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Wayne County Executive Out to Fix Michigan's 'Broken' Funding Model for Cities.

LANSING, MI — When Wayne County Executive Warren Evans took office he set out to right the county's budget. He did it, but realized about halfway through his first year in office that the way Michigan's cities get money is, in his words, "broken."

"Balancing the budget... it made me realize that even running effectively and getting ourselves on firm financial footing, we just didn't have the resources going forward with the existing state of municipal financing," Evans said.

He's launching a statewide tour titled, "Investing in Michigan Communities: Finding Fair Funding for Strong, Successful Communities."

Evans is kicking off the tour in Trenton, and plans to talk with local officials about financing mechanisms that fuel their communities and challenges they face. In addition to Southeast Michigan, he plans to visit Grand Rapids, Lansing, Flint, Traverse City and the Upper Peninsula.

The goal is to build consensus around a solution. Evans laid out a problem in his March State of the County address: the county got \$418 million less in tax receipts from 2008 to 2014 due to declining property values and limitations on how local municipalities can recover those funds.

He plans to hear from local officials statewide on this tour, and spend this year gathering information. In 2017, he intends to gather what he has learned and put forward solutions with broad support.

Evans is not the only one who has delved into municipal finance lately. Michigan State University researchers have traced local financial problems back to state policies, and the Michigan Municipal League recently launched a website that aims to educate on Michigan's "abysmal record" of investing in local governments.

Evans recognized that there are differences between municipalities, and there may be disagreement on how to proceed.

"If that weren't the case we'd have a remedy now," Evans said. "But we think that if we know enough about the problem and know enough about the issues that different parts of the state have, that gives us a leg up on trying to craft something that we can all live with."

Around Wayne County Evans said he hears almost universally that residents want two things: better infrastructure, like roads, and more public safety workers.

He said there are levels of nuance and differences between communities, but there are also a lot of similarities. Statewide solutions are necessary for all communities, Evans said.

In Wayne County, he's confident he's put the area on a sound financial footing. But he's still hearing

about public safety, about roads.

“Without additional revenue, we, like a lot of communities are going to fall short of being able to perform the way that we think our citizens expect us to perform,” Evans said.

Joining Evans on the tour are Bill Anderson, Government Finance & Operations Specialist for the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments; Eric Scorsone, founder of Michigan State University’s Center for Local Government Finance and Policy; Tony Minghine, Associate Executive Director & COO of the Michigan Municipal League; Eric Luper, President of the Citizens Research Council of Michigan; and city of Taylor Mayor Rick Sollars.

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