

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission



Planning Great Communities Together.

Serving Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren
Counties

2020

Annual Report

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission 2020 Board

Berrien County

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Teri Sue Freehling
Donnie Meeks

Representatives
Yemi Akinwale
Dan Fette
Kristen Gundersen
Paul Pantaleo
Gloria Payne
Rich Remus
James Schueneman
Dick Stauffer
Jim Stover

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Roseann Marchetti

Representatives
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Leon Laylin
Linda Preston
Doug Tyler

Van Buren County

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Don Hanson
Gail Patterson-Gladney

Representatives
Dave Foerster
Sandra Hanson
Judy Janssen
Matthew Newton

Pokagon Band of Potawatomi

Robert Torzynski

Economic Development

Zach Morris

Our Team

K. John Egelhaaf, AICP
Executive Director

Marcy Hamilton
Deputy Director/Senior
Planner

Kim Gallagher
Senior Planner

Patrice Rose
Office Manager

Jill Plescher
Geographic Information
Systems Specialist

Jerrid Burdue
Associate Planner

Brandon Kovnat
Associate Planner

Kristopher Martin
Associate Planner

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Benton Harbor, Michigan 49022

269-925-1137

www.swmpc.org

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC)

We are one of fourteen state recognized regional planning governmental non-profit organizations in Michigan. The organization was enabled by state legislation (the Regional Planning Act, 1945 PA 281) and formally created in 1971 by the three counties it serves, Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren. SWMPC is a regional planning resource staffed with professional regional planners and is designed to be responsive to the planning needs of our region.

SWMPC is the USDOT and MDOT recognized Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Twin Cities Area (Benton Harbor-St. Joseph) and the Niles-Buchanan-Cass County Area Transportation Studies, as well as the rural and small urban transportation Regional Planning Agency for Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. SWMPC is the state designated area-wide water quality management planning agency under the Clean Water Act, and the SWMPC leads and participates in watershed management planning. SWMPC is also the U.S. Economic Development Administration designated Economic Development District for those same three counties.

SWMPC Mission Statement

Our team uses its passion and expertise to connect people, assist communities and advance cooperative solutions to regional challenges experienced by the communities that created us.



Message from Our Executive Director

No one on planet earth could deny that 2020 was an extraordinary year. The COVID-19 pandemic inflicted unspeakable grief on families across the globe. It stretched our capacity for grief, compassion, care, and for innovation and resiliency. By necessity, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission needed to fulfill its important role as a link in the chain of decision-making that makes major infrastructure projects possible. Moreover, the need for continuity and access to quality information and expertise did not stop amid the emergency declarations. Internally, by March the SWMPC had to completely pivot to a remote work environment. Thanks to infrastructure that had been in place for some time, the SWMPC staff snapped into the new paradigm with very few hiccups. Never has an executive director appreciated a smart, innovative, and flexible staff more. There was never a moment that they stopped exploring ways to help people and governments make the region better.

The SWMPC board has also proven to be quite flexible and resilient. Our initial platform for board meetings was tested and scuttled. By the second board meeting during the pandemic the board hit its stride and they haven't looked back. Attendance and active participation at meetings has been exceptional. During challenging times, great leadership is essential. Chair Teri Freehling has been the kind of leader that assimilates quickly to new technology and new paradigms. She has kept the organization moving forward efficiently.

This report constitutes a snapshot of the many projects on the SWMPC docket in 2020. From our experience with prior annual reports we know that a summary of every project is simply too much to digest. Our purpose is not to overload the reader. Rather, it is to give a flavor of the range of our project work and some highlights in each. As always, we are a call or email message away with more detail.



K. John Egelhaaf, AICP, Executive Director



transportation & mobility

Urban Transportation Program

Project Description

By law, metro areas must plan their transportation infrastructure together. The SWMPC facilitates this work with the Twin Cities (Benton Harbor-St. Joseph Urbanized Area) Area Transportation Study (TwinCATS) and Niles-Buchanan-Cass County Area Transportation Study (NATS). (Michigan portion of the South Bend Urbanized Area) Because of this collaboration, 24 of our urbanized communities together decide how best to spend annual state and federal transportation funding. Each year the urban planning process results in essential transportation infrastructure development for the citizens and businesses in the region.



Quick Facts

Benton Harbor/St. Joseph Urbanized Area

- 5 Local Road Projects \$2,539,892
- 5 Public Transit Projects \$2,749,058

Niles Buchanan Cass Urbanized Area

- 6 Local Road Projects \$1,538,522
- 6 Public Transit Projects \$740,958



Stakeholders

54 contributing members that include: 24 Southwest Michigan communities, Berrien County/Road Dept., Cass County/Road Commission, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG), Northern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), Cornerstone Alliance, Buchanan Dial-A-Ride, Niles Dial-A-Ride Transit, Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority (TCATA), and Southwest Michigan Regional Airport.

