

CITY OF
WEST BRANCH

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY



APRIL 2024

Resolution

Acknowledgements

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A graphic of a piece of white paper that has been torn horizontally. The top edge is jagged and uneven. The bottom edge is also jagged. The interior of the paper is a vibrant, solid green color. The word "RESULTS" is written across the center of the green area in a white, hand-drawn, sketchy font. The letters are slightly irregular and have a textured appearance, as if drawn with a marker or thick pen. The white paper on the left side of the tear is slightly curled and has a soft shadow underneath, giving it a three-dimensional effect.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The City of West Branch is a small rural community in central Michigan located in Ogemaw County. It is often referred to as the “gateway to northern Michigan” because it serves as a convenient stop along I-75 to fill up the car and grab a bit to eat, or a cup of coffee. However, it is much more than an exit stop. Along business route I-75 (Houghton Avenue) which connects I-75 exit 212 and 215, one can find a historic downtown surrounded by residential neighborhoods. The West Branch community is the economic hub of Ogemaw County and this part of northern rural Michigan.

A review of different data sources reveals that the City is an employment center for the County and surrounding region. Commuters enter the City daily to attend their jobs in the retail, health care and restaurant industry sectors. Over 7,000 people work in the 48661 zip code (West Branch) and produce an economic output of \$1.086 billion annually. The IMPLAN Economic Model monitors 543 different industry sectors, of which 190 are represented in the 48661 zip code. The employment sector is diversified and not dependent on one major employer or industry sector.

The City is the center of retail, dining, professional services, government, wholesale distribution, and manufacturing.

However, it is confronted with a lack of workforce housing, limited options for child care, and constrained access to higher education and career training opportunities. Further, local and county governments have small administrative staffs as well as fiscal restrictions that limit their involvement outside of the regular duties and, sometimes, their financial participation in economic initiatives. Although the data tell us the overall market is stable, underlying issues of housing availability and the absence of dependable child care create obstacles for employers who have jobs to fill and that are dependent on a reliable workforce to meet their demands. However, West Branch’s centralized location along the I-75 corridor with two major exits (212 and 215) presents the opportunity for continued growth in wholesale and logistics distribution.

This economic development strategy dives into the data to paint a picture of the local market, market forces, and opportunities. This information is supplemented by a SWOT analysis where community leaders and local government representatives assess their community’s strengths and opportunities while also articulating their weaknesses and potential threats. When this information is combined and the data supports the local intuition and knowledge of employers and residents, a targeted strategy can be developed to balance local capacity with potential outcomes.



2.0 COMMUNITY ECONOMICS

A strong understanding of a community's economic trends and characteristics is key when informed decision making is the goal of economic planning. Because of the singular importance of labor in local economies, this chapter examines the City of West Branch's population in the context of the East Central Michigan region and the State of Michigan. This chapter also inventories the City's economy, including major industries, employment sectors, and earnings by industry, and examines how these measures have changed over time. Last, this chapter describes the West Branch community's major economic organizations and assets.

DATA SOURCES

Unless otherwise specified, the information in this chapter was retrieved from the following sources, in order of preference.

2000, 2010 and 2020 U.S. Decennial Censuses: This is considered the most accurate source of demographic data in the United States. The Decennial Census measures 100% of the population and offers comparable data points at regular intervals throughout most of the United States' developed history. However, available data is limited to population and housing information, and the ten-year interval between data points means it is rarely "fresh."

American Community Survey. The ACS program replaced the "long form" Census questions beginning in 2000, collecting the same types of detailed information about social, economic, and housing conditions on a rolling basis instead of

once per decade. The statistical validity of the ACS depends on sampling. In communities with populations of 65,000 or more, it is possible to gain a valid sample within twelve months, which the ACS calls a "one-year estimate." For smaller communities, data is collected over 60 months to achieve a valid sample size, called a "five-year estimate." This system shows the statistical tradeoff between the reliability gained by increasing sample size and the currency that is sacrificed in the time it takes to do so. The dataset used for this project was the 2013-2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates.

ESRI Business Analyst. This proprietary software presents privately generated market research data. In addition, it estimates Census and ACS data for geographic configurations other than Census-defined tracts, blocks, and places.

POPULATION

The availability of quality labor remains a fundamental determinant of economic activity in the 21st-century. In some respects, it is becoming increasingly important as businesses in technology, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and other growing sectors increasingly rely on skilled and educated workers. More broadly, enhancing residents' welfare is the goal of economic development planning; therefore, understanding the unique needs of households is key. Considering the importance of demographics, this section examines the City of West Branch's population, describes its social attributes, and discusses their implications for the economy.

