents by completing construction of Hawk Island Park, which is now scheduled to open in the spring of 2002;
- Continuing to improve the administration of justice by opening the new \$24.5 million Veterans Memorial Courthouse in July, 2001, and approving financing for renovation of the \$10.5 million of the adjoining Grady Porter Building;
- Migrating the Friend of the Court information system to the state-run Child Enforcement Support System with minimal disruption in the delivery of services and child support payments to clients;
- Promoting and expanding sentencing alternatives for non-violent adult offenders with the April, 2001 opening of the probation residential center in Mason;
- Improving services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault through formation of a grant funded Domestic Assault Response Team in the Prosecutor's Office;
- Enhancing access to county records by making many property tax records, vital records, and other documents such as campaign financing reports, available on-line, accessible through the county web site; and

- Establishing a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority in order to provide a tool for the re-use of contaminated or obsolete facilities throughout the county.

The County, through its elected officials, staff, and appointees, has also contributed time and resources planning efforts designed to develop effective long term strategies improving our communities and region. These efforts include the Youth Violence Prevention Coalition with its comprehensive planning process focusing on developing consensus and strategies to prevent incidents of youth violence and encouraging wise youth. It also includes the Tri-County Planning Commission's 3-year planning process of evaluating the long term impact of current land use trends. It also includes the Capital Area Health Alliance's process, supported by the Health Department, to develop an organized system of health care in the region for those without insurance.

From a concern based on a need to assure that the voice of youth is heard on county issues and services affecting county residents under 18 years of age, the Board of Commissioners, with staff support from MSU Extension, established the Ingham County Youth Commission. This Commission, which is charged generally with advising the Board on county issues and services affecting county residents under 18 years of age, held its first meeting on December 10.

The numerous physical location changes related to the occupancy of the Veterans Memorial Courthouse and the temporary relocation of employees from the Grady Porter Building to Jackson National Life presented many challenges. A high level of effort and cooperation between contractors, the staff of Facilities, MIS, and Purchasing departments, and the Circuit Court, Probate Court, and Prosecutor's Office, resulted in these moves being accomplished with minimal disruption of essential work.

Other issues faced by the county continue to be addressed. However, they have been less susceptible to specific resolution. These issues include:

- A county jail which has been overcrowded significantly more this year than in past years. The Circuit and District courts, the Sheriff's Office, the Prosecutor's Office, Community Corrections, and the Controller's Office have all worked diligently to address the situation in a manner that assures that the safety of the public is protected while the integrity of the judicial system is maintained. Strategies include improving the sharing of information in a timely manner; establishing a committee of judicial and law enforcement representatives who meet regularly to monitor the use and population of the jail; and a review and update of the Circuit Court Administrative Order governing early release. Several meetings have been held this year on this topic.
- A significant increase in delinquent and neglect petitions filed with Family Division of Circuit Court, partially as a result of change in state law. As a result, the county's Youth Center has been regularly overcrowded, and the Child Care Fund has required significant additional appropriations during the year. The 2002 budget includes a significant increase for processing

and placement costs, and provides support for the recently created Truancy Court. In addition, the court is exploring an alternate arrangement with the state FIA which may increase the capacity of the system without further increasing costs.

- Continuing debate on a proposed regulation to assure smoke-free areas in public places and work sites. Public hearings have been held and a task force was formed to work on a regulation acceptable at least to a majority of the Board. It is anticipated that a proposed regulation may be presented for board consideration in early 2002.
- Addressing a legal challenge to the county's proposed method of financing some portions of the recently adopted solid waste plan. Although the issue remains unresolved, current levels of recycling, household hazardous waste disposal, and enforcement, have continued at current levels, due in part to financial support, both voluntary and contractual, from local solid waste management companies.
- Passage of the new Concealed Weapons Permit legislation, which has increased the workload in the Clerk, Prosecutor, and Sheriff's Office, and generated consideration of a Headlee challenge. Currently, efforts are underway to document actual costs which have been incurred.
- Rapidly rising health insurance costs which will result in many county employees sharing in health insurance premiums for the first time. With the concerted efforts of the Health Coalition, alternatives have been developed which may significantly reduce the premium cost sharing for some, but at the risk of increased out of pocket expenses.
- Receiving notice of unanticipated revenue losses shortly after next year's budget was adopted. While the 2002 budget was adopted with relatively little controversy, increases in services and staffing were minimal. Unfortunately, immediately after the budget was finalized, further interest rate reductions were announced by the Federal Reserve Board, and the Governor issued an Executive Order reducing state revenue sharing and other revenues to the county. As a result some slight reduction in planned spending is being considered, and offices and departments have been asked to identify a plan by which their spending can be held to 98% of the budgeted amount.
- More delay in making improvements to the 911 emergency telephone answering and dispatch systems which have been under discussion for the past several years. The development of recommended improvements has been the responsibility of the 911 Advisory Committee, assisted by the Gartner Group. Unfortunately, progress has been problematic, due to changes in the consulting group personnel staffing the project, and then by a decision to reject the initial design and bid. The result has been much slower progress than anticipated. On the positive side, funds being accumulated for the improvements continue to increase; on the negative side, the current system continues to be relied upon, but is increasingly inadequate.
- Responding to September 11 with increased focus on safety and security. As throughout the

United States, the events of September 11 have heightened the need for emergency planning and response capability. The County Emergency Services Office and the Health Department have focused much time and effort in monitoring related activities, and in informing and educating county departments and offices as well as the public.

- Advocating for a safe route through Ingham County for the proposed Wolverine Pipeline. While the opposition to the initial proposals for locating the pipeline contributed to the identification of alternate routes, the route recently announced may not satisfactorily address all initial concerns.

In addition, County staff has begun to address other issues identified as important by the new Board of Commissioners. These issues include achieving more equitable funding for the airport; identifying the county role in Phase II of the Federal Clean Water Act, and improving the jury selection process. Resolution of these issues will likely require multi-year efforts.

Looking Ahead to 2002

As a county with a significant urban population, Ingham is increasingly challenged to determine how demands for services, particularly those relative to low income residents and incidents of crime, will be addressed when total population is declining, and while the county's tax base relative to other counties in the region is also declining. It is also challenged to assure residents in suburban and rural areas of the county that their demands for county services, which may not be the same as for urban areas, are also addressed.

2002 will present many of the same challenges in addition to new ones. Consideration of the proposed smoking regulation and the plan to provide an organized system of health care for the uninsured; financing of the solid waste plan; improvements to the 911 emergency dispatch system; continued focus on alleviating regular jail and youth detention center overcrowding; and improving the jury selection system are all examples. A review of progress made on identified areas of priority will be made and further progress determined. Renovation of the Grady Porter Building will take place during 2002, with employees returning from temporary quarters by year's end. Accommodations will be made for the expansion of the Board of Commissioners from 13 to 16 members. In addition, there will likely be continuing discussions on issues of regional and county importance, including the need for a living wage ordinance; economic development, access to health, water quality, and land use growth trends. Ongoing budgetary, labor relations, and other administrative processes will occur, with the possibility of budgetary amendments necessary to reflect unanticipated revenue losses; with consideration of recommendations on user fees; and the reality of labor negotiations with major bargaining units, where the continuing escalation of employee health insurance premiums is expected to be a major concern. Finally, there will be continuing work with the various elected officials, judges, department heads, and others as opportunities and challenges arise in the day to day delivery of county services.