CEDS 2018-2022

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the West Michigan Shoreline Economic Development District

Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana Counties

West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission is a federal and state designated regional planning and development agency serving 120 local governments in Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana counties.

The mission of the Commission is to promote and foster regional development in West Michigan through cooperation amongst local governments and other regional partners.

James Rynberg, Chairperson

Wally Taranko, Vice-Chairperson

Bonnie McGlothin, Secretary

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director

WMSRDC
WEST MICHIGAN SHORELINE
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Project Staff: Stephen Carlson, Program Manager
Economic Development / Local Government Services

CEDS Strategy Committee

Tobi Lake	Lake County Administrator
Barb Stenger	Lake County Economic Development Alliance
Kathy Maclean	Ludington Scottville Chamber of Commerce
Spence Riggs	Mason County Growth Alliance
Crystal Young	West Shore Community College
Jonathan Wilson	Muskegon County Economic Development Coordinator
Ed Garner	Muskegon Area First
Dan Rinsema-Sybenga	Muskegon Community College
Anne Hardy	Oceana County Economic Development Corporation
Ron Steiner	The Starting Block
Mark Guzniczak	Newaygo County Economic Development Office

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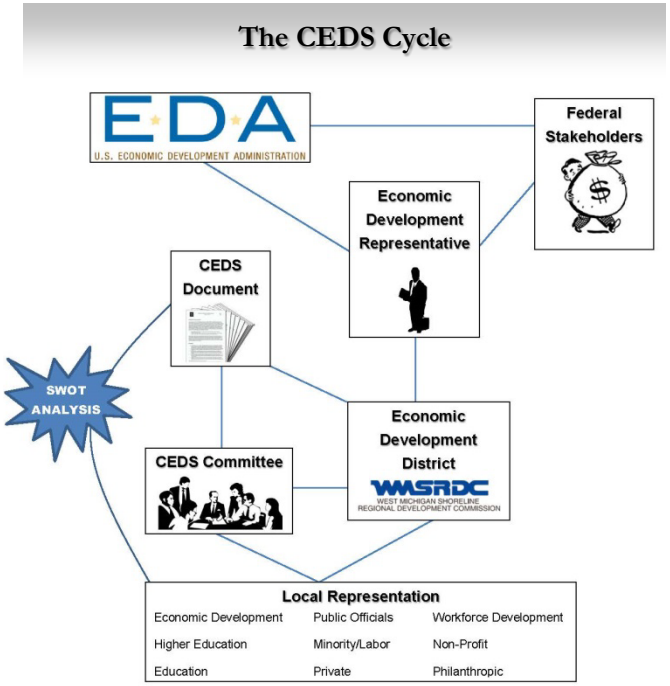
Introduction

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) is an Economic Development District (EDD) of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). This designation enables communities within the district to remain eligible for EDA funding programs. As the region's EDD, the WMSRDC is responsible for developing and maintaining a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) designed to identify regional priorities for economic and community development. Since 1966, EDA has made over 40 investments in the WMSRDC region, including industrial park and infrastructure improvements, technology centers, technical assistance, and loans.

The West Michigan Shoreline EDD consists of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana counties. The WMSRDC maintains a number of other regional programs as well, many of which extend beyond these five counties. The mission of WMSRDC is to promote and foster regional development in West Michigan through cooperation amongst local governments and other regional partners. WMSRDC provides services and manages and administers programs in homeland security, transportation planning, economic development, environmental planning, community development, local government services, and other special projects.

What economic development means in the WMSRDC Economic Development District



CEDS Process

This plan follows CEDS development guidelines released by EDA in February 2015. 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 the economic prosperity and resiliency of a region. Development of the CEDS is led by WMSRDC, overseen by the CEDS Strategy Committee, and approved by the WMSRDC Board. The CEDS Strategy Committee meets quarterly and includes representatives from throughout the WMSRDC region.

This CEDS is effective from 2018 through 2022. Development began in the fall of 2016 with a regional SWOT analysis. The plan was developed throughout 2017; made available for a 30-day review period in October 2017; and approved by the WMSRDC Board in November 2017.

Summary Background

The WMSRDC Economic Development District is geographically rural, although much of the population is concentrated in the urbanized Muskegon metropolitan area. Agriculture, tourism, retail and manufacturing serve as the primary economic sectors throughout the district.

Environment

The West Michigan Shoreline EDD is located along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. The counties of Mason, Muskegon, and Oceana share a western border with the "big lake." Due to the influence of Lake Michigan, temperature extremes are typically moderated and annual precipitation, especially snowfall, is enhanced.

Unique landscapes in the district include Great Lakes coastal plains, shoreline sand dunes, inland prairies and savannahs, and various types of forests.

The region is well-known for its agriculture, expansive forests, freshwater resources, and bountiful outdoor recreation opportunities. Major river systems include the Muskegon, Pentwater, Pere Marquette, and White; all of which include some of the most pristine and flourishing cold-water streams in the Midwest.

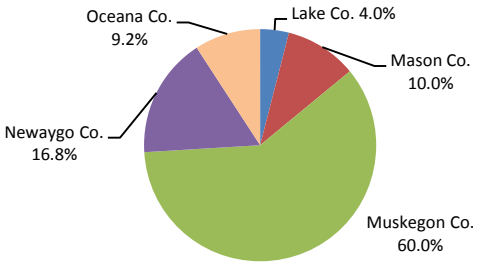
Compared to other areas of the United States, the district is relatively safe from natural hazards. Winter weather, severe winds, flooding, wildfire, and extreme temperatures are the most threatening natural hazards cited in local hazard mitigation plans.

Population Centers

The industrial and commercial hub of the district is the Muskegon metropolitan area, where about 60 percent of the district's population resides. Ludington, the county seat of Mason County, serves as the secondary nucleus of the region. Other communities that serve as commercial and/or industrial centers for the surrounding area are the cities of Fremont, Newaygo and White Cloud in Newaygo County, the White Lake area in northern Muskegon County, the City of Hart and Village of Shelby in Oceana County, and the Village of Baldwin in Lake County. There are 120 local units of government in the region, consisting of cities, villages, townships, and counties.

2015 Population Estimate

Region Population: 287,050



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates (2011-2015)

Industry Clusters

Thanks in part to its rich history of manufacturing, the district maintains a manufacturing supercluster that is led by primary metal manufacturing, and also includes fabricated metal products, machinery, and transportation equipment industries. Other leading employment clusters in the district include biomedical/bio-technical (life sciences); advanced materials; and agribusiness, food processing & technology.

Recreation & Tourism

Much of the region is heavily dependent upon tourism and recreation during the warm months from late spring through early fall. This economic activity is often derived from and

dependent upon the beauty and quality of the area's lakes, rivers, and forests. Due to the seasonal nature of this sector, annual economic statistics tend to understate its importance.

The Manistee National Forest covers a large portion of the area and there are seven Michigan state parks and two designated state recreation areas spread throughout the region. These assets provide numerous opportunities for outdoor recreation, including camping, hiking, fishing, and off-roading.

Lakes and rivers provide ideal settings to play and relax; from over 75 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline and sandy beaches, to world-class trout streams. Natural ports along Lake Michigan provide recreational boating access to the Great Lakes via Mona Lake, Muskegon Lake and White Lake in Muskegon County; Pentwater Lake in Oceana County, and Pere Marquette Lake in Mason County.

Non-motorized trails are emerging as a relatively new strength of the region's tourism strategy. One example is the 22-mile Hart-Montague Trail State Park, which connects the City of Hart to the City of Montague. In Newaygo County, efforts are underway to establish a mountain bike trail around the Croton and Hardy Dam ponds, which is expected to be a major attraction.

In addition to outdoor recreation, the region supports a strong collection of cultural and historical attractions including museums, playhouses, festivals, Victorian Era architecture, and traditional downtowns.

Agriculture

Agriculture and food processing are important components of the district's economy and identity. Many rural communities in the region are heavily influenced by the economics and culture surrounding agricultural endeavors.

Agriculture in the District
2007 to 2012

- Market value of products sold **increased 13.2%**
- Total acreage in farms **decreased 0.3%**
- Average farm size **increased 4.3%**
- The number of farms **decreased 2.7%**

Source: 2012 Census of Agriculture

According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, Newaygo County led the district in market value of products sold, while Oceana County was second in the state in acres of vegetables (all types). Oceana led the nation in acres of both tart cherries and asparagus, and was second in the state (13th nationally) in cut Christmas trees and short rotation woody crops.

