

FRAMEWORK FOR OUR FUTURE

A REGIONAL PROSPERITY PLAN
FOR NORTHWEST LOWER MICHIGAN





A Framework For Our Future: A REGIONAL PROSPERITY PLAN FOR NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

Michigan has earned the title of America's comeback state. It's an economic success story that would not be possible without collaboration by the public, private and nonprofit sectors. Michigan's shared accomplishments in recent years are underscored by the need to work in partnership toward a common vision of economic prosperity. That's the goal of State of Michigan's Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI).

As it stands today, many of Michigan's regions and their various public planning and service delivery entities have overlapping responsibilities, yet many

times have competing visions. The absence of a broad based regional vision and coordination of services creates both redundancies and gaps. This creates confusion for local, state, federal, private and non-profit partners seeking to invest in a region's success.

RPI is broadly defined by two immediate action items:

1. **Realigning state service delivery regions to reflect one common set of boundaries:** RPI provides a platform for collaboration among all state departments in aligning how they deliver services to the state. Prior to RPI, most state departments had regional service delivery areas; however, rarely did one state department's service delivery area line up with other state departments' lines, creating confusion at a local level and inefficiencies at a state level.
2. **Empowering locals to determine their own path to economic success:** RPI encourages local private, public, and non-profit partners to identify regionally-aligned growth and investment strategies for the State of Michigan to support, not the other way around. It further acknowledges that a one-sized fits all approach to economic growth doesn't make sense. Simply put, what works in northern Michigan doesn't always work in southern Michigan...and vice versa. It also provides the framework for streamlining state services in such a way to support regionally defined goals that will further Northwest Michigan's success.

RPI is voluntary and is not a state mandate, but we all benefit when local and state partners work in close collaboration toward a shared vision of

STATE OF MICHIGAN PROSPERITY REGIONS



190

NUMBER OF LOCAL UNITS OF
GOVERNMENT IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

1,800

NUMBER OF PLANNING COMMISSIONERS,
ELECTED OFFICIALS, AND STAFF IN
NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

109

NUMBER OF MASTER PLANS
IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

146

NUMBER OF ZONING ORDINANCES
IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

economic prosperity. RPI is also incentivized through state legislation and actions, and is increasingly an emphasis in both federal and state funding.

In Northwest Lower Michigan, RPI comes to life in this document, *Framework for Our Future: A Regional Prosperity Plan for Northwest Michigan*. This document and all the topic-based chapters within the *Framework* are the product of a many-month process; and are intended to be a resource for local governments, community organizations, businesses, and everyday people working to achieve locally defined goals.

Developed through an intensive community driven process, *Framework for Our Future* includes a wealth of information and tools that all parts of the community—including the public, community leaders, businesses, nonprofits, public agencies, and statewide stakeholders—can use as they work to address community issues in a way that also support regional

goals. Data and information will help communities supplement their local deliberation, planning, and decision-making processes. Resources include samples of master plan language used in other parts of the region that communities can consider when updating their own plans and ordinances, and an action guide that provides step-by-step planning and zoning guidance, as well as new studies and research such as commercial corridor inventories, county-based target market analyses, county based guides to permitting and zoning, and county-based housing inventories, to name a few.

In addition to data and resources, the *Framework* includes a number of goals, strategies, and actions. These strategies and actions were built upon public input heard throughout the process, as well as on existing and adopted goals from local plans and planning initiatives. Strategies are not intended as recommendations or mandates; nor do they supersede any local government-decision-making. Moreover, the *Framework* is not intended for, nor shall it be used for, infringing upon or the taking of personal property rights enjoyed by the residents of northwest lower Michigan. Rather, the information included in the *Framework* is instead intended to serve as a compilation of best practices to help guide local decision-makers who would like to address the issues identified in the *Framework*.

This document provides a brief introduction to each of the issues addressed in detail by the *Framework for Our Future*. Each chapter highlights facts, goals, strategies, and actions that provide a snapshot of the main issues and solutions identified in the *Framework for Our Future*. For complete reports and accompanying resources for each topic, including background reports and data, please visit www.networksnorthwest.org/rpi.

Making Northwest Lower Michigan economically competitive in the 21st century is not guaranteed, nor easy. This document only begins the conversation on how communities can work individually and regionally toward a shared goal of economic prosperity and resilience. Thank you for caring enough about northwest lower Michigan to learn more and become engaged in its future.



A Framework for Growth & Investment



For the complete **Growth & Investment** report, visit nwm.org/rpp-growth

RESOURCES

For these and other resources, please visit nwm.org/rpp-resources

Commercial Corridor Inventory

Data and maps identifying demographic and housing trends, commuting patterns, commercial and retail data, community planning information, and infrastructure availability and capacity

Northwest Michigan Guides to Permitting and Zoning

Contact information, maps, and flow charts outline the development process in each community in Northwest Michigan

New Designs for Growth

Guidebook illustrating how development can occur in Northwest Michigan while complementing and protecting the region's unique beauty, natural resources, and other assets



Northwest Michigan, renowned for its natural beauty and unique character, is a place where people and businesses can thrive and grow.

Its vibrant communities feature locally owned businesses, walkable downtowns and historic architecture, all set in a landscape of fields and orchards, vast forests, pristine inland lakes, and hundreds of miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. Together these assets offer a high quality of life that attracts visitors, new residents and businesses, making the region one of the fastest growing areas in Michigan and the Midwest.

These assets are becoming increasingly important as Michigan transitions to a new economy where knowledge-based activities, technology, creativity and

innovation are key to economic growth and development. To be competitive in this economic climate, initiatives designed to attract new growth and investment must consider and leverage these regional, place-based assets.

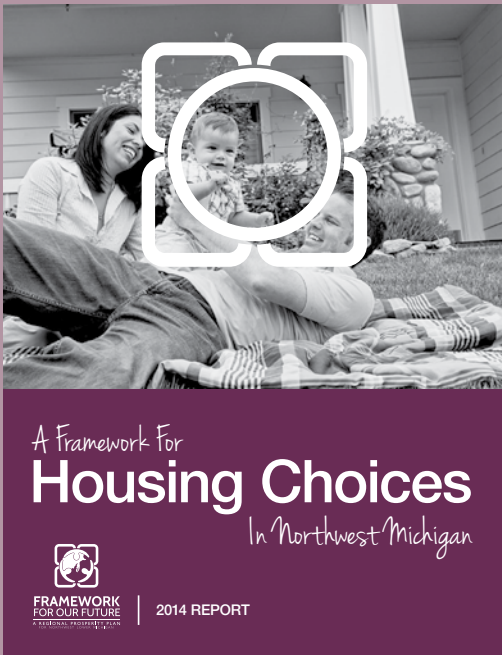
Community leaders in Northwest Michigan have long recognized that their communities' unique character and other place-based assets support new growth and investment. But throughout the region, communities struggle with patterns like sprawl, population shifts, changing workforce trends and more that threaten the valuable community identities, economies, natural resources, and quality of life that have long made the region so attractive.

