

# Making Connections:

Understanding Community Health, Safety, & Welfare  
in Northwest Michigan



**FRAMEWORK  
FOR OUR FUTURE**

A REGIONAL PROSPERITY PLAN  
FOR NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

Networks  Northwest  
Talent / Business / Community

*Making Connections: Understanding Community Health, Safety, and Welfare in Northwest Michigan* was prepared as part of the *Framework for Our Future: A Regional Prosperity Plan for Northwest Michigan*, a regional resource for local governments, community organizations working to meet local goals. The *Framework* was developed as part of Michigan's Regional Prosperity Initiative, as initiated by Governor Rick Snyder and signed into law as a part of the FY 2014 budget. The Regional Prosperity Initiative encourages local private, public, and non-profit partners to identify regionally aligned growth and investment strategies for the State of Michigan to support, not the other way around. It also provides the framework for streamlining state services and highlighting the regionally defined goals and strategies that will further Northwest Michigan's success.

The *Framework for Our Future* includes information and tools that can help stakeholders address

issues such as housing, transportation, land use, energy, arts and culture, workforce and economic development, community health, food and farming systems, and natural resources. Data and information will help communities supplement their local deliberation, planning, and decisionmaking processes, and will help to identify the steps a community can take to address a local issue, if desired.

*The Framework for Our Future* was developed by the Networks Northwest with input and partnerships from a variety of community stakeholders and members of the public. An intensive community outreach process featured a wide variety of opportunities for participation from the public: events, surveys, focus groups, online forums, and public discussions were held regionwide throughout the process. Outreach activities and engagement opportunities included a series of community dialogues, interviews, and other events designed to

obtain input from individuals with disabilities, minorities, youth, those in poverty, and others that have historically been underrepresented in planning processes. Public input was used to identify priority community issues and concerns, and to help develop goals, strategies, and actions.

The goals, strategies, and actions included in the *Framework* were built upon public input heard throughout the process, as well as on existing and adopted goals from local plans and planning initiatives. Strategies are not intended as recommendations, nor do they supersede and local



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# Section I:

What Is Community Health, Safety, & Welfare?

# Making Connections: Introduction

Communities and local leaders nationwide are charged with protecting and serving the public health, safety, and welfare. But our understanding of what that means may vary widely: interpretations may depend on what problems or needs each community is facing.

If asked what it means, some communities might talk about structural issues—like the condition of its roads, its tax rates, or its ability to attract or manage new growth and development. Others might discuss social issues like poverty, crime, addiction, and health.

While these might all be considered part of the public “health, safety, and welfare,” and while each community experiences all of these issues, we often separate one from another when considering solutions. We expect the “structural” issues of the community—like its roads, bridges, sewer systems, and water quality—to be handled by local governments like cities, counties, villages, and townships. And we often look to human service agencies—including social workers, public health officials, and others—to address the social, “people-oriented” needs of the community. Indeed, it often seems that our local decision-



making processes and social or human service provision system rarely cross paths. Local governments typically focus taxpayer resources on protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the community through improving and maintaining physical community assets, while human service providers work within their budgets to meet people’s needs as best they can.

But there are important areas of overlap that many residents, organizations, and decision-makers don’t often consider. Decisions made by our local governments have far-reaching impacts on the lives, livelihoods, and opportunities of all residents in the community; and the individual needs and actions of residents play an enormous part in driving the future development of

the community, and in determining its needs for physical assets and infrastructure. For instance:

- Zoning may limit options for treatment centers. A lack of treatment options for those struggling with addiction can prevent potential employees from getting or maintaining a job, and can create challenges for businesses that are looking for employees.
- A shortage of housing options, which is affected by zoning, can force vulnerable families into unsafe situations. What’s more, without adequate housing choices, we lose families, children, and workers that are needed by our communities—in schools and businesses.
- People that are suffering from

# ALICE: Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed

Many households are living below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but an even greater number of households are what United Way calls ALICE – an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE households have incomes above the FPL, but still struggle to afford basic household necessities. Although evidence is emerging that jobs and wages are improving, 40% of households in Michigan could not afford basic needs in 2015.

A 2017 United Way report identifies the cost of basic needs for each county in Michigan, and the number of households earning below this amount – the ALICE Threshold. It delves deeper into county and municipal data as well as ALICE and poverty-level households by race, ethnicity, age, and household type to reveal variations in hardship that are often masked by state averages. Finally, it highlights emerging trends that will be important to ALICE in the future.

The data reveals an ongoing struggle for ALICE households and the obstacles to achieving financial stability. Trends identified statewide include:

- **Struggling Households:** Of Michigan's 3.86 million households, 15 percent lived in poverty in 2015 and another 25 percent were ALICE. Combined, 40 percent (1.53 million households) had income below the ALICE Threshold.
- **Basic Cost of Living:** The cost of basic household expenses increased steadily in every county in Michigan between 2007 and 2015. The average budget rose by 18 percent, which was above the national rate of inflation of 14 percent during that time period. In 2015, the average annual Household Survival Budget for a Michigan family of four (two adults with one infant and one preschooler) ranged from \$43,920 in Osceola County to \$64,320 in Macomb County – well above the family FPL of \$ 24,250.
- **Low-wage Jobs:** Low-wage jobs continued to

dominate the landscape in Michigan, with 62 percent of all jobs in the state paying less than \$20 per hour. At this wage, a family of four falls far short of the Household Survival Budget of \$56,064. And, more than two-thirds of these jobs pay less than \$15 per hour.

- **Assistance for ALICE:** Since 2012, the amount needed to bring all ALICE households to financial stability has grown faster than government spending. Health care spending increased by 23 percent, accounting for two-thirds of all public and nonprofit spending on ALICE and poverty-level households. Because services and funds are not typically transferable from one area of need to another, there are large gaps between spending and need in many categories. For example, the gap to meet housing needs is 44 percent and the gap to meet child care is 50 percent.
- **Emerging trends:** Several trends could change the economic landscape for ALICE families:
  - The Michigan population is aging, and many seniors do not have the resources they need to support themselves.
  - Differences by race and ethnicity create challenges for many ALICE families as well as for immigrants in Michigan.
  - Low-wage jobs are projected to grow faster than higher-wage jobs over the next decade.



- Technology is changing the workplace, adding some jobs, replacing many others, while also changing where people work, the hours they work, and the skills that are required. Technology creates opportunities as well as challenges for ALICE workers.

allocation of resources based on an outdated federal poverty threshold.

Using the best available information on those who are struggling, the ALICE report offers an enhanced set of tools for stakeholders to measure the real challenges ALICE households face in trying to make ends meet. This information is presented to inform the discussion around programmatic and policy solutions for these households and their communities now and for the future. The lack of accurate information about the number of people who are “poor” and struggling distorts the identification of problems related to poverty, misguides policy solutions, and raises questions of equity, transparency, and fairness in the

					Annual Household Survival	
	Median HH Income	Unemployment Rate	ALICE HH	Poverty HH	Single Adult	2 Adults, 1 infant, 1 preschooler
Antrim	\$46,485	9.70%	28%	13%	\$16,632	\$59,508
Benzie	\$47,388	8.40%	27%	10%	\$19,188	55,244
Charlevoix	\$46,544	7.80%	27%	12%	\$18,924	\$55,908
Emmet	\$51,018	8.40%	26%	11%	\$19,260	\$53,760
Grand	\$55,013	4.40%	25%	10%	\$19,872	\$58,740
Kalkaska	\$40,534	10.40%	27%	16%	\$18,048	\$53,508
Leelanau	\$56,189	7.10%	20%	8%	\$18,852	\$57,708
Manistee	\$41,395	11.50%	25%	14%	\$17,556	\$52,452
Missaukee	\$41,098	11%	29%	15%	\$17,556	\$55,608
Wexford	\$41,354	9.50%	28%	16%	\$17,016	\$51,936
Michigan	\$51,804	7.20%	25%	15%	\$18,192	\$56,064

addiction, homelessness, or mental illness; or that don't have transportation to and from medical care, may place a greater burden on local services, like emergency medical transportation or police protection when regular treatment isn't readily available. Options like long-distance health care or telemedicine, which requires broadband infrastructure, may improve health care access for some; while improved transportation and transit connections can reduce the burden on emergency transportation and medical services.

These policy decisions—about infrastructure, transportation, and zoning—have real and immediate impacts, financial and otherwise, on the health, safety, and welfare of people that live in our communities—and on the local governments that provide services to residents and businesses. When basic needs for health care, nutrition, housing, and personal

safety aren't met, costs are ultimately passed down to local governments and taxpayers through increased demand for emergency medical transportation, police protection, and other services.

Yet, despite the clear intersection of local assets and policies with our communities' social needs, there's often little recognition or understanding of the role that local decisions can make in some of our most complex problems.

*Making Connections: A Guide to Community Health, Safety, and Welfare in Northwest Michigan* attempts to build a greater understanding of how local policy decisions impact public health issues in communities throughout Northwest Michigan. By building awareness and making these connections, we can create additional opportunities for partnerships between local governments and service providers, build a more holistic approach to decision-making, and develop a framework for long-



term, structural solutions that create the conditions for meaningful change.

### The Penny-Farthing: Structural and Service-Based Solutions

When considering connections between local government and social service organizations, it's important to recognize that the nature of their activities—and the solutions they pursue—is necessarily and fundamentally different.

Service-based solutions attempt to address immediate needs. They provide tangible impacts to an individual or family, and are focused on short-term safety and

## Making Connections: Process & Participation

This guidebook was developed by Networks Northwest with support from the Michigan Regional Prosperity Initiative, with guidance and oversight from a committee made up of local governments, human service providers, and other community stakeholders. The document was informed by data, stakeholder input obtained through regular committee meetings, and public events held in 2017. Participating agencies include:

- Addiction Treatment Services
- Area Agency on Aging in Northwest Michigan
- Blair Township
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Elmwood Township
- Grand Traverse Area Continuum of Care
- Leelanau County
- Third Level Crisis Center
- Traverse Bay Children's Advocacy Center
- Traverse Health Clinic

health issues. Food pantries provide food for families without enough to eat, shelters house individuals or families that have lost their homes, and in-patient rehab treats those that might be dealing with an addiction-related crisis. These programmatic solutions are visible and tangible to everyone involved: they change people’s lives immediately and often profoundly.

