

Commission Quarterly



2024 JULY-SEPTEMBER ISSUE

West Michigan Agriculture Cluster Impact Analysis

In September, WMSRDC was awarded a grant from the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration to help bolster the region's agriculture and food processing industries. The project will be conducted October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025, and is intended to inform and empower public officials, economic development organizations, and agriculture producers and processors to make strategic and sustainable investments towards increased efficiency, productivity, and long-term resilience and sustainability of the region's agricultural economy. Activities will include agriculture sector research and analysis, data mapping, stakeholder engagement, and identification and prioritization of strategic investments and innovative opportunities.

The West Michigan region, consisting of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo and Oceana counties, has a robust agricultural and food processing sector with strong potential for future investment and development. The West Michigan Agriculture Cluster Impact Analysis will quantify existing assets, identify key economic and infrastructure gaps, and highlight opportunities to strategically grow and sustain the agricultural sector. The study aims to pinpoint key growth

areas and barriers within the local agricultural economy, addressing essential needs such as infrastructure improvements, workforce development, and facility expansion.

Building on Michigan State University's previous assessments of the economic impacts of agriculture in West Michigan, this study will provide detailed, publicly available data to specify critical facility and development needs. This data will help increase logistical efficiency, leverage public infrastructure capacity, and improve coordination among public and private stakeholders. By aligning with the inaugural Economic Recovery Corps Fellowship program, a collaborative initiative to accelerate COVID-19 recovery in distressed U.S. communities by connecting host organizations with an economic development fellow until June 2026, the project will also raise awareness and enhance the competitiveness of the West Michigan agriculture cluster on a national level.

The West Michigan Agriculture Cluster Impact Analysis is a foundational step for guiding the future, maximizing West Michigan's

agricultural economic potential. There are significant growth opportunities in the region's agricultural production, aggregation, processing, distribution, and consumer markets. Enhancing production potential will build on the region's status as a diverse agricultural area, second only to California. Identifying needs for aggregation infrastructure, like storage facilities and food hubs, will support local producers. The region's established food

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A farmhouse in Oceana County

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West Michigan Agriculture Cluster Impact Analysis

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processing industry can be further strengthened by pinpointing entrepreneurial opportunities, such as kitchen incubators, and supporting business retention and expansion opportunities. Mapping existing infrastructure will help optimize distribution networks and improve efficiency. Additionally, exploring new market opportunities like agritourism and institutional markets can strengthen the local food supply chain and increase visibility for producers.

Transportation: 2024 MTPA Conference

Every year, a different Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) from around the state of Michigan hosts the Michigan Transportation Planning Association (MTPA) conference. This year, the MTPA 2024 Conference was hosted by WMSRDC at the Delta Hotel in downtown Muskegon from July 29 through August 2. Almost two years of preparation went into this event by WMSRDC staff. The success of the conference has been a long-awaited goal, and the satisfaction survey sent out to attendees' post-conference indicated this goal had been met. WMSRDC is proud to have served its peers and community through the hosting of this event.

Day one consisted of a technical session with speakers from the Federal Highway Administration on Title VI and ADA compliance. Day two held a well-received mobile tour, led by WMSRDC staff and members of MDOT. This tour took over 50 attendees over the M-231 bridge as well as over and through the bascule bridge in Grand Haven. The group was divided into two, half exploring one bridge and the other half exploring the other bridge. A notable mention from the second group visiting the bascule bridge was their opportunity to witness the lifting of the bridge from the top and moving mechanisms of the bridge

from within and below the structure. A much-anticipated networking event at SociBowl followed the excitement of the mobile tour.

