GVMC

GRAND VALLEY METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

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AGENDA

GVMC BOARD MEETING

March 5, 2015

8:30 a.m.

Kent County Commission Chambers

300 Monroe, Grand Rapids, MI

1) **Approval of Minutes – Attached**

2) **Public Comment**

3) **Annual Report / Audit Report**

4) **Strategic Planning – April 2, Byron Township Recreation Center 9:00 - Noon**

5) **Adjourn**

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GRAND VALLEY METRO COUNCIL

Board Meeting

February 5, 2015

8:30 a.m.

Kent County Commission Chambers
300 Monroe
Grand Rapids

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. by Al Vanderberg.

Members Present:

Alex Arends	Alpine Township
Rick Baker	At-Large
Rob Beahan	Cascade Township
Ken Bergwerff	Jamestown Township
Tom Butcher	Grand Valley State University
Dan Carlton	Georgetown Township
Daryl Delabbio	Kent County
Mike DeVries	Grand Rapids Township
George Haga	Ada Township
George Heartwell	City of Grand Rapids
Carol Hennessey	Kent County
Don Hilton, Sr.	Gaines Township
Denny Hoemke	Algoma Township
John Hoppough	City of Greenville
Mark Howe	City of Lowell
Mark Huizenga	City of Walker
Diane Jones	Kent County
Steve Kepley	City of Kentwood
Mark Lemoine	At-Large Member
Matt McConnon	Courtland Township
Brenda McNabb-Stange	City of Hastings
Jack Poll	City of Wyoming
Jay Spencer	Plainfield Township
Roger Towsley	Village of Sand Lake
Al Vanderberg	Ottawa County
Bill VerHulst	City of Wyoming

Members Absent:

Jerry Alkema	Allendale Township
Jim Buck	Secretary
Brian Donovan	City of East Grand Rapids
Jason Eppler	City of Ionia
Rebecca Fleury	Village of Middleville
Steve Grimm	Cannon Township
Jerry Hale	Lowell Township
Brian Harrison	Caledonia Township
Doyle Hayes	At-Large Member
Jim Holtrop	Ottawa County
Elias Lumpkins, Jr.	City of Grand Rapids
Steve Maas	City of Grandville
Mick McGraw	At-large Member
Cy Moore	Treasurer
Megan Mullendore	City of Belding
Audrey Nevins-Weiss	Byron Township
Steven Patrick	City of Coopersville
Milt Rohwer	City of Grand Rapids
Michael Selden	City of Wayland
Thad Taylor	City of Cedar Springs
Toby VanEss	Tallmadge Township
Patrick Waterman	City of Hudsonville
Michael Young	City of Rockford

Others Present:

Chris Brown	Grand Valley Metro Council
Abed Itani	Grand Valley Metro Council
Dharmesh Jain	GVMC / REGIS
Dennis Kent	MDOT
Gayle McCrath	Grand Valley Metro Council
Wendy Ogilvie	Grand Valley Metro Council
Peter Varga	The Rapid
John Weiss	Grand Valley Metro Council

2. Public Comment

None

3. Meeting Minutes

MOTION – To Approve the GVMC Board Meeting Minutes of November 2015. MOVE – Butcher. SUPPORT – VerHulst. MOTION CARRIED.

4. Swearing In of New Members

Kent County Clerk Mary Hollinrake administered the Oath of Office to Diane Jones, Kent County, and Matt McConnon, Courtland Township.

5. Tom Butler Presentation on New FOIA Regulations

According to the Detroit Free Press (January 24, 2015), new things in the law include:

• Limiting cost of copies at $.10 per page

• Penalizing government agencies for late responses, by reducing the fees they can charge

• Requiring fines of up to $7,500 for government agencies that ignore the law

• Requiring public bodies to provide records electronically if they have the capability

• Allowing public bodies to include fringe benefits costs in their labor charges

• Requiring public bodies to have written summary of FOIA procedures available for free to the public

Some of the Noteworthy Changes to FOIA (Section 4/Fees and costs):

• Cost of paper copies limited to $.10/page

• In calculating search time for records, public body must round down to the nearest 15 minutes

• In calculating cost of separating exempt from non-exempt information, public body is limited to rate of lowest paid person capable of separating limited to "6 times the state minimum wage" (currently $8.15/hour), plus up to 50% of the labor charge to cover cost of fringe benefits

• If use legal counsel to separate exempt from non-exempt information, same cost limitation applies.

