

annual report

2023



**WEST MI  
SHORELINE**

Regional Development Commission

## mission statement

*The Commission's mission is to "promote and foster regional development in West Michigan through cooperation amongst local governments and regional partners."*

### Why/How/What Statements

The following statements were developed by the Commission staff in the spring of 2020 as an organization-wide project to expand upon the Commission's mission statement. "We" in the statements refer to the Commission and its staff.

#### WHY do we do what we do?

We believe that West Michigan is an amazing place with tremendous opportunity, and that regional planning improves the quality of life for all West Michigan residents. Therefore, we are passionate about helping the region reach its full potential and committed to do our part to make a difference in the place we call "home."

#### "HOW do we do it?"

By leveraging the programs of the Commission and utilizing staff expertise to provide local resources through cross jurisdictional collaborative partnerships, involvement of diverse stakeholders, and empowerment of local decision makers.

#### WHAT do we do?

Perform local, state, and federal planning functions through administering programs in transportation, economic development, environmental, and local government services that provides funding and project eligibility to our region.

## equity statement

The Commission defines equity as the intentional inclusion of everyone in society. Equity is achieved when systemic, institutional, and historical barriers based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities and abilities are dismantled and no longer predict socioeconomic, education, and health outcomes.

The Commission recognizes structural racism and other forms of oppression have contributed to persistent disparities which the Commission seeks to dismantle within its region. The Commission strives to engage

community members, especially those whose voices have traditionally been marginalized. The Commission works with local governments, residents, and public and private partners to provide resources, support, and opportunities that create prosperous and thriving communities for all citizens.

The Commission also strives to provide a work environment that recognizes individual differences, is free from discrimination, and is respectful of the rights and dignity

*"The Lake's Edge" sculpture located along the Grand River channel in Grand Haven.*

of all individuals. The Commission has built its reputation on the foundations of excellence and integrity, and expects its employees to exhibit behaviors consistent with these standards.

Therefore, the Commission commits to leveraging our resources and assets to create more equitable communities through the programs it administers, as well as to develop racially conscious partnerships and processes that anticipate unintended outcomes to ensure the inclusion of all people in the region and organization.

## director's message

As I read through the articles in this annual report, I am reminded of the valuable work this agency conducts behind the scenes and unknown by many of those that benefit from that work. I heard someone once describe the work of a regional planning agency as "being the key to unlock state and federal funding and resources." Much of the work we do is just that, conducting required planning and administrative services so local governments and agencies can access funding and resources. As trivial and unnecessary as some might think these planning requirements and exercises are, they are indeed required to bring valuable funds and resources to maintain and grow our region's viability.

Below is a list of activities and funds that came into the region in 2023 because of the work done by WMSRDC:

### Transportation

- \$36 million direct to transportation agencies within the MPO
- \$5 million direct to transportation agencies within the Rural Task Force
- Nearly \$800,000 direct to transportation agencies in the Ludington and White Lake Small Urban Areas
- PASER Ratings for 100% of the Federal Aid Eligible Road System in the region (2,209.13 miles)
- Non-motorized trail technical assistance
- U.S. 31/Grand Haven Study and Transit Governance Study

### Economic Development

- Five (5) active EDA grant projects totaling more than \$3.4 million directly to local governments/agencies
- Numerous hours of providing technical assistance for local project and grant application development

### Environmental

- Nearly \$4 million of environmental projects
- Staffing the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership
- Coordination of the West Michigan Watershed Partners

### Local Government Service/GIS

- Preparation of two (2) county recreation plans and one county master plan
- Preparation of three (3) county hazard mitigation plans
- Completion of Cemetery mapping for two (2) townships
- Creation of comprehensive drain and drain district map data for the Oceana County Darin Commission

This list is not comprehensive of all WMSRDC activities but demonstrates the positive impact the agency had in the region last year alone. I believe it is even more impressive that all this work was accomplished by a staff of nine very talented and dedicated individuals.

I want to thank the staff for their hard work and continued professionalism. I also want to thank the WMSRDC Board of Directors for their ongoing support and guidance. Let's keep up the great work!

