

# Southwest Michigan Planning Commission



**Planning Great Communities Together.**

Serving Berrien, Cass & Van Buren Counties

# 2021

# Annual Report

# Southwest Michigan Planning Commission 2021 Board

## Berrien County

County Commissioners  
Jim Curran  
Teri Sue Freehling  
Donnie Meeks

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

## Cass County

County Commissioner  
Roseann Marchetti

Representatives  
Don DeLong  
Leon Laylin  
Linda Preston  
Doug Tyler

## Van Buren County

County Commissioners  
Kurt Doroh  
Don Hanson  
Gail Patterson-Gladney

Representatives  
Dave Foerster  
Sandra Hanson  
Judy Janssen  
Matthew Newton

## Pokagon Band of Potawatomi

Robert Torzynski

## Economic Development

## Our Team

**K. John Egelhaaf**, AICP  
Executive Director

**Marcy Hamilton**  
Deputy Director/Senior  
Planner

**Kim Gallagher**  
Senior Planner

**Maria Vettrai**  
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](http://www.swmpc.org)

Photo: Wightman—Union Pier

## **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

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to cast a long shadow across 2021. The virus managed to morph into various iterations that kept all of us on our heels. However, there was also adaptation and resiliency. Amid the tragedy, there were also signs of recovery. Medical science was able to respond with vaccines and treatment that provided hope where it was previously difficult to find. For the SWMPC, we progressed from a fully virtual work environment, to one that became hybridized. This hybridization extended to the function of our board where, by August, the board began to meet both in-person and virtually. The staff at the SWMPC continued to perform at the level of excellence that we are accustomed, but to have done so through all the challenges that the pandemic has presented, is even more remarkable.

The federal and state response to the pandemic has meant that significant funding has been flowing to both understand and respond to its impacts. The SWMPC has been in a unique position to help the region in both the study of impacts and the infrastructure repair that has been necessary. The SWMPC 2021 Annual Report is a snapshot of the work that we produced. We are adhering to our new approach to the Annual Report by not providing an excessively long inventory of every project. Instead, we want to give the reader an understanding of the breadth of work we have done. As such, we have highlighted some but not all of the projects though we are proud of all the work we engage. I encourage the reader to call or email me if you would like to learn more.

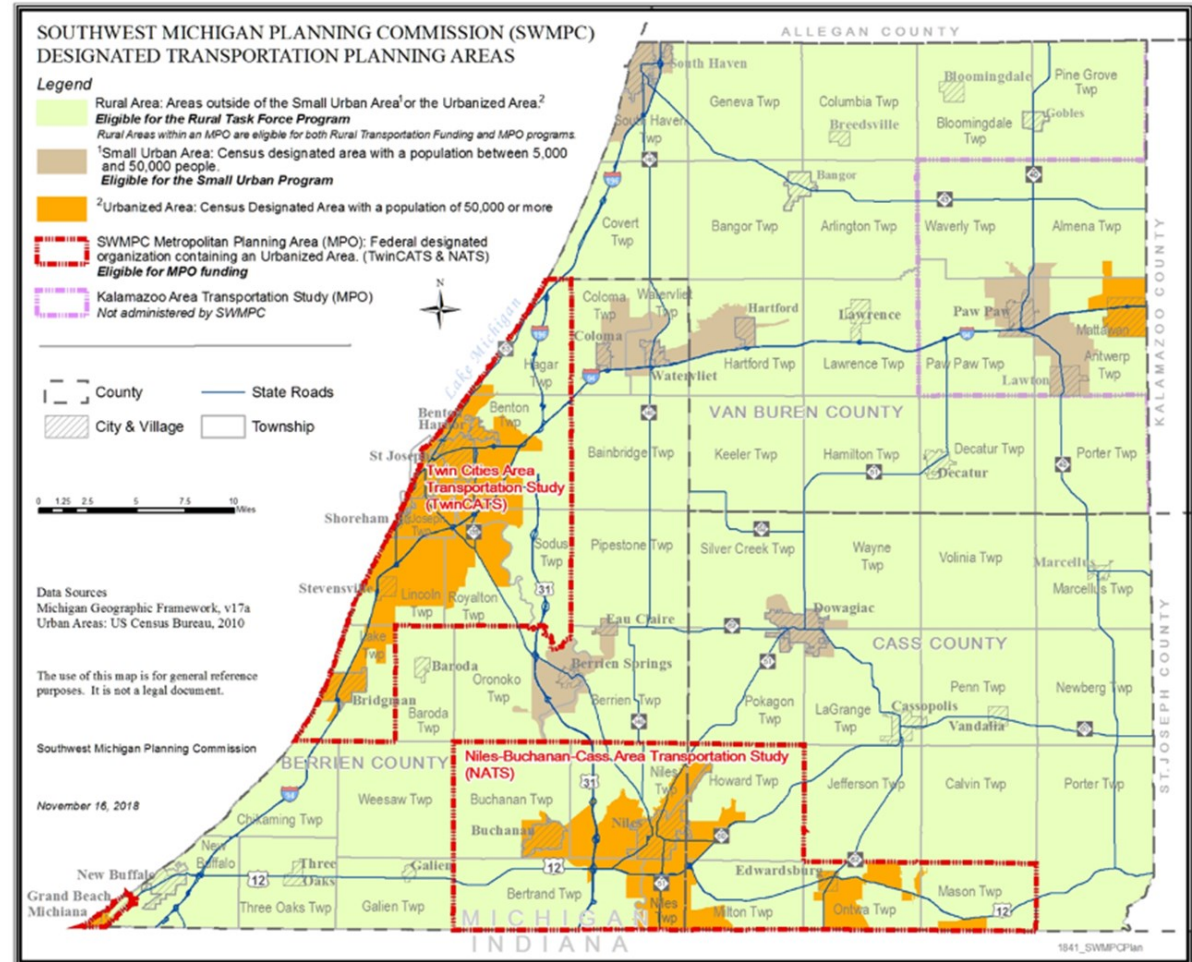
K. John Egelhaaf, AICP, Executive Director