Program Funding

Federal Funding	\$416,946
Local Funding	\$75,462
Total:	\$492,408

Program Contact Information

Kim Gallagher
gallagherk@swmpc.org
Brandon Kovnat
kovnatb@swmpc.org

Rural Transportation Program

Project Description

SWMPC assists the state and local units of government in rural transportation planning. We are the recognized rural and small urban transportation Regional Planning Agency by USDOT and MDOT for Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties.

The SWMPC helps local units of government make the connection between their priority projects and the various transportation funding opportunities available. Several state processes exist for this kind of matching including one designed specifically for small urban places and one designed for rural communities. The SWMPC is tasked with orchestrating our partners through these processes.

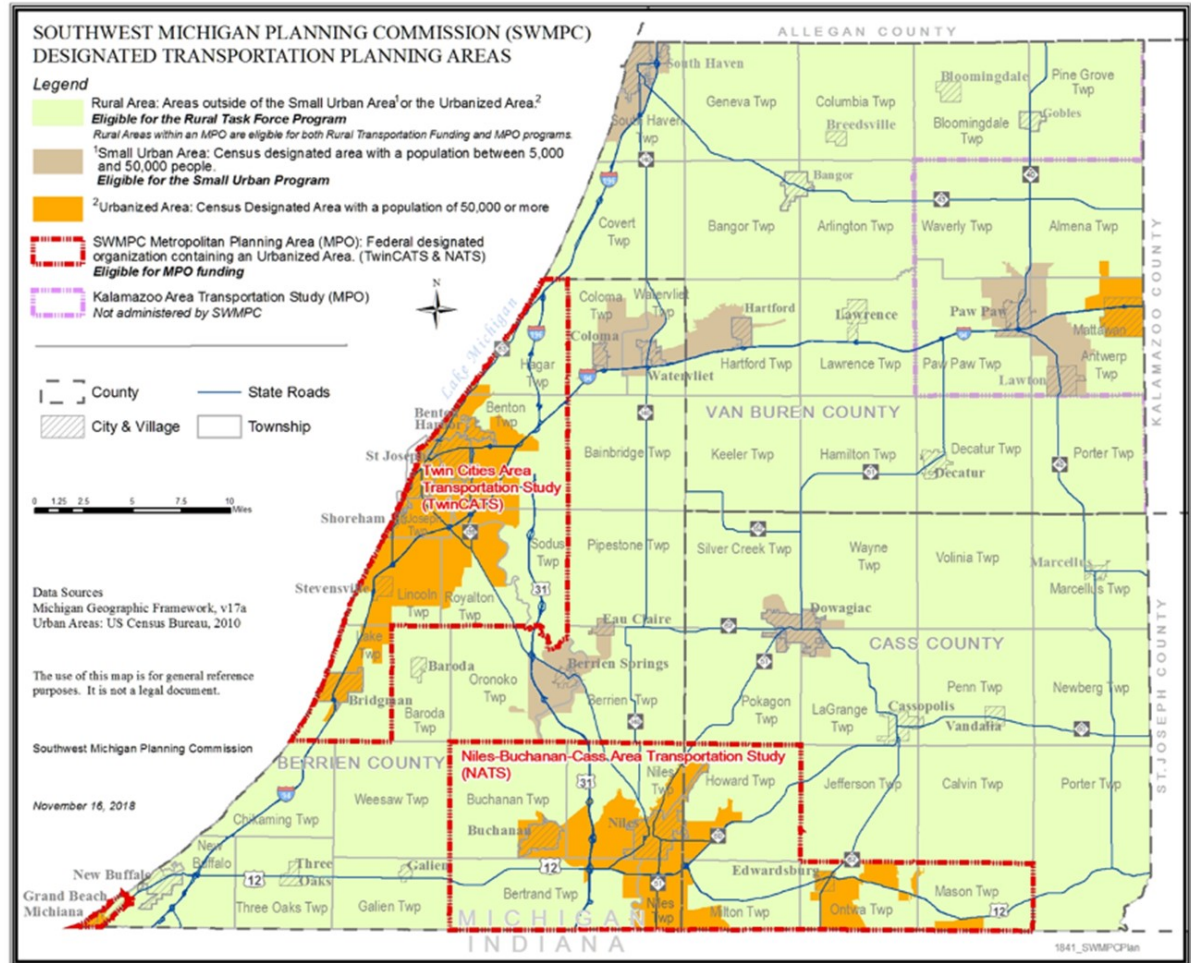
Quick Facts

2020 Road Projects

- Berrien County
 - 1 Project \$804,657
- Cass County
 - 4 Projects \$ 804,657
- Van Buren County
 - 2 Projects \$880,828

Stakeholders

All non-urban local units of government in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties, MDOT.



