

Calhoun County

Strategic Plan Review and Update

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Celebrating Success and Progress

Following are key programming highlights since the adoption of the *2002 County Strategic Plan*. While not every success is noted under the four functional groups, the progress made toward achieving the goals established in 2002 is quite significant.

Health, Education and Human Services

The county has made significant strides in the collaboration of county departments and agencies contributing to the health, education and human service programmatic outreach. The county's collaborative programming efforts at addressing health and nutrition education involving Public Health, MSU Extension, Office of Senior Services, Juvenile Home and Veterans Affairs' are commendable. The linkage with Kalamazoo County for breast and cervical cancer screening and education may serve as programming models for other counties. MSU Extension's partnership with the Juvenile Home and Courts for engagement of youth-at-risk will have long term benefits to the county.

Public Safety and Courts

The collaboration between the Sheriff, Courts, and Prosecutor in maintaining available rental bed capacity resulting in the generation of \$21 million jail bed rental income for the county since 2002 is commendable. The privatization of selected correctional services through the assistance of the county's administrative services department has resulted in reduced expenditures for correctional services and efficiency in contract administration. The Court's

have made significant strides in adopting digital technology to support efficient case management and record storage. The Prosecutor has actively engaged the community and community based organizations in addressing domestic violence and sexual assault support services.

Since the 2002 strategic plan, highlights for the courts include instituting both a women's and men's Drug Courts. The federal government provided funding for the Women's Drug Court and a state grant provided funding for Men's Drug Court. Because funding for both drug courts end in September 2007, the courts will seek outside funding.

Physical and Economic Development

Collaboration between the Road Commission and Drain Commissioner in assessing and maintaining the county's road and drainage infrastructure has resulted in significant improvements to the overall system since 2002. The county has been able to maintain and support a network of county parks to enhance recreational opportunities for county residents and visitors.

Establishing the planning function as a separate county department sets the stage for integrating and expanding the role of the department in linking with townships and cities for both support of planning/zoning, GIS and long term planning of the county's infrastructure. [Due to budget reductions the role of the department may be limited at present.]

Administration and Finance

The county's establishment of the Land Bank Program administered by the County Treasurer provides the county with not only the opportunity to take

custody of abandoned and delinquent/foreclosed properties but in the long run should provide an added source of revenue.

The Clerk/Register of Deeds initiated a pilot program with area hospitals for the filing of birth certificates directly on-line with the office, an excellent adaptation of technology. In addition the office has made excellent progress in digitizing land records dating from 1996 forward and providing internet access to vital records and Register of Deeds recordings. The goal in the coming year is to provide internet access to the general public for searches of vital record indexes.

Administrative Service Department has established e-web procurement, marketed county facilities, instituted oversight of contract administration, and adopted an energy management plan resulting in \$800,000 in energy savings, enhanced security arrangements and provided oversight to improvements of county facilities. Through support of the administrative services department the county is well on its way with an integrated technology plan that provides needed IT support to county departments and agencies.

County Equalization has provided leadership that has resulted in all assessing units utilizing the same assessing software thus facilitating the transfer of assessment roll data as well as the conduct of equalization studies. The Equalization Office will be a key player in utilizing a central GIS system

when it is developed.

The Human Resource office has provided leadership and administrative support to county departments and agencies.

Recruitment and retention of qualified county workers has served as a high priority for the unit. The unit has made periodic analysis of benefit packages for county employees and made changes to the county's defined benefit plan that increased the county multiplier and increased employee contribution (cost share) that in the long run will save the county money.

The county administrator/controller's office has provided broad administrative support to departments, agencies, and the County Board of Commissioners. The county is in the final stages of hiring a finance director that will add capacity in the budgeting and accounting area. The office has expanded the county's website and worked collaboratively with the Fire Keepers Casino and initiated a five year capital improvement program. Plans are underway for replacing the county financial management information system to provide a more user friendly analytical system. The office has served as a collaborator and leader with local units of government in the county. The county organized and promoted a successful "County Summit" in April, bringing together all the local governments in the county. This action has the potential to enhance intergovernmental relationships in the county.

Recommended Actions

The discussions on April 13 and 14, 2007, involved representatives from the county departments to share comments about the economic stress that both Michigan and most of its counties are experiencing. The state has experienced 11 recessions since 1982. And while Michigan has similarly experienced economic recovery a number of times, state revenues have been dropping since 2000. Experts note that the state recessions are often driven by cyclical recessions but Michigan's problem is driven by two other factors. One is that the state is experiencing a structural deficit—meaning “the cost of maintaining programs is increasing relative to revenues, even when the economy is expanding.”¹

In addition, Michigan has had a long and sound reputation of being a manufacturing state. Although the state economy still has a strong manufacturing component, manufacturing has been declining nationally and in Michigan. Because the proportion of manufacturing of the state economy is so much larger than that of the nation, the impact of the decline is much more significant in Michigan. Furthermore, Michigan's tax system is based on a manufacturing economy thus with a decline in the sector, state revenues from the sector have been declining.

The weakening of the state manufacturing base is one aspect of the transforming of the state economy. A second aspect of the transformation,

is the growing influence of information technology (IT) that facilitates international communication and business relationships that lead to both exportation and importation of business.²

These factors give shape and form to the transformation that appears to be taking place. The difficulty is that full scope of the transformation cannot be known. Consequently, reaction to this apparent transformation must be dealt with both cautiously and aggressively. The cautionary approach applies to matters that seem to be developing; aggressive responses are appropriate where the direction of change is clear and evident.

The following recommendations are made with these overarching concepts in mind.

Provide County-wide GIS Resource

The Geographical Information System (GIS) is an important tool for many departments of the county government and jurisdictions in the county. Several department representatives expressed a need for access to GIS data. Several of the municipalities either have or would use GIS for planning and zoning, for property tax assessment and equalization, drain and road management, and others.

Recommendation: The establishment of a countywide committee to prepare a statement of GIS needs and develop a plan for the use, payment, and management of the program. Ideally, the system should be available on a system

¹ Charles L. Ballard, *Michigan's Economic Future*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, MI., 2006. p. 102

² See Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Wilinomics, How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, Portfolio (Penguin Group), New York, 2006

that is commonly accessible by all the municipalities of the county. Note: as a result of the April 2007 “County Summit”, a County-wide GIS Committee with participation from other local governments has been formed to work with Calhoun County.

Public Safety and the Courts

The task of fulfilling the responsibility to provide public safety is a complex task involving not only the police personnel, enforcing the law through prosecutorial actions, judging the accusations and related evidence, and punishing those who have been judged responsible for the improper conduct. The responsibility also relates to the broader community, the role of parents, the operation of schools, and other institutions.

The criminal justice system has traditionally relied on punishment in providing public safety as articulated by society. While punishment continues as a tool in some cases it may not be a sufficient remedy. Preparing an incarcerated individual for a successful return to their family and community has become an important goal for the criminal justice system. Due to the high costs of incarceration employing different corrective measure by engaging various community resources can not only reduce costs but enhance the opportunity for individuals to become productive members of society. These community correction measures have been successfully adopted in Calhoun County.

Recommendation: That the public safety departments and courts form a collaborative team that would bring together elements in the community that would generate a continuing effort to

prevent criminal and inappropriate conduct in the community. The team would focus on a variety of activities that reduce crime.

These activities might include such approaches as community policing and “Neighborhood Watch”. And though difficult, actions to monitor and eliminate “gang” behavior and the use of drugs through strict enforcement, education, and addiction treatment would provide advancement toward the goals.

The team should also call upon the social institutions of the communities such as schools, churches, service clubs, employers, public organizations, and willing individuals to engage in teaching youth and adults at risk how to contribute to their own well-being of and that of others.

Admittedly, such an approach is a cultural change for those in involved in providing public safety and solely or largely reliant on the punishment tools. This recommendation seeks to add “restorative justice” as a goal in not only protecting the general public from criminal conduct but to enable the community to make significant reductions in criminal behavior by helping the weak to become strong.

