

Southwest Washtenaw Council of Governments  
Proposal to LIAA “Partnerships for Change” Grant – Third Round  
April 1, 2006

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The Southwest Washtenaw Council of Governments (SWWCOG) is submitting a Third Round proposal to the Land Information Access Association for project funding under the *Partnerships for Change* program.

## Background

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The Southwest Washtenaw Council of Governments, also known as SWWCOG, is an established regional consortium. It consists of the townships of Manchester, Bridgewater, Freedom and Sharon, the Village of Manchester, and Manchester Community Schools. The Village is geographically centered in the region and is contiguous or nearly contiguous to all four townships. The SWWCOG region is in the southwestern most part of Washtenaw County and is adjacent to the Townships of Saline, Lodi, Scio, Lima and Sylvan, as well as Jackson County to the west and Lenawee County to the south.

SWWCOG’s townships are characterized by significant percentages of prime agricultural land. The accompanying map, Attachment A, illustrates the extent of these agricultural lands, as well as the amount of non-agricultural open space already protected by various methods, such as conservation easements.

The Village of Manchester serves as the town center for the inhabitants of both the Village and the surrounding four townships. It offers educational, commercial, cultural and recreational amenities. All together, this region is a clearly identifiable community, with long and deep roots.

The Village of Manchester is currently taking part in an effort to retain its small town character and picturesque setting through a local historic district designation. The Village Council appointed a Historic District Study Committee, which conducted an inventory of historic and architecturally significant buildings in Manchester’s traditional commercial core, Exchange Place. The Village has since recognized the importance of proper stewardship for its irreplaceable historic downtown commercial buildings and both their intrinsic and economic role in sustained downtown viability. Throughout this process, the Village received technical assistance from the Washtenaw County Historic Preservation Program (a program of Washtenaw County Planning & Environment) that coordinated with the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office on behalf of the Village.

At the same time, the SWWCOG Townships are implementing various policies to preserve the primarily agricultural-based local economy. For example, Bridgewater Township has adopted a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) ordinance, with technical assistance from the Washtenaw County Department of Planning & Environment. Bridgewater Township is also in the process of amending the township Master Plan to include Agricultural Preservation elements. These efforts, once completed, will allow Bridgewater Township to apply to the Michigan Agricultural Preservation fund (State PDR fund).

In addition, SWWCOG’s elected officials, farmers and others are participating in the Food System Economic Partnership (FSEP); a southeastern Michigan five-county initiative that is developing partnerships and strategic plans to maintain and expand a sustainable regional food production, processing, distribution and sales system. FSEP is undertaking both economic development and “food security” strategic planning process. FSEP has numerous partners, including Michigan State University Extension at both the state and county levels.



## Valued Community Resources that Form the Focus of this Project

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The **community resources** that are the focus of this proposal are **the small town character of the Village of Manchester with its historic and cultural resources and the primarily agricultural-based economy of the surrounding SWWCOG region.**

### History of Cooperation

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The Southwest Washtenaw Council of Governments (SWWCOG) is a regional planning group that formed in 1999 and published its first Regional Plan in May 2003. The Regional Plan addresses land use planning, agriculture and rural character, housing and transportation. The Plan can be obtained by going to SWWCOG's website: <http://www.swwcog.org/>, and a hard copy is an attachment to this application. Development of this Plan was achieved through technical assistance from the Washtenaw Department of Planning and Environment; and with the support of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners. It was endorsed by the five local units of government, as well as the Manchester Community Schools Board of Education.

Washtenaw County's Board of Commissioners adopted "A Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County: A Sense of Place, A Sustainable Future," (County Plan) in September 2004. Numerous recommendations within the County Plan are consistent with and supportive of the goals and strategies of the 2003 SWWCOG Regional Plan. Washtenaw County Planning & Environment (P&E) will participate with SWWCOG in a *Partnerships for Change* program to achieve the mutual goals discussed below. The web site for the County Plan is:

<http://complan.ewashtenaw.org>

The 2003 SWWCOG Regional Plan states the following goals:

- Develop common future land use districts for use in a regional plan map.
- Resolve inconsistencies in master plans and zoning ordinances across local unit borders.
- Create a coordinated strategy to decide where all land uses should go, and at what density.
- Continue our willingness to work together toward managed growth, including discussions of annexations and PA 425 agreements.
- Make the plan defensible against legal challenges.
- Develop strategies to maintain the functional and scenic integrity for major traffic corridors.
- Create a plan for shared resources, including public amenities and future public services expansion

The implementation strategies of the 2003 Plan to achieve these goals are:

- To adopt local unit master plans that are consistent with the regional plan.
- To rewrite zoning ordinances to support the master plans.
- To implement supporting ordinances, including natural features and subdivision regulations.
- To develop performance measures to evaluate the regional plan in future years.