Program Funding

Federal Funding	\$15,200
Local Funding	\$42,500
Total:	\$57,700

Program Contact Information

Kim Gallagher
gallagherk@swmpc.org
Brandon Kovnat
kovnatb@swmpc.org

Southwest Region Road and Trail Bicycling Guide

Project Description

SWMPC created a new [Road and Trail Bicycling Guide](#) for the region that covers Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St Joseph and Van Buren Counties. The map is part of a cohesive state-wide series that shows road surface type, traffic volume ranges, paved/unpaved shared use paths with regional significance, recreational facilities, points of interest, plus other facilities and amenities which help make cycling across Michigan an enjoyable tourism experience.

Quick Facts

- Bicycle Facilities in the Southwest Region
- 205 miles of off-road facilities
 - 568 miles of paved shoulders/bicycle lanes

The brochure includes a regional map with detailed maps for seven cities plus information about state/local parks and biking trails.

Stakeholders

US Department of Transportation
 Federal Highway Administration
 Michigan Department of Transportation
 Regional and Local Government Agencies
 Nonprofit Organizations throughout Southwest Michigan



LEGEND

TRANSPORTATION NETWORK
Vehicle Traffic Volume* (Vehicles per day)

Volume Range	Unpaved	Paved	Paved 4' or greater paved shoulder or bike lane
Minor Roads/No Data**	---	---	---
Light (Under 2,500)	---	---	---
Medium (2,500 to 10,000)	---	---	---
Heavy (Above 10,000)	---	---	---

Limited Access Highways: Interchanges
 Active Rail Line
 Amtrak***

BICYCLE AND SHARED USE PATHS

- Improved Shared Use Regional Path (Paved or Crushed Fines)
- Unimproved Shared Use Regional Path (Gravel or Dirt)
- Local Shared Use Path
- North Country National Scenic Trail
- U.S. Bicycle Route

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

- Campground (In State and County Parks)
- Mountain Biking

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Amtrak Station
- Hospital
- Carpool Parking Lot
- Trail Head
- College/University

SERVICES

CITY/VILLAGE NAME	City/Village Name
Full Service (food and lodging)	Some Services (food or lodging)

LAND USE

- County Boundary
- Incorporated City & Village Limit
- Lakes/Water
- River/Stream
- Park/Preserve
- State Land
- Federal Land

*Traffic volumes are estimated based on an average 24-hour period. Rush hour (peak period) traffic volume can be much greater than at other times of the day. Traffic volumes also vary by season and day of week.
 **Minor roads generally have lower traffic volume but road width and surface type may make them less appropriate as a bike route. Consult local county road commissions for more information.
 ***All Amtrak trains in Michigan accept carry-on bike reservations with some restrictions. Visit www.AmtrakMichigan.com or call 800-USA-RAIL for more information.

Project Contact Information
 Marcy Hamilton
 hamiltonm@swmpc.org

Non-Motorized Transportation Plan

Project Description

The [Southwest Michigan Region Non-motorized Plan](#) provides a region-wide vision for a connected system of off-road shared use paths and on-road facilities (paved shoulders/bike lanes). The planning process encouraged a coordinated planning effort among state, county, and local entities.

The Southwest Michigan plan is part of the state-wide initiative through the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to encourage partnerships to implement and operate non-motorized facilities.

The Plan evolved with a coordinated effort from each of these counties (over 200 participants)

- Berrien
- Branch
- Calhoun
- Cass
- Kalamazoo
- St Joseph
- Van Buren

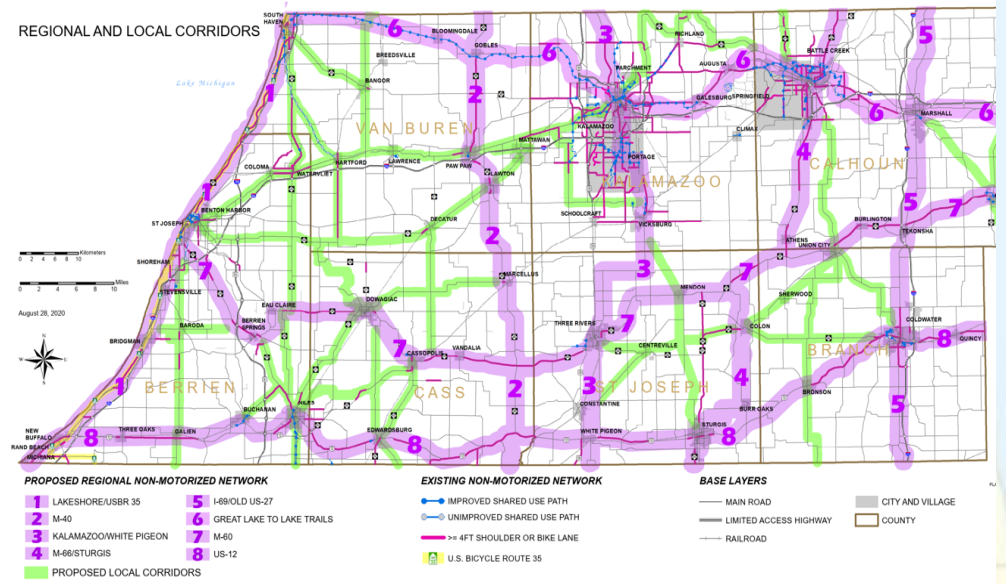
Stakeholders

- Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)
- Regional and Local Government Agencies
- Nonprofit Organizations throughout Southwest Michigan

Results

Each County has a Priority Plan that feeds into a regional non-motorized system.

