

ANNUAL
REPORT
FOR
2020



**WEST MI
SHORELINE**

Regional Development Commission

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

We, at WMSRDC, expected 2020 to be an historic year. It absolutely was, just not in the way we had anticipated. I have heard the adjective “unprecedented” used to describe this year more times than I care to remember. To be honest, I have grown quite tired of it. The definition of unprecedented is “without previous instance; never before known or experienced; unexampled or unparalleled.” Much to my dismay, this description is undeniably spot on for the year 2020.

While 2020 marked the WMSRDC 50th Anniversary, it was quickly overshadowed by global and national events. Staff and board members had been planning for nearly a year to celebrate this special occasion. Unfortunately, many of these activities had to be canceled once the COVID-19 Pandemic hit in March. The WMSRDC offices officially closed on Monday, March 16 and remained closed through 2020 and into 2021. However, staff was able to pivot to working remotely and remain extremely productive.

Despite the cancellation of in-person anniversary activities, we were able to follow through with some commemorative tasks. This included the unveiling of a new WMSRDC logo, an updated look to the newsletter and website, a review and expansion of the agency mission statement, the development of an agency equity statement, and a 50th Anniversary newsletter.

In the spring of 2020, WMSRDC staff embarked on a project to expand upon the Commission’s mission statement. Staff answered three simple questions: 1) Why do we do what we do? 2) How do we do it? and 3) What do we do? The answers were consolidated to form the WMSRDC Why/How/What Statements which serves as a supplement to the agency mission statement.

This year also brought systemic racial inequity to the forefront in our country. As a result, staff felt it important to put into words the efforts woven through the work WMSRDC has conducted for decades in our programs to assist distressed communities and provide prosperity for everyone in our region. These efforts include public involvement, outreach, and education, as well as environmental justice in transportation, economic development, environmental, and local government services planning and programs. The official WMSRDC Equity Statement can be found on the Commission’s website.

The year 2020 was definitely historic. While we all will remember this year for the global pandemic and national social unrest, I also want to remember the dedication and resiliency of the WMSRDC staff and supportive board. As you read through this annual report, you will see the tremendous amount of work accomplished by this small yet mighty staff at WMSRDC. I thank them for their hard work throughout this extremely challenging year and am looking forward to a, dare I say, more uneventful 2021.

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director



MISSION STATEMENT

The Commission's mission is to “promote and foster regional development in West Michigan through cooperation amongst local governments and regional partners.”

Why/How/What Statements

The below statements were developed by the Commission staff in the spring of 2020 as an organization-wide project to expand upon the Commission's mission statement. “We” in the statements refer to the Commission and its staff.

WHY do we do what we do?

We believe that West Michigan is an amazing place with tremendous opportunity, and that regional planning improves the quality of life for all West Michigan residents. Therefore, we are passionate about helping the region reach its full potential and committed to do our part to make a difference in the place we call “home.”

HOW do we do it?

By leveraging the programs of the Commission and utilizing staff expertise to provide local resources through collaborative partnerships that cross jurisdictional boundaries, involvement of diverse stakeholders, and empowerment of local decision makers.

WHAT do we do?

Perform state and federal planning functions through administering programs in transportation, economic development, environmental, and local government services that provides funding and project eligibility to our region.



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ENVIRONMENTAL

West Michigan Watershed Partners

The West Michigan Watershed Partners represent the watershed groups of the WMSRDC Region. The WMWP met quarterly during 2020 to discuss projects, needs and priorities for the region's natural resources, forests, water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. The WMWP shares best practice information that cross watershed and jurisdictional boundaries, and it acts as an advisory committee for the WMSRDC Environmental Program. During 2020, the WMWP also provided input on the Sustainable Watersheds Funding Initiative, a statewide effort that began as a collaborative effort in a 13-county region of West Michigan. The WMWP in-person meetings were replaced by Zoom meetings due to COVID-19. Once the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, the WMWP will have more opportunities to meet in person and to visit various watersheds and project locations.

