

How are Local Governments Planning to Utilize American Rescue Plan Act Funding

As communities enter a new phase of COVID response, they also need to determine how to best utilize their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fiscal Recovery Funds. This spring, WMSRDC conducted a survey of local governments to better understand funding intentions and opportunities, and identify outstanding questions and needs of local government partners in this regard. This information will help WMSRDC better focus its ongoing COVID recovery assistance efforts.

Forty-three of the 120 local governments within the region responded to the survey, which is nearly a 36% response rate. All respondents have elected to accept the ARPA Fiscal Recovery funding allocation. Of the respondents, 42% have already determined how they are going to spend the funds, 37% had not determined yet, and 21% had identified how some of the funds were going to be spent, but not all. The most common funding priorities for the recovery funds included: building improvements, roads, water/wastewater, local business help, broadband, and health department improvements.

According to the survey, more than 80% of respondents were intending to claim the standard allowance for revenue loss. In addition, nearly 81% did not anticipate dedicating funds to any collaborative/multi-jurisdictional efforts. When asked what areas communities need or anticipate needing support regarding the use of ARPA Fiscal Recovery Funds, some of their top responses were as follows:

- Documenting use of funds
- Understanding eligible expenses/final US treasury rules
- Public engagement in decision-making/communicating funding priorities
- Accessing content experts

The survey results will be incorporated into the Pandemic Response and Recovery Plan (see article on page 4) being prepared by WMSRDC and will help target technical assistance efforts. This survey was also part of a larger effort through the Michigan Association of Regions and done in collaboration with other regional planning agencies across the state.

Remembering Greg Mund

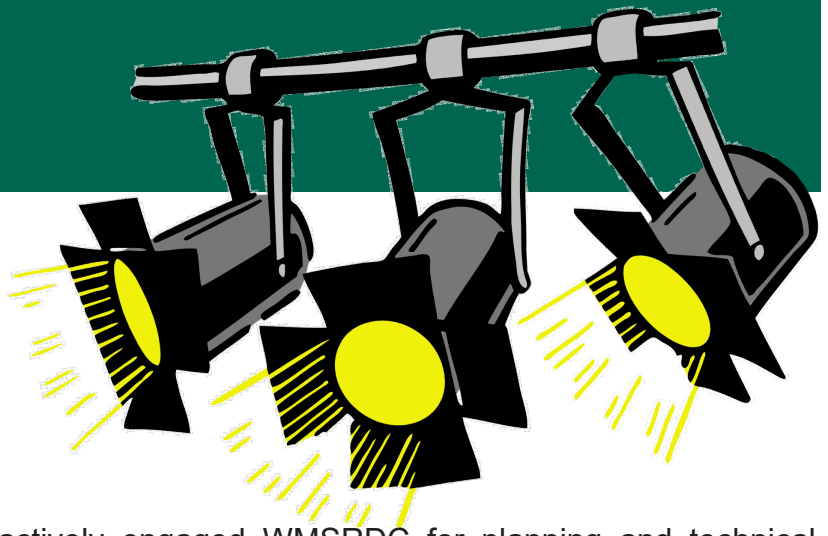
Friend, colleague, and local organic farmer, Greg Mund passed away this spring. Up until his earthly departure, Greg had shared his expertise in environmental planning through contract services with WMSRDC. Greg worked diligently and vigorously on plans and projects that will lead to the delisting of Muskegon Lake as a Great Lakes Area of Concern. He had a no nonsense, yet endearing approach to work and life which made it an absolute honor to be associated with him. Greg's hard work and spirit will live forever in our hearts and minds.



Greg (on the right) pointing in the opposite direction of everyone else to be funny and contrary for the photo. He was fun like that.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

WMSRDC Actively Engaged in Oceana County



Over the years, Oceana County leaders have actively engaged WMSRDC for planning and technical assistance. WMSRDC is currently involved with several initiatives across Oceana County in the areas of economic development, local government, environmental, and transportation planning. The following provides a summary of current WMSRDC activities in Oceana County. Kudos to the many community leaders that are working hard to improve Oceana County!