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN GAP ANALYSIS AND PRIORITIES



Project Contact Information
 Marcy Hamilton
 hamiltonm@swmpc.org

Rideshare

Project Description

SWMPC provides free rideshare matching service to everyone that lives, works, and commutes in Berrien, Cass, or Van Buren County. SWMPC also manages a website www.mywaythere.org that allow users to find available transportation options online. This website has rideshare information and public transportation services that are available. The site provides information on free or reduced rides, transit, non-emergency medical transportation, and transportation services for seniors, veterans and people with disabilities. The rideshare coordinator helps people sign up for the rideshare services, answer questions, connect them with transportation resources, and also promotes this information at libraries, municipal buildings, community events and job fairs. The rideshare coordinator provides presentations and trainings to employees, businesses, community groups, and nonprofits on the use of the rideshare and available transportation services. The coordinator also partners with other rideshare agencies across the state.

Stakeholders

MDOT, Regional Rideshare Coordinators, Mobility Manager, general public, employees, organizations, and businesses.

Program Funding

Federal Funding \$36,000

RIDESHARE & CARPOOLING OPPORTUNITIES IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

RIDESHARE is a free, easy and convenient service that connects people throughout the Southwest Michigan region who are interested in carpooling.

Sign up today!
www.mywaythere.org/carpool.asp

For more information about this service please call 269-925-1137 or visit www.mywaythere.org/carpool.asp today!

MY WAY
Take Charge of Your Transportation
there

Save money and reduce fuel cost!

Reduce your environmental impact!

A great backup plan!

Free and simple registration!

Project Contact Information
Kristopher Martin
martink@swmpc.org

community development

Cass and Van Buren Recreation Plans

Project description

SWMPC assisted both Cass and Van Buren Counties with updating their Recreation Plans in 2020. Recreation Plans that meet Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) standards are needed to access certain grant funding for parks and trails. These plans, once adopted by the local unit of government and approved by MDNR, are in effect for 5 years. The plan documents the existing recreational and natural resources and lays out a five year improvement plan for parks, recreation and open space. With wonderful rivers (Black, Paw Paw and the Dowagiac River), a new focus of the plan updates were on water trails for canoeing and kayaking along with traditional land based trails.

Quick Facts

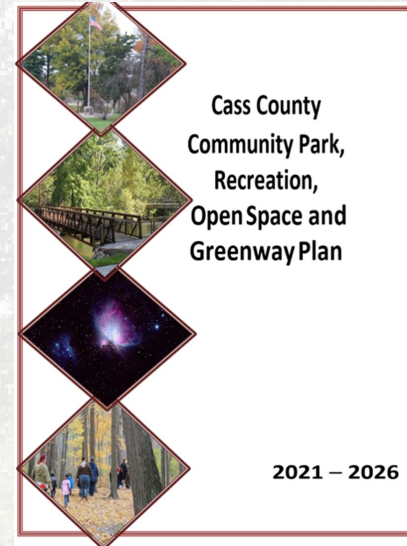
In Van Buren County, there was a unique public-private partnership to update the Recreation Plan. The Van Buren County Convention and Visitors Bureau financed the plan update and the County Board adopted the plan and agreed to consider assisting municipalities without their own approved plans to apply for MDNR grants.

Important Dates

Both plans were adopted and approved by MDNR in early 2021.

Stakeholders

- Cass County Parks Department
- Cass County Board of Commissioners
- Van Buren County Planning Commission
- Van Buren County Road Commission
- Van Buren County Board of Commissioners
- Van Buren County Convention and Visitors Bureau



Project Funding

Cass County Plan	\$7,360
Van Buren County Plan	\$5,000

Project Contact Information
 Marcy Hamilton
hamiltonm@swmpc.org

Decatur-Hamilton Joint Recreation Plan

Project Description

SWMPC assisted the Village of Decatur and Townships of Decatur and Hamilton in the development and adoption of a joint recreation plan. Recreation Plans that meet Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) standards are needed to access certain grant funding for parks and trails. These plans, once adopted by the local unit of government and approved by MDNR, are in effect for 5 years. The plan documents the existing recreational and natural resources and lays out a five year improvement plan for parks, recreation and open space.

