



SWMPC

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN PLANNING COMMISSION

Annual Report

Photo: MEC Smart Park/Abonmarche



Proudly
Serving
Southwest
Michigan for
50 Years



Who is the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission?

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 1973 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.

Our Mission



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.



Letter from Our Executive Director

As we reflect on the past year, I am proud to share the accomplishments of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC). For over 50 years, our mission has been to foster collaboration, innovation, and sustainable growth across Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. In 2024, we continued this tradition, addressing regional challenges and advancing initiatives that strengthen our communities.

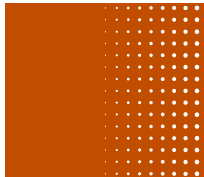
This year, we were honored to present the 2024 Graham Woodhouse Intergovernmental Effort Award to the Southwest Michigan Advanced Research & Technology (SMART) Park. This project exemplifies the power of regional collaboration, bringing together public and private partners to create a forward-thinking industrial hub in Cassopolis. By prioritizing broadband access, green stormwater infrastructure, and renewable energy, SMART Park is setting a new standard for economic development.

Beyond this achievement, our work spanned critical areas such as broadband expansion, transportation planning, environmental stewardship, and economic development. We successfully guided communities through new waste management regulations, supported infrastructure improvements, and developed strategies for long-term regional resilience.

As we look to the future, SWMPC remains committed to innovative solutions that empower our communities. Thank you to our partners, local leaders, and residents who make this work possible. Together, we will continue to build a stronger, more connected Southwest Michigan.



K. John Egelhaaf, AICP
Executive Director, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission



50 Years of Regional Impact

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) was established in 1973 and first staffed in 1974, serving Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. For 50 years, SWMPC has been a leader in regional planning, supporting infrastructure development, environmental stewardship, economic growth, and transportation planning. Initially focused on policy planning to help communities secure federal funding, it diversified to satisfy needs in water quality management, transportation planning, and economic development by the late 1970s.

Despite shifts in federal funding in the 1980s, SWMPC remained a key resource, providing grant writing, project management, and technical assistance. The 1990s saw the rise of digital tools, and SWMPC integrated Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and became a Census Information Center, enhancing data-driven decision-making. In the 2000s, it broadened its programs to include transit planning, land use management, and community development. In 2024, SWMPC celebrated 50 years with a new logo and website, reflecting its commitment to innovation and accessibility.

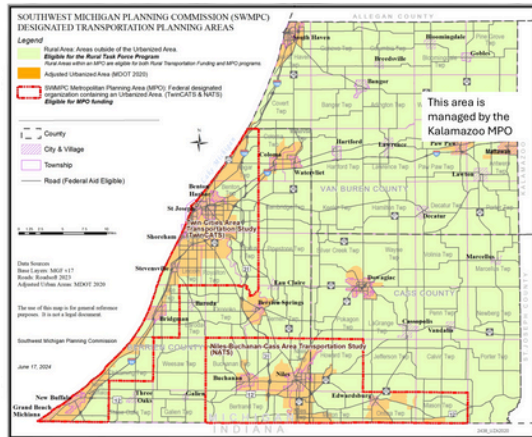
Looking ahead, SWMPC remains dedicated to regional collaboration, sustainable development, and forward-thinking solutions. By addressing community resilience, infrastructure modernization, and economic opportunity, it aims to empower communities and build a thriving future for Southwest Michigan.

1974
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2024



Transportation Planning

In FY 2024, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) played a vital role in securing and coordinating **over \$15 million in transportation funding across Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties**. By working closely with local, state, and federal partners, SWMPC helped ensure that critical infrastructure projects received the necessary support to move forward. From road preservation and transit access to non-motorized transportation improvements, these investments strengthen regional connectivity, enhance safety, and promote economic growth. SWMPC serves as a bridge between local communities and funding opportunities, assisting with project planning, federal and state compliance, and collaboration between stakeholders.



Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) – NATS & TwinCATS

Transportation planning for urban areas in Southwest Michigan is directed through two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), embedded within the SWMPC, led by local elected and appointed officials, with SWMPC staff providing organizational support. The Michigan portions of the South Bend and Elkhart urban areas are covered through the Niles-Buchanan-Cass Area Transportation Study (NATS), while the Benton Harbor-St. Joseph urban area and the Michigan portions of the Michigan City urban area are covered through the Twin Cities Area Transportation Study (TwinCATS). Working with these two MPOs, SWMPC manages Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) that allocate federal funding for local transportation projects, ensuring the projects align with local priorities and long-term regional mobility goals.

MPO Highlights

- Adjusted urban area boundary post-2020 Census, expanding TwinCATS to include Chikaming Township, New Buffalo Township, and the City of New Buffalo
- Led 2026–2029 TIP call for projects, creating a selection process using performance measures and local priorities
- Managed applications, reviewed proposals, and facilitated project selection and federal fund allocation

In FY 2024, SWMPC coordinated **\$4.28 million** in funding for road projects in the NATS and TwinCATS areas:

NATS

\$571,413 in **federal funding**
\$1,342,890 in **local contributions**

TwinCATS

\$1,290,542 in **federal funding**
\$1,078,662 in **local contributions**

Small Urban Program

More than **\$600,000** in combined grant and local funding supported a Small Urban Program road improvement project in Berrien Springs in 2024. The project improved roadway conditions and traffic flow in this small but growing community that serves as a vital link between rural and urban areas.

Rural Task Force (RTF) Region 4

RTF funding focuses on preserving roads, expanding all-season routes, and improving transit access in rural areas. In FY 2024, SWMPC worked with local partners to coordinate \$4.9 million in investments, including:

- \$2.7 million in **federal funds**
- \$419,447 in **state funds**
- \$1.8 million in **local contributions**

Power in Partnership

County Road 388 serves as a vital corridor connecting the Kalamazoo area to South Haven, frequently traversed by residents, visitors, and freight related to the region’s agricultural economy. Recognizing its importance, the Villages of Bloomingdale and Gobles, in partnership with the County of Van Buren and the City of South Haven, have embarked on a multi-year collaborative project to enhance this essential route. Planned improvements include trenching, widening, crushing, shaping, drainage upgrades, and repaving to ensure a safer and more efficient travel experience for all.

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

TAP funding supports non-motorized transportation infrastructure, making communities safer and more accessible for pedestrians and cyclists. In FY 2024, SWMPC helped facilitate **\$3.36 million** in TAP funding, including:

\$2.39 million in **federal funding**
\$970,199 in **local contributions**

These investments expanded sidewalk networks, multi-use trails, and bike lanes, improving connectivity and encouraging active transportation.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program

SWMPC assisted in securing **\$1.88 million** in CMAQ funding for projects aimed at reducing traffic congestion and improving air quality. These funds supported:

- Traffic signal optimization to reduce vehicle idling
- Fleet upgrades for cleaner transportation
- Non-motorized improvements to promote alternative transportation options

Asset Management & Local Training

SWMPC advanced its asset management work by collecting PASER data on 805 miles of federal-aid roads in the northern portions of Cass, Van Buren, and Berrien Counties, in partnership with local road departments. With additional TAMC funding, we also supported local jurisdictions in rating 578.51 miles of non-federal aid roads—the most local data collected in a single year to date. To build local capacity, SWMPC helped certify new raters, distributed asset management binders, and provided guidance on reporting. Roadsoft data was also updated to ensure accurate township and county assignments, meeting MDOT’s MIRE reporting requirements. These efforts help communities make smarter, data-driven infrastructure decisions.

Federal Aid Eligible Data Collection

County	Miles Rated
Cass	182
Van Buren	240
Berrien	383



Materials Management Planning

In 2024, SWMPC played a crucial role in helping Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties navigate Michigan's updated Part 115 Solid Waste Statute by contributing to the development of a regional Materials Management Work Program. By ensuring compliance with statutory requirements and facilitating collaboration, SWMPC strengthened regional waste management efforts.

