



The Asset Management Readiness Scale

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed challenges across every aspect of life. This includes how business is conducted in the public sector management of infrastructure assets. With reduced financial receipts, it is now even more important to focus on the efficient use of funding on infrastructure improvements and maintenance.

An emerging tool for this purpose is integrated asset management. In the spring of 2020, the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) partnered with the Michigan Infrastructure Council (MIC) to release the Asset Management Readiness Assessment Scale. This tool was developed to help infrastructure owners, such as townships, cities, and counties, understand, measure, and advance their asset management proficiency while leveraging a simple to use, common methodology that can be applied across transportation, water, utilities, and communications assets. The Scale delivers quantifiable results, allowing users to develop improvement goals and systematically reassess their progress.

The Scale embraces five asset management competencies—people and leadership; data and information; planning and prioritization; policy and governance; and external communication and knowledge sharing – so infrastructure owners can rank their asset management strengths and improvement areas through “readiness levels.”

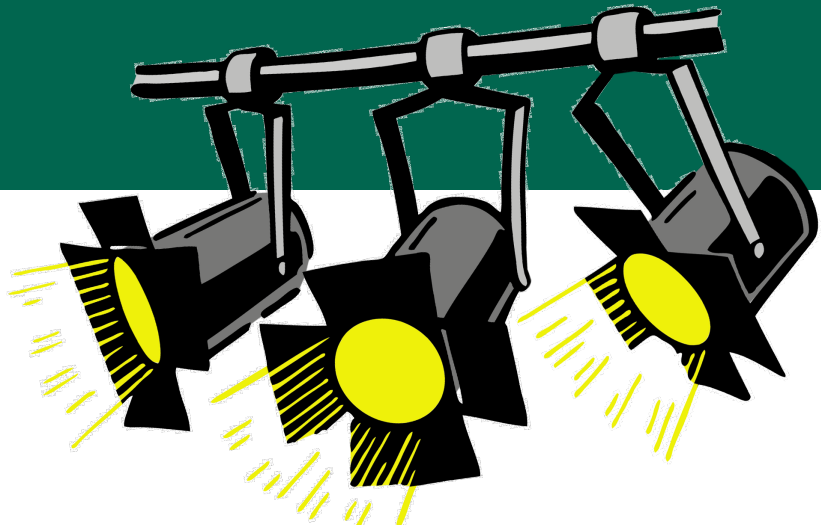
The Scale was adapted from a tool that has been used in Canada over the past decade to manage assets from planning and construction to operations and maintenance, and ultimately to the next generation rebuild. Building on the success of our Canadian neighbors, the MIC hopes the Scale will help shift Michigan’s infrastructure focus from reactive response toward strategic long-term asset management.

WMSRDC, in partnership with MIC and the Michigan Association of Regions (MAR), is ready to help train infrastructure owners with the Scale and to collect results that will guide regional and state policy and target resources.

To learn more about the MIC and to download the Asset Management Readiness Assessment Scale, go to www.michigan.gov/mic. The staff at WMSRDC has been trained in asset management and the implementation of The Scale. WMSRDC is here to help infrastructure owners successfully complete the Scale, interpret results, and confidentially submit scores. Any data voluntarily provided to WMSRDC and/or MIC will be de-identified and be used only in aggregate format to help develop statewide infrastructure asset management policy.

For questions or assistance in completing the Asset Management Readiness Assessment Scale, contact Joel Fitzpatrick, WMSRDC Transportation Planning Director by email at jfitzpatrick@wmsrdc.org.

EDA Grant for Entrepreneurial Study



On September 11, Mike Walsh, the Chief of Staff for the U.S. Department of Commerce, came to Muskegon to make a major grant announcement in support of regionally-driven Coronavirus-impacted small business recovery efforts in West Michigan. On the front steps of the Grand Valley State University Muskegon Innovation Hub (Hub), Mr. Walsh announced that the Economic Development Administration (EDA) had awarded a grant to analyze various aspects of the entrepreneurial environment in the West Michigan lakeshore region. The recipients of the grant are the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) and co-applicant, Grand Valley State University Muskegon Innovation Hub (Hub).

For the better part of a year, WMSRDC worked closely with the Hub to develop a concept that could help the Hub and other entrepreneurial support organizations better serve the needs of entrepreneurs and small start-up businesses. Together, the two organizations developed a successful proposal for an entrepreneurial market analysis focused on the West Michigan region including the counties of Muskegon, Lake, Mason, Newaygo, Oceana, Kent, and Ottawa.