Some of the Noteworthy Changes to FOIA (Section 4/FOIA procedures and guidelines):

• Must publish on public body website (if there is one); if not, must produce in written form

• Must include either website link to FOIA procedures or written copy in EACH FOIA response

• Procedures and guidelines must include (and written in a manner "to be easily understood by the general public"):

- "How to submit written requests to the public body"
- "Use of standard form for detailed itemization of any fee"
- "How to understand a public body's written responses"
- "Deposit requirements"
- "Fee calculations"
- "Avenues for challenge and appeal"
- If FOIA requester so "stipulates," public body must provide records in electronic form

Some of the Noteworthy Changes to FOIA (Section 4/FOIA requests and deposits):

• If entire fee estimate exceeds $50 based upon "good-faith calculation," 50% deposit can be required

• Public body must provide "detailed itemization" of all charges

• Response must contain a "best efforts estimate by the public body regarding the time frame…to comply"

• Failure to timely respond – fees/charges to respond reduced 5%/day up to 50% if failure to respond was "willful and intentional"

Some of the Noteworthy Changes to FOIA (Section 5/responding to requests):
• If a FOIA request is delivered to the "public body's spam or junk-mail folder," the request is not received until 1 day after the public body becomes aware of the written request. The public body "shall note in its records both the "time" the written request was delivered to its spam folder and the "time" the public body became aware of that request

• It is a FOIA request if, in writing, "within first 250 words" it says "freedom of information", "information", "FOIA", "copy", or some abbreviations or "recognizable misspelling of such"

Some of the Noteworthy Changes to FOIA (Section 10/responding to requests):
• If a public body denies, in whole or in part, a FOIA request and the requester files a civil action, if the court determines the public body "arbitrarily and capriciously violated this act by refusal or delay," the court "shall order the public body to pay a civil fine of $1,000…into the general fund of the state treasury."

• Court can also award punitive damages to the requester of $1,000 (up from $500)

Some of the Noteworthy Changes to FOIA (New Section 10a/responding to fee appeals):

• If a FOIA requester believes the fee estimate violates either FOIA or the "publicly available procedures and guidelines," the requester may appeal the fee estimate to the "head of the public body"

• In response to a fee appeal, a public body must do 1 of the following:
    • Waive the fee
    • Reduce the fee and issue a "written determination" the basis for the balance of the fee and such determination must include "certification from the head of the public body" that its statements are accurate and comply with FOIA and the public body's procedures and guidelines
    • Uphold the fee estimate and provide a written determination with certification
    • Extend time to decide for up to 10 business days but must include "detailed reason" for extension

Some of the Noteworthy Changes to FOIA (New Section 10a/penalties for improper fee):
• If a public body denies, in whole or in part, a FOIA request and the requester files a civil action, if the court determines the public body "arbitrarily and capriciously violated this act by charging an excessive fee," the court "shall order the public body to pay a civil fine of $500…into the general fund of the state treasury."

• Also, the Court can also award punitive damages to the requester of $500

Some of the Noteworthy Changes to FOIA (New Section 10b/Additional penalties):
• If a court determines the public body "willfully and intentionally failed to comply with this act or otherwise acted in bad faith, the court shall order the public body to pay, in addition to any other award or sanction, a civil fine of not less than $2,500 or more than $7,500 for each occurrence."

• This fine will be deposited in the general fund of the state treasury

Next Steps?
1. Obtain a copy of your public body's current procedures and guidelines for the Freedom of Information Act

2. Obtain a copy of any FOIA forms from each department

3. Go to your public body's website and type in "Freedom of Information" and "FOIA" and see what turns up

4. Inquire who, at your public body, is addressing the required changes of PA 463 of 2014 5.

July 1, 2015 is the deadline for having your procedures and guidelines updated and published; failure to do so will prevent the public body from recovering any costs or reimbursement of expenses

Query: Should Grand Valley Metro Council facilitate a collaborative effort to develop a model set of procedures and guidelines?

It was decided Tom Butler will work with other member entities and their attorneys to craft a draft model set of procedures and guidelines.

6. Jeff Cranson Presented on the Transportation Ballot Proposal

What is the ballot proposal?
Voters will be asked whether to approve an increase in state sales tax from 6 percent to 7 percent.