**Erin Kuhn, Executive Director**



Mill Pond Creek  
in Whitehall

## environmental

### Lake Michigan Rivers and Coastal Wetlands Regional Partnership

In 2020, WMSRDC entered the Lake Michigan Rivers and Coastal Wetlands Regional Partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This partnership offered up to \$14 million for fish passage and stream habitat restoration projects through 2025. In 2021, three projects were selected for funding. 2023 saw the completion of each engineering and design phase and various levels of work within the implementation phases. The Little Cedar Creek project replaced two road stream crossings in the Little Cedar Creek watershed in addition to the restored 500 feet of instream habitat completed in 2022. The White River project replaced two road stream crossings in Swinton Creek. In 2024, the White River Project will continue with an additional road stream crossing replacement in Swinton Creek, one road stream crossing replacement in Cushman Creek, and 1,000 feet of instream habitat restoration in Swinton Creek. The Stony Creek project at Marshville Dam Park is set to begin efforts to remove the dam remnant, replace an old bridge and three culverts with a single open span timber bridge, and repair 500 feet of instream habitat in April of 2024. Project partners for the three projects include NOAA, Muskegon County Road Commission, Oceana County Road Commission, Grand Valley State University Annis

Water Resources Institute, Conservation Resource Alliance, Oceana County Parks, watershed groups, and private landowners.

### Muskegon Lake Area of Concern

Following the 2022 announcement of all management actions complete for the delisting of the Muskegon Lake Area of Concern, 2023 saw a reduced number of projects under WMSRDC's partnership with the Great Lakes Commission and NOAA through funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). These projects included the continuation of long-term monitoring at the Amoco site, the wrap-up of implementation activities at the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve, and the engineering and design of over 500 feet of shoreline restoration at the Boys and Girls Club. 2024 will be the final year of long-term monitoring of the Amoco site, and permits are being gathered to begin the Boys and Girls Club shoreline restoration in the spring.

### Reforestation for Restoration, Resilience, and Recreation

As a partnering member of the MLWP, WMSRDC was awarded one year of funding for Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership Student & Neighborhood Engagement from EGLE under Watershed Council Support. The project included partnering with Orchard View Middle School to implement a student-led tree planting of 15 trees, preventing 885

gallons of urban stormwater runoff from entering Ryerson and Four Mile Creek. The project also engaged neighborhood associations and other community members regarding their interest in new tree locations. Although the community was supportive of trees, there was great concern regarding the maintenance of dead and dying trees within the community. Taking this feedback into account, WMSRDC and the City of Muskegon have collaborated on funding proposals to assess the current urban tree canopies and plan for how to continue to improve tree canopy resiliency. Additional project partners included the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District, Muskegon Community College, the Muskegon Conservation District, and the City of Muskegon.

Under funds from the DTE Energy Foundation Tree Planting Grant Program, WMSRDC provided 50 trees of differing species to replace the trees that were damaged by high water levels at the Muskegon State Park Channel Campground. This project was initiated by Rebecca Sandee and her Reeths Puffer classroom, who raised funds for student and volunteer transportation, waterbags, tree protection and support materials, mulch, and other related costs. The project culminated on May 31, as roughly 50 students planted all 50 trees under the guidance of DNR staff, Reeths Puffer teachers, and parent volunteers.



Removed White River culvert next to the new culvert that replaced it during fall 2023 construction.



Orchard View Middle School students and project partners planting trees

## air quality and communications

**Clean Air Action** WMSRDC continued to be an active partner of the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC). Formed over twenty-five years ago, the WMCAC remains a strong partnership of business, academic institutions, government agencies, industry, and non-profit organizations in Muskegon, Kent, and Ottawa counties. These partners work together to achieve cleaner air in the region through the education and promotion of voluntary emission reduction activities. Among other outreach activities, an extensive television public education campaign continued in 2023 highlighting voluntary actions people can take on Clean Air Action days. During the 2023 season, a new commercial aired in the West Michigan viewing area featuring local meteorologists from WZZM TV 13, WOOD TV 8, and WXMI Fox 17. This public service announcement was used to promote the actions that should be taken during Clean Air Action days. The announcement aired on each station involved, streaming television, social media, and other information outlets.

