



STATE OF OTTAWA COUNTY 2011

PRESENTED BY COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
ALAN G. VANDERBERG TO THE
OTTAWA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FEBRUARY 22, 2011

STATE OF THE COUNTY 2011

Chair Kuyers, Vice-Chair Holtrop, and members of the Board, I thank you for the opportunity to present this 7th annual State of the County address. I believe it is important to take time each year to reflect upon the accomplishments of the past year and focus on some of the initiatives that we will undertake in the months ahead.

The State of the County format corresponds with the strategic/business plan format. We strive to make the strategic/business plan a living, breathing document and daily guide to our actions, and are moving closer each year to achieving that goal.

Ottawa County is committed to excellence and the delivery of cost-effective public services. There is no better way than our mission statement to tell our residents, employees, and customers what Ottawa County is all about. Every day our employees work to find creative ways to deliver outstanding services within limited resources, which is why the first of our four goals, to **MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE THE STRONG FINANCIAL POSITION OF THE COUNTY**, is so critical to what we do. Residents trust Ottawa County government to use tax dollars wisely, and with Michigan's economic climate, prudence and foresight has always been important to our organization.

Many factors outside of our control will continue to impact the short- and long-term financial outlook for the County. A January 11 presentation to the Holland Area Chamber of Commerce membership by Upjohn Institute economist George Erickcek indicated that Michigan employment has stabilized with growth of 30,500 jobs expected for 2011. This is positive news but represents a slow comeback from a loss of nearly 900,000 jobs over the past decade. Employment in Ottawa County experienced another loss of jobs last year but we are not sure how many as we found errors in the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth data and are waiting for them to clarify the number. Residential construction remains flat and another year of decreased tax revenue is forecast by the Equalization Department. Current forecasts show that if our spending and revenue continue at existing levels, we could see operating deficits at the end of the next five years of \$7.4 to \$15.5 million. We will remain vigilant to continually monitor these trends and take the appropriate measures to retain the firm fiscal footing of the County. It has been reported that the state and national economy are showing increased positive signs of recovery. We have not "hit bottom" and will not be able to make this claim until the decrease in property tax halts and we begin to see a positive trend develop. Michigan county and local governments are in for tough times for the foreseeable future.

In 2010, we faced the third straight year of economy related budget cuts. Almost \$3.7 million was made in expenditure reductions, highlighted by a budgeted reduction in the health insurance benefit of \$3.4 million. The 2012 General Fund Budget will likely

be based on 2005 revenue levels. Work on this budget has already begun and some of the most critical factors include the following:

Revenue Sharing was restored to Ottawa County and others on the expected schedule for the current fiscal year. The battle for 2012 will no longer be to continue to restore revenue sharing to counties but to maintain statutory revenue sharing for county government. Revenue Sharing represents \$4.7 million in general fund money for 2011, or 7% of the total general fund budget. The Governor unveiled his two-year budget proposal on February 17th, and proposed a massive cut in County revenue sharing.

In 2011 we will continue to advocate for full funding of State mandates, reminding the State that their funding for mandated services is critical to the County's ability to carry out those mandates, and it is those at the local level who suffer when such funds are reduced or eliminated without a corresponding reduction in mandated requirements.

The total cost of fringe benefits has been steadily increasing over the past decade. Changes to health, dental and life insurance were implemented effective January 1, 2011 with a first year cost savings of \$4.8 million dollars. The County is also initiating a major health management plan initiative designed to both assist employees with making healthy choices and directly attacking future claims cost. While significant changes were made with some employee groups on sharing the costs for health care and prescriptions, further work must be done to more effectively manage these costs. The Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution committing to move new hires from the current MERS Defined Benefit Pension Plan to a MERS Defined Contribution when four major economic trends show positive growth. We have continued to evaluate this issue and believe that we must make this change as soon as possible. We will soon submit a proposal to the Board of Commissioners to create a DB/DC financing tool and a plan to begin to fund this tool.