# transportation & mobility

# Transportation Planning

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) is the federal and state designated center for Transportation Planning for the region's urbanized and non-urbanized areas. Certified by the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration, SWMPC is the Metropolitan Planning Organization for two urbanized areas in the region – St. Joseph Benton Harbor (TwinCATS) and the Niles, Buchanan Cass Area (NATS). The SWMPC staff work closely with MDOT as well. We are often the bridge that links local roads and transit agencies with state and federal funding for transportation improvements and operations. With representation from elected officials and transportation agencies, federal and state-funded transportation projects are coordinated through SWMPC. SWMPC transportation planning staff members facilitate regular public meetings and work closely with area road and transit agencies to identify and plan for roads, public transit services, and non-motorized pathways. This program coordinates and facilitates regional planning for federal and state investments in surface transportation.



## Stakeholders

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

## Program Contact Information

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

# Regionwide Call for 2023-2026 Transportation Projects

In 2021, the SWMPC transportation program staff made significant improvements to the region's transportation planning processes with a streamlined call for projects process for the Urban, Rural, Small Urban, CMAQ transportation programs. The call for projects is a multi-year planning effort which also included the creation of new information guides and project applications for each of the five federal transportation programs SWMPC manages. All of this material was distributed to various agencies across the region for the 2023-2026 call for projects. This work generated over 62 project applications for projects across the region. SWMPC staff scored, evaluated and held public meetings for each of the transportation programs. All of this work culminated with \$22 million dollars in federal funds awarded to local road agencies.

## 2023-2026 Local Agency Projects



**60** miles

Total Center lane miles of  
**ROADWAY** improvements.



**2** projects

Rehabilitation or reconstruction  
of **BRIDGES** that are currently  
rated in poor or fair condition



**6** miles

**Non-motorized paths**



**21** miles

Reconstruction or rehabilitation of  
roads in poor or fair condition



**7** projects

Roadway **SAFETY** improvements

# Asset Management Program

Transportation asset management is an important planning tool for public officials, planners, engineers, and others. Transportation asset management is based on an inventory of each local road network within the region. It provides data that allows transportation officials to monitor, plan, and strategically improve the road network.

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 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. The PASER assessment system rates the surface condition for a given segment of road 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.

In a typical year, SWMPC staff, along with a Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and a county road commission representative, collect condition information for approximately half of all the federal aid roads within the region which equals about 805 miles. In 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions, data was not collected on any of the federal aid roads. Since no roads were rated in 2020, SWMPC collected data for the region’s entire federal aid road network (1606 miles) in 2021.

