

## Current Challenges

Washtenaw County government is facing a historic budget crisis. If you've been reading the newspapers or AnnArborChronicle.com, you know that Washtenaw County is considering deep cuts in programs and personnel that serve our neediest and most vulnerable citizens. For the first time in at least 50 years, property taxes will bring in less money than the year before due to falling property values. Concurrently, costs are rising and support from the state is waning.

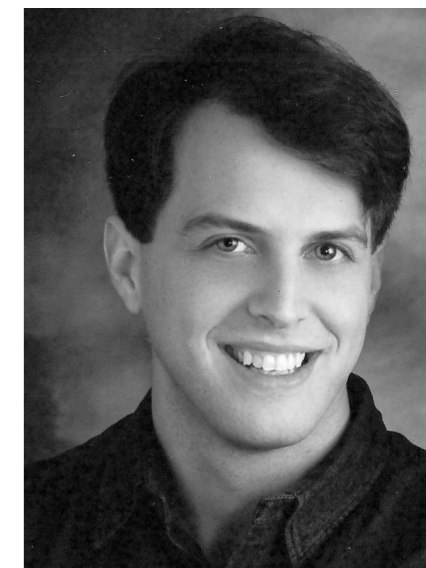
In addition, Washtenaw County has lost two of its top ten employers: General Motors and Pfizer. Unemployment and foreclosures are rampant. Just when our community most needs the safety net services provided by the county, those same programs are under intense budget pressure.

***Our community is better prepared than most to handle this crisis. For the last six years, the county has increased reserves and made strategic budget reductions.***

These challenges are not unique to Washtenaw County, but our community is better prepared than most to handle this crisis. For the last six years, the county has increased reserves and made strategic budget reductions using the following principles:

1. Programs and personnel that provide *direct* service to citizens should be protected.
2. Programs and personnel that serve vulnerable populations such as children or the elderly should be cut last.
3. Administrative and "back-office" services, such as information technology, facilities and finance should be examined for operational efficiencies and consolidation with other like functions in the county or other local governments.
4. Other opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between local governments should be pursued aggressively, especially when they may save money.
5. Minimize lay-offs for our employees.

Continued Page 2.



Thank you for electing me to my fifth term as Washtenaw County Commissioner. It is an honor to serve the public.

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## Thank You . . .

Thank you for electing me to represent you on the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners and thank you for picking up this *County Update*. I hope that you will enjoy reading this quick synopsis of County Government. I have included articles focused on Washtenaw County's efforts to address current challenges and on how we work to capitalize on opportunities for the community.

Being a politician, I like to talk. I am available to communicate in greater detail about any of these topics or pretty much anything else at [jeffmirwin@gmail.com](mailto:jeffmirwin@gmail.com) or (734) 834-7152.

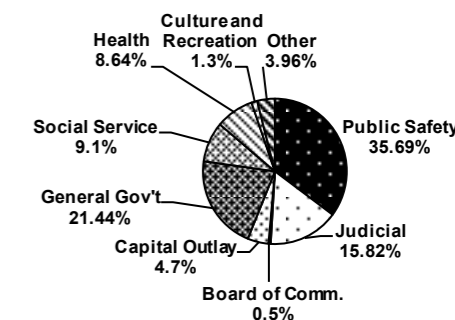


Jeff Irwin and Sylvia Irwin playing on the swings at Scheffler Park.

### Recent General Fund Budgets and Future General Fund Projections

2007	\$105,421,603
2008	\$107,552,529
2009	\$110,764,839
2010 (projection)	\$97,813,162
2011 (projection)	\$92,915,549

### How County Taxes are Spent



## Affordable Housing

One of my goals as your County Commissioner is to increase the availability of affordable housing. I believe that economic diversity is a critical element of a successful and desirable community. Because Washtenaw County is a great place to live, the cost of living is high—especially in homes near jobs. This high cost of housing drives young professionals and young families away from our neighborhoods and threatens the healthy mix that supports successful local businesses, schools and the community.