Infrastructure Assets

Most of the cities within the district operate water distribution and wastewater collection systems. Age and lack of capacity are frequently cited as current or future economic threats. One exception to this is the Muskegon County Wastewater System, which is one of the most advanced wastewater treatment facilities in the nation. The total capacity of the facility is 46 million gallons per day. However the county's largest wastewater user closed in 2009 and the system has since remained underutilized.

Muskegon County Wastewater Treatment Plant

Consumers Energy has a strong presence in the district, even after the decommissioning of a coal power plant in Muskegon in 2016. In Mason County there is the Ludington Pumped Storage Plant as well as the Lake Winds Energy Park. In Newaygo County, Consumers owns and operates the Croton and Hardy hydro-electric dams on the Muskegon River. There is one other hydroelectric dam in the district, the Hart Hydroelectric Dam, which is owned and operated by the City of Hart in Oceana County.

Telecommunications and broadband services are available mostly in populated areas, and seriously lacking in rural areas. This has been identified as a significant economic development need within the district.

Infrastructure failure is consistently cited in local hazard mitigation plans as one of the top threats. In Newaygo County, flooding/dam failure is considered the number one hazard threat due to the two large dams on the Muskegon River.

Transportation Infrastructure

Air, water, and land modes of transportation are available within the WMSRDC region. Each county contains at least one state or federal highway that runs north/south and one that runs east/west. Overall, highways within the district are considered to be assets. Still, some rural areas of the district, such as northeast Oceana County, lie more than 10 miles from the nearest highway. There are three transit agencies in the district: Muskegon Area Transit System in Muskegon County; Ludington Mass Transit Authority in Mason County; and Yates Dial-A-Ride in Lake County.

Deep-water harbors in Muskegon and Ludington offer water-born shipping access to the Great Lakes. Muskegon Lake boasts the largest deep-water port in West Michigan and has the capacity and port facilities to accommodate the largest ships on the Great Lakes. Both harbors feature car-ferry service as well. The Lake Express high-speed car ferry docks in Muskegon Lake and offers a seasonal route to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The U.S.S. Badger, the only steam ferry on the Great Lakes, provides seasonal service between Ludington and Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

Railroad infrastructure exists in four of the five counties in the district (all except Oceana). Short lines operate in the Muskegon area; between Muskegon and Fremont; and between Grand Rapids and Manistee, via Lake and Mason counties. Commercial air service is available at the Muskegon County Airport with daily United Airlines service to Chicago O'Hare.

Workforce

Maintaining a ready workforce has become increasingly difficult in the wake of the Great Recession. Issues pertaining to the workforce are consistently identified as a weakness and vulnerability in the district. The district lags behind national averages in 24-month average unemployment, labor force participation, and percentage of the population with any college degree. Community colleges, K-12, and promise zones are strengths throughout the district. Access to higher education and career training are lacking especially in rural areas.

Socio-Economics

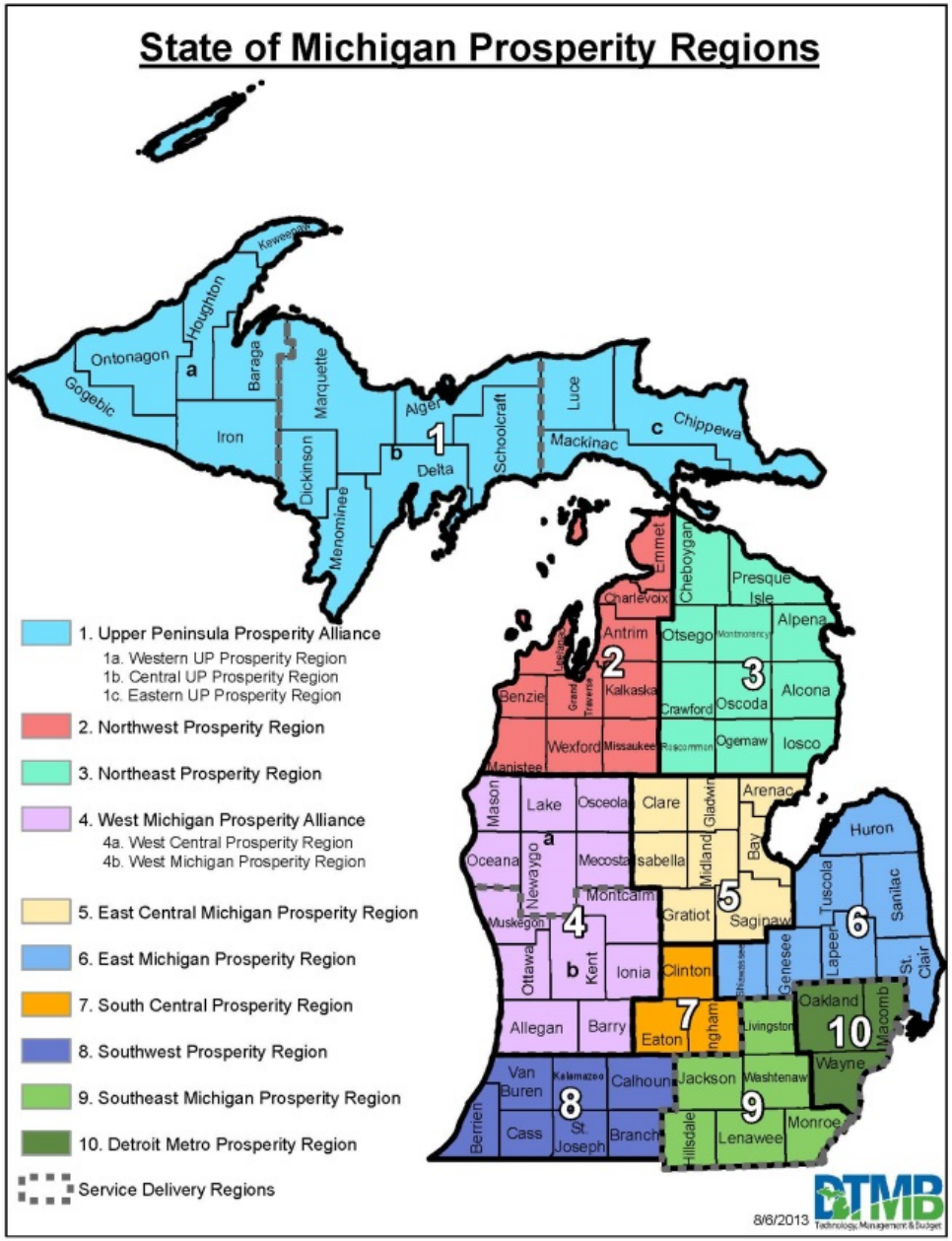
The median age and poverty rate in the region are greater than the national averages. Over forty percent of the district's population either lives within the ALICE threshold or in poverty. ALICE, a United Way acronym which stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, represents the number of individuals and families who are working, but are unable to afford the basic necessities of housing, food, child care, and transportation. Affordable housing and good quality housing are in short supply in many areas throughout the district, hampering efforts to attract workforce and expand businesses. These trends mirror the conclusions of a 2017 report from the Home Builders Association of Michigan regarding housing in the state.

Regional Cooperation

The WMSRDC Economic Development District is contained within the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA), which was created in 2013 as part of Michigan Governor Rick Snyder's Regional Prosperity Initiative. The WMPA, also known as Prosperity Region 4, is one of ten prosperity regions across the state. The purpose of the initiative is to ***increase communication and collaboration as well as better coordinate and integrate investments around economic development, workforce development, and infrastructure***.

