



Entrepreneurial Market Analysis

In September 2020, WMSRDC and the Muskegon Innovation Hub at Grand Valley State University (The HUB) were the recipients of a US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) investment to study the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the West Michigan counties of Muskegon, Lake, Mason, Newaygo, Oceana and Ottawa, as well as portions of Kent County. The consulting firm, Public Sector Consultants, was selected to conduct the study.

Titled “West Michigan Entrepreneurial Market Analysis,” this study was completed in May and made available to the public in June through the WMSRDC website. The intent of this project is to help The Hub and other entrepreneurial support organizations (ESOs)

be more responsive to the entrepreneurial market, especially considering coronavirus pandemic impacts. Recommendations of the final report are centered around potential programmatic enhancements that The Hub and partner ESOs could make to enhance overall entrepreneurial and business success.

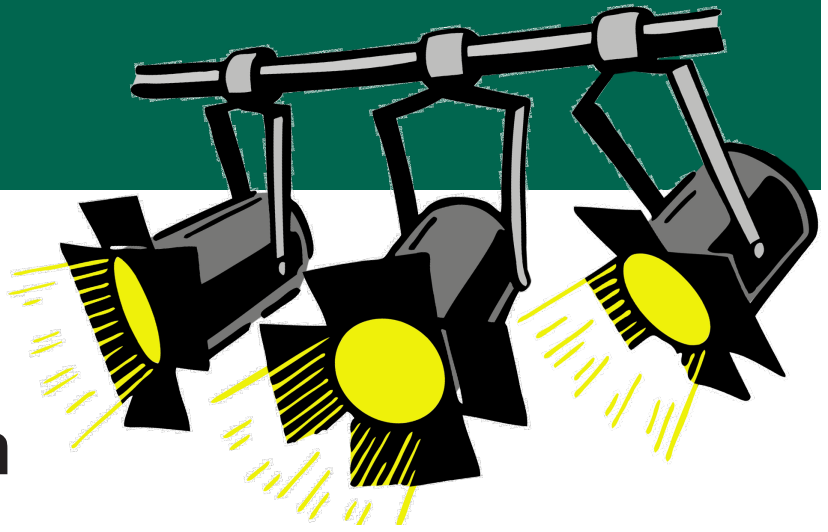
In addition to the main report, Public Sector Consultants was able to produce two supplements. The “Second Stage Analysis” report provided further clarity about the potential need for support for second-stage company acceleration, while the “Governance Models” report houses information on shared governance models to support greater cooperation amongst the ESOs within the region. Some additional highlights and takeaways of the project include:

- Data on population/demographics, business characteristics, etc. provides an informative “snapshot” of current conditions in the seven counties.
- Descriptive inventory of business assistance entities and their respective services.
- Matrix of services by organization provides a summary of available assistance services.

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SPOTLIGHT STORY

MIC Asset Management Champion Program



The first ever Michigan Infrastructure Council (MIC) Asset Management Champion Program recently wrapped up. More than 80 individuals from around the State of Michigan participated in this unique opportunity. Participants included city managers, department of public works managers, practitioners, regional planners, state employees, private sector asset representatives, public asset authorities, and elected officials.

The purpose of the program is to establish a network of talented individuals and organizations to help strengthen and champion best practice asset management across Michigan's complex infrastructure environment. The program has three main goals:

- **Build Awareness:** Build AM Champions to foster a culture of asset management best practices across Michigan.
- **Develop Knowledge:** Develop AM Champions who understand and promote the value of asset management aligned with the five topics in the [MIC Asset Management Readiness Scale \(AMRS\)](https://michigan.gov/MIC) - [Michigan.gov/MIC – Readiness Assessment Scale Tab](https://michigan.gov/MIC).
- **Establish Community:** Establish a community of AM Champions to seed peer relationships and build a network of asset management leaders across infrastructure silos throughout the state.

The AM Champion Program is a fast-paced and interactive training curriculum that combined asynchronous education, facilitated discussion, peer interactions, and industry learning into a professional certification from MIC. The program ran from April through June 2021 and required approximately 20 hours to complete the following tasks:

- **Asynchronous Modules:** Nine lessons featuring asset management content, interactive activities, and assessments aligned with the five AMRS topics areas.
- **Facilitated Discussion and Peer Interaction:** Three 90-minute, in-depth thematic discussion sessions with peers and industry leaders.
- **Industry Learning:** Access to a comprehensive library of webinars and presentations from the Canadian Network of Asset Managers (CNAM).

