

Commission Quarterly

Navigating Broadband

According to the Michigan High-Speed Internet Office (MIHI), access to affordable high-speed internet has become a necessity in our professional, personal, and social lives. People who lack connectivity miss out on online learning, healthcare, and economic opportunities. MIHI was established by Governor Whitmer in June 2021, and has an ambitious charge to achieve two statewide goals:

- Ensure that high-speed internet access is available to every home, business, institution, and community
- Ensure 95% of Michigan households adopt a permanent home internet connection

As a regional planning agency committed to supporting local governments, WMSRDC is well-positioned to facilitate communication between state and federal interests, local stakeholders, and internet service providers (ISPs). Economic development, community development, and infrastructure asset management programs all have strong ties to aspects of broadband planning, including access, adoption, and use.

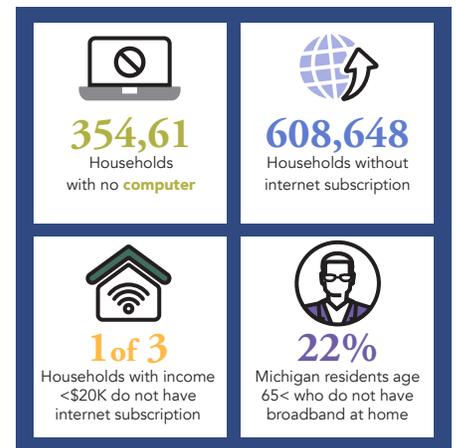
Although broadband has been a regional economic development priority for many years, especially in rural areas, the COVID-19 pandemic brought it to the forefront of economic and community

development. WMSRDC is committed to supporting local broadband planning and implementation efforts in the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. An ad hoc committee of county-level representatives has been established to encourage local networking between counterparts and facilitate the exchange of information regarding broadband opportunities and resources as they become available. This committee meets on demand as issues arise.

WMSRDC has also offered to be a central point of contact between the MIHI office and local units of government in the region. In recent months, WMSRDC has helped MIHI promote its “MI Connected Future” statewide listening tour. This massive undertaking will provide Michiganders an opportunity to share perspectives that will help prioritize the investment of about \$1.6 billion to deliver affordable, equitable, and reliable highspeed internet service throughout the state. Two tour stops were scheduled within the WMSRDC region: City of Muskegon (April 11) and Village of Baldwin (April 12). Communities that were not selected for a tour stop are able to request a “meeting-in-a-box” with which to host their own community broadband meeting.

For more information, the MIHI office maintains a thorough,

up-to-date website at <https://www.michigan.gov/leo/bureaus-agencies/mihi>. In addition, broadband questions and comments may be directed to Stephen Carlson, Program Manager, at scarlson@wmsrdc.org. As long as there is a need, WMSRDC is committed to supporting broadband planning and helping to bring resources to communities in the region.



U.S. Census Bureau (2022) 2020 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates Detailed Tables

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Economic Development: Updates on projects within the program (Broadband, Technical Assistance, and CEDS)

