



Ottawa County
Where You Belong[®]

The State of the County Address
March 9, 2021

Presented by
County Administrator Alan G. Vanderberg
to the
Ottawa County Board of Commissioners

Thank you, Chair Bergman, Vice-Chair Fenske and the Board of Commissioners for this opportunity to present the sixteenth annual State of the County address. It is an honor to share the highlights and challenges of 2020 as well as a glimpse into the future.

Ottawa County continues to excel and stand out as a leader among local governments in Michigan. Our vision is to make Ottawa County **where you belong**: a place where all people, visitors and businesses feel welcomed and valued as vital threads of the community fabric.

On January 30th, 2020 the World Health Organization declared a global health emergency for the COVID-19 virus and Michigan saw its first two cases in March. Preparations by Ottawa County government and the Health Department had already begun in expectation of spread to West Michigan. On March 24th, 2020, in accordance with Section 10 of 1976 PA 390, the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners declared a local state of emergency to ensure quick and efficient response to the public need. The declaration opened up the response and recovery elements of the County's emergency operations plan and provided agility with staffing and emergency purchases; all crucial to an effective response. The response effort included strategies to reduce transmission among staff, protect people at higher risk for adverse health complications, and striking a balance between the maintenance of essential and necessary governmental operations/services and minimizing the spread of the virus and the negative impacts to county residents. As the pandemic grew, testing, contact tracing, quarantine and isolation, and vaccination, dominated efforts and continue to do so. To date, Ottawa County has continued its state of emergency 4 times (each has been for 2 months) and is currently in place until March 23, 2021. On May 17, 2020, Ottawa County Emergency Management also declared a state of emergency due to inland flooding near the Grand River.

Recent census reports indicate that 291,830 people choose to call Ottawa County home. From 2010 to 2019, Ottawa County's population increased by 10.6%; the fastest growing county in the State and still the eighth most populous county in Michigan. Over 50% of Ottawa County's population growth resulted from migration to the area. The non-seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Ottawa County was 3.7% in December 2020, 3rd lowest unemployment in the State.

Since 2010, residential building permits have increased by 188%. The Taxable Value on the Ad-Valorem Roll increased by 5.42%.

The General Fund Operations Tax Levy and the total of the operations levy and all special millages place Ottawa County as having the fifth-lowest property tax rate of Michigan's 83 counties. Ottawa voters approved a tax-limitation proposal in the General Election that will freeze the millage allocation for 10-years. This action also reset the County Operating Millage to 4.4400. In 2020, the Headlee Rollback reduced the maximum allowable millage from 4.4186 to 4.3814. The Board of Commissioners continued to levy 3.9 mills, committing .3 mill to pay down the unfunded

liability from the closed defined benefit plan. After the Headlee Rollback and committing a portion of millage, the Board levied .4814 mills or \$6.2 million **less** than the maximum allowable. The Financing Tools, a series of funds designed to smooth the impact of one-time expenses on the General Fund, saved taxpayers another \$1.3 million in 2020. Prudent cost allocation activity passed \$2.5 million of expense to state and federal grant programs.

The result of this activity is a strong financial position. Ottawa is one of four Michigan Counties to hold two triple-A credit ratings. These top scores allow Ottawa County, plus its local units of government, to borrow money for capital improvement projects with lower interest rates, saving taxpayer dollars.

2020 was a record-breaking year in many ways for the Register of Deeds office, with the foundation being laid in 2018 and 2019, as they increased the number of documents being recorded electronically by a significant margin. Online recording of land records is more secure, more transparent and also offers a quicker turnaround time for customers. While they have seen a steady increase in electronic recording of documents over the past few years, 2020 not surprisingly saw the largest jump. 79% of all transactions were electronic in 2020, representing a 12% increase over 2019 and a nearly 44% increase since 2017.

