

# *P*ARTNERSHIPS *for* *C*HANGE *Sustainable Communities*

## **Program Description**

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Sponsored by

*Land Information Access Association  
Michigan Municipal League  
And  
Michigan Townships Association  
With  
Michigan Association of Planning  
Michigan State University - Extension*

# *Partnerships for Change Sustainable Communities*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Partnerships for Change (Pfc) Sustainable Communities* is a multi-jurisdictional planning assistance program developed by the Land Information Access Association (LIAA), Michigan Municipal League (MML) and Michigan Townships Association (MTA) with support from Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) and the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP). The overall mission of the program is to foster new and expanded cooperation between cities, townships and villages in developing and carrying out local land use policies that contribute to the preservation of cultural and natural resources. Wherever possible, these policies should encourage urban redevelopment and discourage inefficient, low-density development. Administered by LIAA, *Pfc Sustainable Communities* is funded by grants from the **Americana Foundation, C.S. Mott Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Department of Environmental Quality's Coastal Management Program, MML, and MTA.**

This document is intended to provide a general description of the *Pfc Sustainable Communities* program, as it is currently configured, and to explain how local governments can participate and benefit from this program.

### Documenting the Need

In 2004, the *Michigan Land Use Leadership Council* issued its report recommending a number of improvements to state policies, including the adoption of legislation to provide local governments with new tools to better manage growth and redevelopment. Among other things, the report called for increased density of residential development where services are available, the location of new development in existing communities, the preservation of farms and forestlands, and the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and lands with recreational potential. A number of the recommendations addressed the need for better information, training, technical support, and intergovernmental cooperation.

However, there are a number of barriers to intergovernmental cooperation in land use planning and community development. A survey of city, township and village officials completed in 2007 by LIAA, MML, MTA, and the Land Policy Institute of Michigan State University (MSU) highlighted many of these barriers. Among other things, the survey found that:

- Over 36% of the responding local government officials said their jurisdiction does not cooperate with neighboring jurisdictions at all.
- Nearly 60% of the responding local government officials said that many important barriers to inter-jurisdictional cooperation remain, including the time and expense of getting the process started and lack of information about how to get started.
- More than half of the responding local government officials were neutral or had no opinion about the value of cooperation - displaying a great deal of uncertainty about the benefits of cooperative planning.
- Over 70% of the responding local government officials said that specific incentives are important in stimulating inter-jurisdictional cooperation, including grants of cash or support services, information and examples of cooperation and protection from legal challenges.

### Responding to the Need

There is a broad array of land use policy changes that local governments can make to better preserve cultural and natural resources. For example, state law now allows cities, townships, and counties to adopt a purchase of development rights (PDR) program to protect farmland and open space. However, very few governmental units in Michigan have adopted PDR programs. Legislation authorizing local governments to establish transfer of development rights (TDR) programs at the local government level has been passed

by the Michigan Legislature. Such programs are designed to support in-fill and greater density in developed areas while protecting farmland, open space, cultural resources, and key ecosystems.

In addition to new programs, there are many ways in which local master plans and zoning ordinances can be amended to encourage urban revitalization and provide for the preservation of heritage landscapes and shared cultural resources (including ecosystem protection and water quality improvements). For example, changes in existing regulations may support greater housing density and diversity while supporting the preservation of open space. Investments in “green infrastructure” such as parks, wetlands, and wildlife areas can be included in local capital improvement plans. Even relatively simple zoning changes, such as requiring filter strips near streams can be very effective (e.g., using an overlay zone). Changes in local health codes could quickly reduce the damage done by inadequate domestic wastewater disposal systems.

Ideally, a combination of local governments would join together in considering and adopting the programs and changes to local planning and zoning noted above. Such cooperative planning efforts are necessary to provide an equitable distribution of resources and access across whole communities. In fact, in 2003 the Michigan Legislature adopted legislation that supports such cooperative planning through the work of joint planning commissions. Unfortunately, the costs associated with plan reviews, geographic analyses, and policy development processes are substantial barriers to change for many of Michigan’s rural governments – the governments most often under development pressures.