But what about the roads?
An increase in fuel taxes and truck registration fees is tied to the outcome of the sales tax vote. The sales tax on fuel would end on Oct. 1, 2015, the gas tax would increase, and all the tax paid at the gas pump would be used for transportation.

When is the election?
May 5, 2015. It will be run like other statewide elections with absentee ballots available.

Why is the election necessary?

The sales tax is set in the state Constitution, and increasing it requires voter approval. The election will decide whether to increase the sales tax overall to offset removing it from fuel sales.

What happens if voters approve it?
The sales tax would increase to 7 percent on Oct. 1, 2015. (Sales tax is not charged on food or prescriptions). Starting Oct. 1, 2015, transportation programs would start to receive additional fuel tax and registration fee revenue.

What happens if voters reject it?
The sales tax remains at 6 percent and fuel taxes and truck registration fees do not increase. There would be no new money to improve roads or other transportation services.

Then what happens to the roads?
If the ballot is approved, road agencies will have additional funds to slow the deterioration of roads and bridges. If it is not approved, roads and bridges will continue to decline at a rapid rate. These projections are based on scientific measures for pavement quality developed through extensive research and consultations with universities. These measures indicate that nearly 15 percent of state highways are presently in "poor" condition. That percentage is expected to increase if there is no additional investment.

MOTION – To Approve Resolution in Support of the Transportation Ballot Proposal.
MOVE – Heartwell. SUPPORT – Stange. ABSTAIN – Baker. MOTION CARRIED

7. Resolution in Support of Laker Line BRT

Peter Varga explained the request for support of the Laker Line BRT and it being the first step in the process to include the BRT in the Long Range Transportation Plan.

MOTION – To Approve the Resolution in Support of the Laker Bus Rapid Transit Line.
MOVE – Heartwell. SUPPORT – Kepley. MOTION CARRIED.

8. Other

John Weiss talked about the Governor's Economic and Educational Summit. The West Michigan Regional Prosperity Alliance will be chairing two sessions as well as addressing the entire group.

The next GVMC Board meeting will run longer than usual, as it will include approval of the Long Range Transportation Plan, the financial audit, and annual meeting.

Wendy Ogilvie updated the group on LGROW with GVSU becoming a member of the NPDES program.

The April GVMC Meeting will be held at the Byron Township Community Center and will include a Strategic Planning session lead by Lew Bender. The session will run approximately 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

9. Adjournment – 9:30 a.m.

MOTION - To Adjourn – Heartwell. SUPPORT – Poll. MOTION CARRIED

If voters defeat Michigan road tax, Grand Rapids 'will fall short of our goal' for street repairs

Matt Vande Bunte | mvandebu@mlive.com By **Matt Vande Bunte | mvandebu@mlive.com**

Follow on Twitter

on February 11, 2015 at 5:28 AM

GRAND RAPIDS, MI - City voters went to the polls last May and approved a tax for roads. This May, they'll go to the polls and be asked to approve a tax for roads.

Come again?

"It's going to be confusing to many of our Grand Rapids voters," Mayor George Heartwell said. "The thought is 'We voted for money for streets,' and we did. But it was always predicated on the state stepping up and doing its job. The (Michigan) Legislature has punted that to the voters.

"Passage of the ballot initiative (in May 2015) is essential to us achieving the goals we have set. Achieving the goals that we set when we went to our voters (in May 2014) and asked for the extension of the income tax - we were clear at the time - requires additional investment by the state."

RELATED: Details on Michigan sales tax, road funding proposal endorsed by Kent, Ottawa governments

Grand Rapids City Commission on Tuesday, Feb. 10, heard its first update from the Vital Streets Oversight Commission, a board created to guide spending of the $10 million-per-year income tax for streets that city voters approved last May. Grand Rapids is off and running toward its 15-year goal of getting 70 percent of city streets into good or fair shape by 2030, the oversight commission's chairwoman said.

The funding mix is still missing a key ingredient - more road money from the state.

City leaders estimate that another $6 million in annual road funding from the state is needed to hit the 70 percent good/fair

Michigan sales tax ballot proposal

Here's a comparison of current taxes at the pump, and taxes if the ballot proposal gets approved

• Currently, when gas is, say, $3 a gallon, motorists pay 19 cents per gallon in fuel tax plus a 6-percent sales tax. So if you buy 10 gallons, you pay $1.90 in fuel tax and $1.80 in sales tax, or $3.70 in tax altogether. (At the moment, the price of gas is less than $3 a gallon, so the tax amounts are lower if you pump gas today.)

