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The Quarterly

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Planning that is Credible, Credentialed, and Connected

Project Connection

Last October, the Van Buren County Continuum of Care and the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission partnered to host **Project Connection!** the County's first Project Homeless Connect event. Over 125 adults received assistance for themselves and a reported 189 minor children. The event was successful due to the dedication and support of the social service agencies working with Van Buren County and a large number of wonderful volunteers. A second event is scheduled for April 17, 2008.

Although there are not a large number of homeless people on county streets, there are many residents who are precariously housed, doubled-up, at risk of eviction, or dealing with one or more of a wide variety of problems. Transportation around Van Buren County's rural landscape is an additional challenge to those striving for self-sufficiency. To address this broad scope of issues, the one-stop-shop day is called Project Connection! - a way to help people "connect the dots" of transportation, agency contacts, appointments, evaluations of eligibility, legal assistance, and many other services that can often seem overwhelming.

The April 17 event will be held at the Van Buren ISD Technology Center in Lawrence from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. In addition to assistance provided by the social services agencies, the students at the Tech Center will provide haircuts, blood pressure readings, and help in several other ways. Child care and bilingual (Spanish) translation services will be available and there will be free hot food from 1:30 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. If you would like more information or are interested in volunteering, please call Shelley Klug at 269-925-1137 x13.

By receiving this newsletter electronically you will be reducing greenhouse gases: **The carbon footprint of 40 reams of paper is equal to the amount of carbon that a 1.5 acre pine forest absorbs for one year!** Please help us reduce our carbon footprint....

RECEIVE OUR NEWSLETTER ELECTRONICALLY

Contact Terri Moore at mooret@swmpc.org or 269-925-1137 x20.

SWMPC HIGHLIGHTS

Meet our new staff members

Nickolas Musson is our new Transportation Planner and comes to us from Wausau, Wisconsin. Nick majored in Philosophy, Public administration; and Geography and minored in Environmental Studies and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. His previous experiences include volunteering at the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and interning at the Small Business Development Center.

Suzann Flowers is the new Program Assistant and first came to the Commission during the summer of 2007 as a student intern from Western Michigan University. She has now completed her Masters in Public Administration degree with a concentration in local government. Her project paper analyzed the use of urban growth boundaries as a means of mitigating the effects urban sprawl has on air and water quality. Suzann has just written her first grant application to the Heart of Cook Committee for the Green Infrastructure program.

WELCOME NEW STAFF MEMBERS

TRANSPORTATION

Profiling TwinCATS and NATS

NATS-Niles Area Transportation Study

The Niles-Buchanan-Cass Area Transportation Study (NATS) is the Michigan piece of the South Bend, Indiana urbanized area as designated by the United States Census. Meetings are the 4th Tuesday of each month with the TAC meeting at 1:30 p.m. and the Policy committee meeting at 3:00 p.m. at the City of Niles Council Chamber 1345 E. Main St., Niles, MI 49120.

TwinCATS-Twin Cities Area Transportation Study

TwinCATS has two committees, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Policy Committee. These two committees work cooperatively to make transportation related decisions for the Benton Harbor-St. Joseph urbanized area. Meetings are the 3rd Tuesday of each month with the TAC meeting at 9:30 a.m. and the Policy committee meeting at 10:30 a.m. at the Southwest Michigan Regional Airport 1123 Territorial Rd., Benton Harbor, MI 49022.

For more information about NATS & TWINCATS visit

www.swmpc.org/transportation.asp

ENVIRONMENT

2008 Graham Woodhouse Intergovernmental Award goes to MEANDRS Partners

The Graham Woodhouse Award was given to the Dowagiac River Meander Restoration at Arthur Dodd Memorial Park Project.

The award was presented at the January 2008 meeting by David Bly, Chairman, to representatives of nine of the sixteen entities involved in the project.

- Bill Westrate received the plaque for MEANDRS
- Amy Druskovich for Cass County Conservation District
- Robert Wagel for Cass County Board of Commissioners
- Robert Powers for Cass County Road Commission
- Scott Wyman for Cass County Parks Department
- Chris Bauer for Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Water Division
- Kregg Smith for Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Fisheries
- Brad Parlato for Trout Unlimited
- Elmer Graber and Joe Mitchell for St. Joseph River Valley Fly Fishers



In addition, US Fish and Wildlife, Partnership for Fish and Wildlife Habitat Program; Michigan Department of Agriculture, Inter-county Drain Board; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; St Deny's Foundation; Pheasants Forever, Cass County Chapter; and the Dowagiac Conservation Club were also honored for their participation.

