**Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee**

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**Southwest Michigan Planning Commission**

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Introduction

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) is the designated Economic Development District for Berrien, Cass and Van Buren Counties. It is the role of the SWMPC, with the help of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee, local government and members of the community to produce a region-wide approach to economic development. What makes this plan comprehensive is looking beyond traditional economic development by incorporating quality of place, sustainability, diversity, equity and inclusion.

The region continues to face a declining and aging population while struggling to attract young talent. To better understand why this is, SWMPC staff went to high schools throughout the region to see how students feel about the region and what improvements would be welcomed. This effort was well received with over 400 students participating in this discussion. SWMPC will continue this in future years to not only engage students but also to introduce them to the field of planning and public service.

An addition to the 2022 CEDS, there is an online interactive interface known as a StoryMap. This tool allows users to interact with up-to-date data specific to the area they wish to look at. Various performance measure dashboards will show trends and progress towards the goals outlined in this document.

This plan was produced with funding from the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration.
The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee has outlined six goals to work towards over the next five years. These goals aim to improve economic conditions for everyone working, living and visiting southwest Michigan. Socioeconomic data, a SWOT Analysis and public engagement informed the Committee on the priorities of the region.

**Goals**

- **Quality of Place**
  
  The quality of place is the features of the natural and built environment as well as the human networks and systems that combine to make a location a healthy, desirable, competitive and economically viable place to live.

- **Education and Workforce**
  
  An educated and talented workforce is vital for the continued growth and development of the region’s economy.

- **Business Support**
  
  Supporting local business – both large and small.

- **Infrastructure**
  
  Infrastructure includes many aspects of the built environment around us including roads, bridges, air, rail, utilities and broadband internet. These elements drive the economy forward.

- **Economic and Environmental Sustainability**
  
  Economic development should be conducted in a way that helps minimize the risk of future economic hardship and protects the environment for generations to come.

- **Equity and Inclusion**
  
  Economic prosperity should positively impact all members of the community and never should further disadvantage underserved populations.
Online CEDS

Current & Interactive Data

Data in this report, in addition to other economic data for the region, can be found online at www.swmpc.org. This report was produced in a StoryMap format to allow for an interactive user experience. Through the StoryMap, you are able to interact by clicking to see definitions, additional data, comparison data, and to enlarge, print or download. Many sources of data (US Census, Esri, FRED) will update automatically allowing for this report to stay relevant for years to come.
Southwest Michigan continues to see a slight decline in population and increasing average age. The total number of households grew with an average household size of 2.42 (2020). This means that even though there is a decrease in overall population, there is a greater need for housing than prior years. Population forecasts for 2027 show the fastest growing population will be the Alpha generation (born 2010-2024) which will account for 12 percent of the region's population.

The region's unemployment rate in 2022 has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels at five percent. Manufacturing has remained the top sector in terms of employment, output and value added followed by administrative government.

The infographic report as seen on the next page can be viewed at the county, city, village or township level via the online StoryMap. Additional economic sector specific data can also be found on the StoryMap.
Measuring Economic Distress

The Economic Development Administration’s primary criteria for economic distress are the unemployment rate, per capita income (American Community Survey five-year average), and per capita personal income (from the Bureau of Economic Analysis). The two fundamental EDA requirements are that the 24-month unemployment rate be at least one point higher than the U.S. rate and that per capita income be 80 percent or less than the U.S. rate.
This year’s CEDS included the largest effort taken by SWMPC staff to engage with the community regarding economic and workforce development. These efforts took the form of a survey (online & paper) and direct in-person discussion with local high school and community college students. Over 400 students and 40 adults participated in this outreach.

445 Students  
46 Adults

Student outreach this year primarily occurred at Niles High School and Cassopolis Ross Beatty High School, though responses were received from schools in all three counties. SWMPC staff plans to engage high school and community college students at least yearly as the result of this successful engagement strategy. Several questions will remain the same to show trends while others will change to receive input from the variety of work taking place in the region.
What events do you enjoy?

Southwest Michigan has/is...

Quality health care, welcoming to diverse groups of people, quality schools, trade schools, higher education options.
What are some challenges or needs the region has?

What are you plans after high school?

- Community College
- Workforce
- Skilled Trades
- Military

4-year University
The SWOT Analysis is the product of community survey results, data analysis and input from the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee.