## Stakeholders

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

## Program Contact Information

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

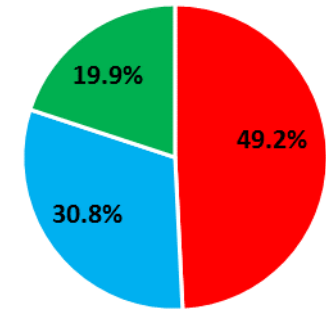
### Berrien County

747 Rated Miles

49.2% Poor Condition

30.8% Fair Condition

19.9% Good Condition



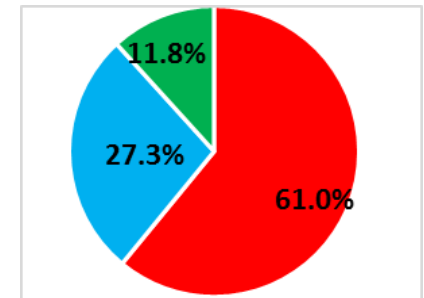
### Cass County

369 Rated Miles

61.0% Poor Condition

27.3% Fair Condition

11.8% Good Condition



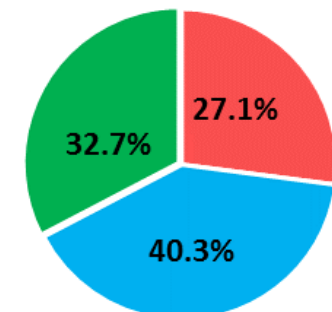
### Van Buren County

466 Rated Miles

27.1% Poor Condition

40.3% Fair Condition

32.7% Good Condition





# 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](http://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**

Sign up today!  
[www.mywaythere.org/carpool.asp](http://www.mywaythere.org/carpool.asp)

For more information about this service please call 269-925-1137 or visit [www.mywaythere.org/carpool.asp](http://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!

