



risingtide

Action Strategy

City of Grayling
January 2016



rising tide

Rising Tide is an initiative envisioned by Governor Snyder and implemented by the Department of Talent and Economic Development (TED) with the mission of supplying at-risk communities with the tools they need to design and build a successful economic framework. Project Rising Tide supports vibrant, thriving communities to attract business investment and talent by creating a sustainable path toward economic stability and growth.

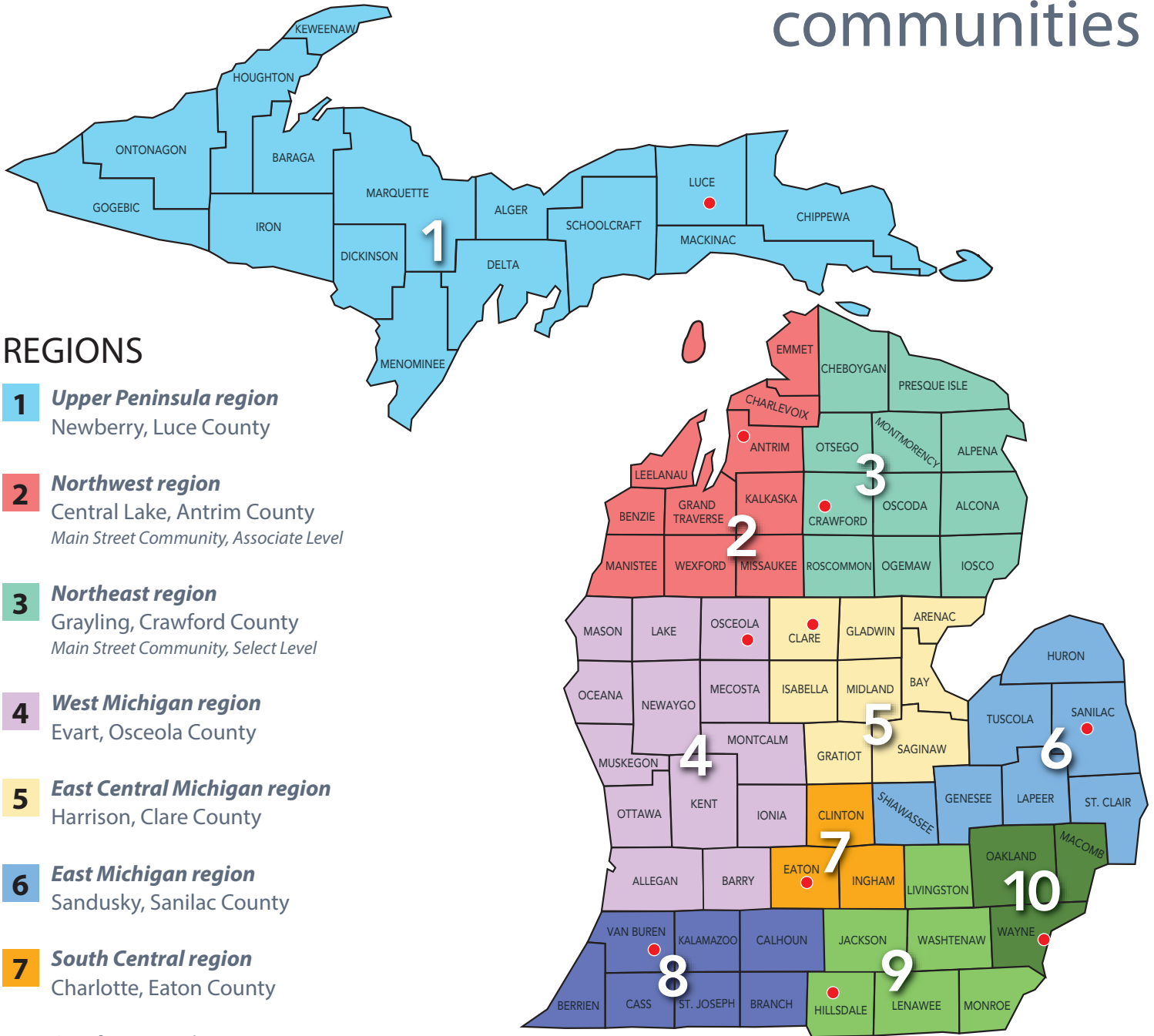
The Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Talent Investment Agency, and Michigan State Housing Development Authority (TED team) have committed their assets to engaging specific communities across the state in order to empower them to shape their future and maximize economic potential.