That is why Washtenaw County has been steadily increasing our investment in quality affordable housing in and around our urban centers. That investment—ranging from \$150,000 in 2002 to \$360,000 in 2007—is only about a quarter of a percent of our general fund budget. However, that small and increasing investment is heavily leveraged by local not-for-profit housing developers who use it to obtain matching funds provided by the Michigan



A tree-lined lined street in a great 'east Ann Arbor' neighborhood.

State Housing Development Authority and the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

*Continued on page 4.*

## Current Challenges (continued)

These principles have been very useful in realizing operational efficiencies and spurring productive collaboration with other units of government. As a result, the county has been able to keep up with rising health care costs and slowed economic growth without resorting to cutbacks that endanger our ability to fulfill our role in the community. At the same time, our employee unions have been able to secure contracts with modest wage increases and modest cutbacks to their health care.

Now, our situation is more precarious. Most of the “back-office” and administrative efficiencies have been realized and the looming shortfalls are larger.

On June 3rd, the Board of Commissioners took decisive action to deal with our looming crisis by approving budget reductions saving the county roughly \$12 million in 2010. The biggest portion of these savings came from reducing non-union salaries and eliminating planned wage increases for non-union employees. On August 5<sup>th</sup>, the Board of Commissioners received another set of potential budget reductions from the administrator. These reductions cut deeply into critical safety net programs for the mentally ill, the homeless, programs that divert sick and addicted prisoners from the county jail, HeadStart and more (see the potential reductions by viewing “Phase II

Budget Adjustments” at <http://www.ewashtenaw.org/budget>). Many of these programs – particularly those that divert the sick from our criminal justice system – are winning investments that pay off immediately by saving expensive jail beds – averting both expense and more misery for our citizens.

I will continue to apply the principles above to our future budget reductions and hope to bring our accounts into balance without dismantling quality services. Washtenaw County has a strong reputation as a place that takes good care of its citizens using innovative programs that define best practices for our peer counties. That is precisely what is at risk and I intend to protect those services by finding more reductions and efficiencies throughout the organization. As always, I appreciate all comments and suggestions (email me at [JeffIrwin@gmail.com](mailto:JeffIrwin@gmail.com)). This is a tough situation and we need all the ideas we can get.

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## Protecting Natural Areas

In 1998, I volunteered on an ultimately unsuccessful campaign to support the purchase of development rights in Washtenaw County. One year later, I ran for the position of County Commissioner partly to address the unfinished business of protecting our county's best natural areas for the enjoyment of generations to come.

In 2002, together with my colleagues, Washtenaw County authorized a modest 0.25 mill tax proposal to purchase natural areas throughout the county. Since the voters overwhelmingly approved this program, Washtenaw County's Parks and Recreation Commission has purchased 1,488 acres of natural areas in the county. We know there will be plenty of new subdivisions in the future, but because of this measure we've also ensured that pockets of natural beauty will remain forever.

When it comes to clean air, clean water and protecting the forests and wetlands that cover our Great Lakes State, I get a bit romantic. Michigan is awash in natural



*From protecting local food to preserving habitat, land preservation is an important element of our strategy for success.*

Sylvia, Kathryn, and I enjoy nature up close.



beauty; with more and better water than anywhere in the world. I grew up in Sault Ste. Marie, on the St. Mary's River, and throughout my life I've loved the water and stolen every moment I could to explore our beautiful state and nation. With my wife Kathryn, we've camped and hiked State Parks and National Forests from Erie to the Keweenaw. We've also enjoyed the many parks right here in Washtenaw County.

With the MetroParks, the County Parks and Recreation facilities, and the City of Ann Arbor's Parks and Recreation Department we have a fabulous constellation of natural settings to enjoy whether it is a quiet walk through County Farm Park or something more active, like canoeing on the Huron.

Each addition to our community inventory of parks and natural areas further enhances our community, cementing our reputation as naturally rich and environmentally conscious. Moreover, we get to enjoy them—forever.

