

City of Alma, Michigan
2011 Collaboration Plan
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The City of Alma has a long history of collaborating with its neighboring communities. In many cases, certain services would not be possible without collaborating with our neighbors. In other cases, the level of service that we can provide through collaboration is much greater than if we had provided the service for just our residents. Many of the collaborative efforts have become routine business for the City of Alma and many other cities. Finally, in some collaborative efforts, the benefits are more through coordinated efforts that enhance the service for each community than simply cost savings.

This report is being prepared to comply with the State of Michigan Economic Vitality Incentive Program (EVIP) requirement that every city must prepare a report on collaboration and cooperation. The report needs to provide information on current collaborative efforts as well as discuss the future cooperative ideas under discussion. The report needs to include cost savings for each collaborative effort.

The cost savings for many collaborative efforts is difficult to calculate. The calculation of the cost savings often depends on the perspective of the entity making the estimate and the set of assumptions about the level of service to be provided. For this report, the estimate of cost savings will be from the perspective of the City of Alma. The level of service is assumed to be the current level of service. The amount of cost savings will be the past year for current savings and the first year in future savings. In reality, many of the services could not be provided but for the cooperation of the other units of government. Finally, not all collaborative efforts are undertaken for cost saving reasons. Sometimes a collaborative effort is just good public policy. Sometimes, a joint approach makes life easier for the citizens or customers. For future collaborative efforts, cost estimates are even more difficult to estimate. Until the details of the efforts are worked out and placed in a contract, estimating any cost savings are extremely imprecise. We have attempted to provide a cost estimate as close as we can. The reader needs to recognize that the final negotiated details can greatly affect the actual savings. In this report, a brief history of current collaborations will be provided first. Each service description will include an estimate of the cost savings. In making the estimated cost savings calculation, the report will be focused on the cost saving to the City of Alma. The report will not attempt to calculate the overall net savings of the collaboration.

Current Collaborations:

- 1. Greater Gratiot Development, Inc.** was one of the first major collaborative efforts in Gratiot County. GGDI is the economic development agency for the all the communities in Gratiot County. By having a coordinated effort, Alma receives a better level of service than could be achieved by running its own office. If a prospective developer does not fit within the first target community, GGDI frequently shifts their focus to a neighboring community that may be better suited for their needs.
 - a. Key Partners:** Gratiot County, Alma, Breckenridge, Ithaca, Saint Louis and Pine River Township.
 - b. Budget:** \$375,954.

4. **Gratiot Community Airport Authority** is a joint venture between Alma, Saint Louis, Ithaca, Pine River, Arcada, and Gratiot County. The airport serves the entire county. It is difficult for any one government to operate the airport. All revenues for the airport total \$113,136. The governmental share is \$60,000 of which \$34,000 comes from other agencies. Without the joint effort, it is doubtful the airport would survive.
 - a. **Key Partners:** Alma, Gratiot County, Arcada, Ithaca, Pine River, Saint Louis.
 - b. **Budget:** The Airport operating budget is \$98,398. The City of Alma and Gratiot County contribute \$26,000 each. The other municipalities contribute \$2,000 each.
 - c. **Benefits:** Gratiot County has only one general aviation airport. The airport has proven to be an important economic development tool. Without the airport, it is unlikely that several of the major new industrial customers would have located within the county. Without the collaborative effort, the airport would likely close or be scaled back to a much lesser of an asset.
 - d. **Cost Savings:** \$34,000.