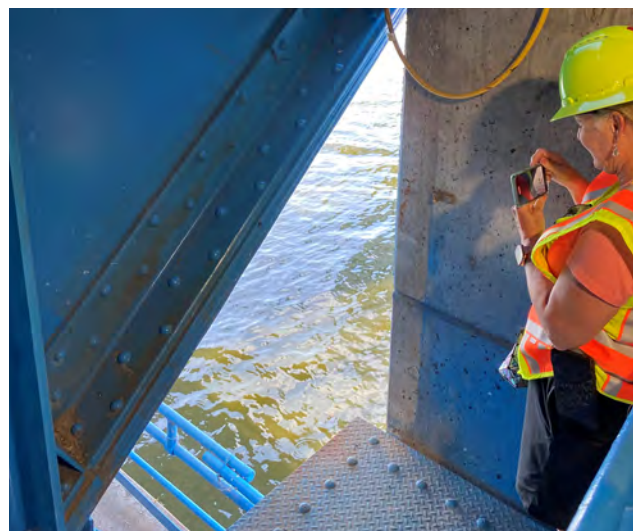
Day three was a highly informative, multi-session event with the highest attendee interaction being a walking tour highlighting the redevelopment of downtown Muskegon that has occurred over the last 20+ years. Following this, the awards banquet was held at The Lake House. Day four wrapped up early on Friday, August 2.



Attendees learn about traffic safety issues



Attendees visit M-231 By-pass Bridge during MTPA Conference mobile tour



Attendees tour control room of the Grand Haven drawbridge during mobile tour

Transportation: Asset Management

Regional staff recently completed the process of collecting data on Federal Aid eligible roads for its annual asset management program. Asset management is a planning tool for public officials, planners, engineers, and other stakeholders. Asset management is based on an inventory of the Federal Aid eligible road network within the region. It provides data that will allow transportation officials to monitor, plan, and strategically improve the road network.

Each year, WMSRDC staff, along with MDOT and a county road commission employee, collect this data for at least half of all the federal aid roads within Region 14. The data collection effort

requires the collection of three items: road condition rating, surface type, and the number of lanes. The road rating assessment rates the road surface condition for a given segment on a scale of 1-10.

Two staff members attended the Integrated Infrastructure Conference which was held August 13 and 14 in Grand Rapids. Highlights included presentations on asset management best practices as well as discussions on levels of service and infrastructure coordination.

In addition to rating the Federal Aid roads, WMSRDC staff will also rate a municipality's local roads on occasion. For fiscal year 2024 WMSRDC received additional funding to rate local roads. Local roads were rated for Muskegon County, northern Ottawa County, and Newaygo County.



US-31 in Oceana County

Transportation: MPO Non-Motorized Plan

Recognizing the need for an MPO-wide non-motorized plan, West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission will be undertaking the creation of a non-motorized master trail plan for the WestPlan MPO area of Muskegon and northern Ottawa Counties. The plan will include existing trails, planned trails, trail improvements, trail connections, trail gaps, and an action plan.

The plan is also intended to increase equitable access to the regional trail network. It will examine target areas, engaging the community, identifying multi-modal connectivity, and addressing the socio-economic gaps so all individuals, regardless of their background or abilities,

can enjoy the recreational, health, and transportation benefits that trails provide.

Additionally, the City of Muskegon Parks Department is partnering in this project. Since the Muskegon Lakeshore Trail is largely complete, full-scale trail planning is not necessarily needed, but urban greenway planning is needed as this trail connects many public park spaces, business districts, amenities, and other destinations of interest without a cohesive level of planning or an integrated design/experience.

It is anticipated that the RFP for planning service will be released this fall with a plan completion date of September 30, 2025.



Berry Junction Trail in Muskegon County

Transportation: MPO Update

WestPlan MPO committees met in September and acted on the FY2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The FY2023-2026 TIP Amendment 18 will allow for a signal modernization project to be constructed in Ottawa County. The project is under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and will be completed in FY2024.



Transportation: FY2026-2029 TIP Development

WestPlan MPO staff has started the process of developing the FY2026-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP’s primary purpose is to program projects to be funded with federal aid in accordance with federal law and the regulations of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) during a four-year period. The current TIP has projects programmed from FY2023-2026 and will expire in June of 2025.

