

Wayne County

Shared Services Proposal

I. Introduction

Quality, local, connected, repetitive planning is the key to addressing an ever-changing landscape of policy, land use, economic development, growth, and protection of character and quality of life. As communities confront the opportunities and challenges of growth and development, they also come to recognize the value of improving their local planning and zoning laws and practices.

The state constitutional provisions for home rule specify that the primary authority for guiding community planning and development is vested in cities, towns and villages. In devising their comprehensive plans, zoning, subdivision, site plan, and other regulatory options, local governments often turn for technical assistance from the county. County governments have become valued partners with municipalities in the design and implementation of innovative land use and natural resource protection measures including farmland protection plans and land use policy.

Policy areas including agriculture and food systems, economic development, energy and environment, land use and natural resources, housing and transportation; local and regional governance, and workforce development are not only important areas to address locally, but provide an opportunity to cooperate and leverage resources to affect change or address an issue.

Local municipal officials and boards who have not prepared their communities often discover that they have few land use tools in place to deal with new planning challenges that arise, like affordable housing, large solar farms, strip mall or big box proposal. Suddenly the written comprehensive plan that's been collecting dust — if one exists — is hauled out and revisited, and a scramble to adopt new plans and regulations is launched. Often in such cases, the only option for the local government is to establish a temporary moratorium on such projects, until it can handle the situation on behalf of community residents.

Local municipalities often lack resources necessary to evaluate and implement planning and land use policy, many times relying on consultants to develop specific (often disconnected) plans. The County Planning department is often tasked with addressing land use and policy across the County on a range of topics including farmland protection, housing, and economic development; however, plans and policy are often left to local towns and villages with home rule authority and taking recommendations and implementing them.

This dichotomy and proposal are intended to provide a solution to connecting regional, county, and local land use decisions by the provision and sharing of planning staff through a shared services approach to planning.

Implementation and tasks associated would include:

- Staffing of two positions within the county planning department entirely focused on providing local planning assistance. Assistance would include:
 - Guidance for local town, planning, and zoning boards on specific topics as requested.
 - Dissemination of information relative to emerging topics and information garnered from county-wide studies and local recommendations
 - Grant writing assistance and implementation to guide local governments access to resources.

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II. Professional Advisory Planning Assistance

County Planning staff will provide professional planning assistance to local municipalities on a variety of projects. Most projects are of limited duration and focus on a particular geographic area or a particular zoning or land use issue. Local municipalities receive this professional planning assistance at no cost. The process will also build trust between local governments and the County, while connecting broader analysis to local decision making. Staff would attend local town, planning, and zoning board meetings on various topics to provide opportunities to discuss topics and bring information to the Town, or back to the County to create a stronger ongoing and direct relationship.

III. Grant Writing and Implementation

As local plans are developed implementation becomes increasingly relevant. There are resources to assist in the development of commercial corridors, affordable housing, industrial site development, and other projects identified as areas needing attention at the local level. Towns and villages are often left with the only option of acquiring outside assistance given time and capacity with existing staff. Consultants are a significant part of developing and implementing plans at the local level. However, consistent direction can be difficult when utilizing consultants, and some funding programs can be applied for without the need for outside assistance, simple but dedicating time from a qualified individual. However, utilization of that individual can be inconsistent, leading to a benefit by sharing that assistance among municipalities.

IV. Financial Benefits

It is estimated that (2) shared planner positions could serve our local municipalities in the capacity described above. Each position would be estimated to cost approximately \$80,000 per year in salary, benefits, and overhead. For the purposes of estimating benefits, each position is expected to assist in a minimum of (4) grant application annually, in addition to the ongoing local planning assistance. Estimated local economic impact is described in the table below:

Senior Planner	\$ 80,000.00
Number of Towns	15
Annual Expense	\$ 1,200,000.00

Senior Planner	\$ 80,000.00
Shared Positions	2
	\$ 160,000.00

Grants Funding Average	\$ 50,000.00
Number of Grants Applied For	8
Number of Grants Awarded	4
Funding Secured Through Grants	\$ 200,000.00

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Ongoing staffing of planning positions at the town level would come at an expense estimated at \$1.2M, and shared services position at an expense of \$160,000. Estimated assistance with a 50% success rate is estimated at \$200,000 providing an overall benefit, without estimating the impact of ongoing planning assistance.

V. Conclusion

Regular local planning assistance is a significant challenge in rural Counties. Local municipal staff are often stretched for time addressing regular day-to-day business with limited budgets; however local planning has never been more important in directing those municipalities to sound planning addressing the balance of desired growth, farmland protection, affordable housing, and additional challenges and opportunities. Shared local planning assistance can fill gaps in providing guidance and direction to local decision makers, leading to direct and focused efforts to addressing issues, with grant funding assistance available to address areas of local focus. Overall estimated savings when compared to each municipality acting on their own is substantial. Sharing these services at the County level also provides a direct connection to overall County efforts increasing coordination and direction.

With a solid understanding of expectations and responsibilities sharing of planning services will have direct and immediate impact while minimizing financial impacts and improving the level of guidance and assistance at the local level.