5. **Alma Dial-A-Ride** is supported by the City of Alma, the State of Michigan, the federal government and the City of Saint Louis. The collaboration between the local, state and federal agencies makes the service possible. While DART serves all citizens, most of the customers on DART are senior citizens, disabled citizens or children. Many of our customers depend on DART to live independently. Without DART, many would need an assisted living facility. It is difficult to attach a value to having residents live independently. Without the \$390,000 in federal and state assistance, DART could not exist.
 - a. **Key Partners:** Alma, Saint Louis, State of Michigan and U.S. Department of Transportation.
 - b. **Budget:** The total budget for Dial-A-Ride is \$574,400 of which \$223,200 is raised locally through property taxes and the fare box. The state contributes \$182,202 for operations. The federal government contributes \$75,127 for operations and most of the funds for capital acquisitions. Saint Louis contributes \$4,092 to support a more limited service in Saint Louis.
 - c. **Benefits:** The City of Alma can run a bus service much cheaper than can the state or federal government. Our overhead and cost of doing business is much lower. By having the city run the service, the state and federal governments save money by allowing more people to live independently. With the collaborative financing, the City is able to offer the service to its residents.
 - d. **Cost Savings:** \$368,483.

6. The **Gratiot County Geographical Information System Authority** is funded by all the cities, villages, townships and county in Gratiot County. The GIS Authority provides maps, aerial photographs and other address related information. The GIS Authority also provides a web interface for our residents to easily access the information. For the City of Alma, the aerial photographs were the top selling point. The aerial photographs are used by the engineering staff, the assessor, zoning administration and economic development. Our annual contribution is \$3,304. By cooperating, we are able to receive aerial photographs of the entire county every 5 years. Without the collaboration, Alma would not receive the aerial photographs as frequently nor at such a high resolution. The web interface makes the information available to our residents.
 - a. **Key Partners:** Gratiot County, Alma, Ithaca, Saint Louis, Breckenridge, Arcada, Pine River, Fulton, Bethany, and all other Gratiot County townships, and MDOT.
 - b. **Budget:** \$3,304.
 - c. **Benefits:** Our joint effort has made it easier for developers to access key information about potential sites. It also makes it affordable for all the municipalities to have their GIS data available on the Internet. We have a consistent format that makes it easier for developers to use.
 - d. **Cost Savings:** The aerial photographs cost ~\$80,000. We contribute \$16,520. Our savings is \$63,480.
7. The **MAGNET drug enforcement team** is a multicounty drug enforcement effort. We provide one officer to the team. Our officer works in another county. Another agency sends an officer to work in our community. Without the collaboration, drug enforcement would not be undertaken. Our communities are too small for our officers to work drug enforcement. Too many of our residents know all our officers.
 - a. **Key Partners:** Alma, Saint Louis, Owosso, Gratiot County, Shiawassee County, and Michigan State Police.
 - b. **Budget:** The City of Alma contributes one police officer to MAGNET.
 - c. **Benefits:** Without a collaborative effort, it would be very difficult for municipalities in Gratiot and Shiawassee counties to work the illegal drug scene. Our team approach has resulted in many successful drug investigations in both counties.
 - d. **Cost Savings:** \$50,000.
8. **Countywide Master Planning** has saved each municipality money and improved the quality of the resulting master plan. Each community contributed \$1 per parcel to the planning. By working together we were able to better understand our neighboring communities and their plans for the future. Most communities learned that their neighbor's plans fit well with their plans and even complemented each other. The \$3,262 the City of Alma contributed was a bargain. A go-it-alone approach would have cost between \$10,000 and \$20,000 and the product would have been less comprehensive.