One community in each of the 10 prosperity regions was selected using the following data cross matched by population (the data are provided in Appendix A):

- Poverty level
- Unemployment level
- Labor participation rate
- Renter occupied units
- Vacancy rates
- Percentage of households receiving food stamps

This initiative will employ the MEDC's Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) program as the initial mechanism to support the Rising Tide platform in each of the 10 prosperity regions. Depending on each community's unique challenges, additional supportive services may be provided.





REGIONS

- 1
Upper Peninsula region
 Newberry, Luce County
- 2
Northwest region
 Central Lake, Antrim County
Main Street Community, Associate Level
- 3
Northeast region
 Grayling, Crawford County
Main Street Community, Select Level
- 4
West Michigan region
 Ewart, Osceola County
- 5
East Central Michigan region
 Harrison, Clare County
- 6
East Michigan region
 Sandusky, Sanilac County
- 7
South Central region
 Charlotte, Eaton County
- 8
Southwest region
 Paw Paw, Van Buren County
- 9
Southeast Michigan region
 Hillsdale, Hillsdale County
Redevelopment Ready Communities, evaluation completed
- 10
Detroit Metro region
 River Rouge, Wayne County
Redevelopment Ready Communities, evaluation pending

SUMMARY FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

In September 2015, the TED team initiated meetings with community stakeholders in Grayling. The initial stakeholder meeting discussed the community background and identified community challenges and priorities to inform Project Rising Tide (PRT) efforts moving forward. Stakeholder meetings included city staff, Main Street staff, local financial institutions, surrounding Township officials, representatives from the Crawford AuSable School District, Munson Hospital, Kirtland Community College and major employers.

Stakeholders identified many local assets within the city of Grayling to build upon. As a rural community, the region was considered as a part of the area of impact given several assets were located outside of Grayling's traditional downtown. The abundance of four-season recreational opportunities and the direct access to the AuSable River downtown are key assets. The flourishing wood products industry is a key employer and economic driver. The traditional downtown, underutilized infrastructure capacity, community connectivity to the surrounding trail systems, direct access to I-75 and M-72, award winning Crawford AuSable School District, Munson Hospital are additional strengths. These assets are highly valued by the community, with support and encouragement for future marketing, branding and utilization. Once the asset inventory was complete the group then focused on issues which pose great challenges to the economic climate of the city and region.

During conversations with Grayling stakeholders and staff, several challenges impacting the data sets used to select this community as a priority for the PRT pilot were identified. A reoccurring theme throughout interviews was the need to revisit and strengthen the community brand and establish a cohesive plan to market the city and its many assets. Community stakeholders also identified the need for a revitalized downtown building stock, rental code enforcement, workforce development, talent needs for both the wood products and health care industries, evaluate current and future housing needs including short-term housing and the desire to better accommodate and support area entrepreneurs.

Stakeholders selected the development of a comprehensive marketing strategy as the top priority for the city of Grayling. Marketing is defined as the intentional efforts to communicate with target audiences. This marks an opportunity for the city to begin to address several of the challenges identified. The community marketing strategy will provide direction for how the city can support local economic development activities through the consistent promotion of local opportunities. The city of Grayling will begin to take steps toward greater

ownership and control over how the community is perceived. By drafting and adopting a marketing strategy, Grayling may determine the need to revisit the community brand and logo. City staff completed the six RRC self-evaluations in September 2015, identifying areas where Grayling may begin to make improvements to move toward economic growth and development and the city council passed a resolution to formally engage in the RRC program. Next steps for the city to move forward with the RRC program will be outlined throughout the Action Strategy. The TED team has also provided the city with an analysis of the municipal website and suggested various enhancements to improve the impact and effectiveness of this key marketing tool (Appendix B).

