



# risingtide

## Action Strategy

City of Ewart  
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.

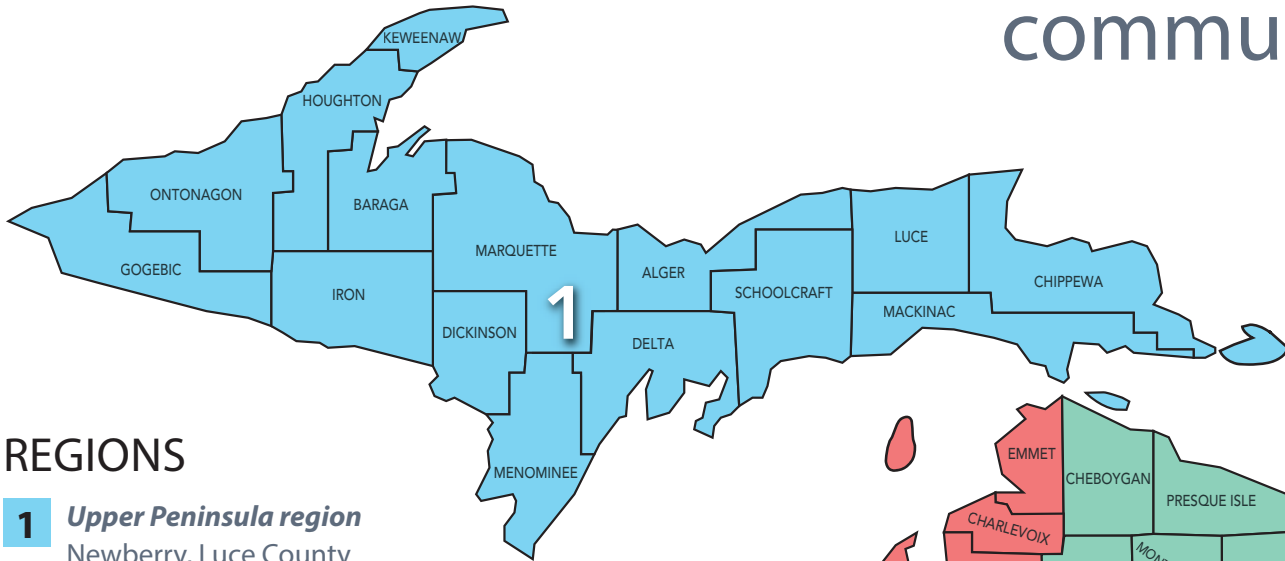
The Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Talent Investment Agency, and Michigan State Housing Development Authority (TED team) have committed their assets to engaging specific communities across the state in order to empower them to shape their future and maximize economic potential.

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

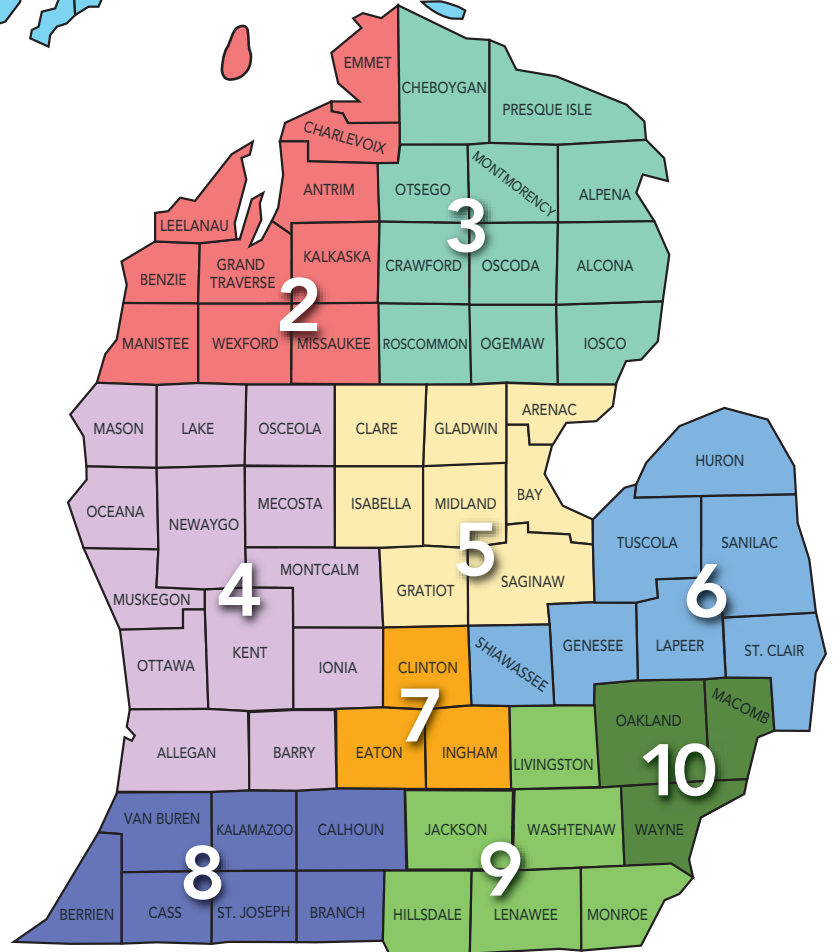
This initiative will employ the MEDC's Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) program as the initial mechanism to support the Rising Tide platform in each of the 10 prosperity regions. Depending on each community's unique challenges, additional supportive services may be provided.