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When basic needs for health care, nutrition, housing, and personal safety aren’t met, costs are ultimately passed down to local governments and taxpayers through increased demand for emergency medical transportation, police protection, and other services.

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Local policy solutions, however, have a much longer timeframe: communities often plan 10, 20, or 50 years into the future. They’re also more likely to be focused on physical assets or activities, like development, land use, sewer and water systems, and planning for roads. When considering these needs and policies, communities often don’t see the impact right away: it may take years before there’s a visible change. For example, zoning ordinances — which can take years to write— may fundamentally alter the way development is regulated, but it could be even more years before a developer comes to town to build new homes that meet those zoning regulations—and citizens may or may not be aware of zoning’s role in that construction.

Service Solutions	Local Policy Solutions
Immediate	Long-term
Tangible impacts to individual	Impacts are cumulative; often unnoticed by individuals
Social/needs focus	Land use/tax focus

Similarly, it may take decades for decisions about taxes to result in enough revenues to effectively enhance transit, transform blighted neighborhoods, or complete a sidewalk system in an underserved neighborhood.

Both of these approaches, while dramatically different, are necessary parts of the whole. Like the penny-farthing, or the big-wheel bike of the late nineteenth century, both of them turn together, at different speeds, to make the system run and meet community needs.

### Using This Guide

While the importance of service-based solutions cannot be overstated, this document is not intended to focus on specific, service-based programmatic solutions, or on public services like safety and emergency medical services. County and local governments are an important part of the public health system, through funding and representation in public health agencies, community mental health, community collaborative, and other local and regional agencies and initiatives. Yet, local zoning and other policies that can have long-lasting, far-reaching

impacts on community needs aren’t often considered in terms of their impacts on the community’s most pressing social needs. Therefore, rather than focus on specific programs, organizations, agencies, or departments, this guide is intended to start a conversation about local policy, budgeting, and leadership decisions, and their impact on long-term, structural issues that affect pressing community needs.

To that end, the region’s priority social service issues—or community health, safety, and welfare needs—are discussed in the context of major community development issues, including:

- Housing
- Transportation
- Food & Farming
- Natural Resources & Recreation

Local policy, budgeting, and leadership solutions that can address priority community health, safety, and welfare issues are identified and summarized.



# Data and Resources

An important first step in creating meaningful, impactful change through policy is understanding specific needs and issues around community health, safety, and welfare. A wealth of data and resources is available to decision-makers and stakeholders on public health and safety.

## Kids Count Michigan

[www.mlpp.org/kids-count](http://www.mlpp.org/kids-count)

Kids Count in Michigan is part of a broad national effort to measure the well-being of children at the state and local levels, and use that information to shape efforts to improve the lives of children. Kids Count in Michigan has three major objectives:

1. to develop and analyze indicators of child well-being on basic needs such as health, education, and safety;
2. to publish an annual data book and disseminate findings broadly; and
3. to maintain a public awareness campaign about the status of children and their families.

## Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings

[www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)

The annual *Rankings* provide a revealing snapshot of how health is influenced by where we live, learn, work and play. They provide a starting point for change in communities.

## A Framework for Our Future: A Regional Prosperity Plan for Northwest Michigan

[www.networksnorthwest.org/rpi](http://www.networksnorthwest.org/rpi)

Developed as part of Michigan's Regional Prosperity Initiative, the *Framework* is a regional resource for communities working to meet local goals. It includes information and tools that can help stakeholders address issues related to housing, workforce and economic development, transportation, food and farming, arts and culture, community health, natural resources, and recreation. Sample master plan language and zoning checklists are included for each topic.

## ALICE: Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed

[www.uwmich.org/alice](http://www.uwmich.org/alice)

The United Way ALICE Report is the most comprehensive depiction of need in Michigan to date. It introduces new metrics including the **ALICE Threshold**, **Household Survival Budget** and **Economic Viability Dashboard**. First released in September 2014, an updated ALICE Report was released in April 2017. The report provides a greater understanding of the struggles that hard working members of our communities face.

# Community Planning 101:

## Master Plans, Zoning Ordinances, & Local Leadership

The policies and ordinances that are guided by local plans have tremendous impacts on our communities—including the price of our homes, the views out our windows, the quality of our air and water, and the amount of time we spend in traffic. In order for these policies to reflect the values and priorities of citizens, it's imperative for the public to become involved in the planning process.

### Master Plans

A master plan is a guide that's intended to help shape local decisions. It helps the community understand current conditions and build a vision for the future—and identify what actions they need to take to achieve that vision. To do this, plans make recommendations about the development of land and public services like schools, roads, and sewer and water lines. In communities that are zoned, they also serve as the foundation for zoning ordinance regulations, which control how land and buildings are developed and used.

State law allows all local governments, including townships, cities, villages, and counties, to adopt plans. They're created by the community's planning commission, with help from staff or consultants.

### Public Input

Because the purpose of the plan is to create a shared vision of the community's future, public participation is one of the most important steps in the planning process. To get input, the planning commission may conduct a survey, hold a visioning session, or invite citizens to be part of a steering committee. Public input is used, along with background studies and analysis of the community's population, environment, transportation systems, and other features, to develop goals and objectives for the next 20 years or more.

### Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives are the “heart” of the master plan: they identify the community's priorities for the future and how it will achieve its goals. They might include recommendations on the future development of land, which is shown on a future land use map. For communities that have adopted zoning, the plan must also include a zoning plan.

### Putting the Plan into Action

The master plan is just a guide for a community—it does not have the force of law. A community might adopt an excellent master plan, but it will only be effective if the public and the local government are willing to put its goals into practice.

- Zoning regulates how and where development occurs and is the most common means of implementing a master plan.
- Tax breaks or other economic incentives available through brownfield authorities, land bank authorities, economic development corporations, and other governmental entities can encourage development in certain areas.
- Recommendations that are beyond the scope of the local government may require partnerships with nonprofits or other community partners.
- New or remodeled public buildings, parks, and major equipment are all considered capital improvements.
- Other local ordinances can also be used to implement parts of an adopted plan—such as junk ordinances, housing inspections, erosion prevention, solid waste management, or land division and subdivision ordinances.

### Zoning Ordinances

A zoning ordinance is a local law that regulates land and buildings in order to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of all citizens. Together with the master plan, the zoning ordinance is an important tool

that allows the community to guide development and land use in a way that achieves their long term goals.

### Zoning Districts and Map

A zoning ordinance divides a township, village, city, or county into different districts (zones). The zoning map shows the legal boundaries for each district. Districts regulate the uses, building size, and other features for all properties in the district. Zoning districts are often based on the types of uses that are allowed, with separate districts for residential, commercial, agriculture, recreation, and industrial development.

### Types of Regulations

Each zoning district includes sets of regulations designed to ensure that development is safely designed. Regulations address use, dimensions, and other aspects of development:

- Use regulations state what types of land use can be located in each zoning district. Some uses are allowed “by right,” which means they can be allowed through a simple application process. Others, called special uses, are subject to extra requirements and additional review. These are more intensive uses that need additional review in order to protect the neighborhood from any negative impacts.
- Dimensional regulations control features such as building height, floor area, yard area, and the building footprint, or outline.
- Setbacks control the distance between the building and the street or property line. Setbacks are specified for the front, side, and rear of a lot.
- Density regulations limit the number of homes or other buildings that may be built on a piece of land. Usually this is done by requiring a minimum property size—such as one home per acre.

Ordinances also include general development standards that regulate features of larger developments, including parking, landscaping, lighting, and street layout.

### Administration

The zoning ordinance is developed by the planning



commission, and is approved by the legislative body (i.e. the city council or township board). The zoning administrator reviews applications for land use permits and other requests, and interprets the ordinance to determine if new developments or uses meet its requirements.

### Master Plans & Zoning Ordinances

A community’s master plan and zoning ordinance are closely linked. State law requires zoning ordinances to be based on a master plan; and the zoning ordinance also offers important ways to achieve a master plan’s goals. By defining appropriate uses of land, regulating density, and creating standards for development, the zoning ordinance offers clear direction on where and how development should occur. It’s important to remember, though, that the master plan is a guide without the force of law behind it, while zoning is an enforceable law. Because it affects the use and value of private property, state law is very specific about how zoning ordinances are structured, what’s included, and how zoning authority can be limited. In order to meet these legal obligations, while balancing community goals with the interests of property owners, zoning ordinances are often complex legal documents.

## Local Leadership

Anyone can get involved in local land use issues. To do so, it's very important to become familiar with the key players. Depending on the issue you're interested in, you may need to get to know the local legislative body, planning commission, zoning board of appeals, and local government staff.

### Legislative Body

The local legislative body is elected by the public every 2-4 years to represent the community. These bodies— including boards, councils, or commissions—make the final decisions on zoning, and in some cases (but not all) they are the final authority on plan adoption. They also control, through appointments to the planning commission and oversight of staff, how local ordinances are administered. Their responsibilities include:

- Adopting plans and ordinances
- Setting the tax rates
- Authorizing expenditures and borrowing
- Hiring administrative staff
- Providing oversight of public facilities and infrastructure
- Appointing members to the planning commission and zoning board of appeals
- Other duties as necessary

### Planning Commission

The planning commission is an important advisory group that is appointed by the legislative body to develop plans. For communities with zoning authority, it also prepares and makes recommendations on zoning ordinances, zoning changes, special use or planned developments, and site plans. The planning commission can serve as the final authority on some of these matters - but only when authorized by the zoning ordinance.

Planning commissions are made up of 5-11 citizen volunteers that serve a 3 year term. Some members may have a land use background like engineering, architecture, or development, but this experience isn't

required. Planning commissioners may be appointed based on their ability to represent different segments or interests of the community—such as schools, farming, or business. A planning commission is generally expected to:

- Develop and maintain a master plan
- Develop capital improvement plans, recreation plans, and other community plans
- Develop a zoning ordinance and map
- Review rezoning applications, site plans, and planned unit development applications
- Review the community's property purchases and development projects

### Zoning Board of Appeals

All zoned communities must appoint a zoning board of appeals, or ZBA. The ZBA hears appeals on requirements or on zoning decisions, and can grant variances to regulations in order to change one or more requirements of the zoning ordinance. In order to receive a variance, the property owner must show that the zoning regulation creates a hardship or prevents the development of the property. On request, the ZBA also provides interpretation of language in the zoning ordinance. The responsibilities, makeup and procedures of planning commissions and elected officials vary from community to community. However, regardless of the community's individual government structure, and whether officials are elected, appointed, or hired, it is the imperative of local government and staff to serve the interests of the community. Citizens are encouraged to contact their local officials and staff to communicate their interests, learn about local issues, and find out how they can get involved.