**Strengths**

- Mix of both urban and rural with close proximity to larger urban areas: Mishawaka, Kalamazoo, and even Chicago and Detroit
- Amtrak/passenger rail
- Hospitality/tourism
- Manufacturing
- Agricultural diversity/activity
- Festivals such as Hunter Ice, Apple, Bluegrass
- 4-H Fair, beaches, farmers' markets
- Natural features/resources
- Wineries and breweries
- Cost of living
- Health care systems
- Community colleges
- Nearby universities
- K-12 education

**Weaknesses**

- Some individuals who lack respect for diverse groups of people
- Areas with high rates of individuals/families in poverty or ALICE populations
- Public transportation
- Housing options
- Brain drain
- Labor shortages (skilled trades)
- Employment barriers
- Road conditions
Opportunities

- Increased connectivity to surrounding urban areas (e.g. Amtrak increased frequency)
- Additional access to outdoor recreation activities
- Downtown revitalization across region
- Water transportation
- Renewable/clean energy
- Local coordination
- Local retail
- Climate change - more suitable region for people and agriculture
- Asset management
- Harbor redevelopment
- Outdoor recreation activities & non-motorized trail expansion
- Broadband connection
- Skilled trades programs
- Events and activities

Threats

- Crime rates (perceived and real)
- Housing availability
- Climate change
- Road/bridge conditions
- Reliance on manufacturing
- Sprawl/population decline in urban areas
- Brain drain
- Disregard for natural resources
- Local policy not being inclusive or forward thinking
- Teacher shortages
- Employment barriers
**Goals**

**Quality of Place**

The quality of place is the features of the natural and built environment as well as the human networks and systems that combine to make a location a healthy, desirable, competitive and economically viable place to live.

**Education and Workforce**

An educated and talented workforce is vital for the continued growth and development of the region’s economy.

**Business Support**

Supporting local business – both large and small.

**Infrastructure**

Infrastructure includes many aspects of the built environment around us including roads, bridges, air, rail, utilities and broadband internet. These elements drive the economy forward.

**Economic and Environmental Sustainability**

Economic development should be conducted in a way that helps minimize the risk of future economic hardship and protects the environment for generations to come.

**Equity and Inclusion**

Economic prosperity should positively impact all members of the community and never should further disadvantage underserved populations.
### Quality of Place

The quality of place is the features of the natural and built environment as well as the human networks and systems that combine to make a location a healthy, desirable, competitive and economically viable place to live.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Partners</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expand mobility throughout the region</strong>&lt;br&gt;(non-motorized, public transportation, water transportation, etc.)</td>
<td>SWMPC, Berrien County, Cass County, Van Buren County, Cornerstone Alliance, MDNR, MDOT, FTA</td>
<td>Long Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increase attainable housing and housing types for all</strong></td>
<td>SWMPC, Berrien, Cass, Van Buren, SLC, UWSM, BCF, PF, private builders</td>
<td>Long Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harbor Redevelopment</strong></td>
<td>SWMPC, Berrien County, EGLE, local municipalities, private business</td>
<td>Long Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership Development</strong></td>
<td>SLC, UWSM, LMC, Wightman</td>
<td>Short Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improvements to current amenities and additional amenities</strong>&lt;br&gt;(natural resources, parks and recreation, etc.)</td>
<td>SWMPC, Cass County, Berrien County, Cornerstone Alliance, Wightman, Abonmarche, SMRC, MDRN</td>
<td>Intermediate, Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), United Way of Southwest Michigan (UWSM), Berrien Community Foundation (BCF), Pokagon Fund (PF), Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber (SMRC), Michigan’s Great Southwest Strategic Leadership Council (SLC)

Learn More / Resources:
MEDC Community Development Programs, MSU Extension - Planning, EDA/USDA Rural Communities, WealthWorks, Michigan Municipal League, American Planning Association, Michigan Association of Planning
An educated and talented workforce is vital for the continued growth and development of the region’s economy.