## REGIONS

- 1** **Upper Peninsula region**  
Newberry, Luce County
- 2** **Northwest region**  
Central Lake, Antrim County  
*Main Street Community, Associate Level*
- 3** **Northeast region**  
Grayling 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*



## PROJECT SCOPE AND MISSION

To create a sustainable path toward economic stability and growth in the city of Evert.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is a lack of coordinated economic activity focused on building a stable and pro-growth strategy for community investment.

## BACKGROUND

During conversation with members of the Evert community, staff and city council, it was clear that there are several issues impacting the major metrics used to identify this community as a priority for the Project Rising Tide (PRT) pilot. The current condition of local housing stock, the general public perception of the quality of schools and the capacity of the local workforce to qualify for and maintain steady work with the major employers were the three primary factors identified as having the biggest impact on current economic conditions. These factors combined with changes in state revenue sharing and limitations on the increase in taxable value of real property sparked much discussion.

Over the last 20 years, the city of Evert has experienced dramatic fluctuations in local employment options. The closure of Dean's Dairy and significant layoffs at other local companies resulted in high unemployment rates and increasing need for social service programs. This has contributed to cycles of poverty among segments of the local population, a reduction in homeownership rates, an increase in blighted structures and an increase in need for social services.

A major source of the local economic activity has become detached from many of the residents of Evert. Although large employers are based in Evert and sustain a combined total of more than 1,500 jobs within the city, a majority of these positions are held by individuals living outside of the community. One of the deterrents for current employees to move to Evert is the amount of blighted housing and its impact upon property values in the city, as well as a continuous decline in the perception of the local schools.

All of the above has resulted in regional activity which is economically disconnected from the city. Those working in the city tend not to live in the city, and many of those living in the city, tend to shop and attend schools in other areas.

Organizational assets include a downtown development authority with paid staff, a local development finance authority with paid staff, a local chamber of commerce, a committed city and school administrative staff, and several large employers and community partners. Physical assets include a municipal airport, a very high quality and high capacity municipal water system, abundant recreational assets, a traditional downtown with a walkable neighborhood grid, a strategic location along US-10 midway between US-131 and I-75 and several mid-sized employers.

## TARGET CUSTOMER

For the purposes of this project, the goal is to design technical assistance for the city and its administrative staff—inclusive of the DDA and LDFA—to develop a long range economic development strategy and short-term implementation steps. Other forms of assistance targeted toward entrepreneurs, existing businesses or the residential community may be explored in a later stage of the process.

## MILESTONES

This work plan will be the shared responsibility of the city, DDA and LDFA staff as well as the city council and the TED team. We must keep all of the above issues in mind and be aware of opportunities to impact each factor in a positive manner. We must also have a shared vision for what will be accomplished over the next 6–12 months and take mutual accountability for the work to be done and the progress that can be achieved. None of the identified issues can be ignored, and no single issue is more or less important, though we must select a primary area of focus to which we can all dedicate significant effort to making lasting and positive change.