• If voters approve the May proposal, there no longer will be a sales tax on gas and the fuel tax will change from a per-gallon charge to a wholesale tax at 14.9 percent of the price. That initial price would be set at a price that yields 42 cents per gallon in tax. So if you buy 10 gallons, you'd pay $4.20 in fuel tax. (This tax would fluctuate with the price of gas, within limits set by the law).

• Going from $1.90 in fuel tax to $4.20 in

goal by 2030. Without that money, "we will fall short of our goal," said Cindy Irving, chairwoman of the oversight commission.

Voters statewide will consider increasing the sales tax from 6 percent to 7 percent as part of a plan to boost funding for Michigan roads by $1.2 billion. If it passes, Grand Rapids stands to get another $9 million per year by 2018, according to Michigan Department of Transportation estimates.

But the ballot proposal is complicated, and early polling suggests voters may reject it.

fuel tax will boost funding for the roads. But the state would lose $1.80 in sales tax on that hypothetical 10-gallon purchase, and that money goes to schools and local governments. That's where the proposed sales tax increase comes in.

• By paying an extra penny in sales tax for every $1 you spend, schools and local governments will keep getting the money they're currently getting from the sales tax on gas. They'll actually start getting more money: about $300 million more for schools and almost $100 million more for local governments.

"We're gathering information, like everybody else, and trying to understand it" before deciding whether to endorse the proposal, Irving said.

RELATED: $17 million spike in income tax revenue: How should Grand Rapids spend the money?

The Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, which includes Grand Rapids, last week voted in support of the ballot proposal, with a lone abstention from the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce. **Speaking Friday, Feb. 6, at a Michigan Press Association lunch** in Grand Rapids, Lt. Gov. Brian Calley called the proposal the state's "best shot" in a long time for a "permanent, ongoing solution" to road funding.