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

This action strategy will be the shared responsibility of the city staff, Main Street manager and board members, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Development Authority, city council, and additional stakeholders, with the assistance of the TED team when appropriate. The action strategy is heavily reliant on the participation of local citizens and their support.

In addition to the items listed in the action strategy, the TED team acknowledges the city is exploring or should explore the following items listed below and may be considered at a later date at the discretion of the local municipality:

- Explore code enforcement surrounding housing rentals
- Diversification and promotion of businesses within the region for cross sales/purchasing efforts
- Create business incubator and partnerships with downtown Grayling
- Update municipal website based off of TED team's website review (Appendix B)

The philosophy of this action strategy is to lay the foundation for economic development activities in the city that can sustainably function without in-depth assistance from the TED team and championed by the community.

- ✓ Effective marketing and branding
- ✓ Evaluate current & future housing needs
- ✓ Rental code enforcement
- ✓ Revitalize downtown building stock
- ✓ Talent needs for wood products and health care industries
- ✓ Accommodate and support entrepreneurs

JANUARY–MARCH 2016		
Action item	Owner	Deliverable
Complete MEDC community profile video outline	City staff and stakeholders	Completed outline emailed to TED team
Recruit local stakeholders to lead marketing strategy efforts	City staff	Local steering committee established
Schedule RRC kick-off and introduction to PRT engagement presentation	Main Street, Chamber, DDA, city staff, RRC	RRC kick-off and introduction to PRT presentation completed
Sign RRC MOU	City of Grayling mayor, MEDC	Community placed in RRC pipeline
Review of economic development information in the master plan and DDA plan	TED team	Feedback on economic development information presented to local stakeholders
Review zoning ordinance	TED team	Feedback on zoning ordinance presented to city staff
Apply for Main Street marketing and branding services	Main Street director	Application for marketing and branding services submitted
Begin local stakeholder engagement	Main Street marketing committee, city, DDA and chamber staff	Host local interviews with constituents and key stakeholders
Contact regional SBDC office for market analysis	TED team	SBDC market analysis completed
Summarize essential background information for marketing strategy	Main Street marketing committee, city staff, DDA staff, chamber staff	Initial historical data and background information summarized

Prior to the PRT initiative, Grayling expressed interest become formally engaged with the Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) program. Formal participation in this effort will help to build a strong planning, zoning and development foundation for the city and ultimately support the city’s objectives for an increased marketing presence. Working through the RRC best practices will strategically position the community for success when considering new business, redevelopment and new private investment within Grayling. The next steps for the city in the RRC process include a scheduling kick-off presentation to local stakeholders that will provide an overview of the RRC program and outline next steps. Additional, a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU), signed by both the city and MEDC must be executed. The MOU will outline expectations for the city and MEDC moving forward with the RRC process. Completing these two steps place the city in the RRC pipeline to receive a formal evaluation.

To date, the city of Grayling has not implemented a strategy focused specifically on economic development. The topic is

generally referenced throughout both the local DDA plan and within the city’s master plan and the TED team will review existing plans to try to determine a baseline of where the community has been focusing economic development efforts to date. While the creation of a marketing strategy was selected as the top priority, economic development and marketing are closely related, and it is likely that the marketing strategy will include economic development elements. The TED team will also be reviewing the zoning ordinance. It is difficult to attract investment if the zoning ordinance is confusing, conflicting or not regulating for desired outcomes. The zoning ordinance review provide feedback to enhance the current code, improve user-friendliness and more effectively implement the goals of the master plan.

The need for an effective comprehensive marketing strategy was identified as the top priority for the city. A marketing strategy defines deliberate steps to promote and draw attention to community attributes and economic opportunity. In conjunction with the development of a community marketing strategy, Grayling Main Street staff plans to apply

for marketing and branding services available through the Michigan Main Street program. If the application for funding is successful, the services will greatly assist marketing efforts.