To support this initiative, SWMPC provided guidance on the updated statute, emphasizing the benefits of a multi-county approach. We assisted in drafting and approving an interlocal agreement that established the Materials Management Planning Committee (MMPC) appointment process, the Designated Planning Agency (DPA) payment structure, and plan approval procedures. Additionally, we facilitated outreach to adjacent counties to explore collaborative opportunities and coordinated the timely filing of each county's Notice of Intent to the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) in July 2024.

A key achievement was the creation of an online MMPC application process, allowing for an efficient review of candidates and appointment recommendations. In November, SWMPC drafted MMPC bylaws, which were formally approved during the committee's first meeting. We continue to administer the MMPC by scheduling meetings, preparing agendas, and issuing public notices.

Throughout this process, SWMPC worked closely with county staff and administrators to ensure the County Boards of Commissioners could successfully appoint MMPC members. By fostering strong regional partnerships and streamlining waste management planning, we are helping Southwest Michigan build a more sustainable future.

SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS MANAGEMENT



Public Education Plan

In 2024, the Public Education Plan (PEP) made significant strides in raising awareness about water quality, pollution prevention, and green infrastructure.

Key accomplishments include:

- Presented at five City, Village, and Township Board meetings, integrating water quality and pollution prevention strategies into local master plans.
- Engaged the public at three events in Berrien and Cass Counties, educating attendees on wetlands and watersheds.
- Displayed educational materials and a tabletop sign at 10 locations across both counties, increasing visibility and outreach.
- Partnered with the Berrien County Drain Office to feature the Blue Costume in the Blossomtime Parade, serving as a fun and memorable reminder to keep our waters clean.
- Conducted a public survey with 98 respondents to assess knowledge and perceptions of water quality, watersheds, and their impact on local waterways.

Collaboration

The PEP is a collaborative effort among MS4 communities in Berrien and Cass Counties, working in partnership with SWMPC. Together, they develop, update, and implement the PEP to promote watershed education. The goal is to encourage residents to actively reduce pollutants in stormwater, fostering a cleaner and healthier environment for all.



Broadband Planning

In 2024, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) played a key role in expanding broadband access across Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties, ensuring unserved and underserved communities gained reliable high-speed internet. These efforts aimed to bridge the digital divide, boost economic opportunities, and improve quality of life.

In Berrien County, the Berrien County Broadband Internet Task Force (BCBIT) secured nearly **\$26 million** through the ROBIN grant program to expand rural broadband. Comcast also expanded its fiber network in Bainbridge Township, bringing gigabit-speed internet to previously unserved households and businesses.

In Van Buren County, over **\$4.1 million** in county funds, along with **\$1.4 million** from 13 townships, is supporting broadband expansion to 3,734 unserved locations. Construction is underway and expected to continue through 2026.

Midwest Energy & Communications (MEC) is extending high-speed fiber to nearly 7,000 addresses, supported by a **\$25.3 million** ROBIN grant and **\$15.8 million** from MEC. This investment is significantly improving access to education, telehealth, and economic opportunities in rural areas in southwest Michigan.

By securing funding, fostering partnerships, and guiding broadband expansion, SWMPC continues to strengthen digital infrastructure, ensuring Southwest Michigan communities remain connected and competitive.



Economic Development Palisades

In August 2024, we finalized the Palisades Economic Recovery Strategy in collaboration with our regional partners, including Kinexus Group, and the Economic Growth Institute at the University of Michigan. This strategy was developed in response to the closure of the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant (PNPP), which significantly impacted the economic stability of Van Buren, Berrien, and Cass Counties.

