

Commission Quarterly

2026 APRIL - JUNE ISSUE

Special Project: Economic Recovery Corps Fellowship

Over the past two and a half years, the Economic Recovery Corps Fellowship has helped West Michigan turn its diverse agricultural strengths into coordinated regional action. Since February 2024, ERC Fellow Annika Gacnik has worked alongside the WMSRDC to deepen the region's understanding of its food and agriculture economy and lay the groundwork for long-term, cross-sector collaboration. From facilitating an economic impact analysis to launching a multi-county coalition, her 30-month fellowship has helped align the region around a shared strategy for addressing its most pressing agricultural challenges and opportunities.

In her first year, Annika helped secure the \$250,000 Michigan Agriculture Cluster Economic Impact Analysis funded by EDA, the Making It In Michigan Fund, and the region's

community foundations. This comprehensive study identified key constraints and opportunities while providing a data-driven foundation for regional planning. Building on those findings, Annika helped establish the West Michigan Agri-Cluster Coalition, a collaborative network of supply chain partners and support to organizations with a shared mission to advance the food and agriculture cluster. Over the last year, she has coordinated Coalition meetings, developed shared resources, and worked to define a long-term strategy for the Coalition's continuity.

Throughout her time in West Michigan, Annika has connected her regional work to national initiatives and industry best practices. She helped co-design the Statewide and Regional Food Systems Planning National Community of Practice with MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, and participated in the

North American Food Systems Network, Food Systems Leadership Network, and NADO's Cluster Identification Training to inform her strategic approach.

As the fellowship concludes in July 2026, Annika's primary goal is to position the West Michigan Agri-Cluster Coalition for ongoing collaboration. She is hopeful the momentum built over the past 30 months is just the beginning. "Every person I work with is so dedicated to West Michigan's success," she says. "While it's sad to see the fellowship come to an end, I know the future of the region is in great hands."



Annika presenting her ERC capstone research on the economic development opportunities of food waste at IEDC's Leadership Summit in Washington DC

WMSRDC'S New Website!

Check out WMSRDC's new and improved website and watch our new WMSRDC video! Scan the QR code below to explore the site and learn more about the work we're doing across the region!