A steering committee can help guide marketing efforts. A diverse group of local stakeholders must be recruited to lead the development of the community marketing strategy. To jump start community marketing efforts, the steering committee will be responsible for identifying community assets to include in a 90-second promotional video developed by MEDC staff. This exercise will be crucial for drawing positive attention to the city, and attracting people to visit and live

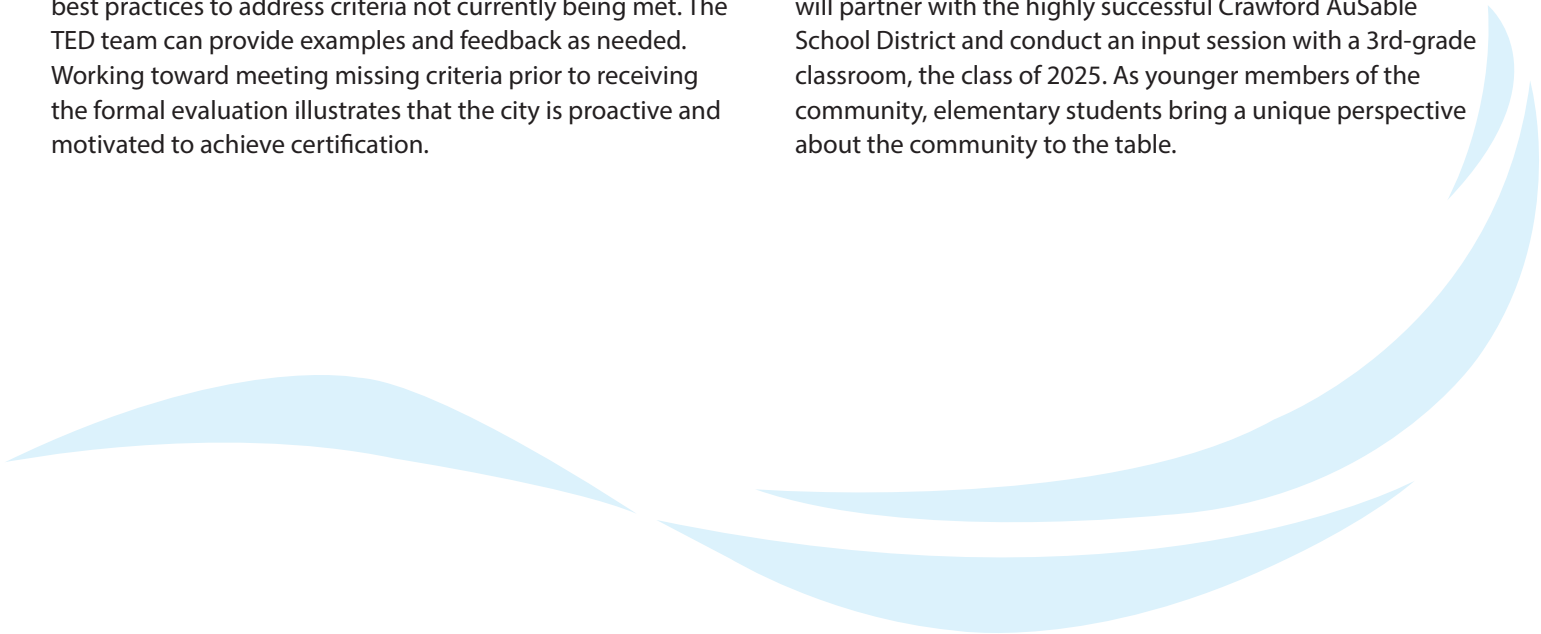
in Grayling. The identification of community assets is also a critical step in gathering background information for the marketing strategy. The steering committee will continue to gather and summarize background information and will also be responsible for engaging local stakeholders to collect input. To assist with information gathering, the TED team will reach out to the regional Small Business Development Center contact to begin the process to obtain a market analysis for the downtown. This information will assist marketing efforts and help inform the property information package to be developed in the third quarter.