The 31-member WMPA includes representatives from a variety of sectors including regional transportation and planning, economic development, higher education, community development, adult education, workforce development, private business, and philanthropy. This alliance has been working towards the goal of improving the economic prosperity in the 13-county West Michigan Region. One priority of the WMPA has been to support and promote regional projects that help reach that goal and meet the following criteria:

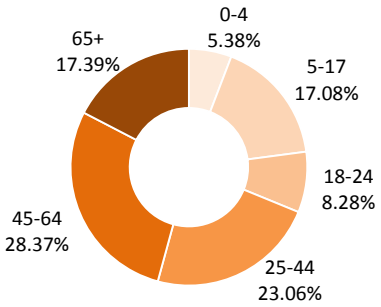
- Long-term impact & sustainability
- Regional Impact – proportion of the region potentially impacted by the project
- Provide employment opportunities to people with a variety of skill levels in a variety of employment sectors
- Recognizes the Region's strengths and challenges
- Promotes and supports public and private partnerships



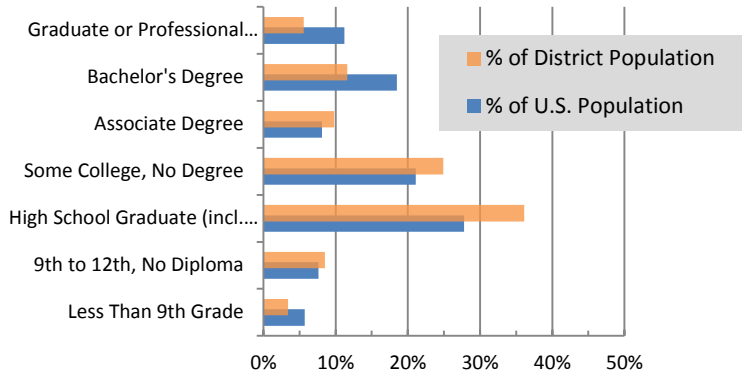
WMSRDC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

2015 Population [1]	% Change from 2010	Median Age [1]
285,878	-0.7%	41.1

AGE DISTRIBUTION [2]

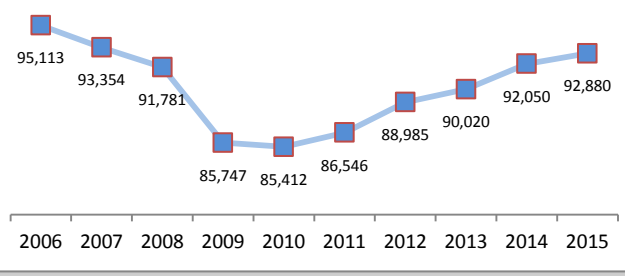


EDUCATION ATTAINMENT [1]



2015 Labor Force Participation Rate [3] **57.6 %**

WMSRDC EDD EMPLOYMENT [4]



UNIQUE INDUSTRY CLUSTERS [5]

- Primary Metal Manufacturing
- Glass & Ceramics
- Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing
- Machinery Manufacturing
- Manufacturing Supercluster

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Per Capita Income [2]	$34,367
Average Annual Wage [4]	$36,100
Population in Poverty + ALICE* [6]	42 %
Food Insecurity Rate [7]	13.8 %
Worked Outside County of Residence [1]	33.5 %

TOP INDUSTRIES OF EMPLOYMENT, 2015 [8]

Manufacturing	21.0 %
Retail Trade	16.1 %
Health Care and Social Services	14.5 %
Accomodation and Food Services	9.2 %
Educational Services	6.1 %

HOUSING [1]

Median Home Value ♦	$100,820
Homeowner Vacancy Rate ♦	2.8 %
Rental Vacancy Rate ♦	4.1 %
Housing Units With No Vehicle ♦	6.7 %
Residential Building Permits, 2016 [2]	421

** ALICE = Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*

♦ Figures averaged from counties in the district

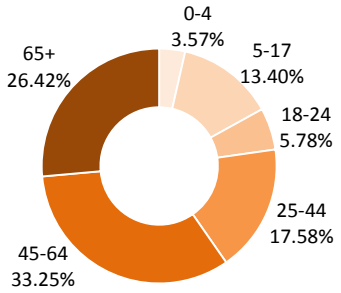
Sources:

1. ACS 5-Year Estimates (2011-2015)
2. US Census (via StatsAmerica.org)
3. WMSRDC calculation based upon W.E. Upjohn Institute's analysis of Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) and US Census Population Estimates
4. US BLS (via wmdashboard.org)
5. WMSRDC Analysis based upon US BLS QCEW and Purdue Center for Regional Development (cluster definitions)
6. WMSRDC calculation based upon United Way ALICE Report – 2017 Update for Michigan
7. map.feedingamerica.org
8. US BLS (vis StatsAmeriga.org)

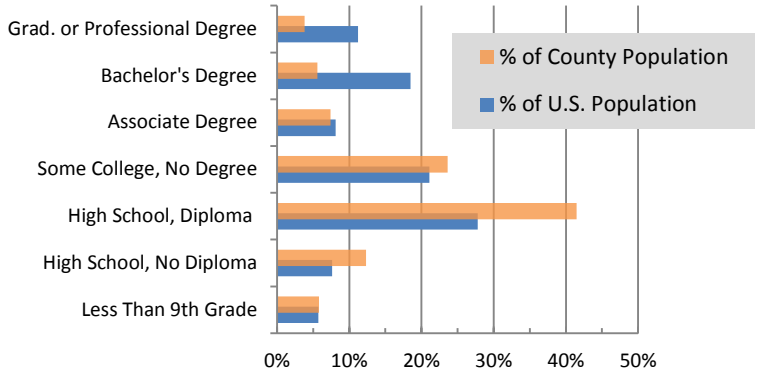
LAKE COUNTY, MICHIGAN

2015 Population [1]	% Change from 2010	Median Age [1]
11,426	-1.0%	51.5

AGE DISTRIBUTION [2]

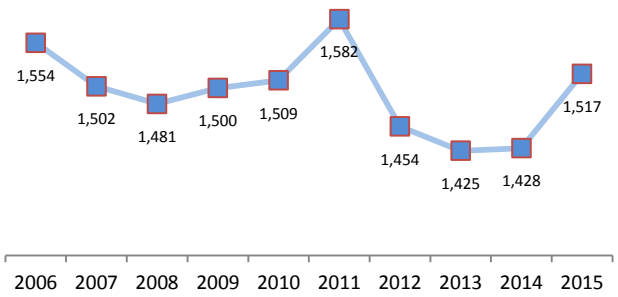


EDUCATION ATTAINMENT [1]



2015 Labor Force Participation Rate [3] **37.8 %**

LAKE COUNTY EMPLOYMENT [4]



UNIQUE INDUSTRY CLUSTERS [5]

Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing

Forest & Wood Products

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Median Household Income [1]	$30,439
Average Annual Wage [4]	$32,500
Population in Poverty + ALICE* [6]	59 %
Food Insecurity Rate [7]	17.5 %
Worked Outside County of Residence [1]	54.2 %

TOP INDUSTRIES OF EMPLOYMENT, 2015 [8]

Health Care and Social Services	21.8 %
Public Administration	17.3 %
Retail Trade	11.7 %
Manufacturing	4.4 %
Finance and Insurance	3.4 %

HOUSING [1]

Median Home Value	$79,500
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	3.9 %
Rental Vacancy Rate	4.8 %
Housing Units With No Vehicle	6.6 %
Residential Building Permits, 2016 [2]	57

** ALICE = Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*

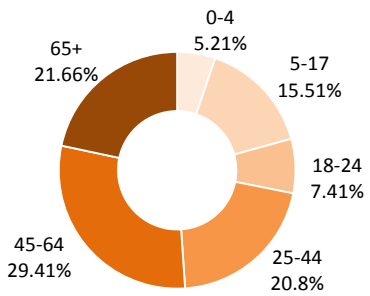
Sources:

1. ACS 5-Year Estimates (2011-2015)
2. US Census (via StatsAmerica.org)
3. W.E. Upjohn Institute's analysis of Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) and US Census Population Estimates
4. US BLS (via wmdashboard.org)
5. WMSRDC Analysis based upon US BLS QCEW and Purdue Center for Regional Development (cluster definitions)
6. United Way ALICE Report – 2017 Update for Michigan
7. map.feedingamerica.org
8. US BLS (vis StatsAmeriga.org)

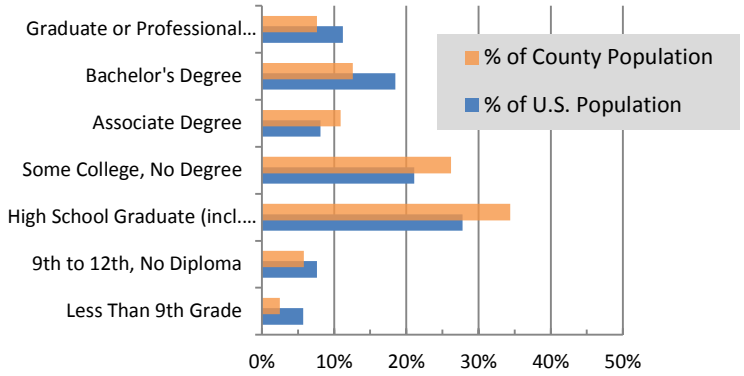
MASON COUNTY, MICHIGAN

2015 Population [1]	% Change from 2010	Median Age [1]
28,711	0.0%	45.7

AGE DISTRIBUTION [2]

