

Commission Quarterly

Economic Recovery Corps Fellow

Last year, WMSRDC applied to be a host organization for the inaugural Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) cohort. On February 5th, the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) formally announced 65 fellows and host organizations from across the country. After vetting more than 500 applications from potential host organizations and over 1,400 Fellow applications, WMSRDC was successfully paired with a Fellow.

The 30-month ERC program will help activate regional economic development strategies and promote innovation and knowledge-sharing between urban, rural, and tribal areas across the U.S. to elevate new practices and transform the field of economic development. The program is led by IEDC with six leading national organizations including the Center on Rural Innovation (CORI), International City/County Management Association (ICMA), National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACo RF), National Association of Developmental Organizations Research Foundation (NADO RF), National League of Cities Institute (NLCI), and RAIN Catalyst.

The WMSRDC ERC project theme focuses on Regional Food Systems. Michigan is the second most agriculturally diverse state in

the nation and is poised to expand in this sector. West Michigan is agriculturally rich with over 9,000 farms and 200 food processors. However, over the past 30 years, as much as 85% of fresh locally produced products are shipped outside of Michigan for further processing due to lack of facilities and infrastructure. West Michigan offers unique opportunities for this cluster being adjacent to the freshwaters of Lake Michigan and historically low hazardous events.

Annika Gacnik is the ERC Fellow paired with WMSRDC to support activities around the agriculture and food processing sector. She has experience in mission-driven organizations and corporate social responsibility and is dedicated to creating equitable, resilient supply chains that prioritize environmental stewardship. She has a B.S. in Molecular Environmental Biology and Ecology from the University of California at Berkeley, and a M.A. in Food Studies: Food Policy, Business, and Culture at New York University. Annika has relocated to West Michigan to begin her 30-month fellowship.

As the ERC Fellow, working alongside partner organizations, Annika will provide consistent support related to accessing economic development and infrastructure resources from local, state, and



Erin Kuhn and Annika Gacnik in Portland, OR for the ERC National kick-off meeting

federal experts to maximize growth potential in these sectors. Armed with project development, research, and economic data analysis skills, Annika will become a key player in supporting economic growth, infrastructure development, and logistical enhancements. The aim is to have a lasting impact in Western Michigan, making it a model for resilient and thriving regional food systems. WMSRDC is excited to be part of this endeavor!

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Commission Operations: Welcome, Lauryn!



Lauryn Blake, Transportation Planner

In March, WMSRDC welcomed Lauryn Blake to the transportation team. Originally from Cadillac, Lauryn relocated to West Michigan to attend Grand Valley State University. She graduated from GVSU in the Spring of 2023 with a bachelor's degree majoring in Geography with an emphasis in Geospatial Technology and a minor in Applied Mathematics. In her free time, Lauryn enjoys roller skating and exploring local restaurants.

As a Planner, Lauryn will focus on the Air Quality and Rural Transportation programs while providing valuable support to the rest of the transportation program. Please join us in welcoming Lauryn should you see her at an upcoming transportation technical or policy committee meeting!

Economic Development: CEDS 2024-2028

The five-year update of the WMSRDC region's economic development plan, the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), was recently completed and is now available at WMSRDC.org. Development of this plan began in the winter of 2022-2023 with a regional SWOT analysis process consisting of focus groups in each of the district's five member counties. The proposed draft was completed in early 2024, then made available for a 30-day review period, and approved by the WMSRDC Board of Directors in March.

The updated CEDS follows guidelines issued by the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) in April 2023. Notable revisions of this edition, which will be effective through 2028, include a SWOT analysis, updated demographics, incorporation of the WMSRDC

Pandemic Response and Recovery Plan, and an overhauled action plan chapter. Per EDA guidance, there is also an increased emphasis on climate resilience, equity, workforce development, and broadband.

The CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development and is the result of a regionally-owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of a region. Development of the CEDS is led by WMSRDC, overseen by the CEDS Strategy

Committee, and approved by the WMSRDC Board of Directors. The CEDS Strategy Committee meets quarterly and includes representatives from throughout the WMSRDC region.

