



# County of Ottawa

12220 Fillmore Street  
West Olive, Michigan 49460  
miottawa.org

## 2013 Budget In Brief

Dear Ottawa County Residents,

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about the County of Ottawa. Your County government contributes to the very high quality of life enjoyed here as defined by the Board of Commissioners and residents. We continue to strive to be an open and transparent government that is easily accessible to all. This Budget in Brief document, as well as a number of dashboards and the Dollars and Cents document which can be found on miottawa.org, are part of a continuous effort to make County government more understandable and accessible to our many stakeholders.

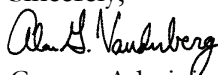
Visit  
[miottawa.org](http://miottawa.org)  
to learn more about  
Ottawa County

Decades of prudent financial management and leadership by the Board of Commissioners, County Administration, and other leaders, as well as the efficient and effective delivery of services by employees throughout the County has resulted in Ottawa County not only maintaining but improving its position as one of the best fiscally managed counties in Michigan. The period of the “Great Recession” was difficult and your County government reduced staff and expense as necessary to maintain balanced budgets and maintain excellence in service delivery during this difficult time which saw property tax reductions of \$3 million between 2009 and 2012 and investment income reductions of \$146,000 over this same timeframe. In addition, we have experienced a constant reduction in state and federal dollars.

Ottawa County is slowly beginning to recover from the “Great Recession” and we are projecting a property taxable value increase for the first time since 2008. In addition, the County has led the state and even nation in some job creation categories and housing values are also showing signs of recovery.

We are always eager to hear citizen input on our spending priorities and will hold budget focus sessions with selected groups in coming months and present findings of these sessions on miottawa.org. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions regarding the County budget or fiscal condition please forward them directly to me at [avanderberg@miottawa.org](mailto:avanderberg@miottawa.org), or Fiscal Services Director Bob Spaman at [rspaman@miottawa.org](mailto:rspaman@miottawa.org).

Thank you again for taking the time to learn more about Ottawa County. We look forward to sharing the results of our communication efforts with you in the future.

Sincerely,  
  
County Administrator

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# The Board of Commissioners



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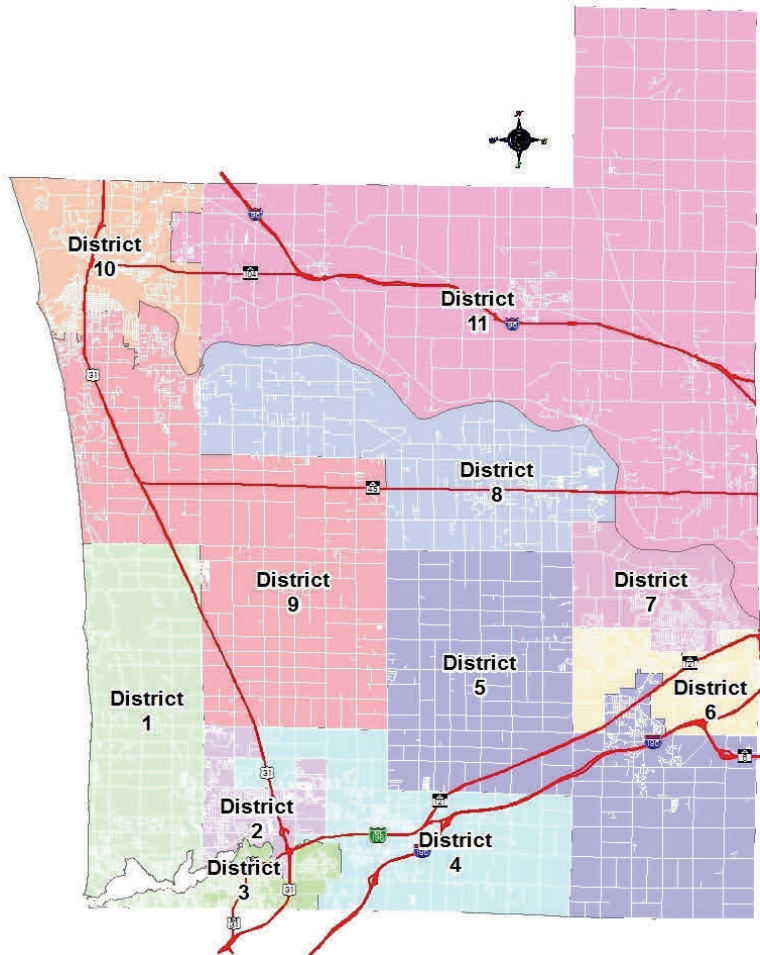
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# About Ottawa County

## GOVERNANCE

The County's legislative body is an eleven-member Board of Commissioners which is elected from single-member districts, determined by population, on a partisan basis for two-year terms. The Board annually elects from within its ranks a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson by majority vote.

## HISTORY

Ottawa County was established in 1837, named for the Ottawa Indians who hunted and fished the area's forests and streams. The County began operation in December of 1837, and the U.S. Census of 1840 listed only 208 people in all of Ottawa County. Ottawa County, encompassing an area of approximately 565 square miles, is located in the southwestern portion of Michigan's lower peninsula, having 30 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. The County is comprised of six cities, one village, and seventeen townships.



## STRATEGIC PLANNING

In 2004 the Board of Commissioners began collecting information needed to develop a strategic plan, including biennial employee (conducted in odd-numbered years) and citizen (conducted in even-numbered years) surveys, a study of mandated services, employee input, program and organizational studies of several departments, a wage and classification study, the United Way Community Needs Assessment, and evaluations of the County's financial tools.

The Board began work on developing the vision, mission, and goals of the strategic plan in 2006. These are the cornerstones of the County's strategic plan and remain unchanged from year to year. The Board meets annually to review the business plan and complete a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). The business plan specifies the objectives and outcomes that the Board and staff focus on achieving annually. The 2013 strategic plan and business plan are available on [miottawa.org](http://miottawa.org).

### Vision

Ottawa County strives to be the location of choice for living, working, and recreation

### Mission

Ottawa County is committed to excellence and the delivery of cost-effective public services

### Goals of the Board of Commissioners

1. To maintain and improve the strong financial position of the County
2. To maintain and enhance communication with citizens, employees, and other stakeholders
3. To contribute to a healthy physical, economic, and community environment
4. To continually improve the County's organization and services

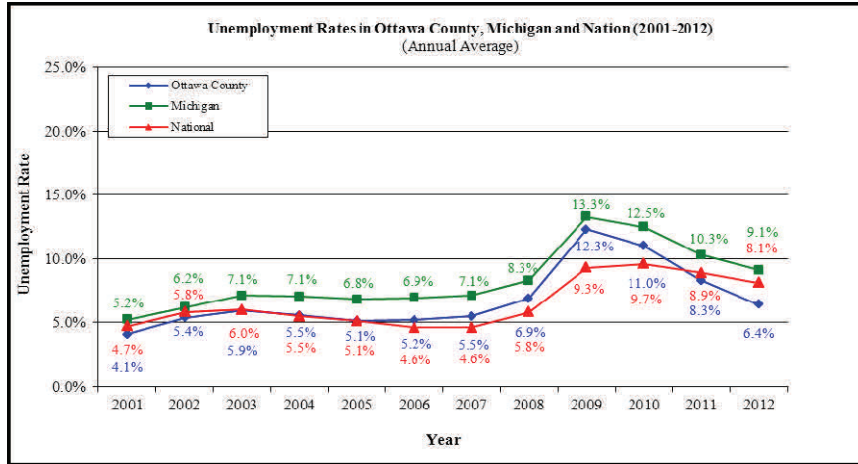
# Selected Demographics

## POPULATION

Ottawa County has seen rapid growth over the last twelve years, from 238,314 residents in 2000 to an estimated 269,099 in 2012. Ottawa County is the eighth-largest County in Michigan and is the fourth-fastest growing County in the State and the fastest growing County of the ten largest counties in the State.