EDA Planning Grant: In early 2021, WMSRDC was approached with an idea that Oceana County might benefit from a skilled trades training facility and that the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) might be a potential source of funding. From that initial seed grew a decision to apply for a grant to analyze workforce needs, identify opportunities for economic diversification, and develop a strategic plan of action. WMSRDC provided connections to EDA representatives and technical assistance for preparing and submitting a grant application. The grant was awarded to Oceana County in May 2022, and work will commence in June with the search for a consultant to conduct the study. A broad coalition of local stakeholders led by county staff contributed ideas and match money to make the grant application successful.

Hart Wastewater: Since 2020, WMSRDC staff has provided connections to EDA representatives and guidance to navigate the EDA application process for a request to help fund wastewater improvements in the City of Hart. The city submitted its application in early 2022, and as of June, was engaged in the next level of discussions with the EDA regarding the project and a potential grant award.

White River Economic Impact Assessment: WMSRDC is the fiduciary for an effort, led by a subcommittee of the White River Watershed Collaborative, to assess the value of the White River to communities it touches in the counties of Oceana, Newaygo, and Muskegon. In this role, WMSRDC staff applied to three community foundations to raise funds for the assessment. If all funding requests are successful, WMSRDC will contract with GVSU to conduct the assessment, which could begin as soon as July or August 2022.

Hazard Mitigation: WMSRDC is updating the hazard mitigation plans for the counties of Oceana, Lake, and Mason. These plans are required to be updated every five years and are required for communities to access certain types of pre-disaster and post-disaster mitigation funding. The plan updates will be completed in 2023.

Countywide Master Plan & Recreation Plan: WMSRDC has agreed to work with Oceana County's planning commission and parks and recreation commission to update the county's master and recreation plans. The project will take place from October 2022 through October 2023.

Transportation Planning: WMSRDC has begun the annual Asset Management process of collecting road condition data for federal aid roads within the region, including Oceana County. Asset Management is a

See Oceana County on page 8



TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Fiscal Year 2023 Unified Work Program

The Fiscal Year 2023 Unified Work Program (UWP) was approved by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Policy Committee at the May meeting. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are reviewing the UWP and final approval is expected in July. The UWP outlines the budget and activities for the MPO for the next fiscal year. Budget estimates for the UWP are provided by the MDOT and are allocated to program areas.

The UWP is a federally required document that is updated annually. Key elements include:

- **Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP):** The LRTP outlines plans for meeting long-term transportation needs with constrained finances including the use of local, state, and federal transportation goals and objectives to guide transportation plans and projects.
- **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP):** The primary purpose of the TIP is to identify

programs and projects to be funded with federal aid in accordance with federal law and the regulations of FHWA during the next three-year period.

- **Air Quality Planning:** Promote voluntary emission reduction activities through marketing and outreach programs.
- **Non-Motorized Planning:** Develop and expand non-motorized transportation options in the region.
- **Performance Measure Planning:** Identify and implement strategies that will aid in planning for the entire transportation network.
- **Public Involvement:** Support and facilitate early and continuing public involvement in the development and review of plans and programs.
- **Special Needs:** Seek out and consider the interests of people traditionally underserved by the existing transportation system.
- **Data Gathering:** Data collection for Highway Performance Monitoring Systems (HPMS) for eligibility of highway safety funds, based upon certified public road mileage, for road improvements.

New Transportation Improvement Program

The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Technical and Policy committees approved the draft FY2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) at the June meetings. Staff worked closely over the past year with member agencies to complete the document. The committees submitted and selected projects and approved several detailed information subsets like environmental justice, air quality analysis, and performance based planning targets.