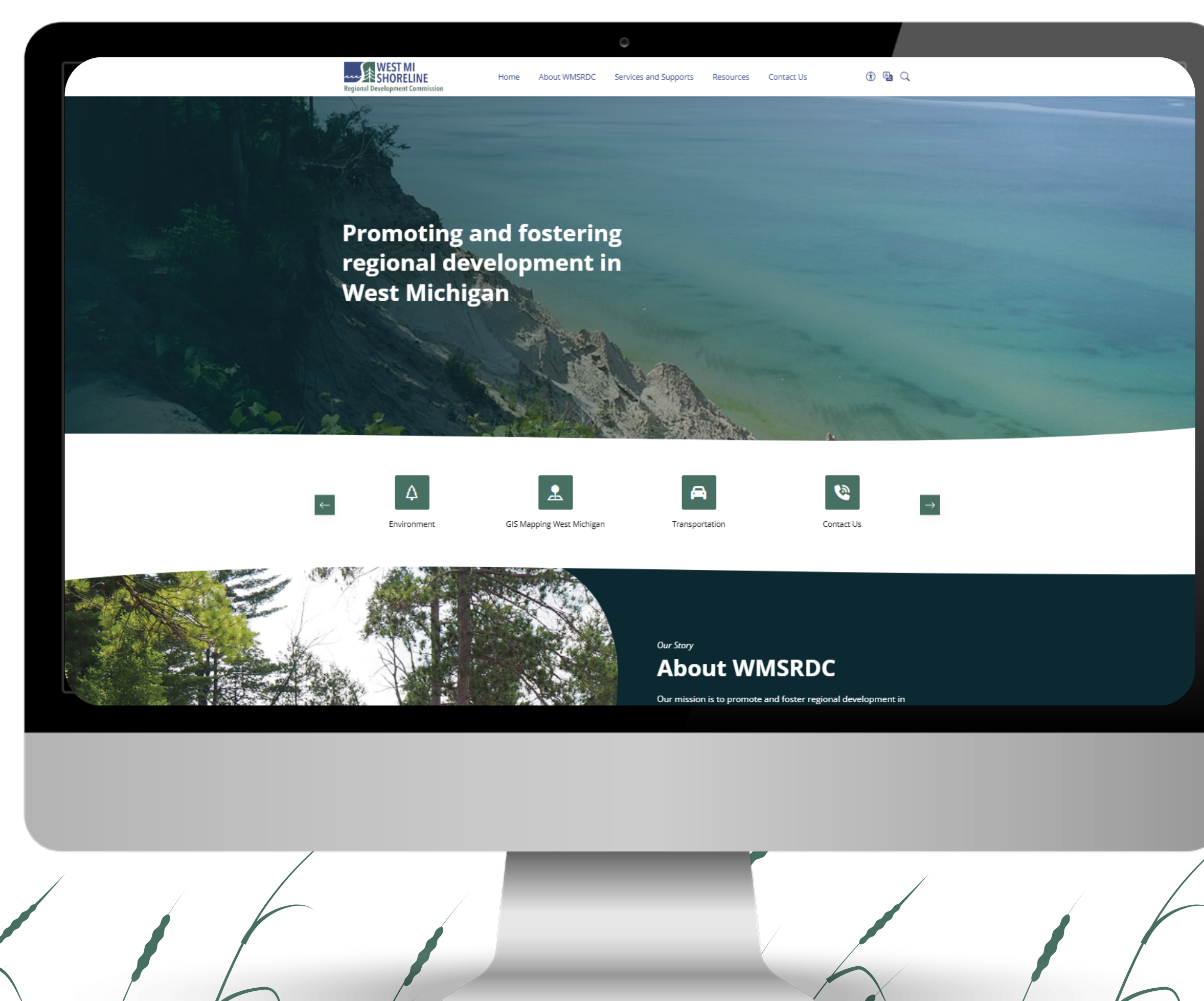


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Transportation: Clean Air Action Season Is Underway!

Welcome back to another exciting Clean Air Action season! We kicked things off on a high note with nearly 50 people attending the Clean Air Action Luncheon, hosted by the WMCAC on May 14 at the Johnson Park Shelter in Kent County. The event brought together steering committee members, educational campaign partners, and air quality advocates for an afternoon of networking and learning. Attendees enjoyed informative presentations from EGLE, Grand Valley Metro Council (GVMC), and West Michigan Trails (WMT), covering a variety of topics related to air quality.

We're also thrilled to continue one of our favorite efforts - the Air Quality Display! Throughout the summer, the display will rotate weekly/bi-weekly among local governments, organizations, educational institutions, and other community partners, helping bring air quality awareness directly to residents across the region.

On June 7, WMCAC hosted a booth at Feet on the Street in Whitehall, connecting with community members of all ages through our custom Clean Air Bingo game, which highlighted everyday sources of emissions and encouraged participants to think about how daily activities impact air quality. After completing the game, participants could spin the prize wheel for a chance to win Clean Air swag and other giveaways. The event was a great opportunity to engage with the community, spark conversations about clean air, and share simple ways everyone can help reduce emissions and improve air quality.

Thank you to all our participating hosts and partners for helping us educate, engage, and inspire action for cleaner air. We look forward to another impactful season of outreach and community involvement! Keep an eye out for us at concerts at McGraft Park in July and August, and the Muskegon Air Show in August.



Feet on the Street in Whitehall occurred on June 7 in the Mears Promenade. Over 50 people participated in our Air Quality Bingo!

Transportation: Non-Motorized Planning

Commission staff have been busy with non-motorized trail planning and data gathering. Recently staff installed four temporary pedestrian counters near the library in Whitehall along the White Lake Pathway. Staff will be looking at the number of trail users in that area, as well as the number of users exiting and entering the library parking lot. The counters will record directional information as well as the time of day. Commission staff will be placing the counters in various locations throughout the region during the summer months gathering trail use data which could be used for project planning and grant applications.

