

SUMMER 2016

Semscope

A quarterly publication of SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments

RIVER RAISIN NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD

CELEBRATING PARKS



SEMCOG

SEMCOG

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Cover photo:

As the National Parks Service (NPS) celebrates 100 years this summer, we visited Southeast Michigan's only national park – River Raisin National Battlefield Park in Monroe. One of the newer units of the NPS, we were amazed at this regional gem and, while there, learned quite a bit about Michigan's role in the War of 1812. This photo was taken on May 19, 2016.

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SEMC

OG's Past Chairs were honored at the Annual General Assembly. (Top, l-r) Kathy Vosburg, Jack Morris, Doug Woolley, John Jones, Jeff Jenks, Michael Sedlak, John Scott, and LaMar Frederick. (Sitting, l-r) Anita Ashford, Joan Flynn, and Mary Blackmon. Check out the rest of the GA photos beginning on page 10.



Commentary

Leading together in exciting, challenging times

Rodrick Green
SEMCOG Chairperson
*Trustee, Superior
Charter Township*

I am honored to serve as Chair of SEMCOG during these exciting times. There is so much that is going on in this place we call home. The new QLine being constructed along Woodward Avenue bolsters our efforts to bring regional transit to Southeast Michigan. The proposed Gordie Howe International Bridge crossing will provide jobs and be an economic stimulus to the entire region. The new hockey arena for our beloved Red Wings. New housing proposed for downtown, midtown, and throughout Detroit. Welcoming new retail outlets like Nike and others, while enjoying the renovated Cobo Center and beautiful new facilities like the Blue Water Convention Center where we held our General Assembly. Regional support for the arts, parks, and recreation that make Southeast Michigan a great place to be. These are exciting times.

And yet, these are challenging times. We face the challenge of finding funding and support for schools and ensuring that every child has access to a quality education. The need to monitor the ongoing impact of the crisis in Flint and what it means for us in Southeast Michigan. The challenge of including in this economic upturn, those who have traditionally been left out and yearn for a slice of the American pie. We have the ongoing fight to end blight and revitalize our struggling neighborhoods. The need to pay attention to an expanding drug epidemic and to corral the spiraling crime that often accompanies it. The task of enticing more people to become part of the Michigan miracle. Finally, the reality of doing more with less: repairing roads, maintaining infrastructure, and balancing budgets in the face of declining revenues and federal assistance.

Where do we stand? Where does SEMCOG fit in this complex mosaic? What is our role in these exciting yet challenging times? I believe that we stand as partners for progress, as those who understand the strength of regionalism. We stand as those who recognize that working together is more dynamic and more productive than working alone, and that more can be achieved because the sum is truly greater than its parts.

I believe that our destinies and those of our children are truly tied to our ability to work together, to build together, to plan together, and to think together. That together, we can 'restore the roar' and imagine new greatness for our community.

I believe that we represent the strength and resilience of Southeast Michigan...and that within these walls and within our community are some of the brightest and best minds and talent the world has to offer.

I believe that the same men and women who gave us Vernors and Faygo; Motown and mass production; great universities and great sports teams, are more than ready to meet the challenges of today. I believe that together, we can achieve great things for a great state!

I know we can and I look forward to a great year!

What calls you outside?

Enjoying beauty and fun in Southeast Michigan parks



With nearly 200,000 acres of parkland, Southeast Michigan's open spaces, trails, and recreation facilities highlight the region's unique landscapes while providing year-round opportunities to enjoy them. Parks have positive impacts on public health, enhance air and water quality, and provide significant economic benefits – increasing both property values and municipal revenues, and attracting and retaining residents in Southeast Michigan.

Parks in Southeast Michigan are owned and operated by local communities and counties, the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, the State of Michigan, federal agencies, and private organizations. The focus of SEMCOG planning is having all the parks in the region operate as a system. SEMCOG partners with parks managers to coordinate planning efforts, share data resources, and assist those seeking funding opportunities. These strategies enhance the region's parks and recreation system and improve the quality of life in Southeast Michigan:

- Increase access to public parks to meet the recommendation of average public access of a quarter to one-half mile for all residents (see map and explanation on page 12).
- Improve the regional trails system by filling in gaps within Southeast Michigan.
- Increase public access along the Great Lakes for boating, swimming, and fishing.
- Partner with local parks departments to address gaps in public recreation needs.

