



County of Ottawa

12220 Fillmore Street
West Olive, Michigan
miottawa.org

2009 Budget In Brief

Dear Ottawa County Citizens,

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about the County of Ottawa. We pride ourselves for contributing to a high quality of life in Ottawa County, as defined by citizens and by the Board of Commissioners. We continue to strive to be an open and transparent government that is easily accessible to all. In an effort to keep citizens informed, the County will host five citizen budget meetings in May 2009 at locations throughout the County.

The citizen budget meetings will provide an opportunity to learn more about the County's budget,

2009 Citizen Budget Meetings

- 5/2, 10 A.M., Fillmore Street Complex, West Olive
- 5/4, 6 P.M., Spring Lake District Library, Spring Lake
- 5/12, 6 P.M., Herrick District Library, Holland
- 5/13, 6 P.M., Georgetown Ice Arena, Hudsonville
- 5/14, 6 P.M., Coopersville Farm Museum, Coopersville

services, and economic outlook. The County is also seeking input from the citizens to help identify what quality of life means to them and what service areas are most important. This information will be used as an additional tool by the Board of Commissioners and staff in the preparation of the 2010 budget and in the long range financial planning for the County.

Decades of prudent financial management by the Board of Commissioners, County Administration, and other leaders as well as the efficient and effective delivery of services by employees throughout the County has left Ottawa County in a very good financial position, especially when compared to other county and local government organizations. But the County now faces a dilemma because certain financial impacts have resulted in a deficit of operating revenues to meet current operating expenditures.

We hope that you will help to identify which services the County currently provides that are important to you. You can do this in two ways:

1. Attend one of the citizen budget meetings listed above;
2. Visit miottawa.org and click on the link for "Citizen Budget Meetings" and leave feedback.

Please check miottawa.org in late May or early June for the results of the citizen budget meetings. If you have any questions, please contact June Hagan, Fiscal Services Director, at jhagan@miottawa.org or me at avanderberg@miottawa.org.

Thank you again for taking the time to learn more about Ottawa County. We look forward to sharing the results of our communication efforts with you in the future.

Sincerely,

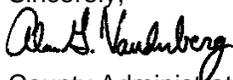

County Administrator

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The Board of Commissioners



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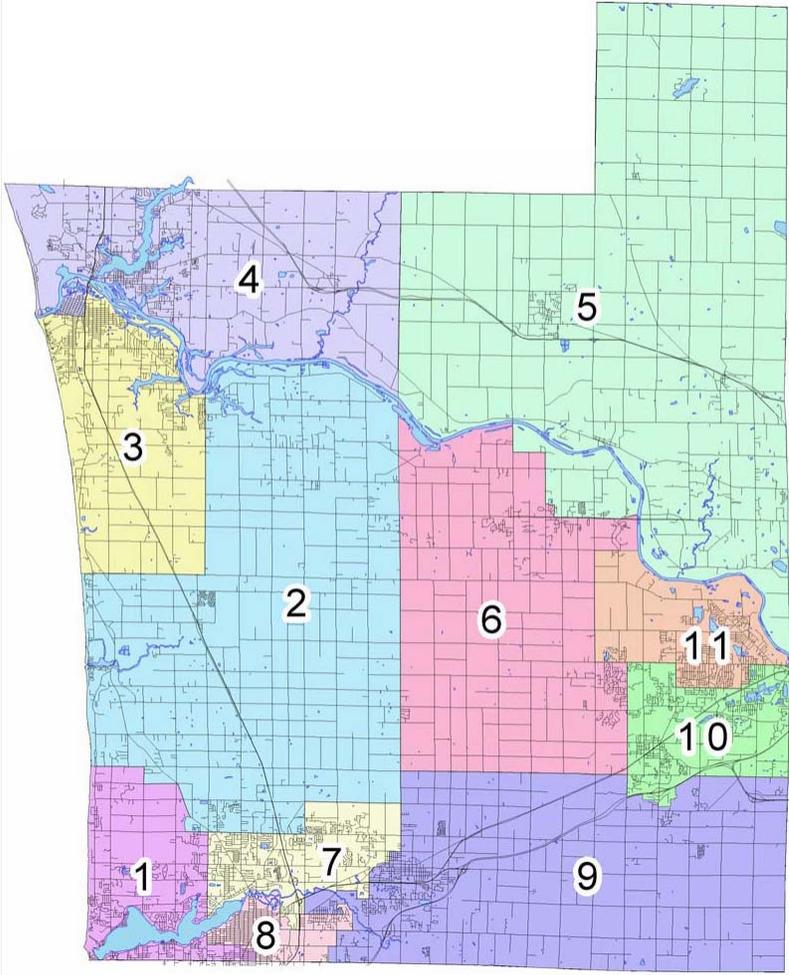
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About Ottawa County

GOVERNANCE

The County's legislative body is an eleven-member Board of Commissioners which is elected from single-member districts, determined by population, on a partisan basis for two-year terms. The Board annually elects from within its ranks a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson by majority vote.

HISTORY



Ottawa County was established in 1837, named for the Ottawa Indians who hunted and fished the area's forests and streams. The County began operation in December of 1837, and the U.S. Census of 1840 listed only 208 people in all of Ottawa County. Ottawa County, encompassing an area of approximately 565 square miles, is located in the southwestern portion of Michigan's lower peninsula, having 30 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. The County is comprised of six cities, one village, and seventeen townships.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

In 2004 the Board of Commissioners began collecting information needed to develop a strategic plan, including biennial employee (conducted in odd-numbered years) and citizen (conducted in even-numbered years) surveys, a study of mandated services, employee input, program and organizational studies of several departments, a wage and classification study, the United Way Community Needs Assessment, and evaluations of the County's financial tools.

