

Regional Planning in Michigan: Challenges and Opportunities of Intergovernmental Cooperation

As in many states, Michigan law allows numerous forms of intergovernmental regional planning. However, state policy does little to actively encourage such efforts, and the state's tradition of home rule creates strong disincentives for regionalism. Despite these obstacles, many efforts are taking place around the state to improve planning across political boundaries. Governor Granholm's Michigan Land Use Leadership Council of 2003, for example, examined land use issues and recommended enhancements to state policies related to regional planning. Locally, officials across the state are drawing together cities and their surrounding townships and villages to discuss how they might enhance their regional planning efforts. Surprisingly little is known, however, about the range of regional planning currently under way in Michigan or elsewhere. To help fill this void, the University of Michigan's Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP), under the direction of Professor Elisabeth Gerber and in collaboration with the Ann Arbor Area Chamber of Commerce, recently conducted a study of existing regional planning efforts across the state.

Through interviews with participants in selected regional planning efforts and surveys of county officials across the state, the CLOSUP study investigates how local governments in Michigan currently conduct cooperative planning; what kinds of arrangements work and what kinds are likely to fail; how participants in these arrangements assess successes and failures; how and why public, private, and non-profit sector actors

participate in these efforts; and how these diverse actors might contribute to regional planning successes. Prior academic research on intergovernmental relations has identified potentially important differences in the factors that affect the *initiation* of collaborative efforts between governments versus the factors that affect *ongoing cooperation*. This CLOSUP study discovers a similar distinction among regional planning efforts, as highlighted in the table of key findings below.

TYPES OF REGIONAL PLANNING

Four models of regional planning efforts emerged during the research. Individual regional planning efforts within each category share a number of important characteristics and face common challenges and opportunities. The four models include the following: (1) local cooperative planning efforts, which involve representatives from a village or city and surrounding townships, (2) county-local efforts, which are county-wide attempts to coordinate the planning activities of numerous jurisdictions within a county, (3) multi-county regional planning efforts, which cover a wider geographic area and often have substantial resources available for regional planning (several serve as the metropolitan

planning organization for their region and thus receive federal transportation funds), and (4) public-private specialized planning efforts, which focus on one or two regional issues, such as sustainable development, watershed management or community health. Though many efforts are still at early stages, all four models appear capable of positive results, with the choice among models dependent on local goals and circumstances and the types of issues involved.

ROLE OF THE COUNTY

In many places, the county planning department acts in an advisory capacity to local governments on planning and zoning matters. Such support may involve consultation, technical assistance, training and education, and model ordinances. Cooperative planning efforts usually benefit from such county involvement, as reported in interviews of local regional planning effort participants. Many county officials surveyed or interviewed during the study suggested that intergovernmental cooperation could be better facilitated by an increase in state financial assistance, such as greater revenue sharing or tying funding directly to the level of intergovernmental cooperation in a region. (continued...)

This policy brief summarizes one of the first academic studies of regional planning efforts related to land use issues in Michigan. More information is available in the study's full policy report at <http://closup.umich.edu>

Key Findings Regarding Regional Planning Efforts

- Participants from all types of regional planning efforts report valuable improvements in cross-jurisdiction communication and information sharing.
- Key factors that facilitate **initiation** of regional efforts include: potential cost savings; a climate of trust and collaboration; and the presence of strong leadership.
- Key factors that help **sustain** regional efforts over time include: prior results and cost savings; political will; effective communication; and perceived similarities between participating jurisdictions in terms of size, resources and goals.
- Key factors that **inhibit** and/or undermine regional efforts include: turf issues; lack of trust and information sharing; changes in leadership; rivalries; and competing goals of participants.





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THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The CLOSUP study also addresses the opportunities and challenges that regional planning efforts may present to the business community, and the roles played by business organizations in these efforts. With turf issues and mistrust hindering intergovernmental planning, chambers of commerce and other business organizations may be able to make substantial contributions by serving as credible representatives of the regional community. In some areas, chambers may be the most important existing regional entity. Although chambers have no direct authority over planning, they can help bring together actors from local government units, speak on behalf of the region's interests, and generate private sector support for a regional plan. While chambers are typically not formal members of regional planning efforts, chamber members can actively participate via public meetings.

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

- State-level policymakers should focus on economic incentives to encourage regional cooperation. Many regional efforts are initiated based on the prospect of practical economic benefits to participants, and the reality of economic benefits is an important factor in sustaining regional efforts.
- Local policymakers should focus on fostering a climate of trust and building regional efforts that can survive changes in leadership.
- Members of the business community should proactively join regional planning efforts through participation in public sessions and, where possible, through (often non-voting) membership in the efforts themselves. The business community, especially through chambers of commerce and business organizations, can often speak on behalf of the region, bring together regional actors, and help sustain their ongoing cooperation.

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