Michigan Rural Council Community Assessment

Eaton Rapids

Julie Hales-Smith, Jamie Schriner-Hooper and Joanna Dunn

April 22, 2016

The Michigan Rural Council (MRC) community assessments provide an affordable opportunity to assess a community’s problems and challenges, identify assets and kick-start the development of projects and goals for the future. The community assessment process is intended to empower communities by giving them the tools to plan for the future in the manner of their choosing. The process is locally led from the beginning, and consists of multiple listening sessions in which everyone in the community has a chance to voice their opinion. This particular assessment will inform two community-wide plans that are currently being updated: the Master Plan and the Parks and Recreation Plan. The MRC representatives in attendance were Julie Hales-Smith from North Coast Community Consultants, Jamie Schriner-Hooper from Community Economic Development Association of Michigan, and Joanna Dunn of USDA Rural Development.

WE ARE ER! Might better be phrased, “We Are (THE ONLY) ER” – naw, it doesn’t have the punch. “Punch” withstanding, Eaton Rapids is able to not only document but justify its uniqueness – indeed, no other place on earth is named “Eaton Rapids” and the community itself is truly unique. The “Island City” as it is called, was once known as the Sarasota of the West. In 1852 mineral springs were discovered that soon became nationally known for their healing powers. People flocked from near and wide to partake in the 14 wells that were drilled throughout town. And today, people in town still remember grandparents who routinely cured their ills by bathing in the springs. The springs are only one of the surprisingly many and interesting attributes of Eaton Rapids.
Driving through downtown Eaton Rapids, it is easy to momentarily believe that when you turned onto M 50 you motored through a time machine and were suddenly thrust back into the early 1900s. Over 30% of the housing stock in the city was built prior to 1939 and most of the buildings in the downtown fall into that category. Many Victorian, the buildings downtown are mostly brick with eclectic ornamentation. Styles and colors and materials vary, but that is what adds to the beauty and richness of the vista as you glance from one side of the street to the other. And then to discover that behind block after block of this regal architecture there is a lovely island park AND river with multiple dams soon to explode into rapids for recreation. It leaves one speechless.

Another reason that Eaton Rapids is truly “one of a kind” is the PEOPLE of Eaton Rapids. As of the census of 2010, there were 5,214 people, 2,092 households, and 1,345 families residing in the city1. Working with a population of just over 5,000 (and by the way, 1,300 of these folks are under 14 and 200 are over 80) this community has too many special projects (did we mention the Rapids?), service groups and activities, and events to mention (see the full list of amenities in the Feedback Section). The PEOPLE of Eaton Rapids are RABID (an awkward play on words) when it comes to their home town. They don’t just talk about how much they love it, they ACT. This report will provide recommendations to further capitalize on this passion and unique character.

THE TOUR

The Michigan Rural Council (MRC) assessment started with a tour of the community lead by Gary Wichman and Lindsay Peters, both from the Eaton Rapids Marketing Alliance. We toured the industrial parks (mostly full) and saw the site that was built up on the unfortunate assumption that an alternative energy company was coming into town. We proceeded to the modern, well-kept school complex and saw the old Miller Farms, learning about its history and current use. Next it was onto downtown and the island park. The architecture is stunning and many of the buildings are very well kept, however as with many downtowns, there are a few in need of “sprucing up”, and almost 20% of the storefronts are vacant. Add to this vacancy problem the lack of a variety of retail. Approximately 80% of the storefronts are service in nature – real estate, insurance – and although these businesses are greatly valued in the community, they do not make the downtown a compelling destination for tourists and they don’t generate the excitement or foot traffic that a variety of interesting/relevant retail would.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK2

Small Group #1

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1 http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tables-services/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF; retrieved 2016-4-24
2 See Community Feedback Tables for detailed listing of comments.
The first small group interview of the assessment included municipal leaders. The top problem areas/barriers fell into three categories: need for upgraded infrastructure; vacancies in and near downtown - most notably the old Horner Mill site which is an eyesore as you enter the town – but also the high rate of vacant storefronts (over 20%); and the lack of variety in businesses downtown – service businesses including government comprise almost 80% of downtown storefronts. The group unanimously complained that this lack of retail variety caused lack of business traffic (often leading to more vacancy) and hindered the city’s ability to attract visitors from outside.