## Getting Involved

The planning process is designed to allow the public to take an active part in shaping the futures of their communities. Unfortunately, many citizens don't get involved until late in the process, when there's controversy over a proposal in their community. But

the stage is usually set for these decisions long before this point, and it may be difficult to change the outcome by the time a proposal is presented. and local government staff. For this reason, the public sometimes feels disenfranchised from the local decision-making process. But even if a particular proposal's outcome isn't ultimately determined by public input, there are many ways citizens can engage in the planning process in order to effect long-term change and improve the community as a whole:

**Stay informed.** By attending meetings, reading written records of meetings, and talking with staff and elected officials, citizens can stay up-to-date on community land use issues.

**Take part in the creation of plans and zoning ordinances.** This is one of the best ways to influence your community over the long term, and gives the public a strong voice in guiding development before it occurs. You can help create plans and ordinances by participating in visioning sessions, commenting on draft plans and ordinances at public hearings, or by serving on committees that are working to develop them.

**Attend public hearings or send written comments to elected and appointed officials.** Public hearings

are an important way for citizens to make their voice heard—but the nature of a public hearing sometimes results in a confrontational approach to public comment. In order to negotiate your position effectively, it's important to take a factual, focused, unemotional approach. Some key points to remember when making public comment:

- Protect your credibility. Avoid personal attacks or statements that cannot be verified.
- Be prepared with a short speech that highlights the critical issues.
- Be clear and concise, with specific suggestions about the proposal.
- Focus on the issues. If the topic is a development proposal, focus on whether or not the proposal meets the standards of the ordinance.
- Use good research and rely on facts, rather than assumptions or emotion.
- Don't make statements in favor of excluding some types of people.
- Make sure you thoroughly understand the proposal that you are commenting on. If you're not sure how to interpret parts of the proposal,



work with staff or consult other planning resources.

- Show support for your position by encouraging participation from other citizens that share the same position.

#### *Work with local government officials and staff.*

Local officials are elected or appointed to represent the interests of the community; and staff can provide a great deal of information on planning in general and on specific proposals. In addition, stakeholders and service providers interested in community health, safety, and welfare can also offer support to local staff by providing information and resources on how the issues under consideration by the local unit of government impact, or are impacted by, community health, safety, and welfare.

*Seek elected or appointed office.* Almost any citizen over the age of 18 can run for local office or apply for a seat on the planning commission, zoning board of appeals, or other committee.

*Join or begin a citizen's network to stay engaged on community activities.* Regardless of how you choose to get involved, your role in planning is critical. Public participation is the only way to ensure that new development is part of a shared vision of what the community wants and needs. By staying engaged throughout the planning process, you can not only help create that vision, but also work to make it a reality.

## More Information

This information is excerpted from A Citizen's Guide to Planning and Zoning in Northwest Michigan. The complete guide is available online at [www.newdesignsforgrowth.com/pages/smartgrowthresources/citizenplanningresources.html](http://www.newdesignsforgrowth.com/pages/smartgrowthresources/citizenplanningresources.html).

# What Is Community Health, Safety, and Welfare?

*The purpose of this Ordinance is to protect the public health, safety, morals and general welfare of the inhabitants of...*

*It is the legislative intent of the city council in adopting this Code, that all provisions and sections of this chapter be liberally construed to protect and preserve the peace, health, safety and welfare of the inhabitants of the city...*

When local governments make decisions about policy, spending, and community improvements, their ordinances and organizational documents guide them towards a clear goal: to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. But, while the goal may be clear, the specific components of what, exactly, constitutes public health, safety, and welfare may vary by community or individual.

Traditionally, local policy decisions have focused on structural issues and the built environment: zoning and development regulations, infrastructure, parks and recreation opportunities, and environmental protection and remediation. Today, evidence is growing that local decisions about the built environment have clear



and substantial connections to our social environment. As we develop a greater understanding of how our social interactions and issues play out in the built environment, it becomes more important to consider these social factors—including the ability to meet our basic needs, maintain and improve behavioral health, and protect and enhance child and family welfare—when making decisions about policies that affect our neighborhoods and communities. To better place these issues in the local context, this guidebook refers to these social factors as elements of **community health, safety, and welfare**.

So what does community health, safety, and welfare mean, and

what does it include? Community health assessments, public participation in regional planning processes like the *Framework for Our Future*, and stakeholder input have identified priority issues that communities are facing in Northwest Michigan. Of those issues, many cannot, or may not, be effectively addressed at the local policy level. However, stakeholder input has identified some issues related to basic needs, behavioral health, and child and family welfare that have a clear linkage to local policy issues. These issues are outlined below, with local policy impacts on each issue explored in Section 3.

## Basic Needs

### Income and employment

To meet its basic needs—that is, food, water, clothing, and shelter—a household or individual needs adequate income. For many households in Northwest Michigan, this most foundational need—that of an adequate income—is a primary challenge. To identify the number of households that are struggling to make ends meet, the United Way has developed data on households that are considered *Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*—or ALICE for short. ALICE households have incomes above the poverty threshold, but still struggle to afford basic household necessities. Nearly 40% of households in Northwest Michigan are considered to be struggling to meet basic needs, due in part to the type of employment available, costs of living, and workforce readiness.

*A Framework for Talent in Northwest Michigan* reports that of available jobs in the ten-county region, a high percentage are hospitality-related positions, which generally have a lower pay scale and are often seasonal. Public input heard throughout the *Framework for Our Future* process indicated that the low wages and temporary or part-time nature of these occupations create difficulties for employees: many don't receive employer benefits, and many are unemployed during



the winter months. Even year-round jobs are significantly impacted by seasonality issues, with less work or income for employees off-season. For these lower-wage employees, seasonally-impacted employment can also come with barriers in obtaining services or assistance; in applying for loans or credit; or in renting or purchasing homes.

Regardless of industry, lower wages— and even average wages— often aren't enough for workers to cover basic living expenses in Northwest Michigan. In Northwest Michigan, wages tend to be lower, and expenses higher, than statewide averages. For a single worker earning the region's average earnings of about \$43,000 annually, expenses account for about half of total wages, and for single parents earning the region's average income, basic annual living expenses consume all of their

annual wages. Workers statewide earn more—\$55,786 annually, on average—and pay less for basic living expenses.

Workers earning below-average wages in Northwest Michigan struggle to make ends meet, even when working fulltime; and the many regional residents that must spend more than average for transportation, heating, or housing costs experience extreme financial instability.

### Food access, insecurity, and affordability

Food insecurity is defined by the USDA as a lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members, and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. Lack of access to food in Northwest Michigan means, primarily, that a household cannot afford enough food, but it can also be connected to an individual or



# Northwest Michigan's Aging Population

Northwest Michigan has a higher-than-average concentration of older residents when compared to the state or the nation. While this is due in part to the region's appeal as a retirement destination, the trend is also impacted by natural population and aging trends, and from the region's economic and demographic conditions.

Many rural communities nationwide have experienced a decline in younger populations. The out-migration of younger individuals, combined with the already-higher rates of seniors in rural communities, creates an imbalance wherein seniors make up a larger percentage of rural communities than in other areas. This holds true in Northwest Michigan, where seniors are the fastest growing population group in the region, and where the proportion of seniors as a percentage of the population is expected to continue to increase. Natural age increases that are occurring as the Baby Boomer generation reaches retirement age are compounded by large numbers of retirees that are relocating to communities in Northwest Michigan post-retirement. At the same time, Michigan's "Great Recession," combined with the lack of year-round employment or higher education opportunities in many communities, have resulted in a significant decline in the numbers of younger individuals and families.

An aging population creates an increased demand for specific services, particularly related to health care. Demand for services related to chronic disease and pain management, dementia, case management needs, transportation for medical needs, preventative care services, accessing affordable care, and end-of-life planning will increase as the population ages. Exacerbating the demand for these services is the fact that many of the young families and individuals leaving the region over the last ten years represent important family support for seniors. And, for those retirees who have recently relocated to the area, family or social supports may not be in place at all. Without these supports present to provide much of the day-to-day care for these seniors, many seniors may need to rely more heavily on services from regional and local agencies.

The aging of the population also has profound implications for the workforce and the economy. As Baby Boomers—our nation's largest population group—reach retirement age and beyond, the nation is experiencing major shifts in service demand, housing needs, and health care. Because of the sheer volume of seniors, these issues are occurring at a greater intensity and volume than ever before in US history. Addressing these needs will be particularly important for Northwest Michigan, where existing age imbalances and growing senior populations, combined with an out-flow of younger workers that can provide services and support, will exacerbate demand and need.



household's ability to walk or drive to stores or pantries.

Food insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all the time. Rather, food insecurity may reflect a household's need to make tradeoffs between important basic needs, such as housing or medical bills, and purchasing nutritionally adequate foods.

In Northwest Michigan, over 40,000 individuals are considered food insecure. On average, about 27% of those individuals are not eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or other nutrition programs like the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, which provides food assistance to income-eligible families and individuals.

### Access to health care

Community needs assessments, public input, and diverse health agencies have identified access to care as a high-priority concern for many communities throughout Northwest Michigan. Related issues include:

- A shortage of both primary care physicians and specialists
- Lack of providers for some specialized services and for new Medicaid patients
- Unaffordable medications
- Increased need for preventive care services
- Lack of access to dental care for people in poverty
- Increased demand from aging



population

### Healthy lifestyles

Physical activities and exercise play an important part in preventing and addressing obesity. However, the design of some neighborhoods and communities discourages physical activity. In some cases, neighborhood or subdivision design creates conditions in which it is difficult or unsafe for residents to walk and bike. In other cases, neighborhoods may not have good access to parks and other recreation opportunities that provide important options for exercise and fitness.

### Environmental health

The environment we live in directly affects our health. Environmental factors like poor air quality contribute to cancers, cardiovascular disease, asthma, and other illnesses, while poor water quality can lead to gastrointestinal illness and a host of other conditions, including neurological problems and cancer.