Quick Facts

148 individuals completed a survey about recreational activities in the area. The majority of respondents also indicated they would be supportive of a millage for maintenance of the park system as well as for the development of park facilities.

Important Dates

The plan was adopted and approved by MDNR in early 2020.

Stakeholders

Village of Decatur
Decatur Township
Hamilton Township

Project Funding

Decatur-Hamilton Joint Recreation Plan \$9,400



Project Contact Information

Jerrid Burdue
burduej@swmpc.org

Berrien County Housing Diagnosis

Project Description

SWMPC was tasked with looking at housing in Berrien County in a comprehensive way and through a planner's lens. It is different from most housing studies in that it is data driven throughout and offers unique solutions to solve some of the most challenging issues facing housing. SWMPC has met with local housing experts along the way to supplement the data where needed. The novel coronavirus pandemic has greatly impacted housing in Berrien County through increased demand while building supplies and home values are reaching all time highs.

Quick Facts

SWMPC decided on the use of ESRI StoryMaps as the best way to represent the data, problem statements, and solutions. This tool allows for users to interact with the data and can be easily updated.

Important Dates

Kick Off: late 2019

Expected Completion: early summer 2021

Stakeholders

Michigan's Great Southwest Strategic Leadership Council

Pokagon Fund

United Way of Southwest Michigan

Berrien Community Foundation

Project Funding

Berrien County Housing Diagnosis

\$30,000

[Berrien County StoryMap Link](#)

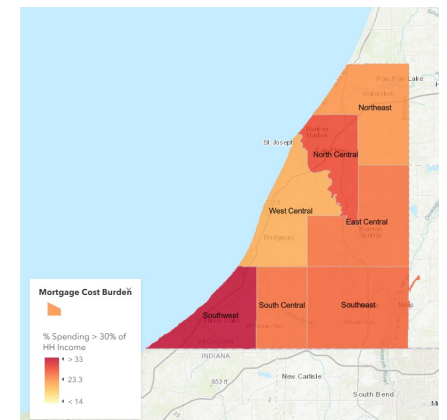
Cost Burdened Owners

With a Mortgage

Owners who spend more than 30 percent of their household income on housing costs are considered to be **cost burdened**.

Key Findings

- 35.50% of households with a mortgage in the Southwest Sub-Region spend more than 30 percent of their household income on housing expenses.
- In each region over 20% of households with a mortgage are cost burdened.
- A total of 6,537 households who own and pay a mortgage in Berrien County are cost burdened.

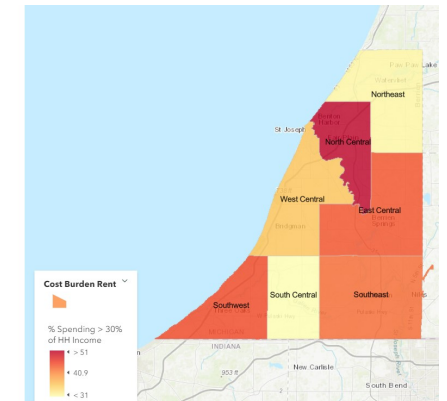


Cost Burdened Renters

Renters who spend more than 30 percent of their household income on gross rent are considered to be **cost burdened**.

Key Findings

- 57.86% of households who rent in the North Central Sub-Region spend more than 30 percent of their household income on housing costs alone. 32.87% spend more than 50 percent of household income on housing costs.
- Other sub-regions that have a high share of cost burdened renters include Southwest (45.38%), East Central (44.77%), and Southeast (43.2%).
- In each region over 25% of households who rent are cost burdened.
- A total of 8,657 households who rent in Berrien County are cost burdened.



Project Contact Information

Jerrid Burdue

burduej@swmpc.org

GIS Open Data

Project Description

SWMPC has created a new portal to view, search and download spatial data directly from the web. The service provides direct access to GIS data created at SWMPC. The data can be examined immediately via an online map and by the associated table. Much of the data was created by SWMPC in conjunction with work in transportation, transit and non-motorized planning and cannot be found elsewhere. Highlights are an up-to-date inventory of non-motorized trails, local and state park system and the state's Michigan Economic Recovery Council (MERC).

