



**Ottawa County**  
*Where You Belong<sup>®</sup>*

**The State of the County Address**  
*January 23, 2018*

Presented by  
County Administrator Alan G. Vanderberg  
to the  
Ottawa County Board of Commissioners

Thank you, Chair DeJong, Vice-Chair Bergman and the Board of Commissioners for this opportunity to present the thirteenth annual State of the County address. It is an honor to share the highlights of 2017, the challenges we faced and a glimpse into what we are preparing for in the future.

Ottawa County is where people want to be and belong.

Ottawa County continues to excel and stand out as a leader among local governments in Michigan. Our vision is to make Ottawa County *where you belong*: a place where all people, visitors and businesses feel welcomed and valued as vital threads of our community fabric.

One thing is certain: Ottawa County is the place where people want to be.

Recent census reports indicate that 282,250 people choose to call Ottawa County home. From 2010 to 2016, Ottawa was the fastest growing county in the state with a 7% increase in population, placing it firmly as the eighth most populous county in Michigan. Nearly 45% of Ottawa County's population growth resulted from migration to the area.

The Ottawa economy continues to rebound strongly from the Great Recession with growth in manufacturing, commercial and residential investment. Since 2010, residential building permits are up 177%. The Taxable Value on the Ad-Valorem Roll increased by 3.73%, up from only 1.37% in 2016. This growth continues to be limited, however, by state law as both the Headlee Amendment and Proposal A significantly limit inflationary increases.

The growing population of residents and businesses works hard to earn every dollar, so they can count on Ottawa County to use the property tax dollars they pay wisely. The most recent survey found that the majority of residents are comfortable with their tax burden. The Ottawa County's general property tax levy of 3.6 mills is the fifth lowest among the 83 counties. When special, voter approved levies of 911, Parks, Mental Health and Roads are included, the fifth place standing doesn't budge. In fact, the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners takes \$6.9 million less in property taxes than allowed by the Headlee cap. Through financing tools, including the Solid Waste Clean-up Fund, Infrastructure Fund, DB/DC Conversion Fund and Delinquent Tax Revolving Fund, the County saves tax payers another \$9 million dollars. Careful cost allocation programs charge \$1.3 million in indirect costs and \$1 million in Innovation and Technology overhead appropriately to state and federal grants, keeping local dollars available for other services. A legacy of prudent financial leadership has also completely funded Ottawa County's modest Other Post Employment Benefit (OPEB) liability.

All this adds up to a strong financial position. Ottawa is one of four Michigan Counties to hold two triple A credit ratings. These top scores allow Ottawa County plus its local units of government to borrow money for capital improvement projects with lower interest rates, saving taxpayer dollars. PFM Financial Advisors determined the Aaa resulted in approximately 0.35% lower interest rates than compared to the median rating for Michigan counties. In dollars, the County's triple A credit rating has resulted in over \$16 million in savings for local units of government that have used the County rating to finance water and sewer expansion projects.

Collaborations have also served the residents of Ottawa County well. The County seeks partnerships that will save tax dollars and improve services for citizens. The County expanded its collaboration effort by working with the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District, Grand Haven Area Public Schools and Holland Board of Public Works to establish the Fiber Optimized Government Network, known as FOG-Net. FOG-Net provides an inter-organizational infrastructure that presents opportunities for shared services between participants. This concept became a reality in 2015 and has led the County to transition one of its two internet connections to a higher speed and lower cost service. As fiber was extended from the FOG-Net, the County has been able to provide IT services to several local governments including the Village of Spring Lake, Spring Lake Township, the City of Ferrysburg and now Park Township. A new direct "on network" fiber connection was activated via the FOG-Net to Allendale Charter Township, providing direct access to the Ottawa County Community Policing office and providing the potential to serve Allendale Charter Township. Among other partnerships, Ottawa continues to provide assessing for the City of Grand Haven and Crockery Township; financial services for both the Village of Spring Lake and Crockery Township; prosecutorial services for the City of Coopersville and Georgetown Township; multiple sheriff contracts; and to all local units, a reverse purchasing module, strategic planning assistance, and County trainings are available.