Additionally, some chemicals in and around homes and workplaces can contribute to acute poisonings and other toxic effects. Other factors, including those in our built environment, such as poor quality housing, can cause or exacerbate chronic illnesses, or can contribute to unhealthy lifestyles.

### Accessibility

Disabled individuals have specific needs and challenges related to accessibility, both in homes and in public spaces. Accessible or barrier-free housing is very limited throughout the region. Additional community challenges for the disabled include contending with transportation systems that are designed around private vehicles. For disabled individuals who can't drive, transit options are limited, and many residential neighborhoods and homes lack connections to services, jobs, or shopping. Street crossings, paths, and sidewalks may be too narrow for or otherwise not accommodate wheelchairs or

those with other mobility impairments.

## Housing/Shelter

Northwest Michigan is experiencing a well-documented shortage of housing—particularly rental housing—that’s affordable to a broad range of income levels.

The short supply of available and affordable housing leaves many families with few choices but to live in deteriorating or inadequate homes, which has been shown to increase exposure to allergens, indoor air pollutants, and extreme hot or cold temperatures. These conditions, in turn, can lead to the development of chronic or infectious diseases and increased mortality rates among some populations.

Other families that can’t afford housing may have to “double up” with relatives or friends, leading to overcrowding, which comes with increased risks of health hazards like communicable diseases and stress, and places children in vulnerable situations—for instance, living with individuals that may be more prone to physical or sexual abuse. And families those that live in unaffordable housing have less expendable income, reducing the resources available for healthy food, child care, and health care. Fewer resources can in turn can result in hunger, stress, and decreased access to health care.



## Behavioral Health

### Substance abuse/addiction

Addiction is a complex condition, a brain disease that is manifested by compulsive substance use despite harmful consequence. People with addiction, or severe substance use disorder, have an intense focus on using a certain substance, such as alcohol or drugs, to the point that it takes over their life.

Addictive disorders have far-reaching impacts for individuals, families, and communities. For individuals, there are tremendous impacts on health and well-being, up to and including overdose and death. Untreated addiction can destabilize employment and subsequently income, thereby increasing the risk of housing insecurity or homelessness. It is a contributing factor in domestic violence and child abuse and neglect, and is strongly associated with crime and public safety.

At the community level, consequences for local law enforcement, courts, and the jail and prison system are profound: addiction-related crimes and drug abuse incur enormous costs. Local governments and medical

providers, meanwhile, bear the expense of increased demand for emergency services and law enforcement. And employers in some industries struggle to find workers that can pass drug tests.

Alcohol and drug addiction affect millions of people nationwide, and have long been a primary public health concern. But today, the United States is experiencing an opioid addiction and overdose epidemic that has significantly altered communities nationwide, impacting mortality rates, especially among men; family and workplace dynamics; and the legal system. Northwest Michigan is no exception.

As addiction rates rise and associated impacts leave a ripple effect on the community, treatment options—including in-patient rehabilitation, long- and short-term residential treatment, methadone clinics, transitional housing or short-term residential treatment, or out-patient rehab – for drug and alcohol addiction become increasingly important.

### Mental Health Care and Treatment

Mental health issues impact nearly every family, and approximately

one in five Americans have a mental health problem in any given year. Yet only a little over a third of those with mental health issues will receive treatment or services.

Those who receive community mental health services after hospital stays are more likely to achieve full recovery or improvement in psychiatric status and social function. Services and treatment can dramatically improve health and well-being, and can increase an individual's chance of securing employment.

Treatment and recovery are closely connected to access to health care, along with its affordability. The inability to afford care is among the top reasons that people report not seeking treatment. Additionally, housing instability, or lack of available housing options, greatly reduces an individual's ability to begin or maintain effective treatment and recovery. Without appropriate treatment or housing options, people with mental illness may be more likely to remain unemployed, experience homelessness, require costly emergency hospitalization or other medical services, or incarceration—often for non-violent offenses. Untreated mental illness is also closely associated with substance abuse and addiction.

Problems associated with access to behavioral health issues were emphasized in the health assessment process, with issues including:



- A fragmented behavioral health system
- Difficulty accessing services for those with mild to moderate behavioral health issues
- Challenging transportation issues for those living in rural areas
- Lack of providers for some specialized services, such as children and substance abuse treatment
- Violence/crime

Health care access, along with appropriate housing options—including supportive housing—are necessary in improving public mental health.

## Child & Family Welfare

Child and family welfare is directly impacted by the full spectrum of community health, safety, and welfare issues—such as mental health, housing instability, and

substance abuse or addiction. The impact of these issues on children is profound and long-lasting, with consequences that reach into later life and even subsequent generations.

Child and family welfare issues might best be understood through the lens of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), or childhood events that negatively impact the child's future, including:

- Witnessing or experiencing verbal, psychological, physical, or sexual abuse;
- Living with household members who are substance abusers, mentally ill, suicidal or ever incarcerated;
- Living in a household with poor economic resources or with parents who divorced or separated after the child was born
- Exposure to racial or ethnic discrimination

ACEs have been linked to a range of poor health outcomes in adulthood, including substance abuse, depression, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and premature mortality. They impact the current health of individuals and can predict future individual and intergenerational health and social outcomes.

In addition to the health and economic issues that are considered other community health, safety, and welfare issues, specific ACEs are outlined below.

### Child Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse occurs when a parent or caregiver, whether through action or failing to act, causes injury, death, emotional harm or risk of serious harm to a child. There are many forms of child maltreatment, including neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation and emotional abuse.

Data show that more families are investigated, and more victims are confirmed, at a rate that's higher in Northwest Michigan than the state as a whole.

Preventing child abuse and neglect requires a community-wide network of resources and support to minimize risk factors—including treatment for drug and alcohol abuse, providing additional housing options for vulnerable families in unsafe situations, improving awareness of signs of child abuse and reporting procedures, and building social

connections for parents and families.

To prevent and stop child abuse and neglect, social supports are critical. Children must have trusted adults with whom they can share their experience and from whom they can ask for help. When families or children are isolated or disconnected from the community, without social support or services, it can be more difficult for victims to seek help, and for others to see signs of abuse and take action to report and prevent it. It's important to build those social connections into the fabric of a community, through institutions like schools, churches, and community centers. At the same time, ensuring that all families have access to services and adequate housing options are vital for providing a "way out" for children or families in abusive or unsafe situations.

### Early childhood education & development

The years from birth to five are a critical time in the life of a child. During this time, the brain has the capacity to form more new neurological connections than at any other phase of development. 90% of the brain's architecture is built and most of the foundation for language, social behavior, problem solving ability and emotional health is created in the first five years.

With positive stimulation, healthy learning experiences, stable family

and social environments, and other positive inputs, children grow up with greater capacity to learn and succeed. Under the wrong conditions, neurological development suffers, with consequences that can impact an individual's ability to succeed in school and later on in the workplace.

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Research has shown that rates of domestic and family violence are higher in rural areas, and difficulties in accessing services in those areas are greater—particularly if the victim doesn't have access to a vehicle.

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### Domestic violence

Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner's consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other.

Data from the Michigan State Police report 2,199 domestic violence crimes in Northwest Michigan in 2014.

Domestic violence affects individuals in every community, regardless of age, economic status, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, or nationality. It can result in physical injury, psychological trauma, and in severe cases, even death. The devastating physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of domestic violence can cross generations and last a lifetime. At the community level, domestic violence increases the costs of healthcare services, social and welfare services, counseling, police and criminal justice services, legal services, transportation costs, and housing and other refuge services used by victims of domestic violence and special education services used to treat children of abused women.

Northwest Michigan stakeholders report that a primary issue associated with domestic violence is isolation. Isolation from family, friends, and other social supports is a key characteristic of domestic violence: it increases the abuser's control over victims and prevents them from seeking help. The geographic isolation experienced in rural areas or remote locations enables the social isolation that domestic violence. Research has shown that rates of domestic and family violence are higher in rural areas, and difficulties in accessing services in those areas are greater—particularly if the victim doesn't have access to a vehicle. Without transportation options, those that attempt to seek help for



domestic violence may not be able to access what limited services are available. What's more, without adequate affordable housing options, victims may not have anywhere else to go.



## Section 2:

Local Government Tools for  
Community Health, Safety, & Welfare

# Leadership & Awareness

While long-term policy and budget decisions are critical to improving communities' health, safety, and welfare, these health and welfare issues come with immediate and pressing needs.

Many of these needs are addressed at some level by local or regional initiatives and programs that are driven by individual organizations, community collaboratives, public health agencies, and many others.

One of the first opportunities for local governments that are working to address the full spectrum of community health, safety, and welfare is through participation in and support of those ongoing initiatives. In fact, their participation in these initiatives is a cornerstone of their success.

By their very definition, local governments are community leaders. They set policy, make decisions about how to spend taxpayer dollars, and maintain public facilities and infrastructure. acting as champions, leaders, and supporters—either informally or formally. When they turn their leadership to community health, safety, and welfare, by **building awareness** and acting in **supporting roles**, they can boost the profile, build momentum, aid in funding applications, and create understanding around important



community solutions.

## Building Awareness

Solutions to the complex problems faced by our communities require awareness and understanding among the community as a whole. As elected leaders, local governments are at the forefront of community conversations, and set the tone for new public initiatives through their policy agendas.

Policy agendas are influenced by a number of factors. Among the most important of those factors are what issues are considered by the by the community to be significant problems, and which of those the community perceives it has a responsibility to address. Local governments have a very visible “stage” on which to act in influencing these factors. Their

decisions and discussions are frequent subjects of media coverage: when local leaders talk, the community listens. Thus, when key leaders choose to support a topic, they create an environment in which it can rise to the top of a policy agenda.

To build awareness, local governments can:

- Act as a champion. Local governments can take the lead as a champion for new policies or initiatives that can build the support needed for success.
- Join forces in awareness campaigns. Communities can consider signing on as a participant in a collaborative initiative through resolutions, by designating a representative or staff person



to participate, or acting as a sponsor, co-sponsor or partner of the initiatives.

For example, in Leelanau County, the County Board of Commissioners created and supported a Housing Action Council. The group includes diverse representation from multiple sectors throughout the County that are working to identify and implement solutions to housing needs.