According to the American Community Survey estimates, the City of West Branch had a population of 2,014 people in 2022. The table “Population Change” shows that the City lost population before that year at a rate similar to its neighbors. West Branch Township lost about 53 residents while populations of Ogemaw Township and Ogemaw County were largely constant. Population growth in West Branch also differs from the East Central Michigan region overall where population loss has depleted the workforce, incentivized firms to relocate, and led to declining tax revenue.¹ The City’s modest decline is likely due to a smaller household size and aging population.

unit. According to the 2022 American Community Survey estimates, the City had an estimated 978 households in that year. The Census Bureau uses the term “family household” to describe multiple individuals related biologically or through marriage living in a dwelling unit. The table shows that less than half of West Branch households were families with respect to that definition. Further, the percentage of families with children under 18 years old, long the emblem of economic stability in the United States, is smaller (13.0%) compared to the State of Michigan (17.5%). However, the share of these households has declined across both geographies since 2000.

Across Michigan, young individuals are more frequently choosing not to have children, or to have fewer, which has major implications for local economies. The table “Households and families” shows these patterns in the City of West Branch. The Census Bureau uses the term “household” to describe any grouping of people living together in a dwelling

Economic patterns underlie the trend. The loss of manufacturing jobs and resulting wage stagnation coupled with rising childcare and college costs has made family formation impractical for young residents that have stayed in Michigan. According to a recent analysis, the State’s 1.7 births per woman has fallen below 2.1, often considered “replacement rate”

TABLE 1: POPULATION CHANGE

GEOGRAPHY	2000	2010	2017	2022	CHANGE 2000 - 2022(%)
CITY OF WEST BRANCH	1,926	2,139	2,288	2,014	+4.56
WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP	2,628	2,593	2,511	2,575	-2.01
OGEMAW TOWNSHIP	1,118	1,223	1,153	1,103	+1.34
ROSE CITY	721	653	647	489	-32.08

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2022

TABLE 2: HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES

HOUSEHOLD TYPE	WEST BRANCH		
	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS	SHARE OF TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS (%)	SHARE OF HOUSEHOLDS COMPARED TO SHARE OF HOUSEHOLDS IN MICHIGAN
FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS	978		
MARRIED COUPLE FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS	128	13.0%	SMALLER
FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS, SOLE FEMALE HOUSEHOLDER WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS	13	1.3%	SMALLER
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE	2.06		SMALLER

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2022

of fertility, or the number of births needed to sustain a level population.² This has many implications, including declining school enrollment and an insufficient workforce to support elderly residents. In 2015, the Eastern Michigan Council of Governments reported that many school districts in the region struggled to sustain themselves based on student population.³

Meanwhile, the table “Households and Families” shows that the share of economically vulnerable groups in West Branch, including elderly residents over 65 years old living alone, is larger than the share of those households statewide. Sole-person elderly households are vulnerable to health emergencies and often struggle to meet basic needs, including nutrition. Support for these individuals is, therefore, an important concern. The table also shows that the share of families with a sole female householder is larger in the City than in the State. The availability of stable work for female householders presents another concern, considering that

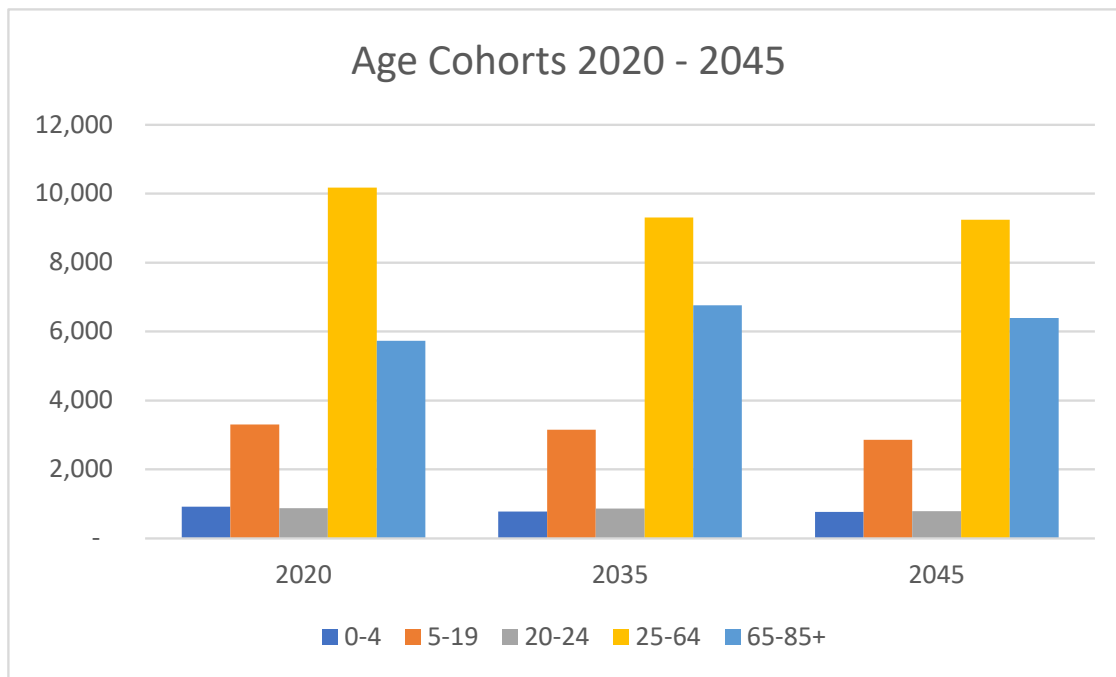
the region’s traditional manufacturing jobs are often held by men.

