MICHIGAN GREEN COMMUNITIES

Madison Heights

Community Sustainability Profile

An installment in the Michigan Green Communities Community Sustainability Profile Series

Most Recent Success: Energy Futures Grant

Billions of dollars are trickling down to states, local governments, and NGOs from the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). An ambitious mindset towards grant applications and a trusting, healthy council-manager relationship has positioned Madison Heights to successfully pursue new grant opportunities as they arise. In early April 2024, the city received notice that it had secured $500,000 through the Department of Energy's (DOE) Energy Futures Grants program. Madison Heights was the lead applicant on a project to create a regional decarbonization plan, along with the Cities of Ferndale and Oak Park, Lamphere School District, Michigan Clean Cities, and Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance. (source)

The creation of this plan will involve outlining strategies for the region to upgrade their current fleet and mobility systems and improve building energy performance. It will also encourage broad reductions in GHG emissions and boost economic development throughout the region. A focus on community engagement and education is key to the implementation of the plan. The team may be eligible for additional implementation funding in the future through DOE. (source)

The Energy Futures Grant award exemplifies Madison Heights' success in proactively positioning itself for grant funding opportunities before they even exist. This achievement occurs at a time when most municipal governments in Michigan already face a lack of funding, yet unprecedented amounts of federal dollars have been made available in recent years through legislation. It showcases the importance of local governments choosing to embrace uncertainty when looking towards the future.

Madison Heights, MI

Population (2020 Census): 28,468
Governance: Council-Manager
Location: Southeast Michigan, Oakland County

Key Takeaways:

- Energy efficiency investments have the potential to drastically lower energy costs. Those savings can be used to make additional investments.
- Apply a sustainability lens to your community's capital improvements planning and/or comprehensive planning.
- To expedite grant applications, consider a "preapproval" list of projects/goals that your council/trustees authorize staff to pursue grants for, even if the specific grants haven't been identified yet.
- Use the Michigan Green Communities Challenge to track progress and identify next steps.
- Regional partnerships can not only make a larger impact, but also set up smaller communities to be more competitive for climate/sustainability-related funding.

What are Madison Heights' key strategies for pursuing grant funding?
In Madison Heights, City Manager Melissa Marsh and her office prioritize open collaboration with the City Council. They build trust by aligning their priorities and maintaining an open line of communication. During the budgeting process, the Manager's Office and Council anticipate that grant funding will partially support budget initiatives, even if the exact source of that funding remains uncertain or unknown. Aligning key priorities unburdens Council and staff because Council no longer needs to make decisions about whether to apply for grants on a case-by-case basis. Authority to pursue grant funding that supports the previously agreed upon priorities is delegated to the Manager's Office.

Madison Heights prepares projects in advance of the identification of grant opportunities. This approach allows staff to respond quickly to grant notices, especially when the application window is short. Even if a funding source has not yet been determined, Madison Heights knows which 'shovel-ready' projects would be the right fit when funding opportunities eventually arise. This emphasis on thinking beyond the present and nurturing a healthy relationship between the Council and the Manager's Office is key to setting and meeting ambitious goals.

> *"If your community wants to pursue funding opportunities, you need to have a focused vision before you start. Madison Heights has been successful in pursuing and securing grants because we have a strategic plan in place. […] The Michigan Green Communities Challenge was critical in starting this planning process. [The MGC Challenge] will help you identify what you've already accomplished and where you want to go next. That's where Madison Heights started, and it's why we've gotten to where we are now."*
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> - Melissa Marsh, Madison Heights City Manager, January 4, 2024

How does this philosophy help Madison Heights set and achieve its sustainability goals?
In the heart of the metro Detroit region, Madison Heights strives to offer its residents the highest quality of life. Feeling the weight of regional expectations, the city keeps pace with neighboring communities, prioritizing excellence in every aspect. The City Council and dedicated city staff have integrated sustainability into their strategic objectives, ensuring they remain competitive and steadfast in their commitment to residents' well-being.

Most of Madison Heights' sustainability projects are grant funded. Although Madison Heights only began participating in MGC in 2022, the city has been involved in energy use reduction projects for over 15 years. This began with grants from the Southeast Michigan Regional Energy Office (SEMREO) in 2010. These grants allowed the city to reduce its energy use by 25 percent over 10 years, achieving a 38 percent energy savings during the recession. Director of Public Services Sean Ballantine explains that the city "powered through because we received really good payback on energy efficiency improvements."

Case Study Highlight:

When it comes to grant applications, having strategic objectives and a sustainability plan in place is key. (Grant funding can also be used for creating a sustainability plan—check out MGC's Sustainability Template Plan.) Madison Heights funded the creation of their sustainability plan through a Community Energy Management Grant from Michigan's Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). Their sustainability plan outlines what they have already accomplished in Madison Heights and delineates their next steps. Working with their consultants at Energy Sciences, the city has made sure its goals are achievable and tailored to the specific needs of their community.



Participation in Michigan Green Communities furthers the future-minded approach of Madison Heights and helps them determine where to focus their energy. The annual Michigan Green Communities Challenge is rooted in best practices for municipalities and helps the city to identify the next steps to advance their goals. Where are they missing out on savings? What have their peer communities been able to achieve? This mindset will allow Madison Heights to continue forward on this path of pursuing opportunities that demonstrate the city's commitment towards realizing a sustainable future for its residents.

Michigan Green Communities (MGC) is a statewide network of local and state government staff and officials, and higher education institution staff that collaborate with one another, through peer learning and information sharing, to promote innovative sustainability, climate change, and environmental justice solutions at the local, state, regional, national, and international levels. The core component of the MGC program is the MGC Challenge, an annual sustainability benchmarking program.

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Learn more at: migreencommunities.com