

2020 Positions and issues

Our region suffers from a lack of many essential services. The lack of affordable transportation, childcare, and internet access are just a few of those very deficits of services for low income families. This is greatly exacerbated by the increase in low wage jobs that often have variable working hours. This challenge is more severe in communities like ours in which the available jobs often require a long commute and non-traditional working hours. The reality is that the economics of many low income workers is overwhelming. The greatest issue that impacts all the other sectors is the opioid epidemic. Local municipalities and non-profits lack the resources to provide criminal justice services, prevention/treatment and other needed intervention resources.

Despite these challenges the municipalities in Southeast Ohio have managed to improve local infrastructure through ARC, CDBG and OPWC funding. These communities have also championed innovative approaches to dealing with opiate addiction, prevention and treatment. The Mayor's Partnership has been a strong advocate for sharing information, suggesting best practices and providing support between the communities in the MPP. The Mayor's Partnership has provided information and training in USDA Housing programs, EPA standards and Asset Management, Water and Wastewater funding and requirements, Fire safety and First Responder programs and a myriad of other topics relevant to the needs of Mayors and Councils in Southeast Ohio.

Position One: Restoration of Local Government Funds

In December of 2016 the MPP sent a resolution to Governor Kasich requesting the restoration of LGF to the 2012 levels. As stated in the letter, "We, the members of the Mayor's Partnership for Progress, a collaboration of Mayors in 12 Counties in Southeast Ohio, write to you seeking the restoration of the Local Government Funds to pre-2012 levels. We understand the desire of the State of Ohio to close the gap on an \$8,000,000,000 deficit that existed prior to 2012, but feel your assessment of local capacity was erroneous. Some communities may have been inefficient and could find savings through shared services, but in our region, we have shared services (formally and informally) for decades. We have also been skilled at frugality for years and years. We rely on volunteers to complete many tasks that would be done by paid employees in other municipalities. These tasks include park maintenance, building repairs, cleaning services, clearing brush, building playground equipment and many other items." Since the sending of this letter our struggles with the loss of Local Government Funds have not diminished. We call for the restoration of funding.

Position Two: The expansion of Broadband access into the MPP region

The MPP has taken a strong stance in support of bringing Broadband access to rural Ohio. The MPP believes that the state and federal government will need to play an active role in policy and funding to make this a reality. As stated in the article “Reaching Rural America with Broadband, by Sharon Strover (January 2017), “The policy debates in Washington provide the U.S. with the opportunity to choose to provide equal access to high-speed internet all across the country, or to relegate rural users to their smartphones, library parking lots and slow home connections. Real high-speed internet could change the lives of rural Americans: The FCC itself has reported that people use fixed broadband differently, and get more benefits from it than mobile data.

Fundamentally, it is a question of values. In the 1930s and '40s, the public sentiment was that the nation would be better off if everyone had reasonably comparable electricity and telephone service. As a result, the federal government established a system of loans and grants to ensure universal access to those key utilities. To help, the FCC set up a system to charge businesses and urban customers slightly higher fees to subsidize the higher costs associated with bringing phone lines to rural areas.” Progress on this issue has been very slow. We support all serious efforts to remedy this challenge.

Position Three: The MPP opposes the financial burden created by State audit requirements

Small, rural communities lack trained staff that can manage the requirements of the State Auditor and the UAN (Unified Accounting Network) system. Municipalities often get “red flagged” for matters that present no danger to the funds provided through the appropriation of tax revenues. When communities get assigned to a “high risk pool” their audit costs can increase by anywhere from 300% to 800% and this presents a substantial burden on the finances of the municipality. In many cases, these communities participate in the “Ohio Treasurer’s Checkbook” which is a mechanism for transparency in which communities voluntarily participate. The MPP believes that the state should provide auditing services not through fees, but a line item for just such a purpose. We supported the AOS efforts to obtain additional state funding for its operation. These funds need to be focused on reducing the cost of audits. We would also encourage a significant expansion of training opportunities provided through the Auditors offices.

Position Four: The MPP supports additional funding for transportation

Our region has faced transportation challenges for decades. The MPP recently engaged in a successful effort to stave off an assault on the Medicaid transportation system that would have further damaged our regional public transportation. On the other hand, the increased gas tax has brought much needed additional resources for road maintenance and public transportation. At the individual level the cost of personal vehicle operation continues to climb. We have advocated for some relief in the form of driver’s license suspension reforms. In general we continue to advocate for infrastructure, public transit, and other transportation related support.

Position Five: Continue and expand water assistance programs

The MPP was successful in obtaining funding for a limited low income water assistance program in cooperation with Community Action Agencies. The program needs to expand the benefit level to \$500 and address the varied living arrangements low income families face. Assistance should be based solely on financial need. Our regions water systems need greater federal and state support to meet EPA quality standards. Funding from the new state water assistance program should be targeted to improve water systems without raising rates.

Position Six: Expanded funding for substance abuse treatment

The region has been devastated by the impact of opioid and other substance abuse. It has taxed our treatment capacity as well as jail space and child welfare systems. The continued expansion of Medicaid service is vital as well the additional funding provided in the recent state budget. Yet much more work remains. It is vital that we continue to expand treatment and prevention programs. The prospect of a significant settlement in the pending opioid lawsuits is encouraging but we must make sure our region is appropriately represented in any final action.

Position Seven: Shared services

We have a long history of collaborative efforts in our region. Recent challenges with finding sufficiently trained fiscal officers and water treatment staff have continued. We welcome the opportunity to explore a cooperative effort with Local Development Districts to consider housing shared personnel to provide these or other essential services for small communities within the MPP region.

Position Eight: Childcare

Our region has lost one-third of its publically funded childcare capacity in recent years. Growing training and technical requirements coupled with low payment rates have pushed many providers out of business. Policy changes are needed to reverse this trend. We also continue to advocate for improved payment rates with special attention to in- home childcare aides. We feel they offer the best opportunity to address our regional childcare challenge.

Position Nine: Basic human needs must be met

We live in the poorest region of the state. Our citizens struggle to meet their basic needs. We support the strengthening of safety net programs that assure that those needs are being met. Education, healthcare or other treatment programs cannot succeed with families or individuals who are struggling to survive. OWF payment levels are very low. A recent federal court ruling cited the unfair difference between foster care and OWF child only cases. We call on Ohio to increase OWF child only payments to address this issue.

Position Ten: The state must stop the continued assault on Home Rule.

The Ohio legislature has acted to thwart Home rule in the areas of minimum wage, Mayor's courts, gun control, plastic bags, local hiring, predatory lending and many others. These state laws need to be reconsidered and further erosion halted.