Other examples of local government participation in building awareness are as simple as passing resolutions in support of community-wide initiatives. When elected leaders sign on to express their understanding and support of ideas such as Health in All Policies (see sidebar) or becoming a trauma-informed community, they bring further legitimacy and community attention that can raise the profile—and potential for success—of initiatives that require broad community understanding and support.

## Supporting Roles

The programs and initiatives that serve our communities require time and resources to make them successful. Especially for the collaborative initiatives that are necessary to holistically address community health, safety, and welfare, where no one agency “owns” the initiative, it’s critical to have staff that can provide a supportive “backbone” role. Often, administrative dollars to support

these new initiatives, or even existing organizations, are scarce; and many promising solutions struggle to get off the ground because of inadequate staff or administrative resources.

To support new or collaborative efforts, local and county governments may consider dedicating staff time or local resources for functions such as:

- Meeting facilitation and consensus building
- Technology and communications support
- Data collection and reporting
- Synthesizing research
- Drafting and management of documents
- Overseeing implementation of projects
- Seeking funding
- Organizing and summarizing expert and public input
- Building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders
- Handling logistical and administrative details

Local government staff support provides a steady hand - the consistent support that’s needed for solutions to be successful. For example, in Grand Traverse County, county staff supported the administrative functions of Homestretch, a nonprofit housing developer, until the organization was able to hire full-time staff.

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Solutions to the complex problems faced by our communities require awareness and understanding among the community as a whole. As elected leaders, local governments are at the forefront of community conversations, and set the tone for new public initiatives through their policy agendas.

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## Working With Partners

Partnerships between local governments and service providers/organizations go both ways: service providers can support local government by serving in an important (unofficial) advisory or “expert” capacity to local units of government when new projects, policies, or programs might have an impact on community health, safety, and welfare. For instance, it may be clear that a new housing project may have an impact on vulnerable populations—but the local government might have questions about the need for housing, the potential impacts on neighboring areas, and how impacts can best be managed. Data, case studies, and other information from service providers and agencies can help the community understand what might be at stake, and how the community might best respond to local needs.

Stakeholders and service

providers interested in community health, safety, and welfare can also play an important advocacy role when projects, new policies, or budgets are under consideration. Public meetings and public hearings offer opportunities to speak for or against projects and policies that may have community health, safety, and welfare impacts. (see pages \_ for more information on how to participate through public comment).



## Best Practice: Health in All Policies

The concept of “Health in All Policies” is a collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas. The approach recognizes that our greatest health challenges are highly complex and closely linked, requiring action around the “social determinants” of health—such as transportation, education, access to healthy food, economic opportunities, and more. It identifies the ways in which decisions in multiple sectors affect health, and how better health can support the goals of those multiple sectors. It engages diverse governmental partners and stakeholders to work together to promote health, equity, and sustainability, while simultaneously advancing other goals like job creation, transportation access, and educational attainment. The ultimate goal of Health in All Policies is to ensure that all decision-makers are informed about the health consequences of various policy options during the policy development process.

*Health in All Policies: A Guide for State and Local Government*, a guidebook developed by the Public Health Insite, is available online at visit [www.phi.org](http://www.phi.org).

## Leadership Best Practice: Becoming a Trauma-Informed Community

Many community health, safety, and welfare issues are directly or indirectly connected to *trauma*. Trauma is an overwhelming event or events that renders an individual helpless, powerless, and creates a threat of harm and/or loss, along with an internalization of the experience that continues to impact the person’s development as well as their perception of self, others, and the world. Trauma-informed communities use this information as a lens to better understand individual and collective actions and decisions.

### WHAT DOES A TRAUMA INFORMED COMMUNITY LOOK LIKE?

Trauma –informed communities educate themselves and their stakeholders on what trauma is and how it impacts individuals, and consider policies and decisions on community health, safety, and welfare from a trauma -informed perspective.

- Shift thinking from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”
- Engage in education, training, and conversations around trauma, resilience, and other social determinants of health.
- Support trauma specific services and interventions in healthcare, education, and social services.
- Use “universal precautions,” assuming everyone has experienced some kind of hardship and treating people with kindness, understanding, and respect.
- Encourage others and promote a sense of community and connectedness.
- Take care of ourselves and consider how our own experiences impact our relationships and interactions.
- Participate in self-reflection, exploring how implicit bias, systemic oppression, historical factors, and privilege play a role in perpetuating traumatized individuals and communities.

# Budgeting for Community Health, Safety, and Welfare

One of the most important, and challenging, roles of local government is as a steward of taxpayer resources.

These resources, including taxes, fines, and fees for specific services, fund local government services that benefit the community in general. As a limited public resource, their use is inherently political: determining where and how those dollars should be spent is a delicate balancing act that requires negotiation and consideration of community needs and available resources. And all of these considerations occur against the emotionally charged backdrop of local politics. What's more, many aspects of a local government's environment are influenced by state and federal levels of government. Local officials generally have little influence over these levels of government and usually only react and adapt to their respective mandates, available grants, and legal requirements.

However, budgeting remains one of the most powerful and impactful tools in the local government toolbox; and consideration of community health, safety, and welfare in the budgeting process can truly "move the needle" on important community solutions.



## Local Expenditures

There is no question that community health, safety, and welfare is an important financial obligation for local and county governments: it makes up a significant proportion of expenditures by county government, accounting for 24% of an average Northwest Michigan county budget. Public safety, which has many profound and direct correlations with community health, safety, and welfare issues, which can make up over half of the county budget (see chart).

Many community health, safety, and welfare expenditures in a county's budget are related to mandated services like public health departments or veteran's

affairs. Outside of these mandated services, however, local governments have other opportunities within their annual budget process to support community health, safety, and welfare.

Services paid for by the municipality for its residents and businesses are considered "public expenditures." Under state law, all public expenditures are for public purposes only. Generally, allowable expenditures fall into the following categories:

- The "general fund" covers general government services and staff, including council, manager, finance, clerk, etc.
- Public safety, including police, fire, code enforcement and inspections

- Public works, including streets, drains, sidewalks, engineering, water and sewer, and other infrastructure.
- Parks, recreation, and cultural amenities like libraries and museums.

Within those categories, local governments can consider line items for specific community programs or needs, including capital improvements, transportation, and local program support.

### Capital Improvements

Community facilities like buildings, equipment, and land are known as “capital assets,” and changes to those facilities are referred to as “capital improvements.” Capital improvements or maintenance can make up a big chunk of a local budget. To be sure that capital assets are budgeted for and managed as efficiently as possible, communities may develop capital improvement plans or replacement schedules.

When planning for capital improvements/new facilities, local governments may consider what community health, safety, and welfare needs can be impacted by new or shared facilities.

Sometimes, public buildings that are unused or under-used can serve a vital function for programs that need building space. Or, new community center buildings might be designed to include space that meets community health, safety, and welfare needs:

- Community centers with youth



-focused programming have been effective in building the social supports needed for victims of abuse and neglect, For example, in Interlochen, the new library includes community center space that can provide some of those functions.

- Communities can also consider providing space to organizations that are working to meet local needs. For instance, some communities have provided low- or no-cost space to function as a homeless shelter or as community center space. These shared space agreements can be conducted through a lease, or through an operating agreement that minimizes costs while ensuring that local nonprofits are able to meet community needs within limited budgets. One example is the City of Traverse City's agreement with Safe Harbor, which will use a

vacant City-owned building to operate a seasonal homeless shelter through an agreement with the City.

### Transportation Improvements

While funding for transportation improvements comes from a variety of local, state, and federal agencies, many of the decisions about how that money is spent are made at the local and county level. Projects are prioritized by a process including multiple local, regional, and state transportation stakeholders; then, when funding becomes available, it is applied to the highest priority projects.

Typically, road improvements and maintenance are considered the highest-priority transportation projects. But many of our most vulnerable populations don't or can't drive, instead depending on sidewalks and trails to connect them to jobs, services, school, and shopping. These connections are missing in many parts of our communities, while non-motorized

connections that do exist, especially in lower-income neighborhoods, may be unsafe. And those that can't walk or bike to meet their daily needs depend on transit—which is limited throughout the region due to cost and geography.

When budgeting for and prioritizing transportation projects, communities might therefore consider increased funding for transportation projects that meet the needs of people who don't drive:

- Building or improving safe sidewalks and trails to connect lower-income neighborhoods, senior housing, or other residential areas to other parts of the community can provide transportation options for people without a car.
- Transit is an important option for those who can't or don't drive. Transit funding from state and federal agencies is

limited, and often requires additional financial support from local millages—a process that requires county and local support.

### Local Program Expenditures

The most direct, immediate impact local governments can have with their budget is to actually provide funding for community programs, services, or needs. Many governments already do, through allocations to community mental health, commissions on aging, veterans affairs, and public health departments, which are mandated by the state.

In addition to these mandated expenditures, local governments can consider line items for specific community programs or needs. They may choose to enhance services offered through local departments, like the commission on aging or county health department, by passing additional

millages, allocating general fund dollars, or seeking and applying for grants. These funds are vital in supporting the missions of organizations and local departments that are working to serve the basic needs of a community's most vulnerable populations.

Because needs are great and resources are limited, budget considerations for local programs might benefit from a structured approach based on community consensus around a particular issue. One example of how this might work is the concept of a housing trust fund. Housing trust funds dedicate local, public funds to local housing programs. When creating a housing trust fund, communities identify housing priorities and how local funds can be spent, and then issue dollars as grants or loans to eligible projects (see sidebar).

Grand Traverse County established a housing trust fund

## Best Practice: Housing Trust Funds

Local governments can also consider tools like housing trust funds, which dedicate local, public funds to local housing programs. Examples of public funds that have been used in other communities include proceeds from the sale of tax-foreclosed properties and tax-increment financing revenues. When creating a housing trust fund, communities identify housing priorities and how local funds can be spent, and then issue dollars as grants or loans to eligible projects. These funds are often more flexible than other sources of funding. Flexible, local funding sources are becoming increasingly important as state and federal funding for rural areas declines while demand rises; and stiff competition, policy changes, and grant administration requirements result in an increasingly difficult financing environment.