Pulse of the Region survey results

SEMCOG recently conducted a regional survey about parks and recreation opportunities. The results help us to understand needs and develop a cohesive parks system in Southeast Michigan.

Here are some of the survey's key findings:

- 95 percent of respondents strongly agree that parks are important resources in Southeast Michigan that have positive impacts on local communities and their quality of life.
- The top five amenities that survey participants visited in the past year are walking, hiking, or running trails (81 percent); picnic areas, shelters, or open spaces (63 percent); cycling trails (58 percent); swimming at beaches (53 percent); and canoeing, kayaking, or paddle boarding (50 percent).
- Trails for walking, running, hiking, and biking are among the top visited amenities at parks; more than 80 percent of survey participants had used them within the past year.
- Approximately 75 percent of residents surveyed would like to see more hiking and biking trails, particularly between parks to provide better connectivity.

Celebrating parks in Southeast Michigan

State of Michigan – The Michigan Department of Natural Resources manages 20 state parks and recreation areas in Southeast Michigan, covering more than 80,000 acres. Featuring forests, lakes, and wetlands, these areas offer a variety of opportunities for camping, swimming, fishing, hunting, and boating, along with hundreds of miles of trails for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and horseback riding. They include William G. Milliken State Park and Harbor along the Detroit River, which is Michigan's first state park in an urban area, as well as Waterloo Recreation Area in Washtenaw County (the largest state recreation area in the Lower Peninsula), and Detroit's Belle Isle, one of the newest state parks with a lot of historical significance (see sidebar description).

Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority (Metroparks)

– This regional park system, located along the Huron and Clinton rivers, consists of 13 parks covering almost 25,000 acres in Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties. It features over 55 miles of hike/bike trails and offers an array of summer and winter activities including picnicking, swimming, disc golf, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, ice fishing, a wave pool, and eight 18-hole golf courses and two par-three courses.

Through the years: Major park milestones in Southeast Michigan

The City of Detroit purchases Belle Isle, partnering with Fredrick Law Olmstead to develop a plan for a large scale, urban park

1879

Elizabeth Park becomes the first county park in the State of Michigan, marking the beginning of the Wayne County Parks System.

1919

Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority (Metroparks) established.

1942

Michigan State Parks Commission is established.

The historic significance of Belle Isle



Meaning Beautiful Island in French, Belle Isle was purchased and designated a public park by the City of Detroit in 1879. The following year, Frederick Olmsted was commissioned to design the park. Olmsted is perhaps best known for the planning and design of the U.S. Capitol grounds, Central Park in New York City, and the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Olmsted's vision for Belle Isle was to maintain the natural scenery of the island and to allow for walking paths

for families and canals for small pleasure boating. Highlights of Belle Isle include the Albert Kahn designed Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory and Aquarium, the oldest conservatory and public aquarium in the country (1904), Dossin Great Lakes Museum, which preserves and celebrates the maritime history of the Detroit River and surrounding region, the James Scott Memorial Fountain, and Belle Isle Nature Zoo, which includes four acres of undisturbed forested wetland. It became a state park in 2014.

Livingston County – In 2008, the 300-acre Lutz County Park opened, featuring a 1.3-mile trail system, natural areas, scenic views, and wildlife. The county's newest park, Fillmore County Park, is expected to open in 2017, with nearly 200 acres of parkland in Genoa Township, including a 5K natural surface trail and several multiuse athletic fields.

Macomb County – The 100-acre Freedom Hill County Park and 7,200 seat amphitheater is the county's preeminent parks and recreation facility. The county also has over 3,800 acres of municipal parks, and also is home to the Macomb-Orchard Trail, a 24-mile hike and bike path and linear park.