Note: County has implemented three different programs aimed at the concept of restorative justice: Work Release authorized by Judge at sentencing and is labor intensive requiring uniformed officer to supervise; Work Program, a effort between the Sheriff and County Road Commission for inmates with “inmate worker status”; and Alternative Sentencing Program, a joint effort between Corrections and County Road

Commission.

County may wish to explore the potential for the development of agreements with cities, villages and townships for the utilization of inmates and possibly contribute monies in recognition of the work performed and the investment by the county.

Juvenile Home Program

The management team of the Calhoun County Juvenile Home has been working diligently to address the needs of the youth that come under their custody. Some of these efforts are directed to fund-raising to enrich the programs and facilities. Several years ago the voters of Calhoun County rejected a request for special millage to improve the facility and the need for the improvements continues.

Recommendation: That the Juvenile Home management team should continue its goal of seeking funds to improve the facility. Given the current economic environment, the general public may not readily endorse another millage request. However, if the team was successful in obtaining a commitment from a major foundation or other funding sources (possibly linking W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Summit Pointe and Urban League) for a gift if the county voters would approve a millage to pay a specified percentage of the project cost, the voters might be enticed to assist in that way. In addition, the management team should make a concerted effort to advance the public understanding and appreciation for the contributions the Juvenile Home make to well-being of the community.

Economic Enhancement Committee

Several county departments and agencies are directly or indirectly involved in contributing to the economy of the county. The Office of Veterans Affairs, Michigan State University Extension, the County Sheriff, the County Road Commission, the Drain Commission and others play key roles in advancing the county economy as they carry out their principal assignments. Increasing awareness of their contributions could advance their awareness and contribution to the economy.

Recommendation: The establishment of a committee of representatives of departments that contribute in varied ways to the county economy. The purpose would be to bring the representatives together periodically to refresh awareness of their role in economic contributions and to explore ways they can increase their contributions to this goal.

Countywide Economic and Entrepreneurial Program

Several municipalities in the county and county agencies are involved in advancing the economy of the county. Much of the effort, however, is focused not on a countywide effort but on parts of the county. This tends to build a framework of competitiveness among the units involved. The county benefits from all economic development in the county and to a degree even beyond the county limits.

Recommendation: County government, in concert with the units within the county, organize a program, and if necessary, a county committee, to advance the development of the economy of the county. Such an effort would

involve efforts to market the county, to be in contact with state agencies and programs, and to be responsive to prospective clients interested in economic development projects. The county is encouraged to contact MSU's Center for Product Agriculture and Natural Resources to assist in the development of an incubator program as well as explore the capitalization of Calhoun's agriculture economy.

Communicating Worldwide

Many organizations, including county governments, have established presentations on the Internet. The Calhoun County website provides a variety of information about the county and covers a number of topics.

Recommendation: Review and evaluate the Calhoun County Website in terms of the message the county wishes to communicate to the world. Those associated with economic development efforts should assemble periodically to determine if the website communicates the image of the county on the website in terms of its effectiveness as a marketing tool.

Planning Coordination

Land use planning is a governmental activity in which all the jurisdictions have a stake, a stake not only in the process but in the plans themselves. On March 1, the Michigan Senate adopted a bill to revise the planning and zoning functions of counties and municipalities. The Michigan House has the legislation under consideration at the present time. In part the bill encourages collaboration in planning and zoning. [The status or future of the bill is uncertain but does give an indication of the legislature's

desire for the encouragement of joint planning.

Given the economic conditions and the opportunity for mutual collaboration, this legislation, when adopted, provides an opportunity for collaborative planning in Calhoun County. The proposal is not one of having the CCPC take over the planning function. Rather it is to enable consolidation of the planning outcomes on a countywide basis.

Recommendation: Revisit the role for the CC Planning Commission in producing a comprehensive county land use plan. This does not suggest that the municipalities should not develop their own plans but that the individual planning maps should be produced in digital format and delivered to the CCPC when the plan will be posted as a countywide plan. These plans could then be juxtaposed and evaluated for consistency and desirability. As such the "countywide planning map" would provide new insights regarding best uses, jurisdictional relationships, and cross jurisdictional project planning.

Zoning Coordination

The responsibility for zoning is a city, village, township responsibility in Michigan. Some counties exercise the zoning function for jurisdictions that do not have a zoning ordinance. Given the way digital technology has shortened the communication and interaction between and the stake that all units have in many zoning decisions, the proposed new legislation offers new possibilities for collaborating on the zoning function as well. This is not to suggest that the CCPC necessarily assumes responsibilities for all zoning but some

aspects of the process may rise to that level.

Recommendation: Explore collaboration as the accepted strategy in how zoning is conducted in Calhoun County. (This would necessitate the adoption of the development of countywide mapping of plans.) With the availability of countywide planning and zoning maps, the CCPC could readily evaluate and comment on pending changes on local zoning. CCPC's observations ordinarily would not pertain to local zoning rules such as setback requirements, sign restrictions, etc, rather, their observations or comments would deal with impacts of proposed conversions or new land uses. (If implemented, this recommendation could extend to county zoning in jurisdictions that do not exercise the zoning responsibilities or wish to terminate them.)

If county funding becomes available, the GIS effort in the county could make a significant contribution to county planning efforts and bolster the department..

County Contracting for Local Services

The roots of many of Michigan statutes spelling out local government functions were established during a period when communications and travel were slow. The laws established the various patterns to adjust to these conditions. However, circumstances have changed significantly and many of the governmental services and functions can now be done in different ways. Making such transitions is somewhat discomfoting but are worth considering as we transition to new economic and technological circumstances and

transform the way local government business is done.

Recommendation: The Board of Commissioners and department heads are encouraged to develop new ways to use their financial resources as they provide governmental services by contracting with local government. The prospect for significant increases in county and municipal revenues is not encouraging but may enable the jurisdictions to provide necessary services more economically. New technologies will play a role in making some of these arrangements cost-effective. Services subject to possible contractual arrangements, either in whole or in part, include police services, property assessment, 911 services, elections administration, purchasing services, recreation programs, etc.

Improving the Quality of Living in the County

The quality of living in the community is affected by a variety of factors, some of which are influenced by individuals, municipalities, the county, and beyond. The county, municipalities, and school districts have facilities that have both a positive and negative effect on the quality of living in the county. Living quality and public images, however, has an important effect on economic conditions. Some of the factors that come into play in this regard are street and transportation conditions, recreational opportunities, public programs, commercial, industrial, and private housing conditions, school programs etc.

Recommendation: The Board of Commissioners continue the concept of the April 2007 "County Summit" on an

annual basis as a vehicle to bring together governmental leaders from the schools, community college, townships, cities, villages and county, to assess and evaluate the trends affecting the quality of living, factors influencing it, and actions that can either correct or advance conditions that define living quality in the county. The county board is encouraged to expand the “County Summit” to include representatives from the private sector and non-profit organizations that are engaged in promoting the economic well-being of county residents.

Marketing the County through Park Recreation Programs

Calhoun County has an excellent inventory of park facilities. The CCRC provides excellent maintenance services for the parks and keeps them in fine condition. Programming and marketing the parks as excellent recreational sites is generally outside the scope of the CCRC.

Because the park facilities are notable assets for recognizing the quality of living in the county, they also constitute assets that can raise the image of the county and as such, contribute to the economic development of Calhoun County.

Recommendation: Develop recreational activities, programs, and events in the parks and employ the facilities and activities as resources to market Calhoun County for high quality living and economic development.