## Directory of County Services

United Way of Washtenaw County (referral)	211
Washtenaw County General Info	(734) 222-4357
Mental Health Services (CSTS)	(734) 544-3050
Veteran Services	(734) 973-4540
Washtenaw Parks and Rec.	(734) 971-6337
Home Toxics Info	(734) 222-3950
Dog Licenses	(734) 222-6600
Drop-Off Station (2950 E. Ellsworth)	(734) 971-7400
County Clerk	(734) 222-6700
County Sheriff Jerry Clayton	(734) 971-8400
County Prosecutor Brian Mackie	(734) 222-6620
County Treasurer Catherine McClary	(734) 222-6600
Water Resources Cmsr. Janis Bobrin	(734) 222-6860
County Road Commission	(734) 761-1500

Washtenaw County online [www.ewashtenaw.org](http://www.ewashtenaw.org)

**EMERGENCIES—DIAL 911**

## Watching Local Government at Work

I believe that government works better when it is transparent. Accordingly, in 2006, I pushed to have our commission meetings webcast. Our talented IT department developed the necessary software in-house and maintains an indexed archive of every meeting since 2006 (<http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/boc/webcast.html>). You can also find minutes, agendas and meeting times at <http://www.ewashtenaw.org>. Of course, you can also watch us on CTN.

# County Update

October 2009

By Jeff Irwin

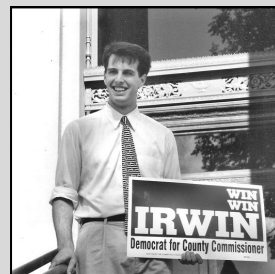
## Homelessness (continued)

We commenced a full-fledged partnership. Under the leadership of County Administrator Bob Guenzel, the county reorganized its services to dovetail with the operations of the shelter. Workforce training, mental health, physical health and substance abuse programs were weaved into the shelter programming. We also began a campaign to build a new shelter to bring all this coordination under one roof.

Together with generous grants from the City of Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and even greater support from private citizens, the Delonis Center was built on W. Huron St. To assure that the building was well-maintained and secure, the county owns and cares for the structure; offering a nominal cost lease to the Shelter Association.

Of all the projects I have been involved with as a Commissioner, the partnership behind the Delonis Center is perhaps the most successful and the most meaningful. The Shelter Association, buttressed by support from Washtenaw County and Ann Arbor vastly improved emergency services for some of our most needy and most vulnerable citizens. As a result, more homeless residents are getting back on their feet and the shelter is more than just a place to sleep.

## Jeff Irwin Your County Commissioner



The years have gone by quickly. This photo was taken when I first ran for office.

Serving as your County Commissioner is a joy. I am grateful that voters in 1999 were willing to give me the opportunity to serve. I've learned so much about this wonderful community and had the chance to meet many of you. After ten years on the job, I am still struck by the people of Washtenaw County. Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti are charming towns, but it is the people who live here that make this a special place.

I came to Ann Arbor in 1995 to earn a BA in Political Science from the University of Michigan. Instantly, I fell in love with this community. I got involved in campaigns for some great local politicians and causes. I started working for the League of Conservation Voters—trying to elect politicians who support clean air and clean water.



I married my high school sweetheart, Kathryn Loomis, and we now have a beautiful daughter, Sylvia.

These experiences encouraged me to act on my strong ideas about public policy and serve our community on the County Board of Commissioners.

## Emergency Sheltering Results (July 2007-July 2008)

Individuals 'exited': 294  
Exited to Transitional Housing: 18%  
Exited to Permanent Housing: 33%

374 Individuals Served at Warming Center

1306 Health Clinic visits (937 unique clients)

## Project Outreach (PORT) Makes a Difference

The H-PORT team works directly with Homeless individuals to connect them with county, state and federal assistance. They work on the streets, under the bridges and in the improvised settlements that house our most desperately poor residents.

The J-PORT team works directly with jail inmates to divert the mentally ill from incarceration and into health services. This critical and humane service reduces recidivism and saves taxpayers money.

# County Update

October 2009

By Jeff Irwin

## Addressing Homelessness

After roughly 30 years of running their services out of an emergency shelter scavenged together in a dilapidated building in the floodway, the Shelter Association of Washtenaw County reached out for a solution.