The program was funded by the MIC and free to participants. Approximately eight individuals from the WMSRDC region participated in the Asset Management Champion program. Initial feedback from participants has been extremely positive. Stay tuned for potential next steps regarding this exciting program.



TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Traffic Counts

WMSRDC recently contracted with the engineering consulting firm AECOM for traffic counting services on behalf of WestPlan Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). AECOM will be completing traffic counts at approximately 100 locations within the MPO.

Once WMSRDC staff receives the count data from AECOM, it will be entered into the region's online traffic count database system. This system is integrated with Google Maps to assist users in retrieving and presenting data.

The data collected is necessary for several reasons. These include obtaining federal aid road funds for road projects, maintaining traffic models for federally required transportation modeling, and managing transportation assets.

MPO Update

The WestPlan MPO met in June to amend the FY2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Amendment (16) was approved at the WestPlan Technical and Policy committee meetings. Staff will work with MDOT to move the project forward through the federal process.

There will be no MPO meetings in July. The next scheduled WestPlan MPO Technical Committee meeting will be on Thursday, August 5, 2021, and the WestPlan MPO Policy Committee will meet on Wednesday, August 18, 2021. Information for these meetings can be found on the WMSRDC website.

West Michigan Regional Transit Systems Governance and Organizational Transition Study

WMSRDC, with direction from The Muskegon County Board of Commissioners, acting on behalf of the Muskegon Area Transit System (MATS), and the Harbor Transit Multi-Model Transit System, widely known as the Harbor Transit Board, has retained a consultant to lead a study that will analyze the current transit services in Muskegon and Northern Ottawa counties. The West Michigan Regional Transit Systems Governance and Organizational Transition Study will be developed with the help of the SRF Consulting Group. SRF was one of three consulting firms that submitted proposals for the project.

The focus of the study is to determine if public transportation services in the MATS and Harbor Transit service areas can be better delivered through a different organizational or governance structure than what is currently operating in the two areas. The study will analyze each organization, possible cooperative opportunities, and potential consolidation of the two transit systems. 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.

It is anticipated that this effort will develop a brief report and a series of draft agreements for local partners to consider at their individual boards. The resultant change will permit a more effectively designed, funded, and determined public transit program in the region. This project will lead the community toward a more effective and efficient public transit service with the potential to support economic vitality, increase mobility, and improve connectivity in the region.

The study is expected to begin this summer and be completed in fiscal year 2022.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Pandemic Recovery & Resiliency Plan

WMSRDC has initiated planning and coordination efforts to help the region's economy in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Efforts will result in a pandemic recovery and resiliency economic development plan for the WMSRDC Economic Development District (EDD). Once completed, the plan will be incorporated into the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and other required planning documents, such as hazard mitigation plans.

Elements of the plan will include specific impacts of the pandemic upon local economies; an assessment of public infrastructure and services in light of the pandemic; anticipated further economic impacts of the pandemic; recommendations for economic recovery and resiliency; and pandemic success stories from local businesses.

The first major component of the planning process will be to collaborate with local economic development offices (LEDOs) within the region to develop and administer surveys to gather insight from business communities, local governments, and individuals regarding local impacts of the pandemic. Each county LEDO will receive a mini grant to help WMSRDC develop and conduct the surveys and contribute to development of the plan. Surveys are expected to be available online through the WMSRDC website from August through September 2021.

The final document will be completed by June 2022. This project is supported by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) with federal funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020.

Connecting MKG Broadband Task Force

Connecting MKG is a county-wide broadband task force to identify broadband needs, gather data, and encourage the coordination of efforts to improve access, adoption and use of broadband internet in Muskegon County. This is a critical step towards orchestrating "bottom-up" broadband efforts and for facilitating expansion of broadband infrastructure. The task force is the result of WMSRDC's broadband facilitation efforts which are supported with funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration.