Electronic recording proved a critical element in allowing the Register of Deeds office to function at full capacity during the height of the COVID-19 shutdown, including periods where other counties were not recording documents. While they continued to accept documents recorded by mail utilizing in-office team members, staff working from home were also able to securely accept electronic transactions, check for accuracy, index and officially record documents. This resulted in over 10,000 more transactions in 2020 than in 2019 (from 49,256 to 59,922). The Register of Deeds office receipted \$2,093,695.45 to the general fund in 2020 in County transfer tax alone. With nearly a full year of data now available for the “work from home” model, the Register of Deeds office has actually seen an increase in productivity and accuracy from March 1, 2020 to March 1, 2021.

IT has begun to refresh the County’s Network with improvements to WiFi capabilities. Significant strategic security improvements to both network and users have been deployed. Office 365 has been deployed to most of the County employees. Engagement with Office, OneDrive, Teams, SharePoint, and BI (Business Intelligence) are occurring. A user group has been established and meets to share how departments are leveraging these tools.

The County continued its goal of updating County facilities, including the renovation of the Ottawa County Health Administration and Environmental Health Office with furniture and lighting in an open-space concept. In addition, COVID-19 thrust Facilities into the spotlight by stepping up efforts to ensure all County facilities were cleaned and sanitized on a regular basis. Plexiglass barriers were installed to provide additional protection to employees and, with the

considerable assistance from IT, equipment was updated to allow most meetings to be conducted virtually in an effort to control the spread of the coronavirus disease.

The County negotiated an Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) agreement with Granger Construction and DLZ Architects to design and construct the new Family Justice Center, which is a courthouse that will house Juvenile Court and Friend of the Court in the same building on the Fillmore Street Complex. This newer building method, in which the contractor, architect and key subcontractors work together from day one on the design and construction of the building, will result in a new building that will meet the County's needs for many years at less cost than traditional building-delivery methods. This project could likely represent the first "true" IPD in the State of Michigan.

The County also provides strategic planning assistance, election support, training and other opportunities to local units of government. Intergovernmental, inter-sector collaborations will remain an area of growth for the County in the future.

In addition to continuing to provide assessing services for the City of Grand Haven, Blendon Township and Crockery Township, the County entered into a two-year agreement to provide assessing services for the City of Hudsonville.

2020 was a challenging year for the Ottawa County Sheriff's Office and for law enforcement nationwide with the global pandemic, community tensions and uncertainty. There were no polices or guidebooks for the ever changing COVID-19 issues and the multitude of changes that were commonplace throughout the year. Calls for service decreased during the initial on-set of the COVID-19 shut down. However, the Sheriff's Office did see an increase in domestic violence and fraud incidents in 2020.

The Sheriff's Office reviewed and adjusted operations to meet the everchanging challenges of 2020, all while continuing to provide professional and quality law enforcement for victims of crime and citizens. The Sheriff Office also made successful changes in the jail operations to provide a safe environment for the employees and citizens housed in the facilities. 90% of the policies and procedures have been updated for the road patrol and jail with completion of the remaining 10%, expected in March of 2021.

The Sheriff Reserve Program and the Sentence Work Abatement Program (SWAP), both highly successful in their day, were eliminated due to the external factors of limited staffing and increased liability.

Hiring during the past year was also a major focus. The Sheriff's Office saw several retirements and welcomed the addition of three new Lieutenants and clerical staff.

In December of 2020, the Sheriff announced that the agency would begin the complex procedure to have the Sheriff's Office become accredited through the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police (MACP).

After many years of advocacy, Community Mental Health of Ottawa County (CMH) finally saw an increase and more equitable Medicaid funding in 2020. This, along with a revised distribution of State General Fund dollars, significantly improved CMH's financial status as well as stability for the Lakeshore Regional Entity (LRE). Millage funds and several new grants allowed CMH to expand services to more individuals and provide a wider safety net system in Ottawa County. As essential health workers, CMH Staff continuously provided services to consumers. The pandemic forced CMH to quickly adjust the service delivery model. Teams successfully implemented most of their programs via telehealth since March of 2020. The public mental health redesign effort, that was recommended by MDHHS in 2019, was placed on hold due to the focus on COVID-19 issues. It is unlikely that the future redesign efforts will include major changes to the system. However, there will be increased emphasis on accessibility, integrated health and accountability.

