

## **Incorporation Improves Services to Village**

### **Residents**

Throughout most of its history, the village of **Lake Isabella, Michigan** (1,100), had to depend for services on the county and the two townships in which the village was located. It was so difficult to coordinate road projects with the two townships that most of the community's roads were unpaved and maintenance was limited. In addition, village property was subject to two different zoning standards, two different assessors, and two different master plans. In the mid-1990s, several residents decided to incorporate Lake Isabella into a home rule village.

### **Leadership/staffing**

Incorporation efforts were led by a group of residents who completed all of the required paperwork. The village currently has seven elected officials as well as two full-time and several part-time staff members.

### **Timeline**

Village residents had discussed incorporation for years and, when the 1990 census showed that the village's population was finally large enough, they took action. The village was incorporated in 1998 after approximately two years of work.

### **Program description**

One of the biggest challenges in the incorporation process was finalizing the village's boundaries to satisfy the state boundary commission. The leaders of the incorporation process also had to develop a charter that met the village's needs and was acceptable to the state. The charter described the village's boundaries, elections process, council member responsibilities, ordinance procedures, staffing, financial procedures, taxation, utilities, and zoning. Several residents expressed concern that their taxes would increase, so the charter stipulated that the general property tax levy was limited to \$1 million.

After the incorporation was finalized, the new village faced the challenge of starting from scratch to develop administrative policies, including a master plan, zoning documents, and administrative ordinances. Town officials used a zoning ordinance provided by a local engineering firm, and this ordinance has gradually been amended over the years. The original master plan was very brief and very general, and was recently rewritten.

## **Results**

Incorporation has improved services significantly for village residents. The village now has good land use policies in place to ensure that residential development does not have a negative impact on the community. Only 4 of the village's 28 miles of road were paved in 1998; today, 12 miles are paved and another 1.5 miles will be paved next year. The village still depends on the county sheriff's department and state police for public safety services, but now that it can request those services directly, residents receive the assistance they need more promptly. Residents also appreciate the ability to visit the village offices any weekday, in contrast with the township office, which is open only once a week.

## **Contact**

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