This fall, the WMSRDC-Hub team will request proposals for a consultant to assist in the development of the analysis. In particular, the study will profile the entrepreneurial market dynamics of the lakeshore region, propose strategies to enhance entrepreneurial support and business acceleration services, and identify existing and potential sectors to target those services. The study will position the Hub to continue and improve upon its presence as a valuable resource for small business, thereby enhancing economic resiliency, supporting innovation, and fostering economic diversification of the lakeshore region.

Innovation and entrepreneurship typically increase in the wake of an economic disruption. Although the full impacts and ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have yet to be fully realized, this study will provide valuable insight into the evolving needs of entrepreneurs and small businesses, as well as opportunities for new economic growth. To say the least, the announcement was welcome news during this tumultuous 2020. The West Michigan Entrepreneurial Market Analysis is expected to be complete in the spring of 2021.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Study of Two Major Transit Systems Underway

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) has received a grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation to perform an analysis of the two major public transportation services within the WestPlan Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) area.

The West Michigan Regional Transit Systems Governance and Organizational Transition Study will focus on the Muskegon Area Transit System (MATS) and the Harbor Transit Multi-Modal Transit System (Harbor Transit) from an organizational and operational perspective with potential recommendations on future collaborations and coordination between the two agencies.

The project is supported by the Muskegon County Board of Commissioners and the Harbor Transit Multi-Model Transit System (Harbor Transit) Board. The goal is to determine if public transportation services in the Muskegon Urbanized Area, (which includes Muskegon County and northern Ottawa County) can be better delivered through a different organizational

or governance structure than what currently exists. The study will analyze each organization individually and look at possible cooperative opportunities as well as potential consolidation opportunities between the two transit systems.

The study will be led by WMSRDC, the WestPlan MPO, and will include internal staff and corporate counsel efforts, as well as facilitation and planning services to be sought from a private consultant.

It is anticipated that the result of this effort will be a brief report and a series of draft agreements for local partners to consider at their individual board levels. The resultant change will permit a more effectively designed, funded, and determined public transit program in the region.

Meetings with stakeholders have begun and the group will soon explore options for consultants. A request for proposals will be drafted within the next several months.

MPO Update

The WestPlan Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Policy and Technical committees adopted the FY2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Amendment #10 at their September MPO committee meetings. The amendment was reviewed by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and has been approved by both agencies. Details of this amendment can be found on the WMSRDC website.

The TIP is a cooperative effort between federal, state, and local officials and serves as the final link in the transportation planning process. Its primary purpose is to identify programs and projects to be funded with federal aid, in accordance with federal law and regulations during the next four year period.



CEDS Strategy Committee Update

On October 23, WMSRDC hosted the fall CEDS Strategy Committee via web conference. Topics of discussion included U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Agency (EDA) funding, pandemic response initiatives, and economic project updates from around the region. Notes from the meeting are available on the Economic Development page on the WMSRDC website. WMSRDC staff also proposed a quarterly meeting schedule for the upcoming year. Meetings are tentatively set for 1:00 p.m. on the fifth Friday in the months of January, April, July, and October. CEDS Strategy Committee meetings are expected to be held virtually, until further notice.

Economic Technical Assistance Update

A major component of the WMSRDC Economic Development program is to provide technical assistance to local communities and other U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA)-eligible applicants. This is done by providing guidance and support throughout all phases of project development and the grant application process.

Since the passage of the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in March, WMSRDC has worked with potential applicants in all corners of the region to identify potential projects and refine them into competitive applications for EDA assistance. By the end of October, there had already been one EDA grant awarded in the region (see Spotlight article in this newsletter on page 2); three additional project applications submitted; and at least three other projects under development.

The CARES Act provided the Economic Development Administration (EDA) with \$1.5 billion for economic development assistance programs to help communities prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.

Broadband Facilitation

A lack of broadband availability and/or capacity has been a documented issue and a regional priority for many years. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced this issue to the forefront, highlighting a nearly universal need for broadband capabilities. Individual communities face varying degrees of broadband needs and hurdles. The pandemic has energized local and county level broadband efforts throughout the region.

To help address this issue, WMSRDC has embarked upon an effort to facilitate information sharing, coordination, and project implementation of broadband initiatives across communities and sectors throughout the region. The first step is to connect with local-level focus groups to identify and discuss local broadband issues. The next step will be to aggregate local needs into a regional broadband profile. The final step will be to seek funding and assistance to meet local broadband needs.