## UNEMPLOYMENT

Ottawa County's annual unemployment rate has been lower than the State and the nation during the past two years, with an annual rate of 6.4% in 2012. The graph below looks at the annual unemployment rate of the County, the State, and the nation for January of each year over the past 12 years. The national economic crisis affected Ottawa County, the State of Michigan and the Nation equally, with Ottawa County's unemployment rate standing at 6.4% for 2012.



Source: Michigan Labor Market Information (Department of Labor and Economic Growth)

### 10 Largest Counties in Michigan (2012)

1. Wayne
2. Oakland
3. Macomb
4. Kent
5. Genesee
6. Washtenaw
7. Ingham
8. **Ottawa**
9. Kalamazoo
10. Saginaw

### 10 Fastest Growing Counties in Michigan (2000-2012)

1. Clinton
2. Livingston
3. Grand Traverse
4. **Ottawa**
5. Isabella
6. Benzie
7. Washtenaw
8. Macomb
9. Wexford
10. Kent

## LARGEST EMPLOYERS

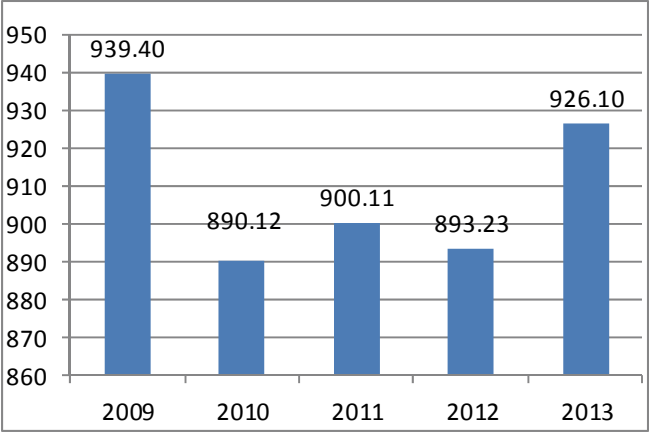
The following are the ten largest employers in Ottawa County as of January 2012. The number of employees includes full-time, part-time, and temporary workers.

Organization	Industry	# of Employees
1. Herman Miller	Office Furniture	3,739
2. Gentex Corporation	Automotive Mirrors	3,638
3. Johnson Controls	Automotive Interiors	3,444
4. Grand Valley State University	Higher Education	3,213
5. Holland Hospital	Healthcare	2,042
6. Haworth	Office Furniture	1,970
7. Shape Corporation	Metal Roll Forming	1,537
8. Meijer	Retailer	1,429
9. Magna Mirrors	Automotive Mirrors/Windows	1,301
10. County of Ottawa	Government	1,213

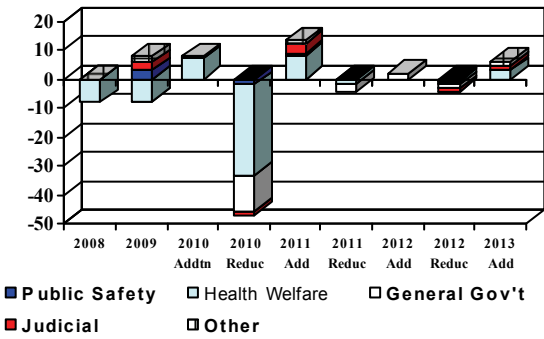
# County Employment Information

### EMPLOYEES BY YEAR

Ottawa County has worked to reduce our largest expenditure, personnel costs, over the last five years while maintaining a high level of service throughout the County. The chart to the right shows the total full time equivalent count for 2009—2013. Beginning in 2005, a hiring freeze was implemented on new positions that would impact the General Fund budget unless the position was critically needed for customer service, grant funded, or contractually required. Consequently, most of the increase was due to grant funded positions. In 2010, full time equivalents dropped primarily in the Community Mental Health agency due to an ongoing reorganization.



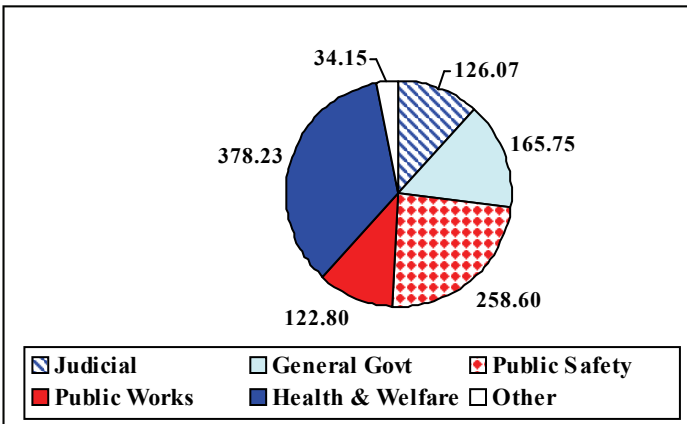
### Positions Added by Function 2008-2013



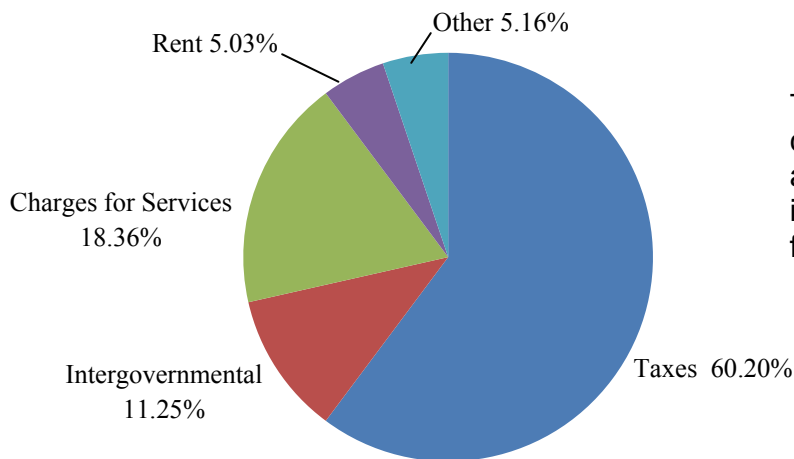
The graph to the left shows the history of positions by function that have been added or reduced with the annual budget process. New personnel approved with the 2011 and 2012 budgets include primarily grant funded positions. In 2013, the County is adding six full time equivalents in a variety of service areas, three of which are grant funded.