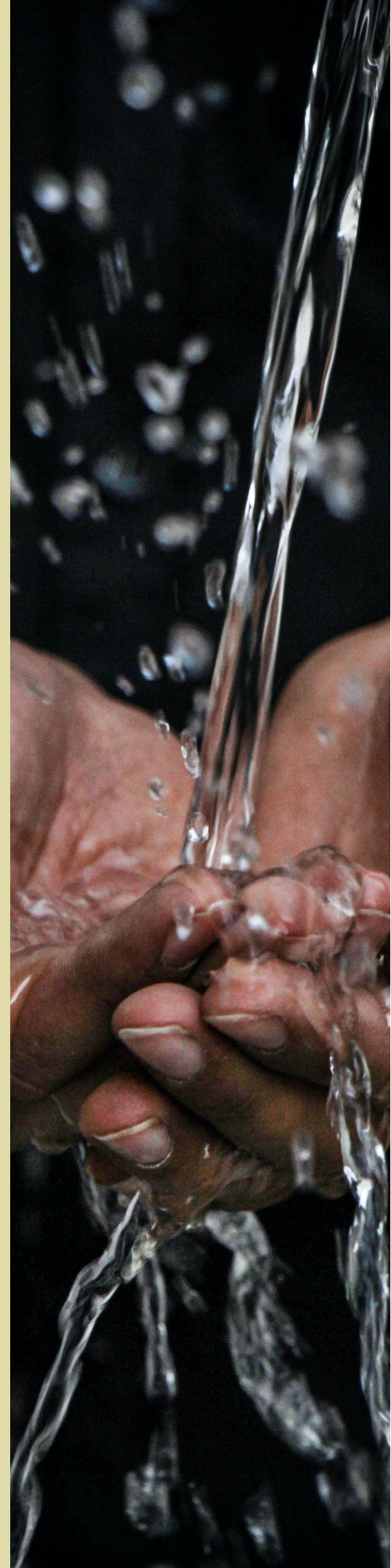
Muskegon Lake Area of Concern

2020 marked the year when all of the final restoration needed to remove Muskegon Lake as one of the Great Lakes Areas of Concern (AOC) got underway. A decades-long collaborative effort of community groups, governmental agencies and other organizations gradually restored the lake as a habitat for fish and wildlife, improving the appearance of the lakeshore and providing access to the waterfront. The final Muskegon Lake contaminated sediment cleanup was completed and significant progress with fish and wildlife habitat restoration was made along the Muskegon River and Muskegon Lake shorelines at Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve, Veterans Memorial Park, a former 53-acre celery farm, and the former Amoco/Standard Oil Dock on the Lakeshore Trail bike path. The annual Great Lakes AOC Conference will be held in Muskegon on September 28-30, 2021. The year 2021 will be the perfect time to celebrate the work that has been completed to delist the AOC.

Reforestation for Restoration, Resilience, and Recreation

Trees provide ecosystem services that are often overlooked or taken for granted. They provide wind and view screens, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, shade, and pleasant walks. They can also absorb pollutants and runoff that has negative impacts on the landscape. Trees make sense. WMSRDC has tackled a variety of projects designed to increase the positive benefits of trees in West Michigan. When implemented, these projects will have prevented over 139,822 gallons of runoff annually from eroding waterways, transporting pollution, and flooding in West Michigan as well as providing aesthetic and habitat benefits.

These projects include a coastal zone reforestation grant that has provided for the planting of 558 trees and 4,300 seedlings. This grant includes partnering with five West Michigan state parks, the Muskegon Conservation District, and the City of Muskegon. WMSRDC is also partnering with the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly to plant 200 trees within the Muskegon River watershed and the Delta Institute to plant 300 trees and 400 seedlings along the Hart Montague Trail in cooperation with the State of Michigan, the Oceana Conservation District and the communities of Hart, Shelby, New Era, Mears, and Rothbury. These projects are currently underway. The U. S. Forest Service has provided funding for these projects through Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grants.



AIR QUALITY & COMMUNICATIONS

Clean Air Action

WMSRDC continued to be an active partner of the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC). Formed over twenty years ago, the WMCAC remains a strong partnership of business, academic institutions, government agencies, industry, and non-profit organizations in Muskegon, Kent, and Ottawa counties. These partners



**WEST MICHIGAN
CLEAN AIR
ACTION!**

continue working together to achieve cleaner air in the region through the education and promotion of voluntary emission reduction activities.

Among other outreach activities, an extensive television public education campaign continued in 2020 highlighting voluntary actions people can take on Clean Air Action Days. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many pivots had to be made within the Clean Air Action Program, such as refraining from promoting several voluntary emission reduction activities during the 2020 season, including carpooling with non-household members and using mass transit, in order to adhere to social distancing guidelines. Also many community event opportunities to educate the public about clean air were canceled. The WMCAC plans to actively attend events and encourage all voluntary actions in future messaging when public health conditions deem it safe to do so.

U.S. Census Affiliate

WMSRDC continued to fulfill its duties as a U.S. Census Bureau Affiliate. WMSRDC strives to keep the WMSRDC website up to date with the latest links and most recently released data from the Census Bureau and other data products.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CEDS Implementation

WMSRDC continued its mission to implement the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development, and is the result of a regionally-owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide regional prosperity and resilience. The CEDS is required to maintain the region's designation as an Economic Development District (EDD) by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA), enabling communities within the district to be eligible for EDA economic development grants and assistance.