**OVER THE NEXT 6–12 MONTHS, WE PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING WORK PLAN:**

***December 2015–February 2016***

- RRC best practice evaluations: Complete all six Redevelopment Ready Communities® self-evaluations and review results among staff and officials.
- Assess availability of economic development related information and explore recommendations for improvement.
- Encourage conversations with the city, the Mecosta Osceola ISD superintendent and Michigan Department of Education regarding the direction of the Evart Public Schools and the search for a new school superintendent.
- Discuss opportunities for the Evart Public Schools and the City of Evart to jointly pursue a citizen engagement strategy intended to:
  - » Improve communications between the schools and the general community
  - » Encourage greater citizen participation in school events and activities
  - » Support the parent community in playing a positive role in the education of all students
  - » Identify community partners to assist with programming, events and activities

***January 2016 - June 2016***

**HOUSING**

- Craft the outline of a comprehensive housing strategy.
  - » Housing inventory: develop a clear and enforceable policy for assessing blighted properties and determining next steps (targeted repairs, demolition, etc.)
  - » Blight elimination: define targeted resources to finance removal of blighted structures
  - » Code enforcement: pursue adoption of a reasonable policy for rental/code enforcement
  - » Homeowner assistance: explore and promote programs for home owner repair (examples are MSHDA PIP loans and county home owner rehab)
  - » Explore partnerships to provide home buyer and tenant/ landlord education

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

- Develop a strategic plan for strengthening the local workforce. Issues to address should include:
  - » Educational opportunities including life skills training, technical training, job search assistance, etc.
  - » Programming with local high school students to enhance workforce readiness and make connections to local employers
  - » Create partnerships with faith-based and other community organizations for greater awareness of Michigan Works! West Central programs and services
  - » Increase Michigan Works! West Central's presence in Evart