- a. **Key Partners:** All cities, villages, townships and the county in Gratiot County as well as LIAA.
 - b. **Budget:** \$60,000.
 - c. **Benefits:** Better plan by working together. Increased collaboration by knowing neighboring communities better.
- 9. Sewer:** The **Sewer System and Treatment Plant** receives and treats sewage from both Arcada and Pine River Township. The sewer mains and lift stations in the township are owned by the township. The townships pay the city to repair and maintain the sewer lines and lift stations. The overall flow from the township is low compared to the overall system. We receive \$88,825 from the two townships. This is 7% of the wastewater budget. There are small cost savings to the City of Alma but huge cost savings for the townships by collaborating with the city.
- a. **Key Partners:** Alma, Arcada Township, and Pine River Township.
 - b. **Budget:** The total budget for the wastewater utility is \$1,256,842. Combined Arcada and Pine River Townships contribute \$88,825.
 - c. **Benefits:** The township contribution to the overall revenue and wastewater is small. By allowing the two communities to connect to our plant, the City of Alma was eligible for a federal grant to build the plant. In addition, we saved the two townships millions, since they did not need to construct a second or third plant. The sewer system in their township has permitted additional growth and development in the area.
 - d. **Cost Savings:** \$88,825.
- 10. Water:** The City of Alma provides water to a district in Pine River Township. The city maintains the water main and issues all tapping permits. The City provides water to the mobile home park and Walmart. The township customers currently contribute \$48,500 to the city's water fund which anticipated budget revenue is \$1,563,810. Under the agreement with the townships, the City is able to search for water anywhere in Pine River Township.
- a. **Key Partners:** Alma and Pine River Township
 - b. **Cost Savings:** There are big savings for Pine River Township since they do not need to construct a water system. Very minor savings for the City of Alma. In the future, the water system to Pine River Township may improve the water system looping; but, that is in the future.
 - c. **Cost Savings:** \$48,500.

11. Cable: The City of Alma was a founding member of the Mid-Michigan Cable Consortium to provide joint franchise negotiation, administration, and operation of the Governmental, Public and Educational channels.

- a. Key Partners:** Alma, Arcada Township, Village of Breckenridge, Clare, Ithaca, Mount Pleasant, Pine River Township, Saint Louis, Village of Shepherd, and Village of Harrison.
- b. Budget:** The budget for the cable consortium is \$261,694, of which the City of Alma contributes: \$37,000.
- c. Benefits:** By working together, all the communities can enjoy a state of the art production studio. The consortium has the funds to better protect the communities' interests in franchise discussions and advocacate for legislation affecting cable companies.
- d. Cost Savings:** \$224,694.

12. Brownfield Authority:

- a. Key Partners:** All cities, villages and townships in Gratiot County, Greater Gratiot Development.
- b. Budget:** \$13,435.
- c. Benefits:** By working together, only one office, Greater Gratiot Development, needs to become an expert on all the details related to accounting and report of Brownfield Authorities. The City of Alma Finance Department does not need to learn all the accounting and reporting requirements of the Brownfield Authority. Our annual audit is easier. If we had a separate Brownfield Authority, it would need to be reported as a component unit with full disclosure. By having Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. run the Brownfield Authority, it is easier for the developers and for the municipalities. It is likely that the City of Alma saves \$3,000 to \$4,000 each year in accounting, reporting and auditing expenses.
- d. Cost Savings:** \$3,000 to \$10,000 per year depending on the activity of the authority.

13. Solid Waste: The cities of Alma and Saint Louis jointly bid solid waste and recycling services. We have recently expanded to provide an environmentally safe means of disposing of unused or expired drugs.

- a. Key Partners:** Alma and Saint Louis.
- b. Budget:** The total budget for the Solid Waste Authority is \$545,494, of which the City of Alma contributes: \$376,146.

- c. **Benefits:** It is difficult to calculate the savings to each community. There is very little administrative overhead. Unless we bid each community separately as well as a package, it is impossible estimate the savings. Beyond dollars savings, there are numerous other benefits. The two cities now have similar trash and recycling programs. The rules are the same which makes educating and administering the program easier. By sharing in the household hazardous waste program, we can reduce the overhead and increase the awareness of the program.
- d. **Cost Savings:** At this point, it is difficult to calculate. The savings are likely to be under \$10,000.

14. Grant Writing: The Cities of Alma, Ithaca, Saint Louis with the Village of Breckenridge, Gratiot County and Alma College jointly wrote a grant application for energy efficiency. Each governmental entity received an energy audit. Businesses within the county received mini-grants to undertake energy efficiency projects.