But all the news is not bad. As an indicator that Ottawa County has been successful in maintaining an overall secure financial status, in 2011 we maintained our high credit ratings with all three major rating agencies and achieved the Aaa with MoodyRatings, their highest rating. This upgrade was mostly due to the global recalibration of ratings that Moody completed but also due to our solid financial condition.

Additionally, between 2000 and 2010 Ottawa had an annual average population growth rate of 1.04%, higher than the state or the nation. I believe this reflects something we all know, that Ottawa County remains a great place to live and work. Our continued commitment is to retain this high quality of life, maximizing the natural resources of the area and strengths of character our residents possess.

Our second goal is to MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE COMMUNICATION WITH CITIZENS, EMPLOYEES, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS. The County website, miOttawa.org, improved upon its status as an award-winning website in 2010, achieving 4th place in the nation for counties with a population of 250,000-499,000 in the Annual Digital Counties Survey. The website continues to offer increased services to residents and businesses online, which is not only more convenient for the citizen but also increases the efficiency of our operations. "Page views" on the website increased by 25% in 2010, with a 33% increase in document downloads. The site also generated 63% more revenue for departments in 2010, which translated into a 28% increase in convenience fee revenue.

In 2010, the Board of Commissioners expanded the comprehensive communication plan originally adopted in 2009. MiOttawa.org will continue to be the centerpiece by which information and services are provided to residents. Several new initiatives were developed in 2010 to better communicate with residents and other County stakeholders. These include; adoption of a social networking policy, new social network vehicles, citizen budget meetings, posting of agenda packets online, the County Administrator's Blog, and a "County in the News" link on the webpage to highlight and add information regarding articles in the local media.

As has become an important practice to gather input and data from our residents, a citizen survey was administered in March of 2010. The survey confirmed the importance of the four major goals in the Board strategic plan, with the maintenance of a "strong financial position" being the highest rated of the four goals. The overall rating of Ottawa County improved from 2008 and remains high at 73 percent.

The GOLD Standard Training Program continued to expand and by the end of 2010, 118 employees had completed this three month program. In 2010, 165 training classes were conducted and 1,604 attendees participated in those classes. Since the inception of the program in 2008, 436 classes have been conducted. At this time, 1,027 unique employees have taken at least one class through the GOLD program, resulting in an 88% participation rate of our entire workforce.

The third goal established in the strategic plan is to CONTRIBUTE TO A HEALTHY PHYSICAL, ECONOMIC, AND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT. The Ottawa County Courthouse project was completed on schedule, under budget and with LEED certification accomplished. This project represents the flagship of County facilities and also the end of a 15-year facility development plan. The grand opening ceremony held on May 6th was an event that many will remember for years to come.

Water quality remains an important component for maintaining a high quality of life in Ottawa County, and in 2010 we maintained our focus on bringing policy makers and scientists together to discuss the best approaches for maintaining our most valuable natural resource. We are continually learning more about the human and non-human impacts on our local waterways and see water quality as a regional effort. The Water Quality Forum and water resource assessment demonstrate the County's commitment to addressing water quality concerns, keeping our waters safe, our tourism economy strong, and our citizens healthy.

In 2010, the Planning and Performance Improvement Department began focusing more of its attention on economic development. And it was a busy year for economic development in Ottawa County.

An Agricultural Renaissance Zone was established for Request Foods and a Renewable Energy Renaissance Zone designation extended for Energetx Composites. These projects will result in approximately 1,250 new jobs in the county. It is our understanding that Request Foods, which is close to completing its new building, has already expanded their originally proposed building plans and will add an additional assembly line.

The Planning and Performance Improvement Department also processed over \$60 million in Recovery Zone Bond allotments. These allotments provided low-cost financing options for several public projects and one private sector project in Ottawa County which resulted in a \$90 million dollar capital investment by Continental Dairy Products to convert the former Delphi plant in Coopersville into a milk processing plant. This project will create another 70 permanent, full-time jobs.

Our area was also fortunate to land two lithium ion battery plants. Johnson-Saft will create 300 new jobs and LG Chem will create another 400 in an industry that has high growth potential.

