

# Economic Organization

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## **ORGANIZATION**

During the course of multiple interviews and clearly shown by the attendance and participation in the Town Hall meeting, a strong sense of community reaches throughout Chesaning. The issues discussed during the interviews covered a broad spectrum, with three primary organizational issues consistently identified: a) volunteerism and leadership; b) business support activities; c) intergovernmental cooperation. The following will provide an overview of the current organizational situation in the Chesaning area and provide ideas on how to further capitalize and grow the region's volunteerism.

### **Volunteerism and Leadership**

Empowered by the high levels of volunteerism, the Chamber of Commerce is positioned as a leading organization in Chesaning. In its ongoing efforts to attract visitors to the area, the Chamber manages a full calendar of events, including antique shows and art fairs along the Boulevard and culminating in the Showboat events each summer.

Without question, Showboat is the defining event in the community. People from across Michigan recognize Chesaning as the "Showboat community." However, beyond Showboat, Chesaning has developed events that make other communities envious, including the annual Christmas Candlelight events. Many communities attempt to draw visitors with their festivals and events; Chesaning has successfully built off of its attractive Boulevard to create events that are truly destination activities.

During the course of community interviews, it was noted that the number of volunteers for Showboat rises "...well into the hundreds." Add to that number the hours and energy needed to hold the Boulevard events. Volunteerism is a true strength in Chesaning. But as might be expected, there were signs that the volunteers and leadership may be tiring.

Many of the events along the Boulevard were originated by a Boulevard Association, which began as a small group of dedicated business owners seeking to increase their business and add to the quality of life of the community. Today, the Boulevard Association no longer operates as a separate entity, but rather, is housed within the Chamber of Commerce. From an organizational perspective, this seems to have been a logical step—essentially all events are under the umbrella of one management organization.

However, the demise of the Boulevard Association is a sign of the over dependence on a few leaders and the overall strain placed on the area's volunteers. There are limits to individual volunteerism. Family pressure, job commitments and other interests all compete for time. For the community to continue to utilize the same people to operate the successful events, Chesaning runs the risk of burning out its strong volunteer base.

## **Recommendation**

**Set up a Community Foundation with a mission of assisting “regionally” oriented programs.** Many communities in Michigan have their own Community Foundation, a non-profit organization with a Board of Directors that solicits funds from the community to be pooled together to be used to support grant requests in support of community projects or other, Chesaning community organizations.

Volunteerism is the strength of the community. To continue to build upon that foundation and ease the burden placed on existing volunteers, it is imperative that the community continue to foster new leaders and volunteers. Many communities have leadership training programs that could easily be duplicated for Chesaning or the community could participate in the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce's leadership training efforts. The existing leadership of the community should seek to involve these new volunteers and leaders into the planning and operation of key community projects, such as Showboat, Chamber of Commerce committees, Boulevard events, governmental committees and boards. By actively recruiting and involving new people into leadership

roles, the community will have insured the long run success of its hallmark events and volunteerism in the community will remain a strength.

### **Business Support Activity**

Beyond its activities related to attracting visitors, the Chamber has a responsibility to promote business activity in the community. In its efforts towards "...building a better community in which to live, work, shop, and play," the Chamber has historically focused on the promotion and improvement of its events. From community interviews and a review of the Chamber's web page, this is abundantly clear—the Chamber has concentrated its efforts on marketing its high quality events.

To capture the full economic impact these visitors represent, a community must have spending opportunities readily available. If not, the tourists will restrict their visit to the event, without spending additional dollars elsewhere in the community. The Chesaning area appears to have strong dining choices and has unique lodging and shopping opportunities along the Boulevard. However, there are signals (closed storefronts, buildings for sale, etc.) that these opportunities are fading.

### **Recommendation**

The Chamber of Commerce has an opportunity to expand its service to its members and the community. By having the Chamber Board members contact individual members on an annual basis, the Chamber will have an opportunity to learn of new issues facing the business community. Is customer service becoming a problem, and if so, is there a training program the Chamber could offer to address the issue? Is small business financing an issue, and if so, is there something a local bank or the Downtown Development Association do to address this? Are local businesses and the Chamber adequately promoting spending opportunities to the visiting public, and if not, what changes could be made to address this? By listening to the needs of the broad membership, the Chamber may begin to address the business turnover that was identified as an issue in the community. In addition, the Chamber can take measures to ensure that

the events are coordinated in such a way to promote additional spending in the community.

### **Intergovernmental Relationships**

The involvement of both the Township and Village in the strategic planning efforts is encouraging. Too often neighboring governmental units are embroiled in long standing squabbles, which tend to lead to inefficient public services and ineffective public leadership.

The two parties have worked jointly, particularly in recent years, to develop a plan of action. Highlighted by the “21 Points,” each unit of government has worked to cooperate. However, during the course of the interview process and town hall meeting, there were signs that an underlying mistrust exists.

With a Village form of government, the ability to seek *and find* cooperative solutions to development issues, which are beneficial to both the Township and Village are greatly enhanced. Because the Township levies its millage within the borders of the Village, an expansion of the Village boundaries has little impact on the Township (this is not true in a city-township situation, because a township does not tax within the city limits).

In fact, by working cooperatively, both the township and village could realize substantial tax base increases. By allowing the Village boundaries to expand, the Village would automatically see an increase in tax revenues. As infrastructure is extended and the property develops, the taxable value of the property would increase, so the township would now be levying its millage on property with much higher value.

### **Recommendation**

The two units of government have agreed and have cooperated on a new Master Plan. If all parties agree that the Village-Township structure could be advantageous to all, the two governmental bodies could move the Master Plan forward. To do so, a clear growth plan, which recognizes both market demand and infrastructure limitations, should be adopted.

Clearly, it is evident that there is growth pressure to the west of the community. A growth strategy will need to balance that development pressure with the current infrastructure difficulties facing the community. As a component of any infrastructure expansion, the township and village should agree on a desired growth pattern for the community. By doing so, the community (village and township together) should be able to plan for positive growth that will compliment, not detract, from the community's attractive downtown district.

### **Organizational Summary**

This is an area of strength that needs subtle fine-tuning. The high level of volunteerism active in the community is a goal other communities strive for. By simply seeking new ways to expand the volunteer base and develop new leaders, the community will realize long-term success. Further, by listening to the needs of area businesses, the Chamber will be better able to focus its efforts on the most pertinent issues. Finally, the two local units of government need to put to action the plans they have developed. There is a tremendous opportunity, particularly with the form of governmental structure in place, to capitalize on future growth demands in a cooperative fashion.