

Project updates

2022: Edition I

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Featured Projects

Performance Improvement Projects

Lakeshore Nonprofit Alliance: Department staff began collecting data in February for the Lakeshore Nonprofit Alliance's (LNA) second Nonprofit Community Assessment. The goal of the assessment is to measure the all-around health of the local nonprofit sector, with the results used to strengthen the nonprofit sector in the years ahead. This assessment consists of two surveys—one completed by executive directors of local nonprofits and one by board chairs. The survey responses, which take executive directors approximately 90 minutes to 2 hours to complete, will be analyzed by department staff and compiled into a visual report during the remaining months of Spring and into the Summer.

Ready for School: Department staff are in the process of executing a scope of work to assist Ready for School with an evaluation of its 2022 Summer Kindergarten Readiness Camp, a program that aims to bridge the divide from home to kindergarten for area families and their children—helping kids be confident and curious as they enter kindergarten. This will be the second year that Ready for School has contracted with the department for evaluation services. Opportunities for additional evaluation services are also being discussed. The evaluation completed by the department in 2021 can be [viewed here](#).



Food Club Evaluation: Over the last few months, department staff continued to work with Community Action House (CAH) on data collection efforts needed for a 6-month evaluation of the new Food Club. This involved an in-person meeting with CAH staff to review progress since opening the Food Club, discuss any data collection issues, and for department staff to take a tour of the Food Club. Department staff then reviewed and researched some methodological questions that surfaced to ensure everything is in place for the first evaluation. Based on current timelines, the first evaluation is set to kick-off in June.

Master Plan Updates: Department staff worked with Spring Lake Township and the City of Grand Haven over the last several months to update the local area demographic and economic characteristic data for their master plan documents. These projects involve obtaining data primarily from the U.S. Census Bureau, creating graphs and tables to display the data, and explaining changes in data over time. These are both fee-for-service projects.

Migrant Health Strategic Planning: Department staff completed its strategic planning work with Public Health and the Migrant Health Task Force in December. The mission of the Migrant Health Task Force is to improve the health of Ottawa County's migrant farmworkers by bridging health gaps, improving social determinants of health, and addressing health disparities and inequities. Department staff compiled [this strategic plan](#) after facilitating the group through two strategic planning sessions. This document will now serve as the action plan from which the taskforce will focus its efforts over the next two years.

Community Action Agency Strategic Plan: Department staff met in March with Community Action Agency (CAA) staff to kick-off their strategic planning process. The plan is to spend time gathering requirements for the plan and organizing strategic planning activities between now and the end of Summer. A group will then be convened in September for strategic planning, with department staff facilitating the process. The goal is to have a new plan in place by the end of 2022.



Video Highlighting Evaluation & Data Fee-for-Service Projects: In 2017, the department began offering its evaluation, research, and data services to nonprofits and local units of government as part of a fee-for-service arrangement. As a way to highlight this service offering, the department created a short video that is now available on the [department website](#). This video includes samples of work completed by the department and testimonials from county, local unit, and nonprofit leaders who have utilized the department's services. In addition, during the last few months, the department has executed two additional MOUs as part of its fee-for-service offerings.





Featured Projects continued



Land Use Planning Projects

Countywide Future Land Use Vision: It is known that Ottawa County is the fastest growing County in the State of Michigan. The County also has significant challenges with respect to declining groundwater availability, limited affordable housing opportunities, and diminishing acreage of productive agricultural lands to name a few. Addressing these types of challenges, which cross political/jurisdictional boundaries, requires a broader, regional perspective. Moreover, ensuring the County has vibrant urban *and* rural communities that offer the quality-of-life amenities that make our county the place “where you belong” also requires an informed understanding of the interconnectedness of our collective *planning* endeavors. It is not possible for Ottawa County and the 24 local units of government to tackle its challenges and continue its upward trajectory of positive, maintainable growth without a shared vision of what our future landscape should look like. It is imperative for the County to have a data-driven *plan* that provides community leaders with the information they need to make informed decisions to help positively impact our collective futures.

The creation of the anticipated first-of-its-kind Coordinated Future Land Use Vision is a highly complex endeavor that will require significant partnerships and resources. Undaunted, department staff are wholly committed to continuing down the path to effectively launch this critical project. A steering committee comprised of a cross-section of community leaders is being assembled, and conversations are being activated with potential funding partners. It's the hope of department staff to release a Request For Proposals to commence with the vision planning before the end of 2022.

Housing Commission: The Housing Commission recently formed an Eviction Diversion Advocacy Committee that is comprised of a cross-section of agencies that help families and individuals avoid eviction from their homes. Funding for the County's current Eviction Diversion Program (EDP) is provided through the COVID Emergency Rental Assistance (CERA) program which expires in September 2022. Accordingly, the Advocacy Committee is investigating other sources of funding to sustain the program, as well as opportunities for programmatic enhancements. Department staff are developing materials that outline a more holistic and 'progressive engagement' approach to eviction diversion. Staff have also engaged with mathematics students at GVSU who are conducting predictive modeling as it pertains to evictions. This data will provide even further insight into creating an enhanced EDP.

Groundwater Monitoring Project: Ottawa County was recently awarded funding from the State of Michigan to expand the groundwater monitoring network. The \$1.1 million funding is in the form of an appropriation, and the County has until October 2025 to use it. The Groundwater Board met in March to decide upon a plan of action for utilizing the funds. Under the guidance of the Board, the department will work with the Technical Committee and its other partners to develop a network of monitoring wells in strategic locations across the County. Each monitoring well will house equipment that detects water levels, then transmits those readings to the County's data servers for analysis and reporting.