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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
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<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand current and future labor trends</td>
<td>SLC, SWMPC, MEDC, EDA, Michigan Works!, local K-12, SMC, LMC, trade programs, Southwest Michigan Building Trades</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit and retain a skilled labor force to meet industry demand</td>
<td>Cornerstone Alliance, LMC, SMC Michigan Works!</td>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and afterschool programs</td>
<td>Cass County, local libraries, K-12, LMC, SMC, UWSM</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training programs and apprenticeship opportunities</td>
<td>Michigan Works!, Kinexus, SMC, LMC, Southwest Michigan Building Tades</td>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide public transportation for vocational and continuing technical education</td>
<td>Berrien County, LMC, SWMPC, Michigan Works!</td>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote and provide quality adult education</td>
<td>UWSM, Cass County, Berrien County, Van Buren County</td>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Education and Workforce

### Objective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expand workforce housing availability</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UWSM, Cass County, Berrien County, Van Buren County, Kinexus, SWMPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Range</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultivate relationships between workforce development, local K-12 schools, community colleges, trade programs and local employers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kinexus, Michigan Works!, SWMPC, SLC, Berrien County, Cass County, Van Buren County, K-12, Cornerstone Alliance, Southwest Michigan Building Trades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), United Way of Southwest Michigan (UWSM), Berrien Community Foundation (BCF), Pokagon Fund (PF), Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber (SMRC), Michigan's Great Southwest Strategic Leadership Council (SLC), US Economic Development Administration (EDA), Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), Lake Michigan College (LMC), Southwest Michigan College (SMC)

### Learn More / Resources:

## Business Support

Supporting local business – both large and small.

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<tr>
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<th>Timeframe</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide the highest quality response to qualified new leads that generate new project opportunities</td>
<td>Cornerstone Alliance, Market Van Buren, Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce, Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber</td>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and advocate for educational and financial resources needed by both large and small area business to ensure their longevity</td>
<td>Market Van Buren, Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce, Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber, Cornerstone Alliance, MEDC</td>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide resources and specialized assistance during proactive Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) calls to strengthen relationship building that lead to referrals and additional BRE assistance</td>
<td>Cornerstone Alliance, Market Van Buren, Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce, Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber</td>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify, coordinate, or improve sites and buildings suitable for development</td>
<td>Market Van Buren, Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce, Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber, Cornerstone Alliance, MEDC</td>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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DRAFT
### Objective

Develop a business incubator to support entrepreneurship following the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant closure

### Partners

- Market Van Buren, EDA

### Timeframe

Intermediate, ongoing

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), United Way of Southwest Michigan (UWSM), Berrien Community Foundation (BCF), Pokagon Fund (PF), Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber (SMRC), Michigan's Great Southwest Strategic Leadership Council (SLC), US Economic Development Administration (EDA), Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), Lake Michigan College (LMC), Southwest Michigan College (SMC)
## Infrastructure

Infrastructure includes many aspects of the built environment around us including roads, bridges, air, rail, utilities and broadband internet. These elements drive the economy forward.

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<th>Partners</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asset Management - ensures that investments are adequate to improve bridge and pavement conditions, keep transit fleet in a state of good repair, and maintain bicycle and pedestrian facilities</td>
<td>SWMPC, MDOT, local road agencies, public transit, NATS, TwinCATS, Berrien County, Cass County, Van Buren County</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Streets - ensuring access for everyone</td>
<td>SWMPC, MDOT, local road agencies, NATS, TwinCATS</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase broadband internet access</td>
<td>SWMPC, Berrien &amp; Van Buren Counties, local municipalities, State of Michigan, Merit, ISPs</td>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation of freight (highways, rail, air, and water)</td>
<td>SWMPC, MDOT, SLC</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase renewable and other clean energy sources including solar, wind and nuclear</td>
<td>Indiana Michigan Power - AEP, Midwest Energy and Communications</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>Timeframe</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation of people</td>
<td>SWMPC, MDOT, local road agencies, NATS, TwinCATS, public transit</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>(highways, streets/roads, passenger rail,</td>
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<tr>
<td>passenger air, non-motorized, public</td>
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<tr>
<td>transportation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote, design, build, and maintain green</td>
<td>SWMPC, MDOT, local road agencies, public transit, NATS, TwinCATS,</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>infrastructure</td>
<td>Berrien County, Cass County, Van Buren County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mitigation of the effects of climate change</td>
<td>SWMPC, MDOT, local road agencies, public transit, NATS, TwinCATS,</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>on infrastructure</td>
<td>Berrien County, Cass County, Van Buren County</td>
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Learn More / Resources:
Michigan Municipal League, American Planning Association
Economic development should be conducted in a way that helps minimize the risk of future economic hardship and protects the environment for generations to come.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hazard Mitigation Planning</td>
<td>SWMPC, Berrien County, Van Buren County, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid impacts to environmentally sensitive</td>
<td>SWMPC, Abonmarche, Wightman, MDOT, EGLE, MDNR</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>features, such as woodlands and wetlands,</td>
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<td>early in the planning process</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote ridesharing through the Go Rideshare</td>
<td>SWMPC, MDOT</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>program to reduce single occupancy trips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Support green development standards (energy,</td>
<td>SWMPC, Abonmarche, Wightman, MDOT, EGLE, MDNR</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water, wastewater conservation) in both new</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>development and redevelopment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage non-motorized and public</td>
<td>SWMPC, public transit, Berrien County, Cass County, Van Buren County</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transportation</td>
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### Economic and Environmental Sustainability