They did express belief in passion-filled community spirit as evidenced by the many, active community service groups and other volunteers that work on behalf of the community. They were excited by the prospects that the new rapids and recreation center by the river will generate, and are eager to work together to capitalize on these as destination places. They agreed, however, that in order to move ahead to both address challenges and capitalize on opportunities they needed to be working together on an overall strategy for community economic development.

If they could do “just one thing” to make a difference in Eaton Rapids, the majority of participants would make something happen at the old Horner Mill site. This site appears to inhabit two extremes – it represents the worst eyesore in the community and the best opportunity for the community.

Small Group #2

The second group was made up of business owners. Their concerns echoed much of what the first group identified with the addition of two things: lack of parking downtown and discreet places to put trash receptacles; and lack of community engagement and support in two areas that really matter – the downtown businesses and the school system. Since the city is actually (not metaphorically) an island, there is limited space. And although lack of parking is often one of the first things you hear from downtown businesses (which often is more of a perception than a reality), in this case there really does appear to be, if not a lack of available parking, a lack of quality parking. Some of the parking lots are in need of significant repair, as well as signage directing people to appropriate parking.

Community spirit is a true asset in Eaton Rapids but this group perceived that although the support is clearly evident in volunteer activities and service groups, two areas that could really use that active support are the downtown businesses and the schools. Neither families nor agencies within the community necessarily support and shop at the local businesses. In the same vein, although the community is proud of its schools, it took three tries to pass a bond for school improvements. If the school system can’t retain top talent through competitive salaries, the community will have to face the reality of families moving to their competition.

This enthusiastic group identified the river as Eaton Rapids’ key asset. They also mentioned the great location of Eaton Rapids – so close to Lansing and Battle Creek – and how accessible it was on both M 99 and M 50. It makes it so convenient and a great bedroom community for folks to enjoy the small town charm but still have access to jobs in the cities.
Small Group #3

The third and final small group of the day was made up of community/civic leaders. As expected, they identified many of the same barriers as the previous two groups. However, in addition they emphasized three areas of concern: the shabbiness of the gateways into the city on both M 99 and M 50; the need for a coordinated plan for economic development with all parties collaborating to implement; and the lack of a focused, strategic approach to business recruitment. The first impression of Eaton Rapids is formed as you drive into the city. Unfortunately the quality of housing stock is inconsistent and the overall appearance is not overly inviting.

The group agreed that the city needs an overall coordinated plan for economic development. This requires all parties talking and working together. Related to that is the need for a strategic approach to business recruitment AND a transparent process for assisting businesses as they work to locate in Eaton Rapids.

This group also identified the river as Eaton Rapids greatest asset and went on to speculate on how this could lead to an evolution into a “recreation destination” with the rapids, fishing, trails, and recreation related businesses.

Town Hall Meeting

The Town Hall meeting was very well attended by a broad cross section of Eaton Rapids residents. In general, sentiments about challenges echoed those heard earlier in the day, with an emphasis on the need for stakeholders to work more collaboratively across the community – the city, economic development leaders, city anchors – working together to harness all the great assets of the city to launch it ahead.

During the work session, small groups enthusiastically identified assets and generated several ideas for short and long term projects that could capitalize on those assets. See attached table for lists of projects as well as volunteers who are willing to help plan and implement these projects.

Recommendations

A theme throughout the interviews was that people in Eaton Rapids are very willing to take action; there is a great deal of community pride and enthusiasm; they just need to agree on specific action steps and work together to accomplish them. Based on what we saw and heard in Eaton Rapids, the following are recommendations for short and longer term projects/initiatives.
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<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>PROJECT/INITIATIVE</th>
<th>RESOURCE</th>
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| Downtown: vacancies, beautification; lack of retail | Michigan Main Street Program | Michigan Main Street Program: Participating in the Main Street Program as an associate member could assist Eaton Rapids in multiple ways. Creating a volunteer driven Main Street program will help revitalize and reinvigorate the downtown, systematically work to engage more citizens in community/downtown projects and initiatives, and provide planning and implementation support to the downtown. **Benefits of the Michigan Main Street (MMS) Program include:**  
  a. Protecting and strengthening the existing tax base  
  b. Creating a positive community image  
  c. Enhancing economically viable buildings  
  d. Supporting business recruitment and retention  
  e. Fostering the development of new jobs  
  f. Attracting new residents to the Main Street area  
  g. Increasing investment in the Main Street area  
  h. Preserving historic architectural resources  
  i. Providing services tailored to specific community needs  
  