The Headlee Amendment and Property Tax Revenues

Calhoun County’s Tax Allocation Board recommended the allocation of property

tax millage in 1972 which voters approved at the November general election in 1972. The millage rates for general law townships, ISD, K-12 schools, and county was fixed in perpetuity and the Tax Allocation Board dissolved prior to the adoption of the Headlee constitutional amendment in 1978. As a result, Calhoun County’s fixed millage has not come up for renewal. As a result, without a vote to override the Headlee provisions, the allocated millage is rolled back each year in relation to the rate of inflation.

The county’s original allocation of then 15-mills allocated in 1972 was 5.5600 mills. As of 2005, the county’s permitted millage has been rolled back to 5.3779 mills--a difference of 0.1821 mills—to reflect the rates of inflation. If a Headlee override vote had been approved, the property tax revenue gain would exceed \$604,000.

Often taxpayers were pleased by the property tax savings resulting from the Headlee rollbacks. What is often overlooked, however, is the fact that these changes do not reflect the rising costs of government services that result from inflation. Hence, it is recommended that the Board of Commissioners consider steps to re-establish the allocated millage rates.

Several options exist for restoring the rolled back millage.

First, the county board can place a Headlee override request before voters. Michigan voters are often reluctant to approve Headlee overrides because it looks like a tax increase.

Second, recapture of rolled back millage can be placed before voters in other ways. Several options exist for placing the fixed millage question before voters. The county board by resolution could place the question before voters. Or, the county board by resolution could re-establish the County Tax Allocation Board and request that the board convene and develop a recommendation of the allocated millage split to be placed before county voters. Or, a petition referendum could be developed and circulated among county voters seeking to place the fixed millage question before voters.

Based on experience with other counties reconvening the Tax Allocation Board is probably the most judicious action since units benefiting from the allocated millage are at the table in developing the proposal. The Tax Allocation Board could also recommend increasing the fixed millage total from 15 mills to an amount not to exceed 18 mills less the amount allocated to the K-12 school districts as of April 1994. With the approval of Proposal A by Michigan voters in 1994, that portion of the allocated millage dedicated to K-12 school districts was permanently assigned for use by schools thus reducing the 15-18 mill limit by the amount allocated to school districts in the county. The reconvened Tax Allocation Board could restore the amount allocated to the county, townships and ISD and would probably be a recommended strategy in order to gain support of the townships.

Recommendation: County Board of Commissioners reconvene the Tax Allocation Board (TAB) and request that the board prepare a fixed millage

renewal question to place before county voters taking into account the Millage needs of the county, ISD, and general law townships. The TAB's decision to allocate millage should run for a period of 5 years so that the rolled back millage in the intervening years may be reestablished again.

County Role in Health Insurance Pool

Some state senators are proposing a bill to permit local governments with 250 or more employees to form an insurance pool for health, dental, and vision insurance. They are projecting that the program will produce a reduction of 8 percent in health insurance costs. The proposal also calls for the state to establish a "catastrophic claims" fund that would be financed from member fees. The proposal has not been introduced as legislation at this writing but it may offer the potential for reduction of health care costs that may benefit townships, cities, and villages as well as the county if the proposal materializes. Most likely the plan would call for the program to be administered by Blue Cross Blue Shield, Aetna, or another health care insurance company.³ *Recommendation: The Board of Commissioners continue to monitor the legislation and consider with the Summit Conference members whether the proposal has the potential of reducing the health care costs of government in Calhoun County. Because of the suggested 250 employee requirement, it is not likely that many of the municipalities in the county will qualify for participation on their own. However, it is possible that with a health insurance pool administered under county leadership, the concept could benefit all of the jurisdictions.*

³ *The MTA News*, May 2007, p. 3.

Document Security

The broadened use of IT and the broad use of digitized documents carries with it certain risks. First, with the evolution of technological development, documents created with modern hardware or software may become outdated technology and then not be retrievable over time. Second, electronic records may be exposed to illicit access by third party “invaders” and result in identity or information theft. Third, if the programs are established as “store-fronts” so that persons seeking to purchase a document or service and pay for it electronically, the system should be protected against fraudulent conduct.

Recommendation: The Board of Commissioners should evaluate and monitor practices and policies relating to the broadened use of IT and consider a requirement that specified electronic records be stored in secure locations in paper format as protection against permanent loss or inaccessibility.

Document Fees

Litigation against some registers of deeds regarding policies and practices has been ongoing for several years. The litigation was initiated by various title insurance companies that use property records on file in the registers of deeds offices. The dispute arose over prices registers charge for documents. State law specifies a price of \$1 per paper page but some registers modified the price for electronic copies. Some registers also included a fixed condition that the companies not sell the documents to third parties.

Very recently, the US Court of Appeals ruled on an appeal by four title insurance companies. The Court of Appeals upheld two of the registers’ practices and returned one of the complaints to the trial court asking for adjudication. The Court of Appeals ruled that a register may refuse to offer non-paper copies that are available. It also held that state law leaves to the register the discretion regarding the practice of offering bulk rate discounts. Referred to the trial court is the issue of whether a register may forbid the title companies from selling the documents provided by the registers’ offices.⁴

Two state laws relate to the issues in this case. One statute, the Enhanced Access to Public Records Act, refers to a public record’s immediate availability for public inspection, purchase, or copying by digital means.⁵ The opinion refers to another statute relating only to registers of deeds which exempts registers of deeds from the Enhanced Access to Public Records Act.⁶

Recommendation: The Board of Commissioners may wish to request the county legal counsel to examine these statutes in light of the court decisions and legislative acts to determine if departmental practices regarding access to county records and documents are consistent with the law and with county preferences regarding fees and charges.

Financial Management

Overseeing the financial assets and resources of the county is a fundamental responsibility of the Board of Commissioners and central

⁴ *First American Title Company et al v. Lapeer County Register of Deeds, et al*, U.S. Court of Appeals, February 22, 2007.

⁵ MCL 15.441-15.443.

⁶ See MCL 565.551

administration. It is especially important now because of the economic transformation the state economy is undergoing.

Calhoun County has employed a county administrator/controller for many years. From this position title, one might assume that the occupant of this position is the operating financial officer.

However, the county administrator/controller's role is more like that of a county manager who provides leadership of county operations and county board relationships.

Recommendation: The Board of Commissioners has under consideration

the filling of a position Finance Director. The person appointed to this position, unlike that of the county administrator/controller position, would focus entirely on the administration of the financial circumstances of the county and provide the ongoing management of these matters on behalf of the administrator/controller and the Board of Commissioners. This person will enable the Board of Commissioners and county administrator/ controller to focus more completely on county leadership for the successful transformation of the county's economy.

Summary of Departmental Reports

In 2002 KV Associates assisted the Calhoun Board of Commissioners, the county administrator/controller, administrative staff, and department heads in preparing a strategic plan. These participants generated a series of goal statements and a number of key strategic actions (KSA) that represented steps that the various departments could take to move the county government toward achieving its goals.

The report also included a summary of observations of a focus group consisting of officers of rural agencies in the county, officers of local urban governments, members of appointed boards in the county, and representatives of non-profit organizations. These groups were some of the county's client groups.

In addition, the report included a departmental SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis generated by the respective departments. The report ended with a five year financial trend analysis of county finances.

The current strategic planning process was programmed around the four major groupings of county agencies. These groups and the departments within them are as follows:

Health, Education and Human Services

Health Department
Juvenile Home
MSU Extension
Senior Services

Veterans Affairs

Physical and Economic Development

Land Use Planning.
Drain Commissioner
County Road Commission
Facilities Management and Support Services

Public Safety and Courts

County Prosecutor
County Sheriff
Circuit Court
District Court
Family Court

Administration and Finance

Equalization Department
Civil Counsel
Human Resources
Office of Treasurer
Clerk/Register
Purchasing
County Administration
Finance
Administrative Services

On April 13 and 14, 2007, the county commissioners, administrator/controller, administrative staff and department heads reassembled to conduct a review of the 2002 plan, to assess current circumstances, and evaluate options for the future. The report of these discussions is not as detailed as the one of five years ago but it does seek to provide a summary of the discussions, a review of interdepartmental collaborations, and provide some options regarding conditions that are surfacing.