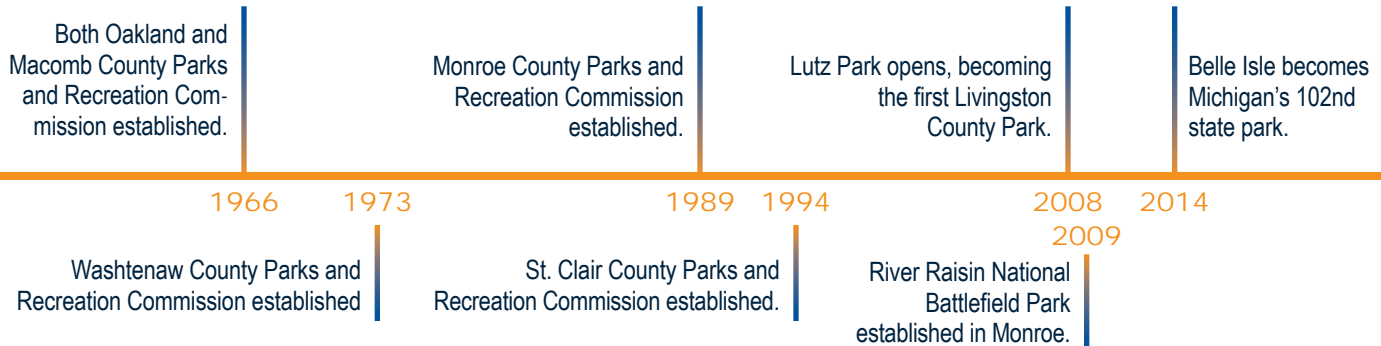
Monroe County – Its five county parks contribute to the well-being of residents and the economic health of the community. Additionally, Monroe County is home to both the region's only national park (see sidebar description of River Raisin National Battlefield Park) and Sterling State Park, the only state park on Lake Erie with over one mile of beach, boating, and shore fishing.

Oakland County – Celebrating 50 years in 2016, Oakland County Parks System has grown to 6,700 acres of natural landscapes and outdoor recreation and includes 13 parks that serve residents in 62 communities. Additionally, several local parks provide an array of recreational opportunities including Bloomer Park in Rochester Hills, Booth Park in Birmingham, and Lakeshore Park in Novi.

St. Clair County – The County Parks and Recreation Commission currently operates five parks (nearly 800 acres), plus the 12-mile Wadhams-to-Avoca Trail. St. Clair County also has 16 different water trails as part of the Blueways of St. Clair, including the 10.2-mile Island Loop Route, selected as a National Water Trail in 2013.

Washtenaw County – The county manages 30 parks, nature preserves, a trails system, and water recreation. It has been actively working to create the 35-mile Border to Border Trail which, when complete, will connect Livingston County to Wayne County along the Huron River.

Wayne County – Elizabeth Park in Trenton was the first park owned and operated by Wayne County. It was donated to the county in 1919 by a local family, making it the oldest county park in the state. Today, Wayne County parks total 5,600 acres, including 35 parks, two golf courses, and one water park. One of the gems of Wayne County is Hines Parkway, home to the Lightfest, the midwest's largest and longest holiday light show stretching 15 miles from Northville to Dearborn.



National Parks Service celebrates 100 years in 2016

On August 25, 1916, the National Parks Service (NPS) was created under President Woodrow Wilson, and included 35 existing parks, plus future parks, and areas of historic importance. Currently, that total is 411 areas, including 59 parks, and more than 84 million acres in all 50 states, plus Washington, D.C., and U.S. territories.

Today, the mission of NPS is to preserve natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. Southeast Michigan residents are now experiencing this at the River Raisin National Battlefield Park in Monroe.

Southeast Michigan's only national park: River Raisin National Battlefield Park



Ron Jones of the National Parks Service, calls River Raisin National Battlefield Park, one of Southeast Michigan's hidden gems. Located in Monroe, it is America's newest national battlefield park, thanks to legislation introduced by former U.S. Congressman, John Dingell in 2009. President Obama signed the legislation on March 30, 2009, making it the 393rd unit of the National Parks Service, and the only battlefield park commemorating the War of 1812.

It was there that significant battles in the War of 1812 occurred over a four-day period in January 1813. These battles accounted for the largest loss of life in the war – 300-400 killed and approximately 560 wounded. It produced the rallying cry, “Remember the Raisin!” Because many of those killed were from the Kentucky militia, the site has permission to fly the state flag of Kentucky.