While these challenges will require the continued attention of many public, private and nonprofit

stakeholders, Northwest Michigan's future prosperity depends first and foremost upon the actions taken and policies adopted by each of the region's communities. Recognizing these local roles as our most fundamental economic development drivers, *A Framework for Growth and Investment in Northwest Michigan* identifies some of the people-, place-, and policy-based actions that communities can take to address growth and investment opportunities in a transitioning economy.



A Framework for Housing Choices



For the complete **Housing** report,
visit nwm.org/rpp-housing

RESOURCES

For these and other resources, please visit
nwm.org/rpp-resources

Housing Inventories

Data and analysis on housing affordability, type, and condition, energy and transportation costs, vacancies and foreclosures, and homelessness

Target Market Analyses

Recommendations and data on market demand potential for various types of housing for communities in each county in Northwest Michigan

Citizen's Guide to Housing Solutions

Information and resources on housing issues, policies and programs, and grassroots advocacy

NWMHousingSearch

Search portal of housing assistance programs, rentals, and homes for sale

57%

AMOUNT OF INCOME SPENT BY AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD ON COMBINED COSTS OF HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION

\$12.19

HOURLY WAGE NEEDED IN ORDER TO EARN ENOUGH TO AFFORD AN AVERAGE RENTAL IN NW MICHIGAN

Source: National Housing Wage Calculator

73%

AMOUNT OF INCOME SPENT BY A MODERATE-INCOME HOUSEHOLD ON COMBINED COSTS OF HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION

Source: Data from H&T Affordability Index

65 ⌚

HOURS A MINIMUM WAGE WORKER WOULD NEED TO WORK IN ORDER TO EARN ENOUGH TO AFFORD AN AVERAGE RENTAL

Source: National Housing Wage Calculator

Our homes are among the most fundamental elements of our lives: the choices we make about where we live can affect our health, quality of life, and access to opportunity. These choices depend in large part on the type of housing that's available to buy or rent near our jobs, schools or families.

When diverse housing choices are available, all residents – including working families and individuals, disabled individuals, seniors, and low income households – have quality, affordable homes that meet their individual and family needs. Whether these are traditional homes on large yards in the country, small homes on small lots in town, apartments, or housing that includes barrier-free features, they should meet both the financial and physical needs of existing and future residents. But

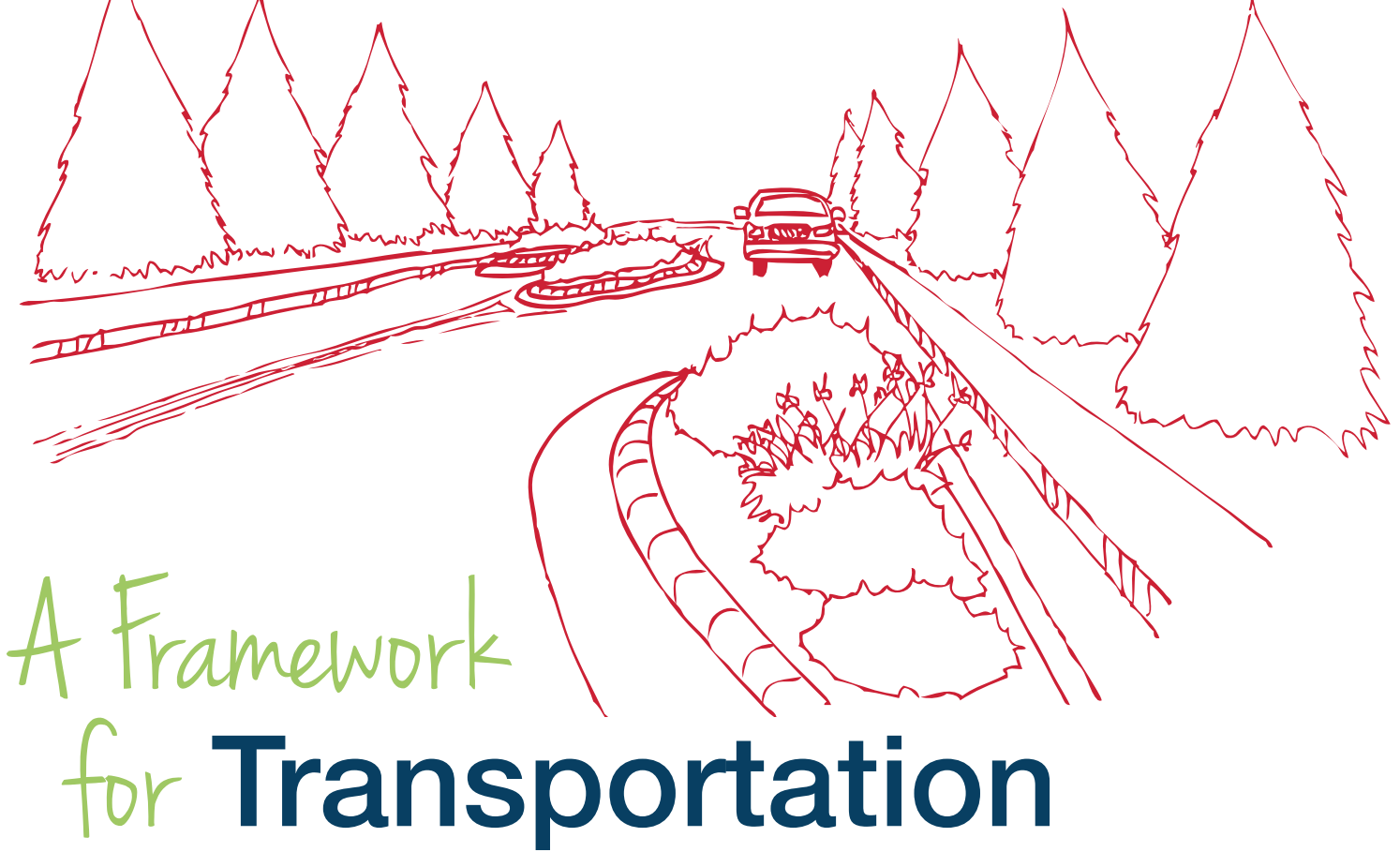
many individuals and families in Northwest Michigan have limited choices about where to live.