  For more information: [http://www.michiganmainstreetcenter.com/](http://www.michiganmainstreetcenter.com/) |
| Initiate/support Lighter Quicker Cheaper Events | Michigan Municipal League | PlacePOP is a low-cost, high-impact service that demonstrates the power of place. We develop engaging, temporary improvements to a public space that can catalyze development, strengthen community connections, and make an area more attractive.  
PlacePOP projects can test creative ideas like:  

- Use art, lighting, wayfinding, and landscaping to improve walkability between two areas  
- Activate underutilized space with people-centered improvements  
- Gauge demand with pop-up retail in a vacant storefront  
- Build a temporary pocket park with outdoor furniture and family-friendly activities  
  
  Sarah Craft  
  Michigan Municipal League  
  (734) 669-6328  
  scraft@mml.org  
  - Allegan Place POP |
Create a “shop local” program

- Muskegon provides an example of a buy local campaign with a memorable message, utilizing kids to promote buying local. Airing before movies at the local Cinema Carousel. Put out by the Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce, this campaign has a clear message: “We love Muskegon!” The full video clip can be found on the chamber’s website: http://www.muskegon.org/whats-happening/202-a-new-kind-of-buy-local-message
- Keys to Successful “buy local” campaigns: http://www.amiba.net/buy-local-campaigns/
- Grand Rapids groundbreaking local first campaign: http://www.localfirst.com/
- "Old Town 4-3-50" is an ongoing community project aiming to support neighborhood businesses, and keep money right here in the community where it makes a real difference. How it works:
  - Old Town shoppers are given a 4-3-50 stamp-card each 4-month period of the year
  - Over that 4-month period, each time a shopper spends $50 at one time in a participating Old Town business they receive a stamp from that business
  - Shoppers must collect stamps from 3 different participating Old Town businesses at the end of the 4-month period
  - If this goal is met, shoppers bring their stamp-card into the Old Town office to be entered into a raffle to win a $100 gift card they can spend at any participating Old Town business!
  http://iloveoldtown.org/4-3-50-project

Need a plan for re-development that includes incentives and how to walk a new development through the city processes.

Redevelopment Ready Program at MEDC
- The Michigan Economic Development Corporation is pleased to offer the Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) program to municipalities across the state. RRC is a voluntary, no cost certification program promoting effective redevelopment strategies through a set of best practices. The program measures and then certifies communities that integrate transparency, predictability and efficiency into their daily development practices. The RRC certification is a formal recognition that a community has a vision for the future and the fundamental practices in place to get there.

To be vibrant and competitive, Michigan communities must be ready for development. This involves planning for new investment and re-investment, identifying assets and opportunities, and focusing limited resources. Certified Redevelopment Ready Communities® encourage business attraction and retention, offer superior customer service, and have a streamlined development approval process making pertinent information available around-the-clock for anyone around the world to view.
### Redvelop Horner Property

**Conduct a Charrette and develop a design for the space:**

- **MSU Small Town Design Initiative/Community Design Initiative**
  
  *Description:* The Small Town Design Initiative (STDI)/Community Design Initiative (CDI) is a resource that offers physical environmental design assistance in community development and land use for small communities in Michigan, aimed at improving quality of life and addressing environmental challenges. The objectives of the initiative include:
  - Working with communities to develop environmental design ideas that address local issues and opportunities; Consensus building; Generating ideas; Attacking a challenging environmental concern;
  - Acting as a bridge between communities and consulting design professionals; and
  - Providing for in-community student learning, as well as a creative and scholarly work outlet.
  
  Examples of design projects completed by STDI are downtown streetscapes, parks, bikeways and trails, open space systems, industrial/commercial development, beautification, land use, signs, agricultural land preservation, ecosystem management, and residential development.
  - **Location:** STDI/CDI: 101 Human Ecology Building, MSU, East Lansing, MI, 48824.
  - **Audience:** Communities with a population ranging from 500 to 15,000 qualify for STDI services, as well as non-profit organizations and local citizen groups.
  - **Partners:** Administered by the Landscape Architecture Program.