Revenue sources that have been used for housing trust funds include proceeds from the sale of tax-foreclosed properties and tax-increment financing revenues.

that's linked to the County Land Bank Authority. After developing criteria for how dollars could be used, housing trust fund revenues were used as a grant to aid with a land purchase for an affordable housing project in a well-connected neighborhood within the City of Traverse City.

### Millage Requests

Every property in a community is subject to multiple taxing authorities: schools, transit authorities, road commissions, and other public agencies can all levy property taxes, known as millages. These taxes provide funding for specific purposes, like road improvements and government facilities. They're important for many services that meet the needs of community health, safety, and welfare—like services offered by county commissions on aging, transit, libraries, and recreation facilities.

To take effect, millages must be approved by voters on a local ballot; but first, a local government must approve the language and agree to place it on the ballot. If an agency brings forward a ballot proposal, local governments can consider that proposal in the context of meeting local needs for community health, safety, and welfare when deciding whether to allow the language to appear on the ballot. Because they're approved by voters, millages reflect the priorities of the community. They're often used to support or expand services that already exist in a community—



such as transit, road repair, or senior services, which are often provided through county commissions on aging. But sometimes the public advocates for a new millage that would be used for a very specific purpose, or for a new program. Examples in Northwest Michigan include farmland preservation initiatives and the preservation of natural areas. Outside of the region, in Ottawa County, voters passed a “mental health” millage to increase funding for their community mental health agency. In Kalamazoo County, meanwhile, voters approved a millage in 2016 that will provide funding for six years to the Local Housing Assistance Fund.

### Revenue Sources

Before local governments can make decisions about whether to spend dollars on public projects or improvements, the community first must understand whether there are resources available, or whether additional funding is

necessary—and where those dollars would come from.

Local government budgets are typically made up of revenue sources including:

- Property taxes, which are tied to the value of a property. Property taxes are often shared between multiple taxing authorities, such as school districts, county and local units of government, and special authorities like downtown development authorities.
- Intergovernmental revenues, such as revenue sharing with the State of Michigan.
- Fines and forfeitures, such as those from drug forfeiture proceeds or penal fines.
- Special assessments, which can be charged against property for a public improvement that confers a special benefit to that property that is different from the benefit enjoyed by the general

public. They're often used to construct and maintain local capital improvements such as water and sewer mains, street improvements, and sidewalks.

- Local governments also charge fees for some services, particularly when a service used by a distinct stakeholder group and when the local government's tax base does not support a wide range of services. Examples of fees might include those for engineering review fees, plan review fees, licenses, and permits.

Because these public resources are limited, there's often the sense that there simply isn't enough to go around for regular government programming, let alone to add expenditures that affect community health, safety, and welfare. But, when these projects or programs are a community priority, local governments can explore creative solutions, including the potential to draw from new revenues or alternative funding sources—such as grant dollars—for special projects. Local governments are eligible to apply for a wide variety of grants,

particularly when working in partnership with other agencies. In addition, state and federal agencies have grant programs specifically for many public projects like transportation improvements, public health projects, housing development and rehabilitation, parks and recreation, and more.

## County Expenditures on Health & Welfare and Public Safety in Northwest Michigan, 2015

	Health & Welfare Expenditures	Health & Welfare Expenditures as % of Total Budget	Public Safety Expenditures	Public Safety Expenditures as % of Total Budget	Total Expenditures
Antrim	\$1,900,000	15%	\$4,700,000	36%	\$12,932,264
Benzie	\$1,500,000	24%	\$3,700,000	58%	\$6,382,133
Charlevoix	\$3,200,000	23%	\$4,800,000	35%	\$13,849,085
Emmet	\$7,000,000	34%	\$5,300,000	26%	\$20,359,960
Grand Traverse	\$11,600,000	33%	\$16,900,000	49%	\$34,827,295
Kalkaska	\$1,600,000	23%	\$2,100,000	31%	\$6,809,185
Leelanau	\$1,800,000	13%	\$5,900,000	44%	\$13,384,148
Manistee	\$853,000	8%	\$4,500,000	42%	\$10,627,633
Missaukee	\$1,300,000	29%	\$2,600,000	57%	\$4,554,487
Wexford	\$2,000,000	16%	\$5,200,000	41%	\$12,675,071
Northwest Michigan	\$32,753,000	24%	\$55,700,000	41%	\$136,401,261

Data from Munetrix, 2015



## Public Health Agencies

Local and county governments are an important part of the human service landscape: county governments, in particular, are mandated by some state laws to fund or participate in public health-related activities. County governments are particularly instrumental in supporting community collaborative groups; public health departments; and community mental health services, through local representation and funding allocations.

## Community Collaboratives

Every county in Michigan has an established collaborative group that addresses issues impacting the lives of children, families, and special populations in their area. Previously known as human service collaborative bodies, Community Collaboratives are unincorporated coalitions of public, private, and non-profit agencies and businesses working together to coordinate services and aid in each county in Michigan. These local entities organize and coordinate to:

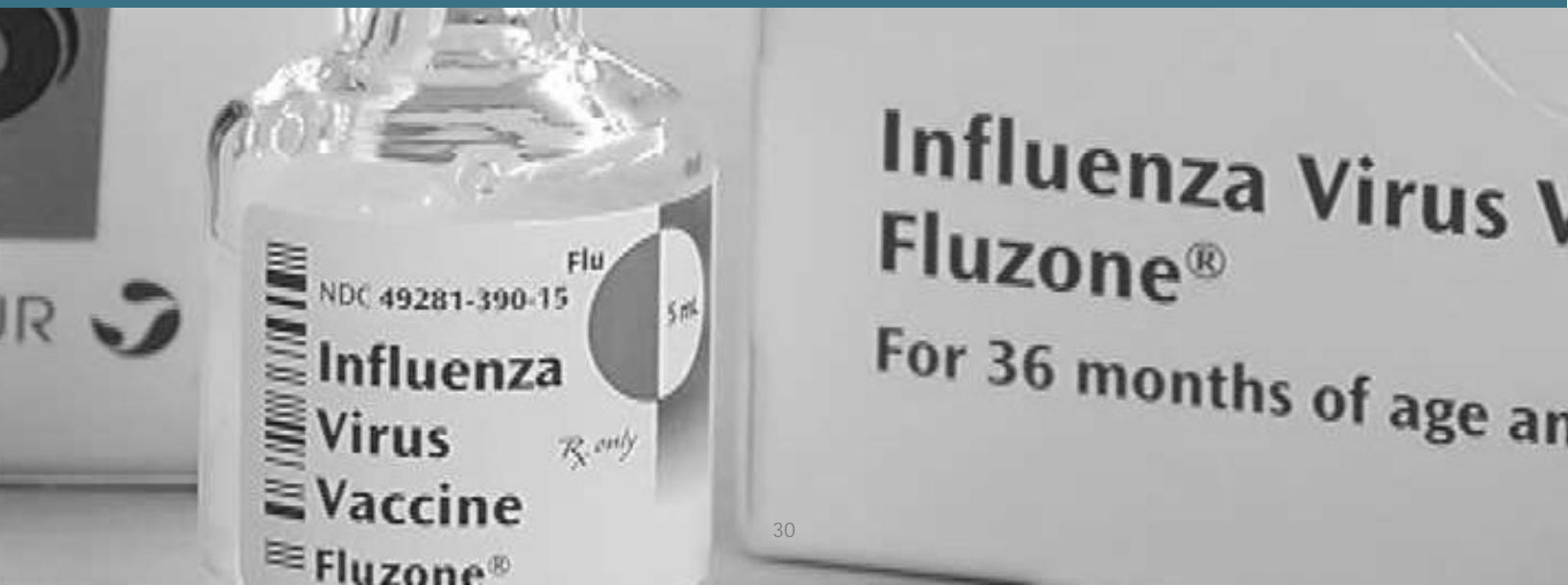
- Set the agenda for collaborative activities
- Focus resources on common outcomes
- Serve as common interface with state agencies on state collaborative efforts
- Conduct or use community assessments to perform their work

Often, a county commissioner is appointed to serve on a community collaborative. Groups are funded by membership dues, county appropriations, and funding from the State of Michigan Department of Human Services.

## Local Public Health Departments

County boards of commission are charged with creating and maintaining local health departments under Act 368 of 1978, Michigan's Public Health Code. Health departments, which can be organized for a single county or for multiple counties as part of a "district" health department, are charged with preventing communicable disease and protecting environmental health, through:

- Prevention and control of environmental health hazards
- Prevention and control of diseases
- Prevention and control of health problems of particularly vulnerable populations



- Development of health care facilities and health services delivery systems
- Regulation of health care facilities and health services delivery systems

Mandated, cost-shared services provided by public health departments include food protection; regulation of private groundwater/public water supply; on-site sewage disposal management; hearing screening; vision services; sexually transmitted disease control and prevention; immunizations; and infectious disease control. Health departments are also charged with addressing “imminent dangers,” responding to epidemics, and addressing unsafe or unsanitary buildings.

The State of Michigan reimburses counties up to 50% of costs expended on mandated activities.

## Community Mental Health

Community Mental Health Service Providers are established by Act 258 of 1974, Michigan’s Mental Health Code. These single or multi-county boards are responsible for planning, monitoring, and implementing health programs for persons with mental illness and developmental disabilities. CMH organizations are considered the “gatekeepers” of the public mental health system, and work to promote, and maintain, and improve comprehensive community-based mental health services. Services managed and delivered by CMHSPs are designed to assist individuals in achieving, maintaining, and maximizing their potential. They are provided in accordance with the principles of person-centered planning. The role of CMHSPs and their contracted provider networks is to:

- Provide the safety net for persons with severe and persistent mental illnesses, serious substance use disorders, serious emotional disturbance, and intellectual/developmental disabilities.
- Be the “network of choice” to effectively manage specialty services for Medicaid beneficiaries and for children enrolled in the MIChild program, in partnership with county, state and federal government agencies.
- Preserve and promote the value of serving and supporting individuals in the least restrictive setting by providing a full range of community-based services and supports (including housing, employment, transportation and other essential supports) and by providing community-based, long-term care for persons with psychiatric, substance use, and intellectual/developmental disabilities.
- Be a valued resource to community schools, jails, law enforcement/criminal justice organizations, primary care providers, and other community agencies and organizations.

Improve services to children and adolescents in partnership with other state and local organizations and agencies through collaborative planning, service coordination, and delivery.