The communities of southwestern Washtenaw County have been working cooperatively for over 50 years. Though it consists of five separate municipalities and a school district, southwest Washtenaw has for many years been characterized as a shared community. They have worked cooperatively on such projects as the annual Manchester Chicken Broil (since 1953), which raise significant funds for community improvements. A co-operative multi-jurisdictional refuse



transfer system has operated for a number of years. Several of the jurisdictions participate in the Western Washtenaw Recycling Authority.

Among the most successful collaborations to date has been the shared Mineral Extraction Ordinance. Originally created by Bridgewater Township in the early 1990s, the other SWWCOG townships worked to perfect the ordinance and all have since adopted it. The ordinance continues to hold up to challenges in court in part because of its regional significance and support.

### Opportunities for Improving, Protecting and Preserving Identified Community Resources

The SWWCOG communities will use the *Partnerships for Change* technical assistance to incorporate its strategic goals into consistent master plans and zoning ordinances, among other strategies, to preserve and protect the highly valuable and irreplaceable agricultural and small town rural landscapes.

Given the extent of SWWCOG's existing cooperative arrangements, the receipt of technical assistance from LIAA via the *Partnerships for Change* program will enable this region to take its partnership from the planning phase to the implementation phase. In addition, the strong relationship with Washtenaw County Planning & Environment will provide local support to SWWCOG in the crafting of its regional goals into tangible policies and ordinances.

The 2003 Regional Plan goals and strategies are listed on page 2 of this proposal. The *specific opportunities for change* utilizing LIAA assistance are listed below numerically. There is no specific order of priority in this list. However, it is believed by SWWCOG and County Planning & Environment that all goal areas are logically related and that they flow together.

**The eight Specific Opportunity Areas** for which the SWWCOG leadership is seeking support from the LIAA *Partnerships for Change* program are:

1. Define the boundaries of an urban growth area in and around the Village of Manchester. This would address several aspects of the 2003 plan, such as providing density where services exist, and in the process reducing pressure on sprawl into rural and agricultural lands.
2. Include infill development design and character features that are sensitive to scale and that maintain the regional sense of place as rural and village landscapes.
3. Develop model ordinances to ensure the desired character of the community is retained e.g. architectural guidelines, signage, lighting, etc.
4. Identify potential uses of 425 agreements; where to use them, where not.
5. Designate areas for the expansion of medium to high density residential housing to accommodate the needs of the local workforce and/or older adults.
6. Identify a greenway, open space buffers or transitional areas between the growth area and agricultural areas.
7. Resolve inconsistencies in master plans and zoning ordinances across local unit boundaries.
8. Integrate the County Comprehensive Plan with the SWWCOG Regional Plan.

LIAA, the SWWCOG communities and Washtenaw County government all have a strong likelihood of success with a *Partnerships for Change* initiative, given the already established working relationships in this region and the strategic opportunities that exist as a result of there being an adopted regional plan and a recent county comprehensive plan.

The primary opportunity for both LIAA and SWWCOG lies within the chance to assist these local units to achieve the **eight specific opportunity areas** that are driven by the 2003



SWWCOG Regional Plan goals. The leadership at both the regional and the county levels are prepared to implement their plans using LIAA technical assistance.

### How Partners Will Administer and Participate in this Multi-Jurisdictional Project

SWWCOG has been meeting monthly for seven years. Each participating community has two representatives, one regular and one alternate, for participation in monthly meetings and various task groups. Members of the SWWCOG are the Supervisors of Manchester, Bridgewater and Freedom Township, a member of Sharon Township's Board of Trustees, the Village President of the Village of Manchester, a member of the Manchester Community Schools School Board and a member of the Village Planning Commission. Alternates for elected officials are typically the chairperson of the planning commission or another member of the board of trustees of a given unit of government. The *Partnerships for Change* program personnel would work directly with this leadership group and their alternates.