Spatial data formats available for downloaded

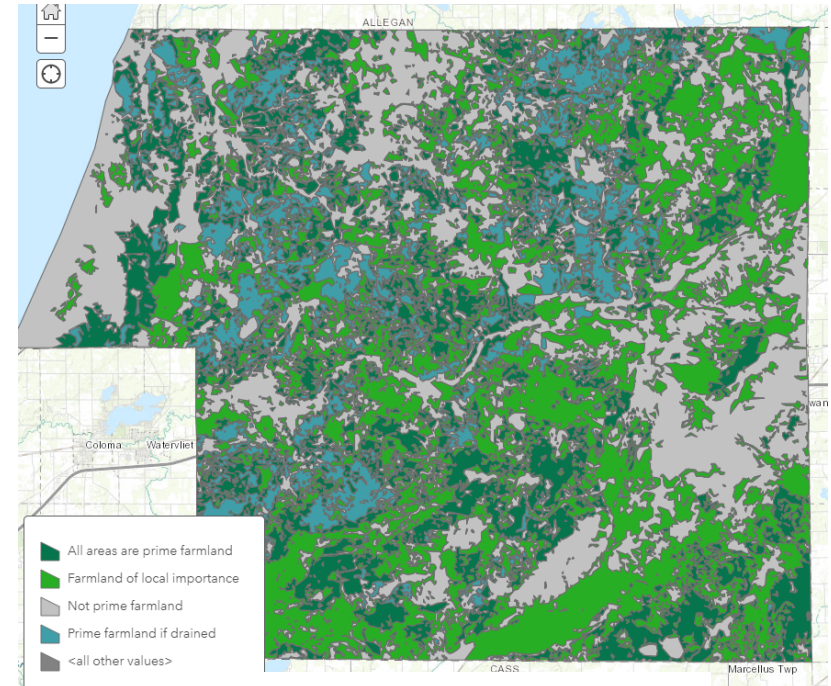
- ⇒ SHAPEFILES
- ⇒ KML
- ⇒ FILE GEODATABASE
- ⇒ SPREADSHEET
- ⇒ FILTERED DATA

By Categories

- ⇒ TRANSPORTATION
- ⇒ NON-MOTORIZED
- ⇒ BOUNDARIES
- ⇒ NATURAL RESOURCES

[SWMPC Open
Data Link](#)

Berrien
Cass
Van Buren



Find Data

Project Contact Information
Jill Plescher
plescherj@swmpc.org

economic development

CARES Act Economic Recovery Plan

Project Description

This two-year project that began July 1, 2020 will produce a plan to identify actions that can repair the damage done to our regional economy by the COVID 19 pandemic. The work in 2020 to contribute to the plan includes extensive information collection on broadband internet generally and its availability across the three-county region. Also, the initial stages of design and construction began on an SWMPC computer application to assist in building regional collaboration across economic sectors and among economic development practitioners. An extensive economic data collection effort was also initiated to build a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the regional economy over time.

Important Dates

Project initiation July 1, 2020

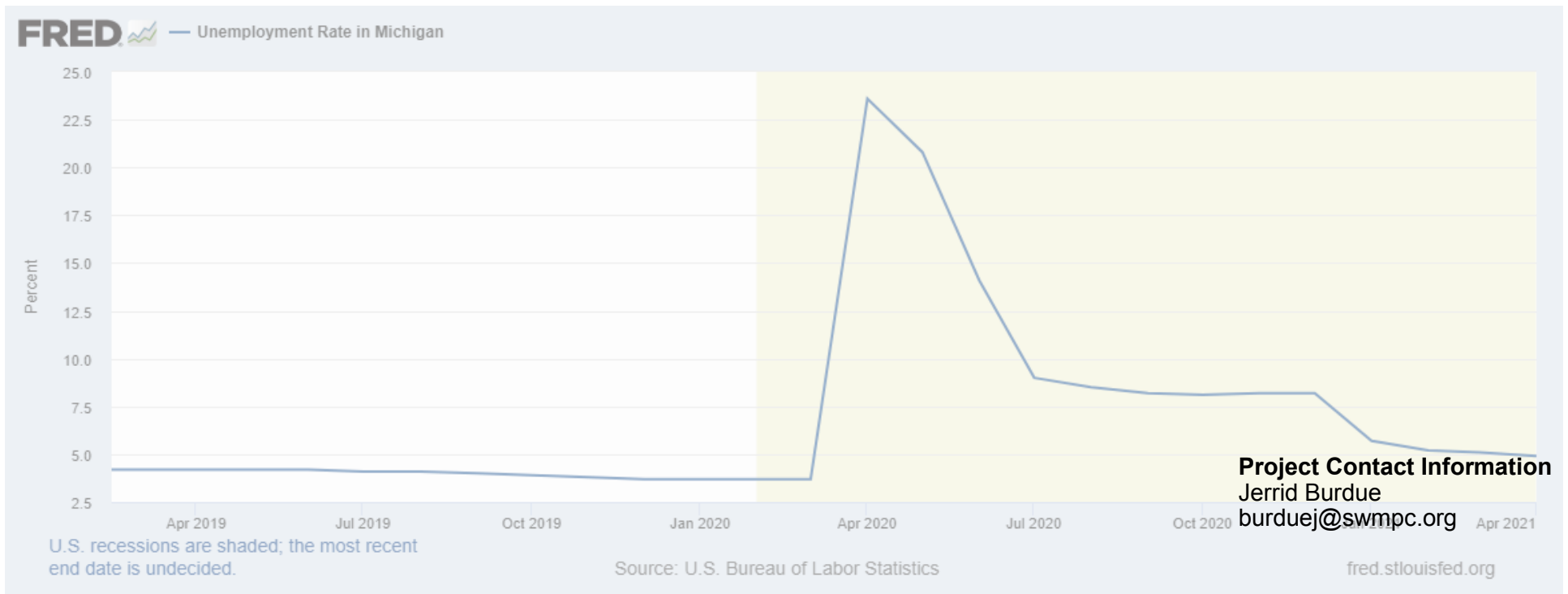
Anticipated project completion June 30, 2022