### EMPLOYEES BY FUNCTION

The graph to the right represents the total FTEs by function for 2013. Health and Welfare, which includes Community Mental Health and the Health Department, has the largest number of employees, while Public Safety is second. General Government includes the Clerk/Register of Deeds, Treasurer, and Water Resources Commissioner (all elected officials), Facilities Maintenance, and other general administrative/support functions.



# 2012 General Fund Revenues



**GENERAL FUND:**  
The General Fund is the common term used in State and Local Governments to identify the chief operating fund.

<u>Source</u>	<u>2013 Adopted Budget</u>
Taxes	\$37,771,003
Intergovernmental	\$7,062,459
Charges for Services	\$11,523,086
Fines & Forfeits	\$1,075,600
Interest on Investments	\$329,004
Rental Income	\$3,159,481
Licenses & Permits	\$281,300
Other Revenue	\$380,316
Operating Transfers In	\$1,170,937
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$62,753,186</b>

## Ottawa County's Bond Ratings

<b>FitchRatings</b> (AAA= very high quality)	<b>AAA</b>
<b>Standard &amp; Poor's</b> (AA= high quality)	<b>AA</b>
<b>Moody's Investors Service</b> (Aaa= very high quality)	<b>Aaa</b>

## Bond Ratings

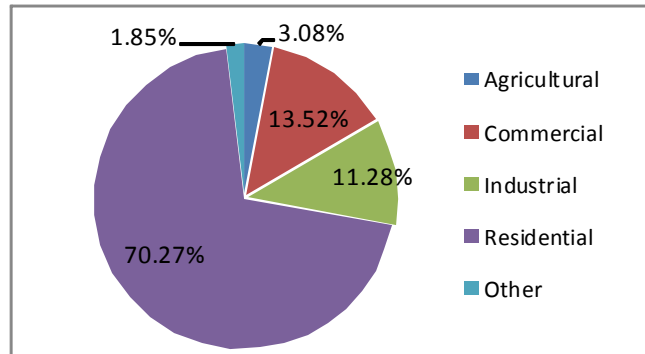
A bond rating is an evaluation of credit worthiness and risk potential for future repayment of municipal bonds. Three firms in the United States issue this rating: FitchRatings, Moody's Investors Service and Standard and Poor's.

Multiple financial and economic factors play into a rating agency's decision, often based on a government's past performance and future projections. These ratings are especially important to Ottawa County because the risk potential often determines the interest rate at which the County can bond; the lower the interest rate, the lower the overall cost of repayment by the County. The County also guarantees the water and sewer bond issues of the municipalities of Ottawa County. This effectively lowers their interest rates, helping to save money for taxpayers throughout the County.

# Understanding Property Tax

## TAX BASE

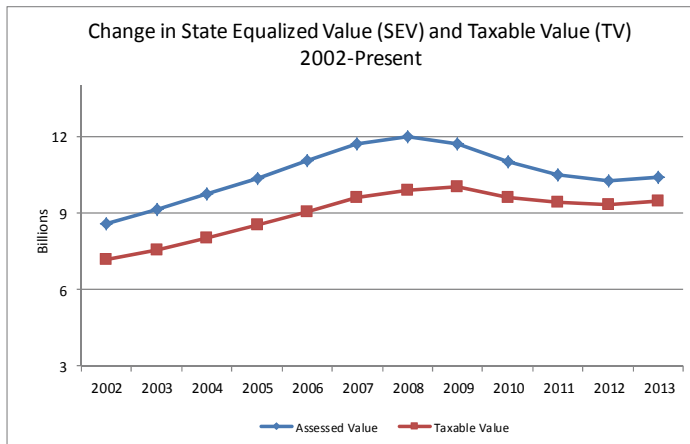
Ottawa County has five major classes of real property: agricultural, commercial, industrial, residential, and personal property. The graph to the right shows that the 2013 residential class is approximately 70% of the County's tax base. This means that when home values fall, the County's property tax revenue also drops.



## ASSESSED AND TAXABLE VALUES

The citizens of Michigan enacted Proposal A in 1994, which changed the method of property tax calculation. Prior to Proposal A, the assessed value of your home was used to determine how much you would pay in taxes. Proposal A created a taxable value for each piece of property which was only allowed to

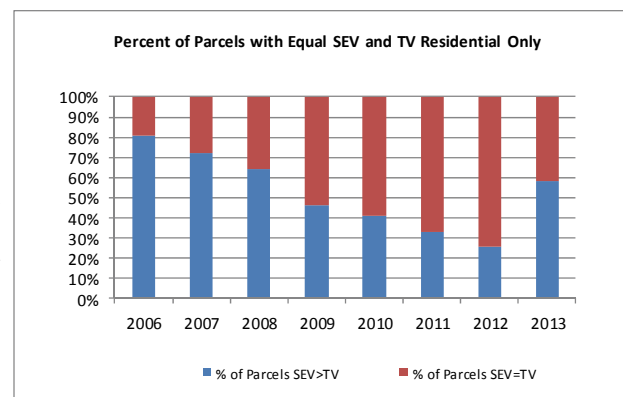
increase annually by the rate of inflation or 5%, whichever was less. The graph to the left shows that since 1995 Proposal A has resulted in savings to taxpayers, which is evident by the gap between the assessed and taxable value. 2009 is the first time that Ottawa County has seen a significant decrease in the gap between the two values, and the estimated SEV and TV for 2013 shows the same trend with an 1.44% decrease in taxable value. Overall, Ottawa County residents have still had a benefit from Proposal A. Since the implementation, the total savings to taxpayers on only the County levy is \$89.9 million.



## THE "GAP"

Since Proposal A started, the State Equalized Value (SEV) has grown at a faster rate than the Taxable Value (TV), mostly due to the fact that the growth in TV is limited to the rate of inflation or 5%, whichever is less. This created a healthy cushion between the two values on more than 80% of the residential properties in Ottawa County. The current economic conditions have caused a decline in the SEV, bringing the two values closer together and reducing the gap.