Ranger Jones says that the NPS Centennial celebration has helped raise the profile of the River Raisin National Battlefield Park. Classes of schoolchildren from the region have visited the park in great numbers this spring. New signage was unveiled in May and excavators have discovered the foundations of many building used during the war.

There is hope that they will be rebuilt, adding to the historical significance of the park.

Monroe Mayor Robert Clark proudly notes that it took “decades of community involvement and dedication” to get the national battlefield designation that occurred in 2009. “There is a commitment in the community to further expand the park,” he says. He also notes that while the park is still in its infancy it is attracting tourists and, as a result, Monroe is already seeing increased economic and community development opportunities. In 2015, Mayor Clark says that the park had 58,000 visitors, from 49 of 50 states and 16 countries. **For more information, go to www.nps.gov/rira.**

Where the rubber meets the road

Implementing the Southeast Michigan Traffic Safety Plan

At the end of 2015, SEMCOG's Executive Committee approved the policy recommendations contained in the *Southeast Michigan Traffic Safety Plan*. These recommendations aim to reduce fatalities and severe injuries due to traffic crashes and 2016 marks the first year of implementation. As part of the plan, Southeast Michigan has enlisted in the Toward Zero Deaths national strategy for highway safety. Within this framework, Southeast Michigan's goals are to achieve a five percent reduction in traffic fatalities and a 10 percent reduction in severe injuries by 2019.

The safety plan was a collaborative effort of the Road Safety Task Force, led by Romulus Mayor LeRoy Burcroff and composed of transportation system stakeholders from state and local government. This summer, a safety plan implementation team begins work to collaboratively apply the plan's key principles and make Southeast Michigan a safer place for all road users.

Based on crash data trends and task force input, four high-priority emphasis areas were identified in the safety plan. These include intersection crashes, lane departure crashes, pedestrian crashes, and crashes involving drivers age 24 and younger. SEMCOG and the Michigan Department of Transportation will work with the implementation team to promote an array of safety solutions (see examples below) in these four areas, in addition to several additional emphasis points.

Intersection



Intersections, while making up an extremely small portion of the road network, are involved in 28 percent of all traffic fatalities in our region. An even higher percentage of all severe injury crashes in Southeast Michigan occur at intersections.

Red-light running is involved in 14 percent of intersection fatalities. One technique to help drivers recognize a traffic signal and its current phase (color) is the use of retroreflective borders on signal backplates. These improve visibility both in daytime and at night, and have been shown to reduce crashes at intersections.

Roundabouts have also been shown to improve operations and safety with appropriate application.



Lane departure crashes



Lane departure crashes occur when a vehicle crosses an edge line, centerline, or otherwise leaves the traveled way. Though a relatively small proportion of total crashes (14 percent), lane departure crashes account for nearly 34 percent of Southeast Michigan traffic fatalities.

Centerline rumble strips have been shown to reduce run-off-the-road crashes by 46 percent and fatalities from such crashes by more than half.

Southeast Michigan's safety goals – five percent reduction in traffic fatalities and a 10 percent reduction in severe injuries by 2019.

Pedestrian



Countdown signals allow pedestrians to judge how much time they have to safely cross within a crosswalk. This countermeasure is especially beneficial for elderly pedestrians.

Southeast Michigan's pedestrian fatality rate exceeds statewide and national averages. While pedestrian crashes account for only one percent of total crashes in Southeast Michigan, they are responsible for 28 percent of traffic fatalities.

Countdown signals allow pedestrians to judge how much time they have to safely cross within a crosswalk. This countermeasure is especially beneficial for elderly pedestrians.

Drivers age 24 and younger



Michigan's young drivers were involved in 32 percent of all traffic fatalities despite only comprising 14 percent of the state's licensed drivers. Throughout the SEMCOG region,

crashes involving young drivers meet or exceed the state-wide average for incapacitating injuries.

Improving driver education, especially about the laws of the road, is critical to improving young driver safety. Curbing issues inherent to adolescent novice drivers is essential to building safer driving habits at the novice level. Problem behaviors associated with inexperience and youth include speeding, driving too fast for conditions, failure to recognize hazards, errors in attention, and allowing shorter headways.