The objective of the project was to reconnect a portion of the Dowagiac River with its original floodplain creating a channel that would restore the functions of a natural stream. Goals included involving stakeholders such as fishermen, canoe enthusiasts, and businesses catering to those recreational activities to once again take ownership of the River. John Egelhaaf explained that the relationships that were built over the years and collaboration between units of government were "sustained through hard work and dogged dedication to the underlying virtue of the project." Great financial and technical problems were overcome through the efforts of all parties concerned.

Bill Westrate, responding on behalf of the entire group, commended the hard work of all the partners and thanked the Commission for the recognition of their efforts.

TOURISM

Scenic Byways Grant Awarded to US 12 Heritage Trail to Create a Visitor Experience Strategy



The 212 miles of the US 12 Heritage Trail in Michigan is home to exceptional historic, cultural, and recreational features. Building on the foundation laid by the US 12 Heritage Trail Corridor Management Plan (CMP), the US 12 Heritage Trail Council wanted to integrate the hundreds of individual destinations into a single destination with hundreds of resources working together to tell the story and capture the imagination of travelers.

The US 12 Heritage Trail Council, which includes representatives of local government, and stakeholders throughout the corridor, realized that connecting with a place, enjoying quality infrastructure, and personalized service were vital to the success of any visit, but it is interpretation and engagement that make the difference between a pleasant break and an *unforgettable* experience along the US 12 Heritage Trail.

Through a \$228,000 grant from the Scenic Byways program, a Visitor Experience Strategy (VES) will be created and implemented. The US 12 Heritage Trail will now move forward to be the host of *unforgettable* experiences that reflect its strengths and complement the aspirations of the US 12 Heritage Trail aspirations. For example a VES could include interrelated railroad experiences along the trail that would include visits to railroad museums, taking a ride on the rails, and meeting some locals along the way with stories to tell.

Community enthusiasm, involvement, local knowledge, and passion for place are integral to the creation and implementation of this VES. Residents are the keepers of the stories and engagement with locals is fundamental to the unforgettable experience. Unfortunately, residents sometimes do not recognize what aspects of the natural and cultural heritage will be of interest to others. The VES will offer communities the opportunity to discover their own heritage and a strategy to communicate it to visitors with passion.

If you would like to learn more about the US 12 Heritage Trail please visit www.us12heritagetrail.org or call Kim Gallagher who manages the project.

AWARDS

2007 Welch-Lackey Leadership Award Recipient

~Linda Preston~

The Pokagon Township Supervisor was selected by the SWMPC Commission board as a member who exhibits a sense of service, leadership, and intergovernmental cooperation.

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.



K. John Egelhaaf, Linda Preston, David Bly

Preston has participated in SWMPC since 2000 as the Cass County Township Association Representative. She has also been involved with the organization's Administration Committee, Document Review Committee and has been chosen as Vice Chair for 2008. Complementary to her Supervisor and SWMPC roles, Preston also serves as Chair of the statewide Michigan Association of Regions.

John Egelhaaf, SWMPC Executive Director, commented, "She has a great capacity for compassion and sincerity and many of us have felt her genuine human kindness."



Quotes

"The most valuable natural resource in the 21st century is brains. Smart people tend to be mobile. Watch where they go! Because where they go, robust economic activity will follow".

Found in Michigan Future: Michigan's Transition to a Knowledge-Based Economy.

www.MichiganFuture.org

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

APRIL

April 17-1p.m.-6p.m. Project
Connection
April 18-Traffic count request forms
due
April 21-9:30 a.m. TwinCATS
April 22-1:30 p.m. NATS

MAY

May 1-Traffic counts start
May 6-US 12 meeting
May 19-9:30 a.m. TwinCATS
May 27-1:30 p.m. NATS
May 29-30-Design healthy livable
communities conference

JUNE

June 16-9:30 a.m. TwinCATS
June 24-1:30 p.m. NATS

SWMPC 2008 Board Meeting Schedule

SWMPC Full Commission Meetings
Location: Van Buren Conference Center
Lawrence, MI

April 15, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.
June 15, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.
October 21, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.

SWMPC Administrative Committee Meetings
Location: Vincent Place Conference Center
Benton Harbor, MI

June 17, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.
September 16, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.
December 16, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.

The public is welcome to attend.
For more information about the SWMPC Board please visit our website at www.swmpc.org/board.asp