Across the County, broadband service remains inconsistent. To improve internet access for everyone, the County initiated a new Comprehensive Digital Inclusion Strategy. This four-phase plan seeks to establish affordable broadband access across all areas of the County and eventually West Michigan as a whole. Staff is on the cusp of selecting a vendor to spearhead data collection to determine the status of broadband service and future demand. This will aid in the design and planning for an expanded broadband network to be built in anticipated conjunction with broadband service providers.

Ottawa County continues to address groundwater quality and quantity issues with the Groundwater Sustainability Initiative. In early 2020, the Proactive Strategies Index was adopted by the County Board of Commissioners. Many of the strategies within the Index were swiftly put into motion. In October, County Planners installed the first of many well monitoring systems to offer real-time observation of aquifer conditions and fluctuations in water levels. This data will be invaluable for long-range decision-making with respect to balancing continued growth and development in the County with available natural resources. County Planners also released an educational paper titled, "Rethinking the American Lawn" which explains the benefits of native plantings as an alternative to traditional, water-intensive turf grass.

Affordable housing continues to be a challenge in West Michigan, so the County reinitiated and relaunched the Ottawa County Housing Commission in early 2020. The Commission was recognized by HUD as an official Public Housing Agency (PHA) which will allow the County to secure funding and project-based vouchers to help facilitate the construction of more affordable housing options in the future. The Commission effectively partnered with multiple entities including HousingNext, Lakeshore Housing Alliance and Good Samaritan Ministries.

Through grants and programs, Ottawa County continued to seek innovative ways to spur economic growth while reviving blighted or other underutilized properties. In May of 2020, the County beat out 280 communities across the nation for a \$300,000 EPA Brownfield Redevelopment assistance grant. These funds, promoted by the Ottawa County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (OCBRA) for environmental site assessment and cleanup planning, have already facilitated eight assessments and planning activities on four project sites. Since creating the Brownfield Incentive Program (BIP) back in 2019, OCBRA has supported four redevelopment projects with an estimated capital investment of \$6.75 million and has assisted two additional sites that are seeking developer interest. Additionally, OCBRA began capturing taxes on its fifth Brownfield Tax Increment Financing Plan. This TIF supports a multimillion-dollar redevelopment project expected to bring 75 new jobs to the Village of Spring Lake.

Ottawa County's Farmland Preservation Program protects a storied local industry that employs well over 9,000 people. Two farms were added to the 'preservation portfolio' this past fiscal year: a 168.2-acre Chester Township parcel owned by Jim Klein; and several parcels owned by the Kruihoff family totaling 148 acres in Wright and Chester townships.

2020 was also a big year for farmland preservation applications. The 2020 application period closed with a record nine submissions totaling 773 acres from five different townships. Fundraising and outreach are vital to the success of the Farmland Preservation Program. COVID-19 derailed many events in 2020, but not the County's premier farmland preservation fundraiser and chefs' competition, Farms are the Tapas. With the public's safety in mind, the Agriculture Preservation Board and Farmland Preservation Program staff adjusted the format by partnering with an online auction and ticketing site, Event.Gives. Through this web portal, the County sold tickets and ran a virtual silent auction. Despite lower total attendance due to Covid, the event raised \$19,136, \$611 more than 2019.

The County continued to improve and expand its non-motorized recreational trail network. After successfully securing funding from the Meijer Foundation in spring 2020, the 4.2-mile Spoonville Trail project pedaled its way toward the finish line. This brand-new paved pathway safely guides cyclists and walkers over the MDOT M-231 Grand River Bridge crossing, hugs the picturesque Terre Verde golf course, and ends in Nunica where it connects to the North Bank Trail. A cornerstone north-south connector in the County's trail network, Spoonville Trail enhances recreational opportunities for all.

During the pandemic, it was clear that the community re-connected to nature, venturing outdoors more often. Parks in Ottawa County, and across the nation, became essential to coping with the stress of the unknown. Google mobility data supported this observation, reporting increases in visits to parks in Ottawa County of over 450% during spring and summer months in 2020. Ottawa County Parks welcomed the large influx of visitors, acting quickly to reduce

overflow parking, implement one-way trails, and create signage and media in order to minimize overcrowding.