Ottawa County has also recently committed resources to foster economic development and job creation through economic gardening, entrepreneurship, and other economic development tools. Currently, the Planning and Performance Improvement Department is working to develop an Agricultural Technology Business Incubator which will provide an array of services and programs to assist entrepreneurs and entities in developing new agricultural-related businesses. The Department is also working to establish a Revolving Loan Fund for small and medium sized businesses that would allow start-up and growing businesses to access low-interest loans which

are paid back to the revolving fund. This tool would also be available to qualifying small and medium sized farms to expand or diversify their operations.

Despite the change in Planning and Performance Improvement staffing a great deal of progress has been made with the West Michigan Transit Linkages Study, a report on which is expected in April, the Purchase of Development Rights, or PDR Program, and the Urban Smart Growth Demonstration Project, which has garnered awards from the Michigan Association of Planning and the American Institute of Architects.

The Parks and Recreation Commission continued its focus on greenways in 2010 and acquired 303 acres of land plus completed a number of important park improvement projects. Along the Grand River, the Parks Commission partnered with the United States Department of Agriculture to acquire 111 acres of riverfront property in Tallmadge Township and restore 26 acres of floodplain forest involving the planting of 15,000 native trees and shrubs. Along the Macatawa River, the Parks Commission acquired 122 acres of the former Holland Country Club property and worked with Request Foods to permit development of 22 acres of wetland mitigation on the property needed for expansion of Request Foods' Holland Township facility but which also furthered park goals to restore habitat and improve water quality. A large EPA grant was also secured to fund additional restoration at this site in 2011. A long-range vision became reality in 2010 with the opening of the new Nature Education Center at Hemlock Crossing. The 8,000 square foot facility houses all of the Parks Commission's nature interpretive functions while also serving as a visitor center for the County Park and open space system. The new center received LEED certification at the gold level and features geothermal heating and cooling. Programs for school groups and the general public began immediately following the dedication.

The final goal established by the Board of Commissioners is to CONTINUALLY IMPROVE THE COUNTY'S ORGANIZATION AND SERVICES. Ottawa County remains at the forefront among counties in Michigan, and nationally, in verifying the efficiency and effectiveness of its services and programs through strategic planning, evaluation, and performance based budgeting. Our Planning and Performance Improvement Department has gained a state-wide reputation for its strategic planning services, time-study analyses, and performance based evaluations. As of this year, evaluations completed by the Department have saved over *\$5.8 million* as a result of recommendations that modified, privatized, restructured, or discontinued ineffective programs and services. Moreover, and to the credit of County employees as a whole, over *\$20.5 million* in programming and services has been verified as cost-effective through the evaluation process.

In 2010, we continued to offer services to our local units of government. While this included the very successful EECBG program, it also extended to including imaging and web improvement services through WebTecs. We will continue to evaluate what services the county provides to assess the usability for the local units of government.

We live in troubled times. Many businesses in Ottawa have either significantly reduced their workforces and some have even closed their doors. Unemployment has surpassed 10%. Even though times are tough, we also have much to be thankful for and to accomplish in 2010, and I look forward to working with the Board of Commissioners, employees, and other County stakeholders to continually improve our operations and quality of services to residents.

2011 AND BEYOND

Governor Rick Snyder laid out an aggressive tax overhaul and cost cutting reform agenda for the State of Michigan in his budget message on Thursday.

The immediate impact on Ottawa County would be a 34% reduction in State Revenue Sharing, or a \$1,880,000 hit to the County General Fund Budget beginning October 1. Governor Snyder made it clear that he will not tackle elimination of the personal property tax this year but it will be a priority after the structural changes to the State budget have taken hold. Cutting the personal property tax would reduce the County General Fund revenue by an additional \$2,700,000. The Health Department will be cut an additional 3% which equates to \$70,000.

We anticipated and hoped that the Governor would lay out a two-year budget with some specificity regarding the level of funding for county government so that we could plan and take appropriate action on the budget. Unfortunately, there is still much that is unclear.

We were disappointed to learn that county governments will not be given the same opportunity as city governments to compete for revenue sharing restoration dollars on the basis of addressing legacy costs, outcome based performance measurement, best practices, and inter-governmental collaboration. We believe that we would compete well in all three areas.