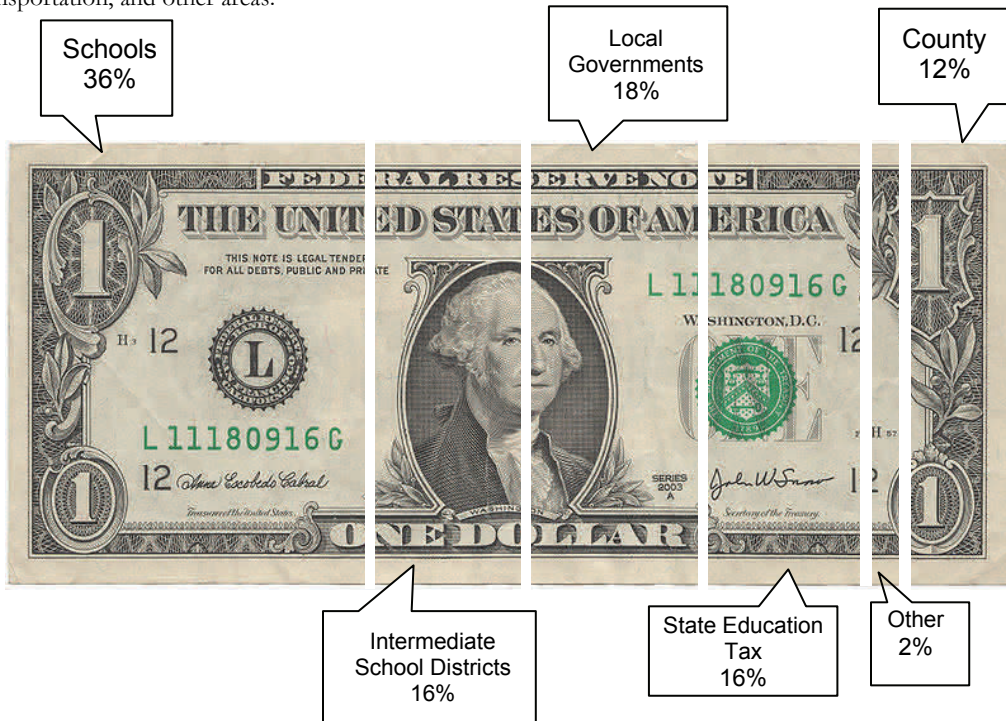
Nearly 58% of properties had an equal SEV and TV in 2013 while 60% are expected to have equal SEV and TV values in 2014.



# Tracking The Dollar: How Your Property Tax Supports County Government

## If I am a Homeowner, Where Does My Tax Dollar Go?

The breakdown of the tax dollar below is an average of all areas of Ottawa County. The local government tax varies based on where you live. The schools total is what property owners pay to the schools. Homeowners getting the Principal Residence Exemption (PRE) pay a lower percentage to the schools. Other includes local taxes for libraries, pools, transportation, and other areas.



## Did You Know...

Ottawa County's annual financial reports also include the revenues and expenditures for other component units. A component unit is a legally separate entity that a primary government must include as part of its financial reporting for fair presentation in conformity with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles. In Ottawa County, the component units include the following:

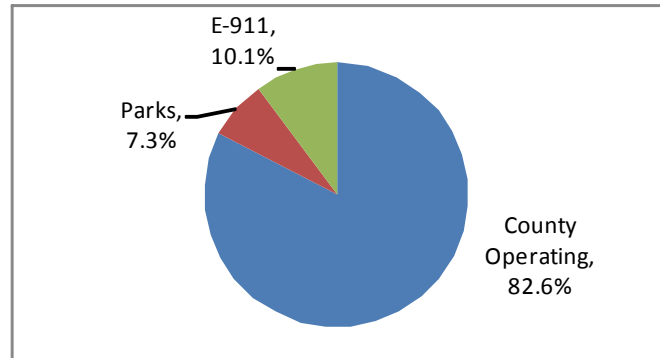
- Ottawa County Public Utilities System
- Ottawa County Central Dispatch Authority
- Ottawa County Water Resources Commissioner
- Ottawa County Road Commission
- Land Bank Authority



# Tracking The Dollar: How Your Property Tax Supports County Government

## Ottawa County's Tax Dollar Breakdown

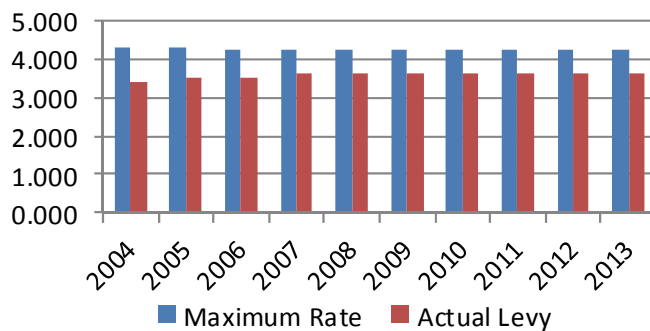
Of the 12% of taxes you pay to Ottawa County, 82% or approximately \$34 million supports the general operations of the County.



## The County Millage Levy

The citizens of Ottawa County enjoy one of the lowest County millage levies in the State of Michigan. The maximum allowable millage for County operations is 4.2650 mills, but Ottawa County property owners only pay 3.6 mills. The graph to the right shows the gap between the maximum and actual millage rates. Specifically, the difference between the maximum levy and the actual levy represents a **16% savings** to the taxpayers.

Actual vs. Maximum County Levy



## How Ottawa County Compares

Each year Ottawa County monitors how our operating property tax levy and voted tax levy compares to other counties in Michigan. Not only is Ottawa County's tax levy lower than neighboring counties, but it is also lower than that of four comparable counties.

**1 mill = \$1 per every \$1,000 of taxable valuation**

### Neighboring Counties (2012)

Ottawa	3.6000
Kent	4.2803
Allegan	4.6093
Muskegon	5.6984

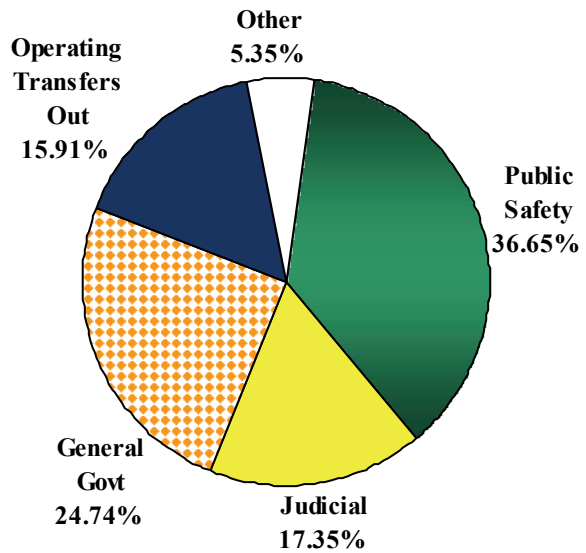
### Counties of Similar Size (2012)

Ottawa	3.6000
Washtenaw	4.5493
Kalamazoo	4.6871
Genesee	5.5072
Ingham	6.3512

### Highest/Lowest (2012)

Baraga	8.6000
Livingston	3.3897

# 2012 General Fund Expenditures



<u>Use</u>	<u>2013 Adopted Budget</u>
Legislative	\$429,309
Judicial	\$11,098,017
General Government	\$15,823,889
Public Safety	\$23,433,728
Public Works	\$539,500
Health and Welfare	\$1,016,999
Community & Economic Development	\$700,508
Other	\$735,405
Operating Transfers Out	\$10,172,652
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$63,950,007</b>

## What is an Operating Transfer Out?

Every year, the County transfers money received in the General Fund to special revenue funds (used to account for proceeds of specific revenue sources that are committed to expenditures for specific purposes) in order to support the operations of various departments in the County.