Taking action on these high-priority areas, along with many other safety issues, will be critical to improving safety for drivers, passengers, pedestrians, and bicyclists throughout Southeast Michigan's transportation system. More information on the plan implementation team will be available soon in SEMCOG's *Regional Update*.

By the Numbers: 2015 Southeast Michigan traffic safety statistics

387 Traffic fatalities – up four percent from 2014 (371). This is also the highest total since 2006.

Up 10% Pedestrian fatalities increased from 94 to 103.

Up 38% Motorcycle fatalities increased from 45 to 62.

The economic cost of 2015 traffic crashes to Southeast Michigan is estimated at more than

\$5.5 billion

Opportunity on the waterfront

St. Clair County's new convention center



The DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel, Freightier's Eatery and Taproom, the Blue Water Convention Center, and the Culinary Institute of Michigan (not pictured) are located next to the Blue Water Bridge and are all part of the recently renovated property that was once the Thomas Edison Inn.

The Blue Water Convention Center is celebrating a successful first year of operation. It has hosted a steady stream of events including banquets, trade shows, and meetings for institutions such as Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, DTE Energy, the Michigan Townships Association, and SEMCOG. These activities promote economic activity in St. Clair County, and this success story began with significant leadership, partnership, and investment by government officials.

In December of 2011, the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners approved a \$9 million convention center project at the site of the former Thomas Edison Inn in Port Huron. "Without the county taking on the biggest risk," said Port Huron Mayor Pauline Repp, "this could not have happened. I am grateful." This was a bold attempt to retain and improve an important community asset with an uncertain future, add a new feature to an underused waterfront, and create a dynamic anchor for future success.

Reworking the waterfront

For decades, the Thomas Edison Inn was a landmark establishment in the City of Port Huron. A large hotel situated on the banks of the St. Clair River and featuring a fine restaurant, the inn was a critical component of tourism for the city and county. When it became known that the facility would likely close unless a new owner stepped up, local leaders considered their options.

"It has always been talked about that Port Huron could use a convention center," said Repp. Efforts were made to expand McMorran Place in Downtown Port Huron, but a slowly recovering economy and lack of hotel space in the

immediate vicinity kept a deal from coming to fruition. Meanwhile, prospective buyers for the waterfront Thomas Edison Inn indicated that the hotel would be a more desirable commodity if it had a convention center to provide a steady stream of guests.

This is when St. Clair County's Board of Commissioners and Administration, in partnership with multiple developers and stakeholders, took on the job of creating a new convention center adjacent to the hotel. "When pursuing economic development, it's really important to engage well-qualified consultants," said Karl Tomion, St. Clair County Commissioner. "The county hired nationally renowned experts for design and planning and then local architects to implement," said Tomion.

Additional development a key component

The end result was the beautiful new state-of-the-art Blue Water Convention Center, which sits in the shadow of the Blue Water Bridge, one of the United States' most important international trade crossings. Coordination with the Blue Water Area Transit system connects the convention center and hotel facilities to downtown Port Huron.

While the convention facility stands on its own as a significant attraction and community asset, the accompanying developments are critical to greater success. The convention center opened shortly after the renovated Thomas Edison Inn started a new life as the DoubleTree by Hilton Port Huron, and the new hotel is home to a new restaurant, Freighters Eatery & Taproom.

Another key component of the convention center project was the addition of Baker College's Culinary Institute of Michigan. With its proximity to multiple hospitality facilities, the culinary school provides unique opportunities for its students. Since opening, enrollment has continued to grow, and the college has needed to expand its student housing. According to Bill Kauffman, recently retired St. Clair County Administrator, the college will soon add a program on catering and convention facilities management.

The convention center is managed by SMG, the same company that manages Cobo Center in Detroit, and there are benefits to this relationship. In addition to advising their Port Huron colleagues, SMG representatives cross promote the Blue Water Convention Center when Cobo is booked. Bringing people to the facility accomplishes another St. Clair County goal, which is to remind the rest of Southeast Michigan of the area's unique benefits.

Creating a dynamic presence

The presence of the convention center has made St. Clair County a more dynamic destination. "The goal of the Blue Water Convention Center is not to compete with local banquet halls, but to bring new dollars into the community," said Kauffman.