Ottawa County is well positioned to work with a state government led by a Governor who is driven more by data than by ideology. We will continue to document and improve our efforts in the following areas:

- I. **Best Practices** – There are a number of areas where Ottawa County has developed programs and policies that deliver high quality services in an efficient and effective manner. We have served as a model for other counties in many areas. We will collect and document these best practices and provide them to Governor Snyder and our legislative delegation.

- II. **Outcome Based Performance Measurement** – We embarked on developing a system of outcome based performance measurements six-years ago and trained 100 county department heads and staff on how to develop not just output measures, which count how many times a particular service is delivered, but outcome measures, which tell us how fast and effectively a service is delivered. We will publish a book of all County outcome based performance measures and deliver it to the Governor and our legislative delegation in May.

We have also developed the Ottawa County Dashboard similar to the Michigan Dashboard recently released by Governor Snyder. As you can see, Ottawa County compares very well to the State in many important areas. We are also working on a version that compares Ottawa County to other Michigan counties.

- III. **Legacy and Benefit Cost Control** – The Board of Commissioners implemented the Other Post Employee Benefit (OPEB) requirements per the General Accounting Standards Board (GASB) three years ago. Ottawa County never provided retiree health benefits like most governments did and thus has a very low OPEB liability comparatively. The County is also well on the way of replacing the MERS Defined Benefit pension with a MERS Defined Contribution plan for new hires which will result in a projected future benefit after 30 years of \$30 million dollars. Decisive action was also taken with the health insurance benefit as previously mentioned which resulted in savings of \$4.8 million for the 2011 budget.

- IV. **Transparency** – We have held citizen budget input meetings and published a citizen budget guide that reduced the 500 page budget document to a 16 page book replete with pictorial representations, charts, and graphs. Governor Snyder is attempting to make the annual audit report, or Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR), more understandable for citizens. The State completed a new 20 page document called "Dollars and Sense - A 2011 Citizen's Guide to Michigan's Financial Health", which basically reduced the State CAFR to 20 pages and now provides a format for local governments to

do the same with our CAFR documents. Fiscal Services is hard at work to complete our Citizen's Guide to Financial Health which will be presented to the Board and posted on miOttawa.org when completed.

Clearly, we are well on the path of achieving the guiding principles that Governor Snyder provided for employee benefits/compensation: 1) pay as you go; 2) pay down liability; 3) develop reserves.

- V. Inter-governmental Cooperation** – Ottawa County and West Michigan are lead areas in the state and even the nation for inter-department, inter-agency and inter-governmental cooperation. We have made a call to all County departments, courts, offices and agencies for documentation of these efforts and will be providing the compilation of these to Governor Snyder and to our legislative delegation. We are currently having conversations with other counties and cities on how we might create additional collaborative ventures that maintain or improve service at a reduced expense.

We will continue to work with our legislative delegation to significantly amend state laws that inhibit intergovernmental cooperation. Of the laws that have been discussed we believe that the Urban Cooperation Act, Intergovernmental Transfer of Functions and Responsibilities Act, Metropolitan Councils Act and Act 312, The Compulsory Binding Arbitration for Public Safety Workers Law are the most in need of change.

- VI. Unfunded Mandated Services** – One of the items not mentioned by Governor Snyder is the whole area of mandated services and unfunded mandates. A study commissioned by the Michigan Association of County Administrative Officials revealed that the state pays counties only 55 cents on the dollar for services that the State requires counties to perform. A Citizens Research Council report concluded that all three branches of the state government have violated the provision of the Headlee Amendment to the Michigan Constitution that prohibits the state government from passing on unfunded mandates to local government. It is our belief that as the state cuts revenue sharing and other revenue sources, it should also cut the mandates that it has placed on county government.

There is an ancient Chinese curse that says “*May you live in interesting times*”. The future in Michigan will be a roller-coaster experience for those of us who work in county government. We will face major challenges and changes with the goal of improving our County and the services we provide during these difficult times.

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Ultimately we are very blessed as a people and as a County government. Both I and the executive staff look forward to rolling up our sleeves with you and working through these challenges for a better tomorrow.