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Partners</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Fuel Vehicles (electric, fuel cell, hybrid)</td>
<td>SWMPC, MDOT, DOT, State of Michigan</td>
<td>Intermediate, Long Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease the number of households who have incomes below the ALICE threshold through increased wages</td>
<td>UWSM, PF, BCF, SLC, LMC, SMC</td>
<td>Long Range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Learn More / Resources:
- MEDC Community Development Programs, MSU Extension - Planning, EDA/USDA Rural Communities, WealthWorks, Michigan Municipal League, American Planning Association, Michigan Association of Planning
**Equity and Inclusion**

Economic prosperity should positively impact all members of the community and never should further disadvantage underserved populations.

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<th>Timeline</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Outreach in schools, Turning Outward</td>
<td>SWMPC, UWSM</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase last mile service transportation options to increase access to public transit for all users</td>
<td>SWMPC, FTA, MDOT, public transit</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the number of wide shoulders or bike lanes to improve conditions for commuting by bike</td>
<td>SWMPC, local road agencies, Berrien County</td>
<td>Long Range, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore the entire pipeline linking workers with jobs: individuals' skills and interests, available training, jobs reachable by transit, and employers interested in hiring workers for those jobs</td>
<td>SWMPC, SLC</td>
<td>Intermediate, ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease the number of households who have incomes below the ALICE threshold through increased wages</td>
<td>UWSM, PF, BCF, SLC, LMC, SMC</td>
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**Learn More / Resources:**
 MEDC Community Development Programs, MSU Extension - Planning, EDA/USDA Rural Communities, WealthWorks, Michigan Municipal League, American Planning Association, Michigan Association of Planning
Performance Measures

Quality of Place

- Number of communities with a current master plan
- Population located within a food desert
- Average lifespan
- Broadband internet availability
- Average commute to employment
- Population changes

Education and Workforce

- Educational attainment
- Labor Force Participation Rate
- Community college enrollment
- Career and technical education course offerings

Business Support

- Business start-ups
- Number and type of programs offered by local chambers

Infrastructure

- PASER road ratings
- Miles of non-motorized infrastructure
- Passenger rail ridership
- Annual utility outages
- Annual incidents where flooding caused road closures
Economic and Environmental Sustainability

- Percent of electric power coming from renewables or nuclear
- Number of Clean Air Action Days
- Diversification of economy

Equity and Inclusion

- ALICE and poverty numbers
- Cost-burdened renters and owners
- Median household income
- Public outreach/engagement
The CEDS process has brought individuals and organizations together to collectively define regional goals. It is vital to continue this momentum to now make progress and accomplish these goals.

In order to do this, the Southwest Michigan Economic Development District will:

- Meet informally quarterly to reconnect, learn from each other, understand where future partnerships might exist and celebrate success in our region.

- Meet formally twice yearly (and as needed) as public meetings to address new challenges, highlight successes and make necessary updates to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

- Focus on continuing education and participation in economic and community development best practices. Host workshops when appropriate for local community leaders.

- Invite community groups and local units of government to learn and participate in the goals and objectives outlined in this document.

- Continue to engage with members of the public.
In addition to the goal of economic and environmental sustainability, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission has produced an Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to play the lead role in the Palisades Economic Recovery Initiative.

Given the unique relationship between the Southwest Michigan Economic Development District and the US Economic Development Administration, an official endorsement can carry significant weight. Applicants seeking an endorsement should demonstrate how the proposed project helps “move the needle” in the desired direction for the above stated performance measures.

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is able to review projects with potential applicants and help build a strong case for grant funding. Staff at SWMPC have a great understanding of EDA, MEDC, MDOT and other funding sources as well as the ability to connect applicants with additional state and federal agencies.