County Services and Programs

County governments have the responsibility to provide a variety of services. Some departments, staff agencies, provide services that are internal; that is, they address the needs of other departments and units (line agencies) of the county. The recipients of such staff services are then equipped to deliver services to external client populations. While both line and staff agencies are specialized and focused on their particular functions, both nonetheless enable the county government to achieve its principal goal, i.e., serving the permanent and temporary populations of Calhoun County.

We tend to view these staff and line units as being highly focused and dedicated to delivering specific services that other units do not provide. What we find as we inventory the responsibilities and functions, however, is that the multitude of county departments is heavily dependent on the services of others to attain their goals or at least to progress toward achieving the goals. Thus, while individual units focus on their tasks, responsibilities, and clients, county government is an integration of agencies and departments that are mutually dependent on other members of the county government community.

Not all would agree with such a perspective in part because some tend to concentrate on the programs they administer and the services they deliver to various classes of recipient clients. In addition, several county departments are linked to the authority and policies articulated through federal or state

authorities or other non-county policymakers.

If the participants in county government will take a step or two back, however, they may be able to place some operational meaning to the forgoing statements. What they will see is that each department contributes to the overall effectiveness of county government and depends on other units of county government for successful programs.

In the strategic planning discussions on April 13 and 14, 2007, the participants examined various aspects of county government within the framework of four groups of county departments: health, education and human services, physical and economic development, law enforcement and courts, and administration. While such a categorization or grouping of departments represents one way to frame the functions of county government, this framework does not construct high “fences” between them. Departments are linked not only with units in the four groupings but through all four groups. Each department has an impact on the actions of other departments and the degree of effectiveness they achieve in their own department, their quadrant, and importantly, in the other three quadrants as well.

As we report on the discussion of the April strategic planning review, we summarize the discussions within the perspective of several broad based county goals and examine how each of the departments influences the

attainment of these goals. All of this is not to suggest that the departments do not specialize in specific areas and are not responsible for the quality of services their units deliver to the Calhoun County populations. Rather, it is to underscore the linkages and connections the departments and units have with each other and to raise the level of awareness how their programs affect other programs and benefit from them. The purpose of this approach then, is to construct a perspective on how the attainment of county goals is influenced by the individual departments.

As we review and summarize the presentation delivered at the two day-long meetings, we will continue to frame the discussion in accordance with the four areas. However, we will seek to emphasize how the roles and responsibilities reach out to the other quadrants as well.

Health, Education and Human Service Programs

Health and human service programs are the principal focus of several Calhoun County departments; the County Health Department, Office of Senior Services, MSU Extension, and Veterans Affairs' Office. Other departments that play a role in delivering health and human services to the residents and visitors of Calhoun County include the office of Drain Commissioner, Road Commission, County Sheriff, County Prosecutor, Medical Examiner, and a number of the administrative departments, as well as the courts.

COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

The Calhoun County Public Health Department (CCPHD) operates both as an arm of state government and a local health service center. State government depends on county health departments to implement many of the regulatory duties assigned by state law. In this capacity the CCPHD administers health regulations such as those relating to communicable disease control, food establishment conditions, public water supply, and others. As a *local* health service center it is engaged in providing direct health services such as immunizations, onsite waste disposal inspections, and education in nutrition. The department's education role focuses on encouraging habits and practices conducive to sound health.

County departments of public health rely primarily on state and county appropriations to finance its programs. In addition to regular appropriations from state government, county agencies, depending whether the special grant funding is intended to address, exist in a particular county and the relative seriousness of conditions in particular counties.

Potential Challenges. The CCPHD regularly confronts potential challenges related to funding. On one hand, the department must live and prepare for the unpredictability of epidemic diseases such as influenza that can impose substantial costs on the agency. On the other hand, the agency may face budgetary constraints brought on by either state or county budget reductions. The latter condition is especially relevant as the state and local economy experience unusual stress.

In response to such stress, the CCPHD has been undergoing an overall assessment and organizational reassessment. The agency has been refocusing on mandated services-- programs that help improve Community Health Indicators--and operational constraints.

The CCPHD has significantly fewer employees than it did a decade ago. The department now has about 54 employees. Given the financial constraints in state and county governments, it is not likely that the department's resources will improve significantly in the near future. And because the fiscal constraints will also affect the county population, demands for health services will likely increase.

Juvenile Home

The Calhoun County Juvenile Home (CCJH) houses youths who have come under the custody of the county's legal system. The youth population ranges in age from 11 to 17. The Home has 42 beds and generally operates at full capacity either by assignees from Calhoun County or by youth from other counties.

The Juvenile Home seeks to provide individual and group counseling to improve the social skills and knowledge level of the detained youth. The CCJH has established a Girl's Group because of the increased detention of juvenile females. One of the CCJH programs referred to as EYES (Empowered Youth Experiencing Success) as an intervention program to assist in transitioning youth back to the community and their families. The 12 week program aims to provide volunteer opportunities for

troubled youth and to increase parental involvement.

Funding for the facility comes mainly from the county general appropriations but CCJH support groups help the Juvenile Home in generating flexible resources through an annual golf outing, bake sales, Angel Tree, donations from the Optimist Club, and from an estate bequest. The Juvenile Home has a broad network of community partners including youth groups, MSU Extension, Planned Parenthood, K-12 Schools, Substance Abuse Council, Summit Pointe, and Human Services Coordinating Council.

Potential Challenges

The CCJH confronts several challenges. One relates to the declining ability to accept youth from other counties on a fee basis and the consequent reduction in revenue available for facility operations. In addition, the agency is experiencing an increase in staff overtime as a result of a reduction in full-time positions.

Other increased demands relate to the increase of youth with mental health concerns that place a growing demand for accommodation but also because such youth require additional treatment. An increase in gang activity overflows into the CCJH raises the risk to youth and staff.

The staff reported an increase in the severity of actions resulting in detention which will require attention by the courts and prosecutor's office. The juvenile home was originally built to accommodate males but with the increase in female detainees, space

requirements have been a growing challenge.

OFFICE of SENIOR SERVICES

The Calhoun County Office of Senior Services (OSS), in many ways is a health care-oriented department with the mission of helping senior citizens address their health and special circumstance needs. This program, in cooperation with the Area Agency on Aging-Region III, have a common goal of enabling senior citizens to remain in their homes as long as possible. This is done by providing home delivered meals and home medical care services, as well as making social and recreational services and transportation to persons over the age of 60.

The programs for senior citizens in Calhoun County are funded by a special millage. Presently, the program receives about \$2.5 million annually from the 0.75 mill levy (Headlee Rollback has reduced the actual levy). The millage was last approved in 2006 with approximately 85 percent of the voter's casting votes approving the millage. The special millage has been approved through 2010.

The OSS has its own very clearly defined clientele and general public support program. And because of the special millage factor, the program does not appear to be affected immediately by threatening economic conditions of the state. The agency, however, faces potential challenges that should not be overlooked.

Potential Challenges. One factor is the projected increase in clientele as the age of the "baby boomer" population increases significantly in the coming

years. If this expanded clientele experiences financial difficulty because of a state economic crisis, they may place a significant demand on the program's services.

MSU EXTENSION

The Extension Service at Michigan State University is a product of the Smith-Lever Act passed by Congress in 1914 with roots going back to President Abraham Lincoln's signing of the Morrill Act in 1862 that enabled land grant colleges throughout the nation to develop research and outreach programs for citizens and business. MSU's outreach efforts are based on cooperative linkages between USDA (federal), state and county government.

MSU Extension programs focus on three primary areas: agriculture and natural resources; children, youth and families; and community and economic. Programs are diverse and reach all sectors of the county. MSU Extension has a county advisory council to assist in identifying programming priorities. As a result of a statewide survey, focus groups and input from county extension councils, five priorities were established: developing entrepreneurs; promoting healthy life styles; preparing for the expanding bioeconomy; educating and supporting decision makers; and building leaders for today and tomorrow.