At the beginning of the 2023 calendar year, Amy Haack retired from WMSRDC after nearly 25 years of service. Robert Johnson filled her position. The annual Clean Air Action kick-off picnic was held at Johnson Park in Grand Rapids on May 11 featuring presentations from EGLE and JustAir. Additionally, staff at WMSRDC continued active participation in the planning of WMCAC Steering Committee meetings and activities.

In the summer of 2023, smoke from Canadian wildfires impacted much of the Midwest. As a result, West Michigan had the earliest clean air action day in its history on April 14 with particulate matter (PM) 2.5, a fine particulate matter that in high volumes can be unsafe for humans. The Canadian wildfires released a large amount of PM 2.5 into the air causing a total of 20 clean air action days from April 14 through August 24. Twelve of those action days were called because of high ozone levels, while the other eight were due to elevated PM 2.5 levels from the wildfires.

**U.S. Census Affiliate** U.S. Census Affiliate WMSRDC continued to fulfill its duties as a U.S. Census Bureau Affiliate. WMSRDC strives to keep the WMSRDC website up to date with the latest links and most recently released data from the Census Bureau and other data products.

### Clean Air Action days...



...don't mow...



...don't fuel...



...take the bus.



Bald eagle hunting along  
Muskegon River  
in Newaygo County

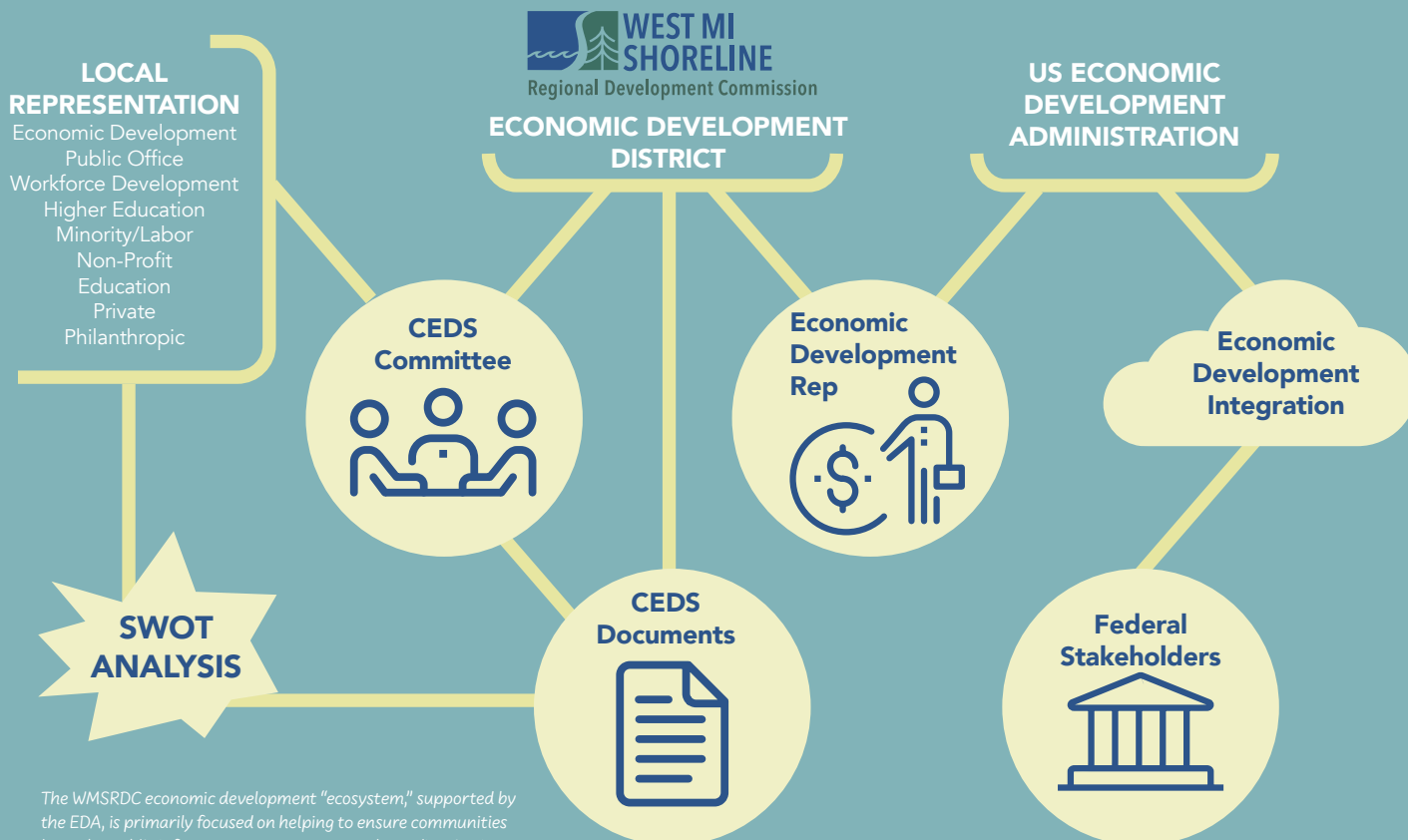
## economic development

2023 was the first year of a three-year planning grant awarded to WMSRDC by the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). For decades, WMSRDC has leveraged this federal support to prepare, maintain, and implement the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and provide economic development technical assistance to local communities. The CEDS is required for entities within the region to apply for EDA assistance, and to maintain the region's "Economic Development District" designation. A core component of the WMSRDC economic development program is to provide economic development technical assistance to local communities. This includes helping communities navigate the EDA grant application process; from vetting ideas, to crafting applications, to accepting and managing grants.

Over the past year, WMSRDC economic development activities included implementation of the CEDS, initiation of the CEDS five-year update process, hosting CEDS committee meetings, and provision of technical assistance to EDA grantees within the region. In addition to the partnership planning grant, there were an astounding five EDA-funded projects ongoing throughout the region in 2023.

- Lake County Economic Diversification Planning and Capacity
- Muskegon Heights Industrial Park Planning
- Muskegon County Broadband Gap Analysis
- Oceana County Economic Diversification and Workforce Planning
- City of Hart Wastewater Improvements