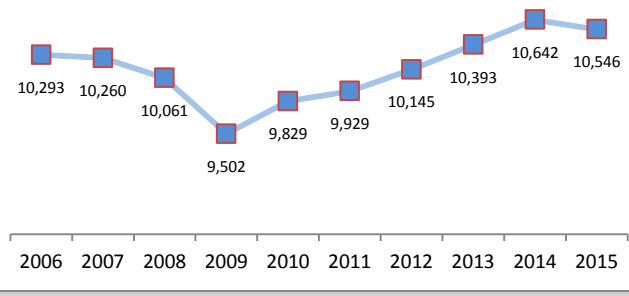


EDUCATION ATTAINMENT [1]



2015 Labor Force Participation Rate [3] **62.0 %**

MASON COUNTY EMPLOYMENT [4]



UNIQUE INDUSTRY CLUSTERS [5]

Primary Metal Manufacturing
Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing
Agribusiness, Food Processing & Technology

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Median Household Income [1]	42,024
Average Annual Wage [4]	$36,200
Population in Poverty + ALICE* [6]	40 %
Food Insecurity Rate [7]	12.8 %
Worked Outside County of Residence [1]	42.3 %

TOP INDUSTRIES OF EMPLOYMENT, 2015 [8]

Manufacturing	18.7 %
Retail Trade	13.8 %
Health Care and Social Services	11.6 %
Accomodation and Food Services	9.3 %
Educational Services	8.4 %

HOUSING [1]

Median Home Value	$119,900
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	2.7 %
Rental Vacancy Rate	2.5 %
Housing Units With No Vehicle	7.2 %
Residential Building Permits, 2016 [2]	50

** ALICE = Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*

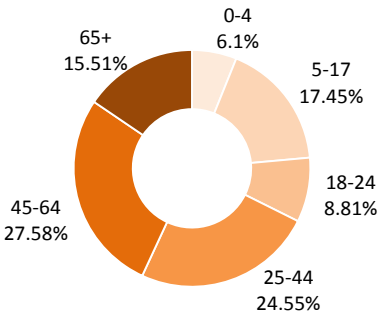
Sources:

1. ACS 5-Year Estimates (2011-2015)
2. US Census (via StatsAmerica.org)
3. W.E. Upjohn Institute's analysis of Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) and US Census Population Estimates
4. US BLS (via wmdashboard.org)
5. WMSRDC Analysis based upon US BLS QCEW and Purdue Center for Regional Development (cluster definitions)
6. United Way ALICE Report – 2017 Update for Michigan
7. map.feedingamerica.org
8. US BLS (vis StatsAmeriga.org)

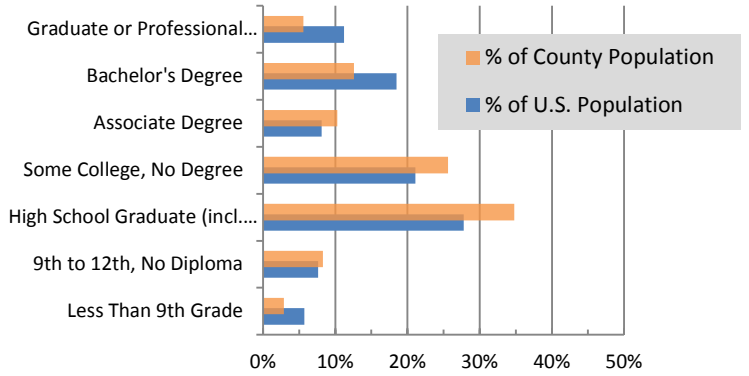
MUSKEGON COUNTY, MICHIGAN

2015 Population [1]	% Change from 2010	Median Age [1]
171,483	-0.7%	39.1

AGE DISTRIBUTION [2]

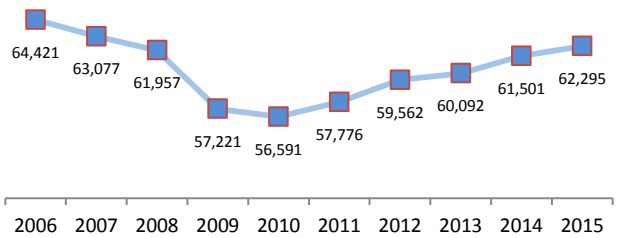


EDUCATION ATTAINMENT [1]



2015 Labor Force Participation Rate [3] **56.8 %**

MUSKEGON COUNTY EMPLOYMENT [4]



UNIQUE INDUSTRY CLUSTERS [5]

- Primary Metal Manufacturing
- Glass & Ceramics
- Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing
- Machinery Manufacturing
- Advanced Materials

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Median Household Income [1]	$42,829
Average Annual Wage [4]	$40,300
Population in Poverty + ALICE* [6]	40 %
Food Insecurity Rate [7]	14.7 %
Worked Outside County of Residence [1]	26.8 %

TOP INDUSTRIES OF EMPLOYMENT, 2015 [8]

Manufacturing	21.7 %
Health Care and Social Services	17.3 %
Retail Trade	17.2 %
Accomodation and Food Services	9.4 %
Educational Services	6.9 %

HOUSING [1]

Median Home Value	$99,000
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	2.7 %
Rental Vacancy Rate	6.3 %
Housing Units With No Vehicle	9.2 %
Residential Building Permits, 2016 [2]	233

** ALICE = Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*

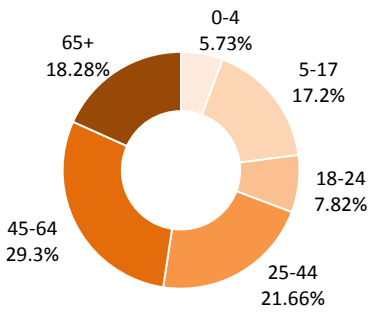
Sources:

1. ACS 5-Year Estimates (2011-2015)
2. US Census (via StatsAmerica.org)
3. W.E. Upjohn Institute's analysis of Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) and US Census Population Estimates
4. US BLS (via wmdashboard.org)
5. WMSRDC Analysis based upon US BLS QCEW and Purdue Center for Regional Development (cluster definitions)
6. United Way ALICE Report – 2017 Update for Michigan
7. map.feedingamerica.org
8. US BLS (vis StatsAmeriga.org)

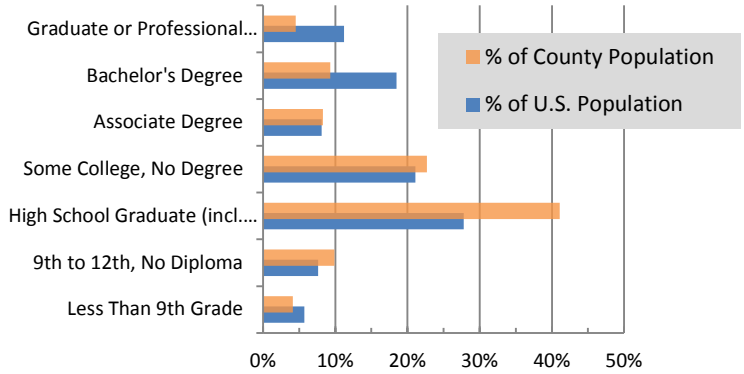
NEWAYGO COUNTY, MICHIGAN

2015 Population [1]	% Change from 2010	Median Age [1]
48,029	-0.9%	42.8

AGE DISTRIBUTION [2]

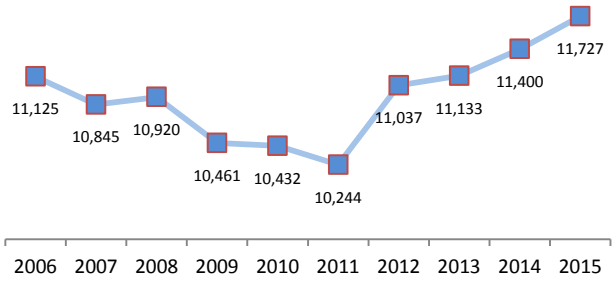


EDUCATION ATTAINMENT [1]



2015 Labor Force Participation Rate [3] **60.5 %**

NEWAYGO COUNTY EMPLOYMENT [4]



UNIQUE INDUSTRY CLUSTERS [5]

Forest & Wood Products

Transportation Equipment Manufacturing

Agribusiness, Food Processing & Technology

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Median Household Income [1]	$43,693
Average Annual Wage [4]	$37,300
Population in Poverty + ALICE* [6]	41 %
Food Insecurity Rate [7]	11.6 %
Worked Outside County of Residence [1]	44.0 %

TOP INDUSTRIES OF EMPLOYMENT, 2015 [8]

Manufacturing	20.9 %
Retail Trade	15.7 %
Health Care and Social Services	9.5 %
Accomodation and Food Services	6.9 %
Finance and Insurance	6.0 %