The office has developed several goals addressing youth development in the county both through the traditional 4-H youth program as well as linking with community partners.

Agriculture makes a significant contribution to the county's economy

and MSU Extension is linked with agriculture producers and supporting organizations to maintain ag profitability while sustaining and promoting a healthy environment. The office has linked with county planning in addressing land use issues and land preservation.

The office has developed a variety of educational outreach programs to enhance the commitment of youth and adults to maintain healthy lifestyles and good nutrition. As partners with Health Department, Senior Programs and Juvenile Home have initiated targeted programs such as breastfeeding, family nutrition and Project FRESH.

Potential Challenges. MSU Extension funding comes from multiple sources: university revenues from federal grants and matching state appropriations, funds from county governments, and governmental and private grants. The Calhoun County MSUE office is staffed by 10 persons, 7 of whom are funded from MSUE funds and 3 by county appropriations.

Funding for Extension programs has been challenged frequently over the decades. Federal funding has remained flat over the last ten years while funding from the state has been a continuing challenge. The office will need to be aggressive at securing and matching local funding in order to maintain stable funding levels. Continuing well established partnerships in the county will assist in being able to offer continued educational outreach.

VETERANS AFFAIR'S OFFICE

The Calhoun County Office of Veteran's Affairs (VAO) was established by the Board of Commissioners pursuant to a state law. Although the VAO does not deliver health or human services directly, it is instrumental in connecting veterans with health or social problems with federal, state, and county resources.

Perhaps the most directly linked "health and human service" function the VAO provides is that of enabling veterans to gain access to emergency financial relief from the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund. Funding for such short-term relief also comes from the Calhoun County Soldiers and Sailors Relief Fund which is entitled by law to one-tenth of a mill of the county property tax. This appropriation also entitles veterans to burial benefits of \$300 if they possessed less than \$40,000 upon their death.⁷ The VAO is a county office under the jurisdiction of the Board of Commissioners, the County Administrator/Controller's Office and a Veteran Affairs Committee which consists of 5 members who are veterans of the national war conflicts since WWII. The VAO staff consists of two positions—the director and a service officer.

Funding for the services provided to veterans and the spouses comes from federal, state, and county programs Department of Veterans Affairs. These claims are processed through the agency's regional office in Detroit.

⁷ The bill authorizing this benefit, passed by the state legislature in 1911, has not been amended in the intervening 96 years.

Health Related Support from Other Departments

Most other departments of county government do not perceive themselves as having a role in supporting and advancing health maintenance efforts. Yet, many of the governmental agencies in the county have such responsibilities. For example, the County Sheriff's Department, while focusing on crime prevention and corrections, has an impact on health conditions. While the CCPHD uses some of its resources to reduce substance abuse in the county, so also does the County Sheriff's Department (CCSD), the Prosecutor's Office and the Drug Court. In addition, with the large population in the county jail, the Sheriff's Department has a significant role in health management not only while inmates are in custody of the Sheriff but after they are released as well.

Similarly, the county court system tends to focus on dimensions other than health management and does not focus on health matters. Yet many matters that

come before the courts are health related and present opportunities to emphasize health related practices. Some of these, by way of example, relate to substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, adult foster care, and many others.

Administrative departments also can have an impact on the effectiveness of county health programs. Providing the departments with IT equipment and programs as well as with advice and counsel regarding new applications could have an important effect on the health programs. In the 2002 Strategic Planning Report, low employee morale was one of the factors reported. This was a matter of concern to the CCPHD leadership but could also have been a matter of concern to the Human Relations Department as well as other administrative units.

Public Safety and Courts

Michigan county government historically and currently plays a major role in addressing the public safety needs of the population of our state. At the county level these needs are addressed through the office of the county sheriff, the county prosecutor, county circuit, probate and district courts. The office of the county sheriff is responsible not only for county and state law enforcement but also for operating the county jail or corrections facility. The county prosecutor, while a collaborator in this

law enforcement, also plays a key role in overseeing the enforcement actions of the sheriff's department determining whether the allegations and evidence associated with them is sufficient to advance the charges to the appropriate court.

Office of County Sheriff

The county sheriff is one of several full-time elected officials of county government. Providing the service is

labor intensive and therefore the Sheriff services are an expensive public service. Cities and townships that provide their own police protection services help reduce the county cost of providing these services but because of the size of the geographical area to be covered, the county sheriff department is one of the largest cost centers of county government.

The Calhoun County Sheriff Department (CCSD) is an especially large cost center because of the scope of the Calhoun County corrections facility and the expenses associated with operating such facilities. The Calhoun County Corrections Center has the capacity to house 600 inmates. The average daily occupancy, however, is about 575 because of inmate turnover and need to accommodate emergency demand.

The capacity of the Calhoun County facility is unusually large given the size of the county population. This extraordinary capacity results from an earlier decision to house inmates from other counties and jurisdictions. Calhoun County has been highly successful in housing federal prisoners for a fee. Current rates for federal prisoners are approximately \$58 per day. Typically, the county has the capacity of “rent” approximately 200 spaces per day. This generates a gross amount of \$4.3 million annually. Considering the inclusion of local inmates, the Corrections Center is an important cost center, or in the words of the county sheriff, a “small village.”

Because inmates are stripped of most of their personal authority when in custody of the facility, the county bears a

significant responsibility for their care. The inmates must be provided with food and numerous services such as medical care, laundry, educational, barber, and religious services. And because it is a *corrections* rather than just a custodial facility, the facility requires the involvement a significant number of corrections personnel. Some of these personnel are employees of the county but many others are employed by companies that provide services on a contract basis.

The CCSD plays a key role in collaborating with other law enforcement departments involved in managing the demand for county corrections space. This Community Corrections program enables county personnel to release some incarcerated individuals to find employment and enable them to fulfill their child support obligations. Other strategies involve daytime release for employment, working with inmates so they can learn and improve their job skills and life skills, help them go back to school, and prepare them for post-incarceration living.

Office of County Prosecutor

The Calhoun County Prosecutor’s Office (CCPO) is positioned between the law enforcement and the courts. The primary responsibility of a prosecutor’s office is the enforcement of the criminal statutes of the State of Michigan and Calhoun County ordinances. The CCPO has over 750 statutorily mandated responsibilities including, but not limited to, enforcement of criminal laws, child support and paternity, abuse and neglect,

juvenile delinquency proceedings, victims' rights, and regulatory responsibilities. The office currently employs 40 individuals including sixteen lawyers. Interns from Cooley Law School assist the CCPA.

The office handles eight to ten thousand cases each year. In cooperation with the courts of the county, the office has instituted a technology plan to implement a paperless system that has the potential of reducing operating costs and provide lawyers ready access to electronic resources thus enabling them to deliver and retrieve court files electronically. The paperless system, when fully implemented, will serve as an excellent model for other counties in Michigan. The office is also working on the implementation of the Crime COG to enhance data transfer between law enforcement agencies and the prosecutor's office.

The office has been focusing on efforts addressing domestic/sexual violence by working in partnership with the Domestic Coordinating Council, SAFE Place, and Sexual Assault Services of Calhoun County. The implementation of a diversion and alternative sentencing program should yield economic dividends by reducing incarceration rates. Calhoun County's Drug Treatment Courts serve as a tool for reducing criminal behavior resulting from drug abuse. The Index Crime Rate (violent crime) shows the county as being above the state average despite the CCPO's working in a collaborative way with the law enforcement community, federal agencies, school, and community groups as a way of preventing and resolving crime and to bring effective

prosecution of violent crimes. The office collaborates extensively as well with county departments, community non-profit groups, and community agencies.

