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History

Suburbs Alliance Metro Matters

Our beginnings: The Michigan Suburbs Alliance

In the spring of 2002, a group of city leaders representing a handful of southeast Michigan's older suburbs gathered together to discuss the challenges their respective communities were facing. Deep concerns were expressed over crumbling infrastructure, declining populations, decreased state and federal funding, disadvantages in attracting developers and, of course, their struggles to make ends meet with the state's municipal finance policy draining away their property tax revenue.

That day, a light bulb clicked on in metro Detroit. These leaders realized that as diverse as their cities were, they shared important characteristics. They were older, located in close proximity to a major city and had little to no undeveloped land. Many of these cities identified as "inner-ring" or "built-out" suburbs. More importantly, these leaders saw they were all struggling with losing residents to newer subdivisions in younger suburbs, developers that were passing them over because they did not want to deal with the complications of "redeveloping" already existing infrastructure and a deficient state finance system that was disproportionately hurting their aging communities. Working together – to share resources when providing services, to voice their collective concerns and to craft a survival strategy – was the answer to overcoming their challenges.

In June that year, representatives from 14 metro Detroit suburbs unanimously agreed to form the Michigan Suburbs Alliance. Together, they sought to harness the power of southeast Michigan's 1.9 million inhabitants to demand an end to the systematic disinvestment in older cities. These mayors and city managers founded the Michigan Suburbs Alliance as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit coalition of southeast Michigan's mature suburbs. They understood that finding solutions to their shared problems would require cooperation among similar communities across the region.

Over a decade, the Suburbs Alliance grew to encompass 31 of the region's mature, inner-ring suburbs, representing more than 1,000,000 residents. With far-reaching partnerships and unexpected collaborations, the Suburbs Alliance facilitated local action shaped by the wisdom of many.

Our Future: Metro Matters

In the early 2010's, we realized that the pathway to success for our region was different than we originally imagined. Our region's greatest wins in recent years have come about through the collaboration of diverse constituencies—local government, yes, but also business leaders, civic leaders, and advocacy organizations.

For example, transit in this region couldn't have been catalyzed without the business community committing to build M1-Rail; it can't be sustained without the Regional Transit Authority as an institution; and the RTA wouldn't exist without the civic infrastructure that fought for decades for its creation. Individually, any of these efforts is laudable but limited. Together, however, they created a real opportunity to transform our region for the better. We saw the need for a different organization to help discover and advance more of these opportunities—and decided to become that organization.

Our core philosophy has always been that our interdependence is our greatest strength; that is, if we can recognize and build on our commonalities rather than our divisions, our potential as a region is unlimited. Previously, we'd applied it as a coalition of local governments. Now, we'd expand our work to better unify metro Detroit's diverse leadership around smart regional solutions.

We'd already begun working with the City of Detroit and a more diverse group of stakeholders, but even as we walked the regionalism walk, one glaring mismatch between our beliefs and our practices stared us in the face: our identity. The Michigan Suburbs Alliance was the perfect descriptor for our organization at its inception, but it didn't work anymore. When we said "we are one", it said "we are separate". When we said "Detroit is the heart of region", it cut us off with "but you are the suburbs". When we proclaimed the metropolitan space is our home and municipal borders are meant to be crossed, it insisted that our borders define us.

So we began the process of rebranding the organization to better communicate our philosophy and strategy. After more than a year of research and planning, we unveiled our new identity: Metro Matters. We believe this name describes the organization we truly are, and the organization we want to be: sharp, inclusive, and dedicated to solutions that benefit the entire region.

We still carry the DNA that made the Michigan Suburbs Alliance great: a collaborative spirit, bold creativity, expertise in our issue areas, and a deep appreciation for our metropolitan mosaic. And we'll always be there to help and advise communities, but Metro Matters now focuses on researching and advocating for smart regional policies that strengthen the region while also creating opportunity and improving equity. Perhaps most importantly, we carry forward the belief that across the politics, issues and boundaries that shape our region, we proclaim: our Metro Matters.

UPDATES

YOUR TURN TO MAKE THE NEWS!

What do you think are the biggest challenges and/or opportunities facing our region in 2016? What kind of media coverage can effectively communicate the complexity of these issues, and vet possible solutions? These questions are at the heart of our new project with Metromode, Issue Media Group's regional publication for metro Detroit. We believe that ...

HAZEL PARK: A POINT OF PRIDE

Hazel Park is a pretty special place, home to smart local government, engaged community, and unexpected innovation. As they experience new investment and attention from this region and beyond, it's important to recognize the hard

work that brought them to this point. Read our love letter to the city!

MEET DETROIT'S FIRST MILLENNIAL REP!

Since 2009, the Millennial Mayors Congress has worked to tackle shared challenges in metro Detroit through regional collaboration, but we were missing a paramount participant—the City of Detroit! This year, Detroit City Council voted unanimously to join the Congress, officially making Detroit our 23rd member city.

EVENTS

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