HOUSING [1]

Median Home Value	$101,500
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	2.5 %
Rental Vacancy Rate	3.8 %
Housing Units With No Vehicle	5.4 %
Residential Building Permits, 2016 [2]	79

** ALICE = Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*

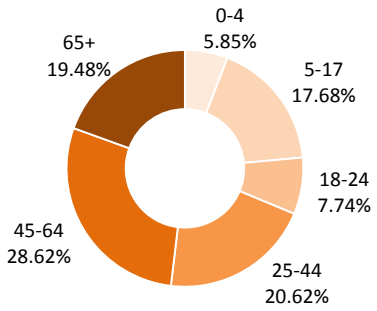
Sources:

1. ACS 5-Year Estimates (2011-2015)
2. US Census (via StatsAmerica.org)
3. W.E. Upjohn Institute's analysis of Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) and US Census Population Estimates
4. US BLS (via wmdashboard.org)
5. WMSRDC Analysis based upon US BLS QCEW and Purdue Center for Regional Development (cluster definitions)
6. United Way ALICE Report – 2017 Update for Michigan
7. map.feedingamerica.org
8. US BLS (vis StatsAmeriga.org)

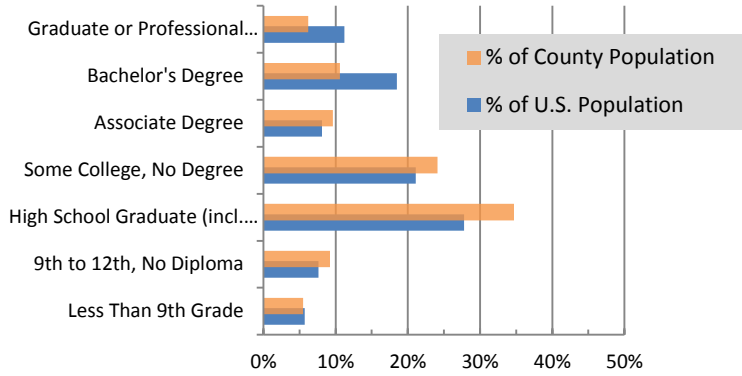
OCEANA COUNTY, MICHIGAN

2015 Population [1]	% Change from 2010	Median Age [1]
26,229	-1.3%	43.3

AGE DISTRIBUTION [2]

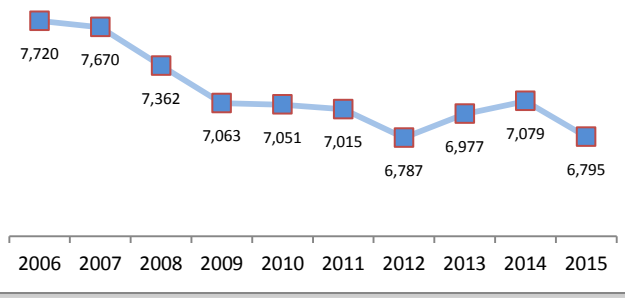


EDUCATION ATTAINMENT [1]



2015 Labor Force Participation Rate [3] **61.1 %**

Oceana County EMPLOYMENT [4]



UNIQUE INDUSTRY CLUSTERS [5]

Agribusiness, Food Processing & Technology
Primary Metal Manufacturing
Transportation Equipment Manufacturing
Glass & Ceramics
Arts, Entertainment, Rec. & Visitor Industries

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Median Household Income [1]	$41,617
Average Annual Wage [4]	$34,200
Population in Poverty + ALICE* [6]	47 %
Food Insecurity Rate [7]	12.0 %
Worked Outside County of Residence [1]	38.4 %

TOP INDUSTRIES OF EMPLOYMENT, 2015 [8]

Manufacturing	21.4 %
Accomodation and Food Services	12.4 %
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	11.2 %
Retail Trade	10.3 %
Public Administration	7.8 %

HOUSING [1]

Median Home Value	$104,200
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	2.1 %
Rental Vacancy Rate	3.3 %
Housing Units With No Vehicle	5.0 %
Residential Building Permits, 2016 [2]	2

** ALICE = Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*

Sources:

1. ACS 5-Year Estimates (2011-2015)
2. US Census (via StatsAmerica.org)
3. W.E. Upjohn Institute's analysis of Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) and US Census Population Estimates
4. US BLS (via wmdashboard.org)
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6. United Way ALICE Report – 2017 Update for Michigan
7. map.feedingamerica.org
8. US BLS (vis StatsAmeriga.org)

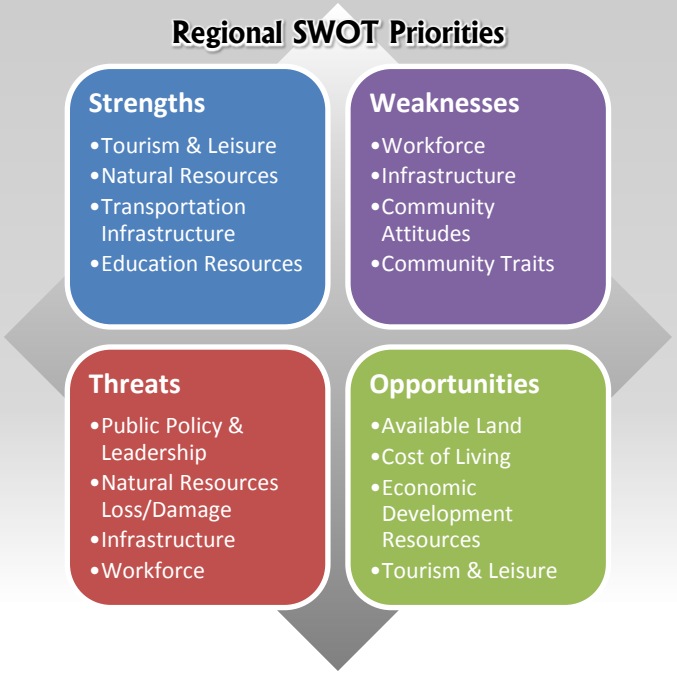
SWOT Analysis

In the fall of 2016, an assessment of the region's economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, known as a SWOT analysis, was conducted. A series of six focus groups were facilitated throughout the region to maximize the participation and effectiveness. An interactive SWOT form was also made available online to allow interested stakeholders and citizens to provide their perspectives. Nearly 70 individuals participated in the assessment representing private businesses, non-profits, higher education, local and elected officials, utilities, and private citizens.

The SWOT analysis yielded 485 comments, which were subsequently tabulated and described in the Regional SWOT Analysis Report, included as an appendix of this document. Two significant regional threads were revealed by the SWOT analysis. First, tourism, recreation and natural resources are closely related and are all highly regarded as strengths. Second, workforce was widely cited as a weakness in all areas of the region and garnered the greatest number of comments of any SWOT topic.

Due to an uneven geographic distribution of comments collected from around the region, a simple tally of comments could not be relied upon to accurately gauge the top *regional* priorities. To control for this discrepancy, the three most commonly mentioned strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from each county were identified and weighted. The results of this weighted analysis, shown in the graphic to the right, help to provide a more accurate snapshot of region-wide economic development priorities.

The following section briefly describes the *regional* themes uncovered during the SWOT analysis. These are provided to help unpack some of the nuances within each of the generalized SWOT categories, and to allow for a greater understanding of the regional economy.



Regional SWOT Analysis Themes

Agriculture

S ☑ W ☐ O ☑ T ☐

Agriculture in the district is viewed as a strength in terms of crop production, food processing, and the overall agricultural community feel. Opportunities to build upon those strengths include development of the agriculture cluster, food processing, and niche agriculture.

Available Land

S ☐ W ☑ O ☑ T ☐

Components of 'Available Land' include undeveloped land, industrial park land, and obsolete industrial properties. Opportunities include the amount of undeveloped land (room to grow), potential industrial park expansions, and reuse of old industrial properties. Noted weaknesses include old/obsolete industrial properties, lack of industrial park capacity, and the cost of construction and land.

Community Characteristics

S ☑ W ☑ O ☑ T ☑

Sub-Themes: Community Traits, Geographic Location, Public Policy & Leadership

'Community Characteristics' entails the various traits that help describe the district's character. Geographic location was frequently cited as a strength and opportunity of the district, as it strikes a desirable balance between access to natural resources, the presence of regional services, and access to metropolitan areas. Economic and land use diversity are also valued as strengths, while traditional downtowns present unique opportunities. Lake Michigan presents opportunities for shipping and recreation, but is also seen as a weakness for being a barrier to transportation and development. In rural areas of the district, agricultural/bedroom community characteristics are valued for the small town feel; however, the inherent inability of those areas to attract critical mass is noted as a weakness. Lastly, region-wide threats include weather, climate change, exploitation and degradation of natural resources, and issues of governance and government policy (funding sources, red tape, regulations, etc.).