The Board began work on developing the vision, mission, and goals of the strategic plan in 2006. These are the cornerstones of the County's strategic plan and remain unchanged from year to year. The Board meets annually to review the business plan and complete a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). The business plan specifies the objectives and outcomes that the Board and staff focus on achieving annually. The 2009 strategic plan and business plan are available on miottawa.org.

Vision

Ottawa County strives to be the location of choice for living, working, and recreation

Mission

Ottawa County is committed to excellence and the delivery of cost-effective public services

Goals of the Board of Commissioners

- 1. To maintain and improve the strong financial position of the County**
- 2. To maintain and enhance communication with citizens, employees, and other stakeholders**
- 3. To contribute to a healthy physical, economic, and community environment**
- 4. To continually improve the County's organization and services**

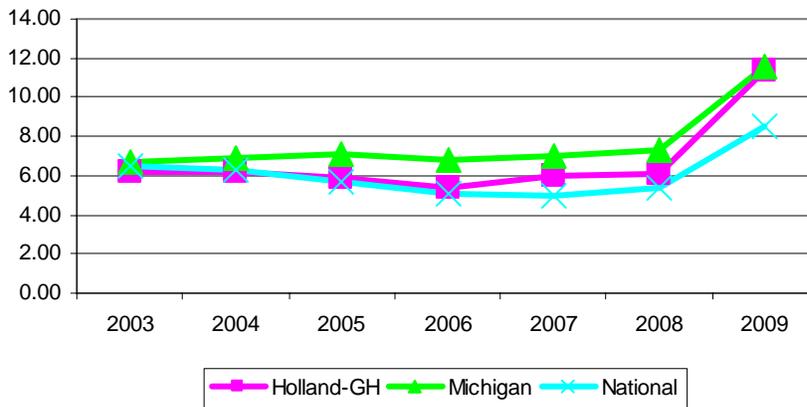
Selected Demographics

POPULATION

Ottawa County has seen rapid growth over the last eleven years, from 229,401 residents in 1998 to 260,364 in 2008. Ottawa County is the eighth-largest County in Michigan and is the third-fastest growing County in the state and the fastest growing County of the ten largest counties in the State.

UNEMPLOYMENT

In the past, Ottawa County's unemployment rate has mirrored the national unemployment rate and been consistently lower than the state's unemployment rate. The graph below looks at the unemployment rates of the County, state, and nation for January of each year. The national economic crisis affected Ottawa County, the State of Michigan and the nation equally, with Ottawa County's unemployment rate standing at 11.4% for January 2009.



10 Largest Counties in Michigan (2008)

1. Wayne
2. Oakland
3. Macomb
4. Kent
5. Genesee
6. Washtenaw
7. Ingham
8. Ottawa
9. Kalamazoo
10. Saginaw

10 Fastest Growing Counties in Michigan (2007-2008)

1. Keweenaw
2. Grand Traverse
3. Ottawa
4. Houghton
5. Kalamazoo
6. Emmet
7. Kent
8. Allegan
9. Marquette
10. Macomb

LARGEST EMPLOYERS

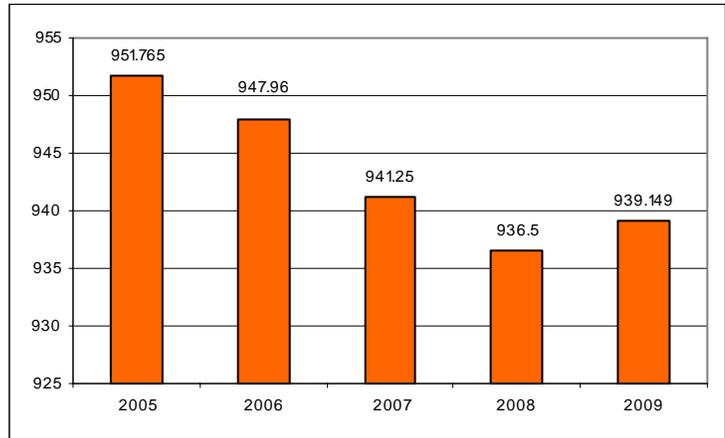
The following are the nine largest employers in Ottawa County as of January 2, 2009. The number of employees includes full-time, part-time, and temporary workers.

Organization	Industry	# of Employees
1. Herman Miller	Office Furniture	4,206
2. Grand Valley State University	Higher Education	2,893
3. Gentex Corporation	Automotive Mirrors	2,298
4. Holland Hospital	Healthcare	1,806
5. Haworth	Office Furniture	1,753
6. Meijer	Retailer	1,303
7. Shape Corporation	Metal Roll Forming	1,274
8. Johnson Controls	Automotive Interior Parts	1,259
9. Magna Mirrors	Automotive Mirrors/Windows	1,227

County Employment Information

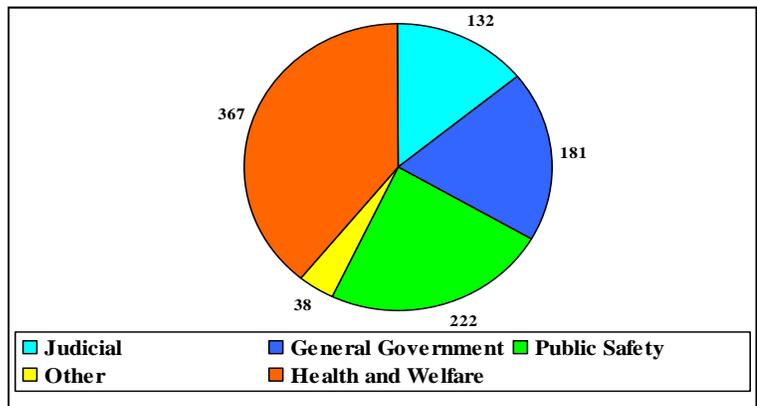
EMPLOYEES BY YEAR

Ottawa County has worked to reduce one of our largest expenditures, personnel costs, over the last four years while maintaining a high level of service throughout the County. The chart on the right shows that the County has seen a total reduction in the number of full-time equivalents (FTEs) since 2005, when a hiring freeze on new positions that would increase the General Fund cost was implemented, with the exception of critically needed customer service and contractually required positions.



