



Cass County

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TUESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2017

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: **CASS COUNTY STRATEGIC PLANNING**

CASS COUNTY COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

Located in the southwestern region of Michigan, Cass County is the second county east of Lake Michigan, sits on the Indiana border mere miles from Elkhart, South Bend, Notre Dame University and the extensive retail area found in Mishawaka. Chicago is about 75 miles west and easily accessible by rail out of Dowagiac, the only city situated within the County. Cass County was organized in 1829, named after the former territorial governor, Lewis Cass and originally inhabited by three bands of Potawatomi Indians with European settlers moving here in the 1820's. Cass County played an important role in the Civil War as a location for the Underground Railroad. Assisted primarily by Quakers, many black slaves were successfully settled there.

Today, Cass County is both a rich agricultural area with numerous family and large, corporate size farms, as well as a tourist location, primarily because of the approximately 250 lakes and ponds, including several nature preserves and three major County parks which makes for great water sports, hiking and bird watching. According to the 2010 census Cass County had a population of 52, 293 and covers 508.5 square miles, which includes one city, four villages and fifteen townships. County government operations are situated in the Village of Cassopolis.

FINANCIAL PICTURE

The Government Finance Officers Association awarded a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting to Cass County for its comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR) for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2016. This is the twentieth consecutive year that the County has received this award.

The reserve of cash, along with the management and policies of the County's delinquent tax revolving funds, has allowed the County to maintain an A 1 bond rating throughout the recent time of economic instability. Additionally:

- The assets of Cass County in 2016 exceeded its liabilities at the close of the most recent fiscal year by \$29,081,337 (net position). Of this amount \$15, 979,875 (unrestricted net position) may be used to meet the County’s ongoing obligations to citizens and creditors. Governmental activities contain \$5,666,817 of the unrestricted net position.
- At September 30, 2016, Cass County’s governmental funds reported combined ending fund balances of \$15,145,979. Of this total \$5,533,455 or 36% is unassigned and is available for spending at the County’s discretion. \$4,482,727 or 30% has been assigned by the governing body to be used for specific purposes; and the remaining \$5,129,797 or 34% has been determined to be committed, restricted or non-spendable.
- At the end of the fiscal year, unassigned fund balance for the General Fund was \$5,533,455 or 35% of total General Fund expenditures.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The County has had some notable successes in the area of economic development in recent years. The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians has opened a regional casino located near the City of Dowagiac. Also, a new 30,000 square foot community health center was completed within the Village of Cassopolis, Southwestern Michigan College, located in Dowagiac, continues to expand, opening on-campus dorms, offering education opportunities for local and regional residents providing an educated and trained workforce. However, opportunity exists for more strategic economic development. The Economic Development Corporation of Cass County is in the process of creating a 501c 6 that will actively engage business leaders throughout the region and encourage same to play an active role in the development of business opportunities.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Cass County’s governance body is comprised of seven Commissioners, elected to two-year terms. As recent as about seven years ago, the County moved from fifteen Commissioners to a Board that has been appropriately whittled back to seven members. January of 2017 saw the installation of two new Commissioners, as one long time Commissioner and one 4 year Commissioner did not return to the Board.

Some years ago, Cass had retained a County Administrator that served in that capacity for over 20 years followed by several Administrators within about a six year time frame. The Board, most recently, hired a County Administrator in June of 2016. Over the past year, the Board of Commissioners have been discussing and making some progress on several major issues such as health care costs, pension costs, unfunded liability with MERS, and a vacant, historic courthouse.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic Planning History

The County of Cass last engaged in a meaningful strategic planning process in the late fall of 2005. Some of the general outcome ideas from the strategic planning included:

- Resizing and stabilizing the organization
- Outsource certain outmoded programs

- Focus on limited set of core services
- Use more technology
- Develop more partnerships
- Do more with fewer employees
- Change its employee benefit programs: health insurance; pension.
- Look at certain millage opportunities
- Create a five-year financial model

However, the organizational understanding is that 1) Within a couple years, the county, state and all localities began experiencing a recession; 2) Not much was done with the completed strategic plan.

Anticipated Strategic Planning Outcomes

Today, a clear priority is to engage Cass County personnel including elected officials, the governance body, Administrator, and employees in a strategic planning process that values and respects the roles of all and creates consensus around articulable goals that captures a re-energized and exciting path to a bright future for Cass County. While much has been started in the past year, the actual process of working with all relevant populations within the framework of strategic planning plus the creation of a map for critical goals and the supporting activities to achieve these goals will create a much needed shared vision.

Potentially, three populations could be engaged during the strategic planning process: the Community, the Employees, and the Leadership, to include governance body and elected officials. Outcomes from the process would feed into the County's budget process for the 2018 – 2019 fiscal year and beyond. Tentatively, the Board of Commissioners would like to target mid to late January 2018 to begin engaging in the strategic planning process. An all day February 23rd, 2018 workshop date has already been scheduled at the beautiful Edward Lowe Foundation campus for all final strategic planning activities, reviews and other sessions needed to finalize the process.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

The anticipated timeline for conducting and completing the strategic planning process is over the first two months of 2018 with a final written, professional document drafted and finished by the Facilitator reflecting the strategic planning outcomes submitted to the Cass County Administrator no later than Monday, April 2, 2018. Cass County invites qualified individuals to submit electronically a Response to the Request for Proposals to facilitate a strategic planning process with Cass County no later than Noon on Friday, September 15, 2017. After review of submitted Proposals, interviews to further discuss the Proposal in detail, as the Board of Commissioners determines necessary, will be scheduled during the month of October, 2017. A decision would be made by no later than December 1, 2017.

A submitted RESPONSE TO THE REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL should include:

- Name of company/individual and all contact information

- The names and bios of all individuals that would lead and/or facilitate the strategic planning process
- Experience in leading a strategic planning process
- References
- A copy of your last completed strategic planning document
- All anticipated Costs
- Proposed timeline
- Narrative and/or documents that will assist the County in evaluating your company, relevant experience, creativity, ability and expertise in achieving clearly defined goals and objectives, type and variety of strategic planning activities and processes successfully used.

PLEASE SEND YOUR RESPONSIVE PROPOSAL TO:

**Karen L. Folks
County Administrator
County of Cass
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Cassopolis, Michigan 49031**

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