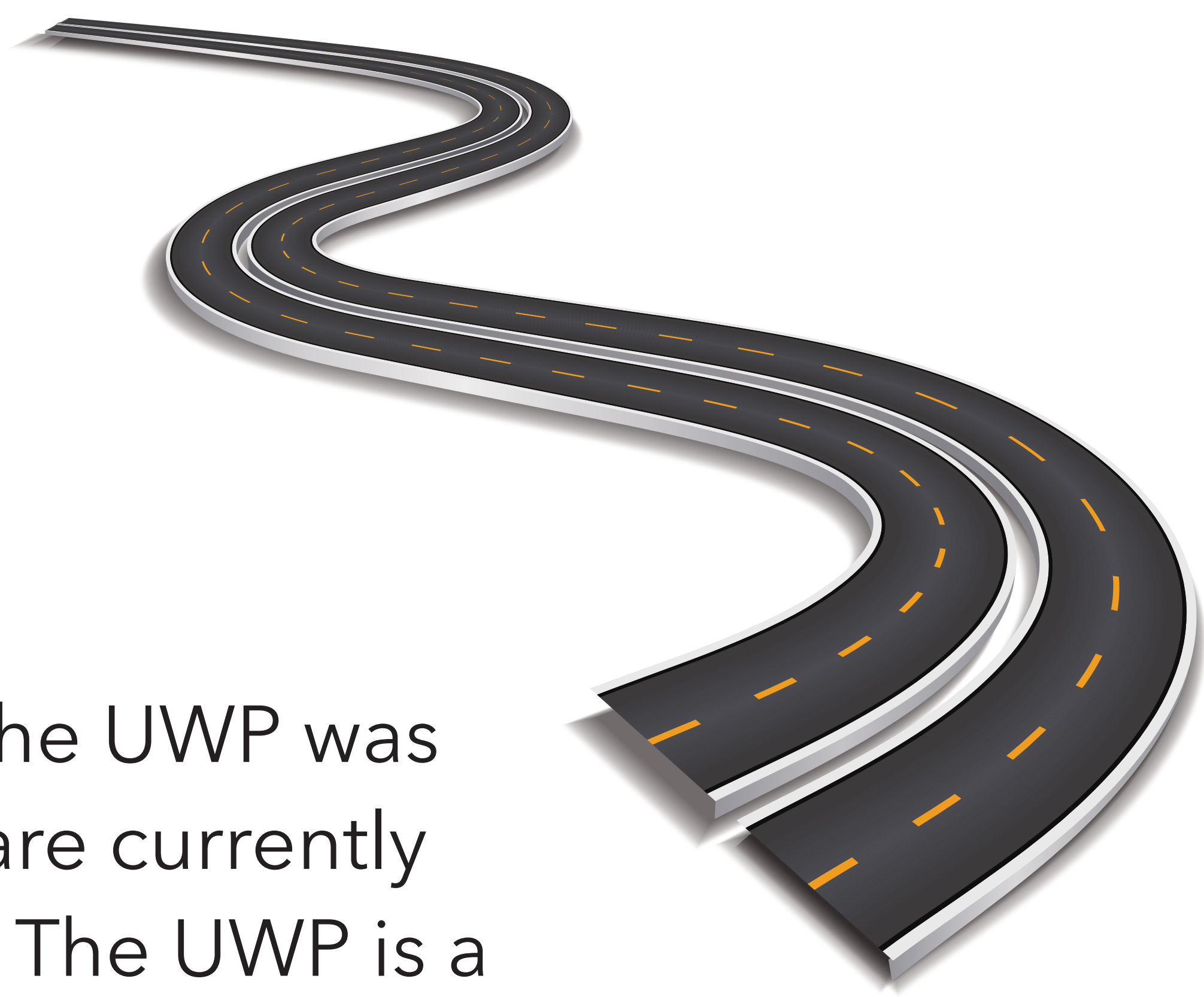


Brian Mulnix, Program Manager, installing the non-motorized counters along the White Lake Pathway

Transportation: MPO Update

The WestPlan MPO Technical and Policy Committees last met in May where they reviewed and approved the 8h Amendment to the FY2026-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The FY2026-2029 TIP and all amendments can be found on the WMSRDC website under the transportation program section.

The WestPlan Policy Committee also approved the FY2027 Unified Work Program (UWP). The UWP was developed with assistance from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), who are currently reviewing the document along with staff from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The UWP is a federally required document and outlines the budget and activities for the MPO for the next fiscal year. Budget estimates for the UWP are provided by MDOT and are allocated to several different program areas for the MPO.



Transportation: WestPlan MPO Advances Regional Safety Efforts

The WestPlan MPO advanced several safety initiatives this spring. In April, staff attended an Safe Streets for All (SS4A) safety plan workshop in Chicago to strengthen the MPO Safety Plan. Staff also supported the City of Muskegon Heights with a technical assistance application through the Michigan Infrastructure Office for the SS4A Notice of Funding Opportunity.

That momentum continued in May with the launch of WestPlan MPO's Near-MISS Safety Survey, a new tool for identifying locations of concern and documenting near-miss incidents across the region. In addition, WestPlan staff shared progress updates with the MPO Tech and Policy Committees, helping to keep partners informed and engaged.



Lakefront Trail in Chicago along Lake Michigan



SS4A safety plan workshop

GIS: White Lake Public Art Mapping Project

The Arts Council of White Lake - Nuveen Center (ACWL-Nuveen Center), located in Whitehall, Michigan, has played a vital role in enhancing the region's cultural landscape through the installation of public art beginning in 2005. Over the years, the organization has curated, maintained, and promoted a diverse collection of sculptures strategically located throughout the White Lake community, particularly along the scenic Hart-Montague Trail. These installations not only enrich the visual environment but also create meaningful opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with art while experiencing the natural beauty of the region.