When a community's housing choices don't meet its residents' needs, impacts are felt far and wide. Traffic congestion worsens as residents commute farther between work and home. Schools struggle with declining enrollment as young families leave communities to find more affordable housing. Employers can't fill jobs because employees can't afford to live nearby. Businesses lose customers when residents have less disposable income because of high housing costs. And, finally, a lack of affordable and supportive housing contributes to a growing homeless population.

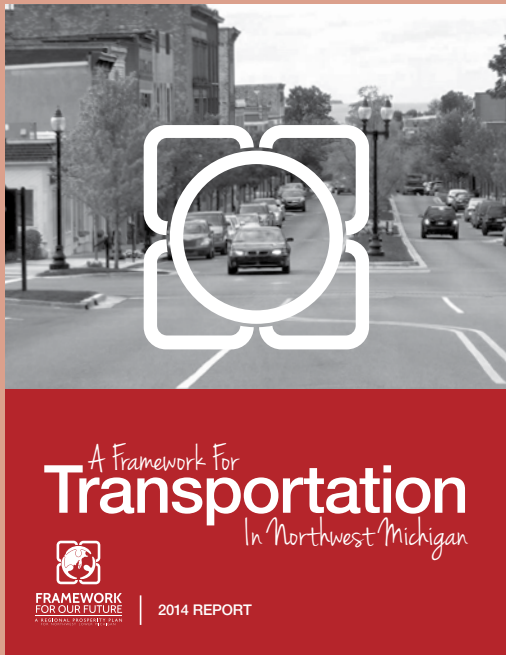
The region is served by public agencies, nonprofits, and private sector interests that work, with

support from local governments and state and federal agencies, to create housing choices that address the full spectrum of our region's housing needs and challenges, from homelessness to homeownership. Yet, despite the dedicated efforts of these many organizations, a number of barriers persist in preventing providers from meeting changing and increasing housing demand.

Addressing these challenges and meeting our region's housing needs will require long-term commitment and action from many public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders. *A Framework for Housing Choices in Northwest Michigan* identifies some of the various roles and potential activities for all these stakeholders as they work to meet our communities' diverse housing needs.



A Framework for **Transportation**



For the complete **Transportation** report, visit nwm.org/rpp-transportation

RESOURCES

For these and other resources, please visit nwm.org/rpp-resources

A Citizen's Guide to Transportation Planning
Information and resources to help citizens get involved in the transportation planning process

Asset Management Reports
Reports detailing road conditions and maintenance priorities for each county in Northwest Michigan

Planning for Pathways: New Designs for Growth Guidebook
Information and models for local governments to use in their efforts to promote connected, continuous pathway networks

NMRide.net
Northwest Michigan Ride Share connects commuters for ride sharing to work, activities, and more throughout the region

25%

OF TRANSIT PASSENGERS ARE DISABLED



11%

OF TRANSIT PASSENGERS ARE ELDERLY

1.2 MILLION

TRANSIT PASSENGERS ANUALLY
IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

Northwest Michigan's transportation network is key to regional vitality and economic opportunity: our road systems provide mobility and access to employment, housing, services and recreation, and facilitate the movement of goods and services within and between communities. All residents, and all parts of our economy – from manufacturers to the tourism industry – depend on the ability to access a well-maintained road network.

But an effective transportation system relies on far more than roads alone. Public transit systems allow many residents – particularly the elderly, disabled, and others without a vehicle – to get to work, shop, and receive medical treatment. Non-motorized transportation networks encourage healthy physical activity, promote

economic opportunities and provide important options for those who can't or don't drive. Rail and air transportation, meanwhile, support both business and tourism activity.

Planning for and providing these many transportation elements requires involvement from local, regional, state, and federal partners. These agencies and communities contend with a number of challenges in maintaining and enhancing the region's transportation network: because of our lakes and coastlines, traffic is concentrated into relatively narrow areas, causing congestion that is compounded by seasonal population pressures. Diminished funding and the strain on roads from harsh winters create ongoing maintenance issues. And, for those that don't drive, there are few viable transportation options:

limited transit services over large geographies discourage many from using transit, and pedestrian and bike paths often lack the connections needed to provide safe and convenient transportation access.

Significant coordination, communication and consensus throughout the region is required to meet these challenges and to provide efficient, effective transportation for all citizens and visitors. *A Framework for Transportation in Northwest Michigan* identifies opportunities and roles for various community players to meet transportation needs in a coordinated fashion in order to maximize transportation investments.



A Framework for Arts & Culture



For the complete **Arts & Culture** report,
visit nwm.org/rpp-arts

RESOURCES

For these and other resources, please visit
nwm.org/rpp-resources

Americans for the Arts

Up-to-date reports, data, and tools demonstrating the economic, social, and educational benefits of the arts

Michigan Council for Arts & Cultural Affairs

A statewide agency dedicated to helping communities cultivate artistic, creative, and cultural activity

The Michigan Cultural Data Project

An online database that helps organizations improve their financial and operational capacity; educates researchers, policymakers, and advocates; and helps funders more effectively plan grantmaking activities



27,788

PAID EMPLOYEES IN TOURISM-RELATED ESTABLISHMENTS* IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN**



2,615

TOURISM-RELATED ESTABLISHMENTS* IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN



626

ANNUAL PAYROLL FOR TOURISM-RELATED ESTABLISHMENTS*, IN MILLIONS OF DOLLARS, IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

Source: 2011 County Business Patterns, U.S. Census Bureau

*Total of Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, Accommodations and Food Services and Retail Trade

**Number of paid employees for the pay period including March 12th

Northwest Michigan is blessed with a strong and thriving arts and cultural scene: residents and visitors have access to world-class music, dance, visual arts, theater, literature, architectural design, and historical resources at museums, schools and performing arts centers throughout the region.

These opportunities are important economic assets, driving a significant portion of Northwest Michigan's vibrant tourism industry. In addition, arts and culture help to attract the educated, professional talent that is needed for the region's transitioning economy. For many residents, arts and cultural activities are important aspects of their quality of life, providing opportunities for personal enrichment and social interaction.

Communities that offer a wide variety of artistic and cultural

outlets are also able to build on these assets to create a vibrant, unique, and recognizable sense of place for residents and visitors alike. Support for arts and culture can be an important economic development strategy that can help to retain and attract a workforce and build tourism, and communities that celebrate their history and preserve important icons from their past are able to pass community traditions and pride onto the next generation. Simply put, the arts help people create deep roots in an area and give them a reason to stay and invest.