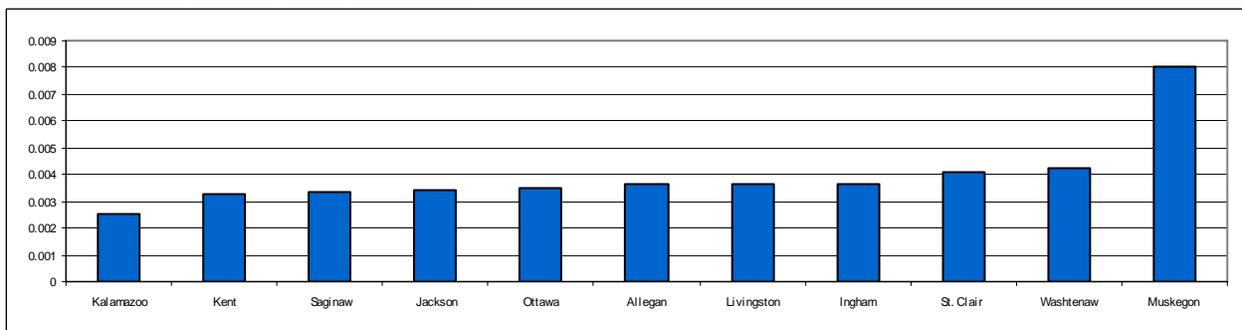
EMPLOYEES BY FUNCTION

The graph to the right represents the total FTEs by function for 2009. Health and Welfare, which includes Community Mental Health and the Health Department, has the largest number of employees, while Public Safety (Sheriff's Department) is second. General Government includes the Clerk, Treasurer, Register of Deeds and Drain Commissioner (all elected officials), Buildings and Grounds, and other general administrative/support functions.



EMPLOYEES PER CAPITA

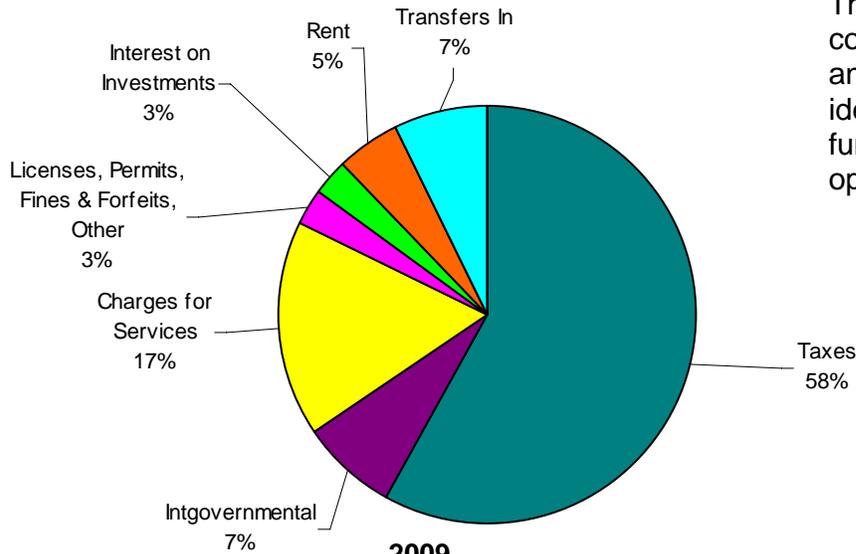
Ottawa County uses the employees per capita (the number of employees per each resident) as a benchmark for our eleven comparable counties. The graph below shows how Ottawa County compared in 2007, with only 0.00347 employees per capita, ranking fifth out of eleven.



2009 General Fund Revenues

GENERAL FUND:

The General Fund is a common term used in state and local governments to identify the main source of funding for government operations.



Source

2009 Adopted Budget

Taxes	\$41,465,748
Intergovernmental	\$4,534,572
Charges for Services	\$9,738,398
Fines & Forfeits	\$961,100
Interest on Investments	\$850,000
Rental Income	\$2,873,024
Licenses & Permits	\$251,675
Other Revenue	\$376,414
Operating Transfers In	\$5,132,000

TOTAL: \$66,182,931

Ottawa County's Bond Ratings

Fitch	AAA
<i>(AAA= very high quality)</i>	
Standard & Poors	AA
<i>(AA= high quality)</i>	
Moody's	Aa1
<i>(Aa= high quality, 1= higher end of Aa category)</i>	

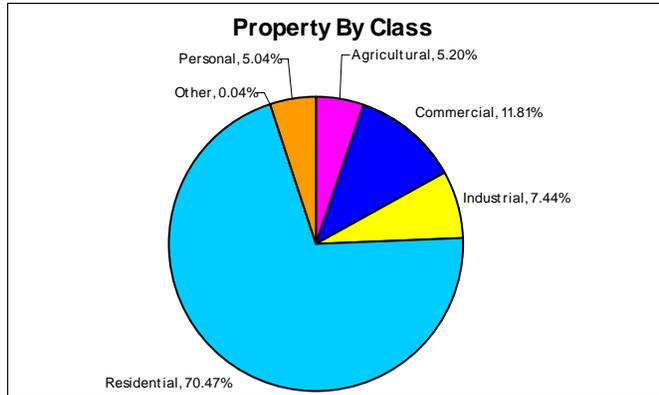
Bond Ratings

A bond rating is an evaluation of credit worthiness and risk potential for future repayment. Three firms in the United States issue this rating: Fitch, Moody's and Standard and Poors. Multiple financial and economic factors play into a rating agency's decision, often based on a government's past performance and future projections. These ratings are especially important to Ottawa County because the risk potential often determines the interest rate at which the County can borrow; the lower the interest rate, the lower the overall cost of repayment by the County. The County also guarantees the water and sewer bond issues of the municipalities of Ottawa County. This effectively lowers their interest rates, helping to save money for taxpayers throughout the County.