This ongoing initiative has been made possible through the generous support of dedicated community members, local

businesses, corporate sponsors, and helped ensure the sustainability and continued growth of the public art program.

To further expand access and engagement, WMSRDC's GIS Mapping Services staff have partnered with the ACWL-Nuveen Center to develop an interactive digital tour of the public art walk. This innovative, mobile-friendly application will integrate seamlessly with the Nuveen Center's existing website, enhancing the user experience while maintaining a consistent online presence.

The application is designed to serve as both an educational and navigational tool. Users will be able to explore the history and artistic significance of each

sculpture, navigate more easily between installations, and easily locate nearby amenities such as parking areas, restrooms, and other points of interest. By blending art, technology, and accessibility, this digital tour will further elevate the visibility of the White Lake public art program and create a more immersive and engaging experience for all who visit.



Arts Council of What Lake - Nuveen Center

Economic Development: Program Update

Through the first half of 2026, the WMSRDC Economic Development program has actively implemented the region’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), providing technical assistance to local communities seeking to apply to the EDA for projects and hosting quarterly CEDS Strategy Committee meetings. In addition, WMSRDC has worked closely with Economic Recovery Corps Fellow, Annika Gacnik, to establish the West Michigan Agri-Cluster Coalition. This work builds on the momentum created through the fellowship to support the agriculture economic cluster and food systems in West Michigan.

The CEDS Strategy Committee held its regular quarterly meeting on April 24, where the Committee continued its review of Economic Development Administration (EDA) investment priorities. The meeting featured “critical infrastructure” and “economic resilience.” These discussions are important because applications for assistance through the EDA must align with one or more of its investment priorities. Go to <https://www.eda.gov/funding/investment-priorities> to learn more about EDA’s current priorities. Upcoming Committee meetings will review additional investment priorities: “Workforce” and “Manufacturing” (July 31) and “Innovation & Entrepreneurship” (October 30). Please send an email to info@wmsrdc.org if you would like to be added to the WMSRDC Economic Development email list to receive occasional updates and meeting notices.



EDA is a bureau within the U.S. Department of Commerce. It partners with regions to generate employment, retain existing jobs, and stimulate economic growth

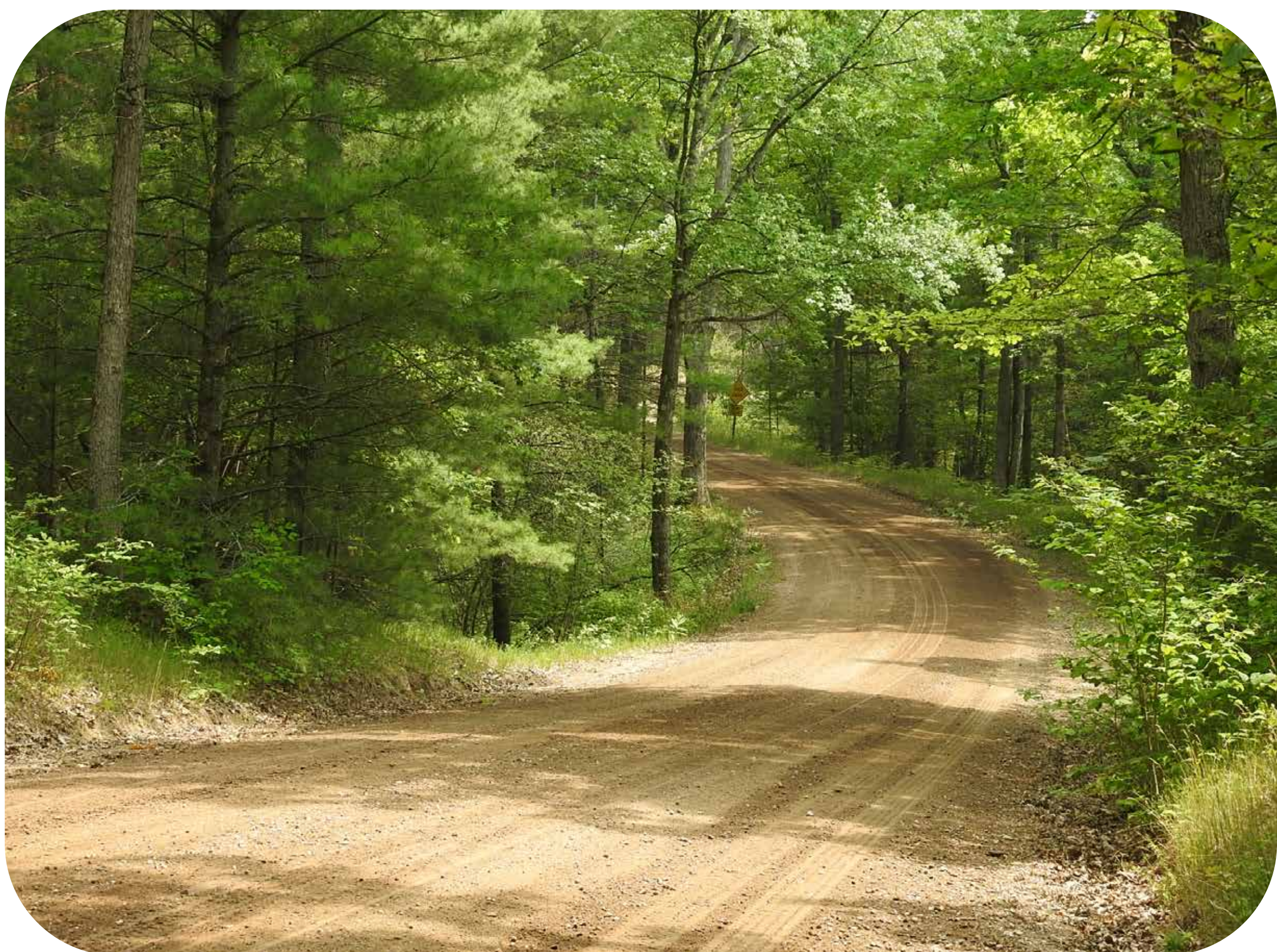
Local Government Services: Program Update