The increase in park visitation was obvious along the Lake Michigan Coastal Greenway, with annual motor vehicle permit sales reaching over a half a million dollars. This supplemental revenue to the park's millage will be important not only to offset lost proceeds on facility reservations and program fees, but also to address the effects of rising lake levels on our lakeshore landscape. High water levels forced the removal of wooden access structures at Rosy Mound, Tunnel Park, and Kirk Park. Debris in the form of lumber continues to wash up on public beaches after every storm. In a collaborative effort to manage debris on Lake Michigan beaches and the Macatawa River watershed, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation formed a partnership with the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council and five other West Michigan partners to formally create the Lakeshore Cleanup Coalition. This group hosted clean up events in the Macatawa Greenway, and along the lakeshore where community members assisted with debris removal.

A formal master plan design process was completed for Ottawa Sands, a recent \$11 million property acquisition connecting thousands of acres of public land in the Grand Haven area. While major improvements are many years in the future, this park has the potential to be a recreational hub along the Lake Michigan coastal corridor, as well as the Grand River. Further south along the lakeshore, in Holland, the first full year of operation at the Ottawa Beach Marina on Lake Macatawa was successful.

Efforts by Macatawa Greenway partners continued to identify the next phase of the greenway project. This included work to acquire additional properties to accommodate route connections along the Macatawa River as well as working with key agencies to determine the feasibility of permitting trail access across key infrastructure barriers. These efforts are expected to be ongoing in 2021 with some hope for new acquisitions in the first of the year. The Bend Area Open Space in Jenison, a critical property in the Grand River Greenway was expanded not once, but twice to 421 acres. Progress on a key feature of the greenway, the Idema Explorers Trail, continued with the completion of a segment of trail connecting the Jenison business district to the Bend Area, as well as a \$300,000 Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant award to complete the crucial connection between Ottawa County trails and Kent County trails.

In addition to trail construction and planning, efforts in park restoration were also completed at one of Ottawa County Park's oldest properties, Riverside Park. Nearly 1,000' of Grand River shoreline was armored to protect from erosion. Both user access and bayou connectivity were also improved.

The Nature Center, located at Hemlock Crossing County Park, celebrated its 10th anniversary. While there wasn't a large gathering as planned, staff was able to adapt to new COVID-19 restrictions and continue to provide nature programs and activities to people of all ages – both

in-person and online. At the end of the year, the Ottawa County Parks Foundation announced their expansion of support to include community engagement and nature education. In 2020 alone, the foundation secured pledges for over \$600,000 for parks projects, including the Grand River Greenway.

The County continues to make progress in promoting a creative, innovative and problem-solving culture through fostering Toyota Kata (LEAN) and design thinking methodologies. Public Health continued to use scientific thinking to approach innovation throughout the pandemic. Ottawa County Community Mental Health (OCCMH) is applying kata in multiple programs, including the Access Center, which has made progress toward the goal of scheduling all psycho-social assessments within 14 days of the request and completing in under 200 minutes. OCCMH also used kata during the application submittal process to qualify as a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCHB) provider to receive state funding for a total of \$4 million per year for 2 years. CMH will utilize the kata framework, in collaboration with the Lakeshore Regional Entity (LRE), to determine disparity and gaps in services based on populations served. OCCMH will teach kata and coordinate experiments with the five member LRE workgroup, five additional CMH organizations and seven counties.

Three additional skill development trainings continued in 2020 with 15 kata learners and coaches. A cross departmental team of five internal 2nd coaches was created to meet with teams monthly. Kata efforts were recognized annually by leadership and the Board of Commissioners.

Human Resources and the County Administrator's Office collaborated to deliver a virtual in-person Creativity Training, introducing kata and design thinking to 8 additional county staff. Training participants learned the Six Thinking Hats tool and familiarized themselves with other resources in the online Creativity Playbook. The playbook is a resource that allows users to download various tools with instructions. A Kata E-learning Training was also developed and piloted by 21 staff to share a fundamental knowledge and create awareness and excitement toward applying it to daily work.