Lt. Gov. Brian Calley

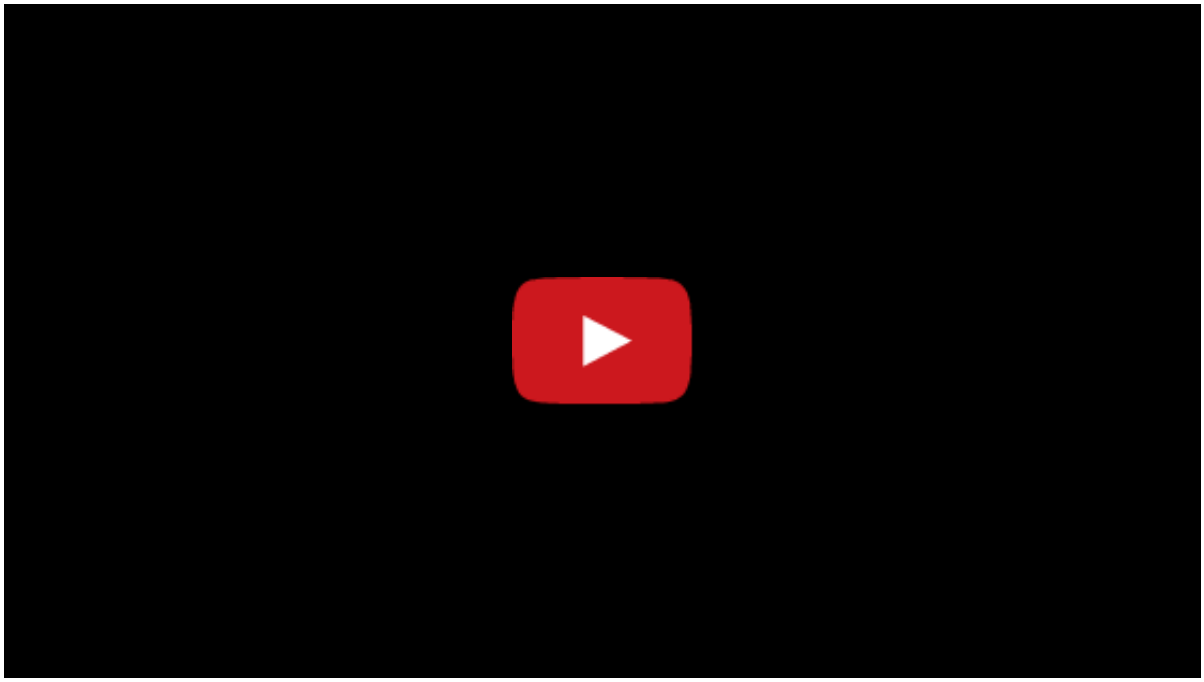
Cory Morse | MLive.com

"One of the things that many in the Legislature were very determined to accomplish was to fix the roads without our gas tax being much higher than the rest of the nation," Calley said. "The only way that could be accomplished was if you remove the sales tax (that funds schools and local governments) from gas and diesel. If you did that though, it would have created a hole in the School Aid Fund which many of the people involved in the process were not willing to create.

"This was a very comprehensive solution that accomplishes keeping our gas prices in line with the rest of the country, but at the same time fixing our roads."

State Sen. Arlan Meekhof, R-West Olive, echoed Calley, saying this ballot proposal is the "optimum opportunity" to boost road funding.

"This is our best option," said Meekhof, the new Senate Majority Leader. The Legislature "just couldn't get the votes to get" a gas tax increase approved without removing the sales tax on gas and asking voters to increase the sales tax on other items, he said.



Matt Vande Bunte covers government for MLive/Grand Rapids Press. Email him at ***mvandebu@mlive.com*** *or follow him on* ***Twitter*** *and* ***Facebook****.*

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Sales tax proposal for roads endorsed by Kent, Ottawa governments: 'We need more' money

Matt Vande Bunte | mvandebu@mlive.com By **Matt Vande Bunte | mvandebu@mlive.com**

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on February 05, 2015 at 3:26 PM, updated February 05, 2015 at 4:25 PM

GRAND RAPIDS, MI - Figure out how much you spend each year on items subject to sales tax and then calculate how much more tax you'd pay if Michigan voters approve a proposal on the May 5 ballot.

That's how Kentwood Mayor Stephen Kepley advises people to think about increasing the state sales tax from 6 percent to 7 percent.

If you spend $10,000 a year on taxable items, that's an extra $100 in tax. If you spend $100,000 a year on taxable items, that's an extra $1,000 in tax. Either way, it could be less than the "hidden" costs motorists pay for driving on bad Michigan roads, at least according to **this report**.

"It's cheap insurance," Kepley said. "I encourage you to pay now because, if you wait, in a couple years it's going to be a lot more.

"We need to fix our roads. The longer we wait, the more costly it gets."

Kepley and other members of the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council approved a resolution of support Thursday, Feb. 5, for the statewide proposal coming to the ballot three months from now. Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce president Rick Baker declined to vote, stating that the chamber had not yet decided whether to support the ballot proposal.

Other members of the panel that includes leaders of several Kent and Ottawa county communities endorsed the proposal to do these basic things: change how gas is taxed so revenue is pegged to the price of gas instead of the number of gallons purchased, and replace sales tax charged at the pump with a 1-cent-per-dollar increase in the sales tax on other items.

It's more complicated than that, and that's a problem for prospective voters, according to **this poll**. The $1.6 billion tax increase also boosts funding for schools, local governments and public transit, for example.

It's not the perfect proposal, Walker Mayor Mark Huizenga said, but the $1.2 billion for roads is sorely needed.

"Nobody wants to see an increase in taxes," he said. "The reality is we can't support the infrastructure in its current state without some augmentation of taxes.

"We're getting a lot, but we need more."

RELATED:

- **More details on road funding plan, statewide ballot proposal**

- **Snyder campaign consultant forms opposition group to fight Michigan road funding proposal**

Here's a comparison of current taxes at the pump, and taxes if the ballot proposal gets approved:

- Currently, when gas is, say, $3 a gallon, motorists pay 19 cents per gallon in fuel tax plus a 6-percent sales tax. So if you buy 10 gallons, you pay $1.90 in fuel tax and $1.80 in sales tax, or $3.70 in tax altogether. (At the moment, the price of gas is less than $3 a gallon, so the tax amounts are lower if you pump gas today.)

- If voters approve the May proposal, there no longer will be a sales tax on gas and the fuel tax will change from a per-gallon charge to a wholesale tax at 14.9 percent of the price. That initial price would be set at a price that yields 42 cents per gallon in tax. So if you buy 10 gallons, you'd pay $4.20 in fuel tax. (This tax would fluctuate with the price of gas, within limits set by the law).