  For more information:
  - (517) 432-0704
  - rauhe@msu.edu
  - [http://msustatewide.msu.edu/Programs/Details/1714](http://msustatewide.msu.edu/Programs/Details/1714)

### Business and Industry Loans and Grants

- **USDA Rural Development Business & Industry loans and grants.** Specifically the RBDG grant that is for non-profits or public entities. Or contact Joanna Dunn at joanna.dunn@mi.usda.gov

  *http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/programs-services-businesses*

### Community-wide beautification including gateways

- **Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA) Arts Mini-grants**

  - **MCACA in partnership with regional regranting agencies throughout the state.** These are special opportunities to address local arts & cultural needs as well as increasing public access to arts and culture.
  - **Arts Projects Minigrants** provide up to $4,000 for locally developed, high quality arts and cultural projects. **Professional Development Minigrants** provide up to $1,500 to assist nonprofit organizations and arts professional acquire services or skills to strengthen the administrative infrastructure of the organization.

  *http://www.michiganbusiness.org/community/council-arts-cultural-affairs/#MCACA*

### The City can consider adopting vacant

- **A Vacant Property Registration Ordinance (VPRO) can be designed to serve a number of purposes related to vacant property issues.** Chiefly, a VPRO provides a way for the City to gather current, local contact
| Property registration and inspection ordinances. | Information for the owners of vacant properties. This contact information is then used to communicate with owners when there is a property maintenance issue that needs to be resolved. Some VPROs also require owners to provide a plan for repair and re-occupancy with their registration.  
- MML also offers a sample of ordinances from across the state, which can be found: [http://www.mml.org/resources/sample_docs/ordinances/blight_sample_ordinances_2.html#Registration](http://www.mml.org/resources/sample_docs/ordinances/blight_sample_ordinances_2.html#Registration)  
- The City of Muskegon Heights, for example, outlines a VPRO with an escalating fee of $0 if the structure is vacant for less than six months to more than $5,000 if the structure is vacant for more than 10 years. [http://www.communityprogress.net/tool-1--vacant-property-registration-ordinances--pages-257.php](http://www.communityprogress.net/tool-1--vacant-property-registration-ordinances--pages-257.php)  
| --- | --- |
| MCACA Retention and engagement grants program | Grants are offered through the New Leaders Arts Council of Michigan to support projects focusing on the retention and community engagement of young people in Michigan through arts and culture.  
- Funding is available for projects that involve the creativity of young people: their mentorship, project already in progress, ideas they have to make the community a better place, and projects that use arts and culture to: empower young people in Michigan, support an atmosphere of entrepreneurship and creativity, and encourage the retention of young people in their communities. [http://www.michiganbusiness.org/community/council-arts-cultural-affairs/#MCACA](http://www.michiganbusiness.org/community/council-arts-cultural-affairs/#MCACA) |
| Housing rehabilitation assistance | The City or service agency should catalogue and promote home improvement grant and loan opportunities.  
- Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis programs: In partnership with their members, FHLBI offers three grant programs designed to address the affordable housing needs:  
  o the Homeownership Opportunities Program (HOP) to help first-time homebuyers with down payment assistance;  
  o the Neighborhood Impact Program (NIP) to assist low-income homeowners with home repairs;  
  o and the Accessibility Modifications Program (AMP) to aid seniors and households with disabled |
| Assistance for blighted rental properties | • The City should work with partners like MSHDA and MEDC as well as participating local lenders, like Chemical Bank, to publicize the availability of repair financing options for landlords.  
  o MEDC offers Community Development Block Grant resources for Rental Rehabilitation, a program that partners with landlords to provide safe, decent affordable rental housing. [http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cb/pdf/cdbg.pdf](http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cb/pdf/cdbg.pdf)  
  o MSHDA, through participating lenders, offers a Property Improvement Program loan for rental properties. The PIP loan can provide landlords with the funding needed to make repairs up to $25,000 for single-family homes. More information about this program: [http://www.michigan.gov/mshda/0,4641,7-141-45866_49317_50740-187373-00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mshda/0,4641,7-141-45866_49317_50740-187373-00.html) |
| Vacant downtown buildings | Engage residents with “I wish this was...” campaign.  
  • *I Wish This Was* is a participatory public art project that explores the process of civic engagement. The creator posted thousands of “I wish this was ____” stickers on vacant buildings across New Orleans to invite residents to easily share their hopes for these spaces. She also provided boxes of free stickers in businesses around the city. The project allows residents to provide civic input on-site. [http://candychang.com/work/i-wish-this-was/](http://candychang.com/work/i-wish-this-was/) |
| Inconsistent/expensive internet service | • Light Speed is actively connecting homes and businesses to insanely fast Gigabit service all over the Lansing area now. Maybe if enough interest they will bring their services to Eaton Rapids [http://golightspeed.com/index.html](http://golightspeed.com/index.html)  
  LightSpeed Communications, LLC  
  4942 Dawn Avenue  
  East Lansing, MI 48823  
  517-492-9000 or 844-2GO-FAST |
<p>| Community Grants Awards: Rural Partners of Michigan | This program offers grants of up to $800 to organizations engaged in rural community development work. RPM, as part of the Michigan Rural Council, seeks to connect and educate community leaders, provide expertise and advocate for policy and projects that impact rural Michigan. |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Eligibility Criteria</th>
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<tr>
<td>• This RFP is open to all nonprofit organizations working within or on behalf of rural Michigan.</td>
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<td>• Grant funds should be used to directly benefit rural communities.</td>
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<td>• A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, municipality or governmental entity must act as the fiduciary/grantee.</td>
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<td>• Awards are limited to one per community per grant period.</td>
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<td>• Projects should commence within the next six months</td>
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Applications are encouraged to include more than one entity or organization within a community or a larger geographic region. Extra weight will be given to programs or projects that have not been funded in the past and have gone through an RPM Community Assessment. Projects or programs selected to receive a Community Grant Award will be required to submit a brief final report when grant funds have been expended. Grants will be awarded bi-annually each year with deadlines in August and February. The Granting Committee, comprised of Board Members of the Rural Partners of Michigan (RPM), will select up to five proposals to be awarded during each of the two cycles throughout the year. http://rural.cedam.info/communityawards/