## Commissions on Aging

County governments operate a “commission on aging” or council on aging, which typically coordinates programs and provides services to protect and safeguard the independence, well-being, and dignity of citizens of residents who are 60 years of age or older. Services are provided through federal, state, and county funds. In some counties, commissions on aging are supported in part with millage dollars, along with donations and volunteer assistance.

# Local Policy Impacts & Tools for Community Health, Safety, and Welfare

How to address zoning, taxes, infrastructure maintenance, parks and recreation: these are the decisions that face local governments on a daily basis.

The potential for local governments to affect community health, safety, and welfare needs through these decisions is enormous. Because there are many areas of potential overlap or impact, this section provides guidance on how basic needs, behavioral health, and child and family welfare correlate to local policies and tools available to local government like zoning and tax incentives. Some policies can achieve many objectives at once—for instance, improved street connectivity can have impacts in a wide range of community health, safety, and welfare issues—while others may be narrowly focused on a particular issue.

It's important to recognize that because community growth and change occurs slowly, impacts of any new policy direction may not be felt for many years. But for those working to address the structural, systemic issues behind community health, safety, and welfare, consideration of these policies and tools at the local level is a critical step in making real and long-lasting change.



# Housing: Policy Overview

## Local Government Roles

- Local planning commissions make decisions about zoning, which define where, what type, and how much of housing is built.
- Local elected boards make decisions about tax incentives and abatements, including payments-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOTs)
- Local elected boards enact and enforce rental inspection ordinances.
- County boards sometimes administer state funding for home repair programs.
- Local and county governments sometimes work in partnership with developers and community organizations to support housing goals and projects.

## Policy Tools

### Zoning for housing choices

Communities can consider zoning changes that, for instance, allow multi-family housing construction such as apartments or townhomes; create opportunities to add small homes to existing neighborhoods, through techniques such as cottage zoning or accessory dwelling units ; or plan for higher densities in areas with infrastructure and good access to nearby services or

jobs.

### Zoning for shelters/transitional housing/supportive housing

Shelters and transitional homes are often controversial topics in a community. Planning proactively to find appropriate locations for these critical facilities can smooth the process for organizations working to provide services and treatment, while ensuring that the community is supportive. Local governments may consider working in partnership with community organizations to determine needs and opportunities.

### Home repair and rehabilitation programs

Communities can take advantage of a variety of home repair or rehabilitation programs available through state or federal funding sources. These programs provide low-interest loans or grants to homeowners and property owners that are working to improve housing units.

### Rental Inspection Ordinances

Enacting rental inspection ordinances —particularly in communities with higher numbers of rentals and/or deteriorating homes—may provide some recourse for renters in deteriorating homes while improving the quality of homes in the community. Additionally,

### Incentives and abatements

An incentive known as a payment-in-lieu of-taxes (PILOT) programs is an important tool in incentivize affordable rental development at the local level. They lower the tax liability for developers of multi-family housing. In many cases, without the PILOT, the affordable development may not be financially viable. Communities can pass ordinances that provide guidance on when and how these incentives should be used. Incentive programs like brownfield redevelopment authorities and land bank authorities can aid in the development of affordable housing. Land bank authorities exist in some counties in the region, and offer opportunities for housing development, with incentives and development tools available to help with elements like site preparation activities, infrastructure costs, and land purchases. In some cases, they may make tax-foreclosed properties available at a low cost to nonprofits for the purposes of housing development, and may also partner in property purchases to lower the costs of development.

# Housing: Policy Connections

## Basic Needs

	What are housing-related issues?	What local policy tools are available?
<b>Income and Employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing costs, combined with lower-than-average wages, make homes unaffordable to the many families and households that are struggling to make ends meet.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing vouchers and subsidies</li> <li>Zoning for housing choices</li> <li>Provide incentives and abatements for desired types of housing</li> </ul>
<b>Shelter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing instability— caused by factors such as unaffordable housing, high energy or transportation costs, substandard housing, or housing discrimination—may result in the loss of housing through eviction or foreclosure. Compounding housing instability issues are issues that can cause or contribute to homelessness, such as alcohol or other drug abuse; divorce, separation, or other personal relationship issues; discharge from a hospital, jail, or prison; domestic or family violence; disability; and loss of income or unemployment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zoning for housing choices</li> <li>Zoning for shelters, transitional housing, and supportive housing</li> <li>Provide incentives and abatements for desired types of housing development</li> </ul>
<b>Healthy lifestyles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Substandard housing can expose inhabitants to air pollutants have been linked with respiratory illness and some types of cancer.</li> <li>Structural features in homes, including steep staircases and balconies, and substandard heating systems can result in injuries occurring at home, especially for seniors, children, and the disabled.</li> <li>Extreme low and high temperatures have been associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease and increased mortality, especially among vulnerable populations such as the elderly.</li> <li>Residential crowding has been linked with psychological distress among both adults and children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rental inspection ordinances</li> <li>Home repair and rehabilitation programs</li> <li>Housing vouchers and subsidies</li> </ul>
<b>Accessibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessible or barrier-free housing is needed by anyone who currently experiences, or may experience in the future, a disability. There is very limited availability of accessible housing units in Northwest Michigan. Long wait times exist for disabled individuals that are looking for accessible rentals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing vouchers and subsidies</li> </ul>

# Housing: Policy Connections

## Behavioral Health

	What are housing-related issues?	What local policy tools are available?
Substance abuse/addiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addiction can disrupt relationships with family and friends and cause people to lose their jobs—putting many people in unstable housing situations.</li> <li>Nationally, 35-40% of chronically homeless people suffer from severe substance use disorders. Often, substance abuse is a result of homelessness rather than a cause, as people turn to drugs and alcohol to cope with their homelessness.</li> <li>Stable housing during and after treatment for substance abuse/addiction decreases the risk of relapse. Treatment without housing has been shown to be inadequate, with better chances for recovery when combined with supported housing opportunities—including transitional housing, residential treatment programs, and long-term supportive housing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zoning for supportive housing</li> <li>Zoning for residential treatment facilities</li> </ul>
Mental health care and treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The effects of untreated mental illness can lead to unstable housing situations or homelessness.</li> <li>The lack of safe and affordable housing is one of the most powerful barriers to recovery. When this basic need isn't met, people can cycle in and out of homelessness, jails, shelters and hospitals. Having a safe, affordable place to live—particularly when it's combined with support services, as in supportive housing—can provide a stable environment and foundation for treatment.</li> <li>Living in unaffordable housing limits resources for other basic necessities, including health care. The unaffordability of treatment has been identified as one of the biggest barriers to accessing behavioral health care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zoning for housing choices</li> <li>Zoning for supportive housing</li> <li>Housing vouchers and subsidies</li> </ul>

# Housing: Policy Connections

## Child & Family Welfare

	What are housing-related issues?	What local policy tools are available?
Abuse and Neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of affordable housing can force families into overcrowded situations and/or substandard or unsafe homes. In some cases, children may be at increased risk of physical or sexual abuse as families are forced to double up with other families or friends.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zoning for housing choices</li> <li>Home repair and rehabilitation programs</li> <li>Provide incentives and abatements for desired types of housing development</li> </ul>
Early childhood education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children who live in crowded housing may have poorer cognitive and psychomotor development or be more anxious, socially withdrawn, stressed or aggressive.</li> <li>Lead poisoning irreversibly affects brain and nervous system development, resulting in lower intelligence and reading disabilities. Deteriorating paint in older homes is the primary source of lead exposure for children.</li> <li>Families who lack affordable housing are more likely to move frequently. Residential instability is associated with emotional, behavioral and academic problems among children, and with increased risk of teen pregnancy, early drug use, and depression during adolescence.</li> <li>Children who lived in areas with higher rates of unaffordable housing tended to have worse health, more behavioral problems and lower school performance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zoning for housing choices</li> <li>Home repair and rehabilitation programs</li> <li>Provide incentives and abatements for desired types of housing development</li> </ul>
Domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Studies have shown that without housing, other services to address domestic violence are less likely to succeed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zoning for shelters, transitional homes, and supportive housing</li> <li>Home repair and rehabilitation programs</li> <li>Provide incentives and abatements for desired types of housing development</li> </ul>

# Transportation: Policy Overview

## Local Government Roles

- Local planning commissions make decisions about zoning, which defines where, what type, and how development occurs—which impacts how uses and activities are connected by transportation networks.
- County road commissions and local governments allocate dollars for transportation improvements and maintenance, including non-motorized transportation facilities like sidewalks.
- Road Commissions work with state and federal agencies to obtain and administer funding for special projects.
- Counties create and participate in county-wide transit authorities, and participate in decisions on when and how to seek funding for transit, including millage requests.

## Policy Tools

### Adopt Complete Streets policies, resolutions, or ordinances

By adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities direct their transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users,



regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. This means that every transportation project will make the street network safer for drivers, transit users, pedestrians, and bicyclists – making a more desirable place to live.

### Provide for improved transit connections or services

Faster service times, cross-county service, and easier-to-navigate transit systems can increase the efficiency of transit for those who can't or don't drive. However, complexities and limitations in transit funding create challenges in expanding transit services. Alternative approaches and partnerships between counties and other agencies can provide some alternatives for improving transit.

### Provide for improved transit connections or services

Communities may consider multiple funding options for new non-motorized transportation improvements, including local sources such as millages, bonds, or community endowments. Grants, however, typically finance the majority of new non-motorized facilities; and many are provided by state and federal agencies. Non-motorized transportation inventories or plans may help communities prioritize and balance improvements and funding.