WMSRDC was also instrumental in enabling completion of the Economic Assessment of the White River conducted by Grand Valley State University (GVSU). On behalf of the White River Watershed Collaborative, WMSRDC successfully raised requisite funds and managed a contract with GVSU to see the project to completion. Simply put, the initiative evaluated the economic impact of the White River on local communities through assessment of river-based recreation and property values. Information gathered will be leveraged to improve natural qualities of the White River and enhance economic opportunities in the counties of Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. The assessment was completed in October 2023 and is available to view on the WMSRDC website.



*The WMSRDC economic development "ecosystem," supported by the EDA, is primarily focused on helping to ensure communities have the public infrastructure, resources, and coordination in place to foster economic development.*

## rural and regional transportation

### Rural Task Force and Small Urban Program Update

After an unusual year in 2022, due to increased funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act (BIL), the Rural Task Force returned to a more normal schedule in 2023. The committee met only twice in 2023, once in April and once in December. With the new funding provided through the BIL, the Task Force receives approximately \$5 million in combined Federal and State funding per year.

Typical projects funded through this program include road construction, road maintenance, and transit capital purchases. WMSRDC assists in the administration of the Rural Transportation Task Force for the counties of Muskegon, Oceana, Newaygo, Lake, and Mason. Looking ahead for 2024, the Rural Task Force committee members will begin considering

projects for the upcoming FY2026-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

In other news, the Fremont area rejoins the ranks of being a designated Small Urban Area, along with existing Small Urban Areas in Ludington and Whitehall. The Fremont Area was a Small Urban Area prior to the 2010 Census but was removed from the list after that Census. Due to changes in designation criteria, the Fremont area was redesignated after the 2020 Census. Each of the three Small Urban Areas receive \$385,000 every other year in funding. Projects are chosen by committee members made up of local road agencies and transit providers.

### Asset Management

In a typical year, WMSRDC staff, along with MDOT and county road commission staff, collect condition information for the federal aid roads

within Region 14 as well as northern Ottawa County. The data collection effort requires the collection of three items: road condition rating, surface type, and the number of lanes. WMSRDC staff successfully completed ratings on 100% of the federal aid eligible roads within Lake, Mason, Oceana, Newaygo, Muskegon, and northern Ottawa County. In addition to rating the Federal Aid roads, WMSRDC staff also rated local roads for the City of Muskegon.