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

**Project Contact Information**  
 Kristopher Martin  
[martink@swmpc.org](mailto:martink@swmpc.org)

# community development

# Berrien County: Indiana/Michigan River Valley Trail Expansion

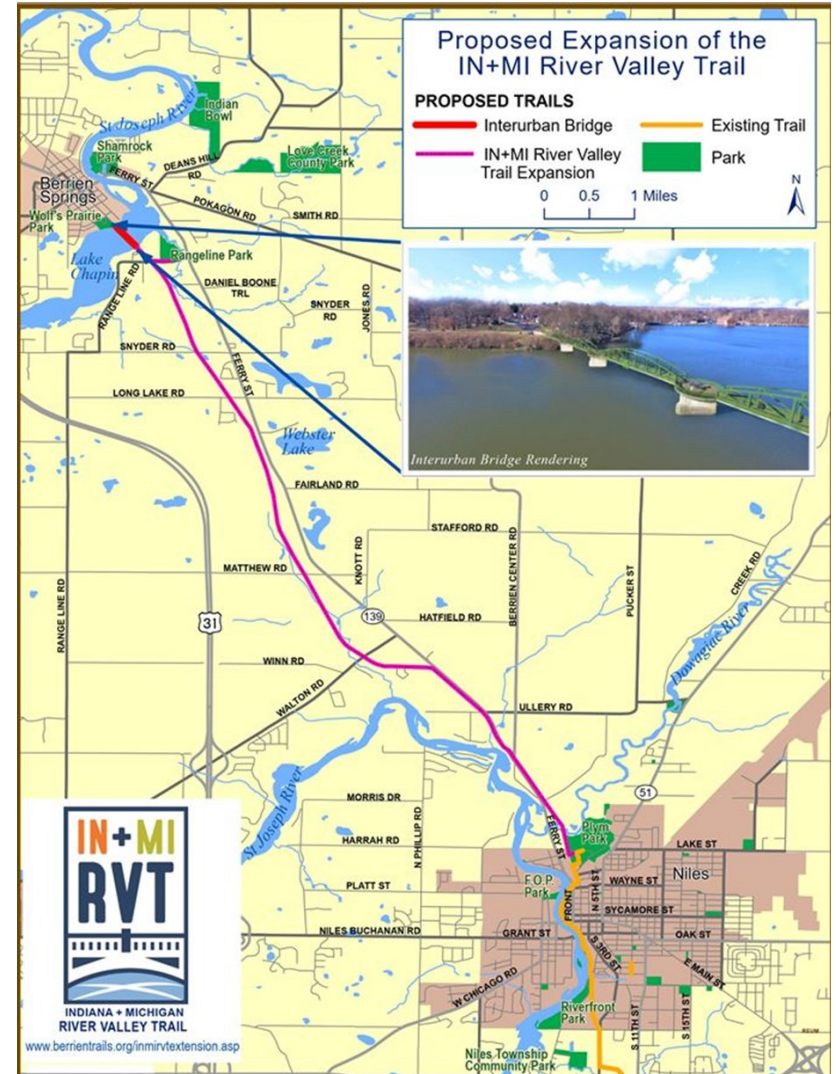
## Project description

SWMPC has been assisting Berrien Township with its Master Plan and Recreation Plan updates. Along with the planning work, SWMPC assisted Berrien Township with a successful grant application to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) for improvements to Range Line Park. The improvements included an accessible playground, updated restroom and kitchenette in an existing picnic shelter, drinking fountain, improved parking lot with accessible parking and an enhanced trail to a scenic overlook along Townsend Creek and Lake Chapin.

This project was a priority in the Township's recreation plan. The project scored well as this park will serve as a future trailhead for the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail. SWMPC is working with stakeholders from Niles to Berrien Springs to extend the 17-mile trail that now connects Niles to Mishawaka, IN. In addition, SWMPC wrote a successful MNRTF grant for Niles Township to construct a new trailhead for the trail at Ontario Road.

## Stakeholders

Berrien Township  
 Niles Township  
 Wightman  
 Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
 Niles City  
 Be Healthy Berrien  
 Berrien Springs Village  
 Oronoko Township



## Project Contact Information

Marcy Hamilton  
[hamiltonm@swmpc.org](mailto:hamiltonm@swmpc.org)

# Regional Food Branding

## Project description

The SWMPC has been one of the founding members of an organization called the Local Food Council (LFC). It is a collective of advocates that takes evidenced-based actions toward the development of an equitable regional food system that values local farmers and entrepreneurs. In 2020, the SWMPC wrote a grant application to the USDA in service to the LFC to fund a project that would establish a brand suitable to promote food produced in our region. The USDA awarded \$65,000 for the project. The firm of Johnson Rauhoff was awarded the project and during the months that followed, worked closely with the LFC, conducted extensive research, and interviewed more than forty industry experts. Their work was extremely thorough. They developed strategic pillars that comprised the brand's foundation. In order to explicitly focus the brand toward particular targets, personas were established that clarified who those individuals were. Ultimately, seven options were narrowed to one. The project has concluded with a logo, variations on that logo, a color palate, and a tag line. Moreover, the project also set out a rough strategy for brand activation across the region. From 2021 and beyond, the LFC and the SWMPC will work to systematically incorporate the brand into the marketplace.



## Project Contact Information

John Egelhaaf  
egelhaafj@swmpc.org

# economic development

# Broadband

## Project description

The SWMPC has been exploring opportunities to move the region into a better future with broadband internet since 2013. Back then, we were working with Connect Michigan to survey and map speeds and coverage across the three counties of southwest Michigan. Without enough funding and support, we paused our activity in 2014. In 2019, we quietly restarted our work on broadband. Between 2019 and 2020, we gradually built our institutional intelligence across a range of broadband issues from a basic technological competence, to infrastructure awareness, to a better understand of how the marketplace functions. By 2020 we had built the knowledge and partnerships to have a clear recognition of promising opportunities to move the region forward. Thus, early in the year we established a strong partnership with Merit Network, an innovative non-profit, created in 1966 by Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, and Wayne State University to manage “resource sharing” between the universities and subsequently become the longest running regional computer network in the US. Leading up to 2021, we met regularly with executives from Merit to explore how they might help the region fill gaps in broadband coverage. By 2021, in partnership with Merit, the SWMPC offered the three counties the opportunity to survey households across the region on their internet access, internet speed, and internet preferences at a cost offset by a generous cost match by Merit.

During this work, with the help of our fellow regional planning organizations across the state, we have observed that counties and leadership vary significantly in their approach to broadband solutions. In southwest, Michigan Berrien County’s approach matched up well with the Merit/SWMPC opportunity. So, after much background work to assure success, in February the broadband survey was launched. The survey concluded in March of 2021. Following a thorough exercise in analysis and translation into infographics and digital mapping, the results were transcribed into the [Berrien County Michigan Broadband Story Map](#). The StoryMap has proven to be a dynamic resource to inform users of all types from residents, business owners, elected officials, to Internet Service Providers.

Addressing broadband gaps across the region will be a long journey requiring plenty of persistence. Each of our three counties will follow the approach that best suits their needs. The SWMPC stands ready to assist each of them and is prepared to innovate wherever necessary.