WMSRDC is able to undertake this complicated yet essential task with federal CARES Act funds awarded through the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration.



Muskegon Lake – A National, NOAA Habitat Focus Area

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) designated Muskegon Lake as one of the nation's ten Habitat Focus Areas (HFA) in 2016. The high level of stakeholder engagement in habitat restoration and conservation was one of the primary motivations behind Muskegon's selection as a HFA. The NOAA HFA Muskegon Lake blueprint was developed, outlining activities to: 1) restore, improve and protect coastline, nearshore, and lake bottom fish and wildlife habitat and to reduce nutrient loads within Muskegon and Bear lakes; 2) support projects which both promote the recreational use of the natural environment and provide strategies to enhance coastal resiliency; and 3) to engage coastal communities with support provided by collaborative research, restoration monitoring, conservation partnerships and outreach and communication.

As partners in the NOAA effort to implement the HFA blueprint, WMSRDC and Grand Valley State University, Annis Water Resources Institute (GVSU AWRI) collaborated on a competitive, \$643,868.63, three-year project proposal to develop collaborative partnerships to help fill science information gaps to support habitat restoration and management activities, monitor the effectiveness of the restoration work, and to gain a better understanding of the restoration impact on Muskegon Lake, Muskegon River and the Lake Michigan nearshore. NOAA selected the proposal and awarded WMSRDC a three-year cooperative agreement in 2017. During year one, \$50,000 was available to convene Muskegon Lake landowners, stakeholders, natural resources managers, private consultants and scientists in an integrated process to implement ecological monitoring at four previously restored fish and wildlife habitat sites. The information is helping to inform the management of the restored resources. During years two and three, federal funding for the NOAA HFA program was limited and not available for work in the Muskegon Lake HFA. Discussions about the value of the NOAA designation and what it means for future HFA work are continuing among state, regional, and local stakeholders as well as other HFA partners.

National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERR)

WMSRDC is collaborating with representatives from Grand Valley State University, Annis Water Resources Institute, University of Michigan, Michigan Department of Natural Resources (Fisheries, Wildlife and Parks Divisions), and the Michigan EGLE Coastal Management Program to discuss the benefits of a potential National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) designation of a Lake Michigan Coastal Drowned Rivermouth NERR in the State of Michigan.

A NOAA NERR provides a framework for scientific information to be collected and provided to state natural resource managers, landowners and other natural resources stewards. Natural resource managers who are responsible for state game areas and other state managed lands, have an ongoing need for science-based ecological information about hydrologic changes, native and non-native invasive plant and animal species, and water quality. Having answers to the important questions from natural resources managers will help them select the appropriate and most cost effective management options.

The designation of a Lake Michigan NERR would benefit coastal communities around the State of Michigan in addition to the West Michigan communities located along the eastern shoreline of Lake Michigan. A NERR can be managed in many ways, including by a regional planning organization, a university, a non-governmental organization or a state agency. The process for establishing a Lake Michigan NERR in Michigan would officially begin with a letter of application from the Governor of Michigan to NOAA. The benefits of a NERR and the various roles that WMSRDC, GVSU AWRI, NOAA and the State of Michigan could play as part of a Lake Michigan NERR has been the focus of discussions over the past three years.



Veteran's Memorial Park

The Veteran's Memorial Park, located along the causeway connecting the cities of Muskegon and North Muskegon, was once named Michigan's Most Beautiful Mile. Recent restoration projects have worked to not only restore the park to its original design, but also to make it more resilient for native fish, wildlife and vegetation. The WMSRDC GIS technician mapped the locations of the veteran's memorial trees and markers before they were collected and stored during construction. Now, with the project complete, the majority of the markers have been placed back in the park.

As part of the project, an online map of Veteran's Memorial Park was created by WMSRDC that shows the locations of the memorial tree markers within the park. Each location includes information about the veteran honored by each marker. The larger monuments have recently been added to the map as well. A user browsing the map is able to click on each marker and view information provided for each veteran as well as a picture of their memorial. Some markers are currently being repaired and will be soon placed at their trees. A veteran can be searched by name in the map's search bar and the map will zoom into that specific memorial. WMSRDC is hoping to be able to map the smaller walkway markers and add them to the map in the near future.

