

County Administrator's Digest

June 6, 2014

Alan G. Vanderberg, County Administrator



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BRINKS CASE

We have linked a very nice article that covers the Sheriff's Office handling of the Brinks Case.

Though I have congratulated many of those involved in this case one on one, I would like to offer congratulations to all who have been involved in investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating this cold case. I am proud to work for a County that values the life of each resident and does not rest until a murderer has been brought to justice.

A national film maker has interviewed local folks in the Brinks case and will be shopping that to a 48 hours, 20-20 type show. The Sheriff's Office will be notified a couple of weeks before the show airs.

[Justice For Newlywed Couple Shot To Death In '87, How Detectives Cracked The Case](#)

"OTTAWA COUNTY WAY" ESSAY CHALLENGE: WINNERS ANNOUNCED (Greg Rappleye)

At its meeting on Tuesday, May 27, 2014, the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners named the winners of the first "Ottawa County Way" Essay Challenge. Chair Jim Holtrop presented Visa Gift Cards to the following winning writers:

1st Place Michael Scott Pearson

2nd Place Tie Elizabeth Williams

2nd Place Tie Amanda Lambrix

3rd Place Katelyn Coffey

The goal of the Essay Challenge was to encourage new and emerging writers to celebrate those stories, great and small, that reveal what it means to live and work in Ottawa County. The Essay Challenge was open to all ages, and received twelve official entries. Greg Rappleye, the Ottawa County Corporation Counsel, who has been involved in judging a number of local and national literary contests,



said that this was a good return of essays for a first time event. "I am involved in judging the literary award for the (Muskegon Area) Showcase event, which has been ongoing for many years among West Michigan schools. We usually have thirty to thirty-five entries per year (for Showcase). I thought our 'Ottawa County Way' Essay Challenge went very well and received a good amount of entries for an inaugural event. I was particularly pleased with the age diversity among our entrants, who included writers from high-school through retirement age." The "Ottawa County Way" Essay Challenge is a part of Ottawa County's Cultural Awareness Initiative, and was supported entirely with private funds.

OTTAWA HOUSING NEXT (Patrick Cisler, Director, Lakeshore Nonprofit Alliance and Ottawa County Human Services Coordinating Council)

Ottawa County has been experiencing an increasing lack of affordable housing in the region primarily affecting individuals and families of lower incomes. Unfortunately, the recognition and discussion of this issue has remained for years among the individuals affected and the human service organizations that often serve them. However, a planning team under the leadership of Lyn Raymond of the Lakeshore Housing Alliance and Patrick Cisler of the Ottawa County Human Services Coordinating Council have recently begun an initiative seeking to elevate this conversation to another level of community stakeholder in the hopes to find solutions to address the issue.

On the morning of Wednesday, May 14th a formal case was presented to 100 key stakeholders representing various sectors (Local and County Government, Business, Nonprofit, Special Interest, Education, and Faith-Based) highlighting the facts and figures related to housing needs in Ottawa County, the impact this is having on us all, and a glimpse into what other communities are doing to address this issue.

Stable housing is a critical foundation to families seeking financial independence, but for many, housing has become a barrier to this success. Both local and federal data highlight the issue we face. A question from Ottawa County's 2012 Community Needs Assessment asks the following question of residents, "*How often do you run out of money for shelter for you and your family?*" Survey respondents indicated that 40% struggle to pay for housing *All the Time* while an additional 10% struggle *At Least Once a Month*. When roughly 50% of our county residents state that they are struggling monthly to make ends meet for their housing, we should be concerned.

Federal data from the *American Community Survey* supports the findings from the Local Needs Assessment. One of the key federal measurements used to understand the housing affordability issue is looking at what is called *Shelter Over-Burden*. This metric states that if a household is paying more than 30% of gross income on shelter needs, it is considered to be over-burdened by housing. The target of 30% (based on past studies) becomes a dangerous threshold where families are paying too great a cost for housing and therefore not enough on other basic needs (food, clothing, education, childcare, medical, etc...). While this metric is used for both owner-occupied and rental housing, it is particularly noticeable for rental households in Ottawa County. In 2000, 29.3% of these households were considered *shelter over-burdened*. In 2006 this number had risen to 41.9% and by 2012 it totaled 49.7%. This issue of affordability is both widespread and escalating.