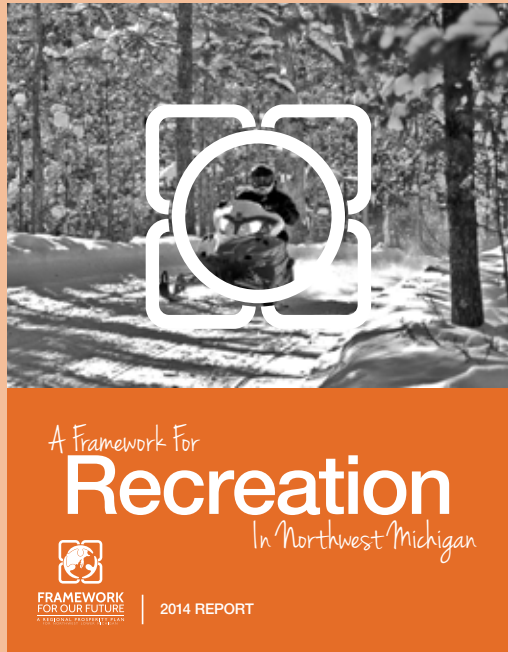
Despite these important benefits, many communities in Northwest Michigan have yet to integrate arts and culture into plans and economic development initiatives, and the arts are often not included in community initiatives due in part to limited communication

or coordination between arts and cultural organizations and communities.

A wide variety of stakeholders throughout the region create and enhance access to arts and culture. Fostering partnership and collaboration between these stakeholders and the broader community can help to build the supports and resources needed to enhance our region's arts and cultural opportunities. *A Framework for Arts and Culture in Northwest Michigan* provides an inventory of the region's cultural assets, as well as an overview of steps that arts and cultural stakeholders and community leaders can take to leverage these assets into positive community growth.



A Framework for Recreation



For the complete **Recreation** report, visit nwm.org/rpp-recreation

RESOURCES

For these and other resources, please visit nwm.org/rpp-resources

UpNorthTrails.org

An online source of detailed trail information and maps for all of Northern Lower Michigan

[MDNR Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plans](#)

Information and resources for communities developing recreation plans that meet state requirements

[Trail Towns: Capturing Trail-Based Tourism](#)

Provides information and guidance for northern Michigan communities interested in enhancing their trail systems

MyNorth.com

Features writing, photography, and a database of northern Michigan's outdoor recreation opportunities, food and wine, events, history, and more

NUMBER OF PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES



Data from field analysis by the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments, 2013. Data include public parks, boat launches, and marinas, but do not include undeveloped/road end water access sites

Outdoor recreation is vitally important to Northwest Michigan’s health, economy and quality of life. From small municipal parks to the expansive and nationally renowned Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Northwest Michigan is home to a rich variety of outdoor opportunities.

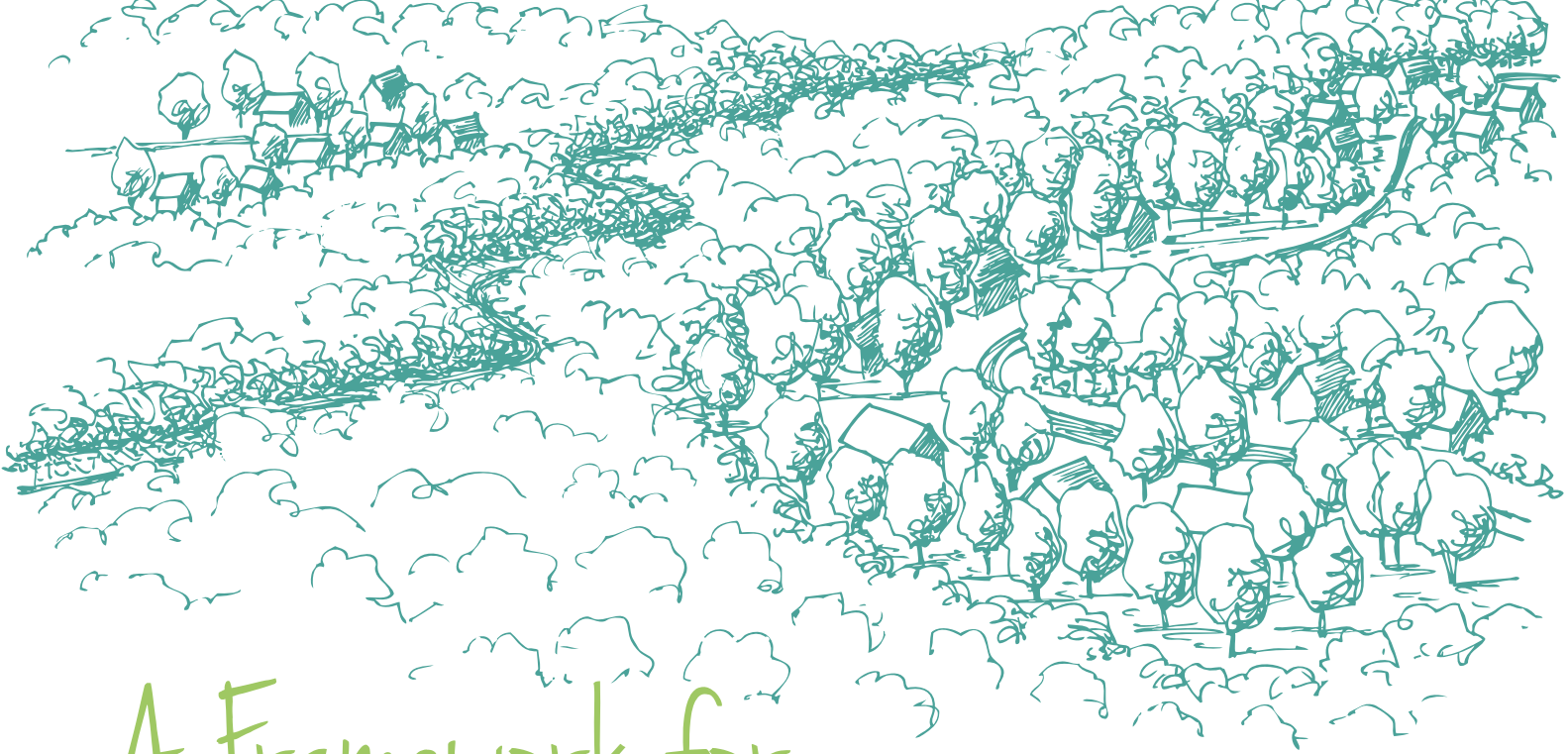
Northwest Michigan’s parks and recreation facilities play host to scores of events and activities, provide easy access to the area’s abundant land and water resources, boost community health and attract visitors from throughout the state and country. Activity supported by these facilities has an enormous economic impact, bringing millions of tourism dollars to our region and supporting thousands of recreation-related jobs.