Ottawa County has several special revenue funds which are funded by dollars from the General Fund annually. The \$10.1 million transferred out in 2013 are for departments such as the Health Department, Community Mental Health, Friend of the Court, Community Corrections, programs in Juvenile Services, contracts in the Sheriff's Department, and the drug courts in the District and Circuit Courts, and others.

# Ottawa County's Financial Outlook

## IMPACTS ON THE COUNTY'S BUDGET

The future financial projections for Ottawa County are highly dependent upon the world around us. The national economy has financial ramifications that trickle down to the State level which make their way to the local economy as well as State Budget impacts. A snapshot of some of Ottawa County's future financial threats are described below.

- **Economic Vitality Incentive Program (EVIP) (Formerly State Revenue Sharing Program)** The county anticipates \$3.6 million in EVIP Dollars in 2014 which represents 5.6% of the total General Fund revenue budget. The proposed State budget for 2014 includes a modest increase in EVIP for the County.
- **Benefit and Pension Costs** For several years, Ottawa County has seen double digit increases in the cost of health, dental, and vision insurance for employees. Prior to 2011, the County self-funded health, dental and optical claims for County employees. The actuary estimate for 2012 costs indicated an increase of 17.5%. As a result, during 2010, the County took bids for health, dental and optical insurance coverage and elected to go with a fully funded insurance plan through Priority Health. Although the benefit level to employees remained essentially the same, costs to the County decreased 25.6% or \$2.88 million when compared to 2010 costs. Plan changes implemented in 2011 resulted in savings of \$5.2 million. Benefit cost is scrutinized each year as are long term strategies for controlling these costs. An aggressive health management plan is currently being implemented.
- **Mandated Services** For many years Ottawa County has seen reduced State funding for mandated services. An example is programs in the Health Department that State law requires to be funded by the State and County at 50% each, which has not occurred as required. In 2012, the State funded only 21% of the required costs. New mandates have not been funded by the State and funding for current mandates have also been reduced. The County has a public lobbying firm representing our interests in Lansing to prevent additional unfunded or under funded mandates and to advocate for funding of current mandates. The Legislative Commission on Statutory Mandates released a report on unfunded mandates for local governments and schools that concluded the State has continually violated the Michigan Constitution by not funding mandates it places on local government. It is unclear if the Legislature will act upon the recommendations of this report and if local governments will see any relief.

# Budget Balancing Tools

There are many tools that Ottawa County utilizes to help make informed decisions in balancing the County's budget. The tools presented below are ongoing and are utilized and updated annually. In addition, analysis is completed on specific functions/programs and expenditures as needed.

## ◆ **Five-Year Budget Projections & Analysis**

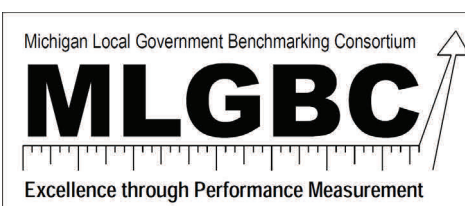
The County utilizes multi-year projections as a tool to prioritize immediate and long-range needs to develop a stable financial base. Budget projections are useful for planning to give the general direction of County finances based on trends. However, it is important to realize the figures projected are by no means guaranteed funding or expenditure levels as future factors (e.g. legislation, economy, etc.) will affect the trends.



At least annually, the County updates the five-year General Fund projections based on historical activity, anticipated trend changes and economic conditions. Current projections for the General Fund indicate a preliminary budget shortfall of \$3.1 million for 2014 which is projected to grow to \$11 million by 2018 if revenue and expense trends remain unchanged. County Administration and the Board of Commissioners will continue to work to bring future expenditures in line with the future revenue stream. Other projections completed annually include fund balance analysis, financing tools analysis, tax base analysis, and employment legacy costs analysis.

## ◆ **Performance Measurement, Benchmarking, & Evaluation**

Performance measures are specific qualitative and quantitative assessments of a department's ability to meet its goals and objectives. Ottawa County has a Performance Verification Policy that prescribes the use of performance measures in all departments in order to assess performance and provide accountability for results. Annually, the performance measures play a role in budget decisions relating to personnel requests, technology initiatives, program funding and other budget decisions. The County includes all departments' measures annually in the budget document, which can be found on [miottawa.org](http://miottawa.org).



The performance measures are also used to benchmark Ottawa County's performance against that of cities, villages, townships, and other counties throughout the State as part of the Michigan Local Government Benchmarking Consortium. The comparisons from the benchmarking data is helpful in determining if there may be better ways to perform a function that could result in better performance and/or lower costs.

Ottawa County has also placed an emphasis on evaluating departments and programs to find efficiencies, ensure performance outcomes, and to reduce costs. Since 2005, the cumulative savings to the County are more than \$6.2 million through evaluations conducted by staff teams and consultants. Also, Planning and Performance Improvement added an additional \$8 million in savings through their evaluations.

# Budget Balancing Tools

## ◆ Ranking of Discretionary and Mandated Services

Ottawa County is mandated to perform many functions by both State and Federal law, but there are additional services which are not required by any higher authority, referred to as discretionary services. There are over 80 discretionary services that account for approximately \$17 million annually. County Administration has worked to identify all discretionary services and bring them before the Board of Commissioners to prioritize. The Board has conducted many ranking sessions, initially with the assistance of Michigan State University, using an audience response system. The results have been presented to the Board as one of many tools for budgetary decision making.

The Board of Commissioners ranked discretionary spending and separately all functional areas in May. The results are used to provide guidance to all departments in preparing their initial, 2014 budget requests for Administration to review and as one of many budget balancing tools.

## ◆ Fiscal Policies and Budget Principles

The Board of Commissioners has adopted and periodically reviews and amends specific fiscal policies that guide the sustainability of County finances. Specific budget principles are taken from the intent of the related policies to help guide each budget year. The following are examples of a few of the budget principles:

Fund Balance Use- Strive to maintain an undesignated fund balance of the lesser of (a) three months of the most recently adopted budget, or (b) 15 percent of the General Fund's expenditures from the most recently completed audit.

Programs and Services to Citizens- It will be the County's intent to continue to provide the highest quality services to citizens. Budget reductions will be considered that would eliminate entire programs before reducing the level of funding for all programs evenly across the board.

The budget principles are also influenced by other budget balancing tools and by specific studies or analysis that occur during the budget cycle.

## ◆ Citizen Outreach

Ottawa County utilizes two different methods for directly connecting with citizens to receive feedback on the quality of services and areas for improvement. The first method is the Citizen Survey, which is conducted every other year in the even-numbered years. The Survey was conducted in 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012. The survey consists of phone interviews with 400 residents and asks a variety of questions about the quality of government of the city, village, or township and Ottawa County.