Community Mindset

S ☑ W ☑ O ☐ T ☐

Sub-Themes: Community Attitudes, Cooperation/Collaboration, Philanthropy

There exists a strong collective frame of mind that sees strength in the community's quality of life, "blue collar" work ethic, rich history, and philanthropy. Municipal cooperation and collaboration is also widely viewed as a strength within the district. Conversely, weaknesses include resistance to change, negative perceptions of skilled trades, and a perceived reliance on government social assistance.

Economic Development Resources

S ☐ W ☐ O ☑ T ☐

Sub Themes: Marketing / Messaging

Economic development resources (organizations, institutions, programs) provide opportunities such as support for small businesses and entrepreneurialism. Other opportunities include marketing and media messaging, business attraction and expansion, and fostering relationships with regional agencies such as WMSRDC and The Right Place.

Education Resources

S ☑ W ☑ O ☑ T ☐

Community colleges, K-12 education, and promise zones are considered strengths in the district. Access to higher education and training are weaknesses, especially in rural areas. Opportunities exist to partner with local and regional higher education institutions to fill the skills gap.

External Economics

S ☐ W ☐ O ☐ T ☑

A number of external economic forces are noted as threats, such as global volatility, strength of currency, and competition from other areas. These generally lie beyond the purview of the district.

Industry

S ☑ W ☐ O ☐ T ☐

Sub-Themes: Energy Production

Industry is viewed as a strength of the district, especially as it relates to diversity of the manufacturing base, high tech and aerospace manufacturing, advanced metals, and chemicals.

Infrastructure

S ☐ W ☑ O ☐ T ☑

Sub-Themes: Municipal Infrastructure, Utilities, Communications Infrastructure

With only a few exceptions, Infrastructure is consistently considered a weakness across the district. In rural areas, communications

infrastructure and utilities are in short supply and are needed to meet economic goals and demands. Aging or failing infrastructure is cited as a threat to the district as well.

Natural Resources

S ☑ W ☐ O ☑ T ☐

Natural resources are revered as a strength throughout the district, including environmental cleanup efforts, Lake Michigan and its shoreline, and public-owned forests. Natural resources form the foundation for much of the Tourism & Leisure sector, and positively contribute to the district's quality of life. Natural resource opportunities include utilization of green infrastructure, blue economy potential, and development that leverages natural beauty. Perceived threats include legacy environmental contamination, invasive species, and attacks on water supply and/or natural resources.

Quality of Life

S ☑ W ☑ O ☑ T ☐

Sub-Themes: Cost of Living, Health Care & Services, Housing, Poverty

Quality of life is generally considered a strength, highlighted by access to natural resources and regional hospitals, as well as an affordable cost of living. However, housing (lacking quantity and quality of all housing types) and poverty are commonly cited as weaknesses throughout the district. The strengths of this theme present opportunities to attract and retain needed workforce talent, so long as affordable and appropriate housing is available.

Tourism & Leisure

S ☑ W ☐ O ☑ T ☐

Tourism & Leisure is closely related, and often dependent upon, the district's natural resources. It includes a spectrum of outdoor recreation activities as well as arts, culture, agri-tourism, and retail. Throughout the district, Tourism & Leisure is considered to be a major strength and a point of pride. One inherent weakness is the seasonal nature of recreation based upon outdoor activities. Many opportunities were identified to leverage and build upon this aspect of the economy, including the development/promotion of winter and "shoulder seasons" recreation opportunities.

Transportation Infrastructure

S ☑ W ☑ O ☐ T ☐

Sub-Theme: Public Transportation

Transportation infrastructure is generally considered a strength of the district. This includes highways, railroads, deep water ports, airports, and in certain areas, public transportation. Weaknesses are closely tied to rural areas that are solely dependent on trucks/roadways for commercial purposes. Also for many rural areas, intra- and extra- county transportation for residents is cited as a weakness.

Workforce

S ☐ W ☑ O ☑ T ☑

Sub-Theme: Aging Population

Across the district, there is a nearly unanimous perception that the workforce is a weakness, especially in areas such as skills/training, educational attainment, talent retention, youth migration, and workforce motivation and age. Depending on individual perspectives, how to address those weaknesses can be viewed as both opportunity and threat. On one hand, addressing those weaknesses presents opportunities for success; on the other, failure to address weaknesses is a critical threat. Other opportunities noted include utilizing retirees as an asset/resource, leveraging quality of life to attract talent, and leveraging partnerships with educational institutions to create "stackable credentials" to bolster the workforce and fill skills gaps.

Region 4 Northern Collaborative

In fall of 2016, the counties of Lake, Mason, Newago and Oceana (four of the five counties in the WMSRDC economic district) banded together to participate in a facilitated planning process called LEAD, which stands for Leaders in Economic Alliance Development. The program was led by USDA Rural Development in cooperation with Michigan State University Extension. The program is designed to build capacity in counties or regions through a partnership development and planning process that enables local residents to accomplish specific goals. As a part of the planning process, a public forum was held on November 3, 2016 to identify the strengths, challenges and opportunities facing the four-county region. The list of opportunities was then prioritized and subcommittees were established to pursue the top three regional priorities:

- ***Workforce Development***
- ***Improve Broadband Access***
- ***Expand Tourism and Recreation***

The results of the forum echo the findings of the CEDS SWOT analysis and are included in this plan to augment the CEDS SWOT findings; support projects that result from the LEAD efforts; demonstrate regional economic development cooperation; and to reflect the coordination that was exhibited between the closely related objectives of the USDA Rural Development initiative and the CEDS planning process, which is supported by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration. Contact information for the Region 4 Northern Collaborative subcommittees are available at wmsrdc.org/project/northern-collaborative/.

LEAD Community Forum
November 3, 2016

Strengths

- Natural resources (including trails)
- Agricultural & mfg industries (including growth industries)
- Food processing & entrepreneurism
- Small town feel
- Self-reliance & hard working people
- Philanthropy
- Tourism industry
- Collaboration
- Promise zone
- Education

Challenges

- Workforce (skills, talent pipeline and career opportunities)
- Poverty (including wage gaps & working poor)
- Generational poverty
- Infrastructure/transportation
- Age demographics (including youth moving away and aging workforce)
- Turf (lack of cooperation)
- Lack of financial resources
- Internet access
- Health (including drug use)
- Child care
- Housing

Opportunities We "Should" Do (ranked)

1. **Workforce development** (including schools and employers)
2. **Improve broadband access**
3. **Expand tourism and recreation** (including development of trail connections; 4 season usage)
4. Collaborative planning (including learning about each other)
5. Address poverty systematically
6. Manufacturing creation
7. Targeted agricultural food processing growth
8. Agricultural diversity (including specialization and forestry)
9. Regional identity
10. Encourage entrepreneurism at any age
11. Middle income housing (including developer incentives)
12. Farm-to-table efforts (including co-ops and farm markets)

Action Plan

The Action Plan is ambitious and comprehensive in scope. A concerted effort of local and regional leaders and organizations will be required to bring the desired outcomes to fruition. **The ultimate purpose of this CEDS is to increase economic capacity to achieve regional economic prosperity in the West Michigan Shoreline Economic Development District**. A broad strategy to increase prosperity over the next ten to twenty years is outlined in the following vision statement and list of goals.

Vision Statement:

The West Michigan Shoreline Region is known for its competent and motivated workforce, reliable infrastructure, economic diversity, vibrant natural settings, and exceptional quality of life. The region's sustained prosperity is supported by resilient networks that are fueled by communication, cooperation, creativity, and optimism.

Goals:

Goal #1: Infrastructure

Maintain and invest in infrastructure critical to sustaining the region's economy, and infrastructure that will enhance the region's competitive economic advantages.

Goal #2: Workforce

Cultivate a workforce that meets the needs of the region's economy, and that can readily adapt to rapidly evolving workforce demands.

Goal #3: Economic Diversity

Expand and retain existing businesses, and diversify the region's economy through innovation and attraction.