The natural question to ask is, “why are we facing this issue as a community?” There are multiple reasons, but one of the primary factors is that while housing costs have continued to rise over the years, wages have remained relatively flat. From 2000 to 2012, housing costs have risen 19.5% in the owner occupied market and 22.5% in the rental market (despite two recessions and the housing bubble). During the same period, median income for the area increased 3.77% (*American Community Survey*). Families simply have fewer financial resources to pay for increasingly higher housing costs.

The reality is that we have a lot of low-income jobs in Ottawa County. We also have middle income and high-income jobs, but we do have a substantial number of low-income jobs. Of the 3,165 jobs Michigan Works posted in the past year for local companies, 90% of them were between \$7.50 - \$14.00/hour. These jobs are critical to the success of our businesses and therefore our local economy. If we have these jobs, we need to have the housing that supports them. Not surprisingly, review of this data point often leads to a discussion of the need to increase wage rates in the region. Certainly, this can play a role in the solution, but this shouldn't be the sole sought-after solution.

While it can be easy to conclude that the issue of affordability only affects families living in or near poverty, this is far from the truth. We have a growing senior population often living on a fixed income, young single college graduates coming out of school with massive student debt, and special interest groups such as individuals with varying disabilities that are all struggling to find housing that accommodates their needs.

To truly address this issue we believe that a regional, long-term, and cross-sector strategy is needed and the May 14th meeting was intended to be the first steps towards developing such a strategy. Housing is simply too big and too complicated for a single sector to solve, therefore, all sectors of the community must be a part of the solution.

If you would like to engage in the Ottawa Housing Next Initiative as we move forward please contact us at Housingnext@ottawawunitedway.org

OTTAWA COUNTY GULL MANAGEMENT STUDY RECEIVES INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ATTENTION (Aaron Bodbyl-Mast)

In 2006, lakeshore home-owner Peter Secchia wrote a letter to County officials expressing his concern about large seagull populations along the Lake Michigan shoreline. Secchia believed that the gulls, as a potential carrier of disease, posed a danger to human health. To back-up his concerns, Secchia funded his own study of the microbial conditions of local beaches. The study found that E. coli levels can be 5,000 times higher on the sand than in water.

Shortly after the 2006 study, a chance meeting occurred at the annual Ottawa County Water Quality Forum between County Administrator Al Vanderberg and Dr. Elizabeth Wheeler Alm, a professor of microbiology with the Central Michigan University Institute of Great Lakes Research. Following this meeting, discussions began between Alm and County officials about a follow-up study of the gull issue.

Bases on these discussions, Alm developed a two-part study proposal for an EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant. The first phase would track gull movements in order to better understand how gulls might transmit pathogens from one location to another. The second phase would evaluate the effectiveness of border collies as a deterrent to gulls and whether this deterrent resulted in improved beach quality. However, the EPA only approved funding for the Border Collie Study.

At the request of County officials, Alm selected Ottawa County as the site for the Border Collie Study. The Study commenced in the summer of 2012 and was completed last year. The Study findings show that the collies were effective in reducing the gull population at beaches during the summer of 2012. This reduction in the gull population did not immediately result in reduced E. coli in beach sand. However, in 2013, researchers used the border collies early in the beach season and were able to reduce E. coli in beach sand. According to Alm, the findings indicate that the key to reducing E. coli at beaches is to prevent it from getting established in the sand. **Based on these findings, Dr. Alm recommends that the County consider using dog exclusion at public beaches. The estimated cost for trained dog for one summer season at a beach would be \$5,840. She also recommended educating the public on ways to help reduce gulls at public beaches, including warning them not to feed gulls and keeping trash in closed containers.** A video describing the study and showing the border collies in action is available at the following link: <http://media.cmich.edu/video?id=4ffa8f7829371a662a000004&fid=520d23e7ee750e6c00004e63>