### Program History

Over the past three years, the *PfC* program has offered educational opportunities as well as grants of technical assistance and professional planning services to partnerships of local governments. Cities, townships and villages in dozens of communities organized to compete for *PfC* service grants under three separate requests for proposals. Ultimately, the services provided by LIAA fostered new intergovernmental policy and program improvements in 14 geographically dispersed communities, composed of 40 townships and 26 cities and villages. Through these local policy and program changes, the program has touched the lives of well over 800,000 people living in the participating communities.

In addition to successfully stimulating local policy changes, *PfC* has helped build a statewide appreciation of intergovernmental cooperation in land use planning and resource management. Well over 500 local officials and citizen activists have participated in *PfC* training and education workshops. The program has also provided extensive phone and e-mail support to local officials as they consider the value and risks of intergovernmental cooperation. MAP formally acknowledged the *PfC* program’s success by awarding it the *2007 Honorable Mention* award for the *Outstanding Planning Project for a Project/Program/Tool*.



*PfC* and all projects completed thus far are more fully described in the publication, *Breaking Down Barriers to Cooperative Land Use Planning*. You may obtain a copy of the publication on the *PfC* website: [www.partnershipsforchange.cc](http://www.partnershipsforchange.cc) or by calling LIAA at (231) 929-3696.

## PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Building on our past expertise, experience and capacity, the *PfC Sustainable Communities Program* helps communities in their efforts to develop coordinated planning programs with neighboring townships, cities, and villages that protect natural resources and cultural character. Jurisdictions that have participated in multi-jurisdiction planning efforts or service programs know that each government gains through the reduction of redundant efforts and by achieving greater control over potentially harmful external forces. When adjacent municipalities work together, the entire community benefits. Ultimately, cooperation can help to guide development to areas where it is most needed and wanted while preserving the natural and cultural features that help define a community and its sense of place.

### Professional Services

To encourage and support multi-jurisdictional cooperation for land use planning and resource management, *PfC Sustainable Communities* provides a menu of professional assistance options to selected multi-jurisdictional partnerships at a fraction of the true cost. These partnerships must be composed of at least two jurisdictions forming a community committed to positive land use policy change. Since program funding is limited, we focus on those communities most prepared to cooperate and most committed to change.

Professional services and technical assistance provided is tailored to meet the needs of each participating community. We provide extensive process support and a broad range of services including:

- On-site facilitation services, surveys, workshops and educational support
- Research and analyses (e.g. identifying & evaluating alternatives)
- Geographic analyses and map production
- Development and drafting of land use policies (e.g. plans & ordinances)

### Partnerships for Change Program Advisory Committee

Chris A. Yonker

Dave Ivan, Executive Director  
Clinton County

John Egelhaaf, Executive Director  
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Charles B. Graham, City Manager  
City of Frankenmuth

Mary Sanders, Supervisor  
Hayes Township

Naheed Huq, Manager  
Southeast Michigan Council of Governments

Jack Bails, Vice president  
Public Sector Consultants

Steward Sandstrom, President & CEO  
Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce

Larry Merrill, Executive Director  
Michigan Townships Association

Doug Luciani, President & CEO  
Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce

Daniel Gilmartin, Executive Director  
Michigan Municipal League

Kurt Schindler, Extension Director  
Wexford County

Andrea Brown, Executive Director  
Michigan Association of Planning

Brian Price, Executive Director  
Leelanau Conservancy

Laura Rubin, Executive Director  
Huron River Watershed Council

The *PfC Sustainable Communities* program also incorporates the expertise of a highly respected Program Advisory Committee with knowledge in natural resources, government, planning, business, and economic development. In addition to helping design this incentive program, the committee assists in establishing selection criteria for choosing the multi-jurisdictional partnerships to participate in *PfC Sustainable Communities*.

### **Low-Cost Education & Training**

In addition to the service program described above, *PfC Sustainable Communities* offers training programs for municipal officials and others interested in multi-jurisdictional planning and cooperation. These workshops provide information and knowledge to people who are considering the value and potential impact of inter-jurisdictional cooperation. In addition, these workshops provide information about how to start an inter-jurisdictional discussion project. Several of these workshops will be offered jointly by LIAA, MML, MTA, and MAP over the next two years.