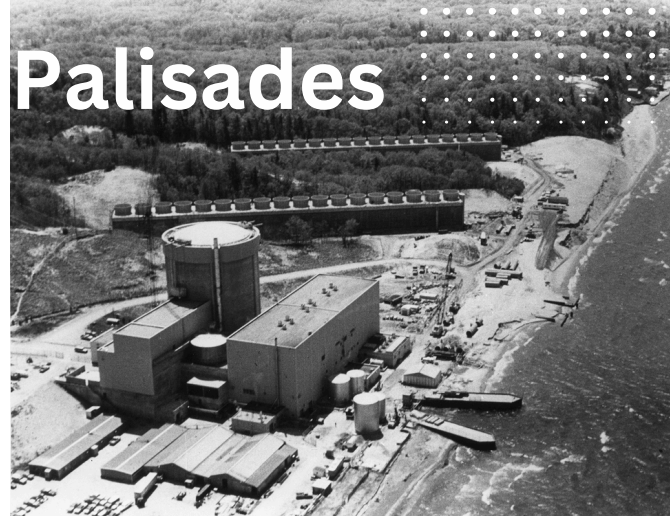
While the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant appears poised to reopen, further economic diversification remains essential, and this strategy offers a clear roadmap to guide the region toward long-term resilience and growth.

The strategy identifies **six key priorities for economic recovery**:

- **Multifaceted Economic Development**
- **Workforce and Talent Development**
- **Regional Marketing**
- **Housing**
- **Local Asset Development**
- **Infrastructure Improvement**

Key findings highlighted the need for economic diversification, workforce training alignment with employer needs, strategic marketing to attract investment, and targeted infrastructure investments. The action plan outlines specific steps to support business growth, workforce development, and housing expansion, while ensuring sustainability and long-term regional resilience.

Looking ahead, our next steps include securing funding for identified projects, implementing targeted workforce training initiatives, and advancing regional marketing efforts to attract new investment and retain talent. Continued collaboration among local governments, businesses, and community stakeholders will be essential in driving economic recovery and sustainable growth.



Economic Development - Partnership Planning

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) continues to foster economic growth across Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties as the U.S. Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) designated Economic Development District (EDD) for the region. By leading strategic planning efforts, securing funding, and strengthening partnerships, SWMPC plays a key role in building long-term economic resilience.

As an EDD, SWMPC connects local communities with federal funding and resources, ensuring regional initiatives align with the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This approach supports investments in infrastructure, workforce development, and business expansion.

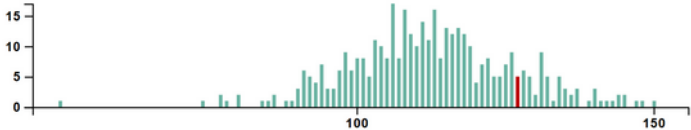
Collaboration remains central to these efforts. SWMPC works closely with Market One, Cornerstone Alliance, the Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber, and local municipalities to identify funding opportunities, assist with grant applications, and guide economic planning. By maintaining and updating the CEDS, SWMPC helps communities secure EDA funding, enabling critical projects that drive job creation and regional prosperity.

Through strategic partnerships and targeted economic development initiatives, SWMPC continues to strengthen Southwest Michigan’s economic foundation, ensuring communities remain competitive and resilient.

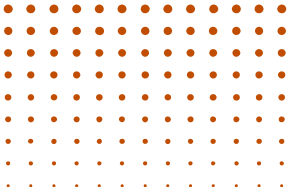
Employment and Productivity Index 127.1 (rank: 59)

Key Takeaways

- Industry performance in Southwest Michigan Planning Commission indicate a **high** level of positive outcomes from existing economic activity.
- The top measures for this index are:
 1. Change in Share of High-Tech Industry Employment (rank 12)
 2. Patent Diversity (rank 158)



STATSAMERICA Innovation Intelligence



Local Government Services

SWMPC supported local governments through strategic planning efforts to enhance recreation, sustainability, and resilience while ensuring eligibility for state and federal funding. In the Village of Decatur, and Decatur and Hamilton Townships, we facilitated the development of a Joint Master and Recreation Plans, guiding land use, economic development, and park improvements through intergovernmental collaboration. Similarly, we assisted Berrien Township in expanding recreational opportunities through a dedicated Recreation Plan and partnered with Weesaw Township to develop a Master Plan that balances development with environmental stewardship. In Dowagiac, we led the creation of a Recreation Plan, helping to secure future funding for parks and trails. Public input played a key role, with over 250 survey responses and a public open house helping shape the plan's goals and priorities.