Partnerships also occur among departments serving vulnerable populations. The Ottawa County Community Health Needs Assessment is a cross-sector collaboration of agencies coming together to identify county health needs and improvement plans. The three highest needs identified were access to healthcare, mental health and healthy behaviors. In response, the Pathways to Better Health program was implemented to assist people with accessing community services, to improve health outcomes and to decrease unnecessary hospitalization and emergency department visits. Since its implementation in February 2017, six community health workers were hired and are serving 389 residents. Ottawa Food is a partnership among local organizations addressing the highest county needs by eliminating hunger, encouraging healthy eating and increasing the sourcing of local food.

The opioid epidemic plagued Ottawa County increasingly in 2017 with a startling average of one overdose per day, and with a higher concentration on weekends. In response to the growing problem, the Board of Commissioners took action by authorizing a new position within Community Mental Health to lead the Ottawa County Prescription Drug and Opioid Task Force.

The year 2017 began, literally, with a new Sheriff in town as Steve Kempker and Undersheriff Val Weiss took their official roles atop the office. While Ottawa County remains a relatively safe community when compared to similarly sized counties, 2017 measured a 40% increase in reports of crimes against children with nearly 500. The Sheriff's investigative teams work tireless on these cases alongside the Children's Advocacy Center. Mental health calls for service for the Sheriff's Office are on the rise. The Sheriff's Office is working with Ottawa County Community Mental Health to ensure that responders have training and resources to safely interact with people who are experiencing a mental health crisis and to get them the help and resources needed.

At the same time the Sheriff's Office is noting a rise in mental health incidents, unanticipated changes made to mental health funding from both Medicaid and State General Fund sources by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services plunged the Lakeshore Regional Entity, including Ottawa County, into a financial deficit. The impact is devastating for the Community Mental Health Department because the number of residents needing services is significantly increasing. Ottawa County will continue to fight for equitable funding for our residents.

The on-going financial crisis overshadowed the accomplishments of the mental health millage which includes programs to provide direct mental health services, fill gaps and prevent mental illness. Examples include the 174 individuals participating in one of four social recreational programs in the county, the 138 referrals to psychiatric services provided to inmates in the jail and the Pathways to Better Health program which provides intervention at the first signs of mental distress.

Ottawa County has quickly become a premiere place for outdoor recreation opportunities in West Michigan. Flourishing County parks and open spaces, partnerships with municipalities and community generosity have given way to opportunities for regional non-motorized pathway networks. The paved shoulder expansion along Lakeshore Drive will be completed this year as will Phase II of the Spoonville Trail. Work during 2017 on the Grand River Greenway's Idema-Explorers Trail, named for Bill and Bea Idema following a \$2 million commitment to the project, included a 3.9-mile segment in Robinson Township as well as route planning in both Allendale and Georgetown Townships. Nearly 300 runners hit the Spoonville and Explorers' Trails during the M23.1k Run. Not only did the run raise nearly \$10,000 for the trails, but awareness of the paved paths increased as well.

Ottawa County's Lakeshore parks, including North Beach, Kirk Park, Rosy Mound, Olive Shores and Tunnel Park, continue to be an attraction for summer tourists. In 2017, the number of daily permits sold to non-residents increased by nearly 3,000 to 26,150. In the last five years, revenue generated from lakeshore operations, winter activities and year-round reservations has increased 79%, totaling more than \$643,000 in 2017. This revenue supplements the parks millage which was renewed in 2016 with over 72% support.

A number of critical additions were made in 2017. One site was an 80-acre expansion of North Ottawa Dunes. Late in 2017, a spectacular 353 acre site known as the "Ottawa Sand" property became available. The County was approved for millions in grant funding to purchase the property in a complicated deal that will stretch over two years. The Parks Commission and County are enthusiastic about the property, which includes pristine dunes, an 80-acre lake and over a mile of Grand River frontage. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of this acquisition is that it would fill the gap in a six-mile preserved corridor of green space that includes the North Pier, P.J. Hoffmaster State Park, North Ottawa Dunes, City of Grand Haven Open Space and the Kitchel-Lindquist-Hartger Dune Preserve.

The formal opening and dedication of Grand Ravines Park, adjacent to Grand Valley State University on the Grand River occurred in 2017. The park is admired by residents with its magnificent natural ravines, picturesque views of the river, renovated lodge, a 21-acre off-leash dog park, a restored, historic barn and 275-foot, donor-funded suspension bridge.