We have created a special website to provide information resources to citizens and municipal officials interested in expanding multi-jurisdictional cooperation. <[www.partnershipsforchange.cc](http://www.partnershipsforchange.cc)>. The website provides direct access to copies of useful documents and materials as well as a complete portal to related information sources on the web. We also post news about the *PfC Sustainable Communities* program on this website, including updates of on-going projects and the most recent *Request for Proposals* (RFP).

### **Program Evaluation & Reporting**

*PfC Sustainable Communities* has contracted with an experienced, independent program evaluation expert to assist on elements of program design. The evaluation consultant uses standard survey and interview methods to discover how well the program is being received by municipal officials, the effectiveness of this intervention in bringing about change, and the relative amount of change achieved.

### **Sponsors of *PfC Sustainable Communities***

As the organizers and sponsors of *PfC Sustainable Communities*, MML, MTA, MAP, MSUE and LIAA have created a unique partnership of statewide organizations dedicated to supporting more cooperative land use planning among cities, townships, and villages. However, this is not the first time these groups

### **Information Technology for Intergovernmental Cooperation**

Completed in the fall of 2004, the Information Technology for Intergovernmental Cooperation Project was developed by the LIAA and the members of the Michigan Council of Local Governments (MCOGL), including the Michigan Municipal League and Michigan Townships Association. With funding from the C.S. Mott and W.K. Kellogg Foundations, the project successfully demonstrated new methods of fostering intergovernmental cooperation and more informed land use and community planning in Michigan's semi-rural counties. Through this project, municipalities and local organizations in each of five counties developed unique, web-based information systems that are shared by all local units of government. The resulting Internet applications provide rapid public access to community and government information, including interactive maps, plans and ordinances – all updated and shared by the local units of government (e.g., visit: [www.leelanau.cc](http://www.leelanau.cc) or [www.vbco.org](http://www.vbco.org)). The project clearly showed that municipalities can cooperate together to:

- build trust and communication networks as a basis of intergovernmental cooperation;
- compile and share comprehensive countywide information needed for land use planning and resource management;
- maintain up-to-date records and information collectively and assure the rapid exchange of information between local units of government; and
- increase civic engagement and public participation as a cooperative, coordinated effort.

have worked together. For example, LIAA and MAP have worked together in the development of training materials and internet website tools. As noted in the sidebar on the previous page, LIAA, MML and MTA have been partners in recent years on a project to foster intergovernmental communication through web-based countywide information systems as well as cooperation.

LIAA is the overall administrator of *PfC Sustainable Communities*. In that role, LIAA provides most of the professional services to the selected multi-jurisdictional partnerships and coordinates the activities of contractors. MML, MTA, MSUE, and MAP are all directly involved in this project in designing educational materials and providing direct program oversight.

The sponsors of *PfC Sustainable Communities* are grateful to the *Americana Foundation, C.S. Mott Foundation, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Frey Foundation, and Department of Environmental Quality's Coastal Management Program* for the funding needed to operate this program. We note that MML and MTA are program funders as well.

## **HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS**

This section details how *PfC Sustainable Communities* can help cities, villages and townships work together as multi-jurisdictional partners in land use planning and resource management. In addition, we will describe the land use policy topics of greatest interest, at this time.

### **Focus on the Community's Defining Natural Features**

People throughout Michigan live in one municipality, work in another, and shop in a third. For many of us, municipal boundaries simply do not define the daily experience of community. However, the decisions made by a single municipality can profoundly affect the experience of an entire community, even when it encompasses a multi-jurisdictional area. Often, an important physical feature, such as a river or historical landscape, is perceived as a defining characteristic of a single community, though it is shared by several municipalities. Ultimately, intergovernmental cooperation in land use planning and regulation is the only way to preserve such multi-jurisdictional resources.