Because of these positive impacts on the economy and residents’ quality of life, the provision of safe, adequate recreation opportunities is crucial to many local communities. Many stakeholders throughout the region are actively engaged in efforts to create open space, provide recreational opportunities, maintain a wide variety of recreational facilities and protect the region’s land and water resources.

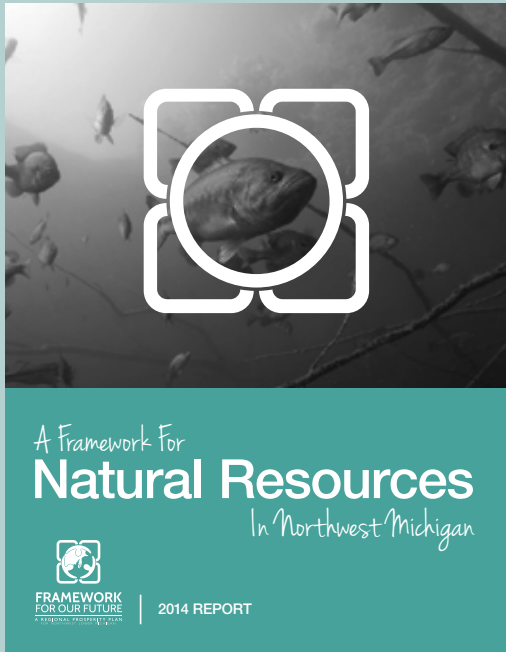
But local efforts to improve and enhance recreational facilities encounter a number of challenges and barriers. Some communities struggle to maintain or upgrade their existing facilities due to budget constraints. Many residents and visitors aren’t fully aware of all of the opportunities in their area. Increased summer populations put pressure on parks and recreation facilities. And a lack of cooperation between communities can also

hinder development of trails, water access or other cross-jurisdictional opportunities.

A Framework for Recreation in Northwest Michigan identifies some of the various roles and potential activities for all stakeholders as they work to ensure that our region remains a recognized leader in providing easily accessible opportunities for outdoor recreation and in protecting our natural resources.



A Framework for Natural Resources



For the complete **Natural Resources** report, visit nwm.org/rpp-nature

RESOURCES

For these and other resources, please visit nwm.org/rpp-resources

Filling the Gaps: Environmental Protection Options for Local Governments

Detailed information for communities creating local land use plans, adopting new environmentally focused regulations, or reviewing proposed development

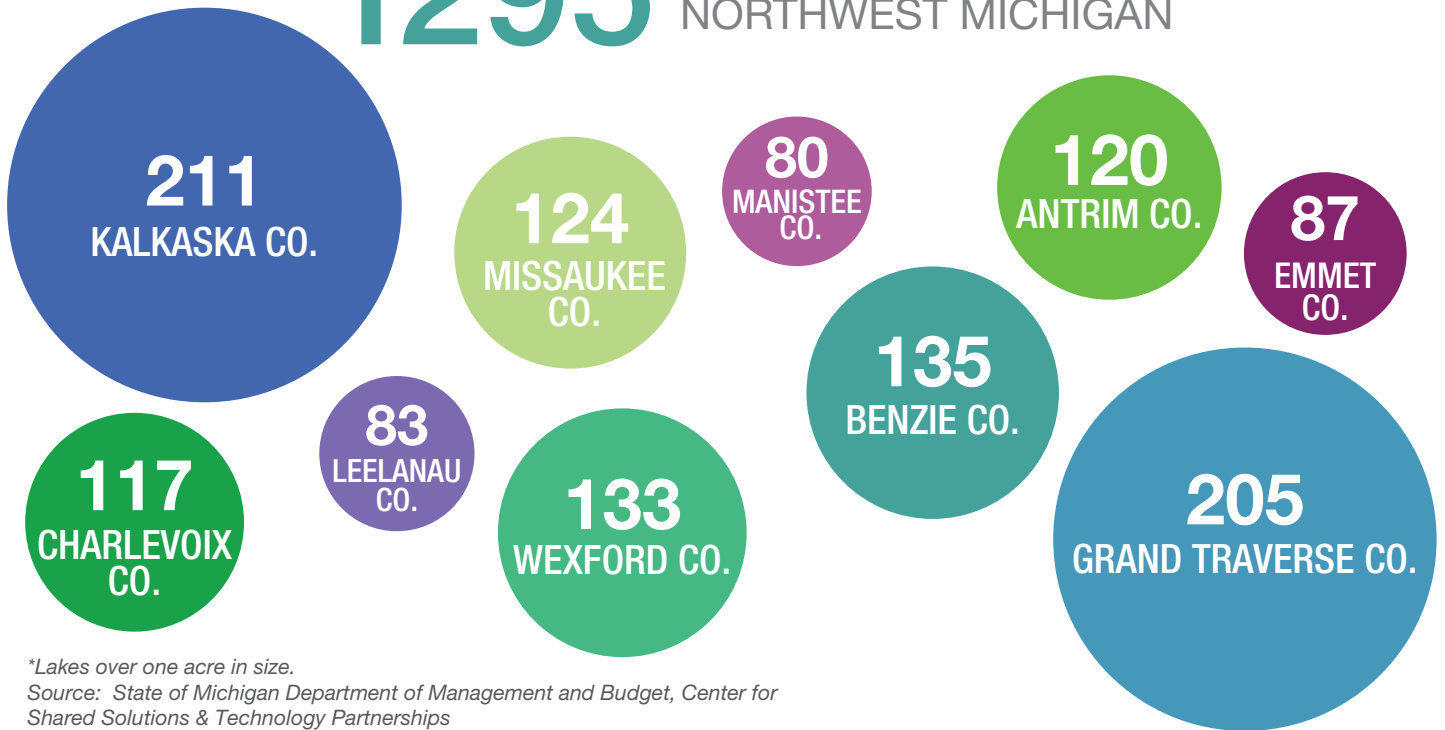
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Local Ordinance Gap Analyses

Comprehensive analysis of local and county regulations and their potential impact on water quality

Planning with Green Infrastructure, New Designs for Growth

Provides information, maps, and guidance on green infrastructure, or natural resource assets in Northwest Michigan

1295 INLAND LAKES* IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN



*Lakes over one acre in size.

Source: State of Michigan Department of Management and Budget, Center for Shared Solutions & Technology Partnerships

Northwest Michigan is home to some of North America's most treasured and valuable natural resources. The region boasts vast and diverse forests, hundreds of miles of Great Lakes shoreline, scores of inland lakes, and miles of pristine rivers. In addition to providing important habitat for countless plant and animal species, these resources are tremendously important to residents' quality of life and act as a huge draw to visitors from throughout the state and beyond.

