

Representatives to the Intermunicipal Committee for Cooperative Land Use are, back row (l-r): Jerry Campbell, Ken Arndt, Richard Edmonds, Randy Stults, Bill Giles, Beth Dipzinski, and Mary Yager; front row (l-r) Rebecca Curtis, Jeff Ratcliffe, Mike Mang and Richard Carlson.



Guest Column

A step toward growth, protection

Imagine local governments joining forces to guide economic development, manage growth, and protect natural resources. That might seem like a pipe dream throughout much of Michigan. But the Gaylord community has begun to make it a reality.

Responding to concerns over rapid and uncoordinated development as well as the loss of farmlands and open space, planners and public officials have begun taking a wider view in the Gaylord community. This week, city and township officials began a rare effort to improve coordination and cooperation in land use planning across their boundaries.

Bagley Township, the city of Gaylord, Livingston Township and Otsego County formed northern Michigan's first Intermunicipality Committee for Cooperative Land Use Planning. Each of the municipalities adopted formal resolutions about a month ago and each government appointed three representatives to the committee.

Nov. 30, the new intergovernmental committee met for the first time, electing a chairperson and getting right down to work considering potential cross-border conflicts in zoning districts and a project to develop urban design guidelines.

The Gaylord Area Cooperative Planning Committee, consisting of representatives from the City of Gaylord, Livingston Township, Bagley Township, and Otsego County

interest and concern, including land use planning, public services, transportation, and growth management.

The committee was established with the assistance of the Land Information Access Association (LIAA), a nonprofit community service organization based in Traverse City. LIAA's committee support work is paid for by a grant from the Partnerships for Change Program. The Partnerships for Change Program was developed by LIAA in conjunction with the Michigan Townships Association (MTA), Michigan Municipal League (MML), Michigan Association of Planning (MAP), and Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) to help cities, villages, and adjacent townships develop a cooperative approach to the preservation of natural and cultural resources throughout their greater community. LIAA is also working with county officials and local jurisdictions on revising the Otsego County Comprehensive Plan.

The establishment of the new committee comes on the heels of several discussions throughout the County concerning growth management and land use change, including the 2004 Otsego County: One County/One Vision Report. The report documented broad public interest in managing regional development.

Randy Stults, an Otsego County planning commissioner and committee member

regional growth is its primary asset.

"Regional planning is what's needed for consistent, managed growth in Otsego County."

Representatives from the county and the participating municipalities have been meeting for several months to discuss specific growth management issues. Becky Curtis, Gaylord city clerk and a committee member, believes the new committee will provide a proactive approach to regional land use planning. "We are very excited to have this opportunity to work with our surrounding townships to develop one vision for the community."

Ken Arndt, a Bagley Township planning commissioner and chairperson of the committee, believes the new committee will provide a unique format for each jurisdiction to communicate openly about common land use issues. "This group is really about cross talk among local governments. If we've had any issues in Otsego County, they've been communication and this related to committee aims to solve these problems first."

The next meeting will be 5:15 p.m. Dec. 15 in the Chamber Room of the County-City Building. All meetings are open to the public and public comment is encouraged.

— This information was provided by the Land Information Access Association in conjunction with the Joint Land Use Planning Committee

Elsenheimer conducting office hours

LANSING — State Rep. Kevin Elsenheimer, R-Bellaire, will be available at office hours throughout the 105th District in December to talk with residents of Otsego, Antrim, Charlevoix and Cheboygan counties.

Elsenheimer's office hours schedule:

- Friday, Dec. 16 at the Otsego County Library Multipurpose Room, in Otsego County, at 10 a.m. The library is located at 700 S. Otsego Ave., in Gaylord.

- Friday, Dec. 16 at the Cheboygan County Building, Commissioners Room 135, in Cheboygan County, at 3 p.m. The county building is located at 870 S. Main St. in Cheboygan.

- Monday, Dec. 19 at the Milton Township Hall in Antrim County, at 10 a.m. The hall is located at 7023 Cherry Ave., in Kewadin.

- Monday, Dec. 19 at the Boyne City Council Chambers in Charlevoix County, at 2 p.m. The city building is located at 321 Lake St., in Boyne City.

"I want to hear residents' thoughts and concerns about their state government," Elsenheimer said. "The more people tell me, the better job I can do representing the needs and issues facing northern Michigan."

Residents unable to attend any of the scheduled sessions may contact Elsenheimer's Lansing office toll free at 877-536-4105, by e-mail at kevinelsenheimer@house.mi.gov, or by writing to the lawmaker at State Capitol, Lansing, MI 48909.

Blood drive dates

GAYLORD — Michigan residents can give the gift of life this season by donating blood through the American Red Cross' local blood drives, offsetting the slump in blood collections that typically occurs this time of year.

Blood drives in Gaylord are scheduled for Dec. 16, noon-5:45 p.m. at Evangelical Free Church and Dec. 28, 10:30 a.m.-4:15 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church. Blood donors must be at least 17 years of age, 110 pounds and in good general health.

According to the Red Cross, blood donations often drop 10 to 15 percent between Thanksgiving and New Year, when donors are busy with holiday activities. The Great Lakes Region of the Red Cross needs to collect about 700 units of blood every week to ensure a safe and