APRIL–JUNE 2016		
Action item	Owner	Deliverable
Review development process	TED team	Flow chart of development process and additional feedback presented to city staff
Utilize the RRC best practices, RRC guides and city’s completed self-evaluations to meet additional criteria	City staff, TED team	Begin to address missing RRC best practice criteria
Engage with community partners	City, DDA, chamber staff	Create local education curriculum/brainstorming session materials Develop presentation for local education system as non-traditional stakeholder engagement working session
Local stakeholder engagement events	Steering committee	Host interviews with local stakeholders
Work with local school district to host student input session	City, DDA, chamber staff, TED team, Crawford AuSable School District	Host input session with local 3rd-grade class
Review background data with TED team	Steering committee, TED team	Assemble information into report for local consideration

The activities for the second quarter will continue to build off of previous action items. The TED team will review the city’s current development process and make recommendations to streamline the process and improve transparency, if applicable. A flowchart outlining the process that includes estimated timelines will be developed and posted on the city’s website to make navigating the development process more user-friendly. The city staff will continue to review the completed RRC self-evaluations, how to guides and the RRC best practices to address criteria not currently being met. The TED team can provide examples and feedback as needed. Working toward meeting missing criteria prior to receiving the formal evaluation illustrates that the city is proactive and motivated to achieve certification.

The development of a successful marketing strategy will hinge upon authentic community engagement efforts. The steering committee will host local stakeholder engagement events in an effort to outline core strengths of the city and develop strategies to effectively communicate what Grayling has to offer visitors, residents and investors. An integral piece of the marketing strategy will be pinpointing ways to attract and retain young talent. In an effort to gain input from younger residents of Grayling, the TED team and steering committee will partner with the highly successful Crawford AuSable School District and conduct an input session with a 3rd-grade classroom, the class of 2025. As younger members of the community, elementary students bring a unique perspective about the community to the table.



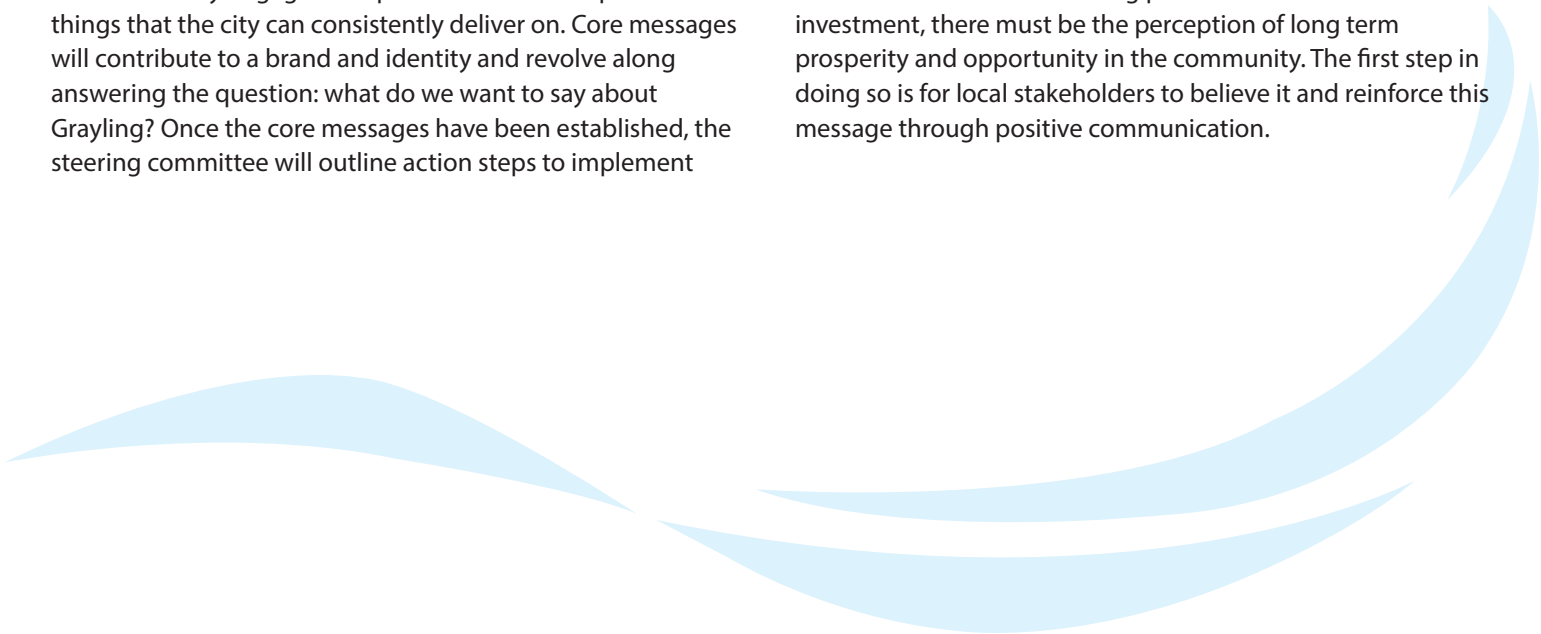
JULY–SEPTEMBER 2016		
Action item	Owner	Deliverable
Inventory redevelopment sites	City staff, city council, TED team	Create inventory of sites available for redevelopment Create one property information package and post online
Define core messages	Steering committee	Core messages drafted
Outline action steps	Steering committee	Action steps including responsible parties, timelines and potential funding sources drafted
Present marketing strategy to city council	Steering committee	Strategy is adopted as the official marketing guide for the city