## Project Contact Information

John Egelhaaf  
egelhaafj@swmpc.org

# Palisades Economic Recovery Initiative

## Project Description

The work will take place from 2021-2023 and will provide the community with the capacity to have greater influence over their economic future while they stay informed and engaged in the events associated with the plant closure and decommissioning process.

The project involves the SWMPC's orchestration of broad organizational collaboration. Vital to the project success are partners at the University of Michigan's Economic Growth Institute, Market Van Buren, Van Buren County, and departments of state government including the Michigan Department of Treasury, and Michigan State Housing and Development Authority.

**Economic Recovery Strategic Planning** – This process has begun and is approximately half-way through a thorough analysis of the current positive impact Palisades has across the regional economy. Out of the analysis, the strategy will then assess the systems, sectors, and community assets already in place that can be aligned, augmented, or expanded to fill the impending gaps to be left by the plant closure. The last step of this planning process will be to develop a recovery/implementation action plan which will outline both general and specific response actions and prioritize them.

**Economic Recovery Implementation** - Implementation of the recovery strategy will be facilitated by a designated recovery implementation specialist. Their sole focus will be to systematically drive the actions itemized in the recovery strategy. The same dedication to transparency and public dialogue will continue in the implementation phase.

### Facilitated by Economic Recovery Specialist

The benefits of a successful recovery strategy will be diverse and will significantly impact:

- School districts
- Philanthropic organizations
- Events and organizations who rely on volunteers
- Local government services
- Local businesses
- Residents and visitors

### Final Product

- Public Information Sharing Website
- Social media channel(s)
- Documented Economic Recovery Strategy
- Analysis to understand breadth and scale of loss
- Roadmap for community action
- Economic Recovery Specialist
- Embedded specialist to facilitate implementation of recovery strategy
- An Innovative Model for Other Communities Facing Decommissioning in the Future

**Budget** - The project has been funded through a partnership with the EDA which has funded the majority of the project (\$969,261), the Consumers Energy Foundation (\$140,000), The Michigan Department of Treasury (\$53,000), and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (\$50,000).

## Project Contact Information

Jerrid Burdue  
burduej@swmpc.org

# Partnership Planning/Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan

## Project Description

The SWMPC continued work on the Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan for southwest Michigan as we bounce back from COVID. Data collection was completed and in-depth analysis began. A unique partnership with the Economic Growth Institute at U of M has allowed for the addition of economic modeling in the plan that looks at sectors of the economy that provide the greatest value added. This project received an extension to the end of December 2022 to better align with the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy refresh.

Through our Partnership Planning grant, SWMPC assisted Midwest Energy and Communications (MEC) on their successful SMART Park application to the Economic Development Administration (EDA). MEC received \$6 million from EDA for infrastructure buildout. SWMPC also assisted the City of New Buffalo on an EDA application that received \$941,383 for marina upgrades and expansion. These two successful grants represented the largest investment from EDA in our region in decades.

SWMPC started outlining a workplan for the 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Administration refresh. This refresh will utilize a digital platform to allow for interactive data.

## Funding

Economic Development Administration  
 Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan \$400,000  
 Partnership Planning \$210,000



**Project Contact Information**  
 Jerrid Burdue  
[burduej@swmpc.org](mailto:burduej@swmpc.org)



# awards

## Graham Woodhouse Award - Dowagiac River Restoration/Water Trail

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission presented the 2021 Graham Woodhouse Intergovernmental Effort award at its Board meeting via a remote meeting held on December 21, 2021. 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 Dowagiac River Restoration/Water Trail Project's partners: City of Niles, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Cass County Parks Department, Cass and Berrien County Drain Commissioners, Pokagon Township, Wightman, Inter-Fluve, Milbocker & Sons, Partnership for MEANDRS, Trans Canada Energy.

As part of the Dowagiac River Restoration/Water Trail project, the Pucker Street Dam removal, river restoration and pathway clearing was a critical part of a larger restoration effort for the Dowagiac River and the improvement of a recreational gem in southwest Michigan. The City of Niles and partners have restored the lower Dowagiac River and created the Dowagiac River Water Trail, allowing for more recreation opportunities. The Dowagiac River is the largest cold-water trout stream in southern lower Michigan making it a spectacular salmon and trout fishery, visited by anglers from all over the Midwest. The Pucker Street Dam used to provide electricity for Niles City. In 2013, the City started working with partners to remove the dam and restore up to two miles of high gradient river upstream. The dam (38 feet high) and its powerhouse were extremely large structures containing hazardous materials. The dam also blocked fish passage to over 159 miles of river upstream. The dam removal planning and permitting took seven years, with construction starting in August of 2019 and ending at the end of 2021.