Beyond recreation, SWMPC advanced coastal resilience efforts to help communities address fluctuating lake levels. In Benton Harbor, we developed a green stormwater infrastructure framework to reduce flooding, provided grant writing support, and trained local leaders. In South Haven, we assisted with a Master Plan Update, incorporating a Coastal Resilience chapter and gathering community input on climate adaptation, housing, and zoning. Additionally, in Bridgman, we supported the Shoreline Resiliency Committee, an apolitical advisory group established by the City Council to monitor Great Lakes water level fluctuations and shoreline dynamics. This initiative helps local governments implement informed planning and zoning practices to ensure a resilient coastline and long-term community well-being.



Photo: City of Dowagiac

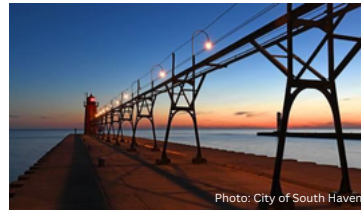


Photo: City of South Haven



Image: PLY+ Architecture

Graham Woodhouse Award

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) awarded the 2024 Graham Woodhouse Intergovernmental Effort Award to the Southwest Michigan Advanced Research & Technology (SMART) Park at its December 17, 2024, Board meeting. This annual award recognizes projects demonstrating strong collaboration among governments, non-profits, and private entities to solve regional challenges efficiently. Eleven partners, including four funders, were honored for their dedication and resourcefulness.

Located in Cassopolis, Michigan, SMART Park is a modern industrial hub spanning 179 acres with ten development sites, 37 acres of commercial space, and 14 acres of shared green space. It features cutting-edge broadband, green stormwater infrastructure, and nine acres of solar power, alongside multi-modal transportation options for enhanced connectivity.

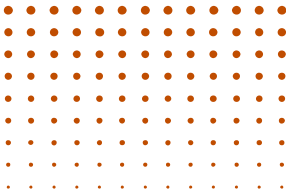
The park aims to diversify the local economy, promote sustainable design, and leverage Midwest Energy and Communication's technology while preserving community character. Its success relied on collaboration between Penn Township and the Village of Cassopolis, which established uniform development conditions through a PA 425 land-use transfer agreement to address jurisdictional challenges.



Project Partners

Abonmarche, Cass County, Cassopolis Area Utilities Authority, Representative Fred Upton, Market One, Michigan Department of Transportation, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Midwest Energy & Communications, Penn Township, U.S. Economic Development Administration, and Village of Cassopolis.

2024 SWMPC Board



Berrien County

County Commissioners
Jim Curran
Teri Sue Freehling
Julie Wuerfel

Representatives
Marge Durm-Hiatt
Dan Fette
Kristen Gundersen
Paul Pantaleo
Dick Stauffer
Gary Wood