The TIP is a short range planning document that covers a four-year span of project programming for the MPO area that covers Muskegon and Northern Ottawa counties. Projects identified in the TIP are generally road or transit related projects. Types of projects include bus purchases, traffic signal work, road resurfacing, road reconstruction, safety, economic development related, non-motorized, and projects that will reduce air quality emissions under the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) category. It is expected that the MPO will receive funding of approximately \$78 million in transportation projects in the FY2023-2026 timeframe. This funding will be distributed over approximately 135 projects in the MPO area.

The document now awaits approval from the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration to ensure compliance with state and federal laws.

Public participation was encouraged throughout the process and all MPO related documents and meeting information is available on the WMSRDC website at wmsrdc.org. A public review period for the TIP was held from May 10th through the 24th and a public open house regarding the TIP was held on May 17th.



Pandemic Response & Recovery Plan

After about a year of development, the WMSRDC Pandemic Response and Recovery Plan (PRRP) is now complete and available on the WMSRDC website. The plan is a product of CARES Act funding WMSRDC received from the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). See the article below for more information about the grant and other activities WMSRDC has taken to respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Three goals of the PRRP include: document local economic impacts of the pandemic; provide recommendations for short term economic response and economic recovery; and provide recommendations for future resilience to future economic disruptions.

Some highlights of the plan include pandemic impacts survey results, data and analysis of economic impacts of the pandemic, and case studies to show how local businesses have weathered the pandemic.

Over time, elements of the PRRP such as regional priorities for economic resilience will be incorporated into the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. In addition, certain data points of interest will be monitored through the ongoing CEDS planning process to obtain a true sense of economic impacts of the pandemic.

Overall, this effort will support regional economic pandemic recovery and contribute to economic resilience to be better prepared for the next major economic disruption.

Planning Grant Extension

WMSRDC received a six-month extension from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) for a planning grant that was awarded in July 2020 to help regions respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and enhance regional resilience to future economic disruptions.

The grant, which was made available through the federal CARES Act, has helped WMSRDC cope with the pandemic and enabled WMSRDC to dedicate additional economic development technical assistance to communities within the region. The funds have been used to develop a regional economic pandemic response and recovery plan (see article above); help facilitate and coordinate planning for broadband infrastructure; equip WMSRDC staff and workplace with tools for conducting business through the pandemic and weathering potential future disruptions; hire additional planning staff; and provide pandemic-related technical assistance to local governments within the region.

The CARES planning grant was originally set to end July 1, 2022. The extension will allow WMSRDC financial flexibility to continue to provide technical assistance, broadband facilitation, and maintain planning capacity for pandemic response and recovery through December 2022.



Celebrations for Muskegon Lake

May 24th kicked off big celebratory moments for Muskegon Lake. EPA Regional Administrator and Great Lakes National Program Manager Debra Shore; Carrie Robinson, director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation; Liesl Clark, director of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE); and City of Muskegon Mayor Ken Johnson gathered with community leaders at Heritage Landing to announce all management actions have been completed to delist Muskegon Lake as an Area of Concern (AOC).



AOC Conference the morning of May 25th.

Muskegon Lake was designated an AOC in 1985 due to ecological problems caused by historic sawmill debris, industrial discharges, shoreline development, and the filling of open water and coastal wetlands. Since then, many organizations have worked collaboratively to remediate contaminated sediments and restore native fish and wildlife habitats. Although cleanup work is complete, comprehensive environmental evaluations will continue to ensure the environmental quality of the lake improves over time. Once the lake meets applicable cleanup criteria, the process for removing the lake from the list of Areas of Concern can begin.

On May 24th and 25th, the annual AOC Conference was held in Muskegon. The conference was hosted by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The conference began with tours via bus, bike, foot, and boat, followed by a day and a half of learning, knowledge sharing, and networking in the VanDyk Mortgage Convention Center. With 308 people in attendance, the 2022 AOC Conference was the most attended AOC Conference to date. Polling from the conference attendees showed the conference was well received. Many attendees had wonderful positive comments, with the only common negative comment being that it was difficult to choose between all the great concurrent sessions.