Following the release of the initial findings of the Border Collie Study, the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners approved funding for CMU's proposal to conduct a Gull Tracking Study. Alm, along with her CMU colleague Dr. Tom Gehring, completed this Study during the summer of 2013. Researchers captured 30 gulls and attached radio transmitters to track their movements. The Study findings indicate that gulls preferred beaches and landfills over other potential locations such as farms or large parking areas. **Based on these findings, Dr. Alm recommended that exclusion be reviewed for landfill sites. Since landfills would not be safe for dogs, other exclusion techniques should be considered, but would need further study to verify their effectiveness. Potential exclusion techniques include the following: loud noises, strobe lights, and laser lights.**

The results of these Studies have received considerable local media attention, but they are also generating national and international attention. After presenting the findings to the Board of Commissioners, Alm presented her findings to the American Society for Microbiology in Boston. In addition to being covered by media in Ireland, Australia and the Netherlands, the Los Angeles Times, BBC, NPR's Morning Edition, and American Association for the Advancement of Science have covered the Study results (see links below).

<http://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-border-collies-beach-gull-droppings-20140516-story.html>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-27468430>

<http://www.npr.org/2014/05/21/314447826/border-collies-enlisted-to-clean-beaches>

http://www.scienceupdate.com/?powerpress_pinw=14371-podcast

PARK WEST DRAIN ARTICLE

Water Resources Commissioner Joe Bush and thought this piece from the Holland Sentinel was the best summary of the Park West Drain issue that we have seen in the local media.

By Annette.Manwell@hollandsentinel.com (616) 546-4270

May 11. 2014 3:37PM

Despite new plan, opposition to Park West Drain remains strong

An enthusiastic round of applause rippled through the standing-room-only crowd of about 60 people at the Thursday meeting of the Park Township Board of Trustees every time someone said the Park West Drain needs to be scrapped.

Since flooding in late 2008 and early 2009 that started the Park West Drain ball rolling, it has always had opposition and the fervor has not died down.

Legally, the drain can not be scrapped, however, said Ottawa County Water Resources Commissioner Joe Bush, who inherited the drain petition when he took office in 2012, replacing retiring Drain Commissioner Paul Geerlings. There is misinformation out there, Bush said, but he is obligated to move forward on the project. Geerlings' plans called for the installation of pipes throughout the drain district to carry the storm water through the district — which covers a good portion of the township from New Holland Street to the north, Ottawa Beach Road to the south and most of the properties between 168th and 160th avenues, though it does jut out to other areas. This original plan would have ended at Winstrom Creek, pushing storm water into Lake Macatawa.

Once in office, Bush hired the firm of Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr and Huber to re-evaluate the drain. The original plan was permitted by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, but met with swift litigation that is still pending. The permit for Bush's plan is expected to be approved sometime this month, said James Smalligan, principal and senior vice president of FTCH.

Last week, the DEQ released its findings that the current plan would have no significant environmental effect on the area.

Bush and FTCH came up with a drain that meets green infrastructure criteria. He eliminated many of the concerns that were voiced before, including taking the drain through the contamination plume of the old Southwest Ottawa County Landfill, groundwater control near the blueberry farms and emptying into Winstrom Creek and Lake Macatawa.

Opposition

Despite multiple changes to the plan and the green infrastructure — including plans for bioswales to absorb and filter the storm water and pipes where necessary to carry the storm water during heavy rain — the drain still has heavy opposition.

The drain was called “a five-year fiasco” at Thursday’s meeting and many speakers asked the township to stand with them to oppose the drain.

“We have a big problem here,” Robin Pintar said, calling it a classic case of government gone wild and that the township board has sat idly by.

Several people said they were not allowed to speak to Bush. In response, Bush told The Sentinel his attorney advised him to not speak to active litigants in the DEQ permit lawsuit. Other than that, Bush said, good customer service is a goal.