- a. **Key Partners:** Alma, Ithaca, Saint Louis, Breckenridge, Gratiot County, Alma College and United Way of Gratiot County.
- b. **Budget:** The total grant received was \$185,805.
- c. **Benefits:** Without the collaboration, it is unlikely that we would have received the grant. The entire \$185,805 would not have been received or expended in Gratiot County. Each city received an energy audit of their municipal facilities. We distributed \$98,608 to Alma businesses to improve the energy efficiency of their buildings.
- d. **Revenue Enhancements/Cost Savings:** The grant will save energy cost in the future. However, for a grant, the revenue side is the significant side of the equation. The partners received \$190,000 which would not have been received if we had not collaborated.
- e. **Benefit incurred:** \$185,805.

15. Wind Ordinance: All the governmental entities within the county drafted and adopted the same ordinance for wind turbines. One wind farm has begun construction of 125 wind turbines with announced intentions of adding an additional 125. We are currently working on two additional wind farms. If all are successful, we will have well over \$1 billion of construction activity because we work together and had one set of rules for the county.

- a. **Key Partners:** All cities, villages and townships in Gratiot County, as well as Gratiot County.
- b. **Budget:** The cost of drafting a new ordinance typically costs \$1,000. The cost of drafting the ordinance was shared by many municipalities.

- c. **Benefits:** While we all saved money on sharing the same ordinance, the real issue is the number turbines we attracted by working together. By having the same rules and having joint planning commission meetings, Gratiot County has attracted the attention of several wind farm developers. Soon, the first wind farm will be the largest tax payer in the county. As other developers progress, the potential for more wind farms means more tax revenue for the townships, schools and county.
- d. **Cost Savings:** A common ordinance saved a nominal amount of legal fees. There are no annual savings since there is no annual cost. The real benefit is in making the region attractive to wind farm developers.

16. Liability Insurance: The City of Alma is a member of the Michigan Municipal Risk Management Authority which is a joint venture with many other cities to provide liability and property insurance for the city.

- a. **Key Partners:** Over 200 cities, villages, townships, counties and special districts.
- b. **Budget:** The total budget is \$45,763,461 of which Alma contributes: \$209,340.
- c. **Cost Savings:** Very difficult to estimate. Our price is competitive with commercial insurance. During some periods, it is extremely difficult to purchase commercial liability insurance for a municipality. The joint venture ensures that we will always be able to be insured.

17. Worker's Compensation: The City of Alma is a member of the Michigan Municipal League's worker's compensation fund which is joint venture to handle worker's compensation claims.

- a. **Key Partners:** 845 Michigan cities, villages, townships and counties.
- b. **Budget:** The total budget is \$27,734,243 of which Alma contributes: \$36,207.
- c. **Cost Savings:** Very difficult to estimate. Unknown.

18. Hazard Mitigation Plan: The City of Alma worked together with representatives from Gratiot County and the other municipalities to develop a hazard mitigation plan for the area.

- a. **Key Partners:** Gratiot County, Alma, Ithaca Saint Louis, Breckenridge, all townships in Gratiot County, Michigan State Police.
- b. **Budget:** Each partner contributed one or more staff people for a series of meetings.

c. **Benefits:** The County took the lead in preparing the Plan. Without their lead, each community would have had to devote its resources to write their own plan. We estimate that it would have cost the City of Alma \$5,000 to prepare its own plan. It is unlikely that the Michigan State Police would have assisted communities on a single community basis. Our joint effort also meant that the Michigan State Police and the Federal Emergency Management Agency could review one plan instead of 24 separate community plans.

d. **Cost Savings:** \$5,000.

19. Equipment Sharing: In Gratiot County, the municipalities frequently borrow and share equipment. We reimburse each other at Schedule C rates. Items such as sewer flushers, street sweepers, and directional boring machines are expensive. It would be impossible of us all to own one. By sharing, we can all access the equipment we need.

a. **Key Partners:** Alma, Gratiot County Road Commission, Ithaca, and Saint Louis.

b. **Budget:** There is no preset budget for equipment sharing.

c. **Benefits:** Communities do not need to buy every type of equipment.

d. **Cost Savings:** This varies widely from year to year depending on the equipment we need to borrow. Best estimate: \$5,000.