Stakeholders

The Recovery Strategy will be one of our most ambitious projects ever for the union of comprehensive data collection and regional collaboration. During the two-years of work the SWMPC will be reaching out to many stakeholders in the private and public sector to inform the final product.

Project Funding

Federal Funding \$400,000 (total project funding)



Project Contact Information
 Jerrid Burdue
burduej@swmpc.org

EDA Partnership Planning

Project Description

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is the US Economic Development Administration designated Economic Development District (EDD) which serves Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. One of our main functions as an EDD includes the preparation of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) every three to five years, as well as annual updates to this document. SWMPC completed a new, full CEDS in December 2017.

As the result of the CARES Act which provided EDA with an additional \$1.5 billion, SWMPC created a more robust project selection process to help drive strong applications to EDA grant programs. Working closely with the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee, SWMPC staff helped several municipalities and organizations apply for EDA funding.

Quick Facts

The CEDS Committee identified seven strong projects to be considered for EDA funding.

Important Dates

SWMPC will start preparing the next CEDS in 2022.

Stakeholders

Area businesses, economic and workforce development groups, local units of government, engineering and design consultants, MEDC, and EDA.

Annual Performance Report—October 2020

Southwest Michigan Economic Development District

Serving Berrien, Cass, & Van Buren Counties

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022



Program Funding

Federal Funding	\$210,000
<u>Local Funding</u>	<u>\$210,000</u>
Total:	\$420,000

Project Contact Information

Jerrid Burdue
burduej@swmpc.org

environmental

Pucker Street Dam Removal

Project Description

SWMPC assisted the City of Niles with the environmental assessment, grant administration and securing over \$1.86 million in grant funding from state, federal and private sources to remove the Pucker Street Dam. The **Pucker Street Dam was ranked the highest priority dam in the entire St. Joseph River Watershed for removal.** Pucker Street Dam was located only 3 miles from the confluence with the St. Joseph River and was responsible for closing off almost the entire Dowagiac River Watershed and all of its tributaries (159 miles). The Pucker Street Dam blocked the upstream migrations of fish species such as steelhead, Chinook salmon, coho salmon, brown trout, white suckers, and walleye. The Dowagiac River is an incredible asset for southwest Michigan with even more potential once the river is restored to a free flowing condition.

Quick Facts

Coldwater streams with a high gradient are rare in southern Michigan. Removal of the Pucker Street Dam will restore approximately 2 miles of this high gradient habitat immediately upstream of the dam. The dam removal reconnected 159 miles of the Dowagiac River system to the St Joseph River.

Partners

City of Niles
Wightman & Associates
Interfluve
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi
MI Department of Natural Resources
MI Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy
US Fish & Wildlife Service
Great Lakes Fishery Trust



Project Funding

City of Niles	\$10,000,000
Grants	\$1,861,585
Total:	\$11,861,585

Project Contact Information
Marcy Hamilton
hamiltonm@swmpc.org

awards

Graham Woodhouse Award - Paw Paw River Water Trail

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission presented the 2020 Graham Woodhouse Intergovernmental Effort award at its Board Commission meeting via a remote meeting held on December 15, 2020. The Award is presented annually for projects that exemplify cooperation between and among governments, non-profits, and private entities. It was established to recognize and reward the partners who execute complex, regional problem solving that optimizes the use of limited resources. This kind of problem solving is often much more difficult than traditional methods but the rewards tend to be greater and more far-reaching. The partners involved were deemed deserving for their resourcefulness, dedication, and persistence. The award was presented to the Paw Paw River Water Trail (PPRWT) Project.

The PPRWT project involves the establishment and maintenance of a water trail for paddlers along the Paw Paw River. Unlike other water trails on larger rivers, the Paw Paw River flows unobstructed through an extensive floodplain forest corridor for 68 miles from Maple Lake Dam in Paw Paw to its confluence with the St. Joseph River in Benton Harbor, thereby providing a unique nature and wildlife viewing opportunity to paddlers.

The primary object of the project was the creation of a regional recreational feature to benefit both local residents and visitors that would be funded, maintained and promoted by a consortium of governmental and non-governmental entities through annual voluntary contributions.