The partners worked together throughout the 9-year process and many have developed a better understanding and appreciation for the Dowagiac River. For the last four years, there have been bi-weekly meetings to ensure coordination and to navigate through the many obstacles encountered. This project needed these diverse partners for their technical expertise, assistance, grant funding and in the end, camaraderie.

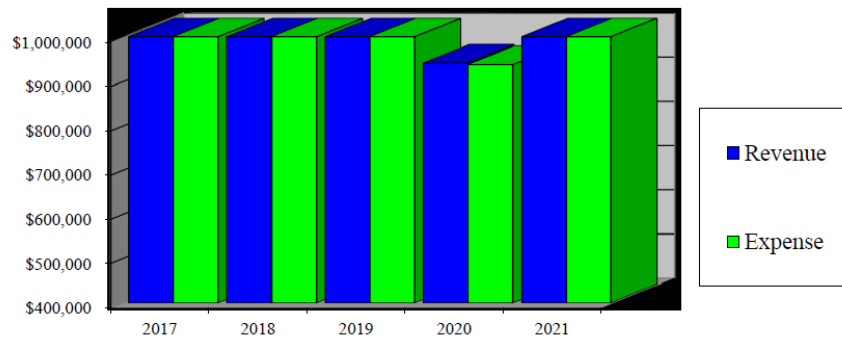
## Welch-Lackey Award - Roseann Marchetti

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) has selected Cass County Commissioner Roseann Marchetti to be honored with the 2021 Welch-Lackey Leadership Award by the SWMPC Board during their meeting held on December 21, 2021. Berrien County Commissioner and SWMPC Chair, Teri Freehling presented the honor to Commissioner Marchetti. Commissioner Marchetti has been a trusted advocate and member of the SWMPC since 2013. She assumed the role of SWMPC Vice-Chair in 2020 and will take on the role of SWMPC Chair in 2022.

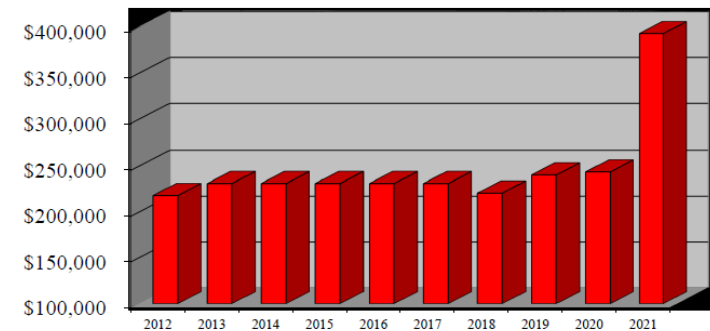
The SWMPC is the regional planning agency for Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties and presents the Welch-Lackey Leadership Award each year in honor of former Commissioners George A. Welch and William F. Lackey. These men served the Commission in times of great personal difficulties, yet continued throughout 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.

# 2021 Annual Audit

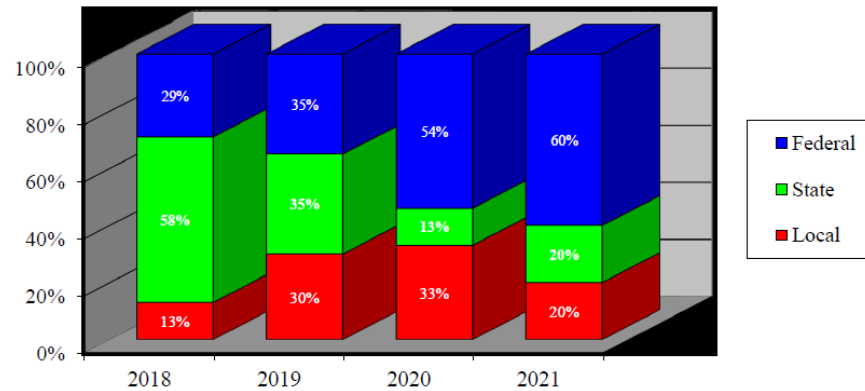
**Southwest Michigan Planning Commission  
Revenue - vs- Expense Analysis**



**Southwest Michigan Planning Commission  
Fund Balance Trends**



**Southwest Michigan Planning Commission  
Revenue Analysis**



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