Aside from offering a healthy living environment and providing endless outdoor recreation opportunities, Northwest Michigan's natural resources are a cornerstone of its economy. The scenic beauty and recreation opportunities beloved by its residents also drive much of the region's thriving tourist industry, and the forests, lakes, fields, and

mineral resources provide jobs and exports in the timber, agriculture, commercial fishing, and mining industries.

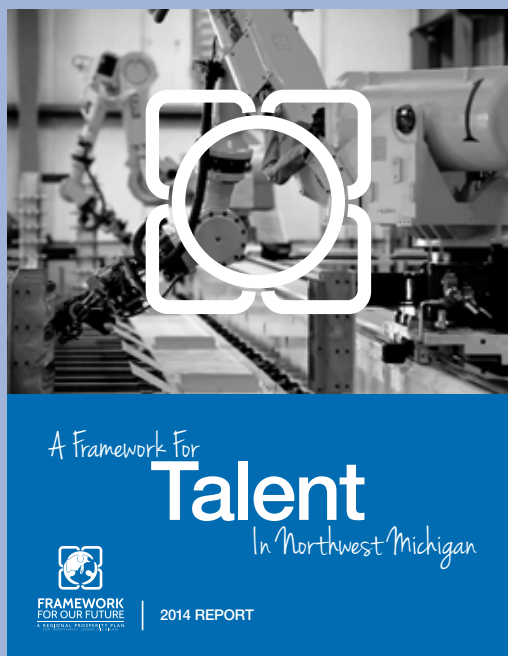
Regional surveys and locally adopted master plans show almost universal agreement that the preservation of these resources is of primary importance to the region's quality of life. But invasive species, erosion, development pressure, pollution and a host of other problems pose constant and significant threats to the region's most cherished assets.

Individuals, governments, and community organizations all have a hand in addressing these threats to Northwest Michigan's natural resources, and each must play a role in order for efforts to protect those resources to be lasting and effective.

A Framework for Natural Resources in Northwest Michigan provides an overview and summary of some of the issues facing Northwest Michigan's natural resources. It also highlights some of the best practices and tools available to most effectively protect and preserve the prosperity, economic benefits, and high quality of life provided by the region's land and water resources.



A Framework for Talent



For the complete **Talent** report, visit nwm.org/rpp-talent

RESOURCES

For these and other resources, please visit nwm.org/rpp-resources

Manufacturing Needs Assessment

Data, survey results, and analysis detailing Northwest Michigan manufacturing sector needs

Northwest Michigan Workforce Development Board and Northwest Michigan Works! Strategic Agenda, 2013-2020

Workforce development goals and strategies adopted by the Northwest Michigan Workforce Development Board

MiTalent.org

Online, searchable database for job seekers and employers in Michigan

Northwest Michigan Hot Jobs Report

Information about the region's job outlook and its most in-demand occupations and industries

\$43,248

ANNUAL COSTS OF BASIC LIVING EXPENSES IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN FOR A **SINGLE PARENT**



\$43,420

AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGES IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

\$20.79

AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE NEEDED TO SUPPORT BASIC LIVING EXPENSES OF A **SINGLE PARENT** HOUSEHOLD



\$8.15

CURRENT MINIMUM HOURLY WAGE

Sources: living expenses and living wage data from Michigan League for Public Policy; average annual wage data from EMSI, 2014

Jobs are crucial for both healthy households and communities: a family without dependable employment experiences financial and domestic hardship, and a community without a strong employment base wrestles with the social impacts of unemployment and struggles to support business and the basic needs of its residents.

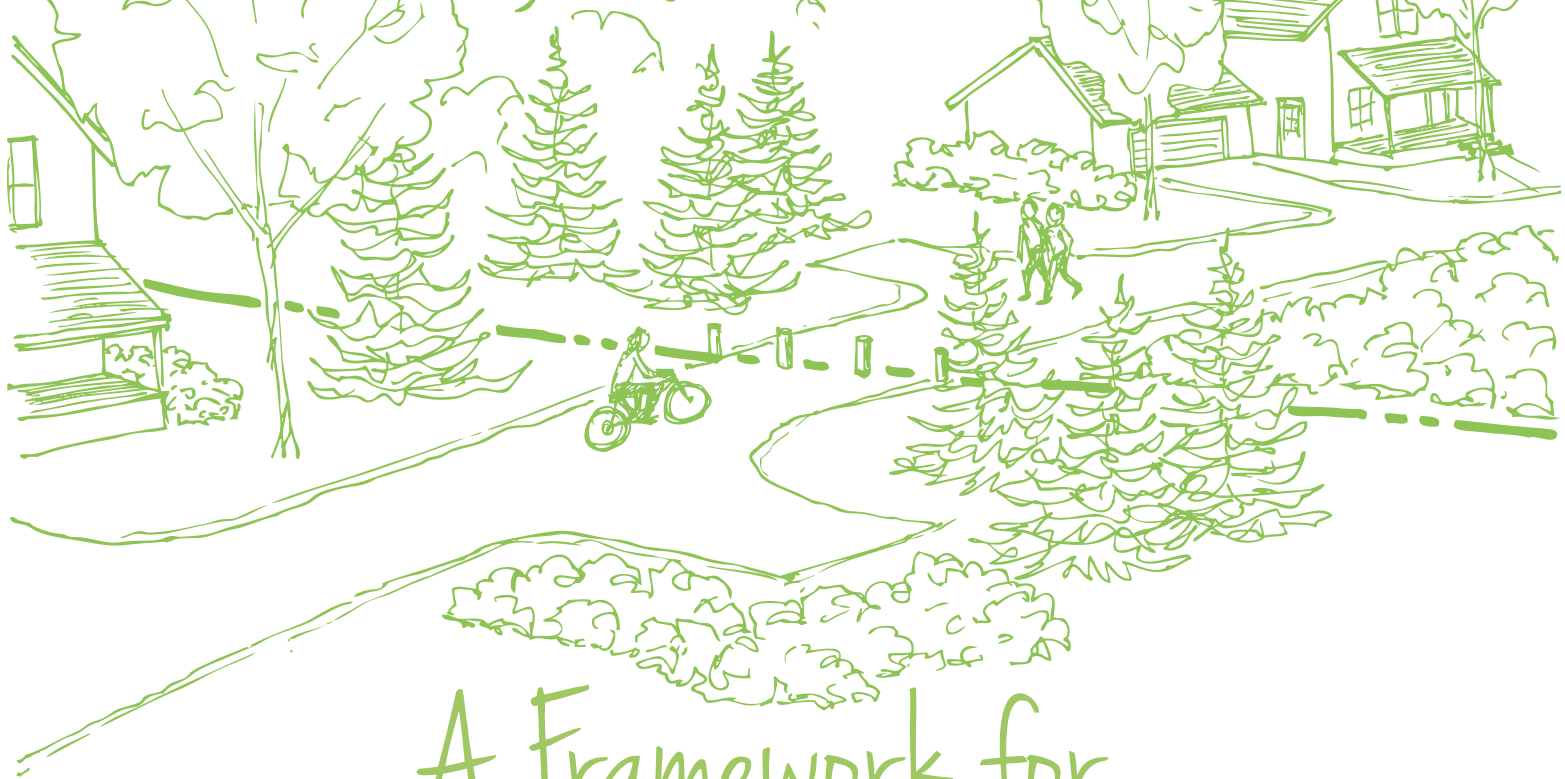
Because of its enormous importance to both individuals and the community overall, improving opportunities for employment is an underlying goal of countless plans, economic development strategies and community initiatives. More and more, these efforts depend on the ability to attract and retain a skilled, knowledgeable workforce, or talent, which is needed to support existing business and attract high-paying, sustainable jobs.