Understanding Property Tax

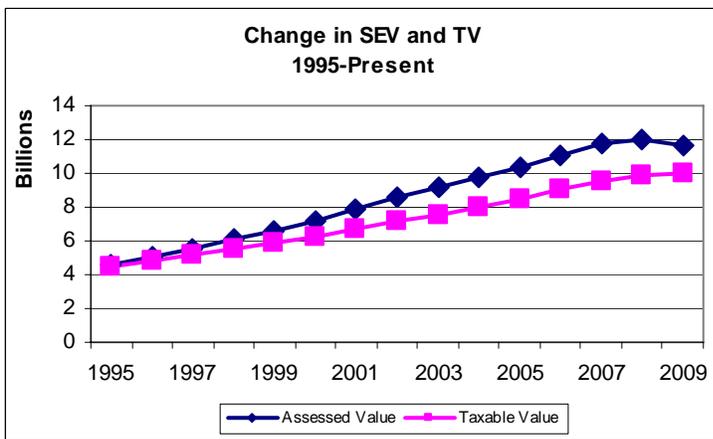
TAX BASE

Ottawa County has four major classes of real property: agricultural, commercial, industrial, and residential. The graph to the right shows that the residential class is 70% of the County's tax base. This means that when home values fall, the County's property tax revenue also drops.



ASSESSED AND TAXABLE VALUES

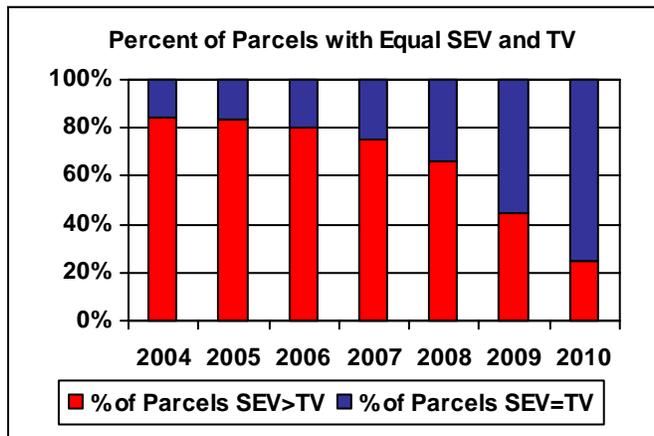
The citizens of Michigan enacted Proposal A in 1994, which changed the method of property tax calculation. Prior to Proposal A, the assessed value of your home was used to determine how much you would pay in taxes. Proposal A created a taxable value for each piece of property which was only allowed to increase annually by the rate of inflation or 5%, whichever was less.



increase annually by the rate of inflation or 5%, whichever was less. The graph to the left shows that since 1995 Proposal A has resulted in savings to taxpayers, which is evident by the gap between the assessed and taxable value. 2009 (estimated totals) is the first time that Ottawa County has seen a significant decrease in the gap between the two values. Overall, Ottawa County residents have still had a benefit from Proposal A. Since the implementation, the total savings to taxpayers on only the County levy is over \$73 million.

THE "GAP"

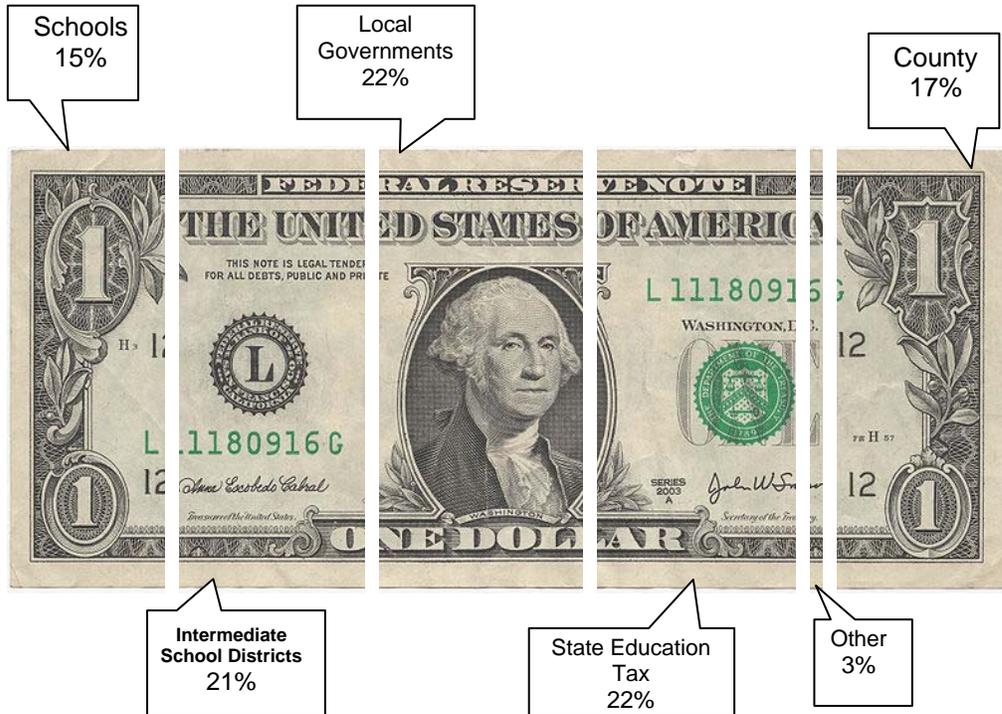
Since Proposal A started, the State Equalized Value (SEV) has grown at a faster rate than the Taxable Value (TV), mostly due to the fact that the growth in TV is limited to the rate of inflation or 5%, whichever is less. This created a healthy cushion between the two values on more than 80% of the residential properties in Ottawa County. The current economic conditions have caused a decline in the SEV, bringing the two values closer together and reducing the gap. For 2009, 55% of properties are expected to have equal SEV and TV values, with this percent growing to 75% by 2010.



