

“Communities of Interest”

Common Ground & Shared Vision: What we heard - What we might do

As it proceeds towards world-class service in an atmosphere of increased need, Washtenaw County government has taken the next step to create more efficient and effective methods of delivering services to its customers, the citizens of Washtenaw County. By soliciting greater involvement from local organizations, agencies and other units of government working in similar areas of public service, “Communities of Interest” helped reveal gaps, duplication and common needs in serving people.

The process brought in new ideas, and added perspective to ideas already in discussion. These Communities of Interest provided the Board of Commissioners and County Administration with a better understanding of ways in which the County can generate clear, positive outcomes in our community.

With input from all sides, including that of the Board of Commissioners, the following issues have been refined for your discussion.

Continuum of Sentencing Options

Jail overcrowding has put a premium on alternatives to jail sentencing but, at present, there is no comprehensive listing of options to gauge gaps and overlaps within the County correctional and justice system. Needed attention to two gaps in this continuum is clear-cut:

- Pre-trial incarceration (More than half the jail's population is awaiting trial)
- Re-integration or re-entry services for inmates.

➤ **Develop a "Continuum of Sentencing Options" that would map out current options and identify gaps. Through this initiative, discover, maximize and leverage the use of existing resources within the Public Safety & Justice Community of Interest.**

Mental Health Services & Corrections

The State's Mental Health system re-design has increased the number of mentally ill persons in the judicial system, creating distinct sets of problems.

➤ **Implement a coordinated initiative with other Communities of Interest (Health, Homelessness) to find and divert the mentally ill in the judicial system, ensuring treatment options as appropriate, and alternatives to incarceration as necessary.**

Referrals to Needed Services

Currently there is no encompassing repository of available resources and accessible services in the County, nor is there an effective and credible means of updating and communicating such information. For virtually *all* of the Communities of Interest this gap was identified as an impediment to effective, efficient and reliable service delivery.

➤ **Establish a coordinated referral system and entry point for services, such as the 211 phone system, that will identify available resources and services in the County. This system-wide referral network will also allow the tracking of real needs to better inform allocation of resources in the future.**

Comprehensive Plan

One of the County's most important obligations has also been identified as one its biggest barriers to successful governing: the need for a County-wide comprehensive plan to provide direction and coordination for every aspect of this community's growth.

➤ **Develop and market a County-wide comprehensive plan that addresses current and future sustainability –economically, socially and environmentally. The plan would also include a strategic housing perspective. It would involve integrating all stakeholders as goals are set, track and market key sustainability factors, and coordinate sub-regional and local unit planning efforts.**

Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare and healthcare coverage was identified as the most ingrained and costly barrier to making Washtenaw County a healthy community. The customer's perspective has been lost in the expansion of decentralized healthcare systems.

➤ **Thoroughly integrate the network of healthcare coverage within Washtenaw County government (Public Health, WCHO, CSTS, WHP, ETCS) and bring it into alignment with private sector initiatives. Once gaps and duplication of services have been identified, develop nontraditional sites and methods for health promotion, for healthcare delivery and for healthcare coverage.**

Strengthened Relationships with Local Units of Government

There was significant agreement by Local Unit representatives who participated in the Communities of Interest that County – Local Units relationships must be improved and strengthened.

➤ **Create an overall strategy to facilitate better communication between County government and Local Units of government that would market existing County services, coordinate individual strengths and continue discussions on County-wide technology integration.**

Coordination of Services for Children

There is little coordination of services for children as they age. Often as a child progresses beyond a program's age limits, there is no mechanism to ensure that services still needed will continue to be provided.

➤ **Create a process that will invite stakeholders in this Community of Interest, especially the schools, to collaborate and share information on available services. Review these information systems for possible integration, and utilize this Community of Interest as a communication vehicle to make citizens aware of better, more coordinated services.**

Treatment Options for Youthful Offenders

This Community of Interest identified serious gaps in treatment alternatives for youth-at-risk and youthful offenders.

➤ **Convene discussions with area stakeholders on the creation of alternative placement programs for youthful offenders. Facilitate the discussion of possible alternative substance abuse programming for youth-at-risk.**