The CEDS is required to maintain the region's designation as an Economic Development District (EDD) by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). This designation enables communities within the district to remain eligible for EDA assistance.



Environmental: Restoration on the White

Habitat restoration in association with culvert replacements on Swinton Creek, a tributary of the White River, has begun. Catskill Remedial, with subcontractor Kanouse Outdoor Restoration, will improve over 1,000 feet of in-stream habitat to reduce erosion, improve water quality, and enhance the cold-water fisheries.

With funding from WMSRDC’s Lake Michigan Rivers and Coastal Wetlands Regional Partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), additional project partners include Oceana County Road Commission, Scott Civil Engineering, Oceana County Drain Commission, Grand Valley State University Annis Water Resources Institute, GEI Consultants, and private landowners.



Subcontractor Kanouse Outdoor Restoration and design engineering firm GEI implementing habitat restoration down stream of Pierce Rd on Swinton Creek.

Environmental: Muskegon Volunteer Opportunities

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 28, 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 Avenue, downtown Muskegon, for pre-cleanup refreshments and guidance from event leaders. Volunteers will work together at twelve different locations from lower Muskegon River to Lake Michigan.

For those interested in a unique tree planting experience, the Marquette Micro Forest partnership project is a native, multi-species forest designed and planted to grow quickly and provide exceptional environmental benefits to the City of Muskegon’s Marquette Neighborhood and broader community. By reforesting a vacant lot in our Marquette Neighborhood, this project will combat climate change and noise pollution while increasing public green space and community engagement. Join Rotary Club of Muskegon, United Way of the Lakeshore, the City of Muskegon, the Marquette Neighborhood Association, and WMSRDC on Friday, May 10 from 9am to 3pm at the corner of Marquette and Broadmoor Avenues before the US-31 bridge to help plant upwards of 3,000 plants and learn the benefits of trees and biodiversity in urban areas.

For more information on these events and other Shoreline Stewards volunteer opportunities this summer, visit the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership Facebook page.



Veteran’s Memorial Park, one of the sites for the Annual Spring Clean-Up



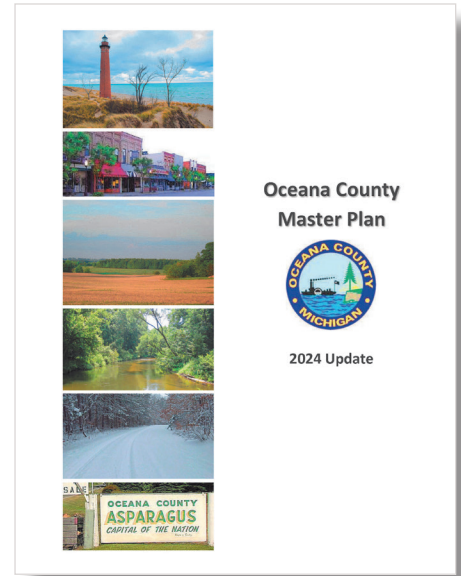
Marquette Micro Forest Sign

Local Government Services: Oceana County Master Plan

In March, the Oceana County Board of Commissioners adopted the updated Oceana County Master Plan five-year update. This was the culmination of nearly two years of coordination, public engagement, and hard work by the Oceana County Planning Commission and WMSRDC.

Master plans, also known as comprehensive plans or future land use plans, help communicate a vision for the future and can help provide legal justification for a community's zoning. Because Oceana does not engage in zoning at the county level, the Oceana County Master Plan has no regulatory power. Rather, the plan is maintained to provide factual information for prospective residents and investors, and to help promote public health, safety, and welfare through coordinated planning by local jurisdictions.

The Oceana County Master Plan is organized into five main topics: quality of life, environment, infrastructure, economic development, and community development. Each section includes information including census data and maps, a summary of public comments and sentiments, and "visions" for the future of Oceana County. The visions of each topic are then combined into a set of goals and objectives, which are intended to help guide and coordinate planning decisions throughout the county.