In 2009, Ottawa County held its first series of Citizen Budget Meetings throughout each area of the County. Attendance for the five meetings was limited, but those that did attend learned a great deal from the information provided.



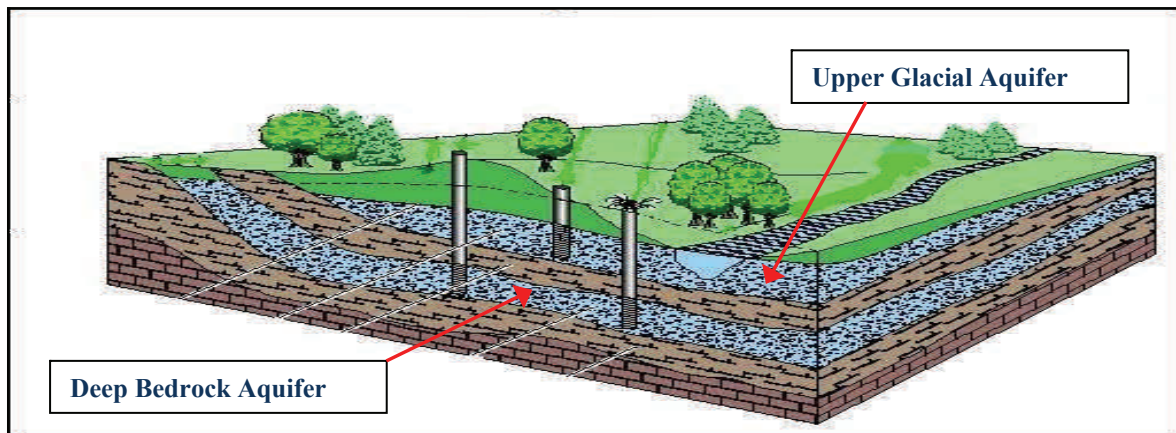
# Ottawa County Comprehensive Water Resource Study

## Background

The MSU Institute of Water Research (IWR) has unveiled the initial findings of a Comprehensive Water Resource Study that is being conducted on behalf of Ottawa County. The findings identified a number of potentially challenging issues related to groundwater quantity and quality in the County.

The Water Resource Study was commissioned in 2010 in response to emerging issues associated with groundwater quantity and quality. These include, but are not limited to, reports of diminishing capacity in some water wells; the presence of elevated levels of sodium chloride and nitrates in some water wells; and isolated clusters of basement flooding during 100-year to 500-year storm events.

Groundwater users in Ottawa County draw primarily from one of two sources groundwater water tables (see **Figure 1**) : the upper “glacial aquifer,” which is close to the surface, and the deeper “bedrock aquifer.”



**Figure 1 – Ottawa County Groundwater System**

## Study Results

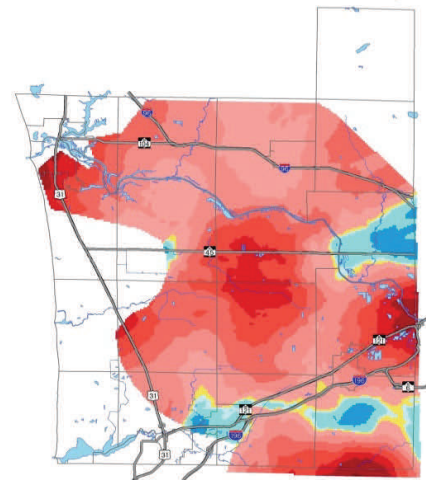
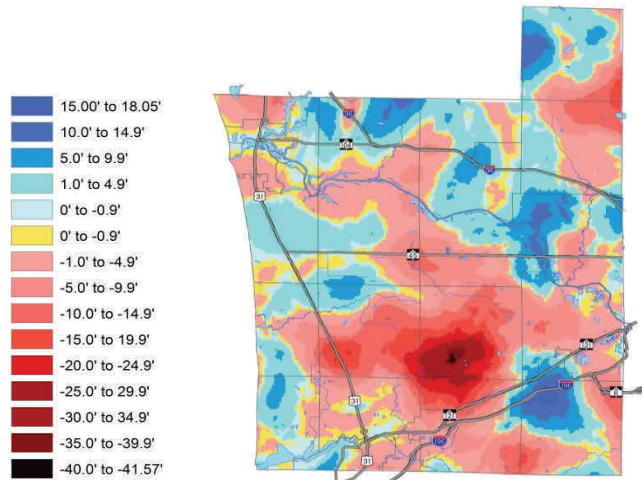
According to the study results, it appears that groundwater in certain areas of the County is actually being “mined.” This means water stores are being utilized faster than they can be replenished in these certain areas. This appears to be occurring in both the “glacial aquifer” and the “bedrock aquifer.” **Figures 2** and **3** show the extent of the decline.

At the same time, water with high concentrations of sodium chloride is “upwelling” from even deeper bedrock stores and is affecting drinking water and irrigation in some areas (see **Figure 4**). It appears that the upwelling may be caused in part by groundwater “mining,” which is lowering pressure on the heavier saline-rich water in the deep bedrock aquifer.

**Average Change in Aquifer Water Levels (Change in Static Water Level) 2012-2000 minus 1960-1999**

Figure 2 - Change in Glacial Aquifer

Figure 3 - Change in Bedrock Aquifer



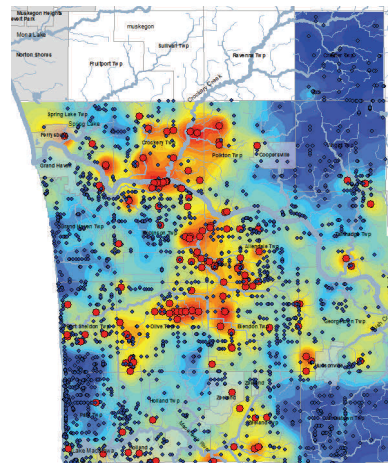
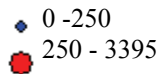
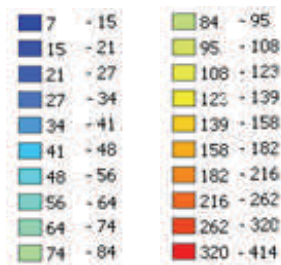
**Chloride Levels in Groundwater Samples (2005-2010)**

Figure 4

Chloride Levels in mg/L  
(Safe Drinking Water Standard: Less 250 mg/L)

“Hotspot” Levels

Well Samples



**Second Study**

While these groundwater issues are a matter for concern, this problem is not yet a crisis. The problems do not impact all areas of the county, and can vary from one neighbor to another. However, in order to avoid a crisis, Ottawa County is currently working with the MSU IWR to develop a second Study of the County’s groundwater system. As part of the study, the MSU IWR will collect data to assist in creating a precise 3D model of both aquifers. The water balance model will look at the entire regional water system to determine how much water enters into and is removed from the aquifers. The 3D models will allow MSU IWR to conduct scenarios estimating the different impacts of varying water withdrawals rates in the future. These models will be key to assisting in the process of developing solutions to address the groundwater issues the County is experiencing in certain areas.