- Going from $1.90 in fuel tax to $4.20 in fuel tax will boost funding for the roads. But the state would lose $1.80 in sales tax on that hypothetical 10-gallon purchase, and that money goes to schools and local governments. That's where the proposed sales tax increase comes in.

- By paying an extra penny in sales tax for every $1 you spend, schools and local governments will keep getting the money they're currently getting from the sales tax on gas. They'll actually start getting more money: about $300 million more for schools and almost $100 million more for local governments.

"What this is about is what you pay at the pump goes as a user fee to (transportation) and what you pay for sales tax goes to schools and revenue sharing (with local governments)," Michigan Department of Transportation Director Kirk Steudle said during a recent visit to MLive's Grand Rapids hub.

"All the taxes collected at the pump are going to take care of roads, bridges and buses, and when they buy a new flat screen TV the sales tax is going to (schools and local government). From a policy perspective it's absolutely the right decision. It's a more sustainable path for the future."

MDOT estimates that voter approval of the sales tax, triggering changes to the gas tax, would boost road funding to cities and counties by two-thirds by 2018. That's another $20 million per year for roads in Kent County and another $11.6 million per year for roads in Ottawa County.

Among area cities, Grand Rapids would get another $9 million per year; Wyoming would get another $3.3 million per year; Kentwood would get another $2 million per year; Holland would get another $1.8 million per year;

Walker would get another $1.1 million per year; Grandville would get another $700,000 per year; East Grand Rapids would get another $500,000 per year.

Voters in Grand Rapids and Ottawa County last year authorized new local taxes to fund roads, and East Grand Rapids voters will consider a 2-mill property tax for roads in May. Additional roads money from the state will enable Grand Rapids to accelerate its road-fixing plans, Deputy City Manager Eric DeLong said. Ottawa County leaders might scale back the local property tax authorized by voters, said Al Vanderberg, county administrator.

The East Grand Rapids proposal limits the local tax to 1.23 mills if voters statewide approve the sales tax increase.

"The millage (in Ottawa County) only raises about half of the identified need to get all the roads into (good shape)," Vanderberg said. "In the event the state revenue exceeds the 50 percent level, then the county board will levy less so the numbers match up (to the identified need for roads)."

*Matt Vande Bunte covers government for MLive/Grand Rapids Press. Email him at **mvandebu@mlive.com** or follow him on **Twitter** and **Facebook**.*

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West Michigan Regional Prosperity Alliance

Press Release
For Immediate Release

Contact : John Weiss, Executive Director GVMC/ Chair West Michigan Prosperity Alliance
616-776-7604 john.weiss@gvmc.org

West Michigan Prosperity Alliance Announces Funding For Projects of Regional Economic Importance

The West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA) is pleased to announce funding in the amount of $230,250 for five projects of Significant Regional Economic Importance. The WMPA was formed in January 2014 as part of Governor Snyder's Regional Prosperity Initiative. The Alliance serves a 13 county region in West Michigan. It is one of the largest regions in the state with 130 miles of Lake Michigan Shoreline, over 90 school systems, 13 colleges and universities, 431 units of government, and a geography roughly the size of New Jersey. The population exceeds 1.5 million residents. Over 10,000 employers create $5.7 billion in economic output.

The thirty-one person Steering Committee includes representatives of Work Force, Economic Development, Higher Education, Adult Education, Transportation and Regional Planning, Business and the area Foundations. All geographic areas are represented.

Through a series of regional meetings, the WMPA developed a Regional Prosperity Plan and as series of criteria to evaluate projects of "Significant Regional Economic Importance". At the meeting last March at the Governor's Economic Summit in Grand Rapids, 180 regional representative came together and established the project criteria. The five criteria are:

- Long term impact and sustainability
- Regional Impact
- Provide Employment Opportunities
- Recognize Regional Strengths and Challenges
- Promotes Public/Private Partnerships

Shortly thereafter, notifications of the project criteria and invitations to nominate projects were sent to over 3,000 individuals and organizations in the region. Thirty-one projects were nominated.

Last October, over 120 representatives from throughout the region gathered to evaluate and vote on the nominated projects. Six were selected as "Projects of Significant Regional Economic Importance". Those 6 projects and the amount of recent funding are:

Port of Muskegon Regional Logistics Hub - A group of regional public and private community leaders are working together to further the development of the Muskegon Port as a regional logistic hub and an economic asset to the region. The WMPA will be supporting this effort by helping to fund both an infrastructure analysis of port assets and an organizational structure analysis of port governance structures. WMPA will also provide other supportive services.