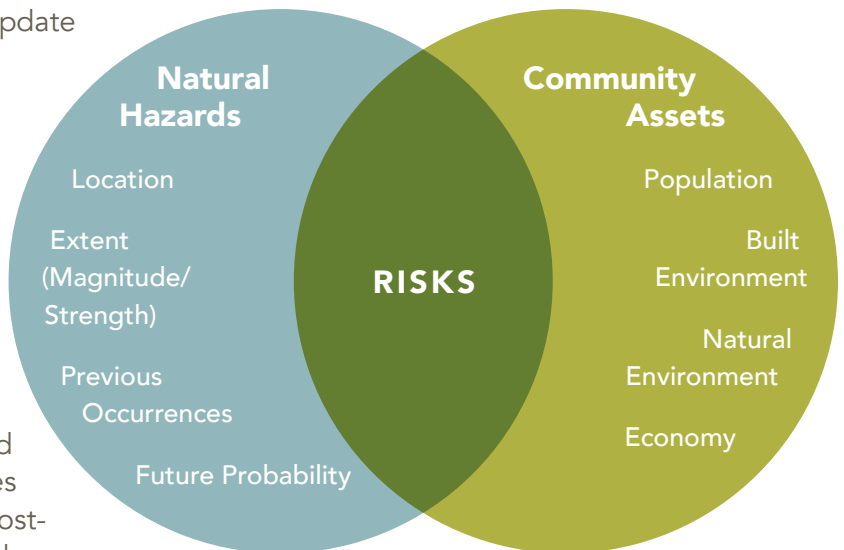
Oceana County Master Plan cover page. The plan was adopted by the Oceana County Board of Commissioner in March 2024.

Local Government Services: Hazard Mitigation Plans Updated

Since June 2021, WMSRDC has worked to update Hazard Mitigation plans for the counties of Oceana, Lake, and Mason. Efforts came to fruition in March 2024, as each county adopted its freshly updated and FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan.

In general, having a hazard mitigation plan can help a community increase awareness of hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities; identify actions to reduce risk; and focus resources on the greatest risks while communicating priorities to state and federal officials. Hazard mitigation plans are required for communities to access certain types of pre-disaster and post-disaster hazard mitigation funding and must be updated every five years.

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.



Community risk can be viewed as the relationship or overlap between hazards and community assets.

Transportation: Traffic Counts

Staff recently began the process of selecting locations for spring 2024 traffic counts. Every year, WestPlan, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Muskegon/northern Ottawa urbanized area, contracts with an engineering consulting firm for traffic counting services. In a typical year the chosen consultant will conduct traffic counts at approximately 100 locations within the MPO boundaries. For 2024, the number of traffic counts will be lower, approximately 77 locations, but with a higher number of classification counts. Typical traffic counts are volume only, measuring just the number of vehicles. Classification counts not only count the number of vehicles but also look at the type of vehicles, such as trucks, to gauge commercial traffic.

To ensure the most accurate traffic counts available, the consultant will follow traffic



Stretch of highway US-231

counting guidelines prepared by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). These include avoiding times of increased tourism, holidays and festivals, areas affected by road closures, and counts being done when local schools are in session to help keep consistent traffic patterns.

Once WMSRDC staff has received the count data from the consultant, the counts will be

entered into the Region’s online traffic count database system. WMSRDC maintains approximately 400 count locations in its database with counts being collected on a rotating basis over a four-year cycle. This system is integrated with Google Maps to assist users in retrieving and presenting data and information. Users of the system can search for data points on the map or search directly in the database.

Transportation: Save the Date

WMSRDC is the proud host of this year’s Michigan Transportation Planning Association (MTPA) annual conference! WMSRDC Staff is currently hard at work planning various sessions, offsite executions, and networking opportunities. Join professional and experts to discuss the latest transportation trends and challenges in Michigan while connecting with peers across the state. The conference will be held at the Delta Hotel in Downtown Muskegon on July 30 through August 2. Keep an eye out on mtpa-mi.org for registration details!