The project brought together 14 units of government from both rural and urban areas. Their collaboration was essential to the project's success. Recreational paddling is one of the fastest growing outdoor activities and the PPRWT provides over 20 different segments ranging from Beginner to Intermediate to Advanced level of paddling skill. Usage surveys suggest that thousands of paddlers are using this water trail, predominantly from local communities but some from other areas of Michigan and out-of-state. The water trail benefits the local communities and their businesses. The water trail is a significant recreational amenity making these communities more attractive places to live and visit.

The 2020 Graham Woodhouse award was given to the project partners: Village of Paw Paw, Paw Paw Township, Waverly Township, Lawrence Township, Village of Lawrence, Hartford Township, City of Hartford, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, Watervliet Township, City of Watervliet, Coloma Township, City of Coloma, Hagar Township, Benton Township, Cornerstone Alliance, Two Rivers Coalition, Van Buren Road Commission, Berrien County Road Department, and Sarett Nature Center.

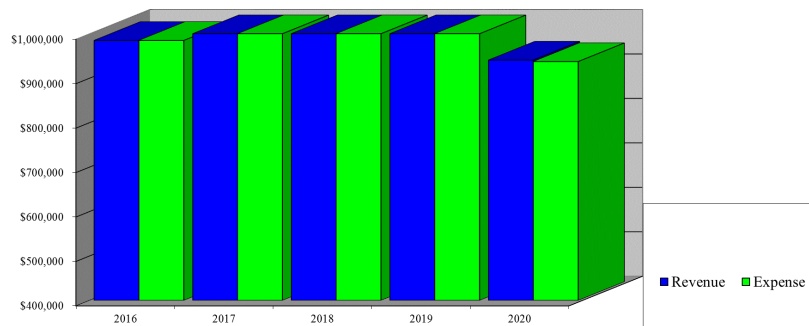
Welch-Lackey Award - Teri Freehling

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission selected Teri Freehling to be honored with the 2020 Welch-Lackey Leadership Award by its Board via a remote meeting held on December 15, 2020. John Egelhaaf, Executive Director of the SWMPC presented the honor to Teri Freehling noting that she has been a member of the SWMPC since 2016. She assumed the role of SWMPC Vice Chair in 2018 and has been SWMPC Chair since February of 2020. Her term as Chair has coincided with the emergence of COVID 19 and the need for virtual meetings. She has skillfully navigated the Commission through this new reality. In 2019-2020 she has been a significant driver of the SWMPC's broadband work. She has maintained her dedication to the SWMPC in spite of profound personal tragedy.

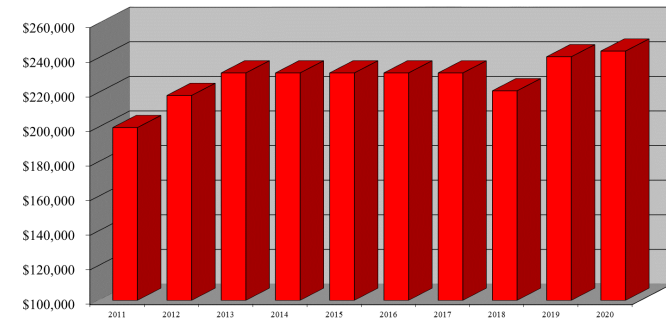
The SWMPC presents the Welch-Lackey Leadership Award each year in honor of former Commissioners George A. Welch and William F. Lackey. These men served the Commission in times of great personal difficulties, yet continued throughout to represent the spirit of public service and to further the goals of intergovernmental cooperation. Their contribution to the communities they served embodies the leadership qualities essential to the preservation of our citizen form of government. Board members vote using a ballot containing nominees of current members with exemplary qualities.

Annual Audit

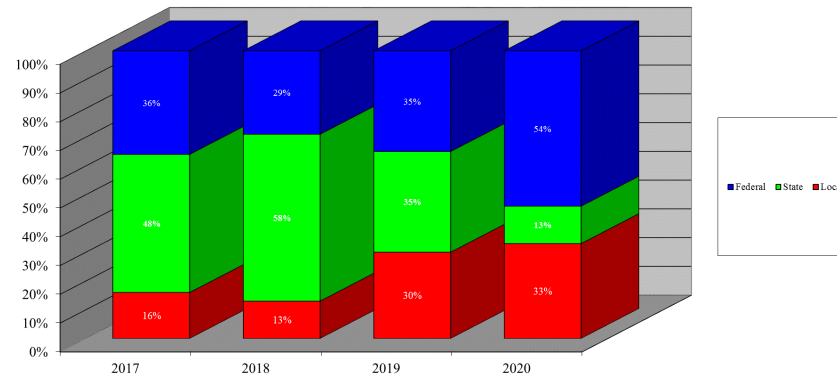
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
Revenue - vs- Expense Analysis



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
Fund Balance Trends



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
Revenue Analysis



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

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