The region's strong sense of place and high quality of life put it at a distinct advantage in terms of being able to attract and retain talent; but factors like relatively low wages and higher costs of living can act as challenges in these efforts. Meanwhile, gaps in job skills and academic readiness among parts of the workforce leave many employers unable to fill positions from the region's existing workforce.

Northwest Michigan has a talented and diverse workforce that generates billions of dollars in economic activity annually. But many workers lack the occupational or technical skills needed for today's new jobs, and many positions remain unfilled due to shortages of qualified workers. And while unemployment rates are dropping, many residents continue

to seek work for which they have the right qualifications.

A Framework for Talent in Northwest Michigan explores the many factors involved in developing and attracting the talent needed to support the region's economy and meeting residents' employment needs, and identifies strategies for helping unemployed workers obtain available jobs, ensuring that young people are adequately prepared for future jobs, and leveraging the region's assets to build a successful working community.



A Framework for Healthy Communities



For the complete **Healthy Communities** report, visit nwm.org/rpp-health

RESOURCES

For these and other resources, please visit nwm.org/rpp-resources

Community Healthy Needs Assessment

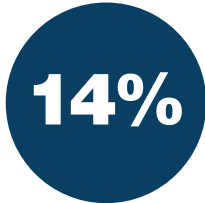
Resource containing data and public input concerning health issues impacting communities in Northwest Lower Michigan

Planning and Health Resource Guide for Designing and Building Healthy Neighborhoods

Links to checklists, audit tools, websites, and other resources that can help planners, local officials, and citizens create communities that promote health

Munson Community Health Dashboard

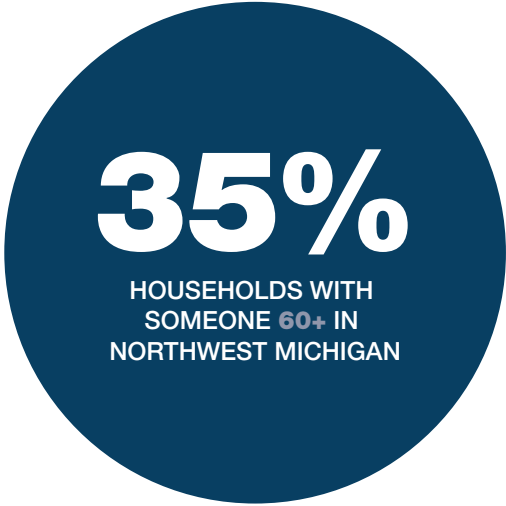
Searchable database of community health indicators that illustrate how counties in Northwest Lower Michigan are performing on key health measures compared to national, state, and local levels



HOUSEHOLDS WITH SOMEONE 65+ IN MICHIGAN



GROWTH IN POPULATION AGED 75+ IN MICHIGAN BETWEEN 2000-2010



HOUSEHOLDS WITH SOMEONE 60+ IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

GROWTH IN POPULATION AGED 75+ IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN BETWEEN 2000-2010



Where we live has profound impacts on our health, our lifestyles and the decisions we make about diet, exercise and disease prevention. While these decisions are highly individual and personal, they are also closely connected to our physical and social environments.

Residents who have adequate housing choices are less likely to live in overcrowded or substandard homes, for example, while neighborhoods with good access to employment and education provide opportunities for financial and emotional security. People are safer in neighborhoods with low crime rates. Access to farmland and markets that offer healthy food contributes to healthy diets and disease prevention. Close proximity to parks and public spaces provide opportunities for exercise, a key element in preventative

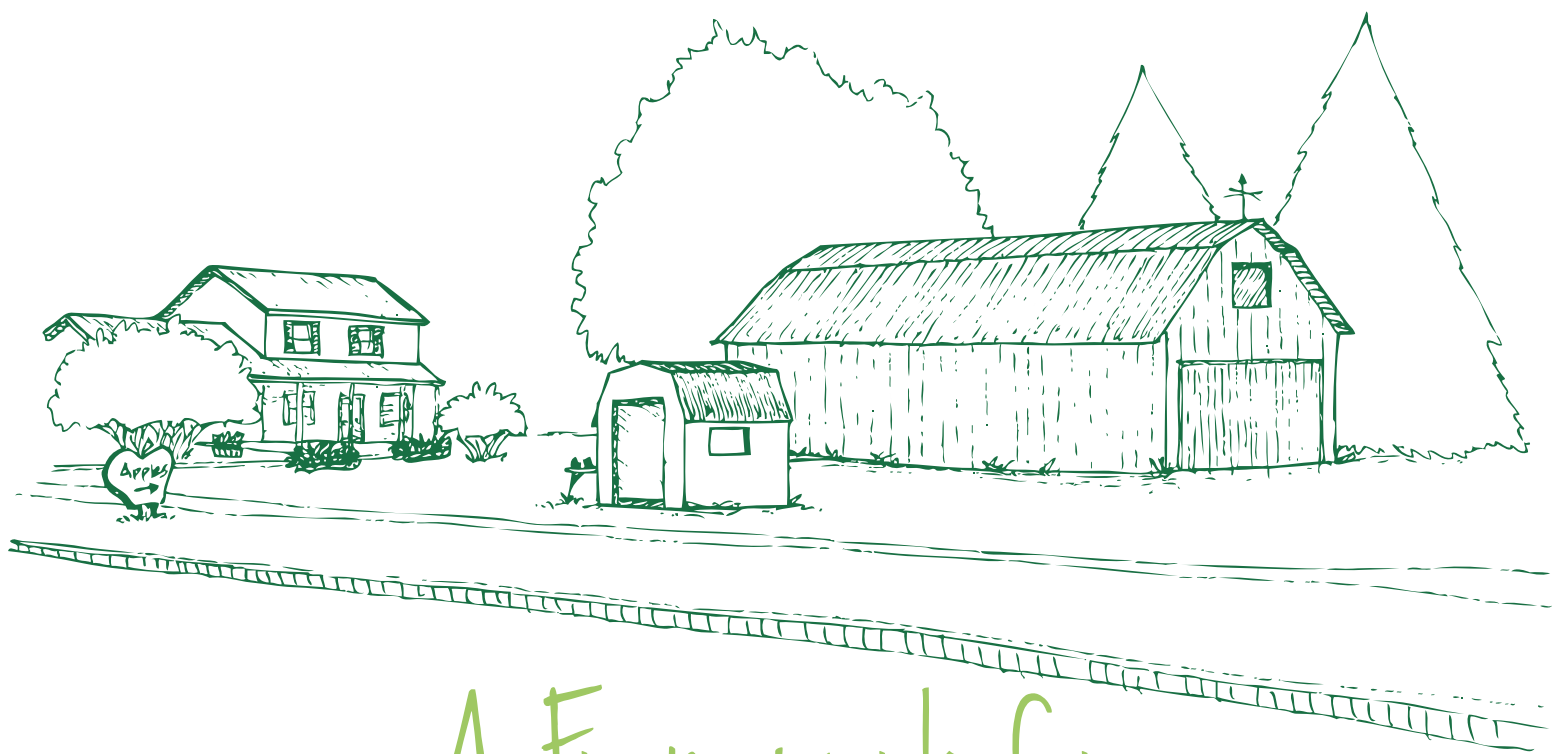
health. Clean air, soil, and water, meanwhile, limit the potential for certain diseases.

