

Calhoun County Looking Forward 2014

For the Marshall Advisor & Chronicle

Kelli Scott, Administrator/Controller

Art Kale, Chairman, Board of Commissioners

Your county government has accomplished quite a lot this past year despite continued reductions in revenues, and two water-related disasters at our Marshall facilities. We've weathered the financial storm that began in 2009, with a stable 'AA-' bond credit rating and a General Fund balance of 11% of annual operations expected at 12/31/2013. After its first full year under the governance of the Board of Commissioners, our new Road Department operates with positive cash flow; reduced overhead costs; and a growing list of efficiencies due to the consolidation. Four of the County's five elected officials began their first terms in 2013. Sheriff Matt Saxton, Prosecutor David Gilbert, Treasurer Christine Schauer and Water Resources Commissioner Christine Kosmowski joined Clerk/Register Anne Norlander in a new county-wide leadership team that gathers once a month with county administration, judicial administrators and department heads to focus on better serving the public with our limited resources. Construction is now almost complete on the first floor of the County Building following its flood in January 2013; the old jail is vacated after its roof was severely damaged in December; and our Sheriff's law enforcement office is temporarily operating from Battle Creek. Changes are once again in the works for 2014! Here are just a few of the highlights:

Better Roads and Bridges

The public will see better long-term upkeep of our roads and bridges through strategies being employed by a new management team in collaboration with Jackson County's Department of Transportation. Our Road Department's 2014 budget includes \$2.5 million for structural road and bridge improvements, and nearly \$850,000 for local road match projects—more than double the set aside from past years. The recently announced \$150,000 in one-time State transportation funding will be added in 2014 to improve local roads. More money is budgeted for direct expenses and less for administrative costs.

Financial Stability

The County's 2014 General Fund budget is \$40 million, which is \$1.5 million less and includes 38 fewer staff positions than in 2010. Despite these cuts, the county will deliver mandated and necessary services to our residents next year. We expect it to be 2018 before property tax revenues rebound to 2010 levels, but the budget gap is narrowing because of steps we've already taken. There should be new job offerings following vacancies from our 2014 Early Retirement Incentive Program.

Public Safety Initiatives

When our new law enforcement records management system goes live in 2014, it will allow for public safety agencies throughout the county to share crime records, and thus increase citizen and officer safety. It is hoped that grant funding and operational savings will allow for the County to proceed with the City of Marshall and the Michigan State Police in building a planned new regional law enforcement center in Marshall scheduled to break ground in 2014.

Improving Health and Wellbeing

Calhoun County is partnering with the City of Battle Creek and Toyota Tsusho of Battle Creek on a new employee health and wellness clinic administered by CareHere, LLC and staffed by local medical professionals. This project will be the first of its kind in Michigan when it opens in early 2014, and is estimated to ultimately save over \$1 million per year in healthcare costs for the County and our employees.

Blazing New Trails

In 2014 the new Calhoun County Trailway, Phase I, Segment 1, will finally be built. This trailway will provide 5 new miles of hiking and biking trails, connecting our three primary County Parks—Ott Biological Preserve, Kimball Pines Park and Historic Bridge Park. Funded entirely with grants from MDOT, MDNR and private dollars, this project is a collaboration between the County, the Friends of the Ott Preserve, and the Calhoun County Trailway Alliance.

Increased Support for Veterans and Seniors

Voters overwhelmingly approved in 2012 a new veterans' millage, doubling the County Veterans Affairs Office budget to more than \$350,000 per year starting in 2014. The new millage will greatly increase our capacity to help the nearly 12,000 veterans living here. Our Office of Senior Services and Senior Millage Allocation Committee (SMAC) will continue to ensure the best use of \$2.6 million in revenues dedicated to services for senior citizens. The 2014 funding allocation reflects new information based on a recently conducted Senior Needs Assessment, and new processes will reduce administrative burden.

Casino Revenue Sharing

During 2013, the FireKeepers Local Revenue Sharing Board (FLRSB) distributed more than \$5 million to local governments from the casino's 2% "net win" according to the State's compact with the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi (NHBP). The FLRSB created a new grant program that provided \$187,875 to nine school programs and government projects last year. The next local revenue sharing payment is due mid-February. Thereafter, the FLRSB will begin the annual process to distribute millions of dollars to our community. County administration will share on behalf of the FLRSB all 2014 meeting notices and funding opportunities.

Continued Shared Services

The County will continue to provide Assessing services in 2014 for the Cities of Albion and Marshall. This arrangement has increased the level of service provided to the public while reducing the cost of government. The County's Equalization and Assessing management continue to improve processes and reports to help the public better understand how property values are determined and how their property tax bills are calculated.

Economic and Community Development

Commissioner Kathy-Sue Dunn is the chair of the newly formed Southcentral Michigan Planning Council (SMPC), which is now the regional planning organization for economic development in our area. The SMPC is developing a new five-county Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document that will provide coordination of local plans to ensure regional prosperity in future years. In 2014 the County is creating a Community Development Department that will oversee several existing county offices, including Senior Services, Planning, MSU Extension, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and Parks, as well as help to facilitate our Economic Development Corporation and Hospital Finance Authority Boards.

User-Friendly Access to County Government

The County Board of Commissioners went paperless this past year and is resolved for 2014 to keeping our business transparent. We post agendas and minutes, policies and financial information on our website, www.calhouncountymi.gov, and we also offer a free e-alert system for important text and email broadcasts. County board meetings are aired on Access Vision channels, and meeting videos are posted on our website. Board Chair Art Kale summarizes Board actions for listeners of WBCK fm station 95.3. We are on Facebook, and value strong relationships with local news media. Your county commissioners are committed to interact often with our constituents at township board meetings, community events, service clubs and coffee hours.