In the third quarter, the TED team will assist city staff and council to identify and market priority redevelopment sites. This includes assembling one property information package including background information, desired development outcomes, negotiable incentives and available market data. This step will assist the city with its RRC efforts and lay the groundwork for the creation of additional property information packages. Marketing properties available for redevelopment is a proactive step toward attracting new investment in Grayling.

Next steps for the steering committee include outlining the core messages to three audiences, visitors, residents/potential residents and people/organizations who may be inclined to invest in the community. Core messages will be developed based on community strengths identified during the community engagement process and must represent things that the city can consistently deliver on. Core messages will contribute to a brand and identity and revolve along answering the question: what do we want to say about Grayling? Once the core messages have been established, the steering committee will outline action steps to implement

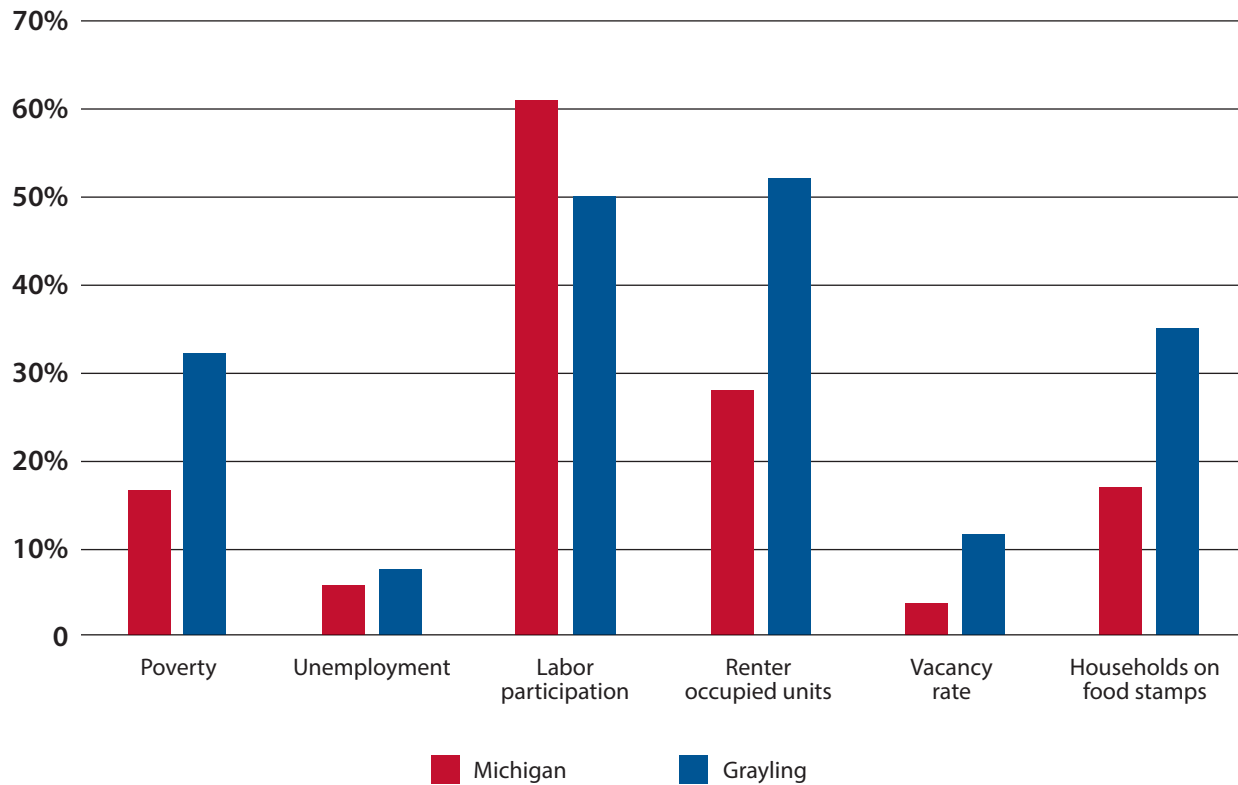
the marketing strategy. Limited community resources require the city to be organized and coordinate efforts. Action steps should identify partnerships to leverage and maximize marketing efforts. The desire for a new or refreshed logo and tagline was expressed throughout the initial meetings with community stakeholders. The development of a new logo should be included as an action item if desired and could be explored should Main Street marketing and branding services be awarded. Reaching consensus on a new logo and tagline will reap benefits for the city. To obtain buy in from the governing body, the steering committee should present the marketing strategy to the city council. If adopted, the marketing strategy will serve as the official guide to marketing efforts in Grayling.