Goal #4: Regional Integration

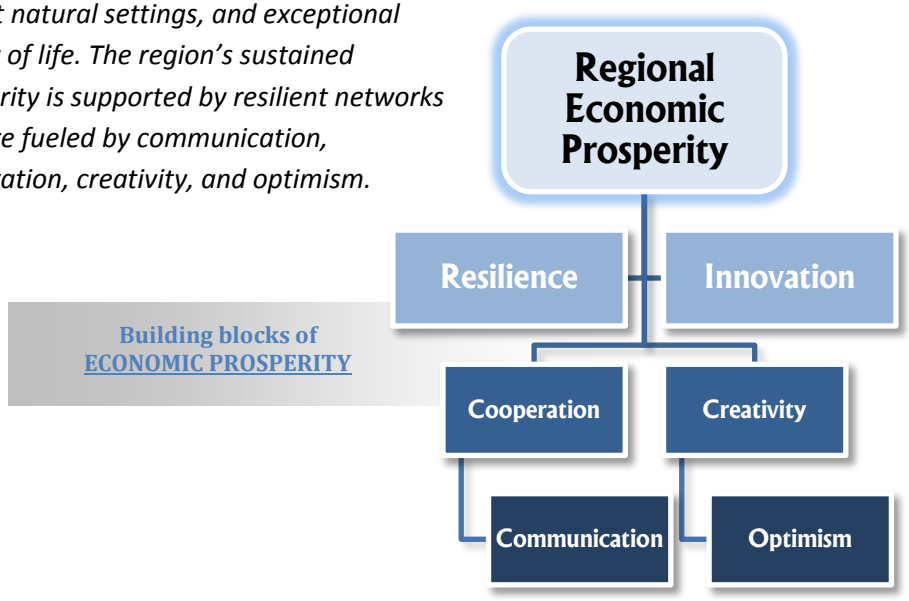
Promote a regional mindset that is cooperative and optimistic, and which seeks innovative and collaborative solutions.

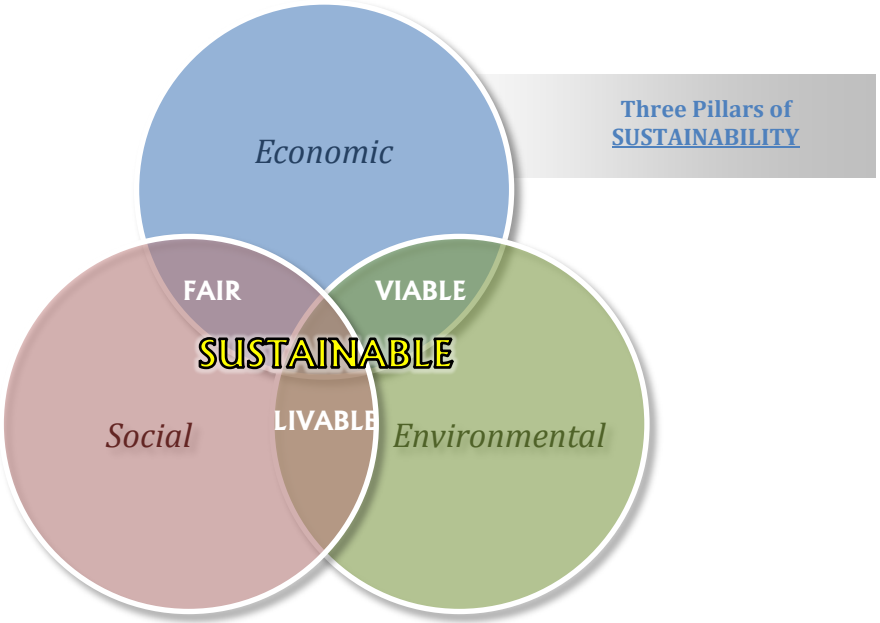
Goal #5: Natural Resources

Practice stewardship of the region's natural resources while leveraging assets for economic gain.

Goal #6: Quality of Life

Provide desirable places to live and recreate; with housing, goods, and services needed to retain and attract talent, and amenities to attract visitors and tourists.





Goal #1: INFRASTRUCTURE

Maintain and invest in infrastructure critical to sustaining the region's economy, and infrastructure that will enhance the region's competitive economic advantages.

Objectives

- Improve broadband availability
- Increase utilization of waterborne commerce
- Maintain reliable transportation infrastructure networks
- Provide infrastructure and utilities (especially natural gas) to support the economy and eliminate barriers to expansion

STRATEGIES	STAKEHOLDERS
1. Continue efforts of Region 4 Northern Collaborative (4-NC) Broadband Subcommittee to improve broadband availability.	4-NC, Connect Michigan, broadband providers
2. Promote utilization of deep water ports in Muskegon and Ludington.	WMSRDC, CEDS Advisory Committee, Muskegon County, Mason County, Commercial Port Owners
3. Relay information to local governments and economic development stakeholders regarding state/federal programs and resources as they become available. Provide technical support when needed to secure state and federal resources.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations
4. Establish lines of communication between economic development planners and transportation/transit planners.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations, Transportation Planners (MDOT, road commissions, etc.)
5. Establish a regional method and baseline for asset management of municipal infrastructure services including water, wastewater, and stormwater.	West Michigan Prosperity Alliance
MILESTONES	**TIME FRAME**
1. Sustain organization of the Region 4 Northern Collaborative Broadband Subcommittee	Ongoing
2. Participate in the 21st Century Infrastructure Asset Management Pilot	Near-term (0-1 year)
3. Complete Connect Michigan 2.0 in each of the five counties in the region	Near-term (0-2 years)
4. a) Complete a vertical asset inventory and broadband service gap analysis	Near-term (0-2 years)
b) Identify "last-mile" providers and implementation resources	Near-term (2-5 years)
5. Hold a regional "summit" focused on economic development & transportation/transit	Near-term (0-5 years)

Goal #2: WORKFORCE

Cultivate a workforce that meets the needs of the region's economy, and that can readily adapt to rapidly evolving workforce demands.

Objectives

- Invigorate partnerships between private industry clusters and higher education and career technical education
- Stabilize workforce through middle management leadership
- Increase workforce participation and CTE enrollment
- Increase student engagement

STRATEGIES	STAKEHOLDERS
1. Continue efforts of Region 4 Northern Collaborative (4-NC) Workforce Subcommittee to address workforce priorities and provide a regional workforce support group.	4-NC, K-12 Education, Higher Education, Employers
2. Increase awareness of training and certification programs within the region.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations, Workforce Development Organizations, K-12 Education, Higher Education
3. Expand existing student engagement initiatives such as Career Quest, Discover Manufacturing, and MI Bright Futures.	4-NC, West Michigan Works!
4. Identify and prioritize impediments to workforce participation.	4-NC, WMSRDC, West Michigan Works!
MILESTONES	**TIME FRAME**
1. Sustain organization of the Region 4 Northern Collaborative Workforce Subcommittee	Ongoing
2. Develop a regional training and certification inventory and guide	Near-term (0-5 years)
3. Increase workforce participation by 10%	Mid-term (5 years)
4. Complete workforce gap analysis	Mid-term (5-10 years)

Goal #3: ECONOMIC DIVERSITY

Expand and retain existing businesses, and diversify the region's economy through innovation and attraction.

Objectives

- Organize small business, innovation & entrepreneurial support
- Build upon regional economic strengths and advantages
- Strengthen agri-business economic sector
- Leverage public/private partnerships to attract private investment
- Coordinate business retention & expansion services efforts

STRATEGIES	STAKEHOLDERS
1. Maintain and publicize Industrial & Business Park Inventory.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations
2. Increase awareness of business incubators and accelerators within the region.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations
3. Develop a common reporting platform for aggregating business retention efforts.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations
4. Maintain strong partnerships between EDD (WMSRDC) and local economic development corporations.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations
5. Grow agri-business through transportation & logistics support, increased food processing capacity, and workforce training.	Economic Development Organizations
MILESTONES	**TIME FRAME**
1. Update and publish online a regional Industrial & Business Park Inventory	Ongoing (annually)
2. Aggregate regional business retention data	Near-term (0-2 years)
3. Participate in the West Michigan Shoreline Sustainable Food Processing Initiative	Near-term (2-3 years)
4. Industrial park certification program	Mid-term (5 years)

Goal #4: REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Promote a regional mindset that is cooperative and optimistic, and which seeks innovative and collaborative solutions.