Instead of driving local businesses out, the new development has brought in new customers. "Multi-day conferences bring business to restaurants, including private parties," said Tomion. "Restaurants have had to stock up on extra fish and steak." And, additional projects are underway, including restoration of the St. Clair Inn in St. Clair, an increase in mixed use development, a new waterfront hotel in Marine City, and additional hotel development in downtown Port Huron.



"The goal of the Blue Water Convention Center is not to compete with local banquet halls, but to bring new dollars into the community."

- Bill Kauffman, St. Clair County Administrator (retired)

In addition, Port Huron recently opened up waterfront recreation access through SEMCOG's Transportation Alternatives Program with the Bridge to Bay Trail, which passes under the Blue Water Bridge and by the new convention center into several other St. Clair County communities. Without positive developments along this waterfront, the full potential of this new asset could not be realized.

With a spirit of collaboration and newfound economic vibrancy attributable to investments capitalizing on education, quality of life, tourism and the blue economy, St. Clair County seems primed for further success. These priorities and many more are included in SEMCOG's *Partnering for Prosperity: Economic Development Strategy for Southeast Michigan* - available on our website.

SEMCOG's Annual General Assembly

June 23, 2016 • Blue Water Convention Center • Port Huron



(Above, top right) Before the meeting, SEMCOG members boarded the Huron Lady II for a short cruise on the St. Clair River. While on board, they learned about the importance of water assets and economic development along the waterfront from Port Huron Planning and Community Development staff. (Below right) Following the cruise, there was a brief stop at the new Blue Water Transit Bus Center in downtown Port Huron.



Port Huron Mayor Pauline Repp welcomed General Assembly members to Port Huron and the Blue Water Convention Center. She spoke with pride about the economic progress the center brings to the city, and also emphasized the importance of partnerships and collaboration.



(Left) St. Clair County Board of Commissioners Chair Jeff Bohm spoke briefly about the county's role in developing the Blue Water Convention Center, then introduced Bill Kauffman (right), recently retired St. Clair County Administrator, who spoke in-depth about the convention center. He emphasized the focus on ensuring transparency to the public in all aspects of the project.



This annual General Assembly includes elections of new SEMCOG leadership. (Left) Incoming Chair Rod Green, Superior Township Trustee, thanks Chair Jeff Jenks, Huntington Woods Commissioner for his service. In his incoming remarks, Green stressed the collaborative nature of SEMCOG. “I believe that we stand as partners for progress, as those who understand the strength of regionalism. We stand as those who recognize that working together is more dynamic and more productive than working alone and that more can be achieved because the sum is truly greater than its parts. I believe that together we can achieve great things.”

Nominating Committee Chair, Don Green, Milford Township Supervisor, conducted the elections of First Vice Chair, Vice Chairs, and Delegates At-Large for the 2016-2017 fiscal year beginning July 1.



SEMCOG Executive Director Kathleen Lomako updated attendees on federal and state legislation and the ongoing Ozone Action season. She also spoke about the Spirit of Southwest Detroit Award that SEMCOG recently received from the Southwest Detroit Business Association.