The board was repeatedly asked to, at the very least, write a letter to Bush supporting the residents' request to withdraw the petition for the drain. Several times people said the township board was not listening to its constituents.

“We are here to ask you to abandon this,” said Martha Urbin, a staunch opponent who ran for drain commissioner against Bush. Urbin said the drain code states the drain commissioner can abandon a drain after five years if no work has been done. “We are at the point that we want your support.”

Work has been done on the drain, however, Bush said, including engineering work, and some pipe has been placed. Because of that, the five-year rule does not apply. He is legally bound to finish the drain.

“It’s out of the township’s hands,” Park Township Supervisor Jerry Hunsburger said. “Please express your opinions to the water resources commissioner.”

“Thanks for nothing,” one man said as more than half the crowd filed out after the public comment portion of the meeting.

Water quality or flood control

Because the written focus of the second drain plan is stated to be a water quality measure, some who questioned if the drain is part of Project Clarity, an area-wide, five-year, \$12 million project to improve water quality in Lake Macatawa. If that’s the case, everyone should pay for this drain, the opponents said.

“We’re going to provide the same amount of flood protection as the previous design,” Smalligan said, adding the drain can help with water quality and flood protection.

The bioswales, grassy areas designed specifically to absorb and filter water, should handle 95 percent of the storm water, he said. But pipes will be under them and under the roads where bioswales cannot be developed.

Money

Many at the township meeting asked for the whole township to pay for the drain rather than just those in the drainage district.

The state's drain code does not allow that, Bush said. There must be a district and a special assessment is applied to those homeowners to cover some of the cost.

The district was developed based on the topography of the land, Smalligan said. "The need for the project has not gone away. This is a district with no drainage."

Bush inherited a \$1.2 million debt that was already spent on the project. The new design is estimated at \$3.8 million, but the addition of the money already spent brings the total to \$5 million. Geerlings' design was estimated at \$7 million.

Bush has worked with the DEQ on a State Revolving Fund loan for the project. The interest would be 2.5 percent and there is the possibility 50 percent, or \$1.7 million, of the loan could be forgiven because of the green infrastructure. Although the DEQ has led Bush to believe this is a good possibility, nothing is certain yet. Bush will know more about the revolving fund loan once the project is bid in mid-July.

If the project is not paid for by the state revolving fund loan, it would have to be bonded, Bush said. That interest rate could be a full percentage point higher.

Despite the crowd Thursday, the township board did not budge.

"We need to represent those folks who had major flooding," Hunsburger said, saying there are people who are still reaching out to him asking for the drain. When the flooding happened, people demanded a solution, he said.

Bush agreed, saying he regularly receives phone calls asking him to keep moving forward.

GVMC WEEKLY UPDATE (John Weiss)

[Click here](#) for the most recent updates.

PLANT A ROW FOR THE HUNGRY (Kristina Wieghmink)

miOttawa Department of
Public Health

Plant a Row for the Hungry

This summer, the Ottawa County Food Policy Council is launching the *Plant a Row for the Hungry* campaign in Holland and Zeeland communities. This program was created to help provide nutritious food to area food pantries and to group homes for adults with disabilities. Community gardeners are encouraged to participate by placing a row marker in their garden as a reminder to donate fruits, vegetables or herbs. When gardeners harvest at various points in the growing season, they may bag the designated produce and take it to one of the local sites.

“Plant a Row for the Hungry is a people-helping people program to assist in feeding those who are hungry in our communities.”

- Mary Grillo, Ottawa County Food Policy Council Member

Since 1995, gardeners around the country have designated a row of their garden to donate to local food banks and soup kitchens through *Plant a Row for the Hungry* program. Several participating organizations and food pantries run on small budgets. They rely heavily on produce donations given by local gardeners, which is tax deductible. As a result, people are given the opportunity to have a more nutritious diet.