One of the first steps in developing a new TIP is issuing a “Call for Projects” to the road and transit agencies. The call for projects was issued in early September, with a prioritized project list from the agencies due back by the end of September. From there, the Technical Committee will work with MPO staff to come up with a prioritized list that is fiscally constrained within the estimated budget for the different funding categories. This call will cover funding for the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ), and Carbon Reduction Program (CRP).

Once the prioritized list is established, MPO staff will complete the Air Quality and Environmental Justice Analysis to ensure that selected projects adhere to federal guidelines. Public participation is also a key component to the TIP development and will be included throughout the process. The TIP will include all federally funded highway and transit projects funded in the years 2026-2029. These projects include Local, MDOT, and Transit.

Construction on BR31 (Seaway Drive) near Grand Haven Road

Local Government Services: Materials Management Plan

The counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana have agreed to develop a multi-county Materials Management Plan (MMP) and have designated WMSRDC as their Designated Planning Agency (DPA). In early July, WMSRDC, on behalf of the counties, submitted the required Notices of Intent (NOI) to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). All five of the NOIs have received approval from EGLE. WMSRDC and the five counties are now in the process of appointing the Materials Management Planning Committee (MMPC). The MMPC is expected to be established and begin meeting during the month of October. The MMPC, counties, and WMSRDC then have until January 2025 to develop an EGLE approved MMP Work Plan.



Truck moving debris at Pere Marquette Industrial Park, Mason County

Environmental: Shoreline Restoration for the Boys and Girls Club

An eroded shoreline has been repaired at the Boys and Girls Club located on the shores of Muskegon Lake! This shoreline restoration project supports larger planning efforts to implement wildlife habitat restoration improvements in Muskegon Lake by restoring shoreline, emergent wetland, open water, and upland habitats for native aquatic and terrestrial species of the Great Lakes.

Previous restoration efforts at the site used purely soft shoreline engineering techniques. However, high water levels in 2019 and 2020 led to erosion at the site, resulting in an approximately 5-ft high cut bank.

GEI Consultants, the project’s environmental engineering firm, designed the 2024 restoration project to use a combination of soft bio-engineered and rip-rap techniques to protect the toe slopes from erosive forces including waves and ice, reduce erosion below the root zone, and ensure resilience future high-water periods.

Final construction, installed by Taplin Enterprises, included removal of debris and unnatural fill material and the installation erosion protection along 480 feet of Muskegon Lake shoreline. Restoration included a native plant buffer within a 20-30 feet wide swath along the shoreline, including a combination of native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous vegetation. Six (6) woody habitat structures and five (5) stone slab structures were installed to provide aquatic habitat for fish, turtles, mudpuppies, and other wildlife. These structures will also help dampen wave energy approaching the shoreline.

The Muskegon Lake Boys and Girls Club Shoreline Restoration Project was one of multiple projects managed by WMSRDC under a Great Lakes Commission and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Regional Partnership funded by Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Additional project partners not already mentioned include Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership and Muskegon County.



Shoreline conditions prior to the 2024 restoration efforts.



The shoreline conditions nearing the end of construction activities.



Tree trunks and roots provide basking sites for turtles, resting sites for birds, cover for fish, and help protect the shoreline from wave activity.

GIS Mapping: Cemetery Mapping and GIS Program Update

September 2024 has seen the completion of two cemetery mapping projects. Shelby Township in Oceana County has three cemeteries under its care; Oceana Center Cemetery, New Era Cemetery, and Mt. Hope Cemetery, which is the largest of the three. Leavitt Township, also in Oceana County, maintains the three smaller cemeteries: Abson, Carpenter, and Goodrich. After these municipalities gathered up all their historical maps and cemetery records, WMSRDC's GIS program took the data, organized it into one master database, and created new GIS shapefiles for all the cemeteries' lots, sections, graves, and monuments. The accuracy of the maps and data were verified on the ground in each cemetery. Detailed digital and printed maps were produced for each township and online maps were created to facilitate the maintenance and accuracy of use of the cemeteries. The online maps are accessible by the public, are searchable by the name of the deceased, and will show not only the location of individual graves but also birth and death dates, military history, and family relations. Leavitt Township's maps also include pictures of each headstone. The process of taking aging, often singular records, and converting them into digital format will safeguard these important documents for generations to come and help new clerks and cemeterians better maintain these valued pieces of our communities. Visit WMSRDC.org and look under the GIS Mapping Services program to see the online maps for these two communities. If you would like more information about cemetery mapping, contact the WMSRDC offices at 231-722-7878.