Tracking The Dollar: How Your Property Tax Supports County Government

If I am a Homeowner, Where Does My Tax Dollar Go?

The breakdown of the tax dollar below is an average of all areas of Ottawa County. The local government tax varies based on where you live. The Schools total is what homeowners with a homestead exemption pay. The Schools portion increases to 35% of your tax bill without the exemption. Other includes local taxes for libraries, pools, transportation, and other areas.



Did You Know...

Ottawa County's annual financial reports also include the revenues and expenditures for other component units. A component unit is a separate government unit, agency, or non-profit that is combined with other component units to form a reporting unit that conforms with governmental accounting practices. In Ottawa County, the component units include the following:

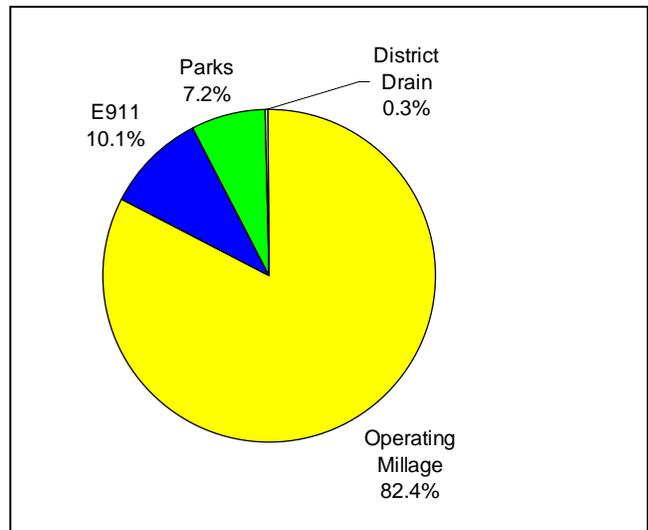
- Ottawa County Public Utilities System
- Ottawa County Central Dispatch Authority
- Ottawa County Drain Commission
- Ottawa County Road Commission

The elected officials of Ottawa County are financially accountable for the component units.

Tracking The Dollar: How Your Property Tax Supports County Government

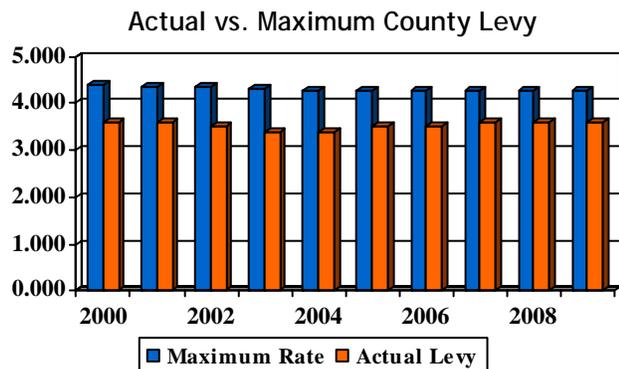
Ottawa County's Tax Dollar Breakdown

Of the 17% of taxes you pay to Ottawa County, 82% or approximately \$35 million supports the general operations of the County.



The County Millage Levy

The citizens of Ottawa County enjoy one of the lowest County millage levies in the State of Michigan. The maximum allowable millage for County operations is 4.2650 mills, but Ottawa County property owners only pay 3.6 mills. The graph to the right shows the gap between the maximum and actual millage rates. Specifically, the difference between the maximum levy and the actual levy represents a **16% savings** to the taxpayers.



How Ottawa County Compares

Each year Ottawa County monitors how our property tax levy compares to other counties in Michigan. We have found that our tax levy is one of the lowest in the state and that Ottawa County is one of the few counties in the state that does not ask citizens to pay the maximum levy possible.

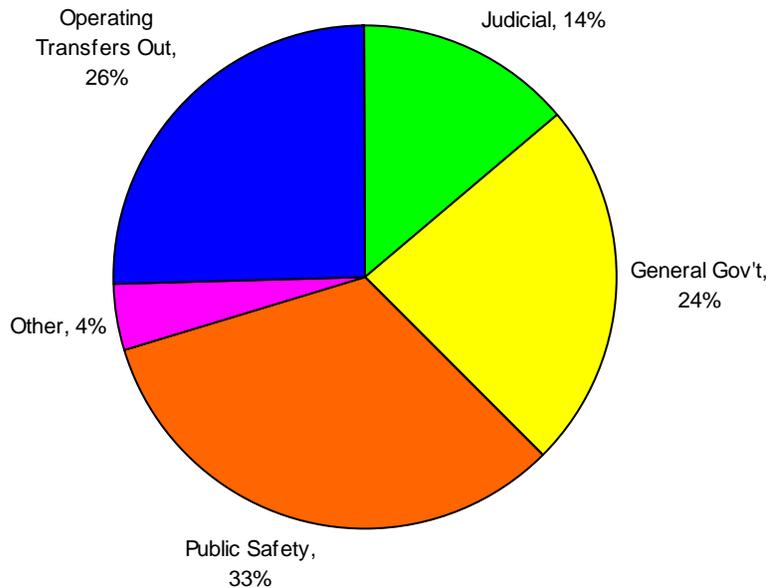
1 mill = \$1 per every \$1,000 of assessed valuation

Ottawa	3.6000
Kent	4.2803
Allegan	4.6577
Muskegon	5.6984

Ottawa	3.6000
Washtenaw	4.5493
Kalamazoo	4.6871
Genesee	5.5072
Ingham	6.3512

Baraga	8.4340
Livingston	3.3897

2009 General Fund Expenditures



<u>Use</u>	<u>2009 Adopted Budget</u>
Legislative	\$574,569
Judicial	\$10,023,962
General Government	\$17,153,854
Health & Welfare	\$735,349
Public Safety	\$23,347,876
Public Works	\$253,300
Community & Economic Development	\$673,050
Other	\$895,286
Operating Transfers Out	\$18,542,035
TOTAL:	\$72,671,443

What is an Operating Transfer Out?