An internal team used design thinking plays to construct and furnish an innovation room or design center. It was created as a unique, fun space to fuel creativity. This space will be used by teams learning and applying kata and design thinking to their work.

The County and the Michigan Lean Consortium co-hosted a Blending Design Thinking and Kata Workshop with 17 county staff attending. Participants learned about new problem-solving methods and design thinking tools that can be applied to daily work.

During Fiscal Year 2020, \$3,008,607 worth of services were transacted through the County's online services. By saving staff time required for over-the-counter transactions, online services provide an additional cost-avoidance benefit. This saves time for customers as well as allows access at a day and time convenient to them. In FY2020, the number of online transactions

totalled 90,678. In typical years, Ottawa County charges a convenience fee for online transactions. Because office visits were restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this fee was waived beginning in April 2020. As a result, the convenience fee revenue was down 43% over the fiscal year or \$58,000.

Transparent communication was a priority for both Ottawa County and for residents in FY2020. One of the primary avenues Ottawa County communicated was through GovDelivery, an email subscription system that began in July of 2015. The system allows subscribers to choose to receive news from over 200 different County topics and receive those messages daily or weekly. At the close of FY2020, a total of 46,605 residents were subscribed to receive news from Ottawa County, an increase of 8,467 from the close of FY2019. Last year, more than 2.9 million e-bulletins were delivered to subscribers. The number of subscribers skyrocketed since January 2021 as residents rushed the County for information about the COVID-19 vaccine.

In 2020, the Ottawa County Art Trust held its third juried exhibition, demonstrating the importance of creativity and culture to Ottawa County while preserving a legacy of assets for generations to come. A total of 46 entries were submitted to the exhibition by artists who live or work in Ottawa County. Of those entries, 11 works were selected and now part of the permanent collection.

ZenCity proved to be an important new tool since its implementation in the Spring of 2020, measuring feedback from a resident's perspective during the pandemic. The application collected thousands of resident-generated data points from a multitude of external and internal sources like social media, local news channels and more. With the use of advanced artificial intelligence, the data were classified and sorted in real-time to identify key topics, trends, anomalies and sentiment. ZenCity reports displayed meaningful and actionable insights about residents' needs and priorities. This tool enabled the County to monitor public conversations to better understand what was important to residents. Without this tool, this work would be impossible to do among other important duties.

Ottawa County was one of 25 West Michigan employers that participated in the HireReach program, a regional initiative which supports employers in piloting an evidence-based selection process. The process evaluates candidates holistically, targeting skills relevant to each job and reducing the potential for unconscious bias. Since launching the pilot program in 2019, the Ottawa County talent acquisition team has hired 32 employees utilizing this method.

In 2020, all seven bargaining agreements expired. The County was successful in ratifying all seven contracts. All groups, except the Juvenile Court, negotiated 3-year contracts, and they agreed to a 2-year contract. All hirings and trainings were moved to Zoom. The County was able to quickly secure a contract with KnowledgeCity for additional on-demand training course. In 2020, during the pandemic, over 2000 different trainings were taken which ranged from on-demand classes

such as Accountability at Work to multiple session courses like Emerging Leaders and Spanish. In addition, the County partnered with its Employee Assistance Program provider, Pine Rest to roll out on-line behavioral health courses which were run at full on-line capacity.

Robertson Brain Clinic's brain chemistry work, paid for by the Ottawa County Insurance Authority, was extended from the Sheriff's Office to Public Health, Mental Health and eventually to Juvenile staff.

In 2020 there were over 300 employee leaves processed due to COVID-19 in relation to the Emergency Paid Sick Leave and Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act. In addition, payroll was successful in the payment of COVID-19 hazard pay for both the Sheriff's Office and Public Health in accordance with federal stimulus monies.