Five staff members attended the fall Asset Management Conference which was held in Grand Rapids on September 26. Highlights included presentations on asset management best practices as well as discussions on using asset management for infrastructure project coordination.



Road construction  
in Oceana County

## metropolitan planning organization

### The West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program

The West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program (WestPlan) is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Muskegon County and parts of Northern Ottawa County. The MPO is responsible for the planning and programming of projects and studies throughout the MPO area and administers a comprehensive transportation planning program to assist in planning for state and federal transportation funding for road and transit improvements. Member road and transit agencies are represented through the MPO Technical and Policy Committees, while WMSRDC serves as staff to these committees. The MPO committees, along with valuable input from the public, develop long and short-range planning documents that help to guide the transportation network investment in the region and beyond to neighboring MPO's. The plans and planning process are crucial for allocating federal transportation dollars to local projects.

### 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program

In FY2023, the MPO worked under the newly adopted FY2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP covers a four-year span of project programming for the WestPlan area. The TIP includes federally funded transportation projects that will be completed in Muskegon County and Northern Ottawa County. Projects identified in the TIP are primarily road construction type projects, which are generally either reconstruction or resurface projects. There are also transit and marketing projects, as well as non-motorized and Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) projects that include signal projects, bus purchases, and trail projects. Projects in the plan are constantly updated and amended through the MPO process. The MPO committees amended the TIP eight times in FY2023, with many of the changes coming from cost increases and securing additional funding sources for the projects. In FY2023, there were \$36,325,923 committed to the projects listed in the TIP, with \$27,383,928 of that coming from the current federal transportation bill. New estimates from the FY2023-2026 TIP show a total investment of more than \$146,000,000 towards transit, highway, and non-motorized projects in the area.

### 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update

WMSRDC staff worked to update the MPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) which was formerly referred to as the Long Range Plan. The MTP is a federally required document that provides for a multi-jurisdictional, multi-year look at the Muskegon and Northern Ottawa area and the future transportation system. Used as a guide for investment of public funds, the document plans for 20+ years of strategy and capital improvements to the transportation system within the MPO area. The MPO Technical and Policy Committees worked with staff to develop project lists for the plan. With those projects, staff were able to work with MDOT to develop modeling scenarios and to analyze the projects for potential Environmental Mitigation and Environmental Justice implications. The models were developed to show areas of potential deficiencies and projects that might improve air quality in the region. This information is important to aid in planning for future transportation investments. The 2050 MTP is expected to be completed and approved by the MPO Committees in April 2024.



Train traveling North along Shoreline  
Drive near downtown Muskegon



MATS Herman Ivory Terminal in  
downtown Muskegon



LST/Mart Dock

## local government services

One role of WMSRDC is to help local governments fulfill state and federal planning responsibilities. WMSRDC strives to do this in a respectable and affordable manner to provide a valuable service for our member communities. This program also helps promote a regional mindset and collaborative environment. In 2023, WMSRDC had a full slate of local government activities:

### **Oceana County Planning:**

WMSRDC was engaged in a wide range of initiatives in Oceana County, including economic development technical assistance, transportation planning, environmental planning, and community development. WMSRDC worked with Oceana County's planning commission and parks and recreation commission to update the county's master and recreation plans concurrently. Both will be completed in early 2024.

### **Newaygo County Recreation Plan:**

WMSRDC guided the Newaygo County parks and recreation commission through the process of conducting a five-year update of the

county's recreation plan. This project was completed in January 2023.

### **Hazard Mitigation:**

Throughout 2023, WMSRDC worked diligently to update hazard mitigation plans for the counties of Oceana, Lake, and Mason. Disasters can cause loss of life, damage buildings and infrastructure, and lead to devastating consequences for a community's economic, social, and environmental well-being. As an important component of emergency management, hazard mitigation lessens the impact of disasters and helps interrupt the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage. Having a hazard mitigation plan increases awareness of hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities; identifies actions for risk reduction; and focuses local resources on the greatest risks while communicating priorities to state and federal