In June, WMSRDC kicked off four new local government planning projects: City of Muskegon Heights Recreation Plan, Yates Township Master Plan, Lake County Master Plan, and Lake County Recreation Plan. All four projects are considered “updates” to existing plans that have either reached or exceeded their intended lifespan. The two recreation plans are expected to be completed by February 1, 2027, while the two master plans will be completed before Fall 2027.

Public input is essential to both master plans and recreation plans. These projects will include opportunities for community engagement through

in-person meetings and online questionnaires. Outreach and engagement efforts will begin this summer to allow seasonal residents the opportunity to participate in the planning process.

Master plans should be assessed, and updated as needed, every five years. Recreation plans must be updated and approved by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) every five years for a community to be eligible to apply for certain types of recreation grants from the state.



Lake County country road



Lake County Court House

Local Government Services:

Materials Management Planning

Throughout the spring, development of the West Michigan Shoreline Materials Management Plan (MMP) continued at full strength with meetings and creation of plan content. The MMP Committee (MMPC) convened in April and June, focused on drafting criteria for the siting of new materials management facilities. For new facilities to be licensed or permitted by the Michigan Department of Environment Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), new facilities will be required to be found consistent with the MMP's objective criteria. Upcoming MMPC meetings are scheduled for August 3 in Oceana County, October 5 in Mason County, and December 7 in Lake County.

In addition, WMSRDC created a variety of outreach assets that will be used to communicate with local governments, citizens and other stakeholders about the MMP, where to access drafts available for public review, and how to participate in the review process. The proposed MMP document will be made available for public review this fall, once it is approved by the MMPC and each participating county.