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<tr>
<th>Parks and public spaces cleanup/spruce up</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public Spaces Community Spaces is a creative crowd funding opportunity sponsored by MEDC and MSHDA. This could be a funding source for improved wayfinding in public places in the community. It is a relatively simple process and the city and college could partner to make it happen. See <a href="https://www.patronicity.com/puremichigan">https://www.patronicity.com/puremichigan</a></td>
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<tr>
<th>Promotion and marketing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Need a comprehensive branding plan and logo</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “We are ER” – seems popular; maybe build off this. Possibly the Marketing Alliance (or new Community Collaborative Board) could fund raise and bring experts to ER to assist.</td>
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<tr>
<th>People both inside and outside of ER don’t know everything that is going on.</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Create a community calendar with activities and plans for all the different groups who are doing things throughout the community</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Create a MORE VIBRANT, multifaceted, informational city website</td>
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<tr>
<th>Expanding/improving the farmers market</th>
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<td>The existing farmers market did not sound very robust and there were questions about having both the market downtown and the one at the hospital.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Ideas for expanding/improving the market:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Marcy Bishop Kates</strong>, 517-974-8944. Marcy is Chairperson of Holt Farmer’s Market (<a href="http://www.holtfarmersmarket.org/">http://www.holtfarmersmarket.org/</a>). Marcy also started Incu-Bake (<a href="http://incu-bake.com/about-incu-bake/">http://incu-bake.com/about-incu-bake/</a>), a small business incubator that combines small business support with rentable commercial kitchen space. She would be happy to work with Eaton Rapids to think about ways to grow the market.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Allen Neighborhood Center</strong>: The Allen Neighborhood Center Farmers’ Market in Lansing is one of the success stories of farmer’s markets in this region. It now boasts a food hub on the property, as well as a hoop house in the park across the street. (517) 367-2468</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capitalizing on the water (and other) recreation destination potential of ER</td>
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| • Connection to resources and technical assistance:  
  o MSU CES  
  Mary Bohling bohling@anr.msu.edu or 313-757-7356 x 101. | |