Because of the implications for agriculture, industry, and residents, the County is working with local units of government and other organizations with an interest in this issue to involve them in helping develop a solution to this emerging problem and to request their partnership in funding this second study. The second Study will take 18 months to complete and is scheduled to commence this summer.

# Ottawa County Departments and Services

## 58th District Court

The mission of the 58th District Court is to interpret and apply the law with fairness, equality, and integrity, and promote public accountability for improved quality of life in Ottawa County. The District Court has a Traffic Division, which handles traffic tickets, a Criminal Division, and a Civil Division, which handles civil cases below \$25,000 including small claims. The District Court also has a Probation Division, which supervises District Court probationers, Community Corrections, which provides alternative sentencing options to District Court offenders, and a Sobriety Court. There are three District Court locations, including Holland, Hudsonville, and Grand Haven.



## 20th Circuit Court

Article VI of Michigan's Constitution vests judicial power of the state exclusively in "one court of justice". Accountable to the Michigan Supreme Court, the 20th Judicial Circuit is part of our "one court of justice" and has a mission "to administer justice and restore wholeness in a manner that inspires public trust". The County of Ottawa is the funding unit for the Circuit Court, providing court facilities and general fund appropriations for Court operations. In addition, the Court receives some financial assistance from state and federal sources and the County is partially reimbursed for Court operations through a variety of state appropriations including: the Court Equity Fund, the Drug Case Information Management Fund, the Drunk Driving Caseload Assistance Fund, the Judicial Technology Improvement Fund, Drug Treatment Court grants, and the Juror Compensation Reimbursement Fund.

## Trial Division

The Circuit Court Trial Division (with offices in Grand Haven) has jurisdiction over many types of cases including: felony criminal, civil, domestic relations, and appeals from District Court, Probate Court and administrative agencies.

## Juvenile Services

Juvenile Services is part of the Family Division of the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court. This Court Division handles delinquency cases and child protective proceedings. It also assists families and juveniles in the prevention, remediation, and treatment of delinquent or maladaptive behaviors. With offices in West Olive and Holland, Juvenile Services provides a continuum of treatment and community-based intervention programs. The Ottawa County Juvenile Detention Center is also located at the Fillmore Complex in West Olive.



## Friend of the Court

The Friend of the Court is a part of the 20th Judicial Circuit Court in Ottawa County and is responsible for protecting the rights and interests of the children in domestic relations matters. The parent should have custody of minor children, enforces child support orders entered by the Court, reviews and modifies child support orders when appropriate and ensures that children's rights to parenting time with non-custodial parents are protected through investigation, recommendation to the Court and through enforcement. The main Friend of the Court office is located in Grand Haven. A satellite office with limited hours is located in Holland.

## Probate Court

The Ottawa County Probate Court is responsible for cases related to estate proceedings, guardianships, conservatorships, and mentally ill persons. The Probate Judge also serves as Presiding Judge of the Circuit Court Family Division, as well as the Adult and Juvenile Drug Court Judge. The Probate Court is located in West Olive and similar to the Circuit Court, the County of Ottawa serves as the Probate Court funding unit.



# Ottawa County Departments and Services

## Prosecuting Attorney

The Prosecuting Attorney is an elected official and serves as the chief law enforcement officer and chief administrator of criminal justice for Ottawa County. The Prosecutor authorizes warrants and juvenile delinquency petitions and is responsible for the prosecution of criminal and delinquency cases on behalf of the People of the State of Michigan. The Prosecutor's Office performs additional roles in the Family Court Division which include representation in child abuse & neglect matters, guardianships and mental illness cases, violations of personal protection orders, as well as paternity establishment and orders for child support. The Prosecutor's Office provides specialized support to victims in domestic violence cases as well as a Crime Victims' Rights program for the support of all victims of crimes. The Prosecutor's Office also includes an Appellate Division, and have assistant prosecutors assigned to law enforcement legal training, cold case review, the Children's Assessment Center and participation on the gang task force. The Prosecuting Attorney has offices in Grand Haven, West Olive, and Holland.

## Sheriff

The Sheriff's Department operates many programs intended to increase the sense of safety in Ottawa County and to prevent crimes from occurring. The Sheriff's Department has statutory responsibilities for operating the County jail. Beyond the more noticed road patrol, community policing efforts and investigative services, the Sheriff operates a marine patrol unit to monitor the various waterways in Ottawa County, employs animal control officers, provides contractual school officers with the financial support of local units of government and schools, coordinates disaster preparedness and response efforts through Emergency Management, and houses a HazMat team to respond to hazardous material spills and other calls. The West Michigan Enforcement Team (WEMET) is a multi-jurisdictional agency that enhances drug enforcement activities and is supported in part by the Sheriff's Department. The Sheriff's Administrative Offices and the County Jail are located at West Olive.



## County Clerk/Register

The County Clerk/Register is a county wide elected official and is one of the major service offices of the County. Birth and death certificates, marriage licenses, concealed weapon permits and many more records are maintained and made available to the public through the Vital Records Division. The Circuit Court Records Division creates and maintains all files for the Circuit Court. The Elections Division administers all elections (school, local, state, and federal) in Ottawa County and assists in the registration of voters and training of election workers. The Register of Deeds Division puts into public record and makes transparent all Ottawa County land related documents to safeguard ownership and monetary obligations. The County Clerk/Register also serves as the official record keeper to the Board of Commissioners. The County Clerk/Register has locations in West Olive, Grand Haven, Holland, and Hudsonville.

## County Treasurer

The County Treasurer is an elected official that serves as the collector and safekeeper of County money. The Treasurer collects all delinquent property tax payments and is the foreclosing unit of government if taxes remain unpaid. It accounts for and deposits all other revenues coming into the County and is responsible for investing County funds. The Treasurer oversees the dog-licensing program for the distribution and selling of animal licenses for Ottawa County. The Treasurer is responsible for establishing and chairing the Land Bank Authority, which helps bring value to property. All services are provided through the West Olive office or our service location in Grand Haven court house.



# Ottawa County Departments and Services

## Water Resources Commissioner


The Water Resource Commissioner is an elected official. The Water Resources Commissioner records and accounts for all legally established County drains and oversees stormwater quality and stormwater management related to land development. The Water Resources Commissioner also provides direction to private land owners and local units of government through projects to ensure proper stormwater drainage. The Water Resources Commissioner's Office is located in West Olive.



## Equalization

The Equalization Department administers the real and personal property tax system at the county level. It conducts valuation studies in order to determine the total assessed value of each classification of property in each township and city. The Department audits Principal Residence Exemptions ensuring they are claimed properly. It analyzes tax levy requests and prepares the apportionment report, maintains the parcel related layers in the county GIS, assigns parcel numbers and writes tax descriptions for new parcels, and provides assistance to local assessors as needed. The Department provides assessment administration services for Grand Haven City.