Potential Challenges

Alternatives need to be developed to address caseload. If the legislature adopts legislation addressing sentencing guidelines it will result in additional workload and stress on the office and staff. In order to make continual progress in adopting a technology plan to increase operational and case management efficiency, necessary county funds need to be made available. The office is examining the potential for e-subpoenas, e-victim right letters and internet based case tracking system. The county's above state average of violent crime will continue to place pressure on the law enforcement, courts and prosecutor's office.

County Trial Courts Circuit Court

The circuit court is Michigan's general trial court having jurisdiction in all civil cases involve claims for more than \$25,000; all felony cases; all serious misdemeanor criminal cases for which the punishment includes the possibility of incarceration for more than one year; appeals from District and Probate Courts as well as from governmental administrative agencies; and all family cases. The Family Division of the Circuit Court has jurisdiction over divorce, child custody, child support, paternity, adoption, name changes, juvenile proceedings, and emancipation of minors, parental consent and personal protection proceedings. The Family Division also includes the Friend of the

Court which enforces court orders and performs court ordered investigation concerning child custody, parenting time, and child support.

District Court

This court handles most traffic violations and hears both criminal and civil cases; civil matters that include general civil claims up to \$25,000, small claims, and landlord/tenant disputes. All criminal cases for people 17 years and older originate in District Court and remain there if the charge is a misdemeanor punishable by less than one year in jail. For charges punishable by more than one year, the case is passed on to Circuit Court.

Probate Court

The probate court handles wills, administers estates and trusts, orders treatment for developmentally disabled persons, and appoints guardians and conservators.

Circuit and Probate Courts now utilize the Supreme Court's Trial Court Case Management System. District Court is working with Prosecutor's Office on electronic data transfer for case management.

Court Collaboration

The Calhoun County courts have been collaborating in a variety of ways. The cooperative efforts are the result of the formation of the Judicial Council in 1993 and initiatives from the State Supreme Court Administrators Office that has lowered the "walls" between the various courts. Each of the courts continues with its own primary assignment but the new laws permit

integration of the courts so that caseloads may be shared and judges may "stand in" for other judges in the event of the overload of cases or absences of other judges. Such cooperation can have the effect of reducing peak load periods.

The courts also cooperate with the Community Corrections Program in an effort to develop and use programs that provide appropriate alternatives to incarceration as a means of reducing these costs. Courts efforts to divert individuals that normally would serve county jail time has freed space in the jail permitting bed rental income to be earned.

The courts are utilizing imaging, microfilming and IT to reduce storage needs and continue to comply with records retention requirements. A major long term goal of this change in methodology is that the courts will be going "paperless." That is, all the parties involved in the legal process will be filing and receiving court documents electronically. Attorneys involved in court cases will not only be required to file their case filings electronically but also will be able to access electronically the documents of other attorney involved in case. The use of this technology will likely reduce the typical delays in court case processing and lead to a quicker resolution of the caseloads before the courts. The technology could also have the effect of reducing the labor costs typically associated with the judicial process.

The courts implemented a Dispute Resolution Program in cooperation with RESOLVE (Kalamazoo County) that resulted in 150 cases being diverted to

DRS. The courts adopted SMILE (Start Making It Livable for Everyone) Program in collaboration with MSU Extension. The program seeks to assist divorcing parents in making the divorce process less contentious and move toward case resolution.

Approximately 150 cases are successfully resolved annually through the use of alternative dispute resolution programs. District Court partners with our local dispute resolution center to have a mediator present in the Justice Center two-days per week for small claim cases.

In collaboration with other county departments and community agencies, the courts have established: “Multi-Systemic Therapy” to prevent residential placement of juvenile offenders; a Community Work Service Program jointly with Community Corrections; Work First program to assist parents in finding employment to meet child support payments; instituting video arraignment to reduce costs and needs to move inmates between jail and courts; and Supervised Parenting Time Program joint with Kalamazoo County Friend of the Court facilitating opportunity parents who require supervision to visit their children.

Potential Challenges

The loss of federal and state funding for Drug Courts in September 2007 will likely have an impact on court financing and programming if alternate funding cannot be obtained. The FOC is required to utilize the Michigan Child Support Enforcement Program (MiCSES) for its daily work activities. Due to federal and state restrictions on

program and information access, MiCSES significantly restricts the ability of the FOC to participate in data transfer and sharing with other court and county agencies. Record storage continues as a challenge for the courts. Maintaining a balance between incarceration, diversion and jail bed rental will require continued communication between Courts, Prosecutor and Sheriff. Changes in state sentencing guidelines (if adopted) will impact the courts, but the larger impact will be on the jail population and community alternatives.

Physical and Economic Development

The general mission of county government with respect to physical and economic development is one of providing and maintaining physical facilities of various types that serve residents, visitors, and governmental agencies. Not only are these facilities to serve people and government but are to enable other economic interests such as manufacturers, businesses, non-profit organizations, and other organizations to conduct their activities and advance the general well-being of the county. While the main focus of this section relates to facilities, numerous other county agencies strongly influence the county’s economic conditions as well.

Calhoun County Road Commission

The central responsibility of the Calhoun County Road Commission (CCRC) is to maintain, manage, and improve the county roads; the roads under CCRC jurisdiction are those located in the townships of the county and some primary roads that traverse cities in the

county. Michigan cities and villages manage the road systems in their jurisdictions. These road agencies are funded primarily through gasoline and weight taxes distributed by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) in accordance with a distribution formula established by the state legislature.

Much of the work regarding road maintenance is done by CCRC employees but the agency also works with a pool of private contractors who perform such tasks as road paving, crack filling, re-graveling, major equipment repairs, roadside mowing, signage work, testing and engineering of projects, and others. The CCRC also acts as a materials supplier for small companies and other government organizations and thus shares the benefits of its large-scale purchasing power.

In addition to such road maintenance and improvement services, the CCRC oversees the county park system and provides a variety of public works services including projects under the drain commission jurisdiction.

Potential Challenges. As noted, taxes on gasoline and vehicle licenses are the source of funding for road services. Both the state and federal government impose these taxes for road services. Federal taxes are redistributed to the states but Michigan is a “donor” state. That is, Michigan traditionally receives less than it sends to Washington.

Michigan and federal fuel taxes are based on a per gallon charge and thus do not benefit from rising gasoline prices. The road interests in the state have been

proposing that the legislature raise state fuel taxes by 9 cents per gallon over a period of 3 years. That issue has not been resolved as of this writing. An increase in the tax would likely result in an increase in CCRC income and offset the steady decline in revenues over the years.

The CCRC is anticipating \$8.1 million in gas and weight tax revenue for the current year; an amount approximately equal to that it received in 2000. The commission calculates that if the fuel taxes are not increased, the amount of its effective purchasing power will be about 79 percent of its purchasing power in 2000. Over recent years, the agency has been reducing its work staff through worker attrition.

An increase in the fuel tax would begin to turn this picture of declining revenues around during the next few years. Given the budgetary shortfalls at the state capitol, it seems unlikely that the legislature will approve a fuel tax increase in the near future. If this view proves accurate, the CCRC and its collegial agencies will experience significant challenges in the coming 30 months.

County Drain Commission

The Office of the County Drain Commission is established by state law. Typically, county drain commissioners are elected but about one-third of the counties have replaced their drain commissioner with a board of public works that then assumes responsibilities for managing the drainage system and other county public works projects.

The Calhoun County Drain Commission Office (CCDCO) is responsible for the approximate 300 drainage districts in the county although only about 150 of them are active drains. The drain commissioner is also a member of two lake boards that have responsibility for maintaining the quality and level of the lake waters.

The CCDCO operates primarily on a “user pay” basis. That is, significant maintenance work that needs to be done on a drainage district is paid from special assessments on the lands benefiting from the improvement. Frequently, the CCRC maintains drains for the CCDCO although occasionally the CCDCO receives grant funding to make the improvements and may then employ outside contractors to do the work.