Age

An aging population coupled with the loss of young individuals poses an economic challenge throughout Michigan. The City of West Branch epitomizes this pattern. The graph “Age Cohorts 2020-2045” shows the percentage of County residents in each age range between 2020 and 2045. Overall, the pre-school and young adults cohorts remain fairly stable at 4%. The School K-12 and the Family cohort slightly decreases, and the mature adult cohort increases from 27% in 2020 to 32% in 2045.

According to recent census estimates, Michigan sustained a net outmigration of 23,670 residents in 2019 - an increase in that annual figure from the middle of the decade. The median age of those leaving was just under 30 years and more than 45 percent had a college degree.⁴

FIGURE 1: WEST BRANCH AGE COHORTS OVER TIME



Source: Michigan Population Projections by County through 2045, published 09-2019

Not only are these young working years typically the most productive of an individual's career, young workers with specialized training form the linchpin in technology, professional services, healthcare, and similar emerging industries. More broadly, young workers will form the local labor pool over subsequent decades. The loss of these residents in West Branch thus portends economic decline. Further, the growing imbalance between retirees and workers foretells fiscal hardship as social needs rise and the capacity to finance social services declines. Retaining and attracting young households will be a key issue in West Branch.

Summary indicators put the community's aging in context. The median age in the City of West Branch was estimated at 43.9 years in 2017, which is a dramatic increase from 34.7 years in 2000. While the City's 2017 median age is high compared with the statewide figure in that year (39.6 years), it is young compared with neighboring West Branch Township (50.6 years), and Ogemaw County as a whole (49.7 years). These numbers suggest that the City may have a younger population compared with its neighbors, which could present an advantage.

Workforce

With the retirement of Michigan's large baby boomer demographic, a shrinking workforce presents a challenge across the

state. The table "Workforce Indicators" shows these striking patterns in the City of West Branch. The "population in labor force" row refers to the number of residents either employed or able to work. This figure has steadily waned in West Branch; the community had a workforce of 963 residents in 2000, which fell to an estimated 637 in 2017. The City's unemployment rate of 10% in 2017 means that fewer than 800 residents were employed that year. Without viable workers, the local economy will stagnate. These trends further illustrate the central importance of retaining youth to anchor the economy.

Meanwhile, the American Community Survey tracks "disconnected youth," individuals between the ages of 16 and 19 years who are not employed and not enrolled in high school or college. The share of Ogemaw County individuals in this age range who are classified this way was concerningly high in 2017 (9.4%), although estimates suggest it declined from 11% in 2010.⁵ Youth unemployment could signify continued workforce issues if local government and schools do not act.

Education

In today's economy, workforce education is a central driver of firms' decisions to locate geographically. The new "jobs follow people" economic pattern is associated with the needs of firms in technology, advanced manufacturing,

TABLE 3: WORKFORCE INDICATORS

GEOGRAPHY	LABOR FORCE INDICATOR	2000	2010	2017	2022
WEST BRANCH	POPULATION IN LABOR FORCE (%)	64.3	58.6	47.2	38.2
	POPULATION WITH SOCIAL SECURITY INCOME (%)	29.9	39.6	48.8	53.9
	NUMBER OF EMPLOYED RESIDENTS	880	1,004	779	637

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017, U.S. Decennial Census SF1 100% Data 2000, 2010 & 2020

