

SUMMARY OF SERVICE SHARING MEETINGS

What can service sharing accomplish?

- Financial savings. Duplication of effort costs money and, especially in a bad economy, may threaten many services.
- An ability to continue to provide services that constituents have become accustomed to and expect, in addition to new services
- Provide a more attractive venue for economic development/redevelopment
- An understanding that each of us is not only a resident of a particular city or township but also is a part of a region. Protecting the health of the region therefore becomes a value and may help people better understand the problems of sprawl, including how thinking like a region in many areas can actually strengthen and protect their own individual cities. The parts benefit from their whole and the whole benefits from its parts. Cooperative problem solving can provide quicker and better solutions and may help prevent future problems. *Think regionally and act locally.*
- Smarter land use planning
- Note that while most of the emphasis here has been on municipalities, we should not forget about educational institutions, including both K-12 and colleges and universities—both among themselves and working together with their local communities

Services currently being shared (this is not an exhaustive list)

- A consortium to deal with the ash borer problem; the Conference of Western Wayne has a committee on this and many other areas have joint projects
- Taylor provides an animal shelter for itself and two other communities
- Taylor is the only city with a compost site in Wayne County
- Oakland and Wayne both have incinerator authorities—at least in parts of those counties
- Grand Rapids and Wyoming have a biosolids agreement—jointly building a plant to make pellets for production of fertilizer, etc.
- Water and sewer authorities in several counties
- Kentwood and Wyoming working together on a wood chipper
- Shared training of public safety officials
- Combating of West Nile Virus
- Livonia, Novi, Farmington Hills, etc. share Hazmat services via the Urban Cooperation Act.
- Transit systems
- Joint fire department among cities and/or townships as well as sharing specialized public safety equipment
- Dispatch—see Genesee which has only two dispatchers: one for Flint; one for the rest of the county
- Oakland County provides GIS for free
- Macomb/Oakland consortium to purchase vehicles

- There is also a tri-county (metro Detroit) purchasing organization for many different types of commodities
- Bay City takes care of Essexville's traffic signals (on a contract basis?) and Essexville shares an assessor/building inspector with Hampton Township
- MML is looking into joint energy purchasing, though the pool would be limited to city-owned facilities. (Note that the state is currently working with universities to do the same.)
- Saginaw/Midland Water Corporation—joint chlorine purchasing, etc.—shared with several communities
- State helps with joint purchasing (salt, vehicles, etc.) and some cities have joined with other areas such as Oakland County in purchasing when it's been cheaper
- Wastewater treatment facility for Bay County, Bay City and Essexville
- Some central dispatch
- Both Midland and Saginaw have joint dispatch and set up separate authorities to run them
- Mt. Pleasant and Isabella County jointly operate an MRF.
- Saginaw has a Mid-Michigan Waste Authority that includes 29 communities in the county. The authority has been highly successful in holding down refuse, recycling and composting costs because of the combined purchasing power. The authority has its own office and staff that handles the day-to-day activities.
- Midland and Frankenmuth have agreements with surrounding areas in re growth—urban growth boundaries (set up some years ago). Midland County has one library, one wastewater plant, a combined law enforcement center, etc.
- Upper Peninsula communities used the UCA to form an authority to handle the closed air force base
- Northwest Michigan school districts formed an authority for food purchase
- Universities have a separate entity to do telecommunications buying
- Traverse City shares a wastewater plant with five surrounding townships and a cable franchise with 10
- The Traverse City area library is a separate authority and in conjunction with neighboring Garfield Twp, TC will create a parkland and recreation authority
- Centralized dispatch in Grand Traverse as well as Cheboygan, Charlevoix and Emmet.
- Petoskey has joint recreational facilities with its school district and also does some work with the local college district
- Charlevoix County equalization does assessing and building inspection
- TC is the contract manager for a septic treatment plant for the area.
- Petoskey does its solid waste recycling through the county
- South Lyon and South Lyon School District built an administration building together
- South Lyon has no local assessor. Instead, it pays Oakland County for assessing services

Potential service sharing ideas

- Computer/server sharing—some communities have enough space to serve other areas—and it is possible the state may also be able to help here
- Economic development and redevelopment
- Treasury collections
- Payroll
- Tree trimming
- Pest invasions
- Animal control
- Composting
- Incineration and other waste management
- Public safety, including the training of public safety officials, dispatch, etc.
- GIS
- Land use planning
- Libraries
- Parks and recreation
- Joint community festivals, art fairs, etc.
- Water
- Sanitary sewer
- Storm water management
- Street and sidewalk maintenance
- Cemeteries
- Cable TV
- Telecommunications
- Technological advancements
- Question: should there be a study in individual regions determining benchmark numbers for various types of municipal workers? Is this feasible?
- Teleconferencing. This is particularly critical outstate where attending meetings and bringing in consultants becomes much more costly because of dollars lost to time and travel