20. Building Inspector: The City of Alma contracts with Gratiot County to provide building inspection services. We have begun discussions about having a countywide Inspection Services Authority to provide building inspection, electrical, plumbing and HVAC inspection services to all our residents.

a. **Key Partners:** Alma and Gratiot County.

b. **Budget:** ~\$45,000.

c. **Benefit:** By working together, both the county and the city can reduce their costs and make the program more affordable to the public. The bigger benefit is to developers in the area by the City of Alma and the Gratiot County by having one inspector have one set of rules of all contractors to follow. This makes it easier to educate the contractors about the rules and expectations.

d. **Cost Savings:** Best estimate is approximately \$50,000.

21. Pension Administration: The City of Alma uses the Municipal Employees Retirement System of Michigan to manage, administer and invest our pension system. By following the rules of MERS, Alma's pension is 93% funded.

a. **Key Partners:** There are 750 municipalities that are member of MERS of Michigan.

b. **Budget:** The total revenue for MERS of Michigan is \$1,341,817,880 of which the City of Alma contributes: \$430,000.

- c. **Benefits:** The City of Alma is too small to hire professional money managers. By pooling our resources, we have access to professional money managers as well as professional staff to manage the personnel records and advise our employees.
 - d. **Cost Savings:** This very difficult to estimate. The City would need to hire additional staff to do this in-house. Rough estimated savings: ~\$100,000.
- 22. Library:** Our library is a member of a regional cooperative, the White Pine Library Cooperative. With the Coop, our library is able to borrow just about any book in any library within Michigan. We sometimes borrow books from out of state libraries.
- a. **Key Partners:** 49 area libraries in 14 counties are members of the cooperative.
 - b. **Budget:** ~\$2,700 per year.
 - c. **Benefits:** The Cooperative provides a service to facilitate interlibrary loans of books and materials. The Cooperative also assists with a number of technical issues.
 - d. **Cost Savings:** This is difficult to determine. Without the Library Coop, our offerings would be less. With the service, our patrons have access to tens of thousands of additional books.
- 23. Data Services:** Our library uses the Internet services from our Intermediate School District. The library needs to have both child friendly Internet services as well as unrestricted access for adults. The RESD has expertise in providing the proper filters for children.
- a. **Key Partners:** Alma and the Gratiot Isabella Regional Education School District.
 - b. **Budget:** \$6,000.
 - c. **Benefits:** The RESD has a special expertise in restricting Internet access for juveniles while provide full access for adults. They provide a safe Internet experience for all the regional schools.
 - d. **Cost Savings:** The Internet service is cost competitive with other providers. The RESD adds value by providing a safe Internet environment for children.
- 24. Road Salt:** We purchase road salt under the state contract. The schools cannot purchase under the state contract because the contract requires delivery of too large of a quantity of salt. We sell the salt to the school district at our cost. Without the City's partnership, the school district would be buying salt in bags which is much more expensive.
- a. **Key Partners:** Alma and Alma Public Schools.
 - b. **Cost Savings:** There are no real cost savings to the City. The Schools realize a significant cost savings. The City has no means to estimate the cost savings to the schools. We bill the school district about \$500 per year for road salt.

