



Pandemic Impacts Survey

WMSRDC conducted an online survey in late September through early November to document local economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is an important component of a pandemic response and recovery plan (PRRP) that WMSRDC is developing for the region. Information gathered through the survey will also be incorporated into the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and shared widely to help the region adapt to evolving economic circumstances and identify potential long-term economic hurdles.

The survey was created and promoted in partnership with local economic development partners from the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo and Oceana. Survey participants were given the opportunity to complete any or all of three survey forms, which were targeted to households, businesses, and public and nonprofit entities. WMSRDC utilized the SurveyMethods online software to design the surveys. Links were distributed via social media, email to regional community and economic development networks, and on the WMSRDC website landing page.

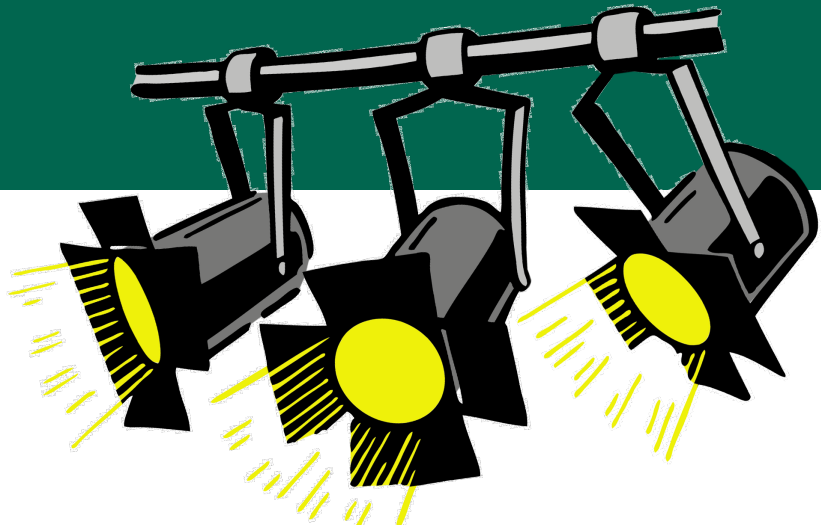
Nearly 500 responses were submitted during the brief survey period, with participants hailing from all corners of the WMSRDC region. The sizable number and geographic distribution of responses will help paint a valuable region-wide picture of pandemic impacts. A survey summary report will be available this coming December at <https://wmsrdc.org/project/pandemic-impacts-survey/>. **Check out page 2 of this newsletter for a preview of survey results.** The full PRRP document is anticipated to be complete by June 2022.

The pandemic impacts survey was made possible with a planning grant from the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration accepted by WMSRDC in July 2020. In addition to the PRRP efforts, the grant has enabled WMSRDC to adapt to the pandemic through workplace upgrades and allowed WMSRDC to facilitate broadband planning and implementation efforts throughout the region. WMSRDC played a leading role in establishing a broadband task force for Muskegon County earlier this year. Lastly, the grant will enable WMSRDC to hire a part-time planner to support PRRP efforts and increase the overall capacity of the organization.

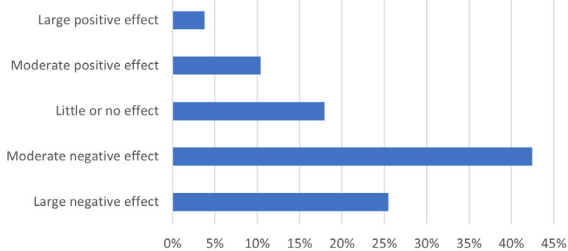
SPOTLIGHT STORY

Pandemic Survey Results

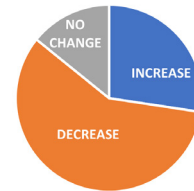
(a continuation of front page story)



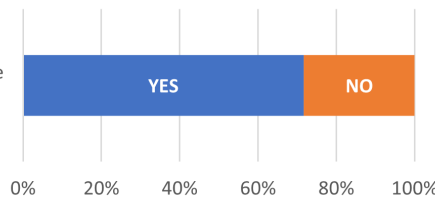
In your opinion, how has your business been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?



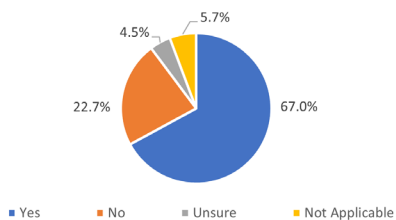
Since April 2020, has your business had a change in revenues/sales/receipts, not including financial assistance?



Did your business seek financial assistance in 2021?