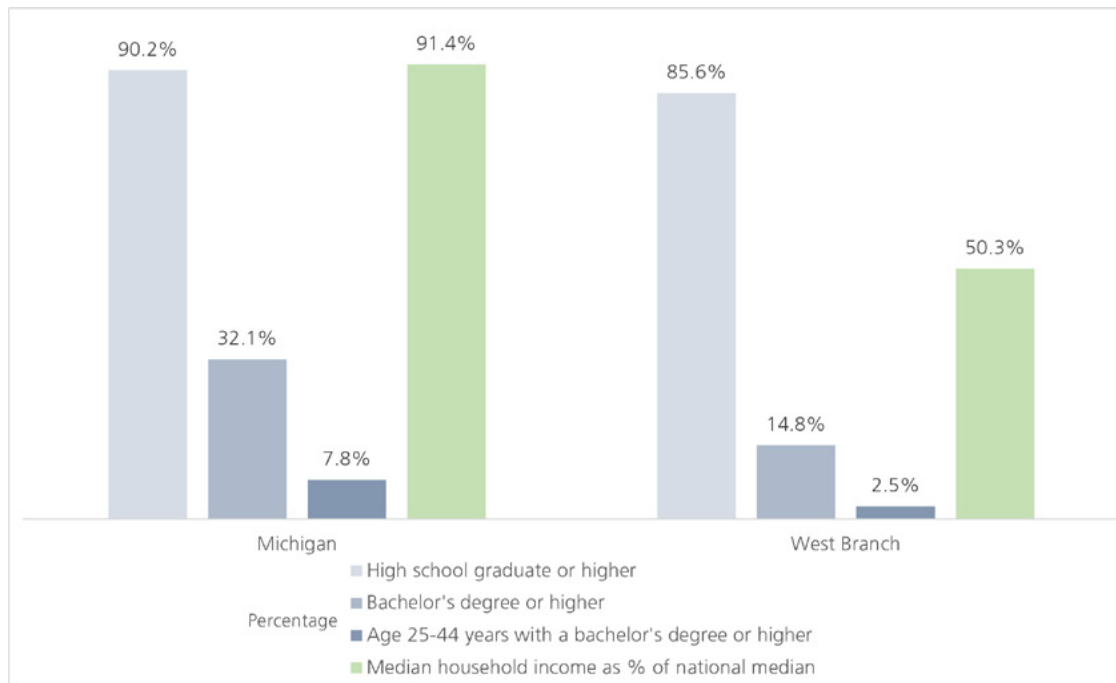
healthcare, and other emerging sectors that are more dependent on workers and specialized talent. This has largely replaced the “people follow jobs” pattern that characterized Michigan’s manufacturing economy of the past, in which firms relied more on physical infrastructure and natural resources. Although both models are simplifications to an extent, the importance of education and training in today’s economic landscape is certain.

That said, low educational attainment among workers is a defining weakness in the East Central Michigan region. The graph “Education, Age, and Income” shows that the City of West Branch exemplifies this pattern.⁶ A large share of the community’s adults, an estimated 330 individuals, did not have a high school diploma in 2017. Meanwhile, only about the same number of adults in the community (338 individuals) had a bachelor’s degree. Correspondingly,

the share of college-educated City residents was less than half the share statewide. Although West Branch has a new extension of Kirtland Community College, the community is in the center of rural Michigan’s “educational desert” where limited access to postsecondary education inhibits the workforce, lowers economic opportunity, and prevents the growth of new industries.⁷ Partnerships with educational institutions, including Kirtland Community College and the region’s universities, present opportunities to promote education.

These trends notwithstanding, a large segment of the West Branch community has skilled trades training. In 2017, about one third (33.8%) of the community’s adults had either “some college, no degree” or an associate’s degree.⁸ This type of technical training is among the region’s strengths, yet employers increasingly report shortages of skilled

FIGURE 2: EDUCATION, AGE, & INCOME



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017

labor in occupations including electricians, HVAC professionals, and systems engineers. Multiple trends underlie the emerging talent gap; the retirement of the baby boomers with these skills has created job openings, while a lack of interest in trades among young workers leaves positions unfilled.⁹ Inadequate resources for youth to learn about these professions compounds the problem. If workforce shortages continue, the exodus of firms will likely worsen. Therefore, cooperation between employers, schools, and government to promote training will be paramount.

