

## Issues Update - December, 2004



*In spite of challenges associated with a weak economy and declining state tax revenues, Ingham County continues to provide a high quality of services to its 279,000 residents. Health and human services, law enforcement and justice administration, recreation, elections, and record keeping are provided through County organization. Over the past several years, the Board of Commissioners has strived to maintain all county services at an acceptable level, but has placed particular importance on providing uninsured residents with access to health care; expanding recreational opportunities; improving the adult and juvenile justice systems; and promoting environmental protection.*

### Significant accomplishments in 2004 include the following:

- Increased access to health care with the initiation of the *Ingham County Advantage* health insurance program for employees of small businesses;
- Expanded recreational opportunities with the addition of a community built playground at Hawk Island Park and beginning efforts to link parks in the county by means of trails;
- Improved programming in and increased capacity of the juvenile justice system, utilizing the funds generated from the special Juvenile Justice millage;
- Improved ability to manage adult offenders through the addition of work release housing at the Jail and additional community based placements;
- Enhanced access to health and human services agencies with the establishment of the Capital Area Human Services Connection /2-1-1 System;
- Local economic development supported through approval of tax sharing agreements with Delhi Charter Township and Lansing Charter Township;
- Enhanced public safety by making significant progress towards a project to upgrade the 911 system and by preparing and implementing plans to improve Homeland Security efforts;
- Initiated efforts to evaluate the extent of lead poisoning in the county and to develop recommendations on how to address the findings;
- Developed strategies for promoting smart growth through confirmed participation in the Regional Growth Study, revision of the Soil Erosion Ordinance, and adoption of a Purchase of Development Rights Ordinance;
- Pursued potential improvements in the financing and delivery of governmental services, including Animal Control, District Court, primary law enforcement in rural areas, community agency funding, and the Capital Region Airport Authority;
- Improved internal operations through such efforts as revising the County's Equal Opportunity Plan, implementing a Living Wage Policy, updating the county's financial management system and implementing energy saving improvements to county building and lighting systems;
- Maintained stable relationships with employees by extending several labor contracts and continuing to work jointly on managing health insurance costs;
- Adopted a budget for 2005 which minimizes the impact of anticipated reductions in state funds on the delivery of services to residents and on county employees.

*A more detailed discussion of these activities follows.*

## Significant Accomplishments in Providing Services to Ingham County Residents In 2004

**Access to health care for more uninsured county residents has improved with the introduction of the *Ingham County Advantage* health insurance program in early June.**

*Ingham County Advantage* is a subsidized health insurance product for small businesses with low-wage employees. Using county, state, and federal funds, the county-sponsored Ingham Health Plan Corporation will subsidize approximately one third of the cost of the premium, with the other two-thirds to be paid by the employer and/or the employee. *ICA* will compliment the *Ingham Health Plan*, which provides nearly half of the county's 30,000 uninsured residents with access to primary health care. It is anticipated that by year's end seven employers covering sixteen employees will have enrolled or are scheduled to enroll in *ICA*.

**Recreational opportunities for county residents have been expanded with the addition of a community built playground at Hawk Island Park. Further improvements are expected as parks in the county are linked together by multi-use trails.** Thanks to the *Friends of Hawk Island Park* and the volunteers who donated money and labor, Hawk Island Park now has a new community playground. Community donations provided most of the \$125,000 needed for materials, and volunteer labor in five days at the end of May accomplished the construction.

Efforts to connect recreational areas in the county by pedestrian and non-motorized trails have begun with efforts to obtain easements from affected property owners. Many of the easements necessary for the first phase of this project - constructing a trail connecting the County's Lake Lansing parks to the Lansing River Trail and ultimately to Hawk Island - have been obtained. Applications for state grants to construct this phase have been filed, and County officials are hopeful that this portion of the trail can be completed within the next few years.

**Improved programming and increased capacity in the juvenile justice system has taken place, utilizing the funds generated from the special Juvenile Justice millage.** In November 2002, voters approved a 5-year 6/10 mill special property tax millage for the treatment and detention of delinquent and disturbed youth. The proceeds of this millage (\$3.6 million in 2004) have provided the opportunity for stabilizing and expanding programming for delinquent juveniles in Ingham County while other parts of the county government have been faced with program reductions and hiring freezes.

Actions taken by the Board of Commissioners and the Family Court Division of the Circuit Court since the beginning of 2003 include:

- Adding staff and security equipment at the Youth Center to bring it into compliance with state certification standards;
- Implementing a standardized risk assessment tool for all delinquent juveniles being detained by the court;
- Creating an Aftercare Unit to monitor and assist delinquent juveniles returning home from residential placements outside of the community;
- Increasing the capacity of the short-term residential program at Camp Highfields from 9 to 24;
- Authorizing a 16-bed increase in the capacity for local residential placements primarily for females;
- Restructuring and expanding the Highfield Youth Attention Program, a short-term placement program; and

- Increasing from 16 to 30 the number of juveniles placed in other residential settings when local alternatives are not available.

One of the significant impacts of the use of these funds has been a substantial reduction in overcrowding at the Ingham County Youth Center, the county's 24-bed juvenile detention facility. In August of this year, the Michigan Family Independence Agency renewed the license for the Ingham County Youth Center, citing "substantial compliance with applicable licensing statutes and administrative procedures." Renewal of the facility's license had been withheld since 2000 due to chronic overcrowding.

Further improvements and program expansions are expected to occur once the County and Court are able to fully analyze data coming from the standardized risk assessments.

**The County's ability to more effectively manage adult offenders has improved with the addition of work release housing at the Jail and additional community based placements.**

State mandated sentencing guidelines combined with the diversion of offenders from the prison system to county jails and programs has created constant overcrowding at the Ingham County Jail, and led to the first official Jail Overcrowding Emergency in several years. The result of this overcrowding is the release of non-violent inmates from the jail or into other programs in advance of their original commitment. However, court and law enforcement officials work diligently to assure that the safety of the public is protected and that the releases do not create a crisis situation. A revision of the Court's Administrative Order which governs a process for managing the jail population was undertaken early in the year.

County and court officials continued to develop additional placements for adult offenders in community based programs, including the establishment of work crews comprised of individuals who would have otherwise been incarcerated for failure to pay child support. In addition, a renovation of the county jail to provide space for work release inmates was completed; an old residence on jail property was converted to a small substance abuse treatment facility; and an application for grant funds to support the second year of Drug Court at the 55<sup>th</sup> District Court in Mason was approved.

**Access to health and human services agencies was enhanced with the start-up of the Capital Area Human Services Connection/2-1-1 System.** With the support of Ingham County and other local units of government, non-profit organizations and foundations, the Capital Area United Way coordinated efforts to establish the Capital Area Human Service Connection/2-1-1 System. This service enables residents of Ingham, Clinton and Eaton Counties to be connected with a trained specialist to get immediate and accurate information about health and human service agencies that can offer assistance. Because communities are required to operate a seven-digit information and referral phone line for at least one year before they can receive 2-1-1 designation, it is necessary at this time for interested persons in Ingham County to call 337-8211, and those in Clinton or Eaton counties to call 866-361-8211.

**Tax sharing agreements were approved with Delhi Township and Lansing Charter Township, allowing the capture of county property taxes in portions of each township will be retained by the township and used to promote additional development.** The Delhi agreement represented a decision by the township to reduce the amount of funds currently being captured by the Township's DDA in exchange for extending the period of capture. The Lansing Township agreement is new and will utilize county funds to develop the area surrounding Eastwood Center. In total, more than \$2 million of incremental growth in Ingham County property taxes are captured annually to promote development in several areas of the County, including these two townships, the cities of East Lansing, Lansing, Mason and Williamston, and the Village of Stockbridge.

**Public Safety will be enhanced when a major upgrade to the 911 Emergency Telephone Answering and Dispatch System is complete and when local plans to improve Homeland Security are completed.** Police, fire and other emergency responders in all areas of the county will have significantly improved communication with the 911 Dispatch Centers and with each other. Implementation of the new \$12 million UHF 400 Mhz system is being overseen by the County's 911 Advisory Committee, and funded from the proceeds of the 911 special millage. Implementation of the project will be complete in early 2005.

In addition, utilizing state and federal funds, the Local Emergency Planning Committee, Ingham County Emergency Operations and the Sheriff's Office have developed and will be implementing a plan to improve Homeland Security. The \$500,000 grant will be used for improving communication between first responders; establishing a Public Health Coordination Center and alternate EOC; improving security in the EOC, purchasing new emergency management software and emergency response equipment.

**A special Lead Task Force was appointed by the Board of Commissioners to develop recommendations addressing the adverse impacts of lead poisoning.** Due to concerns about the potential adverse health impacts of lead exposure on county residents, a special task force was formed to assess the level and sources of lead poisoning in Ingham County and provide recommendations on how to address major sources of contamination, improve public health response and procedures for abatement, and enhance public awareness. The composition of the Task Force includes representatives from several county departments, other local governments, utility companies, and the community. It is anticipated that the Lead Task Force will issue its findings and recommendations to the Board of Commissioners in March 2005.

**Strategies are being developed for promoting smart growth and protecting environmental resources.** Ingham County's involvement in land use concerns and protection of environmental resources includes support of the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission; administration of the Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Ordinance, and ongoing support of the Health Department's Environmental Health Division and the Drain Commissioner's Office. This year, the County has continued its participation in the Tri-County Regional Growth Study, strengthened its Soil Erosion & Sedimentation Program, adopted a Purchase of Development Rights Ordinance, and had initial discussions on a potential Wetlands Ordinance.

Potential improvements in the financing and delivery of governmental services were pursued in several areas:

- Efforts to improve licensing enforcement, to address citizen concerns regarding the operation of the Animal Shelter and to improve responses to dog complaints, particularly in the City of Lansing, have been topics of discussion in the new Animal Control Advisory Committee and the Board's Law Enforcement Committee. A new Animal Control Director has also been hired as a result of the scheduled retirement of the current Director.
- Representatives of the County, the City of East Lansing, and 54B and 55<sup>th</sup> District Courts, continued exploring the possibility of a consolidation or other cooperative arrangement to better equalize the workload of the two courts and to improve citizen access to the district courts. Efforts to date have been focused on evaluating the financial feasibility of a consolidation.
- The Board of Commissioners has directed that efforts be taken to explore an alternate funding mechanism for the delivery of primary law enforcement and paramedic services by the Sheriff's Office to rural areas of the County. It has been noted that since these services are

funded by property taxes levied on a countywide basis but not provided on a countywide basis, some taxpayers are paying for services they cannot receive. It has also been noted that population increases in the areas served only by the Sheriff's Office will result in demands for greater services which the County will likely not be able to afford. Research is currently underway to determine how police services are currently provided and funded throughout the County, to identify discrepancies in the amounts paid for these services, and to identify potential alternate funding models.

- Efforts continue to expand the governance and funding base of the Capital Region Airport Authority into Clinton and Eaton counties. Discussions had been on hold since last fall, pending a study of the airport's economic impact on the region. The study was released in mid year, concluding that the airport generates some 7,400 jobs paying \$239 million in wages and generating \$652 million in sales. Over 40% of the jobs, wages, and sales are in Clinton and Eaton counties. In meetings, subsequent to the study's release, county leaders agreed in concept to the participation of Clinton County and Eaton County, but recognized that actual participation would require addressing several complex issues, including formal approval by each county, the form of governance, and the extent of financial participation.

**The operation of county government will be enhanced as the result of efforts in several areas, including:**

- Following more than a year's work by the Equal Opportunity Committee and the County Services Committee, the Board approved a revised Equal Opportunity Plan. The Plan, which has been supported by the courts and county-wide elected officials, renews and strengthens the County's commitment to the principles of equal opportunity.
- Progress continued in 2004 to replace the County's financial management system. Authorized by the Board of Commissioners in late 2003, the new software will enhance the ability of county departments to process and access purchasing, financial, and payroll related transactions. Implementation will be complete in the first half of 2005.
- Improvements to lighting and mechanical systems totaling \$1.6 million were approved as the result of an energy consumption analysis conducted by the TRANE Company. The energy savings from these improvements are projected to be more than sufficient to pay for the cost of the improvements over the next ten years. Implementation is underway and should be completed in early 2005.

**Stable relationships with employees were maintained.** Several contracts due to expire in 2004 were extended for another year, and letters of agreement implementing measurable changes to the health insurance program were approved. Contract negotiations with law enforcement, corrections officers, and parks employees were delayed due to changes in representation. As the result of representation elections, deputies and paramedics will now be represented by the Michigan Association of Police (MAP) instead of FOP, and Parks employees will now be represented by the ICEA instead of ASCME.

**Adopted a budget for 2005 which minimizes the impact of anticipated reductions in state funds on the delivery of services to residents and on county employees.** The \$163.5 million budget for 2005 places a high priority on continuing all existing services with an emphasis on expanding access to health care; expanding recreational opportunities; encouraging the use of appropriate sanctions; and promoting environmental protection. Through the cooperative efforts of all departments, no permanent county positions or non-grant funded programs were eliminated, although a two month hiring delay was imposed for all county funded positions which become

vacant during the year. The total property tax levy supporting the budget is 8.5669 mills, and the owner of a house valued at \$150,000 (assessed at \$75,000 in May, 2004) will pay \$642.51 in property taxes to support county services. These property taxes include 2 special millages which were re-authorized in 2004 – 911 and Special Transportation.

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