With inadequate facilities to counsel and transition their clients into stable housing, the system was bogging down. Men and women occupied different facilities, forcing Shelter Association staff to manage and maintain two aging buildings. Feeding programs were scattered through the downtown and the shelter was little more than a warehouse for the desperate and disadvantaged. The Shelter Association told me and other government leaders that breaking the cycle of homelessness in our community depended on working intensively with their clients to get at the root causes of their desperation.

Indeed, the Shelter Association looked to the county as a key partner in this process. They recognized that Washtenaw County mental health and substance abuse programs would be critical to their success. They knew first-hand that sustainable housing requires sustained employment and that Washtenaw County's workforce development service could help change their clients lives.

*Continued on page 6.*



- The Night Shelter Program provides a bed and intensive case management for up to 90 days focusing on finding and sustaining housing for clients who commit to sobriety and stabilizing their finances.
- The Warming Center Program opens the doors of the shelter to the homeless in weather below 20 degrees.
- The Health Clinic connects people to care and provides for the uninsured (1174 clinic appointments with 549 individuals in 2008 "Shelter Association Annual Report 2008, page 7).

## Planning for Success

### Economic Development



Talent Development      Quality of Life

*Three interconnected forces that determine a successful community.*

Download the entire Ann Arbor Region Success Plan at [www.annarborregionsuccess.org](http://www.annarborregionsuccess.org)

Property values in Washtenaw County have taken a historic plunge. As of April 2009, the projected property value in Washtenaw County is equal to its value in 2005. Unemployment in the county is pushing 10%. This decline is stressing personal budgets and straining our community institutions. Everyone, from cultural organizations to small businesses to local governments is tightening their belts – at best.

Washtenaw County is working on parallel tracks to address the community's need for jobs and assistance. On one hand, Washtenaw County is seeking and securing millions of dollars in federal assistance for job training, youth development, home weatherization and business development. In addition, Washtenaw County has secured at least \$3 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Funds to be targeted toward helping our most blighted and financially devastated neighborhoods. These funds are providing meaningful work and even more meaningful paychecks to many county residents while simultaneously saving countless others thousands of dollars in utility bills.

Concurrently, we are planning for success – and we have reason for optimism. We have one of the best educated labor pools in the world. Our downtowns are fun and alive and we have top quality natural areas and recreation programs. Most of all, we have very good schools. With the University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University, and Washtenaw Community College as exceptional institutions of higher learning, we benefit from a wide reputation as a smart and savvy community.

*Continued on page 4.*

## Affordable Housing (continued)

### **Washtenaw County is helping to house the working poor and the chronically homeless by attracting millions in federal and state support.**

Specifically, Washtenaw County secured designation as an "Urban County" in 2003, making available federal community development (CDBG) and housing (HOME) funding. This program, a collaboration between Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and most of the surrounding jurisdictions, is drawing federal investment into our county to support home ownership, avoid foreclosure, rehabilitate housing stock, and improve neighborhoods with sidewalks and other infrastructure.

This year, these efforts will mean: 177 individuals receive child care or transportation assistance, 222 households receive foreclosure prevention services, 6 new units dedicated to transitioning the chronically homeless, and renovation for community centers such as Parkridge Community Center in Ypsilanti (and more).

These investments are critical not only for promoting a diverse and successful community generally; but also, these affordable housing choices are important outlets for a successful sheltering program. In order for our emergency shelter to transition people out of sheltering and into sustainable housing, that housing has to exist.



Left to right, from the top: Nichol's Arboretum, Mural by David's Books, and Liberty St. (photos by Pentawing, Tlogmer and Manske).



Our diversity is a key to our success. People friendly environments, both natural and built, make for an attractive and vibrant place to live, work and raise a family.

## Regional Success Plan (continued)

Our countywide plan for success began in 2007 by pulling together over 70 community leaders from a wide variety of organizations and perspectives. After several brainstorming sessions of this large group and of smaller, more focused segments, we learned that there were some common themes. Human service directors, CEO's and educational leaders were making many of the same observations and suggestions. What emerged was the Ann Arbor Region Success Plan (<http://annarborregionsuccess.org/>). While the plan includes many great ideas to propel our region and serves as an inventory of other community-based plans, the goal was to highlight the main areas of overlap. What were the few big ideas that moved us the furthest on many fronts toward a more successful region? I urge you to read the full report because there are great, specific ideas about early childhood education, better coordination of our marketing efforts, and creating a more welcoming culture; but I would boil it down to doing a better job of connecting people, places and ideas.