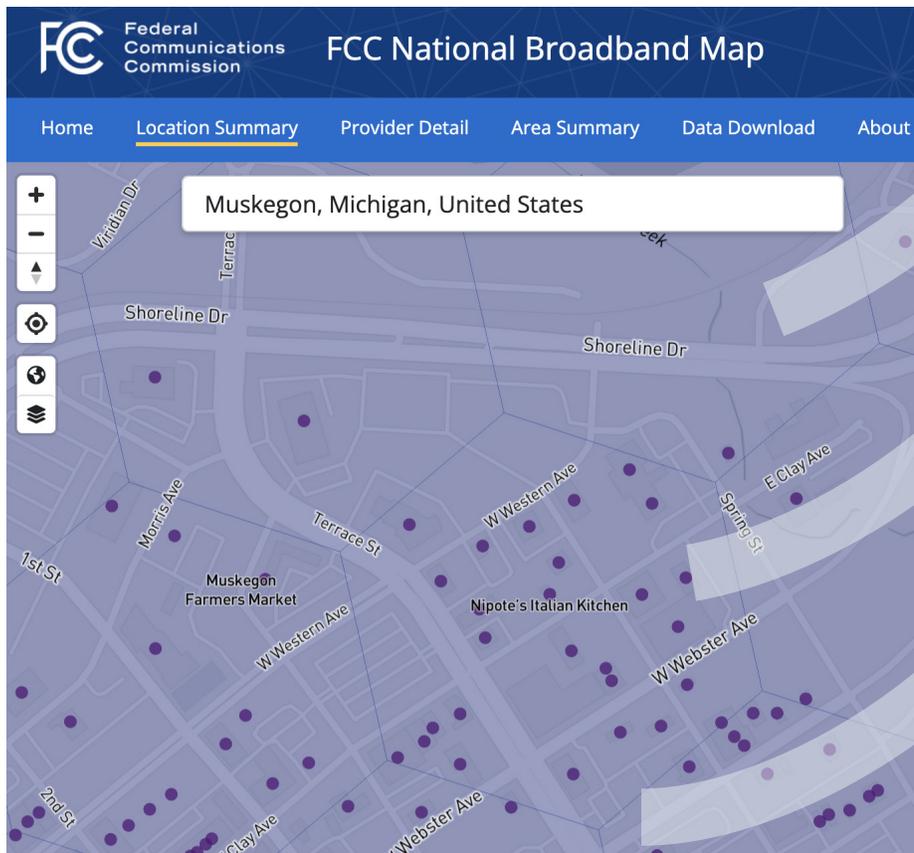
Broadband Update (in addition to information presented on the front page): In January, WMSRDC helped to coordinate local review of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) National Broadband Map. This concerted effort was needed to ensure an accurate representation of high-speed internet availability in Michigan. It was important, considering federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) allocations at the state level were largely based on the FCC maps to determine underserved and unserved areas. At this point, although BEAD allocations have been made, FCC maps remain available for review and challenge. The FCC map is expected to con-

tinue to play a critical role in future broadband funding allocations. Therefore residents, businesses, and institutions are still encouraged to review and submit a challenge if the map at their address is incorrect. To get started, go to <https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/home>.

Technical Assistance Update: WMSRDC staff recently provided Lake County with technical assistance to develop and submit a potentially impactful project application for Economic Development Administration (EDA) assistance. As proposed, the project would increase economic development capacity in Lake County for up to three years and enable the county to hire a

consultant to lead the community through a thorough planning and visioning process.

CEDS Update: The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) update process is underway with county-level SWOT analyses having been conducted in Mason County, Muskegon County, and Newaygo County. Staff also conducted a facilitated discussion with the WMSRDC Board on March 27. All SWOTs will be completed and compiled into a regional profile and presented at the upcoming quarterly CEDS Strategy Committee meeting scheduled for April 28.



Screenshot of the FCC National Broadband Map

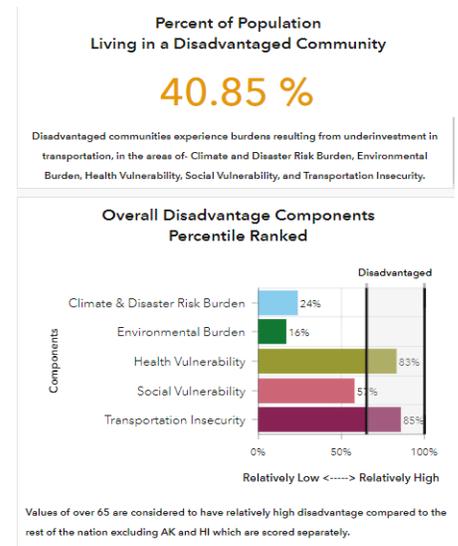
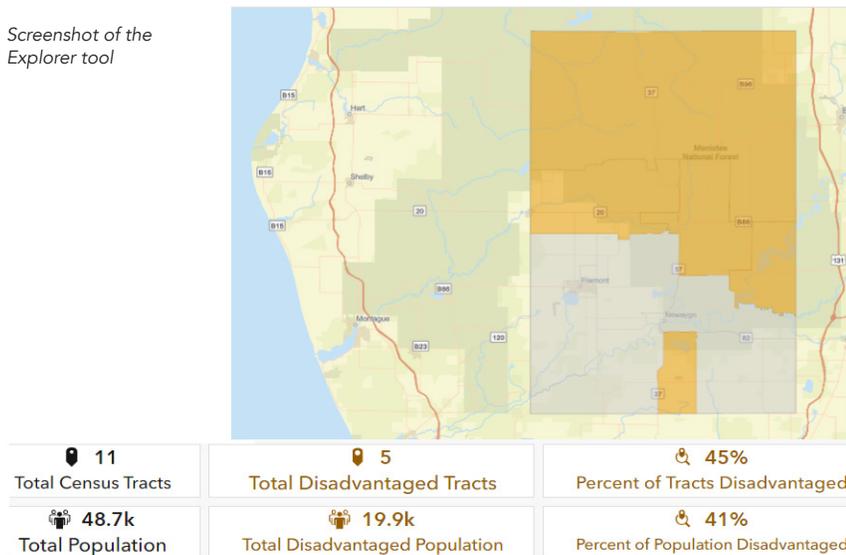
GIS Mapping: Equitable Transportation Community Explorer Tool