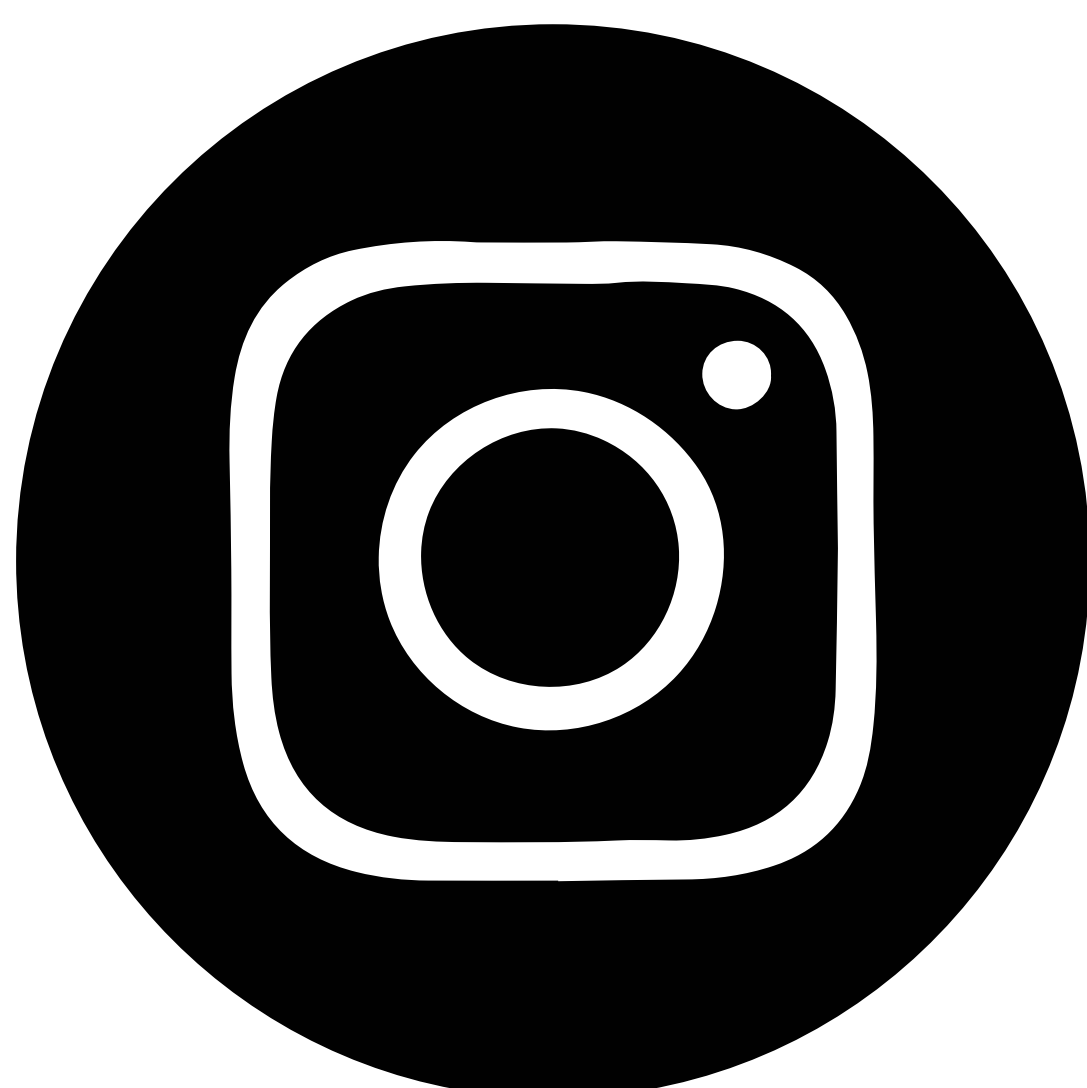
Sample social media graphic. WMSRDC has drafted a variety of communication assets to be used for MMP outreach later this year

Follow Us!

Follow WMSRDC on social media to stay up to date on projects and initiatives across the region.



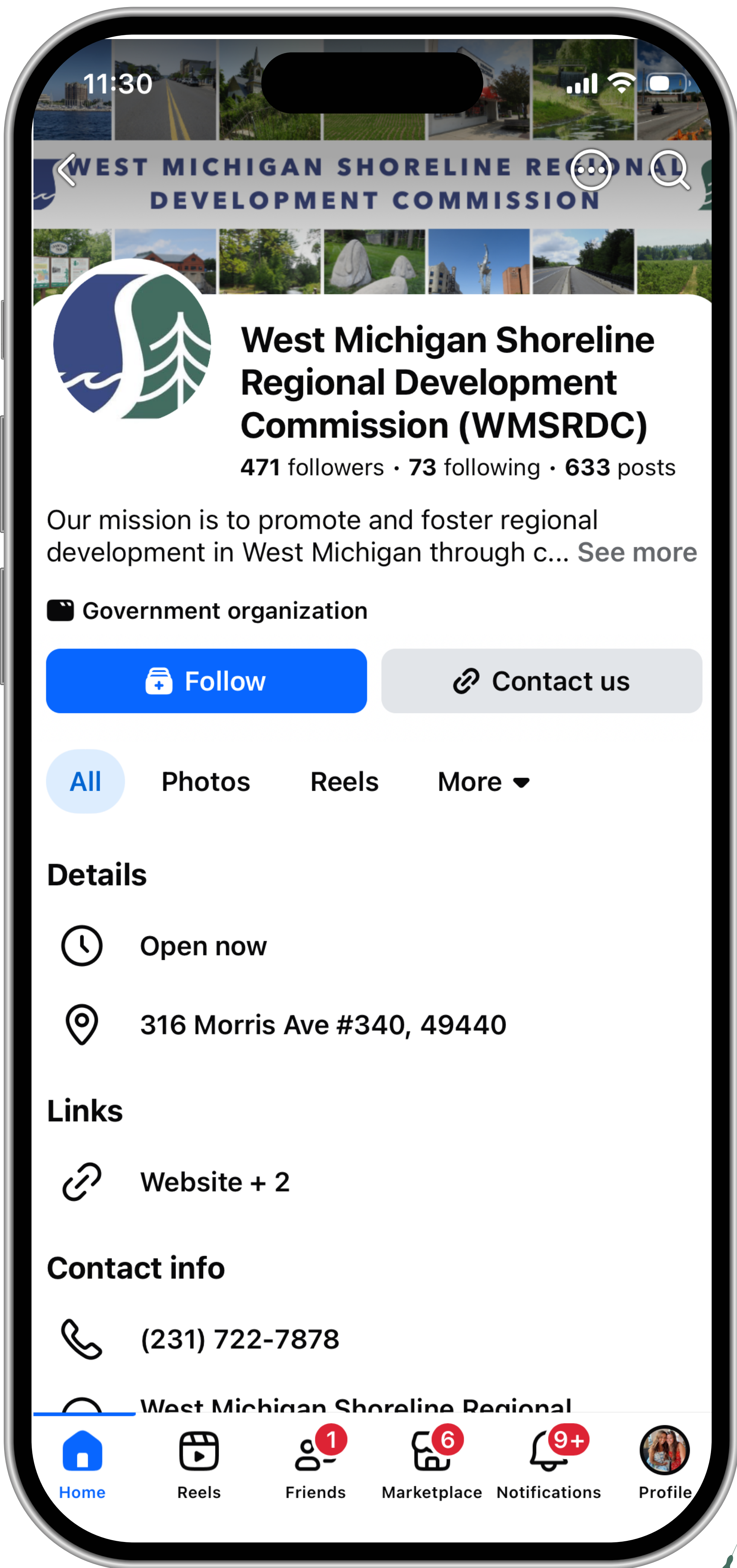
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Celebrate Muskegon Lake's
Remarkable Comeback.