Volume purchasing—among cities and also with counties, school districts, ISDs, colleges and universities and the state

- Health care coverage in general
- Pharmaceuticals
- Road salt
- Larvacides and pesticides
- Fuel
- Gas and electric
- Office supplies
- General building needs: janitorial supplies, hand soap, hand towels, toilet paper, kleenex, etc.
- Vehicles and auto supplies
- Trees
- Tools

- Food

Some considerations to be discussed:

- Should the communities joining together hire a purchasing director, perhaps paid from monies saved through joint purchasing or should they look to another avenue, such as an authority or other entity like the Downriver Community Conference?
- Who will be the depository of volume-purchased goods if the contractor will not deliver separately to each community? (This may also include a person to oversee the distribution of the products.)

Potentials for state help

- Computer technology
- Purchasing
- Training
- GIS
- Teleconferencing: can the state set up teleconferencing centers, especially outstate, in facilities such as DNR offices. These centers would be available to the public—or at least municipal officials—free of charge or at very minimal costs
- Financial incentives:
 - The Metropolitan Rebate: Cities that join together to do x amount (financially) of service sharing get to keep a portion of the tax they owe to the State of Michigan
 - Put aside x percentage of the increase in revenue sharing for communities that enter into service sharing compacts. This could include a general “give-back” or a commitment from the state to pay for a purchasing director, etc.
 - Questions:
 - Should the state have to provide a financial incentive to cities to do something which is going to save them money?
 - Should there also be disincentives?
 - Should there be a benchmark regarding the number of communities involved or the amount of population served?
 - If there are financial incentives, they have to take into account/not leave out smaller communities which have fewer resources and services to share. Furthermore, communities that are primarily residential have different needs and concerns.
 - Would financial incentives only apply to new service sharing or also recognize that which is already going on?

Some problems with service sharing and dealing with possible opponents

- It makes a difference, but perhaps not enough for communities hardest hit not just by the weak economy but more important, the impact of the Headlee Amendment and Proposal A combination. However, joint cooperation would still certainly have a positive impact.

- If service sharing is really going to work, we have to look at big ticket items as well, like health insurance (for current employees and retirees, including pharmaceuticals) and utilities
- Some of the service sharing problems are with counties trying to force the issue instead of with surrounding communities
- Other problems relate to an underlying mistrust between cities and townships in some areas
- Unions are often mentioned as opponents of service sharing, but this is certainly not always true. *Service sharing can actually save jobs*: If two suburbs each have two tree trimmers and neither can afford two anymore, perhaps they can join together and have three trimmers between them, thus actually saving a job. Unions will certainly be more concerned about discussions of major departments, such as police and fire, and that is why communities should perhaps be encouraged to begin with smaller projects (the tree trimmers, joint purchasing, etc.). Of course, wages are also a large part of municipal costs. Will economic strife makes unions more receptive to change? (Saginaw was recently able to drop its minimum manning requirements for police and fire with the concurrence of the unions.)
- Many residents are leery of having services provided by other communities. (This is especially true of public safety. Clio tried to set up a regional fire authority but recalls were threatened.) They moved into their homes for certain reasons and identify with their own cities. Service sharing must take care to preserve the local autonomy and character of each community. As with unions, residents will undoubtedly be more comfortable if we start at a smaller level.
- No matter who the opponents may be—and even if there aren't any, communities have a responsibility to educate their constituencies, including workers, about the benefits and values of service sharing and the positive impact it will actually have on their lives. The communities would also be helped by positive messages coming from the “bully pulpit” of the Governor.

Statutes that help facilitate service sharing

- Urban Cooperation Act
- Metropolitan Council Act (This act provided the impetus and possibility for joint planning and activities in the greater Grand Rapids area, much through the formation of the Metropolitan Planning Organization which deals with land use, transit, GIS, etc.)
- Intergovernmental Transfers of Functions and Responsibilities Act, P.A. 8 of 1967
- There are also statutes allowing the creation of authorities for garbage and rubbish, dog pounds, community recreation, fire
- Are other statutes needed? If so, what should they entail?