Transportation staff recently received training on the United States Department of Transportation’s (US DOT) Equitable Transportation Community Explorer tool (Explorer). Explorer is an interactive web application that explores the disadvantaged

communities’ experience resulting from underinvestment in transportation, climate and disaster risks, environmental issues, and health vulnerability along with other criteria. Explorer uses newly available 2020 Census tracts and data while adding additional

indicators to calculate disadvantage. This tool can be explored at: <https://www.transportation.gov/equity-Justice40>. Click on the “US DOT Equitable Transportation Community Explorer” link to utilize the tool

Screenshot of the Explorer tool



Transportation: Regionwide Coordinated Transportation Plan

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) held a regional forum on March 9th focused on updating the Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Region. WMSRDC is assisting the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) and the Michigan Department of Transportation, Office of Passenger Transportation (MDOT OPT), in the development of the plan. MDOT OPT has engaged KFH Group for writing the plan.

This plan will identify mobility needs and potential improvements in the region — particularly for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes. The forum was well attended

with participants from WMSRDC’s five-county region as well as representatives from northern Ottawa County. (Northern Ottawa County is part of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) administered by WMSRDC.) Input from a wide range of stakeholders is a key component in this study. Representatives from transit agencies, Area Agencies on Aging, economic development professionals, and various local governments were in attendance to provide valuable input.

The next steps involve KFH Group representatives conducting interviews with local stakeholders who were unable to attend the March 9th forum. These interviews will

include transit staff, human service agencies, providers of services for older adults, individuals with disabilities, individuals with lower incomes, and veterans to gain their input on needs, gaps in service, and barriers to coordination. A second online forum will be held in roughly two months. KFH Group will present recommendations from the initial workshop and from the overall study process.

If you would like to be involved in this planning process, please take a few minutes to complete the stakeholder questionnaire available through the following link - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MISStakeholderQuestionnaire>. Your input is valuable and will be incorporated into the draft plan for the region.

Environmental: Muskegon Lake: Avoiding an Erie Situation

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) have become an increasing water quality concern in the Great Lakes, particularly in communities located on relatively shallow Great Lakes water bodies and bays. Scientific monitoring has shown that recent blooms on Muskegon Lake have produced the toxin associated with HABs. As a catalyst for a broader community conversation on ways to prevent and address harmful algal blooms in West Michigan, the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC), Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership (MLWP), Great Lakes Outreach Media, Plastic Oceans, Grand Valley State University Annis Water Resources Institute (GVSU AWRI), and Muskegon Community College (MCC) hosted an event titled “Muskegon Lake: Avoiding an Erie Situation,” to discuss eutrophication and undesirable algae at the Frauenthal Theater on Thursday, February 23rd. The event was made possible by the WMSRDC with funding from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI).

“Muskegon Lake: Avoiding an Erie Situation,” featured the award-winning film *The Erie Situation*, followed by a panel of experts from MLWP, GVSU AWRI, Great Lakes Outreach Media, Muskegon River Watershed Assembly, Alliance for the Great Lakes, Public Health Muskegon County, and Earthscape Farms to answer audience questions and discuss what has been, and is, being done to curb nutrient discharges into surface waters.



photo courtesy: *The Erie Situation*, go to <https://www.theeriesituation.com>



A portion of the 400 audience members in attendance at Muskegon Lake: Avoiding an Erie Situation.

If you were not able to be one of the roughly 400 community members in attendance, a recording of the question and answer period can be found on MCC’s YouTube page at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=632N-QnarXg>. For more on the film including additional viewing sessions, go to <https://www.theeriesituation.com>.

If you are interested in helping clean up Muskegon Lake, a great introductory event is the Muskegon Lake Annual Spring Clean-up scheduled for Sunday, April 23rd from 8 am to noon. This event welcomes community members of all ages. No pre-registration is required. Volunteers are asked to meet at the CIO Hall, 490 W. Western Ave., Downtown Muskegon, MI 49440 for pre-cleanup refreshments and guidance from event leaders. For more information visit the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership Facebook page.

Environmental: Construction Ready!