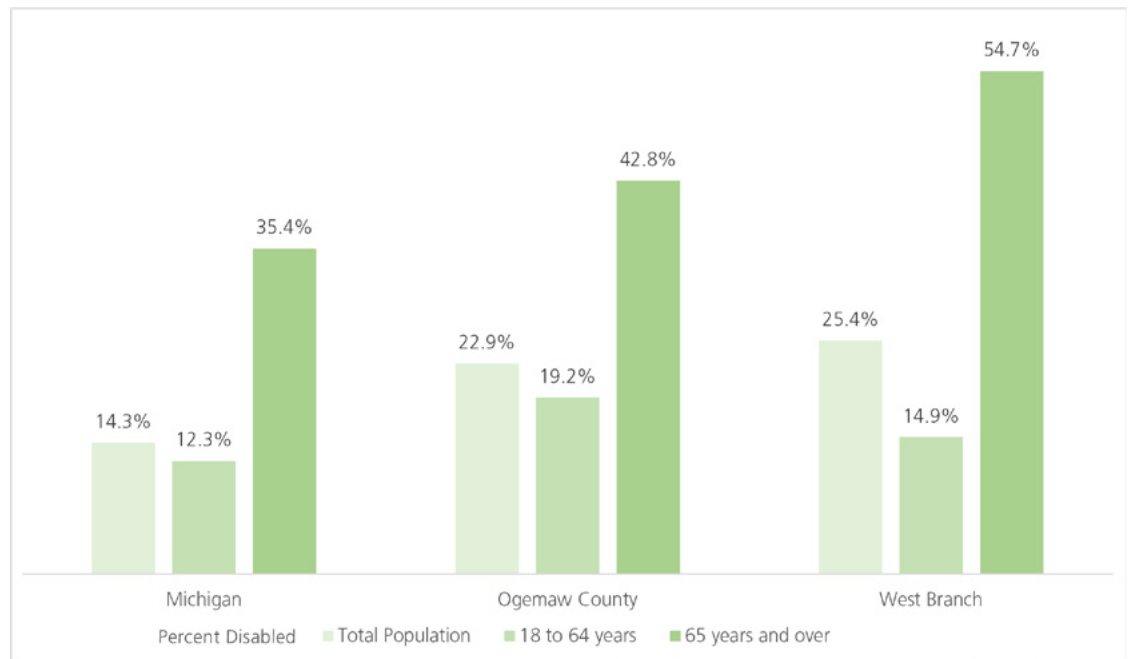
Disabilities

The City of West Branch is in the center of a region some observers have termed Michigan’s own “Disability Belt” - a stretch of counties between the state’s central and northern portions where aging adults with health concerns left the workforce

en masse during the Great Recession and continue to subsist on disability and social assistance. In many instances, this is because they are unable to find work that is less physically demanding with low educational requirements.¹⁰ The graph “Disabilities” conveys the percentage of disabled individuals in each age group in the City of West Branch and across aggregate geographies. It shows that disability rates in the City and the County are far higher than those statewide.

In 2017, about one-quarter of West Branch’s population, more than 500 individuals, had some form of disability. These conditions are concentrated among older individuals; over half (54.7%) of the community’s residents over the age of 65 years had a disability, which equates to nearly 300 people. Elderly residents with these conditions require healthcare, social support, and specialized services, whether they live independently or not. High

FIGURE 3: DISABILITIES



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017

disability rates also affect the community's workforce; the share of individuals between the ages of 18 and 64 years with a disability was higher in West Branch and Ogemaw County compared to the state.¹¹

Substance Abuse and Community Health

Drug abuse and poor health also weaken the community's economic potential. Michigan's District Health Department that serves Ogemaw, Oscoda, Iosco, and Alcona Counties administered a survey to residents in 2016 to understand the public health issues facing communities. The survey garnered 475 responses total, 170 of which were residents living in the West Branch zip code.¹² When asked to rank the top three mental health concerns in their community, "Adult drug use and abuse" and "Adult alcohol use and abuse" were the two most common answers, garnering votes from 58.5% and 47.6% of all respondents, respectively.¹³ "Youth Drug Use and Abuse" and "Youth Alcohol Use and Abuse" also earned large shares of responses. Regarding personal health, the department estimated that over one-third of Ogemaw County adults were obese. Poor education and low incomes often underlie substance abuse and poor health, which in turn weaken the workforce, thereby perpetuating the cycle.

LOCAL ECONOMY

If promoting welfare by growing employment is the goal in economic planning, it is key to first understand local economic trends: the industries that comprise community employment, the sectors that are growing and those that are declining, and the local industries that generate wealth by exporting products to other markets. This section inventories the major components of Ogemaw County's economy.

Industries in Ogemaw County

The graph "Industries in Ogemaw County 2006-2016" conveys three key pieces of information regarding the County's economy. Each bubble represents an industry in the County. The size of the

bubble is proportional to the number of jobs in that industry. The graph shows that the retail trade; healthcare and social assistance; accommodation and food services; and wholesale trade sectors were the four largest segments of the economy in 2016. These four industries provided 1,424; 1,086; 813; and 517 jobs, respectively. Meanwhile, Ogemaw County had only an estimated 5,268 jobs across all industries in that year, meaning that these four sectors combined made up nearly three quarters (72%) of the total economy. Emerging industries in the United States (including professional and technical services, information, finance and real estate, and other producer services) comprise only small shares of the County's economy.