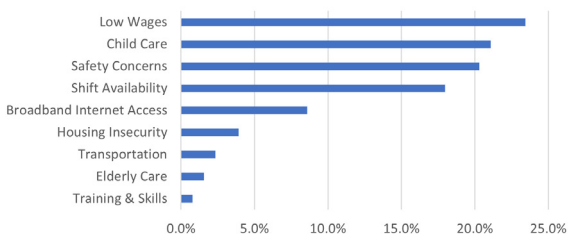
Do you feel your public/nonprofit organization has met the needs of residents and individuals since April 2020?



“Online (meeting) is not the same as in-person”

- Public & Nonprofit Survey Comment

What factors negatively impacted your ability or willingness to seek employment throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?



Since April 2020, **52%** of household survey respondents **began working remotely.**



TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

MPO Update

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) staff has been working on the project selection portion of the FY2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). A call for projects was disseminated in October for transit, congestion mitigation & air quality (CMAQ), and surface transportation planning (STP) funded projects. The MPO Technical Committee has met and prioritized the CMAQ projects. The next step will be for the list to be brought to the MPO committees in December for approval. Additional projects will be discussed in December and a final prioritized list will be developed with members of the Technical Committee. MPO staff has also been working with the Michigan Department of Transportation on final trunkline project lists for the upcoming TIP. Once final lists are approved, MPO staff will work on mapping the projects and running an environmental mitigation and environmental justice analysis on all of the projects.

Staff is also starting to update the TIP document text and is working with MDOT on travel demand scenarios, as well as updating socio-economic data. Amendment 18 to the FY2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) was also prepared and presented at the November 2021 MPO Technical and Policy committee meetings.

Rural Task Force Update

Local county rural transportation task forces met throughout the month of November to select projects for the upcoming Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which covers the fiscal years of 2023-2026. The five-county task force receives approximately \$3.1 million of federal funding per year. Typical projects include road construction, road maintenance, and transit bus purchases. Projects are chosen at the individual county level prior to approval at the five-county task force. A full five-county task force meeting will be held in December.

In addition, small urban transportation meetings were held for the Ludington Area Small Urban Committee as well as the Whitehall Area Small Urban Committee. Each committee receives \$385,000 per area, every other year.

WMSRDC assists in the administration of the Rural Transportation Task Force for the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. It also administers the small urban transportation program. WMSRDC is responsible for scheduling meetings, administering the public involvement process, documenting meeting activities, and submitting information to MDOT.

Regional Transit Study

The West Michigan Regional Transit Systems Governance and Organizational Transitional Study is moving along on schedule. The first phase of the study has been completed and involved stakeholder interviews and input, as well as researching transit agencies nationwide to find a similar scenario to the goals of this study. A series of questions were asked and stakeholders were given the opportunity to add comments and provide input for discussion. The information gathered was summarized and discussed during a series of three policy and planning workshops that were held at the end of October and early November. The consultant will have potential scenarios to look at further toward the end of the calendar year.

The focus of the study is to look at collaboration, and consensus-building efforts and to determine if public transportation services provided by the Muskegon Area Transit System in the Muskegon area and the Harbor Transit service area in northern Ottawa County can be more efficiently delivered.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

EDA Funding Opportunities

The US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) currently offers a wide variety of funding and assistance opportunities for economic development. In addition to its long-standing set of funding opportunities, such as public works and economic adjustment assistance, EDA must allocate \$3 billion in supplemental funding it received through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021. This additional funding enables EDA the flexibility to provide larger, more transformational investments across the nation to support community-led economic development.

Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to submit applications sooner, rather than later. With so many funding opportunities available, organizations interested in seeking EDA

investment should contact WMSRDC early on to ensure the best chance for success. WMSRDC can help identify the appropriate funding opportunity for a given project, determine a project's viability, facilitate discussions with EDA representatives, and provide assistance in preparing an application.

It is a priority of WMSRDC to provide local communities and other eligible applicants with technical assistance that will result in EDA investment within the region. Please direct inquiries to Stephen Carlson at scarlson@wmsrdc.org. To explore EDA's current funding opportunities on your own, feel free to check out the following links:

<https://www.eda.gov/funding-opportunities/>

<https://eda.gov/about/investment-priorities/>

Build Back Better

In October, WMSRDC applied for the EDA Build Back Better Regional Challenge to support and grow the agriculture and food processing economic sector in West Michigan. This program is designed to assist communities nationwide in their efforts to build back better by accelerating the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and building local economies that will be resilient to future economic shocks. WMSRDC established a coalition of support for the application including West Michigan communities and organizations from Van Buren County through Mason County.

WMSRDC is hopeful to be selected for this potentially transformational, albeit highly competitive, program. More information at <https://eda.gov/arpa/build-back-better/>.

Culvert Asset Management

WMSRDC staff recently attended culvert asset management training which was offered through Michigan Tech's Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP). Culvert asset management data collection was recently added as an activity eligible for reimbursement through the State of Michigan's Asset Management program.