Economic development is a long term game. Change will be incremental and over a long period of time. To attract investment, there must be the perception of long term prosperity and opportunity in the community. The first step in doing so is for local stakeholders to believe it and reinforce this message through positive communication.



APPENDIX A

DATA USED TO SELECT PROJECT RISING TIDE COMMUNITIES											
	Michigan	Region 1: Newberry	Region 2: Central Lake	Region 3: Grayling	Region 4: Evert	Region 5: Harrison	Region 6: Sandusky	Region 7: Charlotte	Region 8: Paw Paw	Region 9: Hillsdale	Region 10: River Rouge
Population	9,886,095	1,673	1,078	1,849	1,569	2,324	2,651	9,064	3,498	8,257	7,857
Poverty	16.8%	34.2%	21.1%	32.7%	36.4%	32.9%	26.2%	18.00%	46.3%	31.60%	38.50%
Unemployment	5.9%	7.3%	7.5%	7.7%	6.8%	7.9%	6.6%	4.70%	6.5%	5.80%	7.70%
Labor participation	60.5%	58.4%	53.6%	50.2%	50.3%	47.9%	53.8%	57.30%	57.6%	56.50%	53.60%
Renter occupied units	27.9%	38.0%	35.4%	52.7%	53.6%	39.5%	42.5%	35.90%	62.1%	46.20%	43.50%
Vacancy rate	4.0%	9.0%	10.7%	11.9%	4.7%	9.7%	5.0%	6.50%	7.4%	7.00%	9.50%
Households on food stamps	16.9%	30.6%	30.9%	35.6%	40.9%	39.1%	31.4%	24.20%	34.1%	28.10%	40.80%



APPENDIX B

Project Rising Tide website review: City of Grayling

A municipal website serves numerous purposes. At a basic level, it is a way to share information about public meetings, access public documents, find links to other community organizations and to obtain general community information. The main audience for this basic information is local residents and officials. Beyond this, a municipal web site is also a demonstration of community character and image. People unfamiliar with a community will often look to a website for information and form first impressions and conclusions. In the context of the RRC program, it is essential that communities meet the threshold of functionality. Beyond basic functionality, a municipal website should also communicate an appealing community image. The city of Grayling's website is functional and organized, however website enhancements could lead to greater impact and higher performance levels. These are discussed below in the context of the RRC Best Practices and in terms of general observations.