A number of Ottawa County's natural areas have recently discovered the presence of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, an invasive pest that has devastated forests on the East Coast. A task force was formed and was awarded a \$600,000 grant to identify, treat and save impacted forests. Several other invasive pests and plants were removed from parklands, many of them by way of volunteers who generously logged over 20,000 hours in 2017.

The Ottawa County Water Resources Commissioner's Office secured \$800,000 from the Department of Environmental Quality's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative for the stabilization of the Sand Creek and renewal of the watershed. The funding will reduce pollution caused when run-off carries pollutants into the Sand Creek. The creek flows into the lower Grand River and ultimately Lake Michigan. The improvements along the Sand Creek will reduce sediment by an estimated 1,250 tons per year.

Ottawa County continues to evaluate its groundwater resources. A May 2013 study of the County's groundwater conducted by Michigan State University's (MSU) Institute of Water Research (IWR) indicated that groundwater levels in some areas of the county were declining, while sodium chloride levels were increasing in other areas. A more in-depth analysis is currently underway. For this phase, MSU IWR created detailed 3D models of both the glacial and bedrock aquifers beneath Ottawa County to help better understand current and future groundwater sustainability. The Ottawa County Planning and Performance Improvement Department, using input from local jurisdictions, created buildout analyses to project future growth and development over the next several years. The MSU IWR will use the buildout analyses to simulate future demand and recharge on the County's aquifers. Ottawa County will use the final results to champion a collaborative effort with both public and private stakeholders to effectively manage our groundwater resources into the future.

Ottawa County employs a variety of tools to ensure the organization is continuously improving. Technology, innovative tools and other approaches, some borrowed from the private sector, are now fundamental in County success.

The consultant group Adaptive Capacity was hired to assist with several innovation projects. The Department of Public Health worked with the consultants to evaluate how to best reach and assist children and families impacted by lead exposure. Community Mental Health and Adaptive Capacity improved consumer self-care through the use of technology as a source of support between appointments. Consumers are now using apps to track therapy goals like sleep patterns, meaningful activities, health care and more. Finally, the Adaptive Innovator Type Assessment was completed by 73% of staff. The assessment measures an individual's preferred style of innovation in the workplace. Team reports will be created during 2018 to assist with incorporating innovative tools into daily work.

Toyota Kata (LEAN) Project teams convene to work toward a goal that saves time and resources. Teams also walk away with improved interpersonal working relationships due to the communication sharing that occurs between the learner, the coach and the team. Fiscal Services and IT collaborated on a project using Kata to meet the challenge of locating files within 15 seconds of beginning a search. Public Health updated its phone system to provide the best customer experience. Using Kata tools, they reduced the phone menu from ten options to just three. Today, customers no longer experience the frustration of getting lost in menu recordings, being dumped into voice mail or disconnecting altogether. Several Kata projects completed in the Public Health and Mental Health departments resulted many noticeable process improvements.

The Parks, Public Health, GIS and Performance & Improvement departments used design thinking and innovation methods to collaborate and enhance the Step It Up program, an initiative aimed to increase physical activity and park exploration. More than 1,500 Step It Up participants increased their level of physical activity and increased their awareness of Ottawa County Parks.

The use of technology continues to serve Ottawa County well. Some advancements are more visible than others, such as the self-service jury check-in stations and courtroom docket displays. Behind the scenes, video arraignment systems are now fully integrated into the automated recording system. Circuit Court Records implemented a new e-Filing system which required modifications to the County's existing imaging system with significant testing and adjustment. Alternate work locations with the Friend of the Court office required multiple security enhancements. Finally, the County Clerk/Register of Deeds office deployed 96 new laptops plus new polling equipment for the November elections.

The County's technical infrastructure posture improved as one of nine local governments to enter into a pilot program with the State Department of Technology

Management and Budget. The program provides a Chief Information Security Officer under contract with the State to evaluate our security and improve it. An initial assessment was completed and the County is acting on that information.

In 2017, miOttawa.org, the County's website, saw over 1.1 million visitors. The menu of services available online continues to grow and residents are using them. The total number of payments made online increased from \$1.9 million in 2016 to over \$2.2 million in 2017. miOttawa.org was also redesigned last year to improve its already mobile friendly design, to highlight the opportunities to connect with and do business with Ottawa County, to provide accessibility for the handicapped as prescribed under the 508c Standards and to offer Spanish translation of the site.