As noted, the CCDCO collaborates with the CCRC on projects as well as with MDOT and Conservation Districts throughout the county and with the City of Battle Creek on its watershed management activities.

Potential Challenges. The County Board of Commissioners provides annual operating funds for the CCDCO staff and basic administrative expenses. As noted, improvements are paid by levying special assessments on owners of benefiting properties. The office also generates operating revenues from permit fees. Current funding patterns do not appear vulnerable to significant challenge.

The modest staffing patterns, however, may expose the property owners to problems if the drainage districts are not

maintained properly and are allowed to deteriorate. Reconstructing elements of the system could lead to increased expenses if parts of the system need to be rebuilt to resolve problems. The drainage system could experience an increase in demand as new development occurs.

Inadequate maintenance and monitoring of the drainage systems could also lead to damage of the wetlands and groundwater supplies. Insufficient monitoring of watersheds could also contribute to pollution problems that could be expensive to correct.

County Planning

For a number of years the CCRC staffed the Calhoun County Metropolitan Planning Commission (CCMPC). Because of necessary funding reductions, the CCRC was no longer able to exercise responsibility for that program. The CCMPC presently operates with a professional planner on a part time basis and the purchase of about 200 hours per year from the MSUE service. In 2007 the CCMPC has an annual county appropriation of \$35,000. However, with these funds, the CCPC expects to leverage about \$490,000 in grants for use in the county.

The county planning department is involved in number of county planning related programs. In addition to staffing the CCMPC, the staff works with several other agencies. One of them is the Calhoun County Agricultural Preservation Board, a board that is implementing a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program that would permanently dedicate lands to agricultural purposes. About 80 percent

of the land in Calhoun County is zoned agricultural. Agriculture contributes approximately \$66 million to the county economy.

The planning department also administers the Remonumentation Program. This is a 20-year program to coordinate the replacement of markers of the sections of land. This is done largely as surveyors record their markers placements as they survey lands in the counties. The program is funded from recording fees as the land descriptions are recorded in the offices of county registers of deeds.

A third program is the Housing Rehabilitation Program which assists homeowners outside the city of Battle Creek, whose income levels are at 80 percent or lower the median income level of the county. The program, conducted in cooperation with the Community Action Agency of South Central Michigan, assists in making repairs to houses. Grants will be used to repair 7 homes in 2007-08.

The GIS maps constitute aerial images of zoning patterns of zoning and land use. They represent a highly useful tool for those making planning and zoning decisions. The present maps are out of date because of inadequate funding.

Potential Challenges. Although the planning department is engaged in providing a variety of planning services for the county and the townships in the county, the level of funding does not enable the county planning function to fulfill its role in the county.

In addition, the role of the county in planning may expand. The Michigan Legislature has under consideration a bill called the Coordinated Planning Act. The bill was introduced in the 2005-06 session but was not adopted. It was reintroduced in 2007-08 and will likely be adopted. If it is approved, the influence of planning at the county level will increase and the county will need to be prepared to accept the expanded responsibilities.

Even if the bill does not find its way into law, the county's limited role in planning may lead to a variety of land use commitments that do not take into account the land use interests of the county. Under the present arrangements, planning and zoning decisions by townships tend not to take into account the broader interests.

Economic Development

Calhoun County does not have a distinct office or department of economic development. For the most part, the promoting of economic development in the county is carried out by the cities and the urban townships within the county. Some of the agencies of the county, however, make significant impacts on the economy of the county. The Veterans Affairs Office, for example, is instrumental in bringing some \$19 million of federal funding into the county in the form of VA benefits and veteran services. In addition, the Administration Hospital was allotted \$144 million in 2006-2007 to provide a broad range of health care services to veterans.

Moreover, the County Sheriff Department, through the housing of some 250 federal inmates at a rate of approximately \$58 per inmate per day, generates \$5.3 million per year. To be sure, these funds involve offsetting expenses but nonetheless they import dollars into the economy of the county.

MSUE also plays a role in the economic development of the county through its support of agriculture in the county. As noted earlier, agriculture generates some \$66 million for the county economy annually. MSUE's most direct program efforts are focused on the agricultural and natural resource elements of the economy thru educational programs to enhance the profitability of the agricultural industry by improved farm management. Other program elements seek to generate a knowledgeable, skilled, and self-reliant workforce.

MSUE in cooperation with the planning department is also seeking to preserve the role of agriculture in the economy of the county through the PDR program. If land owners are willing to forego the rights to develop their lands and the program is able to fund the purchase of these rights to a significant extent, agriculture will long remain an important element in the economy of the county.

Potential Challenges. Calhoun County has some important elements in its economy. Aside from the agricultural and natural resource element, the key elements of the economy are located in the cities of the county and supported by those municipalities. Key future challenges will likely deal with issues relating to the abilities of the cities to

renew and revitalize their key economic elements as the present facilities and related technologies deteriorate and wane. Similarly, while the PDR program has the goal of preserving lands for agricultural purposes, PDR programs can also have the effect of creating a scarcity of developable lands. In addition, some owners may reject the PDR approach with the idea that they will benefit from the sale of scarce lands. Thus, it appears that these economic development programs must be executed only after careful and thoughtful planning.

Financial and Administrative Services

Some of the common and essential functions of county government relate to financial and administrative services. Some of these functions reach deeply into the history of county government in Michigan. One of these is the office of county clerk and county register of deeds. In many Michigan counties these are separate offices but the law permits the Board of Commissioners to combine the two service responsibilities into a single office as has been done in Calhoun County.

Office of County Clerk and Register

The office of the county clerk has a number of responsibilities including serving as the clerk of the Board of Commissioners, clerk of the county circuit court, the county's director of

elections, the receiver of various documents such as vital records, custodian of specified county records, processor of accounts payable (if the county has not assigned the duty to another officer), a member of various commissions, and numerous others. Add to that, in the case of Calhoun County where the two offices are consolidated, the duties of the register of deeds. The responsibilities of the register of deeds are more narrowly focused on the various elements of land records. Both offices, of course, are elective positions on a partisan basis.

The office of county clerk is a constitutional office with many of the duties specified in numerous statutes adopted over the decades. The register of deeds is a statutory office but mandated either as a separate or combined office. Both offices generate significant sums of money through the assessing of fees at rates established by state law.

The office is in the process of digitizing many of its records and making them available via the Internet. Making such records available in this way will reduce the number of “in-person” customers without reducing the collection of fees and charges because printing of such records will require advance payment. Once digitized, the records can be stored in a new archival location in the Toeller Building. Such physical records must continue to be maintained in compliance with the State Document Retention Schedule.

The digitizing process will also soon involve court records, an action that will eliminate or minimize the use of paper court documents. The system will enable the public to obtain lists of court actions

and court documents. Printing of such document will likely require advance payment.

Campaign finance records as well as the canvasses of elections are also in the process of being digitized and being made accessible to the public.

Potential Challenges. The office has experienced negative effects from the falling economy. Many of the common transactions that the office process, such as, opening businesses or new business name, purchasing homes, etc, have declined and reduced revenues that the office typically generates.

The digitization of vital and court records will make the documents readily accessible to the public and could generate more inquiries that will require official responses. As the department informs the public of this new electronic access, the message should assure the public regarding the security of the system.

Office of County Treasurer

The office of county treasurer is established by the state constitution as an elective position. The officer is to be elected on a partisan ballot to four-year term. A variety of statutes specify the duties of the office, most of which pertain to being responsible for the custody of the financial resources of the county. The treasurer collects a variety of fees and taxes, has the responsibility of processing payments upon the direction of the Board of Commissioners, and distributes a variety of funds such as penal fines to various public libraries. The office also

maintains the records of the accounts for each of the depository institutions.