Clean Air Action Season Has Begun



**WEST MICHIGAN
CLEAN AIR
ACTION!**

Summer is here and in West Michigan that also means it's Clean Air Action Season. WMSRDC remains an active partner of the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC) which is a partnership of businesses, academic institutions, government agencies, industry, and non-profit organizations in Kent, Ottawa, Muskegon, and Kalamazoo

counties working together to achieve cleaner air in the region through the education and promotion of voluntary emission reduction activities.

This summer, Clean Air Action public service announcements will be aired on local radio and television media, as well as on streaming networks. Staff will participate in media interviews and will attend community events to help spread the word about voluntary emission reduction activities such as using mass transit, carpooling, etc. To learn more, go to the WMCAC website at wmcac.org.



Community Hazards Surveys Available

WMSRDC, in partnership with local emergency management leaders, is working to update hazard mitigation plans for the West Michigan counties of Lake, Mason, and Oceana.

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. Hazard mitigation includes long-term solutions that reduce the impact of disasters in the future. Once hazard mitigation plans are approved by the Federal Emergency Management Administration and adopted locally, communities become eligible to apply for pre-disaster and post-disaster mitigation funding.

Public input is essential to identifying and planning for local hazards. An online survey has been created to collect comments from community members, leaders, and stakeholders. The survey may be accessed through the WMSRDC website: <https://wmsrdc.org/project/hazard-mitigation-plan-updates/>

The survey will be open through the summer, though participants are encouraged to complete the survey as soon as possible. In addition, public hearings will be held in Lake, Mason, and Oceana counties to provide additional opportunities for public input later in 2022. Once dates are identified, public notices will be published in local newspapers and noted on social media and the WMSRDC website.



Erosion at a residence on the Lake Michigan Shoreline in the City of Norton Shores, Muskegon County.

Muskegon River Watershed Tree Plantings

WMSRDC is wrapping up the most recent tree planting grant within the Muskegon River Watershed. A total of 265 trees have been planted in the cities of Muskegon and Roosevelt Park, and the townships of Cedar Creek and Dalton in Muskegon County, as well as the City of Fremont in Newaygo County. The grant is provided by the U.S. Forest Service in partnership with the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly.

Earlier this summer final monitoring of the tree plantings was completed and of the 265 trees planted only 17 did not survive. The trees that did not survive will be replaced later this fall with funds provided by this grant. Native Michigan type trees such as maple, oak, tulip tree, eastern redbud, serviceberry, dogwood, sycamore, arborvitae, linden, river birch and poplars were planted within parks in Muskegon County including Beegle Field, Campbell Field, Marsh Field, Margaret Elliot Drake Park, Padley Park, and Sheldon Field. Trees were also planted at Cedar Creek Township Hall and

See Trees continued on page 7



Mason County Mapping Projects

This summer, WMSRDC's GIS technician and interns will begin two cemetery mapping projects in the Mason County townships of Free Soil and Riverton.

Records for many older cemeteries exist in paper file formats like basic layout drawings showing locations of graves, etc. Through these projects, WMSRDC will help the communities maintain and preserve cemetery records. A digital database of individual graves and names will be created and a digital map of cemetery roads, lots, and graves will be plotted on an interactive, online map that will be available to the public. The online map will also include a picture of each grave marker when the specific grave is selected by the user.