Transparent communication about Ottawa County and its programs and services is a priority. Residents have expressed the desire that the County continues to keep them informed. One of the primary avenues is through our email subscription system which began in July of 2015. Subscribers can choose to receive news from over 200 different County topics and receive those messages daily or weekly. A total of 31,243 residents are subscribed to receive news from Ottawa County, an increase of nearly 10,000 from the close of 2016. Last year, more than 800,000 e-bulletins were delivered to subscribers.

Customer service is an innovative concept when applied to government. Over the past several years, all Ottawa County employees have been trained in the Disney Way. As a result, the County realized that it no longer needed to train to change the customer service culture. It was clear that employees had made a visible shift to ensure each customer experience was positive and respectful. At the same time, staff were hungry for skills to implement in their daily interactions. A new training, built upon the original but focusing on tactical methods, is now available. Evidence of the Disney Way in action pours in regularly. Last year, 187 customers shared stories of great service delivered by Ottawa County employees.

Ottawa County has made a focused investment with the Leadership Cohort initiative. The Leadership Cohorts engage all levels of management, totaling 140 employees, from top leaders through supervisors of front line employees. The goals of the Leadership Cohorts are to improve communication between management and employees, to achieve an empowering culture where employees can fully share knowledge, talents and abilities and to create community within management for collaborating and mentorship.

In a time when skyrocketing healthcare costs continue to be the norm, Ottawa County's health management plan continues to defy the odds. An analysis by Healthcare Analytics found that the Ottawa County's health management plan performed significantly better than benchmarks. The analysis found that because of the plan, employee health has improved and the County avoided an estimated \$2.7 million in health claims in 2016 alone. The total increase to the County's Health Insurance Premiums for 2017 was a noteworthy 1%.



Ottawa County embarked on a rebrand during 2017. One thing was clear as the group came together on the project: Ottawa County has a lot going for it. Leaders of the past have built a solid, strong government here that lives on in today's leaders. West Michigan has a thriving economy built in a region rich with natural resources. Ottawa County has both talented employees and residents who work hard, who are problem solvers and who are generous with the talents and good fortune with which they were blessed. The new logo and brand that is being built around it aligns Ottawa County with the high-caliber, forward-thinking organization we are today and going into the future. The team agreed that the phrase, "Where You Belong" was an important part of the new logo as we strive to be a friendly, welcoming community that embraces diversity, including the full range of human differences it entails.

CEOs of some of West Michigan's top businesses have stated that an inability to attract and retain global talent and create diverse teams impacts the future prosperity of West Michigan. The mission of the Cultural Intelligence Initiative of Ottawa County is to promote an environment where all employees, residents and visitors are valued and welcome. To date, 650 Ottawa County employees have participated in the Racial Equity Training to build understanding, identify unintentional bias and focus on solutions. Many County employees and Board of Commissioners are familiar faces at events such as Latin Americans United for Progress Dinner, West Coast Chamber Minority Business Luncheon, the West Michigan Asian Association Gala, the Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance Summit on Racism and so many more. The Ottawa County Diversity Forum doubled its attendance from its inaugural year to now filling our largest room with more the 150 attendees. Progress is underway and this effort will continue.

A second critical issue plaguing Ottawa County and noted by top business leaders is affordable housing. In 2017, the Ottawa Housing Next research initiative was rebranded into the Housing Next action initiative and is beginning to tackle the lack of affordable housing in the area. The 1983 Board of Commissioners Strategic plan included eliminating the housing problem as a top goal. Thirty-five years later the problem has grown to a lack of 15,000 to 17,000 housing units. A diverse range of housing options is necessary for our major employers to attract talent to their businesses and our community. Housing Next will work with developers and a variety of other partners to narrow the gap between building affordable housing and the high end housing that is developing rapidly in the County.

Other issues and initiatives that will occupy our organizational capacity over the next year include: Sustainability, Art and Culture, Mental Health Finance, Unfunded Pension Liability, Opioid Abuse, Water, Transportation, Cyber-Security, Artificial Intelligence, Building and Courtroom Security and the Juvenile Justice Center.

It is a privilege to serve as County Administrator for the Board of Commissioners and the citizens of this spectacular County. The year 2017 was a great year and I look forward to an ever better 2018.

Thank you