This training covered how to collect inventory data and the condition evaluation under a good/fair/poor/severe rating structure. The second portion of the training included an overview of updates made to RoadSoft to meet the new collection and evaluation procedures. Roadsoft is a software suite designed for collecting, storing, and analyzing data associated with transportation assets.

For more information, contact Joel Fitzpatrick, at jfitzpatrick@wmsrdc.org.



A River Runs Through It

On October 26 of this year, WMSRDC reached a major milestone in efforts to delist Muskegon Lake from the Great Lakes Areas of Concern. This opportunity has been made available by a partnership with the Great Lakes Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through a grant from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The project involved creating a hydrological reconnection between the Muskegon River and adjacent wetlands (previously a 53-acre celery farm). Muskegon County's purchase of the property for the restoration made this project possible.

The project planning has been on-going for a number of years. It entailed breaching the berm separating the river from the wetland at two locations and restoring the wetland to a natural functioning ecosystem. Allowing the river to flow through the restored marsh will not only provide 53 acres of fish and wildlife habitat but also has the added benefits

of dropping sediments and nutrients from the river into the wetland before they enter Muskegon Lake. The openings also provide additional flood routing. The first opening is now established, with the second soon to follow. By the time you read this the project should be complete, and Muskegon Lake will be the beneficiary of this major partnership effort.



Image provided by GEI Consultants

Lake Michigan Rivers and Coastal Wetlands Regional Partnership

In 2020, WMSRDC entered into the Lake Michigan Rivers and Coastal Wetlands Regional Partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Currently, two of the selected projects located in Oceana County are in the beginning stages. Both projects focus on fish passage and stream habitat restoration, with an emphasis on brook trout.

The first project area is in the White River, a designated natural river system under Michigan's Natural Rivers Act. Specifically, three road stream crossings in Swinton Creek and one in Cushman Creek. By removing the impassable structures, replacing them with open span bridges, and restoring 1,000 feet of instream habitat; 7.2 miles of stream will be reconnected, and 7.6 acres of wetland floodplain habitat will open for the native fish and wildlife.

The Oceana County Road Commission (OCRC) is partnering on this project with the road stream crossing removals and replacements. GVSU AWRI will provide pre and post monitoring. Private landowners will provide access and input. GEI was just awarded the consultant role for this project in early November.

The second project location is Stony Creek at Marshville Dam Park. The project includes dam remnant removal, removal of two old bridges and three culverts, a bridge replacement, and 500 feet of instream

Continued on page 8



SPECIAL PROJECTS

West Michigan Prosperity Alliance

The State of Michigan created the Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI) in 2013. This initiative was the catalyst for the formation of the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA). Since 2014, the WMPA collectively reinvested nearly \$1 million into regional projects that touched all 13 counties within the footprint of the region. In addition, the group was able to bring hundreds of people together from West Michigan to participate and provide direct input into the democratic process of determining projects to fund. Over the years, the WMPA created relationships and partnerships that continue today outside of the RPI.

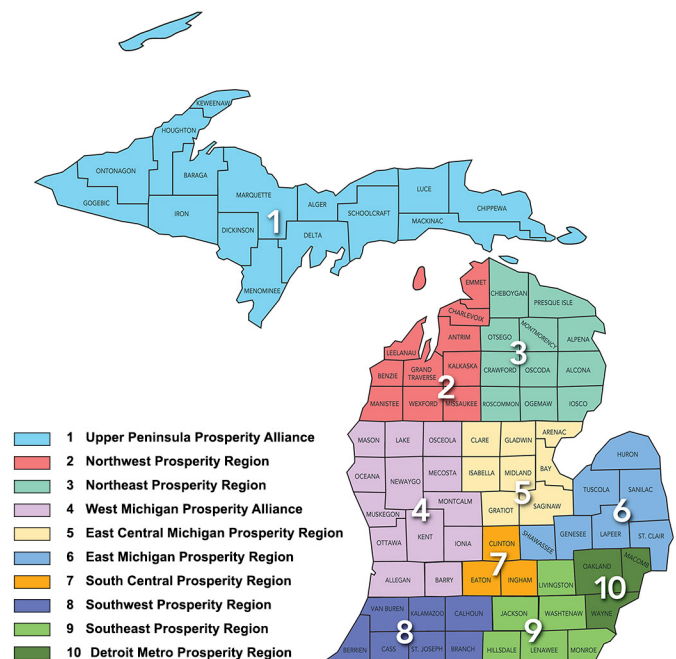
From 2014 through 2018, the Grand Valley Metro Council (GVMC) chaired and served as fiduciary of the WMPA. WMSRDC assumed the responsibility of chair and fiduciary in 2018. However, the state eliminated funding for the RPI in 2019. The group has continued to meet periodically over the past few years and focused efforts on infrastructure asset management. Recently, the executive committee agreed it was time to move forward and distribute the remaining dollars to local projects/initiatives as has happened in the past. It is unlikely that future state funding is possible for this initiative.

