

# A STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR THE  
OGEMAW COUNTY  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP.  
AND  
OGEMAW COUNTY

**2018-2022**



Mandi Chasey  
Director  
Ogemaw County EDC  
[mchasey@michworks4u.org](mailto:mchasey@michworks4u.org)  
989-345-1090

**The Mission of the Ogemaw County EDC is to support, promote, enhance and sustain economic development.**

### **The Process for the Development of the Plan**

This plan was developed with input from citizens at township board meetings, citizen forums and members of the Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation (EDC). The citizens who participated in discussions provided the major issues included in this plan as well as recommendations for action projects that will address the major issues. Members of the EDC offer their thanks to all who have supported the EDC with their input.

### **The Members of the EDC Board of Directors Are:**

Duane Prince, Skidway Lake  
Sue Delahanty, Brownfield  
Theresa Erickson, Rose City  
Jay Jacobs, Consumers Energy  
Brenda Simmons, County Commissioner  
Elizabeth Grabow, Reliable Billing  
Phil Durst, MSU Extension

Steve Loomis, First Federal  
Heather Neuhaus, Chamber of Commerce  
Margaret Winslow, MTA  
Tom Quinn, Kirtland Community College  
Kent Allen, West Branch Regional Medical Center  
Joe Perrera, Whittemore-Prescott Area Schools

### **Strategic Planning for Economic Development in Rural and Urban Areas of Northeastern Michigan**

Economic Development has become the “watchword” for rural Northeastern Michigan as local leaders struggle to revitalize the overall economy. Economic Development is concerned with identifying opportunities for more business in a diverse and growing economy to enhance the quality of life in Ogemaw County.

Strategic Planning implies forward thinking, anticipating the future, and identifying goals and how to achieve them. Resources will be utilized and decisions made to achieve desired future goals. Strategic planning will clarify the process of building a local foundation for economic development. There is nothing mystical about developing a strategy; it involves hard work, communication, thought and cooperation. To succeed in economic development efforts, a community must know where it wants to go and how it should get there. Business firms are often advised to develop a business plan in order to survive in a constantly changing environment. The plans can be used to assist management in assessing potential opportunities and implementing decisions, developing a strategy for community economic development is very similar and necessary if communities are to succeed. Local leaders must be involved in developing the strategy because it cannot be successful without their total support. It is also very important that local leaders understand at the very beginning that they must make a substantial commitment of their time and effort if they hope to succeed.

## Assumptions for Strategic Planning In Ogemaw County

For the purposes of strategic planning, it is assumed that:

1. Without change, there will be a decline in county retail sales because of increasing internet sales, declining population, aging population, and static spendable incomes.
2. There will be continued decline in total county population. Greater economic development should help stabilize the population and turn it around.
3. A substantial increase in the average age of citizens will put increasing pressure on the counties social and medical services. It is expected that about 40% of the population will be over the age of 65 in the future. The average age of the county population was about 49 years in 2015.
4. The local hospital will merge or collaborate with larger hospitals to gain capital funding for facilities, new equipment, and to recruit health care providers.
5. The medical services provided in West Branch will be determined by the nature of mergers, government policies, and the markets available.
6. Hospitals, medical clinics and services for older adults will become more important to an aging population in the county.
7. The agriculture economy, currently under economic pressure due to low prices, will nevertheless be a vital part of the county economy and can be strengthened with a more diverse agriculture. Farm growth is a natural and expected process that is healthy for the county.
8. The educational level of the county needs to improve to create a competitive "labor shed." In the year 2015, 75% of the population had a high school diploma or higher and 11.7 % had a Bachelor's Degree or higher. This does not compare favorably with other communities in Michigan who have about 20% of the population with a Bachelor's Degree. Innovation, business attraction and retention will remain difficult without a more educated workforce.
9. The West Branch location of Kirtland Community College will remain strategically important to the College because of its location on the southern border of the college's service area.
10. County and township government will have to set new priorities for spending to support new economic initiatives and solve problems.
11. Increased wages and better jobs found in other neighboring counties will attract qualified workers from Ogemaw County. The median family income is about \$35,063 which is comparable to Oscoda County (\$33,021) and Roscommon County at \$35,133. This is nevertheless a comparatively low range and many citizens are living in poverty (about 21.8% which is higher than neighboring counties). The average weekly wage for citizens is \$544 which compares favorably with Roscommon and Oscoda County but compares poorly with \$744 in Crawford County or \$889 in Otsego County.
12. The cost of a university education of about \$25,000 per year will continue to increase, making it important that local schools and community colleges work together to make a university degree more affordable.
13. Tourism, a vital part of the county economy, can be improved because of the excellent summer and winter resources available.
14. The people of the county who know one another and work well together will continue to do so on projects that build a better community.
15. The Victorian brand will become increasingly ineffective for the younger members of the county who consider the brand to be simply "old".
16. Without change, the once vibrant recreational vehicle trails will decline in importance to the economy.