The WMSRDC Environmental Program is anxiously waiting warm weather and a few permits to start construction at several restoration sites. The Little Cedar Creek project will see the replacement of the road stream culverts. The White River project will begin construction at two of the four road stream crossings. The Stony Creek project will begin removal of the remnant at Marshville Dam, replacement of the three culvert crossing with an open span timber bridge, and restoration of the stream habitat. The Boys and Girls Club project will restore and protect the Muskegon Lake shoreline. Finally, the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve will wrap up funding with some finishing touches this summer. Big thank you to our funders National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Great Lakes Commission (GLC), and project

partners Muskegon County Road Commission, Oceana County Road Commission, Conservation Resource Alliance, Oceana County Parks, Grand Valley State University Annis Waters Resources Institute, the Boys and Girls Club, GEI Consultants, and the Muskegon Environment, Research, and Education Society (MERES)!



Section of Little Cedar Creek between the culvert that will be replaced.



The box culvert at Roosevelt Road and Cushman Creek, a tributary of the White River, will be replaced with an open span timber bridge.



A wrap-up project at the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve is anchoring this cattail mat away from the bridge to maintain hydrologic connection.

Special Projects: MIC Forum and Survey

The Michigan Infrastructure Council (MIC) is in the process of developing a 30-year Infrastructure Strategy for the State of Michigan. The strategy is a legislative requirement of the MIC and will be Michigan's first long-term integrated infrastructure plan for transportation, drinking water/wastewater, and energy. The strategy will strengthen Michigan's leadership in systematic, holistic infrastructure management and planning by: reinforcing a common language and culture of integrated asset management; reflecting on new challenges and opportunities; and identifying and applying new best practices. As part of the process, MIC is utilizing a variety of opportunities to seek input from local asset owners as well as the general public.

To reach asset owners across the state, MIC, in partnership with the Michigan Association of Regions

(MAR), is hosting nine regional workshops across the state this spring. The workshops will enable stakeholders from across the state to identify, shape, and prioritize strategies and actions that will be included in the strategy. These forums are targeted toward public and private asset owners, MIC asset management champions, elected officials, and state agency representatives.

A public survey is available for

the citizens of Michigan to complete and allow the MIC to take their thoughts and opinions into consideration in the development of the strategy. Visit the strategy section of the MIC website at <https://www.michigan.gov/mic/30-year-integrated-infrastructure-strategy> to take the survey and learn more about the regional forums. WMSRDC's Executive Director is a governor appointee to the MIC and currently serves as Vice-Chair.



MIC website at <https://www.michigan.gov/mic/30-year-integrated-infrastructure-strategy>

Commission Operations: MAR Training & NADO Conference

Three WMSRDC staff members attended a Local Government Finance training workshop in Lansing on February 28 through March 2. The training was hosted by the Michigan Association of Regions (MAR) and conducted by Ball State University. The training took a deep dive into how local governments in Michigan financially operate and was part of a program of capacity building workshops for regional planning agencies. The training program was made possible by an Economic



Development Administration (EDA) grant to Ball State University.

continued on page 7

MAR Training & NADO

Conference *continued from page 6*

The WMSRDC Executive Director attended the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Washington Policy Conference held in Arlington, VA on March 12 through 15. The conference focused on regional development, the federal landscape, and the programs and policies that matter most to Regional Development Organizations (RDOs) from across that country. Over the course of the conference, the more than 400 in attendance heard presentations from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Department of Energy regarding federal funding and initiatives. There were also several breakout sessions addressing infrastructure, strengthening regional economic development, climate change, rural challenges, equity in underserved communities, workforce development, and a number of networking opportunities.

Local Government Services: Updates

In January, WMSRDC wrapped up a project to update the Newaygo County Recreation Plan. The county will be eligible to apply for certain types of recreation funding through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources through the year 2027. Elsewhere, work has continued on the Oceana County Master Plan and Recreation Plan updates. Staff coordinated with the Oceana County Planning Commission to solicit input from the public through a public meeting, a facilitated discussion with the Community Foundation for Oceana County's Youth Advisory Council, and over 90 responses through an online questionnaire. The last project of note, field work for the White River Economic Impact Assessment will resume in April. WMSRDC had commissioned the study through Grand Valley State University. The project is expected to be complete this summer and will provide information to help demonstrate the economic value of the White River to communities where it flows.



Sunset over Sandy Beach County Park, Newaygo, Michigan



Dragon Trail at Hardy Dam



White River at Pines Point Campground, Hesperia, Michigan



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