- 25. Police Services:** Alma and Saint Louis are neighboring communities. We will often work together to reduce the amount of overtime we spend on police services. Our agencies will provide backup to the other community. This reduces the amount of staffing we need to have on duty during the late/early hours of the night and morning. The City also assigns one officer to work closely with the schools. This officer will spend as much time as is possible inside the schools.
- a. Key Partners:** Alma and Saint Louis.
 - b. Budget:** This collaboration has no separate budget.
 - c. Benefits:** \$5,000 to \$10,000.
 - d. Cost Savings:** We have not traditionally tracked this number. We estimate that we save \$5,000 to \$10,000 per year.
- 26. Auctions:** Whenever Alma, Saint Louis or Ithaca has an auction to sell surplus equipment, we cooperate with each other and sell our neighboring community's items as well. This practice makes for a larger auction and tends to draw larger crowds. There has not been an auction for a couple of years. There are no recent cost estimates of savings.
- 27. Rails to Trails:** The Gratiot County Road Commission, Pine River Township, Seville Township and the City of Alma jointly constructed a section of the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail from Alma to the west county line. Thanks to Fred Meijer, MDOT, many, many individuals and all the agencies the funds were raised to construct this trail. The trail was an increase in service that would not have been possible without cooperation. There were no "cost savings" in the traditional meaning of the term.
- 28. Drug Testing:** The City of Alma participates in the Michigan Municipal League drug and alcohol testing program for our employees who possess a Commercial Driver's License (CDL). Under federal regulations, all employers who have positions that require CDL certification must have a random testing program for drugs and alcohol. Also, after most accidents, drivers are required to be tested for drugs and alcohol.
- a. Key Partners:** Alma, Michigan Municipal League, and many other Michigan cities.
 - b. Budget:** ~\$2,000 per year.
 - c. Benefits:** By working together, not every community has to be an expert in all aspect of the rules. The pool provides administrative oversight and organizes the testing program. Having an outside pool select the candidates for testing helps ensure the randomness of the picks. The biggest benefit is ensuring that we remain in compliance with the rules.
 - d. Cost Savings:** This program is currently under review. We may choose a local option since the federal CDL program is now well established and other alternatives are available.

Future Collaborations

The City of Alma is planning several future collaborations. Some plans are far enough along in the planning stage that it is likely that the efforts will bear fruit. Some are in the early exploratory stages which may mean that unknown factors might make the idea uneconomical or unlikely.

- 1. Water:** The City of Alma and the City of Saint Louis are working to create a water authority to produce treat and transmit potable water to the two cities. The likelihood of the project going forward is excellent. The City of Saint Louis needs to replace their current well field. If we fail to reach an agreement, it is likely that the two cities will have a water war over the best well fields. In order for the Alma plant to treat enough water for the City of Saint Louis, the plant will need to be expanded.
 - a. Key Partners:** Alma, Saint Louis, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
 - b. Budget:** The initial estimates for the project are still being developed. The project is likely to cost \$10 million to \$20 million.
 - c. Likelihood of Success:** This is a difficult project to undertake. There is a sense of urgency for the communities to move forward. The chance of success is good to excellent.
 - d. Benefit:** The City of Saint Louis needs a new source of water. The merging of water systems is the best option for both cities. We will not be fighting over ground water if we work together. One set of plant operators can process water for both communities. Re-configuring the plant to be able to process enough water for both communities will provide some upgrades and improvements to the plant that Alma will eventually need to undertake. Short term, there are likely to be few immediate savings. Long term, the savings in operations and equipment replacement could be substantial. A success in this project may lead to other collaborations in the future.
 - e. Cost Savings:** The consolidation of water systems will mean a multi-million dollar upgrade to our water plant to be paid by the City of Saint Louis.
- 2. Water Ordinance:** To develop a uniform water ordinance for Alma, Saint Louis and Pine River Township. With both Alma and Saint Louis providing water to Pine River Township and Alma and Saint Louis looking to create a water authority, the need for a uniform water ordinance is increasing. One ordinance will better educate the three communities about the proper conduct for water utilization as well as make it easier for the staffs of Alma and Saint Louis which will be called upon to perform work in the other jurisdictions. There will be only one set of rules for the employees working with the system and the customers.
 - a. Key Partners:** Alma, Saint Louis, Bethany Township and Pine River Township.
 - b. Budget:** Overall budget is nominal. Cost of \$1,000 to \$3,000.