I believe this is the common thread that connects big ideas like: developing more public transit options; assisting our fellow citizens when they are in need; building a place that fosters innovation jobs, and supporting great places to play and entertain. We recognized the interconnectedness between our sense of place, the quality of our talent and the extent of our economic wellbeing.

In addition to these lofty goals and broad metrics, the County supports other specific tools for economic development. For instance, Washtenaw County co-founded Ann Arbor Spark with the University of Michigan and the City of Ann Arbor to retain and attract businesses. We encourage development along existing infrastructure through our Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and we support local farmers and even small scale growers through programs like the Food System Economic Partnership and the Master Gardener program. For more information on these or other county efforts to boost our economic wellbeing, contact me at [jeffmirwin@gmail.com](mailto:jeffmirwin@gmail.com)

### **The core of our plan for success is doing a better job of connecting people, places, and ideas.**

## Improving Public Transit *It is time to bring the trains back*



One hundred years ago, we had convenient trains linking Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Detroit. With a major international airport, stadiums, world-class universities, museums, hospitals and our region's biggest employers all along the I-94 corridor, I say it's time to bring trains back to Washtenaw County. *Photo of Chicago Metra stop by Jauerback.*

## Intergovernmental Cooperation

One of the best ways for governments to save money is to cooperate with each other. In my experience, local governments in Washtenaw County perform many parallel services. Perhaps more importantly, most of these similar services have very little direct contact with the citizenry. In other words, I'm focusing on payroll and payables, not police and parks.

Accordingly, I have pursued collaboration and consolidation of government services whenever and wherever it makes sense. Thankfully, I have found willing partners on my board and in local governments around Washtenaw. Township Supervisors, Mayors and their boards see the value of reducing the cost of doing business. Of course, we are all dealing with fiscal challenges that buttress the logic behind working together, as we try to deliver the same services with less money.

Here are some recent successes we have had in government collaboration:

**Technology**—Washtenaw County is aggressively collaborating with other local governments on technology projects. In addition to hosting web portals for the City of Ypsilanti and many smaller units, the county also contracts with Ypsilanti and Pittsfield Township to provide technology support staff. This

Improving public transit connects people, places and ideas. It drives greater economic vitality and provides a critical service to those who rely on buses and trains to get to work, shopping, or the doctor.

Unfortunately, our transit services in Washtenaw County are lacking in some major and obvious ways. Although Ann Arbor voters strongly support AATA—providing good bus service within the city—we lack meaningful regional links. Amtrak does run between Detroit and Chicago, but the service is far too infrequent to serve commuters. Moreover, Amtrak rolls right by Detroit Metro airport, missing our region's connection to the world.

The situation countywide is much worse. AATA does not receive sufficient funding to adequately cover communities like Ypsilanti or Pittsfield Township. We need a countywide transit system with regional rail links along our major commuter corridors.

Plans to bring that vision to reality are steaming ahead. SEMCOG, our transportation planning agency, is preparing to run limited commuter service in October 2010 and the federal government recently announced ambitious plans to revive regional rail throughout the Midwest.

Michigan has too many layers of government. In addition to 83 counties, Michigan has 533 cities, 1,242 townships, and countless school districts and other specialized units such as sewer authorities.

relationship saves overhead and maximizes expertise. Also, the county recently moved to co-locate our servers with the City of Ann Arbor and to share the cost of network administration.

**Community Development**—When the County began receiving significant HOME and CDBG funds (see article on affordable housing), it became clear that sharing community development staff with Ann Arbor would be more efficient than running parallel programs. Now, a shared team analyzes programs and manages the investments. In addition to saving money, this move streamlined the process for our community partners and allows a wider strategic view.

**Economic Development**—Washtenaw County, Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan combined our economic development activities in the creation of Spark. Learn more at [www.annarborusa.org](http://www.annarborusa.org).