Throughout 2021, WMSRDC has worked to gather interest and participation in the

task force. During this initial phase of organization, WMSRDC is committed to hosting regular task force meetings and serving as a broadband point of contact for the task force. Regular meetings will be held virtually during the summer months on the third Tuesday at 2:00 p.m. These meetings will feature broadband experts to offer guidance and information regarding opportunities for coordinated action. Task force members will eventually be encouraged to assume leadership of the effort, and WMSRDC will remain available to support task force initiatives as needed. Please contact WMSRDC for additional information.



Celebrate the Restoration of Muskegon Lake at the Great Lakes Areas of Concern Conference in Muskegon, September 28-30

After decades of work, the final restoration needed to remove Muskegon Lake from the Great Lakes Areas of Concern list is underway with large-scale, habitat restoration projects in three shoreline communities. Projects are underway at the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve in the City of North Muskegon, the Lower Muskegon River in Muskegon Township, and the former Amoco Tank Farm along the Lakeshore Trail in the City of Muskegon. To help celebrate this milestone, the Great Lakes Areas of Concern Conference will be held in Muskegon, Michigan. Although the Muskegon Lake cleanup has been underway for decades, the conference is a first for Muskegon. Past conferences have been held in Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Buffalo, New York; Sheboygan, Wisconsin; and other Great Lakes cities.

In the 1980s, the United States and Canada identified 43 highly degraded shoreline areas along the Great Lakes. These Areas of Concern (AOC) have been the focus of comprehensive cleanup and restoration efforts involving local public advisory councils (PAC). The Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership serves as the PAC for Muskegon Lake and has advised local, state and federal governments on four large-scale, Great Lakes Legacy Act contaminated sediment

cleanups: 1) Ruddiman Creek in McGraft Park/Glenside Neighborhood in 2006, 2) Muskegon Lake Division Street Outfall, a 60-acre lake bottom cleanup adjacent to Hartshorn Municipal Marina and Heritage Landing in 2012, 3) the Muskegon River at the former Zephyr Oil Refinery in 2018, and 4) Muskegon Lake Ryerson Outfall next to the former Teledyne Continental Motors in 2020. The projects removed hundreds of thousands of pounds of toxic sediments and served as a catalyst for shoreline habitat restoration, economic revitalization, and quality of life improvements.

Please check out the preliminary conference agenda and save the dates September 28-30. The final agenda is being developed and will be posted at the EGLE Great Lakes AOC Conference 2021 website, https://www.michigan.gov/egle/0,9429,7-135-3308_3333-547532--,00.html. WMSRDC is organizing pre-conference habitat tours around Muskegon Lake, Muskegon River and Bear Creek. The tours will be held during the afternoon of Tuesday, September 28. The conference will begin with a plenary session at 9:30 a.m. at the VanDyke Mortgage Conference Center on the morning of Wednesday, September 29 and conclude at noon on Thursday, September 30.



WMSRDC GIS Services in High Demand

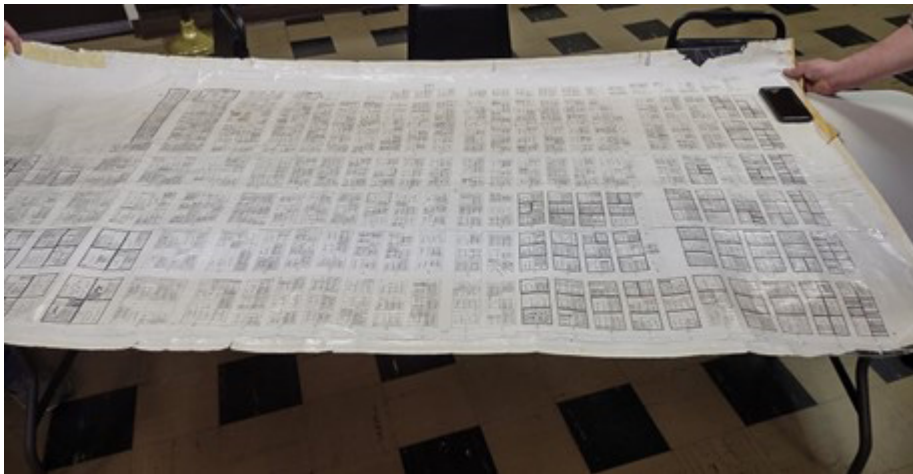
The WMSRDC GIS program has seen quite a bit of interest from local communities for mapping projects in the past couple of months. This is great news as the GIS services have been put into place to assist local governments with digitized mapping needs.