The graph's horizontal axis conveys the change in employment in each industry between 2006 and 2016. Industries on the left side of the vertical axis lost jobs in that timeframe, while those on the right gained jobs. The overall leftward position of the bubbles shows the area's economic stagnation. Manufacturing took a major hit across Michigan in those years; however, the industry's decline was pronounced in Ogemaw County. The County had an estimated 853 manufacturing employees in 2006, which fell to only 300 a decade later. Meanwhile, healthcare employment grew throughout the United States, but declined in Ogemaw County. There were an estimated 1,308 healthcare jobs in 2006, 200 of which were lost over the following decade. The County had an estimated 6,236 jobs across all industries in 2006, which makes the 2016 total of 5,268 jobs a heavy loss of 15%. Wholesale trade was the only local industry to record growth over those years as the County added an estimated 266 jobs in that sector.

The graph's vertical axis conveys the percentage of industry employment in Ogemaw County compared with the percentage of industry employment nationally, a value termed "location quotient". Any number greater than one indicates an industry that exports goods and services to regional, national, or international markets, hence generating

local wealth. These are segments of the economy where additional investment could create value rapidly. The graph shows that Ogemaw County's four largest industries (retail trade, healthcare and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and wholesale trade) had location quotients greater than one. Manufacturing's position below the horizontal axis shows that the sector is less concentrated in the County relative to the nation. While this is true, some segments of "manufacturing" are concentrated locally. Many Ogemaw County manufacturing jobs were in "fabricated metal product manufacturing" (119 jobs), which made the local share of industry employment double the national share. These businesses may export products and thus present an opportunity.

Regional Target Industries

In 2014, the East Central Michigan region's planning organization published a report titled "Regional Prosperity Strategy", which defined five target industries that are positioned for growth.

East Central Michigan Target Industries

Higher Education + Research

Professional Services

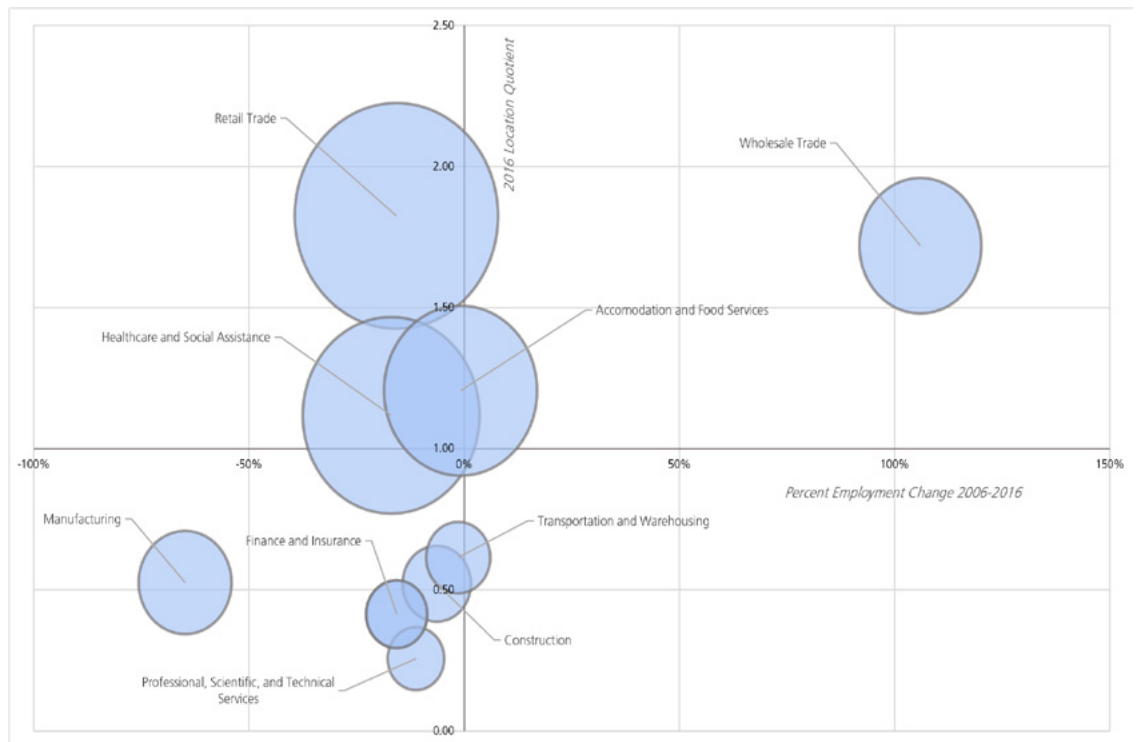
Healthcare

Advanced Manufacturing

Value-added Agriculture

These sectors are higher education and research, professional services, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and value-added agriculture.¹⁴ Firms in these sectors are either concentrated locally or could be brought to the area by leveraging its existing assets, including underused transportation infrastructure and robust institutions of higher education. The table "Ogemaw County Employers" shows that businesses in several target sectors are present in the County. MidMichigan

FIGURE 4: INDUSTRIES IN OGEMAW COUNTY 2006 - 2016



Source: American Fact Finder - County Business Patterns

Health, which has a staff of approximately 350 employees, is in the City, as well as diverse manufacturers in steel fabrication, tool production, and machining.¹⁵ The City should seek to understand and anticipate these firms' needs, including workforce, infrastructure, and facilities, and align its service provision, strategic partnerships, and zoning accordingly.