17. Community blight will be a limiting factor in attracting citizens and industry without change in priorities for spending. Engaged citizens who want a more inviting community will continue to call for stronger policy to address blight.
18. Lack of internet and cell phone services will continue to be a limiting factor for attracting citizens to the county because new arrivals to the county expect these services in their homes and businesses. With sparse populations, private industry will not provide all of the services desired. Local government can and should make this issue a priority.
19. The new industries north of Roscommon will provide good jobs for citizens of Ogemaw County and increase the need for housing in the entire area. Ogemaw County can provide housing for new employees because the travel time to these new industries is about 30 minutes from West Branch. Housing will be a limiting factor for growth in other communities.
20. Without support from county government, business and industry, the county will lose the EDC and the leadership it has provided for economic development.

## **Strengths of the County**

### **MANUFACTURING**

Ogemaw County's 17 manufacturers offer widely diverse products for industry and home. These industries produce everything from high-tech tools and tooling systems, to toys, industrial and residential "high-end" steel-edged doors, and precision turned machining and stamping products. ATF and Sandvik Hyperion are both global in sales while American Thermoforming Machinery and the American Plastic Toys are nationwide leaders.

### **COMMERCE**

West Branch is an attractive place for business development. Interstate 75 is the major route to northern Michigan. I-75 travels directly through West Branch and makes the community and surrounding county an attractive place for retail business, industry and commerce. Approximately 10,100 vehicles travel on the interstate bypass (Cook Road) every day.

### **BROADBAND**

In 2014, Ogemaw County became a Certified Broadband Community. The Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation continues to strategically identify current internet capabilities and expand services to meet increasing needs.

### **AGRICULTURE**

Ogemaw County has substantial agricultural and natural gas industries. 280 farms produce a total of \$46,260,000 in farm sales annually. Dairy, beef cattle and grains are the top agriculture products in the region. There is a strong infrastructure to support continued agricultural growth.

To help diversify agricultural products, the Economic Development Corporation in partnership with Kirtland Community College, has offered training sessions to encourage growth in this sector. An example of this is a fruit and berry production series designed to increase awareness of the opportunities to expand organic foods production in the county.

## **JOB TRAINING**

Michigan Works! and the Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation provide training for employees of local businesses. Industry, business and commerce collaborate with these agencies to develop training that meets employer needs and promotes growth.

To support economic and industry growth throughout the county, Kirtland Community College is committed to providing significant additional funding specifically for training employees in new jobs. All of these training and financial resources are free to employers.

## **A PLAN FOR AN IMPROVED ECONOMY IN OGEMAW COUNTY**

### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #1 – IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT OF CITIES AND VILLAGES**

**PRESENT SITUATION:** Town board members, city councils, and citizens complain blighted properties are affecting community spirit and limiting the ability of the county to attract people to affordable housing and to attract new business. They also say that the Victorian brand that has been used in West Branch for some time is now being questioned and will not be attractive to the younger generations, y and z, who consider this brand as “old”. The stores in downtown West Branch are supposed to be oriented towards retail but they are increasingly service related. Rose City businesses are sprawled out over a distance without a market theme but they are poised for change.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION:** Develop and promote policy for removing blighted properties and encourage property owners to refurbish buildings for new uses. Encourage discussion about the Victorian theme in West Branch and promote a theme that will make the county more attractive to new residents. Support Rose City in creating a theme attractive to tourists.

### **ACTION PROJECTS:**

- Seek investors that may be interested in regenerating properties and provide them information about available properties.
- Seek grants that will provide funding for removal of blighted properties.
- Investigate the ability of volunteers to remove and clean blighted properties.
- Write a grant to construct a new farmer’s market pavilion in Rose City and use this as a springboard for future citizen engagement in creating an experience economy in the city.
- Find a volunteer or commission an individual to take pictures of the empty and other buildings in Rose City and West Branch and digitally morph them with a new face and theme that will be more attractive and cause “passers-by” to stop. Present this information at a community meeting.
- Conduct an open house of empty buildings in West Branch and Rose City. Invite investors to attend. Building owners will need to be present. Expect that this event will encourage existing businesses to “hop,” to new buildings and refurbish their new quarters. Follow-up tours may be needed.
- Advertise the availability of empty buildings. Present information to City Council and others to make them aware of what is available and at what rental price.
- Meet with realtors, bankers and businesses to discuss funding for I-75 and M-33 billboards that encourage travelers to look at county housing.
- Make sure the cities and counties are listed as “development ready” and able to apply for grants.



- Develop a business information portfolio used to attract business to the communities of the county.

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #2 – IMPROVING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZENS AND EMPLOYEES**

**PRESENT SITUATION:** New industrial developing currently being constructed in Grayling will require > 230 employees. This business will also attract other related and dependent businesses that will bring others for work. Plant officials believe that most employees will come from within a 40 minute commute, placing Ogemaw County within that radius. Yet, there is a critical lack of housing in Ogemaw County not only for these workers, but also for health care workers and others that might consider Ogemaw County if there were places to live and grow.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION:** The EDC will actively inform investors, government, and citizens of the need for housing in the county and of the new job opportunities with new industry north of Roscommon. It will seek investors who will consider building or remodeling housing in the area. It will inventory the zoning laws regarding housing and bring discussion on needed changes to community leaders.

