

Issues Update – December, 2006

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 280,000 residents. Health and human services, law enforcement and justice administration, recreation, elections, and record keeping are provided through the various County offices. 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.

2006 has seen much activity in areas of importance to the County Board, including the following:

- Efforts to expand access to health care for the uninsured have continued with promotion of the Ingham County Advantage program and the Ingham Health Plan; expansion of space for the Ingham Health Plan, opening of a new pediatric clinic, and approval of a contract with Free Medical Care, Inc. In addition, the 2007 budget includes funding for the second year of a five-year plan to achieve access for 100% of the County's uninsured residents.

The long anticipated opening of the Angel House, Children's Shelter and Assessment Center, a 12-bed facility to serve abused and neglected children took place in early 2006. However, the State Department of Human Services (DHS) Families First policy greatly reduced the use of this facility through the local DHS creating financial problems for the Angel House, Children's Shelter and Assessment Center. Accordingly the Board of Commissioners approved an Emergency appropriation of \$40,000 to Angel House for services to Ingham County residents as they explore other options with DHS and other human service providers to become financially solvent.

- Efforts to expand recreational opportunities have continued with the August 30, 2006 Ribbon Cutting Ceremony to mark the completion of the new Splash Pad and Patio at Hawk Island Park conducted by the 2006 the Board of Commissioners and the Ingham County Parks and Recreation Commission. The Splash Pad was an intergovernmental cooperative project with funding partnerships with the Michigan Department of National Resources, National Park Service, City of Lansing, Capital Region Community Foundation and Ingham County. Funding is in place for a joint project with the City of Lansing to construct a section of the Heart of Michigan Trail between Potter Park and Hawk Island Park. A Michigan Department of Natural Resources grant has been approved for the continuation of that project south of Hawk Island Park to the intersection of Jolly and Aurelius Roads, with the eventual destination of the Hope Soccer Complex. Local match funding is in place from Ingham County and Meridian Township to match both the Michigan Department of Transportation and Michigan Natural Resource grants for the construction of the section of the Heart of Michigan Trail running between Lake Lansing and the intersection of

Park Lake Road and M43. The Board of Commissioners has authorized the Parks Department to enter into easement agreements for the Heart of Michigan Trail.

- Efforts to expand the capacity to detain and treat delinquent and disturbed youth have continued with a fundamental change in the contractual relationship with Camp Highfields to more appropriately meet the Court's expectations for service. In addition, with the assistance of the Chinn Planning Partnership, the County Board of Commissioners and the Family Court developed an action plan to fill identified gaps in the continuum of care, using the remaining portion of the Juvenile Justice millage. The voters renewed the Juvenile Justice millage at .60 mills for a period of five years (2007-2011) inclusive. When levied in full, this millage will raise an estimated \$4,386,218 for juvenile housing and programming purposes in the first calendar year of the levy.
- Efforts to reduce chronic jail overcrowding have continued with implementation of recommendations made by the Jail Utilization Committee and the Community Corrections Advisory Board to find more alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders and pre-trial detainees. While average daily population has continued to be high, and the early release of non-violent inmates is not uncommon, a review of the County's bed capacity for local purposes indicates that, on a per capita basis, jail capacity is comparable to other counties.
- Efforts to promote wise use of land and to support continued use of existing housing have been initiated. Implementation of the Farmland Preservation Ordinance continues. The Agricultural Preservation Board is conducting its first landowner application cycle with the Board of Commissioners ranking the applications to begin the process of preserving farmland in Ingham County. The Agricultural Preservation Board proposed millage recommendation to the County Services Committee was not approved; however, funding for the administrative expenses was continued in the 2007 Budget.
- The County Treasurer has assumed the role of Foreclosure Agent for tax delinquent properties and the Land Bank Authority is managing foreclosed properties. Start-up funding for the Land Bank has been approved, and a limited tax pledge has been made so that the Land Bank can secure loans to acquire, maintain and rehabilitate property. The Board of Commissioners has approved the acquisition of the first properties to be conveyed to the Land Bank. The Board of Commissioners approved a resolution supporting the "Tri County Regional Planning's Regional Growth: Choices for Our Future" project's regional land use vision, policy, map, themes, and principles as well as agreeing to participate in the implementation phase of the action plan.

A strategic partnership has been formed with the Ingham County Housing Commission to focus on affordable housing in Ingham County. The Board of Commissioners has approved a contract for the Housing Commission to act as the

Third Party Administrator for the City of Eaton Rapids in order to enhance the Housing Commission's efforts.

- Efforts to promote environmental protection have continued with the adoption of a Point of Sale Regulation by the Ingham County Board of Commissioners by amendment to the Ingham County Sanitary Code. The inspection and enforcement of criteria for on-site water supply and sewage disposal is an important public health function. These activities help assure that humans are not exposed to diseases. The amendment requires property owners with on-site sewage disposal and/or water supply systems to have those systems evaluated prior to transferring the property to a new owner. If a water supply or sewage disposal system needs to be repaired or upgraded to meet current standards that upgrade and/or repair would have to take place before the transfer of ownership. A companion resolution was also adopted to establish a Fee Schedule for the Point of Sale Regulation. Furthermore, to assist the Drain Commissioner in continuing to be compliant with the U.S. EPA's Phase II Clean Water Act regulations, the Board of Commissioners recently passed a resolution setting new fees for the commercial soil erosion permit, making explicit that the published soil erosion fee pays for only the permit paperwork and two inspections, including the initial site review prior to issuing the permit and the closing inspection. This resolution also authorized the Drain Commissioner to require the permit holder to fund an escrow account to charge for further inspections at the inspector's hourly rate.
- Labor negotiations for nearly all employees have been concluded in 2006 with the exception of: MAP/LAW ENFORCEMENT CONTRACT: This contract covering 70 employees expired on December 31, 2002. We have concluded 312 Arbitration and are waiting for the Arbitrator's decision. The decision is expected in the first quarter of 2007. This will be a five-year agreement beginning January 1, 2003 and ending December 31, 2008.
- Efforts to expand the Capital Region Airport Authority have continued. However, a proposal from Clinton County for ex-officio membership on the Authority as a precursor to becoming a full member of the Authority has not been accepted by the Airport Authority.
- Efforts to increase adoptions, improve shelter conditions, and enhance licensing have been undertaken at the Ingham County Animal Control Department and County Treasurer's Office. Results from these efforts have been noticeable with demonstrated increases in licensing and adoptions. The Board of Commissioners approved the Animal Control Advisory Committee's recommendations to increase staff at the Ingham County Animal Control Department in December to further these goals through an increase in un-sterilized dog license fees.
- Efforts to support recreational opportunities and intergovernmental collaboration were conducted on the fast track in response to Mayor Bernero's request that the County place a countywide millage proposal on the ballot for the Potter Park Zoo

in order to provide a stable long-term funding base for the operation and capital needs of the Zoo. A Zoo Task Force submitted and the Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution to place a millage question on the November ballot which would increase the County's millage by up to 0.46 mills, for a period of three (3) years and by up to 0.41 mills for the following two (2) years. This millage will generate approximately \$3.2 million in the first year. A lease and operational agreement have been successfully negotiated between the City of Lansing and the County of Ingham, whereby once the City signs the document the County would then assume responsibility for operation and maintenance of both Potter Park and Potter Park Zoo. The funds generated through this millage would provide an increase in the level of service provided by the Zoo beyond what the City of Lansing can currently support through its budget. The increased level of service will include capital funding and maintenance projects necessary to keep Potter Park Zoo accredited and fully functional, an essential element for the Zoo.

- Efforts to assist in meeting basic needs were enhanced with the adoption in August of a new special millage Question for a Countywide Transportation System Primarily for the Disabled and Elderly. This millage runs concurrent with the currently authorized millage (.40 of one (1) mill) through 2010. The millage was deemed necessary in order to maintain services at the current level due to reductions in state funding for "public transit" operational costs.
- Efforts to enhance the internal operations of the County have continued with ongoing improvements to the new finance and payroll system; evaluation of the recently completed energy improvement project; and the successful negotiation of most of the County's labor contracts.
- Efforts have continued in several other areas. The upgrade of the public safety wireless radio system is complete and consideration is being given to consolidating the two current dispatch centers into one. Homeland security capacity continues to be enhanced with annual federal grants.
- Processing at the Register of Deeds continues to be enhanced with the use of designated technology funds. Protection of the public's privacy was assured through the Board of Commissioners approval of a contract with Extract Systems, LLC and some temporary positions for six months for the purpose of redacting Social Security Numbers and other sensitive data from all documents made available to the public on-line by the Register of Deeds Office dating back to 1956. Also, two part-time temporary positions are authorized for six months for the purpose of verifying the appropriate numbers are redacted.
- Accuracy and availability of tax maps is being enhanced with the digitizing of tax maps and acquisition of a 2006 flight of the County.
- Implementation of the 2006 budget proceeded generally as anticipated. Current revenues and expenditures are generally in line with the budget, with the

exception of revenue shortfalls in the Friend of the Court and the Sheriff's Office, as well as jail medical over expenditures. Most (92%) of the Contingency Account was expended in 2006. However, the need to use financial reserves at year's end is not currently anticipated. Should it be necessary to utilize the fund balance, it will not be significant to the financial health of the County, as reserves will remain within established policy limits.

- Adoption of the 2007 Budget was accomplished without crisis, with no increase in the operating millage and a slight budgeted use of reserves only for one-time capital items. The six-week hiring delay implemented in 2006 as a cost reduction measure was changed to a target figure for larger departments to manage internally and still meet the cost reduction goals, additional funding was provided to increase access to health care, improve recreational opportunities, and enhance efforts to manage jail overcrowding.

Many of the activities underway in 2006 will continue in 2007. Multi-year funding efforts to provide access to health care for all of the uninsured in the county and to connect county parks by means of non-motorized pathways can be expected to continue; an Action Plan for the Continuum of Care for youth should be completed, and the 911 Advisory Committee will develop recommendations regarding the Plante Moran feasibility study on combining the Lansing and East Lansing 911 centers. Jail overcrowding, unfortunately, will continue to require the attention of the County Board and the law enforcement community, and county finances will be challenged in the face of continuing reductions in state and federal funding and escalating health care costs.

Finally, the Board of Commissioners is currently engaged in the process to select a replacement for the previous County Controller/Administrator Ed Dore, who left the County at the end of 2006. It is anticipated that the selection process will conclude by the second quarter of 2007.

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