Objectives

- Integrate economic development with other planning disciplines
- Promote coordination of sub-regional land use planning
- Engage elected officials and local leaders
- Communicate and cooperate across jurisdictions and sectors
- Unify the regional economic development narrative
- Coordinate regional economic development efforts

STRATEGIES	STAKEHOLDERS
1. Regularly convene the CEDS Strategy Committee.	WMSRDC
2. Attend local meetings (county boards, townships associations, etc.) to discuss economic development programs.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations
3. Participate in the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA) and the West Michigan EDC.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations, Lake County, Mason County, Muskegon County, Newaygo County, Oceana County
4. Sustain momentum established through the Region 4 Northern Collaborative (4-NC), and include Muskegon County stakeholders when relevant.	4-NC, WMSRDC, USDA Rural Development, MSU Extension
5. Incorporate elements of economic resilience into local FEMA-approved Hazard Mitigation Plans.	County emergency managers
MILESTONES	**TIME FRAME**
1. Attendance at WMPA meetings	Ongoing
2. Quarterly meetings of the CEDS Strategy Committee	Ongoing (quarterly)
3. Submission of regionally impactful projects for WMPA support	Ongoing (as RPI funds are made available)
4. Maintain a webpage to house meeting dates and contacts for the Region 4 Northern Collaborative subcommittees	Near-term (0-1 year)
5. Establish a line of communication with Muskegon County stakeholders regarding Region 4 Northern Collaborative efforts	Near-term (0-1 year)

Goal #5: NATURAL RESOURCES

Practice stewardship of the region's natural resources while leveraging assets for economic gain.

Objectives

- Protect surface and groundwater resources and critical green spaces
- Utilize natural infrastructure
- Maintain healthy fisheries and forests
- Remediate and restore compromised natural habitats
- Utilize state and federal brownfield assistance

STRATEGIES	STAKEHOLDERS
1. Communicate brownfield assistance opportunities to local governments and provide technical assistance to leverage those opportunities, as needed.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations
2. Promote Low Impact Development (LID) and SMART Growth principles of compact design, preservation of greenfields, and direction of development towards existing infrastructure.	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations
3. Employ natural infrastructure to reduce long-term maintenance costs associated with stormwater and drainage infrastructure.	Public Facilities and Grey Infrastructure Managers (drain commissions, public works, road commissions, etc.)
4. Continued organization of the West Michigan Watershed Collaborative to improve and protect water quality through watershed planning.	WMSRDC, Grand Valley Metro Council and Macatawa Area Coordinating Council
MILESTONES	**TIME FRAME**
1. Sustainable funding for water quality planning through watershed groups	Near-term (0-2 years)
2. Muskegon Lake delisted as a Great Lakes Area of Concern (AOC)	Near-term (0-3 years)
3. Hold a regional "summit" focused on natural infrastructure and environmentally friendly development practices	Near-term (0-5 years)

Goal #6: QUALITY OF LIFE

Provide desirable places to live and recreate; with housing, goods, and services needed to retain and attract talent, and amenities to attract visitors and tourists.

Objectives

- Increase "shoulder" season and year-round recreation opportunities
- Practice principles of SMART Growth
- Improve quantity and overall quality of the housing stock
- Develop attractive, mixed-use "places" in historic downtowns and core neighborhoods

STRATEGIES	STAKEHOLDERS
1. Connect regional trail systems and identify an all-seasons strategy for motorized and non-motorized trails.	4-NC, WMSRDC, MDOT
2. Incorporate SMART Growth principles in reviews of local government plans.	WMSRDC, County Boards of Commissioners, Local Planning Commissions
3. Provide technical assistance to local communities seeking Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) designation of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC).	WMSRDC, Economic Development Organizations, MEDC
4. Document regional housing needs and demands.	Everyone
MILESTONES	**TIME FRAME**
1. Regional trail inventory and gap assessment	Near-term (0-2 years)
2. Increased municipal participation in the MEDC RRC program	Near-term (0-2 years)
3. a) Complete a regional housing market gap analysis	Near-term (1-3 years)
b) Complete a regional retail / services gap analysis	Mid-term (5 years)

Economic Resilience

It is becoming increasingly apparent that regional economic prosperity is linked to an area's ***economic resilience: the ability to adapt, avoid, withstand, and/or quickly recover from major disruptions to an economic base.*** Three ways in which disruptions of an economic base can occur include:

- Downturns or other significant events in the national or international economy which impact demand for locally produced goods and consumer spending;
- Downturns in particular industries that constitute a critical component of a region's economic activity; and/or
- Other external shocks (natural or man-made disaster, military base closure, exit of a major employer, impacts of climate change, etc.).

The CEDS process provides a critical mechanism to help identify regional vulnerabilities and prevent and/or respond to economic disruptions. The WMSRDC, the keeper of the region's Economic Development District, engages in both *steady-state* and *responsive* initiatives which enhance the economic resilience of the district. Steady-state initiatives tend to be long-term efforts that seek to bolster an area's ability to withstand or avoid a disruption.

Examples of steady-state initiatives maintained by WMSRDC include:

- Hazard mitigation planning (including identification of community risks and vulnerabilities).
- Geographic Information Systems capabilities.
- Coordinated comprehensive land use planning (including promotion of Smart Growth principles).

Responsive initiatives can include establishing capabilities for an area to be responsive to recovery needs following a disruption. Examples of responsive initiatives maintained by WMSRDC include:

- Management and administration of Homeland Security Region 6 which promotes community preparedness through regional collaboration across 13 counties in Michigan.
- An established process for regular communication, monitoring, and updating of regional needs and issues through the WMSRDC website and bi-monthly newsletter.
- An established CEDS Advisory Committee which meets quarterly and can be convened or communicated with little or no notice.

The WMSRDC EDD is positioned to be both a source for information and a convener of regional stakeholders and encourage collaboration post-disruption.

Emergency Management Cycle

The concept of economic resilience is closely related to the concept of hazard mitigation, which reduces or eliminates potential losses by breaking the cycle of damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage.

Mitigation capabilities include, but are not limited to, community-wide risk reduction projects, efforts to improve the resilience of critical infrastructure and key resource lifelines, risk reduction for specific vulnerabilities from natural hazards and climate change, and initiatives to reduce future risks after a disaster has occurred.

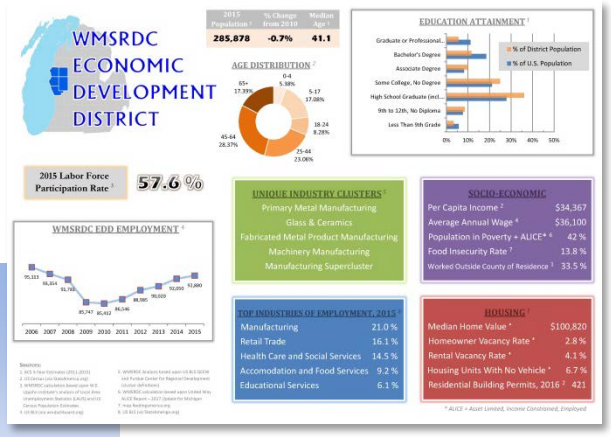
Each county within the WMSRDC Economic Development District maintains a FEMA-approved multi-jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, which is a prerequisite for certain types of pre- and post-disaster hazard mitigation assistance. Future updates of Hazard Mitigation Plans (required every five years) should incorporate economic resilience as a part of the overall emergency management strategy.

Evaluation Framework

The evaluation framework serves as a tool to gauge progress on the successful implementation of the overall CEDS. It is an important element of the ongoing planning process and helps to answer the questions “How are we doing?” and “What can we do better?”

This CEDS will be reviewed annually to maximize the utility and relevance of this CEDS, and also to complete the CEDS Annual Performance Report, as required by EDA. Evaluation will include an assessment of progress towards the Strategies and Milestones outlined in the Action Plan. Evaluation will also include a review of background statistics presented in the Data Fact Sheets section.

In response to the findings of the evaluation, the CEDS may be adjusted by the West Michigan Shoreline EDD under the guidance of the CEDS Strategy Committee. This will allow the CEDS to be flexible and responsive to economic development needs of the district.



Conclusion

There are many virtues of the CEDS and CEDS planning process, such as providing baseline data and resources; establishing consensus for a regional economic vision; and helping communities qualify for assistance from EDA. Perhaps the greatest value lies in the development of synergy through convening a spectrum of stakeholders, enhancing the regional presence, and sustaining a climate of cooperation throughout the district.

The success of this CEDS will depend upon the level of synergy achieved by regional stakeholders, and their collective commitments to pursue the objectives outlined in the Action Plan.

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this CEDS document is to increase economic capacity to achieve regional economic prosperity in the West Michigan Shoreline Economic Development District. The WMSRDC EDD staff is committed to pursuing and promoting the intents outlined in the Action Plan over the next five-year period. The primary challenge in doing so will be to maintain lines of communication established during development of the CEDS. In many cases, implementation of Action Plan strategies will ultimately be the responsibility of stakeholders in the region.

SYNERGY:

“The combined power of a group of things when they are working together that is greater than the total power achieved by each working separately”

-Cambridge Dictionary