- c. **Likelihood of Success:** This project is relatively easy. Much of the initial work has been prepared. The chance of success is excellent.
 - d. **Benefit:** Both Alma and Saint Louis provide water to Pine River Township. Saint Louis provides water to Bethany Township. Both Alma and Saint Louis want to update their existing water ordinance to meet with current industry standards. Having one common water ordinance allows the cities to share the cost development but more importantly, area residents will learn the rules quicker if they are the same. Having residents know the rules reduces time spent on enforcement.
 - e. **Cost Savings:** Nominal: \$1,000 to \$3,000.
3. **Zoning Codes:** Developing common terminology for zoning and planning is a stated goal of our master plan. By using the same terms for zoning, it will be easier for developers to locate, grow and expand in Gratiot County. There will be little cost savings to each community by implementing the common terms, but long term there will be increased growth in the region which will increase the job base and tax base of the community.
- a. **Key Partners:** All zoned cities, villages and township in Gratiot County.
 - b. **Budget:** Overall budget is nominal. Cost of \$1,000 to \$3,000.
 - c. **Likelihood of Success:** This may be a difficult one to achieve. While this is a minor change in the code, it may be difficult for all the boards to agree on the same terminology. The first step may be to get the cities to agree followed by the village and then the townships.
 - d. **Cost Savings:** None the first year. If successful, future growth in area over time.
4. **Improve collaboration within the criminal justice system such as video testimony for police officers for traffic cases, sending criminal cases to prosecutor electronically, implement of e-tickets for traffic violations.** Under the current system, Alma sends an officer to Ithaca every morning. The trip typically takes two to three hours. Much of the time is spent waiting for the prosecutor's office or the court system. By being able to transmit the information electronically, the officers would be able to make a quick trip to Ithaca to sign papers without having the extended waiting time. If just one hour per day is saved, the City will have an additional 260 hours of officer time working in the City on police work. The City will gain one hour of productive time for each hour saved.
- a. **Key Partners:** Alma. Saint Louis, Ithaca, Breckenridge, Gratiot District Court, Gratiot County Prosecutor, Gratiot County Sheriff.
 - b. **Cost Savings:** This project will provide better allocation of resources. Roughly \$16,000 of paperwork and waiting time could be better allocated to investigative services.

5. **Explore sharing of computer data bases and programming such as assessment programs and tax collection records.** All the municipalities and the county use the same program for property assessments and tax collections. Each spring, both the assessment systems and tax collections must be reconciled to the county's database. If the all the units were to use the system database and same system, each unit would save time in not having to reconcile between the local and county system. In addition, maintaining the names and mailing address for every parcel of land is difficult and time consuming. Having one database to maintain would save both the local units and the county time and effort. Having a central database will allow improved security and backup procedures for most local units of government.
 - a. **Key Partners:** All cities, townships, villages in Gratiot County and Gratiot County.
 - b. **Likelihood of Success:** This is a rich target for streamlining services.
 - c. **Cost Savings:** At this point, the cost savings are unknown. As the problem is better defined, a cost estimate will be able to be calculated.

6. **Explore merging police departments** between Alma and Saint Louis. The two communities are neighbors.
 - a. **Key Partners:** Alma, Saint Louis and Police Officers Association of Michigan.
 - b. **Likelihood of Success:** Difficult. The project has the potential to yield significant long-term savings for the City but there will be a number of major decisions that must be made before an estimate can be made.
 - c. **Cost Savings:** The discussions are in the early stages. Until more talks and discussions about staffing levels and the degree of integration have been held, it is very difficult to estimate the amount of savings. In the short term, it is likely that a merger will cost money to properly outfit a combined department. Long term, savings are likely depending on the level of consolidation.

7. **Unified Complete Street policy.** Alma, Saint Louis and Ithaca are all planning to adopt a complete street policy and plan. By coordinating efforts, we are likely to develop a more comprehensive policy. A coordinated plan will ensure that the trail and paths in one community meet the trails and paths of the neighboring community.
 - a. **Key Partners:** Alma, Ithaca, and Saint Louis.
 - b. **Budget:** Initially very little. As plans are formed, funds will need to be raised make the plans a reality.
 - c. **Likelihood of Success:** Medium to high.
 - d. **Cost Savings:** None the first year. Long term street and trail plans will be better coordinated which will reduce overall cost.