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<tr>
<th>Becoming a trail town</th>
<th>Complete guide to becoming a Trail Town using the Main Street 4 points approach as the organizing model.</th>
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</table>
| • Article: Leveraging Your Trail System for Community Economic Development  
  Michigan Township News  
  September 2012  
  Harry Burkholder, AICP, Community Planner,  
  Land Information Access Association,  
  • Burkholder can be reached at (231) 929-3696 or burkholder@liaa.org. | |

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<tr>
<th>Need bike paths</th>
<th>Transportation Alternatives Program</th>
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| • The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a competitive grant program that funds projects such as bike paths, streetscapes, and historic preservation of transportation facilities that enhance Michigan’s intermodal transportation system and provide safe alternative transportation options. These investments support place-based economic development by offering transportation choices, promoting walkability, and improving the quality of life. The program uses Federal Transportation Funds designated by Congress for these types of activities.  
  • Eligible applicants include county road commissions, cities, villages, regional transportation authorities, transit agencies, state and federal natural resource or public land agencies, and tribal governments. MDOT may partner with a local agency to apply for funding and implement the project. Other organizations such as townships or non-motorized trail groups may work with an eligible agency to apply. | |
| | https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,1607,7-151-9621_17216_18231---,00.html |

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<tr>
<th>Miscellaneous Resources</th>
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| • Nate Scramlin: MEDC CATeam representative for this region scramlinn@michigan.org  
  • MIplace.org Toolkit: lists all state agency tools/grants/loans/incentives associated with placemaking: http://miplace.org/resources/funding | |
Summary

Eaton Rapids stakeholders appear ready to take the necessary next steps for their community. The time is right. This will require that organizations and individuals currently working and planning for improvements combine their efforts to work collaboratively and focus their energy. Suggested next steps:

1. Capitalize on the momentum, experience, and relationships that have developed in the Marketing Alliance, and morph this body into a broader collaboration including Chamber, DDA, township officials, City officials, elected officials (others?). Building on the Master Plan and Recreation Plan, create a blueprint for economic development for the community. ³

2. In order to familiarize a broad group of leaders in the community (businesses, DDA, elected/appointed officials, volunteers, etc.) with the Main Street model, invite Brittney Hoszkiw (hoszkiwb@michigan.org) from the Michigan Main Street Program to do a presentation on the Main Street Program.⁴

3. Create an ad hoc task force (under auspices of the Community Collaborative Group) to develop a plan for development and re-use of the Horner complex. This might include seeking assistance to run a communitywide charrette on the site. (See Small Town Design Assistance program above). If not this initiative, MRC and USDA RD will help the city search out other possible resources.⁵

4. Create an ad hoc task force (under auspices of the Community Collaborative Group) to develop a plan for capitalizing on the water recreation that will be launched by the creation of the rapids. Research feasibility of purchasing other dams; seek out case studies of communities who have built destination businesses and services with similar resources; explore how to become a water “trail town”.⁶

Eaton Rapids took the initiative to invite a Michigan Rural Council Assessment. The community did not just attend, they enthusiastically “engaged” with the process. Both the small group sessions (which were by no means “small” in number) and the Community Meeting were filled with passionate, energized, knowledgeable, loyal Eaton Rapid-ians. This community is like a roman candle – just waiting for a spark to launch it to greatness.

³ See Project #3 under Small Group Breakouts on Assessment List
⁴ See Projects #1,5,11 under Small Group Breakouts on Assessment List
⁵ See Project #9 under Small Group Breakouts on Assessment List
⁶ See Project #10 under Small Group Breakouts on Assessment List
Appendix

1. Case Examples

Fremont
(pop. 4,081)
Yard of the Month
Newaygo County
To encourage neighborhood pride and beauty through the upkeep of yards, a volunteer group of citizens (including the former Mayor Pro Tem, the current Mayor and volunteers under the oversight of the Director of Neighborhood and Economic Development), initiated a “Yard of the Month” program for the months of July, August, and September. Yards are nominated by citizens and the “Dead Heads” (volunteers responsible for weeding the four downtown blocks—often while listening to the Grateful Dead) choose a yard for each of the three months. The winner receives a Proclamation from city council, a high-quality bright orange and green sign metal sign for their yard to display for the month, and a picture of the winning family is placed in the local paper. Families get involved and are delighted with the recognition. Cost for the program is minimal, which includes cost of the sign and shirts for the current eight “Dead Head” members.