Every year, the County transfers money received in the General Fund to other special revenue funds (used to account for proceeds of specific revenue sources that are legally restricted to expenditures for specific purposes) in order to support the operations of various departments in the County.

Ottawa County has many special revenue funds which are funded by dollars from the General Fund annually. The \$18.5 million transferred out in 2009 went to the Health Department, Community Mental Health, Friend of the Court, Community Corrections, programs in Juvenile Services, contracts in the Sheriff's Department, and the drug courts in the District and Circuit Courts, and many others.

General Government

Many County departments fall under the heading of "General Government", including offices created by the Michigan Constitution and those that are necessary to function as an organization. The Prosecutor, Sheriff, Treasurer, Drain Commissioner, Clerk, and Register of Deeds are elected offices which carry out some of the oldest functions of counties across the state. General Government also includes the County Administrator's Office, Fiscal Services, Human Resources, Building and Grounds, and other departments that provide support to all County services.

Ottawa County's Financial Outlook

IMPACTS ON THE COUNTY'S BUDGET

The future financial projections for Ottawa County are highly dependent upon the world around us. The national economy has financial ramifications that trickle down to the state level which slowly make their way to the local economy. A snapshot of some of Ottawa County's future financial threats are described in more detail below.

- **State Revenue Sharing** The State of Michigan suspended revenue sharing payments to counties in 2004, but made up for the loss of state revenue to counties by requiring counties to advance the collection of 1/3 of their tax millage early for three years and place it into a reserve fund at no cost to the taxpayers. When the reserve is depleted, the state is required to resume revenue sharing payments. In Ottawa County, this amounts to about \$5 million annually, with the state payments necessary to begin in 2011. If revenue sharing is not reinstated, large-scale cuts in service may be necessary.
- **Investment Income** The County is budgeting \$850,000 in interest income for 2009. While this is not the largest source of revenue, it does provide dollars to the General Fund. For 2008, the interest on investments was approximately \$1.7 million, representing nearly a \$1 million drop in revenue from the prior year. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, the national economy and market have impacted the value of investments, despite the fact that they County's investments are laddered and should withstand large swings in fair market value. Second, the revenue is expected to decrease because the County allocated \$20 million in reserved funds to the Fillmore Street Addition and the new Grand Haven Courthouse.
- **Benefit and Pension Costs** For several years, Ottawa County has seen double digit increases in the costs of health, dental, and vision insurance for employees. The County is partially protected from inflation for medical care self-insuring these costs, but in recent years this has not been enough to shield the County from increasing costs. As a result, employees have had an increased premium share over the last few years, which will be at 10% by 2010. Prescription co-pays have also increased.

Ottawa County offers its employees a pension retirement plan after an employee has completed ten years of service with the County. The Municipal Employees Retirement System (MERS) operates the plan. The County is required to make an annual payment to the plan based on an actuarial study. This payment will be increasing dramatically over the next few years, as the economic conditions have impacted the investment income earned by the plan.

- **Employment Projections** The Upjohn Institute issues quarterly employment projections for all of west Michigan, including Ottawa County. In the March 2009 report, the Institute states that economic indicators for the area suggest that the economic downturn is not likely to end soon. This is further evidenced by the recent layoffs in the goods producing sector (including auto parts and office furniture). Another indicator that tells of the difficulties of the layoffs occurring in Ottawa County is the initial claims for Unemployment Insurance, which were up 90.6% from October-December 2007 to 2008.
- **Mandated Services** For many years Ottawa County has seen reduced state funding for mandated services. This includes programs in the Health Department that state law requires to be funded by the state and County at 50% each, which has not occurred as required. In 2008 the cost to the County was \$653,163. User fees helped to cover about \$400,000 for these programs, bringing the total county cost to \$278,147. The County has a lobbyist firm representing our interests in Lansing to prevent additional unfunded or underfunded mandates and to fight for funding of current mandates.

Ottawa County's Strategic Plan Initiatives

◆ Ranking of Services

Ottawa County is mandated to perform many functions by both state and federal law, but there are additional services which are not required by any higher authority, referred to as discretionary services. There are over 80 discretionary services that account for around \$17 million annually. County Administration has worked to identify all discretionary services and bring them before the Board to prioritize. The Board of Commissioners has conducted three rankings with the assistance of Michigan State University, using an audience response system. The results have been presented to the Board as a tool for budgetary decision making.

Currently work is underway to examine the service levels attached to each mandated action or function the County must perform. If Ottawa County provides a service that is above the minimum level required by the state law, the service would then be prioritized by the Board of Commissioners with the discretionary services. This first effort will result in some mandated services being ranked in August 2009 with discretionary services.

◆ Performance Measurement

Performance measures are specific qualitative and quantitative assessments of a department's ability to meet its goals and objectives. Ottawa County has a policy that prescribes the use of performance measures in all departments in order to assess performance and provide accountability for results. Annually, the performance measures play a role in budget decisions relating to personnel requests, technology initiatives, program funding and other budget decisions. Many departments report their performance measures to the public in annual reports, brochures, and other communication tools. The County includes all departments' measures annually in the budget document, which can be found on miottawa.org.