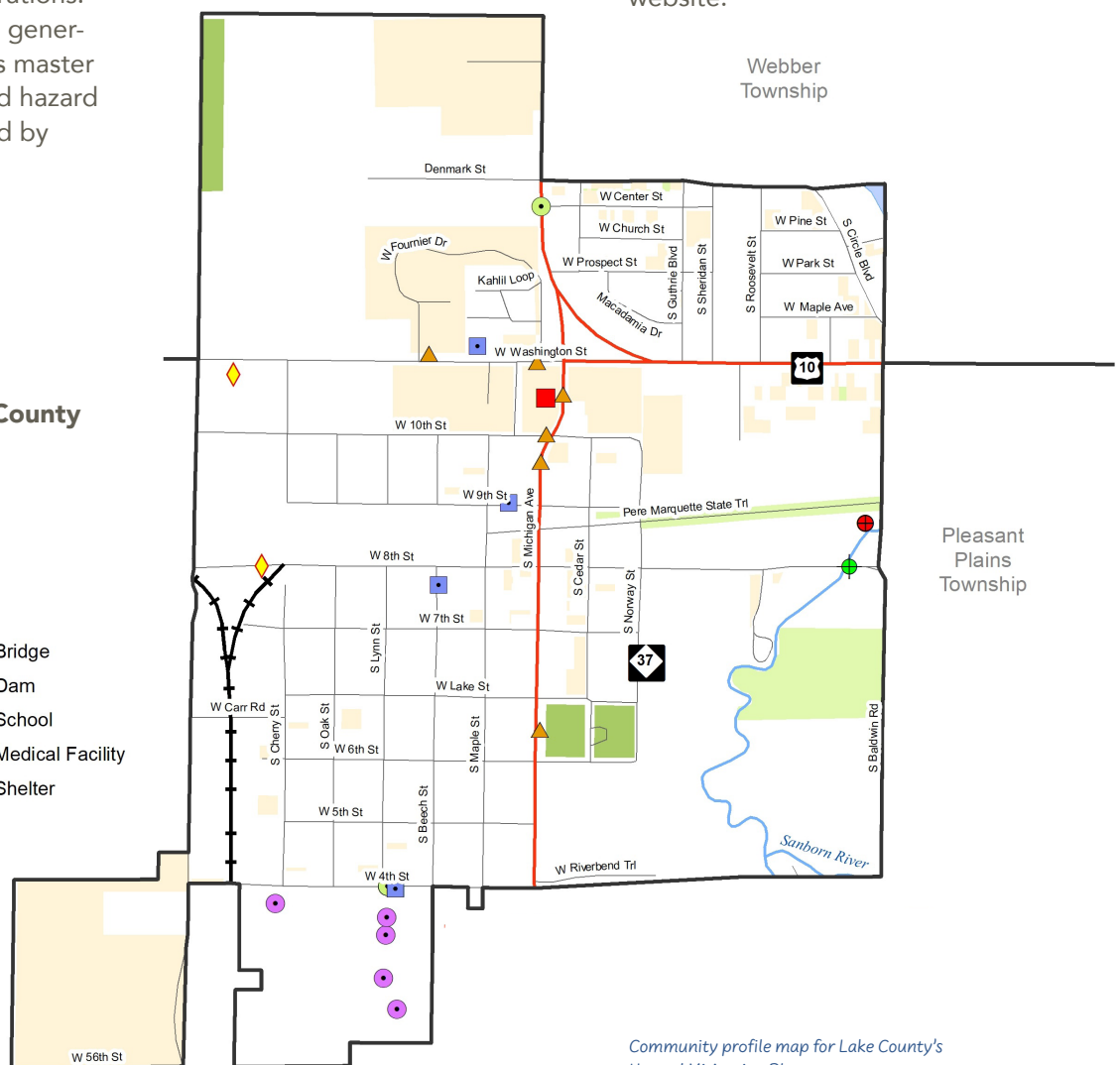
officials. Hazard mitigation plans are required to be updated every five years and are required for communities to access certain types of pre-disaster and post-disaster hazard mitigation funding. Draft plans for the three counties were completed in the fall of 2023 and are in the process of being reviewed and approved by both the Michigan State Police (MSP) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The federal, state, and local approval process is expected to be complete in early 2024.