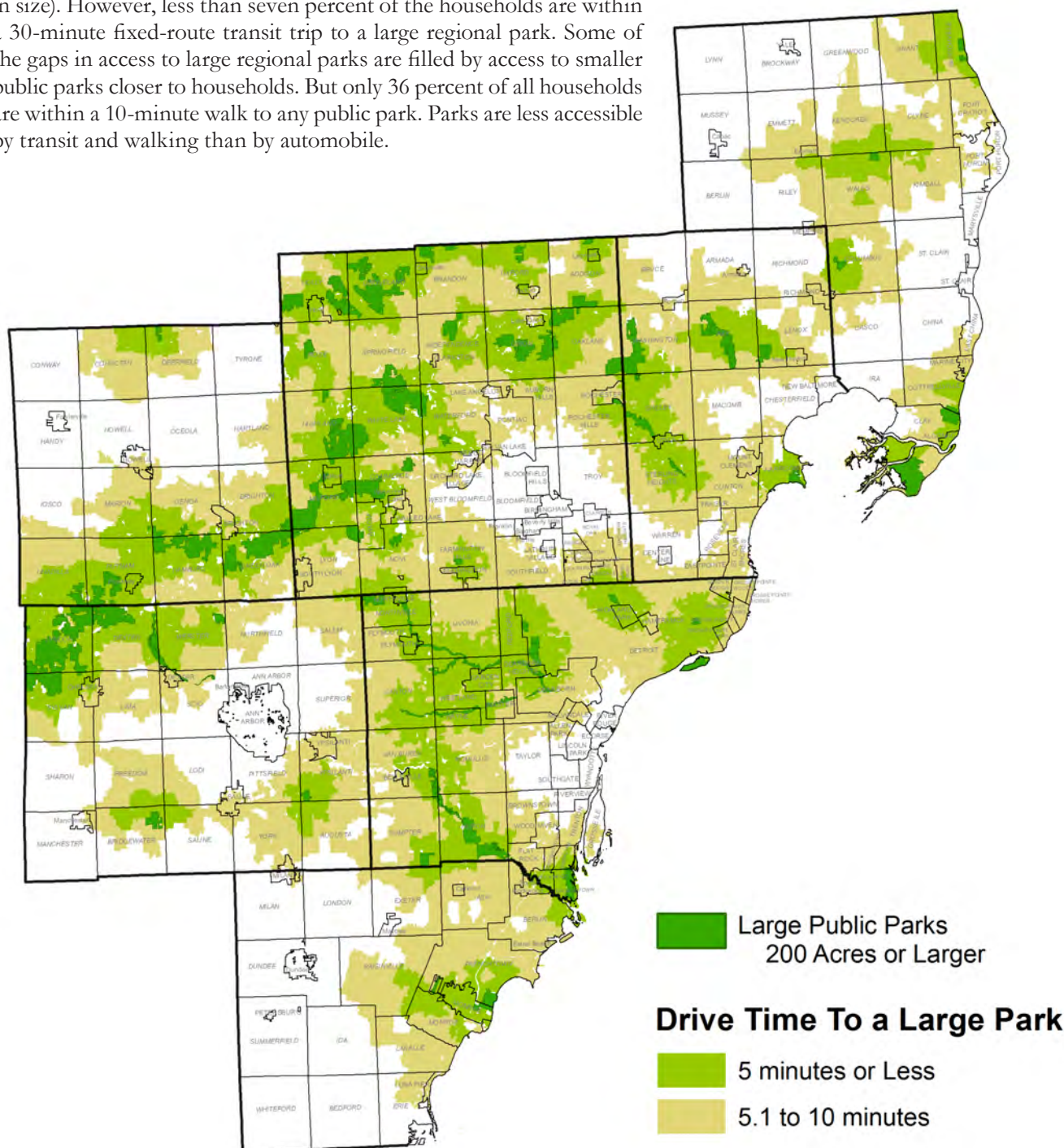


SEMCOG's 2016-2017 Officers: (L-r) Karl Tomion, Vice Chair, St. Clair County Commissioner; Dan O'Leary, Vice Chair, Washington Township Supervisor; Robert Clark, Vice Chair, Monroe Mayor; Rodrick Green, Chairperson, Superior Township Trustee; Phil Weipert, Vice Chair, Oakland County Commissioner; Jeff Jenks, Immediate Past Chair, Huntington Woods Commissioner; and Donald Hubler, Vice Chair, Macomb Intermediate School District Trustee.