Assessment of community website and potential future steps

1. Does the website incorporate basic methods of public notification?

Relevant contact information for all city departments is available. The city of Grayling website offers meeting schedules for the following: city council, planning commission, DDA/Grayling Main Street, Parks and Recreation, Zoning Board of Appeals and cemetery. The website includes minutes of city council, zoning board of appeals and planning commission. The home page features special meeting notices and most crucial is the contact information and office hours for the Grayling city hall.

The city's website provides a user-friendly navigational process to locate each department and contact within the city. While no direct phone line is offered on the website for each staff member, a city of Grayling email is attached to each staff member. A the city's main phone number is listed at the top of the contact link. The idea of listing each city email address as a point of contact for the staff implies that the city of Grayling is well connected.

Recommendations

None. The website is well organized and public notifications are featured prominently on the both the homepage and header tabs. The website is user-friendly and easy to navigate.

2. Is it easy to locate pertinent planning, zoning and economic development documents on the city's website?

Yes, the website includes planning and zoning documents with easy to find drop down boxes for each. Links to the master plan, zoning map, and the code of ordinances, which includes the zoning ordinance are available. The DDA meeting dates, minutes, and agendas are listed with drop down navigation. The DDA development plan is also listed with a drop down menu with information such as the project summary, organizational structure, DDA placement, DDA map, etc. Several applications are available on the website including boards and committee application, citizen complaint form, commercial land use form, payment arrangement form, etc. All forms appear easy to use with contact information available.

Recommendations

Very little as it appears the planning and zoning link is well organized with all their documents in one easy to find designation. However, the following documents should be added to the website as developed: conceptual meeting procedures and expectations; flowcharts for development processes including timelines; variance process and applications; rezoning/zoning text amendment process and application; financial assistance tools available for projects; and procedures or special meetings should also be added. A description of the role of each advisory board and membership requirements should be added.

3. Does the community website include housing and talent information and link to external partner organizations?

City of Grayling does not include housing and talent information but does offer links to area sites of interest. On this links to area sites of interest there are some talent information such as Mercy Hospital Grayling, Huron Pines, Grayling Area Visitors Bureau, Deveroux Memorial Crawford County Library, etc.

Recommendations

Would be helpful to include Crawford Co. housing commission's contact information. Also, any homeless shelters or transitional living facilities if available. Update these links to the links to area sites of interest.

4. Does the website serve as a community marketing tool?

The city website is well designed to provide information to the public and invoke a positive public image. Grayling’s current tagline, “The heart of the north,” is featured prominently on the homepage and a slideshow of rotating community photos is also included on the home page. The sidebar highlights “Area Links,” providing links to area sites of interest.

Recommendations

A long-term goal for the city includes the development of an updated community logo and tagline to express the character of Grayling. A focused branding effort, resulting in a community supported logo and tagline, could provide in an improved sense of local opportunity and vibrancy.

This step may be best accomplished a part of a larger community marketing effort and could lead to related website enhancements. Reorganizing the links of interest by type rather than alphabetical order, may be beneficial to users. In particular, featuring a prominent link to the Grayling visitor’s bureau will assist with community marketing, as the website lists special places to visit, things to do, events, where to sleep, eat and shop and trails information. The city may also want to include a link to the Grayling Regional Chamber of Commerce. Linking to the various community social media pages, including Grayling Main Street and Grayling farmer’s market Facebook pages, will also serve to market things to do in the community.