List of participating pantries and homes:

- Community Action House – Holland
- His Harvest Stand – Zeeland
- Local Adult Foster Care Homes in Holland



www.GardenWriters.org

General Info Contact: Mary Grillo,
Ottawa County Food Policy Council Member
(616)393-5619, ottawaplantarow@yahoo.com

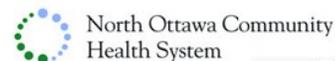


Our Vision – Healthy People

M231 BYPASS PHOTO UPDATE



OTTAWA COUNTY SURVEY PARTICIPATION NEEDED (Kristina Wieghmink)



Ottawa County Survey Participation Needed

Opportunity to give input on local health related needs and concerns.

Starting next week June 9, Ottawa County residents, 18 years of age and older, will have the opportunity to give input on local health related needs and concerns. The outreach is part of the Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFS), which periodically monitors health among various geographic areas within Ottawa County. A total of 2,000 residents will be randomly selected and contacted by Grand Rapids based Barnes Research, Inc. Survey calls will be made in June, July and August to residents' landline and mobile phones. Participation is voluntary and anonymous. If you are called, your participation is very important to the survey. The information provided will help assess community members' health risks, monitor health trends, respond to emerging public health issues, provide data for planning and development, allocate funds and improve treatment. Health related questions about behaviors including exercise, tobacco use, doctor visits, health insurance and other topics are in the survey. Results are expected to be available before the end of the year.

"Information from this survey reveals how healthy Ottawa County is in many specific areas compared to neighboring counties and counties throughout Michigan and the United States.

The results will help hospitals and other organizations target their efforts to where the need is greatest. We're asking residents who receive a call to please contribute 15-20 minutes of their time.

This way, we all help make Ottawa County a healthy place to live, work and play."

- Marcia Knol, OCDPH Epidemiologist

The Ottawa County BRFS is an initiative of the Ottawa County Community Health Needs Assessment Committee. Committee members are from the Ottawa County Department of Public Health, Holland Hospital, North Ottawa Community Health System, Spectrum Health-Zeeland Community Hospital, Community Mental Health of Ottawa County and the Greater Ottawa County United Way. For more information about Ottawa County surveys, assessments and reports, visit www.miOttawa.org/healthdata.



@miOttawa residents, tell us your health needs and concerns! Survey calls begin next week @miOCDPH
<http://ow.ly/xHYYI>



<http://ow.ly/xHYYI> Starting next week, Ottawa County residents, 18 years of age and older, will have

the opportunity to give input on local health related needs and concerns. If you are called to participate in the Ottawa County Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, your input is very important. Information provided will help assess community members' health risks, monitor health trends, respond to emerging public health issues, provide data for planning and development, allocate funds and improve treatment. www.miottawa.org/healthdata

Resources:

2011 BRFS Research Results http://www.miottawa.org/Health/OCHD/pdf/data/2011_BRFS.pdf

Ottawa County Data & Statistics www.miottawa.org/healthdata

Questions? Contact: Marcia Knol, OCDPH Epidemiologist

(616)494-5598, mknol@miottawa.org

Our Vision – Healthy People



Some Comments About Recent GVMC Events

Recently, GVMC has been involved in a series of meetings involving over 300 people. I thought you might be interested in a few of the comments I have received from those sessions.

Strategic Visioning Session

April 24, 2014

It was amazing to see the commonality in vision for the future of the metro council and the passion for working together collaboratively to provide necessary public services in the most efficient and effective way for our West Michigan population. The strategic planning session showed that regional leaders are already thinking differently and willing to take further action to step over older notions of boundaries to achieve increasingly better outcomes."

*Al Vanderberg, Ottawa County
Administrator*

The GVMC Visioning Session was an enlightening experience in several ways. First it was encouraging to see that the board members' ideas about the future of GVMC were similar and that they were inclusive so non-MPO members could be engaged in the GVMC activities as well. It was also refreshing to listen to ways GVMC can engage diverse groups around important initiatives to make a difference in the region; Acting as facilitator and coordinator to make good things happen. In addition, for GVMC to be recognized at the State and Federal lev-

els as "experts" in areas such as transportation and environmental stewardship is a tribute to the hard work of the Executive Director and staff.