A township in Muskegon County has shown interest using GIS to digitize and update the paper maps they currently use for its cemetery. Once a formal agreement is in place, the WMSRDC GIS specialist would map the various cemetery lots, plots, monuments, and roads and make the information available online to both township officials, residents, and others to access. The updated maps will assist with record keeping and park maintenance performed by township staff. The public will be able to do an online search of the cemetery occupants and see the exact location of their plot and a picture of their headstone or monument along with any genealogical information available. The current paper maps used by the township are cumbersome and fragile and becoming difficult to read. Cemetery record

keeping can also be updated and incorporated directly into the new digital maps, saving time and money on the use of outdated and unnecessary software.

WMSRDC's GIS Program has also been contacted by the Oceana County Drain Commission Office to digitize the county's drain districts and create online service to be used by that office. Oceana County has roughly 111 individual drain districts and 120 linear drains. Digitizing the drain districts and verifying the existing linear GIS drain data will make drain assessments easier and more accurate. It will also assist with routine maintenance and drain projects. These digital maps can be made available online for workers to use in the field and for the public to reference along with other baseline GIS data such as parcels, rivers, lakes and roads.

To find out more about GIS projects and mapping opportunities, please contact WMSRDC's GIS Specialist at (231) 722-7878 ext 150.



Current cemetery map



Cemetery marker

Hazard Mitigation Grant Awarded

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), hazard mitigation is any sustainable action that reduces or eliminates long-term risk to people and property from future disasters. Mitigation planning breaks the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage.

WMSRDC has experience working with local communities on hazard mitigation dating back to the early 2000's. This planning tradition is set to continue, thanks to a grant from FEMA accepted by WMSRDC in June. Over the next two years, WMSRDC will work within the counties of Lake, Mason, and Oceana to update existing county-wide hazard mitigation plans. Each county will be armed with an advisory team to help guide the process by helping to identify and assess hazards and prioritize potential mitigation measures.

This effort will help communities within Lake, Mason and Oceana mitigate hazards (including natural, man-made, and other hazards) by identifying potential hazards and mitigation strategies, as well as help communities be eligible to access various sources of federal assistance, such as the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program.

**The WMSRDC office is open.
Staff is currently working a hybrid
of in-person and remotely.**

Coastal Zone Reforestation Grant Closes Successfully

Thanks to a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant through the United States Forest Service (USFS), WMSRDC has facilitated the planting of over 290 trees and 4,300 tree seedlings. This will allow for the interception of up to 286,622 gallons of runoff annually. That is more than twice the obligation of the grant requirement.

Stormwater reduction is an important ecological service that trees provide but one that is seldom considered. The water those trees absorb does not end up creating flash flows that cause erosion, flooding, or damage to infrastructure, and the presence of trees provide many benefits. The benefits include shade, screening of viewsheds, aesthetic quality, cooling of urban landscapes, pollution mitigation, habitat for wildlife along with the targeted runoff reduction of this grant.

WMSRDC worked with private, state, and municipal partners to meet the region's goal. WMSRDC partnered with five state parks (Ludington, Charles Mears, Silver Lake, Muskegon, and Hoffmaster) as well as, the Muskegon Conservation District and the City of Muskegon to achieve the results. WMSRDC is grateful to the USFS and the GLRI grant program for the opportunity to successfully provide these services.



Entrepreneurial continued from page 1

- Business surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc. provide an assessment of the assistance needs of current businesses and their satisfaction with services being provided.
- In general, businesses and entrepreneurs are unaware of assistance programs and how to access them, especially in more rural areas and for minority populations.
- There is a need for increased assistance efforts related to “second-stage” businesses.

It is the intention that the results of this project will be used by regional ESOs to assess and enhance their respective programs, and to decide if and how an effort to consolidate and coordinate assistance services could be implemented.

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. WMSRDC is also the planning agency for the metropolitan transportation planning (MPO) program for Muskegon and northern Ottawa counties.

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