2020 was the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Office's first full year in operation. Over 50 organizations have collaborated to promote and support the ongoing work of the DEI Office in Ottawa County, including the Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area, the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation, the Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce, the North Ottawa Wellness Foundation, Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance, Gentex Corporation, Herman Miller Cares, and Hope College. The DEI Office also convened local municipalities, townships and villages to form Learning Communities of Practices and will implement GARE racial equity toolkits and equity plans.

The DEI Office partnered to secure four important grants including the SAMHSA's Gains Center National Drug Court Institute Training Grant on Equity in Recovery Courts and services, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Grant to support the implementation of a Migrant Health survey, the Community Foundation of Holland/Zeeland Area for Racial Equity work and the Gateways for Growth Research Grant.

Continuing efforts from 2019, the DEI Office worked alongside Inclusive Performance Strategies to create and rollout a DEI Strategic Framework in Ottawa County. In the March of 2020, the Ottawa County Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Workgroup was formed. The workgroup consisted of 15 County employees across different departments and levels of leadership to assist the DEI Office in providing feedback during the document audit and to ensure participation in assessment activities is diverse and well represented. This group played an integral role in the creation of a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy.

In June of 2020, the DEI Office hosted an Ottawa County employee Brown Bag Panel with County Administrator Al Vanderberg, Sheriff Steve Kempker, CIC Chair/Community Health Worker Judy Kettering, HR Manager Sarah Allen, Bob VandePol from Pine Rest, and DEI Office Director Robyn Afrik. 90 employees participated in the event. The panel was curated in response to the circumstances surrounding George Floyd and allowed employees to hear from leaders about their response and to ask questions regarding the aftermath of the tragic events.

In the Fall of 2020, the DEI Office collaborated with the Cultural Intelligence Committee (CIC) and the City of Holland to host the 5th Annual Diversity Forum virtually due to the pandemic. Feedback from forum showed that 95% of participants learned something new, 88% increased their knowledge of DEI, 85% felt the forum increased their individual responsibility to create DEI upon the conclusion of the event and 85% gained resources and tools that will help them in their DEI work.

The County experienced perhaps the largest attendance for public comment in 2020 when approximately 430 residents, from Ottawa County and many from Muskegon County appeared in a Board meeting to speak their opinion regarding whether the Ottawa County Board should vote to continue to accept refugees per a Presidential Executive Order requiring counties to make this decision. About two-thirds of the group spoke in favor of continuing to allow refugees settlement in Ottawa County. With a year of hindsight, it is clear that none of the problems anticipated ever materialized and that the refugee resettlement program occurred as it did for the previous 40 years.

2020 was a very difficult year for everyone. Ottawa County experienced Lake Michigan shoreline erosion, COVID-19, flooding in areas of the County that never experienced it before, and fallout from the death of George Floyd. Ottawa County services continued during the pandemic and Ottawa County employees and the Ottawa County organization proved to be very resilient throughout and I am very proud of both.

As COVID-19 winds down we are evaluating short- and long-term impacts on how we operate and the federal funding status. Ottawa County faced three lawsuits filed in Federal District Court including one that was appealed to the US Circuit of Appeals in Cincinnati over COVID-19 issues. The County was dismissed from one case and prevailed at each stage of the other two cases that have occurred thus far.

2021 is already shaping up to be a better year. I look forward to continuing the great service provision and continuous improvement in everything we do; and in navigating whatever challenges come our way in 2021. The top 10 issues to watch include:

1. Creation of formal Groundwater Board
2. Immigration population impacts on economy (DEI's G4G Grant)
3. Utilization of Self-service kiosks at the Clerk's Office
4. Continued Progress on the Justice Center
5. 2020 Census Results and Board of Commissioners Redistricting
6. Implementation of DEI Strategies
7. Complete and Use Innovation Room
8. CMHOC becoming a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC)
9. Customer Service Recharge Series

10. Southwest Ottawa Landfill

These issues are not in order of importance, as they are all important.

I am honored to serve a County Board of Commissioners that is dedicated to providing high quality services, keeping the cost of government low, removing future problems before they occur and that supports innovation and doing things differently when it can be justified.

Thank you!