CEDS Strategy Committee

The CEDS Strategy Committee typically convenes three to four times per year at various sites throughout the region to discuss the region's CEDS document, discuss the latest economic news and events throughout the region, and to network with peers. In 2020, adjustments to Committee operations were required due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The spring CEDS meeting was canceled; while the summer and fall meetings were held virtually. Video conferencing will continue to be a useful tool throughout the pandemic, and may be utilized even after the pandemic fades.

Technical Assistance

For most of the year, WMSRDC staff was engaged with potential EDA CARES Act applicants to facilitate project development in relation to pandemic response and recovery. Virtual meeting capabilities were essential for working with local units of government in all corners of the region. By the end of 2020, EDA had awarded one grant within the region (see Entrepreneurial Market Analysis below). In addition, three project applications were submitted for consideration in late 2020, with word expected from EDA regarding their viability expected to come in early 2021.

Entrepreneurial Market Analysis

In September 2020, WMSRDC and the Grand Valley State University Muskegon Innovation Hub (Hub) received a grant from the EDA to study the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the West Michigan lakeshore area including the counties of Kent, Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, and Ottawa. The Entrepreneurial Market Analysis will be conducted during the first quarter of 2021 and released in the spring. The study will profile the entrepreneurial market dynamics of the lakeshore region, propose strategies to enhance entrepreneurial support and business acceleration services, and identify existing and potential sectors to target those services.

CARES Act Planning Grant

Due to the difficult and challenging conditions created by the pandemic, WMSRDC successfully applied for a supplemental, non-competitive EDA planning grant that was made available through the federal CARES Act. This funding is intended to help regions respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as support efforts to enhance regional resilience to future economic disruptions.



RURAL TRANSPORTATION

Asset Management

In a typical year, WMSRDC staff, along with MDOT and a county road commission employee, collect condition information for approximately half of all the federal aid roads within the region. The data collection effort requires the collection of three items being road condition rating, surface type, and the number of lanes. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, data was not collected on federal aid roads. Fortunately, Michigan's Asset Management Council is allowing fiscal year 2020 funding to be carried over into fiscal year 2021. WMSRDC staff will coordinate with appropriate agencies in the spring to ensure, if COVID-19 restrictions allow, statistics on 100 percent of all federal aid roads are collected in 2021.

Rural Task Force Update

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic forced the five-county Rural Transportation Task Force to meet virtually in 2020, the committee continued to conduct its important business. The task force annually receives approximately \$3.1 million of federal funding as well as a little over \$425,000 in state funding. Typical projects undertaken by local road agencies include road construction, road maintenance, and transit capital purchases. WMSRDC assists in the administration of the Rural Transportation Task Force for the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. Unfortunately, because of reduced federal and state revenues due to the COVID-19 pandemic, fiscal year 2021 funds were subsequently reduced. The committee met virtually in November to adjust project funding amounts to conform to the new budget. Even with the lower federal and state funding amounts, all projects will continue to be constructed.

**The Rural
Transportation
Task Force
receives about
\$3.1 million
in federal
funding as
well as a little
over \$425,000
in state
funding.**



METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION

The West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program (WestPlan) continues to provide services and expertise to its member agencies. WestPlan is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Muskegon and Northern Ottawa county urbanized areas. WestPlan, under the auspices of WMSRDC, has served as the MPO since 1973 and continues to provide metropolitan transportation planning services to its member agencies. WestPlan administers a comprehensive transportation planning program to assist in planning for state and federal transportation funding for road and transit improvements. Working with partner local, state, and federal agencies, the MPO develops long and short range plans as well as other federally required documents that assist in planning and allocating transportation funding.

A milestone in 2020 was the development and approval of the 2045 Long Range Plan. The Long Range Plan is a federally mandated document that provides for a multi-jurisdictional, multi-year look at the Muskegon and Northern Ottawa area and the future transportation system. Used as a guide for investment of public funds, the document plans for twenty plus years of strategy and capital improvements to the transportation system within the MPO area. Technical modeling and analysis of the current system provided a guide to plan for future deficiencies on the network. The overall goal of the plan is to address these deficiencies with projects and solutions that will allow the network to run more efficiently. The plan also includes the use of local, state, and federal transportation goals and objectives to guide transportation plans and projects. The plan must be financially constrained, and must adhere to other federal regulations such as Air Quality Conformity, Performance Based Planning, Environmental Mitigation, Environmental Justice, and Public Involvement. Another important component of the plan is transit and non-motorized transportation planning.