In addition, more direct involvement of the five SWWCOG jurisdiction planning commissions was discussed at the March 8<sup>th</sup> SWWCOG meeting. At this meeting the application to LIAA was authorized. It is expected that the five planning commissions will participate in the *Partnerships for Change* activities, along with their elected officials. The Village Manager of the Village of Manchester will participate, as will the SWWCOG representative from the Manchester Community Schools Board of Education. Each jurisdiction's planning consultants will also need to participate, as the process of updating master plans and zoning ordinances takes shape.

Washtenaw County Department of Planning & Environment has assigned a Principal Planner to participate with SWWCOG to assist in regional planning efforts. The Principal Planner will also participate in the *Partnerships for Change* program. It is anticipated that this participation will be a major assignment for the Principal Planner.

### Staff and Volunteer In-Kind Support

The leadership of SWWCOG meets monthly. It is anticipated that *Partnerships for Change* project planning and implementation will become the regular business of the SWWCOG monthly meetings for the duration of the project.

The Principal Planner from Washtenaw County Planning and Environment will provide the primary staff support for LIAA, including managing between meeting communication between LIAA and the 5 jurisdictions and the Manchester Community Schools.

The Village Manager of the Village of Manchester will also have a role in supporting the project through his coordination of the efforts of the Village President, who also serves as chairperson of SWWCOG. The Village of Manchester is the largest jurisdiction, by population, in SWWCOG and will be the lynchpin of successful intergovernmental efforts through *Partnerships for Change*. It is anticipated that the majority of the Master Plan and Ordinance changes developed in this project will center upon the Village and its relationship to the four surrounding townships as well as the public school system.



## Level of Services Desired from *Partnerships for Change*

SWWCOG is requesting Level 3 project support. It is difficult at this point to know precisely how many hours it will take to accomplish all 8 specific opportunity areas. However, it is clear that they are sufficiently complex in nature that Level 3 Project support is an appropriate level to request. Reviewing 5 Master Plans and their respective zoning ordinances alone is a major undertaking. Development of new ordinances that are consistent across jurisdictions and taking them through the Master Plan review and approval processes will also be time consuming.

In the event Level 3 project support is not feasible, SWWCOG would be willing to pare back its goals in order to receive maximum practical benefit from LIAA. These 8 specific opportunity areas are interrelated, but it is possible that with the assistance of LIAA project staff, some narrowing or refining of the scope of the project can be achieved by combining or eliminating certain goals, so that there are fewer total goals to implement.

## Commitment to Provide Local Match Within Six Months of Project Start-Up

It is understood by all entities that the *Partnerships for Change* grant has a 20% local match. Washtenaw County Department of Planning & Environment has offered to share the cost of the 20% local match as long as the goals pursued in a *Partnerships for Change* initiative are in alignment with the goals of the County Comprehensive Plan, as was discussed at the SWWCOG meeting of March 8, 2006. The specific distribution of shared local match costs will be determined by SWWCOG and Washtenaw County as soon as practicable upon notice of a LIAA award.

## Documentation of Commitment to the Project by the Participating Jurisdictions

- Attachment B: Copy of the March 8, 2006 authorizing resolution from SWWCOG for Washtenaw County Planning & Environment staff to submit a grant application to LIAA on behalf of SWWCOG for the *Partnerships for Change* program. This is item # 7 in the March 8, 2006 minutes.
- Attachment C: Copy of the March 20, 2006 resolution “Authorizing Submission of an Application to the Land Information Access Association (LIAA) Grant Program Entitled ‘Partnerships for Change.’”
- Note: The other jurisdictions’ supervisors felt that the SWWCOG resolution was sufficient for purposes of this grant application. The local boards of trustees were advised of the grant application to LIAA by each township supervisor.

## Other Attachments

- Attachment A: Map Showing the SWWCOG Region in Relation to the Rest of Washtenaw County
- Copy of the 2003 Southwest Washtenaw Council of Governments Regional Plan