### **ACTION PROJECTS**

- Develop a listing of investors interested in housing development in the county.
- Encourage developers and entrepreneurs to attend an informational meeting on housing needs and opportunities.
- Place billboards near the new wood processing plants north of Roscommon or on I-75 informing them of the housing available in the county.
- Conduct an inventory of housing availability and needs. Encourage banks, property owners, and realtors to invest in a housing study of the county.
- Promote a planned housing development with free internet and other amenities of value.

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #3 – IMPROVING MATERNAL AND CHILD CARE SERVICES**

**PRESENT SITUATION:** Citizens are concerned about the lack of obstetrical care in the county and other maternal care services. There are also concerns about the decline in child care services for families and its impact on the workforce. There is information indicating the number of child care providers has dropped from over 160 providers to less than 20 in less than five years. While the EDC is limited in its ability to address this concern, it can provide support to the hospital and others who can.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION:** Gather information regarding the need for pediatric and obstetrical care services in the county and encourage the hospital to consider providing those services. Provide business plan support for new child care providers.

### **ACTION PROJECTS:**

- Gather data that projects obstetrical needs in the future.
- Support the local hospital in discussions about the need for maternal care /obstetrics in the county and area.
- Continue to serve on the Northern Lower Area Health Education Center (AHEC) board, which works to recruit health care providers to our region.
- Provide business plan support for new child care providers.

#### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #4 – DEVELOPING A STRONGER WORKFORCE WITH EDUCATION**

**PRESENT SITUATION:** The educational level of citizens needs to improve to create a competitive workforce. About 75% of the population has a high school diploma or higher and 11.7 % have a Bachelor's Degree or higher which is not complete with other counties.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION:** Encourage more educational opportunities for citizens and encourage high school students to enroll in college courses while still in high school.

##### **ACTION PROJECTS:**

- Investigate the possibility of bringing a Kirtland program entitled John Deere Ag Tech to the area which educates John Deere service technicians.
- Seek other specific training programs including apprenticeship programs that can be brought to West Branch.
- Write and distribute a letter to parents about college in the high school programs.
- Conduct a feasibility study for a culinary entrepreneurship program in West Branch.
- Provide information to residents of the county on the possibilities of completing a degree at Kirtland-West Branch.
- Host regular community luncheons to identify the needs of citizens for noncredit short-term programs and for credit programs and recommend them to Kirtland.
- Market associate degree programs for returning (nontraditional) students who may be working in the community.

#### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #5 – IMPROVING INTERNET SERVICES FOR CITIZENS AND BUSINESS**

**PRESENT SITUATION:** Businesses and citizens of townships complain there is no or inadequate internet services in many portions of the county. This has an impact on attracting citizens to purchase homes and properties and for the establishment of new businesses and/or strengthening existing businesses.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION:** Improve internet and cell phone services in the county.

##### **ACTION PROJECTS:**

- Continue to distribute information on the number and location of towers and other places where wireless communications equipment could be located.
- Conduct meetings on the possibilities of forming internet and cell phone cooperatives in areas of the counties.
- Work with local government to support improved cell phone and internet access.
- Seek business support for increased services.
- Work with groups of citizens to provide free land to cell and internet tower companies.
- Create "connected communities" in new housing developments.



## **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #6 – IMPROVING TOURISM**

**PRESENT SITUATION:** Town board members and city government have stated there is a remarkable and somewhat unknown tourism economy in the county which can be developed. The significant outdoor resources are a best kept secret for many tourists. Consider tourism not as an “end” but as a means to attract new residents and business development.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION:** Collaborate with other organizations to support a market strategy for the tourism economy of the county/region.

### **ACTION PROJECTS:**

- Create a brochure/card inviting travelers to visit the county parks, lakes, and campgrounds.
- Strengthen farmers markets near campgrounds and other well-traveled areas with grant applications.
- Strengthen the maps and web sites available to promote ORV trails.
- Network with and recruit new business supportive of recreation, especially ORV enthusiasts.
- Act as a local information source regarding economic development issues.

### **Summary**

Ogemaw County has significant economic advantages and challenges. Citizens need to reflect on its opportunities and bring people together to gain consensus for a new strategic direction. Citizens have voiced their belief that to grow our economy we will need to make decisions, in ambiguous times, with an eye to the future, and we may likely be required to make decisions that cause change. Nevertheless, we must push forward thinking of the future or lose to other competitive counties and cities.

The greatest incentive to leave an area is a lack of opportunity. As we work together to promote economic growth, we are building a community where our children and grandchildren will find opportunities and fulfillment.

All of the goals listed in this document will not be accomplished without futuristic leadership from an organization. For many years, the EDC has worked to accomplish economic goals in Ogemaw County, but it cannot exist without the financial support from government, education, business, industry and the people of the county.

This summary is a call to support the EDC because in times of change we need an organization of committed people to work for economic growth. Neighboring counties who do not have an equivalent to the EDC are struggling to provide a single point of contact for new businesses with economic leadership. The EDC pledges to work toward the goals in this document. Please join us.

Respectfully,

Members of the Board of Directors  
Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation