

Neighbor vs. Neighbor

When neighbors fight with one another, it isn't pretty. Whether it is over the placement of a fence, branches hanging over property lines, the location of property lines, or other issues, neighbor wars can get ugly. City, village and township officials often can't get involved in these issues, as they are a 'civil' matter. Feuding neighbors try to get the municipality on their side to help 'get' their neighbor. That is a can of worms for the municipality. Municipalities often urge neighbors to try to resolve their differences in a calm and civilized manner. Another thing we recommend is community dispute resolution.

Public Act 260 of 1988 created Michigan's Community Dispute Resolution program to provide conciliation, mediation or other forms and techniques of voluntary dispute resolution to persons as an alternative to the judicial process.

Begun in 1990, the program is funded by a community dispute resolution fund created in the State Treasury and is administered by the Michigan Supreme Court's State Court Administrative Office. Grant funding provided by both the Michigan Supreme Court and the Michigan State Legislature ensures that mediators are available across the state to help resolve a wide variety of disputes. Services are available statewide through a network of over 20 non-profit organizations and are generally provided free or at low-cost. If there is a fee, it is way less than what you might pay by going to court.

Municipalities have little authority to resolve issues between feuding neighbors, but we can refer people to a mediator.

Anyone with a dispute can call a community dispute resolution center.

Participation in the dispute resolution process is voluntary, and parties can initiate contact with a dispute resolution center, or a court may refer parties in a civil action to a center funded under the program.

Trained mediators, with 40 hours of training in conflict resolution techniques and the legal system help the parties find compromises. They don't make decisions for the parties involved, and they don't impose solutions. Neighbors work things out peacefully.

The centers may also handle disputes that involve businesses and contracts, consumers/merchants, landlords/tenants, neighbors, contractors, auto accident property damage claims, and family disputes-including parent/child and behavior issues. They may also offer conflict resolution workshops for businesses, clubs, associations and other organizations. Consider offering one through your county chapter.

To reach the CDRP center nearest you, call (800) 8RESOLVE (800-873-7658). The SCAO maintains information about the CDRP on its website at: <http://courts.michigan.gov/scao/dispute/>