- 8. Interconnect trails from Saint Louis to Alma to Ithaca.** There has been a long term goal of the three cities in Gratiot County to be interconnected by a non-motorized trail. The trail will provide a green path for commuters as well as encourage the local residents to live a healthier lifestyle.

 - a. Key Partners:** Alma, Ithaca, Saint Louis, Gratiot County Road Commission and MDOT.
 - b. Budget:** Not yet estimated.
 - c. Likelihood for Success:** Difficult. This a long term goal and may take several years to achieve.
 - d. Cost Savings:** None. This will be a new level of service. The trail will cost money. It will save money to work together and share cost with one contract. At this point, cost savings is not possible since not even the route has been finalized.

- 9. Wellhead protection plan.** The State of Michigan is encouraging all jurisdictions with water systems to develop wellhead protection plans. The purpose of the wellhead protection plan is to protect the water source we use at the water treatment facility. Since our source water originates outside the city limits, the best plan will include collaboration with our neighboring communities. The committee formed to develop the plan includes members that reside in neighboring communities that are likely to be affected by the plan.

 - a. Key Partners:** Alma, Saint Louis, Arcada Township and Pine River Township.
 - b. Budget:** \$10,000.
 - c. Likelihood of Success:** High. The plan is important to the city and all of its partners. The results will protect water for many residents in several communities.
 - d. Cost Savings:** Cost savings is the wrong metric for wellhead protection. Collaboration is required for a good plan. Better and safer drinking water for the region is the goal. No cost savings will be generated.

- 10. Banners for downtown.** The Cities of Alma, Ithaca, and Saint Louis are considering jointly hosting a downtown art banner program. Area residents will submit proposed designs for banners. The winners will have an opportunity to create a full size banner to be hung in the downtown. Our plan is raise funds from local businesses to support the art project. The back side of every banner will recognize the major project donors. By working together, the overhead of the project is reduced and the donors only have to contribute once.

 - a. Key Partners:** Alma, Ithaca, and Saint Louis.
 - b. Budget:** ~\$15,000.

- c. **Likelihood of Success:** Good. Fund raising will be the most difficult part to get the project off the ground. The success of the fund raising will determine the number of banners in the program.
- d. **Cost Savings:** The goal is to promote the communities with little cost to the cities. Without this collaboration, this project may not have been considered.

11. Police cross training as firefighters. The changing requirements of the modern workforce are making the staffing of fire departments more difficult. More employers are downsizing and becoming successful by have a lean workforce. This means that fewer employers are willing to allow their employees to respond to fire calls during the day. One solution is to train police officers to respond as fire fighters.

- a. **Key Partners:** Police Officers and Fire Fighters.
- b. **Likelihood of Success:** The new union contract addressed the many labor law issues. Police officers have started responding to fire calls.
- c. **Cost Savings:** In the early years, it will cost a little more to have officers crossed trained. In time, the fire department will save \$2,000 to \$3,000 per officer trained.

12. Inspection Services. Currently, the municipalities only provide building inspectors. For electrical, plumbing, and mechanical inspections, contractors must use state inspectors. This is a constant source of frustration for local businesses. With state cut backs, the state inspectors are frequently only in the county one day per week. The local units have expressed a desire to also have more say in the customer relation aspect of the inspection process. The municipalities are exploring the option of having an inspection firm provide the other inspection services in Gratiot County

- a. **Key Partners:** Alma, Ithaca, Saint Louis, Breckenridge, and Gratiot County.
- b. **Budget:** Charges for the inspection services would need to cover the cost of the inspection service.
- c. **Likelihood of Success:** This concept is in the conceptual stage. It could be easy to implement but it has to make financial sense before approval.
- d. **Cost Savings:** None to the city. Any cost or savings will be borne by the contractors.