The map can be viewed on the WMSRDC website under the GIS Project page or at the following link:
www.wmsrdc.org/project/veteransmemorialpark

A Still Shot of the Veteran's Memorial Marker Map Available on the WMSRDC Website

The screenshot displays the 'Veterans Memorial Park' map interface. A search bar at the top right contains the text 'Wisneski, Charles G'. Below the search bar, a pop-up window shows details for '(2 of 2)' results. The details for 'Wisneski, Charles G' include: Branch/Rank: US ARMY, PFC; Notes: WW II, 11/3/1919-11/17/1985; Status: Completed/At Tree; Tree Type: New Tree This Fall. Below this information is a section titled 'Memorial Photo' with a link 'Click photo to view larger image'. The photo shows a memorial marker with an American flag. The map itself shows various locations marked with blue dots, including 'McMillen, Richard A', 'Lillie, Charles', 'Touse', 'Wisneski, Charles G', 'West, Joseph', 'Combat Wounded Veterans Memorial', and 'VFW Post 446 Memorial'. The map is overlaid with a white line representing the causeway.



Nonmotorized Plan Update

WMSRDC staff will soon begin work on updating the non-motorized transportation plan for the Muskegon County / northern Ottawa County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The plan was completed in 2013 with assistance from Progressive AE and local stakeholders. The plan looked at current non-motorized trails as well as on-road bicycle facilities within the MPO boundaries and also identified potential new connections to fill in the gaps between existing and proposed, but not yet constructed, trails and on-road facilities. The plan is a good comprehensive guide for the MPO, Muskegon County, northern Ottawa County, and the various municipalities and townships that have non-motorized facilities. It provides a glimpse of existing and potential links that create an extensive interconnected system for the entire MPO area.

WMSRDC will review the current plan and make necessary updates where facilities have been created and links have been completed. Staff will meet with local road agencies and review each individual area and their non-motorized amenities. This information will be helpful for the municipalities when applying for future funding to complete these projects.

The updated plan will include current GIS mapping to allow for spatial referencing and detailed graphics showing trail locations and connectivity opportunities locally and regionally. There will also be detailed photographs showing the various trails and facilities such as trail heads and rest areas. Staff will also try to incorporate pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle count data using trail counters at various locations throughout the network. The update will be completed in FY2021.

Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences

WMSRDC applied to the NOAA Bay-Watershed Education and Training program for a \$83,000 grant project to increase the capacity of teachers to engage current and future generations of students in outdoor, hands-on learning. The proposed project is designed to increase teacher and student awareness, understanding, connection, and stewardship of Muskegon Lake's restored natural resources.

If selected for funding, the project will begin in the spring of 2021 with an 18-month duration. The project will potentially provide place-based opportunities for outdoor learning and long-term, community-based stewardship of restored Great Lakes water resources. Activities include place-based teacher professional development training

and outdoor educational experiences for students.

The educational stewardship context for outdoor learning expands upon NOAA investments in the restoration of fish and wildlife habitat and water quality in the Muskegon Lake watershed. The development of lesson plans and teacher trainings will be coordinated with the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District's West Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative and the GVSU W.G. Jackson Research Vessel programs. The project will directly involve eight classroom teachers and 240 students (grades 5-12). Three short videos will feature outdoor educational experiences and a set of diverse restoration champions to inspire and increase teacher and student outdoor learning and place-based stewardship.



Muskegon Lake to Host Great Lakes AOC Conference

Plans are underway to host the popular Great Lakes Areas of Concern Conference in Muskegon in May 2021. The conference will draw approximately 250 people from around the Great Lakes states of New York, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin and Michigan. Conference organizers from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Michigan EGLE, Muskegon County CVB and WMSRDC are also developing contingency plans to hold the conference in the fall of 2021 should COVID-19 prohibit large gatherings in the spring. Stay tuned for more on this.

New Era Future Land Use Plan Complete

In spring of 2019, the Village of New Era in Oceana County contracted with WMSRDC to concurrently assist in the update of the New Era Future Land Use Plan and the New Era Recreation Plan. While the recreation plan was completed and adopted in December 2019, the Future Land Use Plan took a little longer to complete. A proposed Future Land Use Plan draft was made available for public review this past summer, and the Village Council unanimously voted to adopt the New Era Future Land Use Plan on September 10, 2020. WMSRDC would like to congratulate the Village of New Era for its leadership, for completing these two plans, and for taking a proactive approach in planning for the community's future.

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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