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search

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Gratiot County



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Gratiot County

Located in the geographic center of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, Gratiot (pronounced "GRASH-it") County is seeking a visionary leader to move the organization forward and build on the strong working relationships which are a trademark of the County and its cities, villages, and townships. Settled in the mid-1800s, Gratiot County was named for US Army Captain Charles Gratiot, and the county seat in Ithaca was established in 1856.

Gratiot County emphasizes small-town charm and a neighborly, rural atmosphere. The three cities and three villages in the County have maintained stable populations and attractive downtowns to complement safe neighborhoods and excellent school systems. Outdoor recreational and sporting activities are readily accessible including statewide non-motorized trail systems.

Gratiot County is known for its strong, home-grown, and diverse manufacturing base, which contributes to its steady economy. Agriculture is a key component of the county's market, with 65% of land in farm use.

A new type of "farm" is also taking advantage of Gratiot's bountiful landscape—wind and solar. Leaders in the county made alternative energy sources viable by bringing all partners together to create Michigan's first Countywide Model Wind Energy Ordinance. The county is now home to multiple wind farms with a combined 417 turbines, and two solar energy projects are coming online.



The County Administrator is recognized as the chief financial officer within the organization, and the successful candidate will possess excellent skills in all aspects of governmental budgeting, procurement, and resource allocation. There have been three administrators in the last 15 years. In February 2025, the most recent administrator resigned after a pattern of inappropriate expenditures were uncovered by auditors.

The County offers a competitive package of benefits and has set the starting salary range for the new administrator at \$120,000 to \$140,000 depending on experience, qualifications, and skillset. County government management experience is preferred.



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The County and Communities

Gratiot County is attractively located within a two-hour drive from “anywhere” in Lower Michigan, providing easy access to the Great Lakes, urban centers, high-quality higher education, rivers, inland lakes, and unbeatable recreation opportunities. The Pine and Maple Rivers and three State Game Areas offer recreational opportunities in the county. US-127, a major four-lane highway, bisects the county and provides easy access to major cultural and sporting events. Air transportation hubs in Grand Rapids, Lansing, Flint, and Detroit provide convenient access to destinations across the U.S. and beyond.



Three small cities (Alma, Ithaca, and St. Louis), three villages (Breckenridge, Ashley, and Perrinton), and sixteen townships each have a unique personality, but all work together to support larger causes that benefit the entire area.

Alma College is in the City of Alma and provides cultural amenities and programs not usually found in small towns. Many festivals and events take place throughout the year to provide opportunities for entertainment and community enrichment, including the Highland Festival and Gratiot County Players presentations. An area hospital with statewide affiliations provides excellent health care options for residents.

Gratiot County is located at the center of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula between the industrial areas of the south and the recreational area of the north. As a result, the county blends the rural and industrial sectors with a superior quality of life.



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The County and Communities, Continued

The commercial and industrial development in the county is centered primarily along the US-127 corridor, around the cities of Ithaca, Alma, and St. Louis. Manufactured products include Legend Trailer, pleasure boats, molded plastic parts, fabricated and machined products, and aircraft and auto parts. The county also relies on retail trade and service industries.

The Pine and Maple Rivers and the three State Game Areas offer recreational opportunities in the county. Alma College is in the City of Alma. Highway US-127

passes through the county from north to south. US-127 is intersected to the north by M-46 and to the south by M-57, which provide east-west access. The mix of employment sectors between private, public, and non-profit stabilizes the workforce and the local economy.

The county's most enviable claim to fame is the ability of its governmental units to work together in a uniquely collaborative spirit. The development of a county-wide master plan and county-wide wind farm ordinance are two high-profile examples of collaboration that is nationally recognized. Other cooperative ventures include the county-wide chamber of commerce and millage-supported economic development services, which assure funding for Greater Gratiot Development, Inc., and outstanding agriculture extension services.

Residents of Gratiot County exemplify a spirit of community involvement, support, and giving back. Voters have consistently approved special millages to support library services, a commission on aging, economic development, parks, centralized dispatch, and sheriff road patrol.

Six public school districts are located within the county, and parochial grade school options are available. Alma College provides a strong presence in the community with its programs, faculty, and students. Several institutions of higher education are within an easy commute and include Delta Community College, Saginaw Valley State University, Central Michigan University, Michigan State University, and Mid-Michigan Community College.



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The Organization

The Gratiot County government serves 42,000 people through the provision of a wide range of public safety, health and welfare, community development, and parks, recreation, culture services and activities delivered by more than 180 employees. The annual General Fund operating budget for Fiscal Year 2024–25 was set at \$17.75 million, and the total budget at \$52.8 million. The unassigned fund balance in the General Fund was \$12 million at the end of the last fiscal year.

Policy and direction are set by an elected Board of Commissioners. The five-member Board of Commissioners is comprised of district representatives and exercises budgetary approval and legislative authority. Beginning in November 2024, commissioners serve four-year terms; all were elected in November 2024. The current board has a good mix of long-term and recently elected members. The current board has worked well together.