◆ Substance Abuse Funding

Ottawa County receives funding designated for substance abuse treatment and prevention, often referred to as PA 2 funds because the money originates from Public Act 2 of 1986. State law requires that half of the PA 2 monies received by a County be spent on substance abuse treatment and services. For many years this money went to the local coordinating council, who contracted with service providers to provide substance abuse treatment services for Ottawa County residents. In 2010, this process will change. The money will still go to the coordinating council but will be returned to the County to fund substance abuse treatment and services through the County's budget. A work group from several departments is currently collaborating to determine the best use for the PA 2 dollars.

◆ Five-Year Budget Projections

The County's 1993 strategic plan promoted multi-year projections as a tool to prioritize immediate and long-range needs to develop a stable financial base. Budget projections are useful for planning as they give the general direction of County finances based on trends. However, it is important to realize the figures projected are by no means guaranteed funding levels as several factors (e.g. legislation, economy, etc.) affect funding.

Annually, the County updates a five-year General Fund projection based on the history of expenditures, anticipated changes in revenue, and economic conditions. As the 2009 budget was prepared in the summer of 2008, the projections for the General Fund indicated a total fund balance deficit of \$8.3 million by 2014 if spending remains the same. Unfortunately, since then housing values have declined dramatically, resulting in revised estimates as of March 2009 of a total fund balance deficit of \$13.8 million by 2014 if spending remains the same.

Ottawa County's Strategic Plan Initiatives

◆ Saving Through Evaluating

As part of the Board of Commissioners' and Administration's efforts to ensure efficient use of County resources (goal 4 of the strategic plan), several departments have been evaluated to date, with savings achieved in all evaluations listed below.

Information Technology (2005) The County contracted with a consultant to study the Management Information Systems (MIS) Department. The study recommended many changes, most obvious is the name of the department which is now Information Technology. Changes were implemented over two years, including the reduction of two employees and the upgrade of other positions.

Finance and Accounting (2005) The Finance and Accounting Departments were merged in 2005 to form one department, Fiscal Services. The combination eliminated one director-level position while adding a clerical position. Excluding one-time expenses, the County saved \$42,305 in 2005.

Veteran's Affairs Committee (2006) The Soldiers & Sailors Relief Commission was reorganized as a Veteran's Affairs Committee, resulting in \$70,234 savings in 2007.

Administrative Services (2007) Upon the retirement of the Administrative Services Director, the functions of the department were moved to existing areas in the County. Facilities Maintenance remained a stand-alone department, while telecommunications moved to IT, and the purchasing and the Insurance Authority functions moved to Fiscal Services. Estimated first year savings were \$20,000.

Equalization (2007) A study in 2007 evaluated the current staffing levels and the Property Description and Mapping function of the Equalization Department. As a result of the evaluation, Property Description and Mapping remained with Equalization, rather than being moved to Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and support and appraisal positions were modified, resulting in \$63,737 savings in the first year.

Parenting Plus (2007) The Planning and Performance Improvement Department conducted an evaluation of Parenting Plus, a program of the Department of Human Services. Prior to the evaluation, program expenses were over \$700,000 annually. The evaluation revealed that a nonprofit in the community was providing the same service. To eliminate the duplication, the scope of the program was changed, resulting in savings of \$450,208 in 2008.

Human Services Study (2009) In March, Ottawa County started a study to determine if duplication exists with County-funded human service programs and activities. The initial work has focused on internal programs only and will eventually look outside of County departments to determine if Ottawa County's programs duplicate those offered by other governments, nonprofit, and/or religious organizations that serve the citizens of Ottawa County. The results are expected to be complete and presented to the Board of Commissioners during the summer of 2009.

Planning & Performance Improvement Evaluation is a large component of the work done by the Planning & Performance Improvement Department. Past evaluations include the Sobriety/Drug Courts of Ottawa County, Sentenced Work Abatement Program (SWAP), and Intensive Supervision and Cognitive and Behavioral Therapy Programs in Community Corrections. Since 2003 direct cost savings from privatized, restructured, or eliminated programs are estimated at \$4.3 million.

Ottawa County Services

Agriculture/Environment

Ottawa County has the second highest value of total agricultural products sold of all counties in the State of Michigan, according to the 2007 Census of Agriculture. MSU Extension has experts in Ottawa County and the region that work with producers on a variety of crops and animals, all in an effort to keep Ottawa County at the top of the agriculture rankings.



The County supports the environment through funding for Parks and Recreation and the Ottawa County Conservation District. One reason Ottawa County serves as a tourism hot spot is due to our abundant and beautiful natural resources. Protecting and preserving these resources supports the local economy. The Health Department also works to protect public health and preserve natural resources through its Environmental Health branch by testing water at public beaches to ensure the safety of the waterways and lakes in Ottawa County.

Health Education



Ottawa County
Wellness Coalition

The state requires counties to offer health education services to its residents. In Ottawa County, the health education programs strive to promote positive health behaviors that enable people to increase control over and improve their health by providing comprehensive prevention education programs, collaborative community project leadership, community health assessment, reproductive health education, substance abuse prevention, chronic disease prevention programs, and oral health services. The Health Department also works collaboratively with other organizations to provide solutions to major issues facing the citizens of Ottawa County. This includes the Ottawa County Wellness Coalition (OCWC), Communities Helping Ottawa Obtain a Sober Environment (CHOOSE), Ottawa Youth Sexual Health Coalition (OYSHC), and Smoke-Free Ottawa.

Planning & Development

Ottawa County has a Planning Commission designated to oversee various planning initiatives throughout the County. The Commission is supported by the Planning and Performance Improvement Department, which coordinates the projects and performs the work involved with many of the projects. The projects completed in the area of planning and development are beneficial to supporting the economy of the area and ensuring a consistent or improved quality of life for years to come. Specific projects include transportation studies, agricultural preservation, and model ordinance development (wind energy, ethanol production). Economic development efforts are coordinated by the Ottawa County Economic Development Corporation, which works with Planning and Performance Improvement on a regular basis.