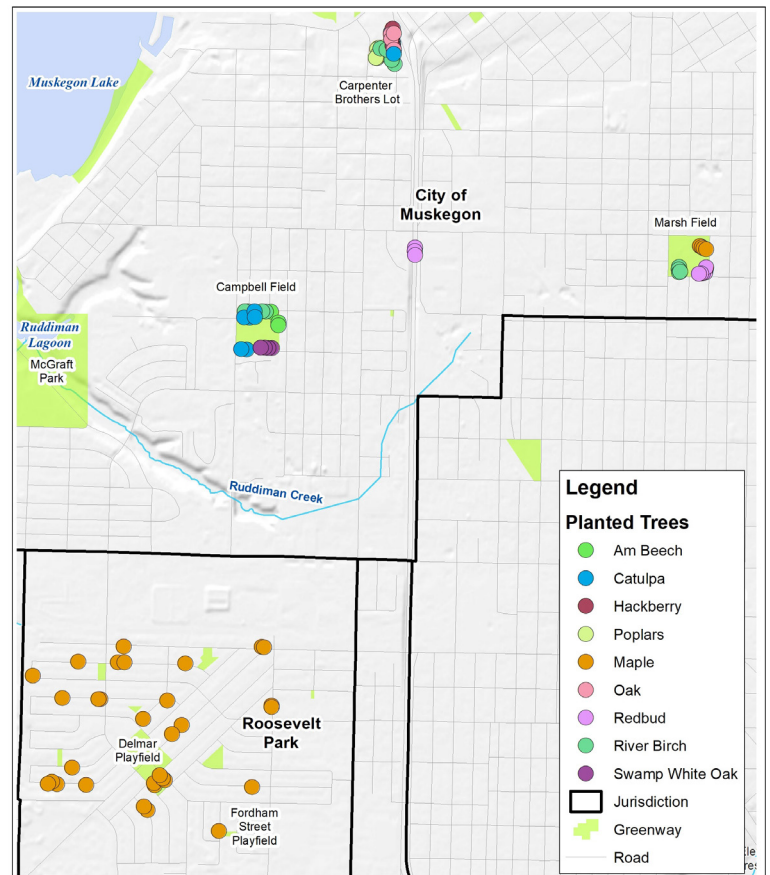
Most importantly, the aging and fragile paper files will no longer be the only source of the data for these cemeteries. The cemetery information will be preserved making future data maintenance easier and data usable to all. Both cemetery projects will be completed by the end of 2022. If you would like to find out more information about cemetery mapping or other mapping projects, please contact Jamie Way, GIS Technician at (231) 722-7878 ext 150.

Trees continued from page 6

transfer station. Trees were also planted within the new Cedar Street Extension in the City of Fremont, Newaygo County, and at the new FARM building on the Muskegon Community College campus.

This grant will conclude at the end of 2022 and will fund replacement of the trees that did not survive the initial plantings as well as allow for the spending of reserve funds that provide additional trees to sites at MERES natural area in the North Muskegon area. The focus of the tree planting grant is to use green infrastructure to reduce stormwater runoff, using trees to retain and filter water before entering the Muskegon River Watershed and Lake Michigan.

The map to the right shows the location of some of the tree plantings.



Oceana County

(continued from page 2)

ranking system which provides data that allows transportation officials to monitor, plan, and strategically improve the road network. In addition, WMSRDC assists in the administration of the Rural Transportation Task Force for the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana.

Lake Michigan Rivers and Coastal Wetlands Regional Partnership: WMSRDC entered the Lake Michigan Rivers and Coastal Wetlands Regional Partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for fish passage and stream habitat restoration projects. Currently there are two ongoing projects in Oceana County. The White River project will replace three road stream crossings in Swinton Creek and one in Cushman Creek and restore 1,000 feet of instream habitat. The Stony Creek project at Marshville Dam Park includes dam remnant removal, removal of two old bridges and three culverts, a bridge replacement, and 500 feet of instream habitat replacement.

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, Mayor, City of Muskegon
James Kelly, WMSRDC Appointee
Bryan Kolk, Newaygo County Commissioner
Andrea Large, WMSRDC Appointee
Roger Morgenstern, Councilperson, City of Norton Shores
Phil Morse, Oceana County Commissioner
James Rynberg, Mayor, 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

WMSRDC

316 Morris Ave. Suite 340 Muskegon, MI 49440

(231) 722-7878 wmsrdc.org