The below projects have received the remaining funds of \$200,298.80.

- West Michigan Regional Dashboard: \$10,000 to support and maintain the dashboard through 2026
- Sustainable Watershed Funding Initiative: \$45,000 for continued work of this initiative as the effort moves state-wide
- West Michigan Agricultural Technologies & Regional Food Systems Initiative: \$100,000 to coordinate the initiative and leverage grant funding through the Economic Development Administration
- Infrastructure Asset Management Activities: \$45,298.80 for continued support for integrated asset management within the region

The WMPA's foundation of collaboration has been established and groups that want to partner and work together continue to do so without the structure of the RPI. As a strong partner in the WMPA, WMSRDC is proud of the accomplishments, successes, and relationships established as a result of this initiative.

MICHIGAN'S PROSPERITY REGIONS



GIS AND PLANNING

Oceana County Drain Mapping

WMSRDC will be working with the Oceana County Drain Commissioner to map the county's drains and drain districts. The drain districts will be digitized and rendered according to the paper files and legal descriptions provided by the Drain Commissioner's office.

There are just over a 100 drain districts within the county. The drain commissioner will use the digitized districts to help with drain maintenance and yearly assessments. WMSRDC will also verify the existing drain mapping layer to assure that it is following the legal descriptions and corrections will be made if needed. Once these mapping features are completed, they can be overlaid with the county's parcel data and other baseline mapping data such as jurisdiction boundaries, lakes, rivers, roads and imagery to ensure more accurate assessments.

Veterans Memorial Park Mapping Project Completed

Following completion of restoration work on the south pond of the Veterans Memorial Causeway Park, the veteran's memorial markers have been returned to their trees with help from the Muskegon County Veterans Affairs office and the Northside Lions Club. A map was created to help family and visitors locate the memorial trees within the park.

To complement that work, WMSRDC's GIS staff completed the mapping of the walkway markers throughout the park just in time for Veterans Day. The walkway markers map can be explored by following the QR code in this article or by visiting WMSRDC's GIS webpage. The map can be used to search by names of veterans honored by markers along the walkways or trees in the park. The search results will show a picture of the marker and where the marker for the honored veteran is located. The QR Code will be posted on the signage throughout

the park so locating markers will only be a couple taps away on a cell phone or laptop computer.

WMSRDC would like to thank the Northside Lions, the Muskegon County Veteran's Affairs office, Robin Wachter and Toni Way for their time and efforts in making this project happen. We would also like to thank all of the Muskegon County veterans for their service.



WMSRDC Hires Intern

WMSRDC recently hired Robert Johnson as an economic development intern to assist in research and preparation of the Pandemic Response and Recovery Plan. Congratulations Robert.



Wetlands Regional Partnership (continued from page 5)

habitat replacement. This will open 6.5 miles of stream and 18 acres of adjacent wetlands giving Lake Michigan anglers the opportunity to catch steelhead and salmon naturally produced in Stony Creek.

The OCRC is partnering on this project with the bridge removals and replacement. GVSU AWRI will provide pre and post monitoring for this project as well. Oceana County Parks and private landowners will provide access and input.

An additional element to the Stony Creek project is that Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA) has funding for engineered designs for 2,000 feet of instream habitat upstream of the WMSRDC project footprint.

Request for Stony Creek proposals are due November 30th, and the goal is to have a consultant on board by mid-December.

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.

Bonnie McGlothin, Chairperson, Councilperson, City of Muskegon Heights
Dale Nesbary, Vice-Chairperson, Muskegon Community College
James Maike, Secretary, Newaygo County Commissioner
Ron Bacon, Mason County Commissioner
Ron Christians, Oceana County Commissioner
Kim Cyr, Muskegon County Commissioner
Jennifer Hodges, Supervisor, Muskegon Township
Rich Houtteman, WMSRDC Appointee
Marcia Hovey-Wright, Muskegon County Commissioner
Ken Johnson, Commissioner, City of Muskegon
James Kelly, WMSRDC Appointee
Bryan Kolk, Newaygo County Commissioner
Andrea Large, WMSRDC Appointee
Phil Morse, Oceana County Commissioner
Gary Nelund, Mayor, City of Norton Shores
James Rynberg, City of Fremont
Lewis Squires, Mason County Commissioner
Len Todd, Lake County Commissioner
Rillastine Wilkins, Muskegon County Commissioner
Kathy Winczewski, Councilperson, City of Ludington
Crystal Young, West Shore Community College

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director

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