Earnings

The low wages offered by Ogemaw County employers cause skilled workers with mobility to seek jobs in other regions. The table "Median Annual Earnings by Industry" compares the median annual earnings between County and State of Michigan workers and shows that wages among County workers are lower in all but two major sectors. Earnings among Ogemaw County residents working in healthcare and social assistance were substantially lower (-6%) than residents employed statewide in that sector. This is an industry where incomes range widely depending on the position - for instance, consider the earnings of a doctor versus a nurse's assistant. Because accurate estimates of these different healthcare jobs in the County and State are not

readily available, the wage comparisons between the two may not be entirely commensurable. That notwithstanding, low pay offered locally could stymie employers' ability to fill positions, even in healthcare, where demand for services will remain steady because of an older population. In 2014, stakeholders throughout the East Central Michigan region reported difficulty recruiting talent for professional jobs, especially from outside the midwest.¹⁶

The "Median Annual Earnings by Industry" table also reveals concerningly low pay in Ogemaw County's service sector occupations. The annual median income among the many residents employed in retail was an estimated \$20,400 while it was estimated at only \$13,600 among workers in arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation. By comparison, the median monthly rent for housing in Ogemaw County was \$664 in 2017, which makes the rent figure 39% and 58% of the monthly incomes in those two industries, respectively. Both industries are associated with tourism and recreation, and so West Branch will need to plan for affordable amenities if it seeks to grow these segments of the economy.

TABLE 4: OGEMAW COUNTY EMPLOYERS

EMPLOYER NAME	LOCATION	TYPE OF ESTABLISHMENT
MIDMICHIGAN MEDICAL CENTER WEST BRANCH	WEST BRANCH	ACUTE CARE FACILITY
SANDVIK HYPERION	WEST BRANCH	METAL CUTTING & MATERIALS TECHNOLOGY
AMERICAN THERMOFORMING MACHINERY	WEST BRANCH	STEEL FABRICATION
SUPERIOR MACHINING SERVICES LLC	WEST BRANCH	MACHINING & FABRICATION
LAHTI FABRICATION INC.	WEST BRANCH	METAL FABRICATION, MACHINING, WELDING
VANTAGE POINT MANUFACTURING	WEST BRANCH	MACHINING
WEST BRANCH-ROSE CITY AREA SCHOOLS	WEST BRANCH	K-12 EDUCATION
ATF	ROSE CITY	MACHINING
AMERICAN PLASTIC TOYS	ROSE CITY	TOY MANUFACTURER
TAYLOR ENTRANCE SYSTEMS	WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP	DOORS AND ENTRANCE SYSTEMS

Source: Ogemaw County Economic Development Strategy and Google Maps

CITY OF WEST BRANCH ECONOMY

Commuting

The United States Census Bureau hosts an online application called “On the Map” that sources publicly available data to estimate workers’ commuting between different geographies. The tool shows that West Branch is a “job center” within Ogemaw County. According to the application, an estimated 1,630 workers were employed in the City in 2021, 1,487 of whom resided outside the community’s boundary. Meanwhile, the application shows that 553 West Branch residents leave the City daily to get to their job. The difference between the number of workers traveling into the City and residents traveling out is 934, which means that the City’s daytime population grows by about that many individuals.¹⁷ As a result, the community’s daytime population

increases by about half (40%) of its full-time residential population. This work-related population increase could perhaps be leveraged to support more business development if workers could be enticed to spend time and money at businesses near their place of employment.

Industries in the City

The graph “City of West Branch Resident Employment” shows the City’s industries ordered by the total number residents employed in descending fashion from right to left. The top segment of each bar represents the estimated residents employed part-time or seasonally in each industry, while the bottom segment conveys the number of residents employed full-time and year-round. The labels are the raw number of residents in each segment of the bar. In 2017, a total of 779 West Branch residents were employed.