Rebecca Fleury, MPA
Middleville Village Manager/
Finance Director

Street Summit II

April 25, 2015

It was very apparent how West Michigan is a leader in collaboration. I often hear about difficulties between road commissions, municipalities and MPOs in other parts of the state. Speaking on behalf of the area business community, we greatly appreciate your ability to work together and with the private sector to make the most of the limited resources we have.

Josh Lunger,
Public Policy Coordinator-GRACC

We are also thankful for the trusted relationships and partnerships that continue to drive all of us to seek those bigger picture solutions. I personally enjoyed looking at everyone's 'story boards' and learning more about the local transportation challenges and opportunities. Thanks for inviting MDOT to participate and be a part of this very informative and beneficial community effort.

Roger L. Safford, P. E
Region Engineer—MDOT

Thank you for your role to coordinate the public agencies in the street summit. I really appreciated that Mr. Bolger appeared be-

fore the group and explained his approach. I have to admit that I came away with a greater appreciation for his efforts when he made the point that this is just the start of reaching a solution.

Terry Schweitzer
Community Development Director
City of Kentwood

We appreciate what the Metro Council is doing to move this issue of transportation infrastructure forward. The status quo isn't working. Bringing all parties together was a solid first step.

Mark Murray, Meijer Inc.

LGROW Spring Forum

May 2, 2015

It's great to see GVMC take such an active role in the Lower Grand Watershed effort. The addition of Wendy Ogilvie to team and increase in watershed budget opens opportunities for community involvement in the project.

Bonnie Shupe Blackledge, MMC
Cannon Township Clerk

The presentations by John Alan and Dr. Al Steinman were paired perfectly to emphasize the need for broad thinking in how we manage our most valuable resources in this Blue Economy".

Scott Conners, P.E.
Walker City Engineer





11th Annual Grand River Spring Forum

On **Friday, May 2nd**, LGROW's 11th Annual Spring Forum was a resounding success. With a 35% increase in attendance from last year, we had standing room only! The Forum was held at the Grand Rapids Public Museum, which had a beautiful view overlooking the Grand River.

Represented at the Forum were:

- 12 Municipalities
- 9 Non-Profits
- 7 Private Companies
- 4 Watershed Groups
- 3 Academic Institutions
- 2 State Agencies

Brian Donovan was presented with an inscribed plaque recognizing his many years of exemplary service to LGROW. Attendees then congratulated John Koches, on his new position as Chair of LGROW. We appreciate John's continued service.

Spring Forum Topics

Jon Allan, Director of the Office of the Great Lakes, invigorated our spirit of cooperation toward the success of Michigan's Water Strategy as our keynote speaker. Dr. Alan Steinman, Director of the Annis Water Resources Institute at Grand Valley State University, gave us a better understanding and vision of Michigan's Blue Economy. An update on the Grand River Restoration Project



was led by Chip Richards and Kalie Nye from Grand Rapids Whitewater. The removal of the Hubbardston Dam was presented by Kristi Klomp from Timberland RC&D. Grand Rapids Public Museum's Exhibit Director Tom Bantle and Senior Project Advisor Marilyn Merdzinski treated us to a presentation of their plans to renovate the Museum's 3rd floor to showcase the Grand River Watershed.



GVMC Welcomes Brian Zuber

Brian Zuber is the new Graduate Assistant for LGROW. Through a generous partnership with GVSU, Brian will be working part-time at GVMC for the next 18 months, while completing his Master's Degree in Biology at GVSU.

His skills, past experience, and knowledge and passion for water resources make him a perfect fit. Brian will assist with implementing watershed projects, maintain LGROW's website, expand public outreach, and participate in events and activities that broaden his knowledge in watershed issues.

We are excited to have Brian join our team!

Social Media

We encourage everyone to spread the word about LGROW! The easiest way to do that is to head to www.facebook.com/LGROW.org

We already know you like us, now it's time to show everyone else!