*PfC Sustainable Communities* was established to stimulate and support multi-jurisdictional cooperation in the development and application of land use policies with a focus on the preservation of cultural and natural resources. We believe these resources are critical to each community's unique sense of place and long-term stability. Further, policies that help to preserve and protect these resources can also encourage urban redevelopment and discourage the harmful effects of inefficient, low-density development. Clearly, multi-jurisdictional cooperation in the management of these community-wide resources is essential.

*PfC Sustainable Communities* encourages the neighboring municipalities of a larger community to identify and characterize their most important cultural and natural features. We suggest that municipal officials, planning commissioners, and active citizen groups identify the defining characteristics of their community. What features, or combination of features, help to form the larger community's sense of place? Which features do civic leaders and residents identify as central to the community's identity? These shared cultural and natural resources can form a valuable focal point for planning and land use policy development.

### **Levels of Service and Project Complexity**

On behalf of *PfC Sustainable Communities*, LIAA provides a broad range of professional planning and technical support services to selected multi-jurisdictional partnerships. These services are tailored to the specific project needs of each participating community, focusing on the development of policies and programs that provide for the preservation of natural and cultural resources and/or urban redevelopment.

Since each community is unique, we encourage creative policy solutions that address the specific interests of each multi-jurisdictional partnership.

LIAA provides three types of project assistance, consistent with the needs described by the selected communities. The three types of projects are intended to reflect the relative complexity and anticipated expenses associated with each project.

*First Steps Projects* focus on the needs of local governments just beginning to consider inter-jurisdictional cooperation in land use planning. Under *First-Steps Projects*, we provide communities with the facilitation, information, training and expert assistance to open the discussion and address the basic barriers to cooperation. A limited number of service grants will be offered in the second year to help public officials and local governments prepare for a more substantial project. To obtain a *First-Steps* service grant, the participating local governments will be required to make a joint application supported by formal resolutions of support. Proposal for *First Steps* service grants may be submitted at any time until June 1, 2010.

*Small-Scale* service grants are tailored to fit combinations of cities, townships and villages that have defined an inter-jurisdictional land use planning, regulation or resource management objective for their communities. *Small-Scale Service Grants* provide for a wide range of planning services including, training and facilitation, mapping and geographic analyses, and research and writing. To obtain a *Small-Scale Service Grant*, the participating local governments are required to make a joint application in response to an RFP.

*Large-Scale* service grants follow the same pattern as *Small-Scale Service Grants*. In each case, a consortium of local governments submits an application to become a program participant in response to an RFP. The technical services provided by a *Large-Scale Service Grant* form a substantial incentive to local government officials hoping to address community-wide land use planning and regulation issues. *Large-Scale Service Grants* focus on the development and adoption of major new inter-jurisdictional land use policies or programs. Each of these projects help establish replicable community-wide approaches to preserving natural and cultural resources while limiting inefficient low-density development.

## **Program Timeline**

*PfC Sustainable Communities* is an on-going three-year program. We will offer several *First-Steps* service grants throughout this period. These service grants may help public officials and local governments prepare for a more substantial project. Applications are accepted at any time. Please refer to the *First-Steps* Request for Proposals (RFP) for additional information in developing a proposal.

Over the next two years, we expect to offer at least four (4) *Small-Scale Service Grants* and three (3) *Large-Scale Service Grants*. Participating local governments will be required to make a joint application in response to an RFP. One new RFP (with response deadline) will be released each year, giving local governments two opportunities to apply. Please refer to the general *Request for Proposals* (RFP) for additional information in developing a *Small-Scale* or *Large-Scale* project proposal.

## **Professional Services Offered**

As the primary staffing organization for *PfC Sustainable Communities*, LIAA will be responsible for providing most of the services needed and coordinating other forms of support. Services available to support participating local government partnerships include:

- Process facilitation, including support for meetings, workshops, and public hearings.
- Mapping and geographic analyses (using a geographic information system).
- Public opinion surveys and public participation activities.

- Training and technical assistance for public officials, appointed and elected.
- Creation of project web sites for intergovernmental data sharing, information collection, public participation, and education.
- Development and publication of educational materials.
- Identification of appropriate model policies and drafting of new language.