# Transportation: Policy Connections

## Basic Needs

	What are related issues?	What local policy tools are available?
<b>Income and employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A lack of reliable transportation is consistently cited as one of the region’s biggest barriers to employment.</li> <li>Low incomes and the high costs associated with owning a private vehicle, combined with affordable housing shortages, leave many households struggling to make ends meet. Many households are “one car repair away” from losing their jobs or their homes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt Complete Streets plans, policies, or resolutions</li> <li>Support transit connections and services or provide for improved transit options</li> </ul>
<b>Healthy lifestyles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safe non-motorized transportation encourages residents to walk or bike, which provide important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt Complete Streets plans, policies, or resolutions</li> </ul>
<b>Access to health care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents, particularly in rural areas, must travel long distances to access medical care. For those who can’t drive but have regular or frequent needs for medical care— such as cancer treatment, physical therapy, or chronic conditions requiring regular care— transportation limitations leave residents unable to adequately manage their medical conditions, ultimately eroding their health and increasing costs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt Complete Streets plans, policies, or resolutions</li> <li>Provide for improved transit options</li> <li>Provide for improved non-motorized transportation options</li> </ul>
<b>Food access, insecurity, and affordability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For those who can’t or don’t drive in rural areas, access to retail outlets and food pantries may be limited.</li> </ul>	
<b>Accessibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For disabled individuals who can’t drive, transit options are limited, and many residential neighborhoods and homes lack connections to services, jobs, or shopping. Even existing pedestrian facilities such as street crossings, paths, and sidewalks may be too narrow for or otherwise not accommodate wheelchairs or those with other mobility impairments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt Complete Streets plans, policies, or resolutions</li> </ul>
<b>Housing/Shelter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of affordable housing forces families to live farther from work and school, forcing a reliance on a private vehicle—which comes with high costs and, if unreliable, can impact the ability to maintain long-term employment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt Complete Streets plans, policies, or resolutions</li> </ul>

# Transportation

## Behavioral Health

	What are related issues?	What local policy tools are available?
Substance abuse/addiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A reliance on private vehicles means that those who don't drive face challenges in getting and maintaining employment. When addiction-related offenses result in a loss of a driver's license, an individual's employment can be adversely affected. Transit and safe biking or walking trails that connect residential and commercial areas provide important transportation options for those who can't drive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt Complete Streets plans, policies, or resolutions</li> <li>Provide transit options</li> <li>Provide non-motorized transportation options</li> <li>Zoning for housing choices near services, employment, shopping, and schools</li> </ul>
Mental health care and treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to behavioral health care is limited in the region, and for those without a private vehicle, transportation is a significant hurdle.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide transit options</li> <li>Provide non-motorized transportation options</li> <li>Zoning for housing choices near services, employment, shopping, and schools</li> </ul>

## Child & Family Welfare

	What are transportation-related issues?	What local policy tools are available?
Abuse and neglect Domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reliance on a private vehicle can leave families, particularly lower-income families in rural areas, in isolated situations, discouraging the social connections necessary to preventing abuse and neglect or domestic violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt Complete Streets plans, policies, or resolutions</li> <li>Provide transit options</li> <li>Provide non-motorized transportation options</li> <li>Zoning for housing choices near services, employment, shopping, and schools</li> </ul>

# Food & Farming: Policy Overview

## Local Government Roles

Local planning commissions make decisions about zoning, which define where, what type, and how development occurs—which can impact where food is accessible and available.

## Policy Tools

### Zoning for mixed commercial and residential uses

Providing opportunities for food retail, farm stands, or other food outlets in residential areas can improve access to healthy food, particularly for lower-income families and those who can't or don't drive.

### Zoning for food innovation

A food innovation district is a geographic concentration of food-oriented businesses, services, and community activities that local governments can support through planning and economic development initiatives. They can improve access to food and food education by clustering food-related businesses in a concentrated area. and increase access to local food.

### Institutional Purchasing Programs

Public schools—although not under the authority of local governments—also have a vital role in ensuring that children have



access to healthy food during the school day. School policies that establish nutrition standards in schools and daycare facilities can promote the health and well-being of children. A number of schools in the region participate in farm-to-school programs that provide healthy local food to school cafeterias while providing outlets for local farms.

# Food & Farming: Policy Connections

## Basic Needs

	What are related issues?	What local policy tools are available?
Food insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 40,000 individuals in Northwest Michigan are considered food insecure, with many of those individuals unable to qualify for nutrition programs that provide food assistance to income-eligible families and individuals .</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zoning for mixed commercial and residential uses</li> <li>Zoning for food innovation districts</li> </ul>
Healthy lifestyles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited access to healthy, affordable food can result in consequences such as hunger, obesity, and related chronic conditions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional purchasing programs</li> </ul>

## Child & Family Welfare

	What are related issues?	What local policy tools are available?
Early childhood education and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food insecurity in early childhood can compound the effects of other risk factors associated with poverty, such as reduced access to health care and unstable or unsafe housing. Poor nutrition and food insecurity are associated with poorer physical and mental health in all age groups, but in young children they can deeply affect well-being and development in ways that can endure for a lifetime.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional purchasing programs</li> </ul>

# Recreation & Natural Resources: Policy Overview

## Local Government Roles

- Local governments purchase, design, develop, and maintain local parks and recreation facilities.
- Local and county governments administer and enforce some environmental regulations.

## Policy Tools

### Provide parks and recreation opportunities in all neighborhoods

Many communities lack the recreation opportunities needed by a changing population. Facilities that provide easy access to seniors, youth, people with disabilities, families, and low-income households can help to create a high quality of life for new and future residents.

### Provide park and trail connections

Communities can partner with a variety of organizations and funding agencies to explore and implement opportunities to connect parks and trails through new non-motorized connections—including trails and wayfinding, or signage.

### Partner with community organizations to provide and support recreational opportunities



When local resources are not available, communities can explore partnerships with community groups and nonprofits to groups and nonprofits offer recreational opportunities for children and families.

### Provide or improve barrier-free access at all parks and recreational facilities

Communities are required to comply with requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which provides minimum standards for accessibility, and many recreation plans region-wide identify compliance with ADA standards as a community goal. However, ADA standards are considered the “bare minimum” of what’s required to provide access, and compliance with these standards does not ensure access for a wide range of people with

disabilities. Some communities are instead striving for universal accessibility, often with support from grant dollars, which encourages spaces and facilities to be designed to be used by the widest range of people possible.

### Zoning for environmental protections and enhancement

A wide variety of zoning techniques provide important environmental protections to wetlands, shorelines, water bodies, and other natural resources.

# Recreation & Natural Resources: Policy Connections

## Basic Needs

	What are related issues?	What local policy tools are available?
Healthy lifestyles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30% of residents region-wide are obese; and a number of counties experience obesity rates that are higher than the statewide rate. Obesity is closely connected with lifestyle issues like physical activity, which is impacted by access to safe and enjoyable recreational facilities.</li> <li>• An environment free of hazards, such as secondhand smoke, carbon monoxide, allergens, lead, and toxic chemicals, helps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide parks and recreation opportunities in all neighborhoods</li> <li>• Provide park and trail connections</li> <li>• Zoning for environmental protections and enhancement</li> </ul>
Income and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obesity among those in poverty is of particular concern, as national studies show that those in poverty are more likely to experience obesity and related disease. Issues associated with recreation access and costs. Many individuals are priced out of activities like fitness programs or classes, biking, or skiing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with community organizations to provide and support recreational opportunities</li> <li>• Provide parks and recreation opportunities in all neighborhoods</li> <li>• Provide park and trail connections</li> </ul>
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreational opportunities that are accessible to people with disabilities are limited. And, as the population ages, recreation needs will shift more towards passive forms of recreation—like walking trails—with an increased need for barrier-free and universally accessible recreation facilities. Many recreation opportunities are focused on water and other natural resources, which may be difficult to access for those in wheelchairs, and due to terrain and other environmental features, there are limited trails that provide universal or</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide or improve barrier-free access at all parks and recreational facilities</li> </ul>

# Making Connections: A Local Decision Checklist

Where do communities begin to make the changes identified in this guidebook? They can start by reviewing existing plans, ordinances, and other with an eye towards how and whether community health, safety, and welfare needs are identified or addressed within them. Some questions that local governments may ask themselves in determining whether it's time to update local policies and ordinances include:

- Have you reviewed local or regional demographic, economic, housing, or natural feature data in the past year?
- Have you reviewed local or regional demographic, economic, housing, or natural feature *projections* in the past year?
- Have there been any major changes to the local economy?
- Have there been any major changes to local institutions?
- Do planned infrastructure needs address the community health?

For communities that are interested in updating their master plans or zoning ordinances to include some of the concepts identified in Section 2 of this guidebook, the *Framework for Our Future: A Regional Prosperity Plan for Northwest Michigan*, available online at [www.networksnorthwest.org/rpi](http://www.networksnorthwest.org/rpi), includes sample master plan language, zoning checklists, and other planning resources related to:

- Housing
- Transportation
- Growth & Investment
- Food & Farming
- Recreation
- Natural Resources
- Talent (Workforce)

When reviewing individual projects, public improvements, budgets, millage requests, or projects, local governments can use the checklist on the following page to help assess what impacts their decisions will have on the community development issues that most directly impact community health, safety, and welfare.

# Making Connections: A Local Decision Checklist

When making decisions about new policies, public improvements, budgets, millage requests, or projects, local governments can use the following checklist to help assess what impacts their decisions will have on the community development issues that most directly impact community health, safety, and welfare.

	YES	NO
<b>Do policies, investments, strategies, or projects enhance transportation access through features such as:</b>		
Locations close to existing services, jobs, and housing?		
Existing or planned transit routes that provide timely connections?		
Additional sidewalks or bike paths to connect neighborhoods to jobs, services, or shopping?		
Greater accessibility for individuals with disabilities?		
<b>Do policies, investments, strategies, or projects enhance housing access through features such as:</b>		
Locations close to existing services, jobs, and housing?		
Greater affordability to low- and moderate-income households and the workforce?		
Energy efficiency?		
Diversity of housing types, including apartments, townhomes, small homes, condos, duplexes, or fourplexes?		
Opportunities to rehabilitate deteriorated housing?		
<b>Do policies, investments, projects, or strategies enhance access to food through features such as:</b>		
Improved access to fresh foods ?		
Opportunities to locate food outlets near residential areas?		
<b>Do investments, projects, or strategies enhance access to food through features such as</b>		
Additional or improved recreation opportunities in or near residential neighborhoods?		
Additional or improved non-motorized transportation connections to or between parks, residential areas, and commercial/employment centers?		
Additional or improved barrier-free access or universal design?		
<b>Have policies, investments, projects, or strategies sought and incorporated input from:</b>		
Vulnerable and/or affected populations?		
Nearby residents?		
Community organizations and human services providers?		
<b>Do investments, projects, or strategies address impacts on:</b>		
Basic needs?		
Behavioral health?		
Child and family welfare?		