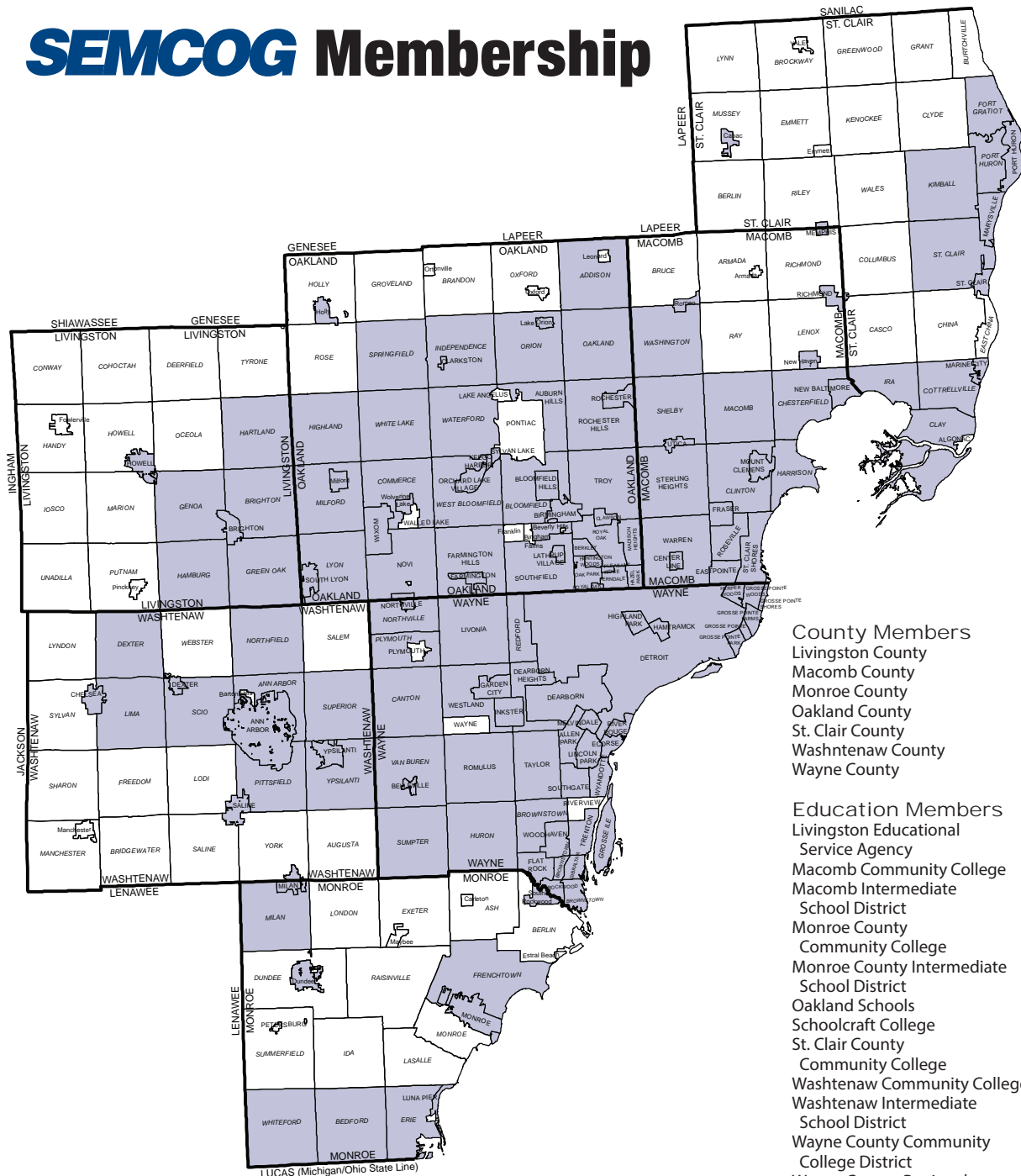
Accessibility to parks in Southeast Michigan

Automobile access to large regional parks, within 10 minutes

Accessibility to parks is one component of SEMCOG's Access to Core Services project. Approximately 73 percent of the region's households are within 10 minutes of driving time to large regional parks (parks greater than 200 acres in size). However, less than seven percent of the households are within a 30-minute fixed-route transit trip to a large regional park. Some of the gaps in access to large regional parks are filled by access to smaller public parks closer to households. But only 36 percent of all households are within a 10-minute walk to any public park. Parks are less accessible by transit and walking than by automobile.



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Washtenaw County
Wayne County

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SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, is the only organization in Southeast Michigan that brings together all governments to develop regional solutions for both now and in the future. SEMCOG:

- Promotes informed decision making to improve Southeast Michigan and its local governments by providing insightful data analysis and direct assistance to member governments;
- Promotes the efficient use of tax dollars for infrastructure investment and governmental effectiveness;
- Develops regional solutions that go beyond the boundaries of individual local governments; and
- Advocates on behalf of Southeast Michigan in Lansing and Washington