WMPA Grant $31,250 Private Donations $31,250 EDA Grant $62,500 Total $125,000

Protecting Lake Michigan Water Quality through Establishment of a Dedicated Revenue Source for Watershed Management – Local watershed organizations will establish a West Michigan Regional Watershed Collaborative. The collaborative will develop a regional water quality plan and a program to generate sustainable financial resources to protect the water quality of Lake Michigan. The WMPA will be supporting this effort by helping to fund the establishment of the collaborative and a consultant to assist with identifying potential sustainable funding models. WMPA will also provide other supportive services.

WMPA Grant $89,000 Private Donations $15,000 Total $104,000

Connected Community Engagement Program, Technology Action Planning – Connect Michigan, a non-profit entity that helps interested communities identify their technology needs and opportunities, will complete Technology Action Plans to address local broadband and technology issues. The WMPA will be supporting this effort by helping to fund the creation of the Technology Action Plans in the region's counties. The WMPA will also provide other supportive services.

WMPA Grant $40,000 Other Funding $90,000 Total $130,000

Michigan Work Ready Communities - The Michigan Work Ready Communities (MiWRC) initiative assists employers to find work-ready individuals. MiWRC focuses on enhancing fundamental credentials of young people who are ready to enter the workforce, as well as adults who have two years or less in a post-secondary education. The WMPA will be supporting this effort by helping to fund a marketing and public relations campaign to increase employer engagement in the MiWRC and certify all counties in the WMPA as a Certified Work Ready Community by September 2016. WMPA will also provide other supportive services.

WMPA Grant $35,000

Emerge West Michigan Website Portal/Mentor Connect – Emerge is a group of public and private organizations working to provide services to entrepreneurs. The WMPA will be supporting this effort by helping to fund a web portal that helps entrepreneurs get the right resources at the right time and the Mentor Connect Program which matches mentors with entrepreneurs. WMPA will also provide other supportive services.

WMPA Grant $35,000 Other Funding $430,000 Total $465,000

Key Comments

"This initiative has allowed our region to join together to discuss significant economic issues for the entire area. West Michigan is a large and diverse region and we have worked together to plan for our future and target regional projects that will have significant impact. It is this type of collaboration and cooperation that helps West Michigan lead our state's economic revival."

John Weiss, Executive Director Grand Valley Metropolitan Council
Chairman, West Michigan Prosperity Alliance
616-776-7604

"As the deepest water port along Michigan's west coast, the Port of Muskegon has the potential to move a variety of goods such as manufacturing and agricultural products through the port reaching the mid-west, North America, and the world. Support and financial assistance from the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance will help provide the groundwork to develop the Port of Muskegon as a multi-model regional logistics hub including access to roads, rail, air, and water."

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director
West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission
231-722-7878

"Keeping Lake Michigan clean is important to everybody in West Michigan. This project will improve collaboration among the region's local watershed organizations and support their efforts to protect this vital regional asset."

Steve Bulthuis
Executive Director Macatawa Area Coordinating Council
616-395-2688

"I am delighted to see the Connect Michigan project approved for funding by the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance board. Having worked with the Connect Michigan team over the last couple years, I have witnessed first-hand the tangible results they have brought to the communities Michigan Works! West Central serves. Seeing them work with a variety of groups and being able to consistently bring the broadband providers to these settings, is a testament to the great partnerships they have established, that will now allow the region as a whole to benefit from, by increasing broadband connectivity to better serve our residents and businesses."

Paul Griffith, Executive Director
Michigan Works! West Central
231-660-0263

"This grant comes at a time when it is becoming more and more difficult to find qualified job candidates for the many good paying jobs in the manufacturing, healthcare and construction sectors. The grant will accelerate efforts by Michigan Work Ready Communities to build awareness of the National Career Readiness as a tool for employers to help them identify individuals with the foundational skills for employment."

Kevin Stotts, President
Talent 2025
616-230-6344

"These projects focus on key private sector needs: infrastructure, talent, entrepreneurship and the environment. They will be a catalyst for public-private partnerships in our region and it is great to see them moving forward with defined action plans."

Andy Johnston,
West Michigan Chamber Coalition
616-771-0335