Farmland Preservation Program: The Ottawa County Farmland Preservation program continues to enjoy success in securing critical grant funding to preserve farmland. The Michigan Agricultural Preservation Fund recently awarded the County the remaining \$168,750 needed to preserve Shadyside Farm in Olive Township. The application scored the highest of all 10 projects submitted for funding. And the importance of protecting farmland is getting noticed. The Lakeshore West Michigan noted that its [story](#) about Shadyside Farm is currently the most read article on their website.

J.H. Campbell Generating Plant Closure: Since Consumers Energy announced last June that it plans to decommission the sprawling J.H. Campbell Generating Plant in Port Sheldon Township, there has been much interest from the public. To keep our residents and area leaders updated on the process, staff devoted a section of our [Land Use Planning page](#) to the J.H. Campbell complex. This tab features a summary, notable facts, as well as an aerial shot of the property. Additional information will be added as Consumers and the J.H. Campbell Plant Closure Planning Committee moves further along in the process.



J.H. Campbell Generating Plant from Pigeon River mouth in Port Sheldon Township in 2021



Economic Development Projects

Agribusiness Talent Council: The Agribusiness Talent Council is doing much to help cultivate new talent for the region's ever-growing food and agriculture industry. One notable effort includes a new series entitled "The Foods that Built West Michigan". Read about Umlor Orchards - located here in Ottawa County - in the [January edition](#) of their newsletter.

Economic Development Corporation Projects: The Ottawa County Economic Development Corporation is working to help Resthaven access tax-exempt bonds to support a new addition to their family of Holland-area senior living facilities. The new project, The Farmstead, will offer 128 units with varying levels of care on a beautiful campus that will feature acres of open space. Many of the units are already reserved for when the facility is complete in 2024. And, the act of residents moving into The Farmstead will provide the added benefit of putting numerous and sorely needed 'starter' homes on the market.



Featured Projects continued

MiFarmLink: Department staff continues to promote MiFarmLink Project farmer-to-farmer connections and succession planning assistance with the help of partner, McShane & Bowie, PLC. A [January press release](#) promoted the Grand Rapids-based estate planning firm's free succession planning services they are offering as a MiFarmLink partner. Additionally, a full-page ad was created and placed in the February 28, 2022 edition of Michigan Farm News, reaching 1,147.



Jolene Brown at Cultivating Connections

The Cultivating Connections event held in November drew 71 attendees to listen to acclaimed speaker Jolene Brown discuss how to tackle farm succession planning. The event also resulted in seven farmers signing up to learn more how to become a mentor or to obtain a mentor.

What can be considered the greatest achievement thus far of the MiFarmLink project is the successful matching of two Michigan farms with new operators. Access to land is the biggest barrier to entering the farming industry or expanding. MiFarmLink helps to connect farmers seeking more acreage with available farmland.

Brownfield Redevelopment: The Ottawa County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority recently hosted a Brownfield 101 workshop for its newer board members and other practitioners in the County. Susan Wenslick presented 45 minutes of education on how brownfield incentives work, when to use them, and how they can benefit the community.

Broadband – Digital Inclusion Strategy: The results of the comprehensive Broadband Data Collection Survey are in - and they reveal 10.5% of residents do not have access to fixed (wired or wireless) high-speed internet. Furthermore, 26% of those with fixed broadband access it at speeds slower than the FCC's minimum broadband threshold, a standard widely considered [insufficient](#).

To share this game-changing broadband survey data and what's next for the four-phase Digital Inclusion Strategy, Ottawa County and its partners presented "Ottawa Online: Verifying Broadband Access Gaps" on Thursday, April 21, to a group representing local municipalities and nonprofits. County staff, Urban Wireless Solution's Doug Weber, and Merit's Pierrette Dagg reviewed survey results, highlighted key statistics, discussed how the data will be used, and paths and potential hurdles as we work to ensure all of Ottawa has affordable and reliable access. Read the [full press release](#) here.

With local units brought up to speed, department staff and the Data Collection Steering Committee are turning their attention to Phase II of the strategy: developing infrastructure plans, feasibility analyses of these plans, preliminary engineering designs, and a cost model. For a closer look at the report, visit MiOttawa.org/Broadband. Watch for additional updates on the website as staff parse the data and create detailed maps.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds: Department staff continues to facilitate the work of the ARPA Committee which was organized by the Board of Commissioners last summer to help guide the distribution of the County's \$56.7M in ARPA funds. After engaging with community stakeholders, the Committee identified the following five categories as the highest priority areas for these funds: 1) Countywide Broadband; 2) Affordable Housing; 3) Social and Human Service Needs; 4) Business Stabilization; and 5) County Initiatives. The County is currently engaging with several entities (via an RFP process) to serve as "bucket managers" to assist in identifying transformational projects within the priority areas. At this time, no definitive timeline has been set to commence with distribution of funds; the key undertaking is to identify the best mechanism(s) for said fund distribution with consideration of county priorities and federal treasury requirements. More information on the ARPA effort can be [viewed here](#), as well as in the [March 2022 West Coast Way newsletter](#).



Events, News, and Notable Statistics

Events

Save the date! Farms are the Tapas: Ottawa County's signature Farmland Preservation Program fundraiser, Farms are the Tapas, is set for 6 p.m.- 8 p.m. on September 29, 2022, at a new venue: The Red Shed. Watch for updates on our [Farms are the Tapas web page](#).

News & Stats

County Statistics: Department staff are constantly updating various County statistics. Some examples of these statistics that are currently being worked on are unemployment stats, building permits, home foreclosures, millage rates, plats, and tax reverted properties. Some of these statistics are featured on the Department's [webpage](#) while others are available upon request.