Despite the countless connections between our communities and our health, local communities haven't traditionally based planning or policy decisions on potential public health impacts. And because many lifestyle and other health-related factors are influenced by policy, these local decisions can have profound consequences for health outcomes.

Most residents in Northwest Michigan live in rural areas, and the region's population is aging faster than other parts of the state. These and other factors contribute to issues like limited healthcare access, obesity, and age-related service difficulties – which can be addressed in part by local initiatives and community design,

like improved pedestrian and bike connections, housing that allows residents to “age in place,” and efforts to train and recruit health care workers.

Recognizing that local policies and initiatives play a major role in individual and community health is an important first step in improving our health outcomes. *A Framework for Healthy Communities in Northwest Michigan* discusses these challenges and how they can be addressed by local policy decisions.



A Framework for Food & Farming



For the complete **Food & Farming** report, visit nwm.org/rpp-food

RESOURCES

For these and other resources, please visit nwm.org/rpp-resources

Food Innovation Districts: An Economic Gardening Guide

Information and tools to develop food innovation districts, or business clusters of food-oriented businesses, services, and community activities

Grand Traverse Regional Market Feasibility Report

A feasibility study for the creating a “food hub” at the Grand Traverse Commons in Traverse City, Michigan

Taste the Local Difference

Resource and directory connecting consumers with Northwest Michigan farms, farmer’s markets, and other local food resources

 **263** FARMS MARKETING PRODUCTS DIRECTLY TO RETAIL OUTLETS

 **274** FARMS PRODUCING AND SELLING VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS

 **48** FARMS MARKETING PRODUCTS THROUGH CSAs

 **68** FARMS WITH AGRI-TOURISM / RECREATION

Food and farming are cornerstones of Northwest Michigan's economy, identity and quality of life. In addition to providing millions of dollars in fruit, potatoes, dairy, and Christmas tree exports, the region's farms also play an important role in tourism – one of the region's largest economic engines. Growing demand for local food also fosters new business opportunities as farmers and food producers innovate and diversify, creating new job opportunities and expanding markets.

Despite the importance of agricultural businesses to the region's economy, a number of pressures combine to impact the financial viability of many farming operations.

Rapid population increases have put agricultural land

under significant pressure for development, raising the value of farmland and the costs of doing business. As farms are subdivided into residential development, farmland is removed from production and rarely returned to farming. Traditional lending parameters mean that new ventures launched by small farms are often difficult to finance; and the region is lacking important food system infrastructure that these businesses need, such as smaller-scale packaging, wholesaling, or distributing. Immigration-related issues also are having increasing impacts on farms and workers throughout the region.

Local priorities and policies have tremendous impacts on these issues, which ultimately affect the continued viability of the region's food and farming economy. *A Framework for Food & Farming*

in Northwest Michigan identifies ways that local policies, incentives, and community initiatives can support and encourage farming operations while also ensuring food access and security in Northwest Michigan.

A message on behalf of the NETWORKS NORTHWEST BOARD & STAFF

On behalf of Networks Northwest and all the community members that made this document possible, I want to thank you: thank you for caring enough about our region to become more knowledgeable about the issues facing our communities today. Northwest Lower Michigan is a highly successful region because of knowledgeable, engaged people like you.

It takes all of a region's assets, and participation from all parts of the community, to be successful. The strategic options offered by the *Framework for Our Future* only set the groundwork for a comprehensive approach that our communities can use to thrive and grow in the 21st century. The hard work has just begun!

Truthfully, there's a mass of information as part this document and no community can likely address all that has been laid out within the *Framework*. However, at the end of the day we believe that there are three key areas for everyone to remember as central themes within *Framework for Our Future*:

TALENT: The presence of talent—a skilled, knowledgeable workforce—is needed to support existing business, and also helps to attract high-paying, sustainable jobs.

COMMUNITY: A high quality of life and place—defined by vibrant, desirable communities and environments—help to attract the talent needed to drive job creation and economic growth.

BUSINESS: Business-friendly community policies—those that provide a supportive regulatory structure and efficient, cost-effective services like affordable sewer, water, and high-tech infrastructure, along with a variety of housing options, outstanding educational systems, and effective transportation networks—are necessary to support new investment.

As just one partner of many that are working to make our region an even better place, Networks Northwest is proud to provide the *Framework for Our Future* as a talent, community and business resource for communities as we work together to build prosperity in Northwest Lower Michigan.

Sincerely,



Elaine Wood, Chief Executive Officer



BENCHMARKS^{NW}

Looking for data on:



Benchmarks Northwest is a collaborative site designed to provide access to relevant, timely data to communities, the public, and stakeholders in Northwest Michigan. The site was developed in partnership with a broad range of regional stakeholders.

visit benchmarksnorthwest.org



**FRAMEWORK
FOR OUR FUTURE**

A REGIONAL PROSPERITY PLAN
FOR NORTHWEST LOWER MICHIGAN

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