*Geese swimming in White River located in Muskegon County*



WMSRDC has contracted with project partners on completed GIS projects to maintain the maps and associated data through annual maintenance agreements. The first of these agreements was completed in 2023 for the Veterans Causeway Memorial Park markers and will continue into 2024. The maps are updated as new veteran walkway markers are placed in the park. The goal of these maintenance agreements is to ensure the maps contain the most up-to-date information for project partners and the public. Most of the WMSRDC program maps and local cemetery maps can be viewed from the WMSRDC website.

State Trunkline  
 Road  
 Railroad  
 Fire/Police/EMS/911  
 Correctional Facility  
 Bridge  
 Dam  
 School  
 Medical Facility  
 Shelter  
 Federal Land  
 State Land  
 Municipal Land  
 SARA Title III Site



Community profile map for Lake County's  
Hazard Mitigation Plan

# financials

REVENUES	2022	2023
<b>Intergovernmental revenues</b>		
Federal	1,961,084	1,831,789
State	286,517	178,596
Local	249,282	345,871
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>2,496,883</b>	<b>2,356,256</b>

## EXPENDITURES

<b>Current</b>		
Land use planning	101,248	143,927
Regional initiatives	81,727	8,108
Economic development	238,495	129,876
Transportation planning	769,356	786,439
Environmental clean-up	1,249,117	1,165,345
Administration	3,112	15,719
<b>Capital outlay</b>	<b>228,322</b>	<b>29,931</b>
<b>Debit service</b>		
Principal	15,792	39,389
Interest and fees	2,360	10,711
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>2,689,529</b>	<b>2,329,445</b>
Excess of revenues over (under) expenditures	(192,646)	26,811

## OTHER FINANCING SOURCES

<b>Proceeds from lease obligations</b>	228,322	-
Net change in fund balance	35,676	26,811

Fund balance at beginning of year	377,629	413,305
<b>Fund balance at end of year</b>	<b>\$413,305</b>	<b>\$440,116</b>

High Rollway Roadside  
Park located along M-82  
in Newaygo County

## 2023 regional commission board

**Jennifer Hodges, Chairperson**  
Supervisor, Muskegon Charter Township

**Kathy Winczewski, Vice Chairperson**  
Councilperson, City of Ludington

**James Rynberg, Secretary**  
Mayor, City of Fremont

**Ron Bacon, Commissioner** Mason County

**Tim Beggs, Commissioner** Oceana County

**Kim Cyr, Commissioner**  
Muskegon County

**Beth Dick, Vice President of Finance**  
Muskegon Community College

**Rachel Gorman, At-Large Commissioner**  
City of Muskegon

**Michelle Hazekamp, Commissioner**  
Muskegon County

**Marcia Hovey-Wright, Commissioner**  
Muskegon County

**James Kelly, WMSRDC Appointee**  
MSU Extension

**Bryan Kolk, Commissioner** Newaygo County

**Andrea Large, WMSRDC Appointee**  
Community Foundation for Mason County

**Bonnie McGlothlin, Mayor,**  
City of Muskegon Heights

**Paul Mellema, Commissioner**  
Newaygo County

**Roger Morgenstern, Councilperson**  
City of Norton Shores

**Phil Morse, Commissioner** Oceana County

**Lewis Squires, Commissioner** Mason County

**Clyde Welford, Commissioner** Lake County

**Jonathan Wilson, WMSRDC**  
Appointee DTE Energy

**Wendy Wells, Talent Pipeline Coordinator**  
West Shore Community College

## WMSRDC Staff

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director

Amanda Snyder, Finance Manager

Syndi Copeland, Office Manager

### Air Quality and Information & Communications

Robert Johnson, Planner

### Economic Development, Community Development and Local Government Services

Stephen Carlson, Program Manager

### Transportation Planning

Joel Fitzpatrick, Planning Director

Brian Mulnix, Program Manager

Jamie Way, GIS Specialist

### Environmental Planning

Fallon Chabala, Program Manager

Gale Nobes, Planner



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"CELEBRATING MUSKEGON" sculpture at  
Pere Marquette Beach in Muskegon.



"Opus in Three Movements" sculpture  
located along the Hart-Montague Bike  
Trail in Montague.