## MSU Extension

 Michigan State University (MSU) Extension in Ottawa County is part of a State-wide education delivery network, applying university level, research-based knowledge to locally identified critical issues. We respond to local needs through a unique partnership of County, State and Federal resources. Information is extended to Ottawa County residents through the MSU non-formal education system, which assists individuals, families and communities to make better decisions. MSU Extension services are divided into four program areas: Agriculture and agribusiness; Health and nutrition; Children and youth; and Greening Michigan--leveraging natural and human assets for prosperity.

## Planning and Performance Improvement

The Planning and Performance Improvement Department supports the Ottawa County Planning Commission and coordinates and performs work involved with many of the projects related to land use and planning, including transportation studies, environmental planning, agricultural preservation, and model ordinance development (wind energy, ethanol production). Planning and Performance Improvement also conducts legislative analysis and assists departments and organizations with strategic planning, performance measurements and outcome-based program evaluations of County funded programs.

## Parks and Recreation

The Parks and Recreation Department is guided by the Parks and Recreation Commission. The County Parks and Open Space system includes 24 parks and 15 open spaces that encompass over 6,400 acres. Funding for the Parks and Recreation Department comes from a variety of sources including user fees and grants, but the bulk of funds come from a dedicated millage. The current parks millage of 0.3165 mills was approved by voters in Ottawa County for a ten year period and provides funding through 2017. The Parks Department recently added an accessible kayak launch at Eastmanville Bayou, located in Polkton Township and the County's newest park, Connor Bayou located in Robinson Township. The Parks Department also offers outdoor education programs throughout the County Park system, managed by naturalist guides housed at the Nature Education Center located at Hemlock Crossing in Port Sheldon Township.



# Ottawa County Departments and Services

## Administrative Departments

Ottawa County has a number of administrative departments that support all departments of the County and are necessary for the functioning of the organization. These departments include the Administrator's Office, Fiscal Services, Human Resources, Corporate Counsel, Information Technology, and Facilities and Maintenance. While each of these departments plays a necessary role in the organizational puzzle, all of the departments are providing innovative ways to deliver services. All administrative departments are located in West Olive.

## Community Mental Health

Community Mental Health (CMH) is a public provider of services for people with developmental disabilities and/or serious mental illness. Service is provided under a "Managed Care" contract with the State of Michigan, Department of Community Health. The programs and activities are governed by a Board of Directors. Services are available to residents of the community who have Medicaid or are uninsured, and who are eligible for services as defined by the Michigan Mental Health Code.



## Health Department

The Ottawa County Health Department (OCHD) assures conditions in which all people can achieve optimal health. Through the Environmental Health Section, OCHD works to keep citizens of Ottawa County safe by providing inspections of food service establishments, inspections of water and sewer systems, and safe disposal options for household hazardous waste products. The OCHD also tracks the spread of communicable disease in the County, works to prevent the spread of disease, and prepares for potential public health emergencies. The Clinic Services Section provides direct health services including Family Planning, STD diagnosis and treatment, and Immunizations. In addition, the Public Health Preparedness program provides health based emergency planning, training and guidance to the community in the event of a disease outbreak. Community Health programs improve the health status of Ottawa County residents through care coordination (Children's Special Health Care Services), direct care services (Maternal and Infant Health, Hearing and Vision Screening, and the "Miles of Smiles" dental van), and community based prevention strategies to reduce the use of tobacco, promote the responsible use of alcohol, and encourage healthy behaviors.



## Michigan Works!/Community Action Agency

Michigan Works is the agency dedicated solely to employment, training and business services. Michigan Works offers employment-related workshops and programs specific to employee training and a business services unit designed to help businesses run smoothly. Ottawa County Michigan Works is located in Grand Haven and Holland. The Holland location is the main center for services and most workshops, and the Grand Haven location is open for job search and some services. The service center offers employment-related classes and workshops, GED (General Education Degree) certification, WorkKeys training and testing, use of its computers, fax and copier (employment related) for anyone performing job searches, and resume posting on the Michigan Talent Bank when qualifying for unemployment and getting an employee resume online.

Community Action Agency (CAA) helps the individuals and families of Ottawa County who are struggling with financial self-sufficiency. The programs offered are mainly related to housing and food issues. Many of the programs include loans or general assistance to participants, but generally the recipients must prove their economic sustainability. CAA assistance is meant to help individuals or families reach a point where they can assist themselves without public funding. The Community Action Agency is part of an extensive regional network of faith-based and non-profit agencies that work on a knowledgeable referral basis. If CAA cannot help a client, assistance will be provided to help find the appropriate channel to meet their needs.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Why does Parks and Recreation keep buying land in this tough economic time?



In 2006 voters approved a millage of 0.33 mills (\$0.33 for every \$1,000 of taxable value for a property) for the “acquisition, improvement and operation of County parklands”. This was approved by 67% of voters. The money used for land purchases and improvements does not impact or take away from other services of Ottawa County. The tax dollars collected through this special millage can only be used for the specific purposes mentioned above. Also, recessions tend to be the best time to buy prime, pristine lands at a fair market value rather than at inflated prices that tend to be present in a better economy. All of the land purchases and improvements made since 1997 have helped to provide recreational opportunities for Ottawa County residents and visitors alike and improve the overall quality of life in Ottawa County. The Parks and Recreation Department is funded 100% by the millage.

## Why doesn't Ottawa County do more about roads and snow removal?

In a biennial citizen survey, roads and snow removal are most often identified as the biggest problems of Ottawa County government. The duties of maintaining roads and removing snow are the duties of the Ottawa County Road Commission and not County government. The Road Commission is a separate body, with five commissioners making decisions that impact roads in Ottawa County. The only connection between the County and the Road Commission is the Board's duty to appoint the Road Commission's Commissioners. The property taxes you pay to the County do not support the Road Commission functions. Instead the Road Commission's revenue consists of funding from the State and federal fuel tax and vehicle registrations.

## Who do I contact about flooding issues?

If you are experiencing flooding of your home or property, you should contact the Ottawa County Water Resources Commissioner's Office at 616-994-4530. Staff will assist you in determining if the flooding is related to an established county drain and whether they have legal authority to perform drain maintenance and/or make drain improvements. If there is no county drain in the vicinity, they can inform you of other options that may be available to get the flooding issue resolved.

## Why can't the County just act like a business and reduce costs?

Like a business, the County has reduced costs in several areas and continues to look for ways to reduce spending. Certain programs not meeting performance standards have been eliminated, employee retirement health insurance benefit costs to the County have been decreased and eliminated for future employees. Other programs, though effective, have also been reduced or eliminated.

However, unlike a business, as the County's revenues decline, the demand for services typically *increases*. Citizens who have lost their jobs and health insurance turn to the Health and Community Mental Health Departments for services. Activity in the civil court increases when citizens are unable to pay their bills. In addition, several County services are mandated by law. For example, the County is required to cover the cost of attorney fees for defendants in criminal cases that are unable to afford those costs.