Delta Hotel Downtown Muskegon

Transportation: Asset Management

Regional staff recently attended the annual virtual training for the Commission's Asset Management program. The data collection process will begin in May. In a typical year, WMSRDC staff, along with MDOT and a county road commission employee, collect condition information for approximately half of all the federal aid roads within Region 14.

According to Michigan's Act 51 (P.A. 499 in 2002 and P.A. 199 in 2007), local road agencies must report the condition of the road system under their jurisdiction to the Michigan Transportation Asset Management Council (TAMC) annually. To meet the requirements of this Act, the TAMC sets policies each year for road condition data collection.

The TAMC has adopted the Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER) system for measuring conditions of paved roads in Michigan. The PASER system is a visual survey method that provides a simple, efficient, and consistent method for evaluating the condition of paved roads. This data collection effort requires the collection of three items: PASER rating, surface type, and the number of lanes. PASER is a visual rating assessment system that rates the road surface condition for a given segment on a scale of 1-10. This data collection process is part of an ongoing statewide program to evaluate the condition of the state's road system.

Once rating is completed, WMSRDC staff converts the data into a format that can be used with RoadSoft. RoadSoft is a management system for collecting, storing, and analyzing data. RoadSoft is funded through the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and developed, supported, and distributed by Michigan Technological University's Center for Technology & Training.

After the data has been converted into RoadSoft it is sent back to each local road agency as well as the State of Michigan. It is the intent of this program that the local units of government would use this information to better plan for needed infrastructure improvements.



Road Construction in Muskegon County



Preparation for roadwork on Henry Street in Muskegon

Transportation: Improvement Program (TIP) Update

The WestPlan MPO Technical and Policy Committees met in March where they reviewed and discussed the 15th Amendment to the FY2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The MPO committees took action to approve the amendment. Projects in the amendment included several local bridge projects throughout Muskegon County, and several transit projects for Harbor Transit. The amendment is currently being reviewed by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Details of WestPlan MPO TIP amendments and other MPO related information can be found by visiting the website at

www.wmsrdc.org.

WMSRDC staff participated in their annual Pre-Unified Work Program (UWP) meeting in March, to discuss the current UWP and to plan for the FY2025 UWP which will be developed and approved by MPO Committees in the next several months. The UWP is a guide that the MPO uses for planning activities and expenditures for the current fiscal year budget. MDOT provides the MPO with revenue estimates, and from that information the MPO develops programs and projects for the next fiscal year.



Roadwork in the City of Ferrysburg

The annual meeting was attended by MDOT and FHWA, as well as staff from the Muskegon Area Transit System and Harbor Transit. Once approved, the FY2025 UWP will be available for viewing on the WMSRDC website.

GIS Mapping: Shelby Township and Leavitt Township Projects

The WMSRDC GIS program has begun mapping three small cemeteries in Leavitt Township, near Walkerville in Oceana County. Abson, Carpenter, and Goodrich Cemeteries are located within seven miles of each other within Leavitt Township, north of Hesperia. These cemeteries have some graves dating back to the early 1800s, and currently the maps and records exist in paper form. WMRDC is working on creating a master database of all the burials within each of the cemeteries. This includes hand typing data from old cemetery registers and death certificates. Once the database is complete, mapping shapefiles will be created from historical township maps. The

many shapefile layers will show the cemeteries' main boundaries, roads, sections, lots, and individual graves. When these initial maps are completed, groundwork can begin in the cemeteries to verify the location of the graves and to take pictures of the headstones. Once the information is verified and approved, an online map will be created for the township which will show exact locations and details of those buried in each cemetery. Digital and paper maps and a master database will be provided to the township for their use. This will

preserve irreplaceable historical records and help the public and township officials more easily use and maintain going forward. If you would like to find out more about WMSRDC's cemetery mapping projects or are interested in mapping services, please contact the WMSRDC office.



Carpenter Cemetery – Shelby Township



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Muskegon, MI 49440

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