Public Safety

Public safety responsibilities are charged to the Sheriff's Department, which operates many programs intended to increase the sense of safety in Ottawa County and to prevent crimes from occurring. The Sheriff's Department also has statutory responsibilities for operating the County jail. Beyond the more noticed road patrol activities, the Sheriff also operates a marine patrol unit to monitor the various waterways in Ottawa County, provides contractual school officers with the financial support of local units of government and schools, and houses a HazMat team to respond to hazardous material spills and other calls.



Ottawa County Services

Justice System

The justice system in Ottawa County includes the 58th District Court, the 20th Circuit Court, and the Probate Court, all of which are mandated by the State of Michigan and must be financially supported by Ottawa County. The three courts share a common mission to administer justice, interpret and apply the law with fairness, equality and integrity, and resolve matters before the court in a timely and courteous manner and conduct themselves in a way that inspires public trust and confidence.



Other components of the justice system include the Prosecuting Attorney, serving as the chief administrator of justice in Ottawa County, Community Corrections, providing alternative sentencing options for offenders, Adult Probation, monitoring and surveillance of offenders, Juvenile Services, providing programs for the rehabilitation of youth offenders, and the Friend of the Court, protecting the rights and interests of children in domestic relations matters.

Preventative Services/Public Assistance

The Health Department has a number of programs that work to prevent health issues from emerging and protect the wellbeing of the public. The Environmental Health division is responsible for restaurant inspections, which ensure the food we eat is safe. The dental van works to prevent major oral health issues for young children on Medicaid, also providing oral health education with services. Ottawa County also funds programs that work to prevent child abuse through educational programs.

Michigan Works! is dedicated to employment and training services, offering employment-related workshops and programs. Community Action Agency (CAA) helps individuals and families struggling with financial self-sufficiency through programs related to housing and food issues. CAA assistance is meant to help individuals or families reach a point where they can assist themselves without public funding.

Clinical Services

Clinical services are generally offered by the Health Department through its clinic locations in Hudsonville, Holland, and Grand Haven or by going to targeted populations. The state mandates many of the programs that are categorized as clinical services to ensure the health and welfare of the state and Ottawa County.

Technology

Ottawa County prides itself on being near the leading edge of technology that internally supports operations and externally provides opportunities for residents. The use of technology allows the County to provide more efficient service to citizens and keep service levels consistent with fewer resources. In 2005 the County initiated a justice imaging system, simplifying the flow of documents between 11 justice departments. The imaging technology will extend into non-justice departments in order to build additional efficiencies into other work flow processes in the future.



Another effort to make it easier to do business with the County while making operations more efficient is miottawa.org, Ottawa County's comprehensive website, recognized as one of the top ten websites in the country in 2008. miottawa.org is a source for information about the County and also serves as a place for citizens to conduct business with different departments. The County has also worked with iPCS Wireless to provide wireless broadband access to over 95% of the County.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why does Parks and Recreation keep buying land in this tough economic time?

In 2006 voters approved a millage of 0.33 mills (\$0.33 for every \$1,000 of taxable value for a property) for the “acquisition, improvement and operation of County parklands”. This was approved by 67% of voters. The money used for land purchases and improvements does not impact or take away from other services of Ottawa County. The tax dollars collected through this special millage can only be used for the specific purposes mentioned above. Also, recessions tend to be the best time to buy prime, pristine lands at a fair market value rather than at inflated prices that tend to be present in a better economy. All of the land purchases and improvements made since 1997 have helped to provide recreational opportunities for Ottawa County residents and visitors alike and improve the overall quality of life in Ottawa County.

Why doesn't Ottawa County do more about roads and snow removal?

In a biennial citizen survey, roads and snow removal are most often identified as the biggest problems of Ottawa County government. The duties of maintaining roads and removing snow are the duties of the Ottawa County Road Commission and not County government. The Road Commission is a separate body, with three commissioners making decisions that impact roads in Ottawa County. The only connection between the County and the Road Commission is the Board's duty to appoint the Road Commission's Commissioners. The property taxes you pay to the County do not support the Road Commission functions. Instead the Road Commission's revenue consists of funding from the state and federal fuel tax and vehicle registrations.

Why is the County adding space to the Fillmore Street Administrative Complex and building the new Ottawa County Courthouse in Grand Haven when times are tough?

The planning for both the new courthouse in Grand Haven and the addition at the Fillmore Street Complex began in 2004, before the economic crisis and current recession. Although formal Board action was taken in June 2006, Ottawa County has a long range building plan that called for the replacement of the courthouse and additional space at the Fillmore Street Complex years before the economy worsened. The economic conditions actually helped Ottawa County with both building projects because of highly competitive bidding and reduced material costs. The Fillmore Street addition was completed on time and came in under budget, with a similar situation expected with the Grand Haven Courthouse. Funding for these projects came from fund balances (one-time dollars) that are not used for on-going operations of the County and through the issuance of bonds.

Why can't the County just act like a business and reduce costs?

Like a business, the County has reduced costs in several areas and continues to look for ways to reduce spending. Certain programs not meeting performance standards have been eliminated, employee retirement health insurance benefit costs to the County have been decreased and eliminated for future employees, and employee insurance premium sharing has been increased. Other programs, though effective, have also been reduced or eliminated.

However, unlike a business, as the County's revenues decline, the demand for services typically *increases*. Citizens who have lost their jobs and health insurance turn to the health department for services. Activity in the civil court increases when citizens are unable to pay their bills. In addition, several County services are mandated by law. For example, the County is required to cover the cost of attorney fees for defendants in criminal cases that are unable to afford those costs.