Contact: Mayor James Rynberg; mayor@cityoffremont.net

Scottville
(pop. 1,214)
Peer Pressure Property Maintenance
Mason County
The city of Scottville decided to handle citizen complaints about vacant and blighted properties with peer pressure instead of tickets. When city hall receives a complaint about a property, the city commission, as a whole, visits the property. The violations are documented, and a “Letter of Concern” is sent to property owners describing the violations. There is no ticketing. The process has resulted in great responses from property owners. The peer pressure, rather than immediate ticketing, is getting results.

Contact: Mayor Richard Maki, ww8u@rocketmail.com

Wayland
(pop. 4,079)
Main Street Building Revitalization
Allegan County
The city of Wayland benefitted from an innovative partnership with Michigan Works, the Michigan Mains Street Program, and the owner of a deteriorated downtown building. Through

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7 From Local Success Stories, 2013 Michigan Association of Mayors Summer Workshop, Frankenmuth
Michigan’s Workforce Investment Act (WIA), low-income 16-21 year-olds get practical experience while learning the construction trade. The crew renovated a building in downtown Wayland with roof repairs, interior repairs, paint job, and handicap accessible bathroom. The young adults earn money and learn construction skills, and the city benefits from the improvements. The building owners paid for the repair costs, and the WIA paid the workers’ wages.
Contact: Mayor Tim Bala, tbala@cityofwayland.org

Zeeland
(pop. 5,504)
Farmers Market/Zeelmania
Ottawa County
Zeeland’s farmers market was dying. In an effort to revive it, the city expanded the traditional farmers market to include a craft sale. There is a small fee to participate, and sellers bring their own tables. In addition, nonprofits use the expanded farmers market as an opportunity to sell items and for public outreach. The farmers market coincides with the eight-week Zeelmania healthy street fair. Zeelmania is a downtown attraction offering family-friendly fitness activities and demonstrations. Each week during the summer, a different event is featured—the first week included a balloon drop off a city fire truck.
Contact: Mayor Kevin Klynstra, kklynstra@ci.zeeland.mi.us

Battle Creek
(pop. 52,347)
Stache Bash/Leilapolooza Music Fest
Calhoun County
In the name of fun and fundraising, the Battle Creek Metropolitan Area Moustache Society holds an annual “Stache Bash.” The bash raises money with a sense of humor “changing the face of charity right under your nose.” The Bash is held in tandem with Leilapolooza, the Leila Arboretum Music Festival. The Stache Bash includes moustache contests (such as longest, prettiest, and most patriotic), and a homemade raft race (the raft has to float and be able to carry someone). The event raises money for the Arboretum and brings the community out in force.
Contact: Mayor Susan Baldwin, susanbaldwinbc@gmail.com

Adrian
(pop. 21,133)
**First Fridays**
*Lenawee County; MML Region 2*
This monthly event was launched in 2012 to get businesses in downtown Adrian hopping. A collaboration of artists, musicians, performers, businesses, organizations, and volunteers gather to host an artist, or musician/entertainer, and each month has a theme. Twenty-five to thirty businesses stay open late—there is a surge in activity downtown. The cost to the city was minimal to non-existent—the businesses sponsor the event. The city is responsible for communication and marketing, and the Chamber of Commerce and the DDA also participate.
Contact: Mayor Jim Berryman, jberryman@adrianmi.gov;

**Hastings**
*(pop. 7,350)*
**Riverwalk/Downtown Sculpture Tour/Spray Plaza**
*b Barry County; MML Region 2*
The city of Hastings has a placemaking and walkability strategy. The city constructed a downtown trail, incorporated sculpture into its downtown streetscape, and put a splash pad in a downtown plaza creating a wonderful, active public space. The trail, art, and public plaza space are interconnected and build a healthier community and quality of life. The DDA and the Thornapple Arts Commission hosted their fourth sculpture tour this summer, featuring 23 unique sculptures selected by an advisory committee of residents, artists, art enthusiasts, and art instructors. Two of the sculptures are on lease from local artists, 14 have been purchased and gifted back to the city for permanent display, and seven are on lease from the MidWest Sculpture Initiative. The Spray Plaza is a downtown public space right next to the theater and was built with 85 percent private funds. The Spray Plaza features its own sculpture and mural.
Contact: Mayor Frank Campbell, fcampbell@hastingsmi.org