The county treasurer has a number of statutory duties related to administration of the property tax. These include the processing and collection of delinquent property taxes and the administration of the delinquent tax revolving fund (DTRF). The office has chosen to be involved in the forfeiture and foreclosure process of delinquent property taxes thereby gaining title to property that is not paid or redeemed as the law requires. This duty, of course, also involves taking custody and disposal of the properties which recently is being administered through the Calhoun County Land Bank Authority

The office is also responsible for the collecting and recording of personal property taxes.

The county treasurer, often along with some other elected officers, is a member of the county apportionment commission, election commission, county plat board, and the tax allocation board.

Expanding use of IT. During the last several years, the county treasurer's office has improved its use of Information Technology through the purchase of new software and equipment. These resources have enabled the office to respond to clients on a timelier basis as well as to resolve the settlement/audit problems involving local units. The office now has ready access to key information on every property in the county and its ability to respond to inquires regarding the properties.

New software also facilitates the recording and processing of "principal residence" records in the county. Efficiency and accuracy of this system plays a key role in tax billing procedures. The purchase of new scanning equipment enables the office to respond quickly and efficiently to taxpayers, attorneys, and the courts in issues dealing with the forfeiting processes.

Potential Challenges. Current economic conditions present some challenges for the office of county treasurer. If the economic conditions continue on the current track, the volume of real property tax delinquency, which has increased by more than \$2 million since 2003, may lead to increased property forfeitures and more administrative involvement. Delinquency in payment of taxes generates revenue for the DTRF and should not be threatened if interest rates on the delinquent tax notes remain stable. Excessive increases in forfeitures of property could become problematic if the forfeited properties are not readily marketable.

Delinquent personal property taxes have the potential of causing some decline in county revenues. Unlike delinquent property taxes that are always settled in one manner or another, delinquent *personal property* taxes often are not resolved and commonly go uncollected.

Equalization Office

The equalization of property tax assessments is a required function of county government. Because property tax assessments are made at the township and city level and because county, school, and some other taxes

cross the municipal boundaries, it is essential that the assessed values of taxable property be determined on a common and accurate basis.

To assure the equity of the property taxes, the county equalization department evaluates the assessments of each municipality within each of the six classes of property. Officially the Board of Commissioners determines the value of each class of property and where the values of the property class are determined to be less or greater than 50 percent of true cash value, the board adjusts the value in each class by applying a county equalization factor. The State Tax Commission reviews each county's equalization factors and adjusts them on a countywide basis if necessary.

The Calhoun County Equalization Department is staffed by the director and four appraisers. This staff works with local assessors and conducts some 90 studies of real property each year to monitor value changes and determine values by class in the county's 23 jurisdictions--19 townships and 4 cities. The assessments and equalization of the 4 villages in the county are done in concert with the townships in which they are located.

Other responsibilities of the department include assembling the data and calculating the annual millage reduction fraction ("Headlee rollback") which the Board of Commissioners uses to establish millage rates across the county.

Potential Challenges. The process of property assessment and equalization is well established and likely to remain stable. Perhaps the two or three most

important challenges in the coming years deal with are the following. (1) A declining market for real property that could disrupt appraisal and equalization factors. (2) Reductions in the county budget that could lead to a reduction in staff. (3) Movement of the property assessment and equalization responsibilities from the local units to the county.

Human Resources

County government is structured in such a way as to give the several departments a significant degree of independence. Constitutional and statutory provisions sometimes give the departments authority that makes county government appear to be a collection of governments rather than a government. Policies of the Board of Commissioners and its appropriating power have a strong influence to bring a degree of unity to the system. However, keeping the units in a collaborative mode requires a few central services agencies. The Department of Human Resources (DHR) is one such department.

The DHR is a small department that provides services to all the departments by administering some of the central policies that affect the day-to-day lives of employees and department managers. The DHR assists the Board of Commissioners and central management by administering personnel policies that affect virtually all the department personnel. In addition, the department provides services such as employee retention and recruitment and providing assistance in managing the collective bargaining contracts.

The HDR plays a key communicator role regarding the county employee benefit plans. It keeps both sides informed regarding the benefit plans, the changing cost configurations of the benefit plans, and the implications of the policies.

Potential Challenges. From the Human Relations perspective the challenges are complex. Rising costs of programs such as healthcare and retirement benefits of longer living retirees have significant implications for financing county government services and providing the services at a satisfactory level. Present economic conditions leading to stable or falling revenues bring rising pressure on the need to require employees to pay a greater share of the benefits.

These factors also affect the DHR ability to help the departments retain an effective workforce and to recruit highly qualified employees. Building and maintaining high employee morale is a related factor.

Administrative Services

The Department of Administrative Services (DAS) is similar to the DHR in that its direct clientele consists of the departments and employees of county government. It provides a broad range of services that individual departments would otherwise have to perform for themselves. These services range from managing the facilities and property to providing a number of services such as procurement, contract management, information technology, and telephone, mail, and copying. Providing these services involves 35 employees and \$7.8 million.

Over the recent years the DAS has brought a variety of efficiencies into the operations of Calhoun County government. For example, savings resulting from management practices such as energy audit, energy contracts, and conservation projects have produced savings of some \$800,000 over the last six years.

The DAS also delivers a variety of services and innovations to the county departments through the provision of and support for broadened use of Information Technology. With the acquisition of new equipment and programs the various departments have increased their efficiency and service in very significant ways. As noted above, the courts are in the process of going “paperless.” This gives judges and court staff, prosecutorial staff, and defense counselors electronic access to complaints, briefs, opinions, etc., rather than by having to go to paper files or having these document delivered by mail. The treasurer’s office and others are also benefiting from these changes and from the DAS support.

Potential Challenges

The DAS has made highly significant changes in the operations of Calhoun County government over the last half decade. It has played a key role in bringing innovation and creativity to county operations. In doing so, the DAS personnel have established significant expectations from the departmental personnel as well as from the board and central management. The challenging question is whether the DAS can continue on this course.

In many respects, it appears that the DAS has set a pattern that will be

followed in the coming years. To have such a pattern continue, however, the DAS will require departments to employ collaborative methods and be given the latitude of flexibility that permits innovation to take place.

Corporation Counsel

The county has recently established an Office of Corporation Counsel (OCC) and appointed a person to fill the position. In addition to serving as counsel to the Board of Commissioners, central management, and department heads, the OCC will play a key role in reviewing contracts and negotiating the collective bargaining contracts. The county has 10 labor groups with whom they negotiate. Contracts mature within a three-year period. With many labor groups under a single employer, bargaining processes involve some leveraging of one contract against an earlier one. Having the contracts mature in a three-year period is an improvement over earlier bargaining conditions.

Finance Department

The Calhoun County Finance Department (CCFD) is not so much involved in handling the transactions of county revenue and expenditures as it is in planning and monitoring the financing of the county's finances. In addition, it monitors the county's internal financial controls to ensure that the financial records accurately represent the financial conditions of the county. The CCFD also plays a key role in evaluating and assessing policies such as benefit plans that have a significant impact on the financial wellbeing of county government.

Perhaps one of the most important planning functions has to do with the development of the annual budget. This process involves the planning of the expenditures in the coming year and projecting the revenue. It also involves the process of monitoring the economic conditions and trends that will affect revenue flow and expense demands.

Potential Challenges

In its report, the Finance Department stated that it "strives to be the trusted source of all financial information thereby demonstrating our commitment to the public, the county, and its employees. We will pursue policies and actions that lead to long-term financial security for the county."

While the Finance Department keeps a close watch on the county financial circumstances, the impact of all economic factors and the changes in the patterns are readily apparent at the beginning of each fiscal period. The key challenge, then, is to monitor conditions after planning decisions have been made to determine whether revenue and spending circumstances are playing out as anticipated.

The Finance Department is strongly committed to maintaining a reservoir of funds that could be used to carry it through unexpected circumstances. The department, though, has a responsibility to recognize that use of these funds will add significantly to the structural deficit conditions if it has no alternative but to draw upon those funds.