The Board appoints a county administrator who serves as the chief administrative officer. All appointed department directors report exclusively to the Administrator. The county government also houses a judicial branch (circuit, district, probate, and juvenile courts). Judges, prosecuting attorney, sheriff, clerk, treasurer, register of deeds, and drain commissioner, as well as County Road Commissioners, are elected at-large.



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The Organization Continued



Under the direction and oversight of the Gratiot County Board of Commissioners as a body, the County Administrator serves as the chief administrative and budget officer of the County and performs a wide range of administrative activities that serve to support effective and efficient county government operations; advises and assists the Board in planning, policy and operational matters; and directs and coordinates the administration of county government in accordance with policies and directives issued by the Board as a whole, pursuant to all applicable state and federal laws and regulations. (MCL 46.11).

The position supervises all appointed department heads unless directed otherwise by resolution of the Board of Commissioners; supervises the following functions and support services, including but not limited to personnel management, financial management, purchasing, grant funding, and building maintenance. He or she also performs various research and development activities assigned by the Board.

The Administrator supervises the following appointed department heads: Information Management, Buildings and Grounds, Permits Office, Animal Control, Veterans Affairs, Equalization, and Emergency Management. The County Administrator serves as a liaison between department heads, elected officials, outside agencies, and the Board of Commissioners.

The County Administrator is responsible for the "business" and service delivery aspects of Gratiot County Government. The Administrator helps maintain good working relationships between the Board's office and other elected officials and acts as the public information officer for the County. In addition, the position negotiates, develops, reviews, and/or approves (based on County policy) a variety of legal documents, including contracts, purchase agreements, grants, and interagency agreements, ensuring the County's interest is represented.



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Opportunities and Challenges

The incoming County Administrator can expect to work on the following items and similar challenges and opportunities recently identified by county-appointed and elected officials:

Opportunities

- Flagship City with the Pure Michigan Campaign
- Green energy knowledge and additional investments in the County
- Adding a Freedom of Information Officer to address the increase in requests and the larger scope of documents reviewed
- Improving relations between Commissioners and elected and appointed department heads
- Grant opportunities and targeted funding from State and Federal sources to address high-priority projects and fiscal challenges



Challenges

- Long-range forecasting and planning for tax revenue, particularly associated with the depreciation of alternative energy-generating facilities
- Pine River Restoration and addressing agricultural run-off
- St. Louis superfund site cleanup
- Cleanup of a former landfill previously owned by the State of Michigan, now owned by the County
- Jail restoration or replacement of the current, outdated facility with a capacity for 72 inmates
- Software modernization and migration
- Budget impact of assuming responsibility for the local airport



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The Ideal Candidate

The County is seeking motivated and experienced local government administrators and will only consider qualified applicants who possess the following knowledge and experience:

- Required: Bachelor's degree in Accounting, Finance, Business, Public Administration, or a related field
- Required: A minimum of five years' experience in public/government service management; county government experience preferred

Any applicant who moves to the level of candidate will have advanced collaborative and facilitation skills with a natural affinity for creating and maintaining successful relationships and the ability to build bridges between other entities and individuals.

Among the skills desired and illustrated in a resume and letter of introduction are these:

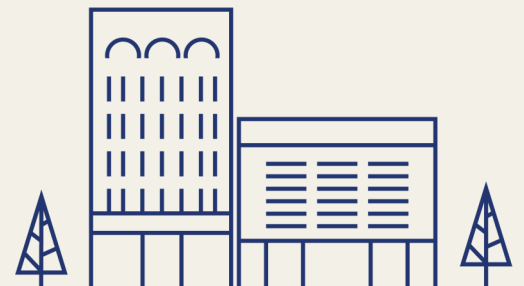
- Strong finance background, including budgeting, procurement, and capital improvement plans
- Human resources management, labor relations, and personnel functions: hiring, recruiting, evaluation, compensation, classification, contract interpretation and implementation, labor negotiation
- Advanced communication talent; can serve as the face of the County in writing, interpersonally, and as a presenter; can create and deliver the county's message to the media and public
- Vision to address the goals and priorities of the County
- Airport management experience
- Understands the role of information technology and its application to local government
- Familiarity with small community and rural settings
- Understands the unique dynamics of county government, and has working knowledge of most county government operations
- Proven history in championing partnerships and intergovernmental agreements with an array of public, nonprofit, and jurisdictional entities



The new county administrator will be using his or her drive and dedication to move the County and its partners forward. He or she should possess or be the following:

- Instinctual fortitude to make decisions
- Transparent
- Community-oriented
- Easy to get along with, but not easily swayed
- Honest
- Able to identify what Commissioners need to know, not what they want to hear
- Outgoing, particularly if coming from outside the area
- Open-minded
- Integrity and respect for county departments
- Calm approach to problem solving and a diversity of opinions

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Application Process

Apply by close of business: September 22, 2025

Please submit resume, cover letter, consent form, and five (5) professional references to:

Email:

execsearch@mml.org

Subject Line: Gratiot County Search

Questions can be directed to MML Executive Recruiter Jerry Richards at jrichards@mml.org.

Candidates desiring confidentiality of their interest, as allowed for and provided by Michigan law, must indicate such in a separate subject line above the body of the cover letter.

This search is conducted by an Equal Opportunity Employer.



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