WestPlan, through guidance of the MPO Policy Committee, received a grant to fund a regional transit study in 2021. The West Michigan Regional Transit Systems Governance and Organizational Transition Study will analyze the public transportation services in the Muskegon and Northern Ottawa County urbanized area. The study will look at ways to potentially share service areas and make a more efficient system to serve transit users of the Muskegon Area Transit System and the Harbor Transit Multi-Modal Transportation System. Organizational structure will also be looked at to determine potential options for the two major transit agencies to share and potentially combine certain services. This project will result in better communication, coordination, and decision-making by local governments in the region as it relates to public transportation services and mobility. The concept is a culmination of years of discussions between the two agencies that seek to streamline the services and provide the best option for transit riders. WMSRDC will manage the project and work with a consultant to complete the study.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

WMSRDC did not take on any new local government projects in 2020, mainly due to disruptions caused by the pandemic. Still, there was plenty of work to be done on projects that were inherited from 2019.

Village of New Era

WMSRDC worked with the New Era Village Council to complete a significant update to the New Era Future Land Use Plan. The Village now has a current plan on file that outlines a vision for its future development and character. One notable outcome of this project was the discovery of inaccurate village boundaries that had been used and accepted for years, if not decades, to graphically represent New Era across a variety of platforms, including plat maps and the village's own future land use and zoning maps. Using parcel-level equalization data, WMSRDC was able to redraw the shape of the Village to show a more accurate geographical representation.

Recreation Plans

Recreation plans outline a community's vision for its future park and recreation assets and programs. In early 2020, WMSRDC provided assistance to the Village of New Era (Oceana County), Big Prairie Township (Newaygo County), and the Village of Fruitport (Muskegon County) to complete recreation plan updates and secure approval of the plans by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Those communities are now eligible to apply for state recreation grants through the year 2024.

Ludington Area Shoreline Study

The purpose of the Ludington Shoreline Land Use and Resiliency Plan (SLURP) is to develop a resource that will include a community-supported vision for the future land use surrounding Pere Marquette Lake, as well as resources and information to facilitate shoreline recovery and resilience efforts. This project is supported with a special grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation through its Redevelopment Ready Communities program. This project launched in 2019 with a target for completion in 2020. However, delays related to the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the project into 2021.



WMSRDC BOARD

Fiscal Year 2020 Board

Bonnie McGlothin, Chairperson, Councilperson, City of Muskegon Heights
Dale Nesbary, Vice-Chairperson, Muskegon Community College
Charles Lange, Secretary, Mason County Commissioner
Kay Beecham, Councilperson, City of Norton Shores
James Brown, Oceana County Commissioner
Burt Cooper, Newaygo County Commissioner
Dean Gustafson, Oceana County Commissioner
Jennifer Hodges, Supervisor, Muskegon Township
Rich Houtteman, WMSRDC Appointee
Marcia Hovey-Wright, Muskegon County Commissioner
Ken Johnson, Commissioner, City of Muskegon
James Kelly, WMSRDC Appointee
Nick Krieger, Mason County Commissioner
Andrea Large, WMSRDC Appointee
Joe Lenius, Commissioner, City of Ludington
Howard Lodholtz, Lake County Commissioner
James Maike, Newaygo County Commissioner
James Rynberg, Mayor, City of Fremont
Bob Scolnik, Muskegon County Commissioner
Rillastine Wilkins, Muskegon County Commissioner
Crystal Young, West Shore Community College

WMSRDC STAFF

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director
Stephen Carlson, Program Manager
Syndi Copeland, Executive Assistant
Kathy Evans, Program Manager
Joel Fitzpatrick, Transportation Director
Amy Haack, Program Manager
Vicki Luthy, Planner
Brian Mulnix, Program Manager
Gale Nobes, Planner
Amanda Snyder, Finance Manager
Jamie Way, GIS Specialist

FINANCIALS

Audited Statement of Revenues, Expenditures, and Changes in Fund Balance For the Year Ended September 30, 2019 and 2020

Revenues	2019	2020
Intergovernmental Revenues		
Federal	\$ 2,728,846	\$ 3,023,061
State	443,103	150,446
Local	<u>218,488</u>	<u>203,677</u>
Total Revenues	3,390,437	3,377,184
Expenditures		
Current		
Land Use Planning	19,236	56,556
Regional Initiatives	298,930	25,524
Economic Development	129,984	148,467
Transportation Planning	655,029	624,950
Environmental Clean-up	1,524,370	2,493,816
Homeland Security	<u>845,472</u>	<u>12,289</u>
Total Expenditures	\$ <u>3,473,021</u>	\$ <u>3,361,602</u>
Net Change in Fund Balance	(82,584)	15,582
Fund Balance at 10/1/18 for FY19 and 10/1/19 for FY20	<u>406,704</u>	<u>324,120</u>
Fund Balance at 9/30/19 for FY19 and 9/30/20 for FY20	\$ <u>324,120</u>	\$ <u>339,702</u>

West Michigan Shoreline
Regional Development Commission
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