Cass County

County Commissioner
Roseann Marchetti

Representatives
Don DeLong
James Dodd
Linda Preston
Doug Tyler

Van Buren County

County Commissioners
Kurt Doroh
Tina Leary
Gail Patterson-Gladney

Representatives
Rick Catherman
Roger Engle
Sandra Hanson
Kimberly Sinclair

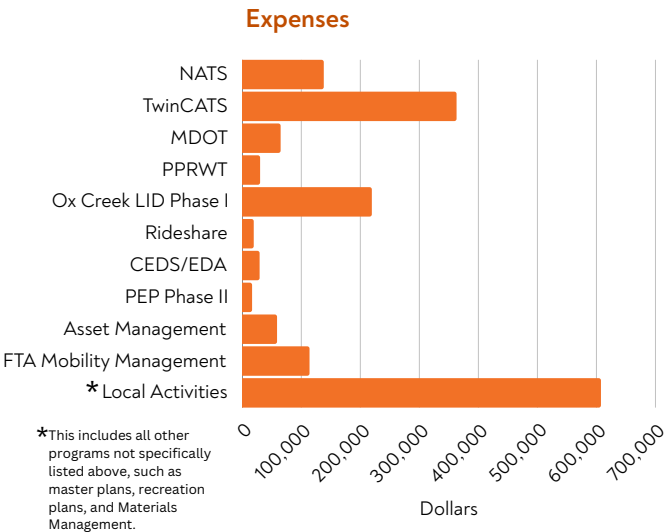
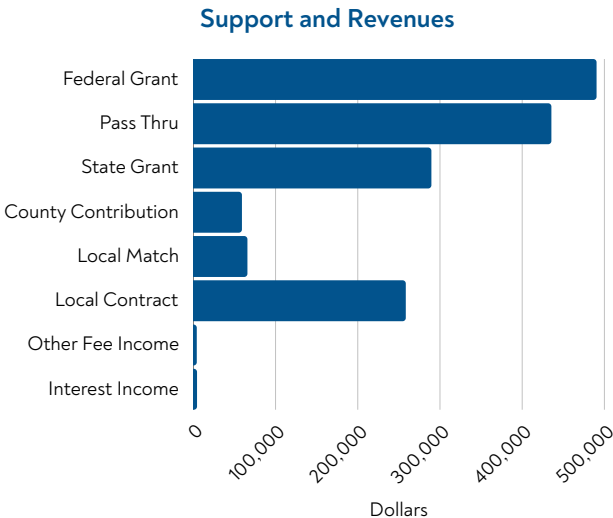
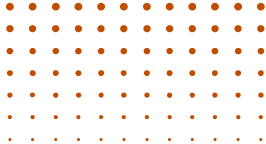
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi

Robert Torzynski

Economic Development Non-Voting Ex-Officio

Katie Multhauf

2024 Annual Audit



In 2024, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission achieved a major administrative milestone by securing its first Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with the federal government. This agreement allows SWMPC to more accurately recover indirect costs associated with managing federal and state grants, ensuring greater financial transparency and sustainability. With a NICRA in place, SWMPC is better positioned to pursue new funding opportunities, streamline project administration, and support long-term organizational growth. This step reflects a continued commitment to operational excellence and fiscal responsibility.

2024 Annual Audit

Assets

Current Assets:

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$504,206
Due from Grantors	\$298,258
Prepaid Expenses	\$111
Total Current Assets:	\$802,575

Non-Current Assets:

Capital Assets	
Depreciable	\$32,056
Accumulated Depreciation	(\$32,056)
Right to Use Assets	\$589,024
Accumulated Amortization	(\$53,994)
Total Non-Current Assets:	\$535,030

Total Assets: \$1,337,605

Liabilities

Current Liabilities:

Accounts Payable	(\$3,835)
Provision for Accrued Leave	\$42,161
Accrued Payroll Taxes	\$20,448
Escrow Accounts	\$37,507
Deferred Revenue	\$168,679
Leases Payable	\$51,833

Total Current Liabilities: \$316,793

Non-Current Liabilities:

Leases Payable	\$489,761
Total Non-Current Liabilities:	\$489,761

Total Liabilities: \$806,554

Net Assets

Net Assets - Beginning	\$585,291
Net Assets - Ending	\$531,051

Net Assets: \$531,051

SWMPC Staff

K. John Egelhaaf, AICP
Executive Director

Marcy Hamilton
Deputy Director/Senior Planner

Kim Gallagher
Senior Planner

Jerrid Burdue
Senior Development Planner

Brandon Kovnat, AICP
Transportation Planner

Jill Plescher
Geographic Information Systems
Specialist

Bekah Schrag
Associate Planner

Maria Vettraino
Office Manager

Planning Great Communities Together

Annual Report

2024