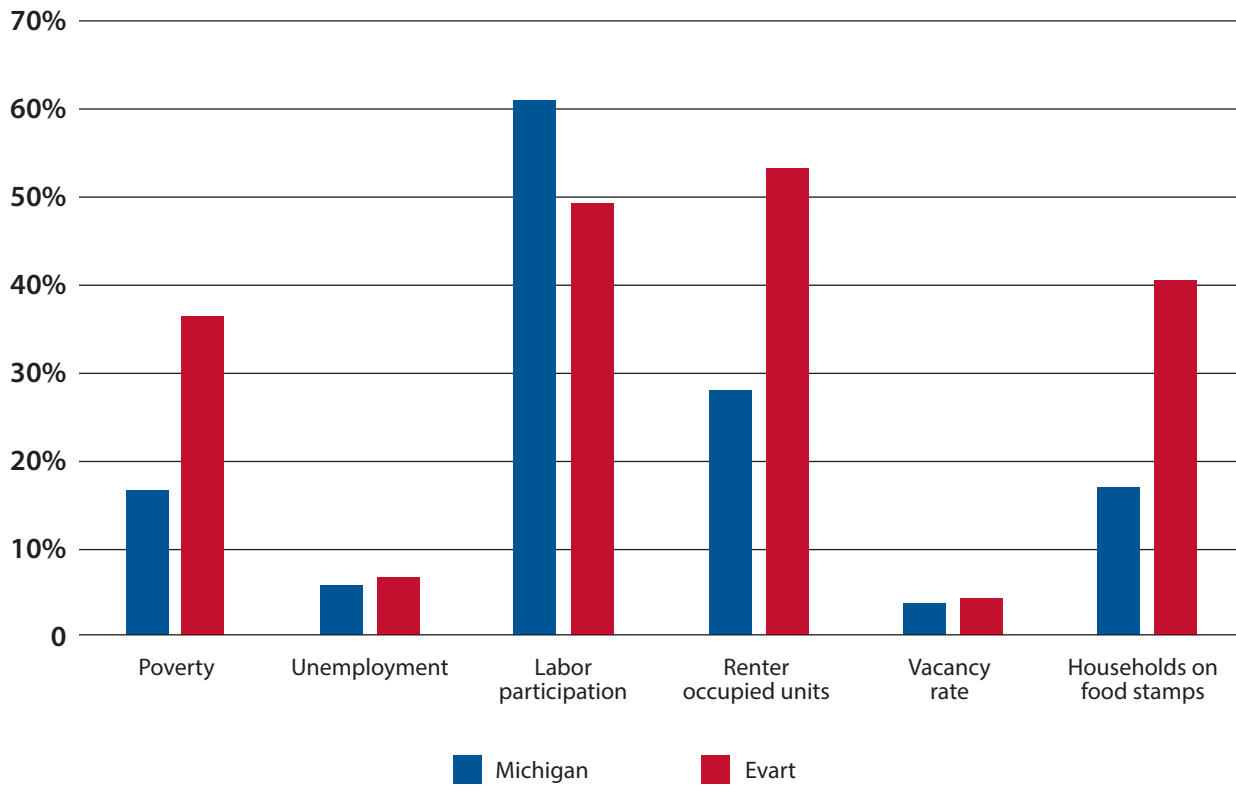
**REDEVELOPMENT READY COMMUNITIES**

- Review city zoning ordinance for consistency with the local master plan and economic development priorities.
  - » Identify areas of inconsistency and potential methods to streamline the document while better reflecting the goals of the master plan
  - » Ensure proposed updates are community supported, reflective of the local character and will result in preferred development patterns across the community
- Review community's development review process and provide visual representation of current process
  - » Ensure that the review process is clearly articulated, consistently implemented and simple to understand by the general public
- Review existing economic development strategy
  - » Establish a method for developing a community based strategy which can be locally implemented with the existing available resources and which provides clear direction for staff and volunteer boards
- Assist with identification and prioritization of redevelopment ready sites
  - » Utilizing the tools of RRC best practice 5.0, begin the process of making each priority site redevelopment ready

The TED team will continue to be available for technical assistance and support throughout the community's efforts to tackle these issues. The TED team can assist with process development, resource exploration and prioritization. However, much of the work ahead must be a collaborative effort which is led by the city and its staff. It is important that decisions related to next steps are fully supported by the local officials and that short term goals are geared to the available resources of the community. The TED team is a supporting resource which will be available to augment the capacity and efforts of the city.

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 Evert

A municipal web site 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 Evert's website is very functional and well organized, however some minor 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?

Yes. The homepage is well organized and includes multiple public announcements which are presented in a clear, concise and articulate manner.

#### Recommendations

While the website makes accessing basic information about the community and local government services quite simple, it does not offer a clear method for engaging more deeply in the regular affairs of the community. The city may want to consider including opportunities for local citizens and business owners to volunteer for committees, boards, special events or engage with local non-profits to offer or request assistance.

The city may also want to consider offering a tool which allows web users to provide comments, feedback or questions directly on the website. There many ways to offer this feature within the website.

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

Yes. The website offers easy access to the zoning ordinance, master plan and the DDA plan. The website also offers access to additional items such as local façade grant information and forms and permits related to site plan review and basic development services.

#### Recommendations

The website currently contains very little information related to the LDFA. It is recommended that the city consider posting

information about any properties which may be available for sale or lease, amenities associated with the industrial/business park and a copy of the TIF plan and long range plan for the LDFA.

It is also recommended that the city consider additional information related to regional and statewide programs which may be available to business owners, property owners and entrepreneurs. Programs available through the USDA Rural Development office for small business loans and grants as well as the Talent and Economic Development agency related to potential building improvement grants, and the regional Michigan Works! office related to workforce training and education assistance. Contact information for each of these agencies could be included along with links to their respective websites and programs.

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

No. The website does offer several features geared toward local residents. However, the website does not offer information about the available housing, support programs, or the qualifications of the regional talent pool for potential business owners.

#### Recommendations

Consider inclusion of key information related to housing affordability, access to local and regional amenities and the skills clusters of the regional workforce.

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

Yes. However, the promotion of the community could be strengthened significantly.

#### Recommendations

Evert is home to several highly successful events and some of the best outdoor recreational amenities in mid-Michigan. The community should highlight these strengths throughout the website. Currently, only the basic facts about the community assets are offered and these are scattered across the website. The "Community" homepage can be the best opportunity to tell a compelling story about who the people of Evert are and why someone might want to visit, start a business or grow their family here. The city should utilize the strengths of staff and community volunteers to showcase the best images and narrative information about the community as possible. Highlighting local events, recreational amenities and the relative low cost of living in the community are key opportunities which are not fully capitalized within the website.