One Day. Two Great Events.
AUGUST 15, 2026

Sun, Fun, and a Lake Restore

📍 **Grand Trunk Pavillion** ⌚ **9am - 2pm**

Join us as we celebrate the restoration and delisting of Muskegon Lake! Enjoy a fun run/walk, kids activities, food trucks, tours of the S.S. Milwaukee Clipper, kayaking, fishing, educational exhibits, and more. It's a day of family-friendly fun celebrating Muskegon Lake's remarkable comeback and bright future.

Back to the Lake - An 80s Celebration

📍 **S.S. Milwaukee Clipper** ⌚ **7pm - 10pm**

Celebrate Muskegon Lake's restoration with an 80s-themed throwback party! Dress in your favorite 80s attire and enjoy heavy appetizers, a cash bar, music, dancing, and a night of fun as we honor the people and progress that helped transform Muskegon Lake.



Scan to learn more and get your ticket!

Enviromental: Growing Micro-Forests

Thanks to the Community Foundation for Muskegon County, WMSRDC has had the fortune of participating in the development of two micro-forests in Muskegon County! Starting with an idea brought forward by Muskegon Rotarians, Muskegon's first micro-forest was implemented in City of Muskegon's Marquette Neighborhood in 2024. Following the success of this project, the Muskegon Environmental Research & Educational Society adopted this idea and championed a second micro forest at Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve this spring.

Research shows both forests will grow faster than other forms of re-wilding. Factoring in warmer climate conditions and the importance of diverse yet complementary native species, micro-forests are better protected from outside forces such as invasives species. The dense placement and special soil preparations give the possibility to adapt a very small area of available land for the broader purpose of preventing floods, cooling against urban heat, and providing resilience against high wind and other natural disaster impacts. The natural selection among seedlings allows the thriving ones to develop quickly, producing a mature forest in 15-20 years. The rapid growth rate enables micro forests to intercept, filter, and transpire an enormous quantity of storm water that would otherwise transport pollutants and excess nutrients to Muskegon Lake.

Both micro-forests have received overwhelming support from local classrooms, environmental organizations, and businesses. The community members, volunteers, and students who help prepare the ground, plant trees, and tend to the micro forest will better understand the benefits of trees, develop greater pride in the project, and can be expected to volunteer in other positive ways in the future. To see a full list of project partners, please visit the new WMSRDC website.



Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve Micro-Forest

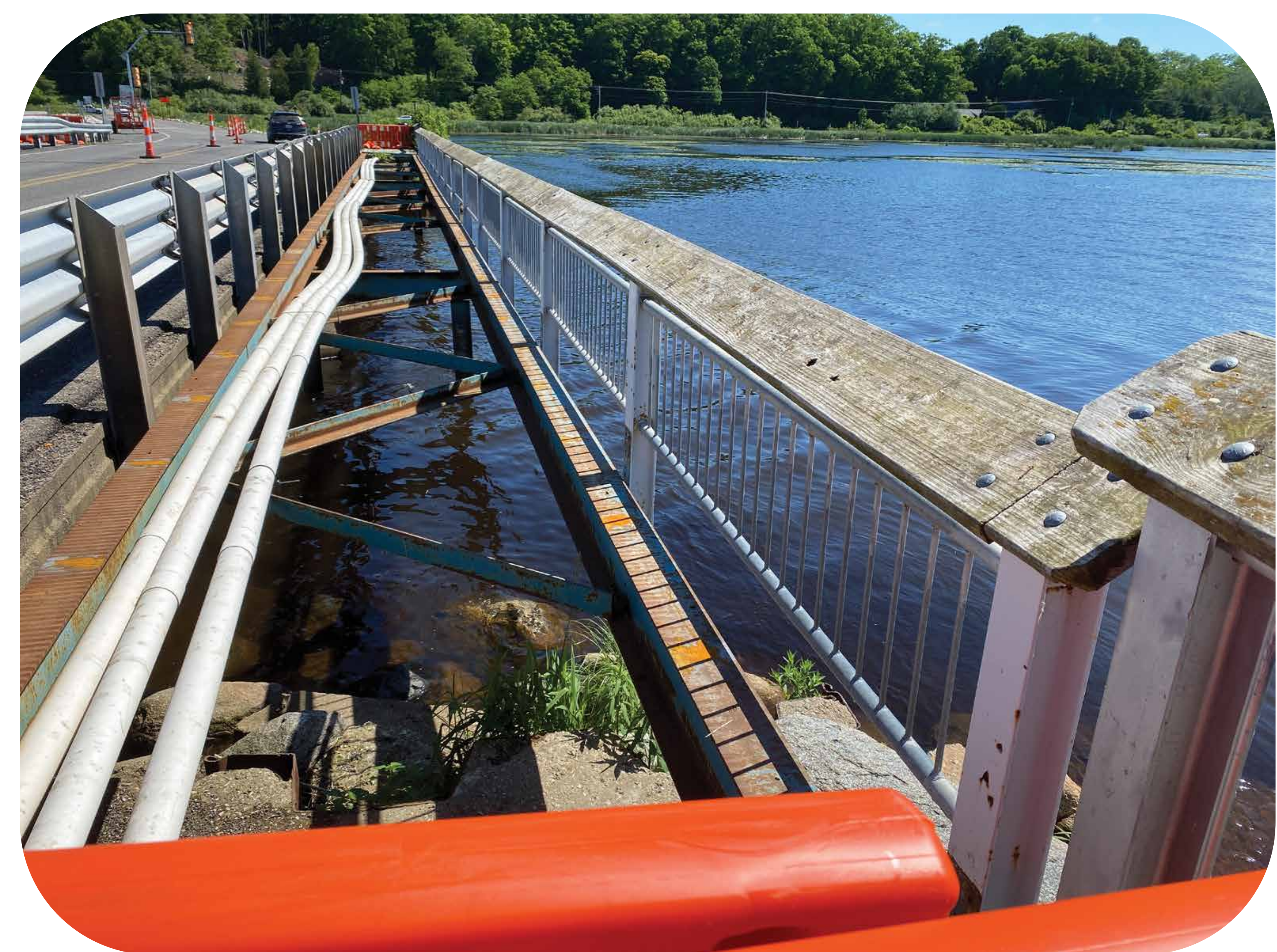


Progress of the Marquette Micro-Forest

Enviromental: Restoring Fishing Access on Longbridge Road

In partnership with Pentwater Township, Oceana County Road Commission, and Great Lakes Fisheries Trust, vital improvements to the Longbridge Road fishing pier began on June 8th, 2026. Prior to this restoration effort, the fishing pier has been closed for multiple years due to corrosion of the underwater support, making the structure unfit for the public to safely utilize. As the only publicly accessible point for shore fishing on Pentwater Lake, anglers were attempting to fish in the road right of way and rip rap along Longbridge Road posing a significant safety concern for the community.

The completion of capital improvements to the Longbridge Road Boardwalk's fishing pier will alleviate current structural and safety concerns; reestablishing a point of access for all anglers, including those with mobility challenges. The Longbridge Road fishing pier is Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible. Additional considerations to accessibility of the pier are accommodated by a barrier free boardwalk, handrails, benches, and nearby parking. The Longbridge Road Boardwalk also has limited shoulder parking, with the closest spaces reserved for those who require ADA parking.



Bridge rehabilitation work on Longbridge Road



WEST MI
SHORELINE

Regional Development Commission

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