### **Technology Assistance**

Advanced computer and software systems are used to gather and display information in ways that make policy development and education more comprehensive, current and accurate. Many of the technical tools or approaches available through this program prove valuable to selected partnerships in the policy development and application process. Some examples of the technical support provided through *PfC Sustainable Communities* are described below.

- **Geographic Information System (GIS) services** are available to collect and aggregate geographic information, including mapped features and associated data (i.e., attribute data). For example, these tools might be used to gather and/or create a wide array of planning maps.
- **Global Positioning System (GPS) and web-based mapping technologies** are available to support the collection and verification of new geographic information such as the distribution of specific cultural and natural features. For example, an inventory of historic sites may be necessary to support historic district planning.
- **Interactive websites** are available to support the collection of information from specific groups and the general public, provide on-line public surveys, and offer interactive forums. These tools are intended to engage citizens in the policy development process and provide additional information resources.
- **Technical training and support** are available to assure that the participating multi-jurisdictional partnerships have the capacity to maintain and apply the integrated digital data sets compiled during the project.

### **Information Sharing**

When citizens have information and are encouraged to become part of the decision-making process, they are more likely to support the planning process and its outcomes. Further, engaged citizens are more likely to learn how land use planning and cooperative management of cultural and natural resources can benefit the greater community (e.g., protecting aesthetic qualities, livability, and property values). Examples of data and information sharing services available are provided below.

- **Community workshops and educational materials** can be developed cooperatively with the participating multi-jurisdictional partnerships to help disseminate information developed and solicit feedback on proposed land use policy solutions.
- **An Interactive web site** will be available to support the publication of maps, geographic analyses, existing and draft policies, and educational materials, as well as providing for the efficient exchange of digital data between participating municipalities.

### **Process Facilitation**

Process facilitation is usually necessary in several stages of land use policy development. In the early stages, community leaders and citizens must work together to establish a common set of facts – an agreement on what the current conditions are. Similarly, facilitated discussions help participants develop a common vision for the future of the community. Defining generally acceptable and defensible land use policies – particularly across municipal boundaries – also requires a substantial amount of discussion and good faith give and take. Some of the process facilitation assistance that will be available is noted below.

- **Public workshops and planning activities** are offered to help engage both citizens and municipal officials in community visioning.
- **Meeting planning and support** are necessary to assure that municipal officials are able to establish goals and objectives, review and comment on draft policies, and establish intergovernmental agreements as needed – all consistent with legal requirements such as the *Open Meetings Act 267 of 1967*.

### **Policy Research & Drafting**

Program staff assist participating multi-jurisdictional partnerships in identifying appropriate policy options based on the goals articulated. These efforts may include extensive research for models within or outside of Michigan. These services will include drafting land use policies (e.g., Master Plans, Recreation Plans) for review and approval by municipal officials during the project.

## **CONCLUSION – TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE PROGRAM**

In response to the *RFP* offered by *PfC Sustainable Communities* in February 2008, we received a number of excellent proposals. There were multi-jurisdictional requests for assistance in developing joint comprehensive plans and joint zoning ordinances, developing an innovative county-wide comprehensive plan, establishing a joint planning commission, and organizing a unique development oversight body. Ultimately, four (4) projects were selected. We expect many more applications for planning assistance in response to the *Second RFP* released in November 2008.

We encourage municipalities to consider the benefits of intergovernmental cooperation for land use planning and policy development. If a partnership of municipalities can agree to cooperate in preserving their shared cultural and natural features and/or stimulating urban redevelopment, this program may be very helpful in reducing the costs of developing new policies and programs. Interested municipalities are encouraged to develop a proposal in response to the new *PfC Sustainable Communities Request for Proposals (RFP)*.

Additional information about *PfC Sustainable Communities* and the *RFP* process can be obtained by visiting the program website <[www.partnershipsforchange.cc](http://www.partnershipsforchange.cc)> or by contacting LIAA at 324 Munson Avenue, Traverse City, MI 49686; Phone: 231-929-3696; web: [www.liaa.org](http://www.liaa.org).