Military monument in Carpenter Cemetery, Leavitt Township



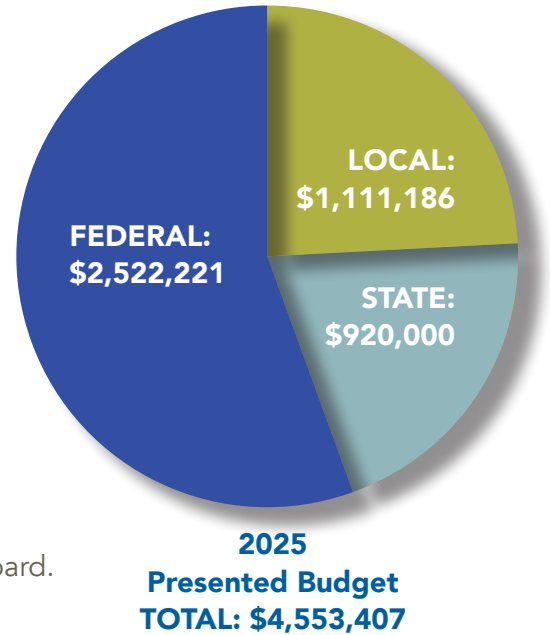
Mount Hope Cemetery, Shelby Township

Commission Operations: F25 Work Plan and Budget

On September 23, 2024, WMSRDC staff presented the fiscal year 2025 work program and budget to the Board of Directors. The annual work program outlines each of WMSRDC’s programs’ goals, objectives, and proposed projects for the upcoming fiscal year. Projects highlighted were the Materials Management Plan for WMSRDC’s five-county region, the West Michigan Agriculture Cluster Impact Analysis, and several pending environmental grant applications for a diverse set of projects across the region.

The fiscal year 2025 budget presented totaled \$4.55 million. WMSRDC’s continued goal of diversifying funding sources was demonstrated through the higher emphasis on state and local funding than in prior years.

WMSRDC is thrilled to report that both the work program and budget received full support and unanimous approval by the board. The staff is excited to kick off fiscal year 2025 in October!



Economic Development: EDA Projects in the Region

A core component of the WMSRDC economic development program is to provide technical assistance to local communities. This includes helping communities navigate the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant application process; from vetting ideas, to crafting applications, to accepting and managing grants. In addition to the recently announced EDA award to study the region’s agriculture sector, two other EDA investments are currently active within the region.

In 2023 the City of Hart received an award to upgrade the BioPure wastewater treatment plant to support the local

economy, especially food processing and agriculture. Also in 2023, Lake County received an award made to support the Lake County Economic Diversification Initiative, which includes an economic development strategy for the County and the hiring of an economic recovery coordinator to assist with the oversight and implementation of the strategy.

The WMSRDC economic development program enables communities within the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana to be eligible for EDA assistance. EDA offers many funding opportunities,

which may be researched at <https://www.eda.gov/funding/funding-opportunities>. Please contact WMSRDC early and often to discuss your community’s economic development ideas, find the right funding program, and make your application to EDA a success!



City of Hart BioPure wastewater treatment plant



316 Morris Avenue, Suite 340
Muskegon, MI 49440

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WMSRDC Staff

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director
Amanda Snyder, Finance Manager
Syndi Copeland, Office Manager

**Economic Development,
Community Development and
Local Government Services**
Stephen Carlson, Program Manager

Transportation Planning
Joel Fitzpatrick, Planning Director
Brian Mulnix, Program Manager
Lauryn Blake, Planner
Jamie Way, GIS Specialist

Environmental Planning
Fallon Chabala, Program Manager

231-722-7878
WMSRDC.org

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