TABLE 5: EARNINGS BY INDUSTRY

INDUSTRY	MICHIGAN (\$)	OGEMAW COUNTY (\$)	DIFFERENCE (%)
AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY, FISHING AND HUNTING, AND MINING	26,546	25,875	-3
CONSTRUCTION	38,356	33,188	-14
MANUFACTURING	47,872	35,806	-25
WHOLESALE TRADE	42,215	31,397	-26
RETAIL TRADE	20,127	20,403	1
TRANSPORTATION AND WAREHOUSING, AND UTILITIES	44,650	37,419	-16
INFORMATION	40,398	32,917	-19
FINANCE AND INSURANCE, AND REAL ESTATE AND RENTAL AND LEASING	42,331	32,083	-24
PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND MANAGEMENT, AND ADMINISTRATIVE AND WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES	37,107	23,860	-36
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES	36,532	26,964	-26
HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	32,072	30,142	-6
ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND RECREATION, AND ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICES	12,584	13,696	9
OTHER SERVICES, EXCEPT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	22,573	15,625	-31
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	52,016	30,568	-41
MEDIAN ACROSS ALL INDUSTRIES	33,371	26,734	-20

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017

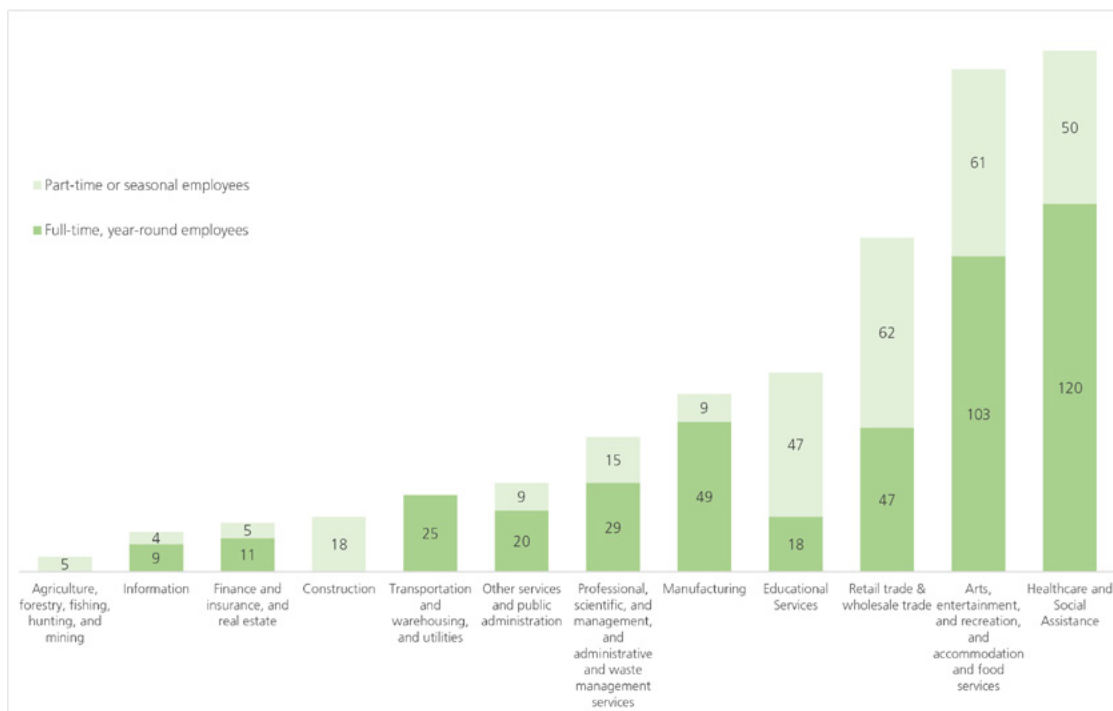
The graph shows that the largest shares of residents were employed in the sectors of healthcare and social assistance, arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation and food services, retail trade, and wholesale trade. Together, these four industries comprised over half (56%) of the community's employment. The table "Earnings by Industry" shows that healthcare, social assistance, and educational services offered some of the higher local wages, while service sector jobs yielded low pay.

A lack of stable, year-round employment is a major weakness in central and northern Michigan; the graph "City of West Branch Resident Employment" shows this pattern in the community. Well over one third (39.8%) of employed residents had part-time or seasonal jobs in 2017. Part-time or seasonal employment is concentrated in the service occupations of arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and food services; and retail. Intermittent work weakens local economies by causing seasonal declines in

economic activity, making credit difficult to obtain. Additionally, many jobs part-time jobs don't provide benefits. In 2017, nearly one-fifth (19.5%) of employed West Branch residents had no healthcare coverage, much higher than the proportion statewide (9.3%).¹⁸

The graph "Ogemaw County Unemployment" shows monthly unemployment in the County since the Great Recession and adds more detail to the picture of the community's seasonal economy. The County's unemployment grows substantially in the winter months and declines in the summer; the percentage of unemployed workers is typically between two and six percent higher in January than in September. The pattern differs from the State of Michigan overall, where employment fluctuates far less seasonally. Although Ogemaw County's unemployment rate generally declined throughout these years, it stood at 4.7% in September 2018, slightly higher than the statewide rate of 3.9% in the same month.

FIGURE 5: CITY OF WEST BRANCH RESIDENT EMPLOYMENT



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017

Income and Poverty

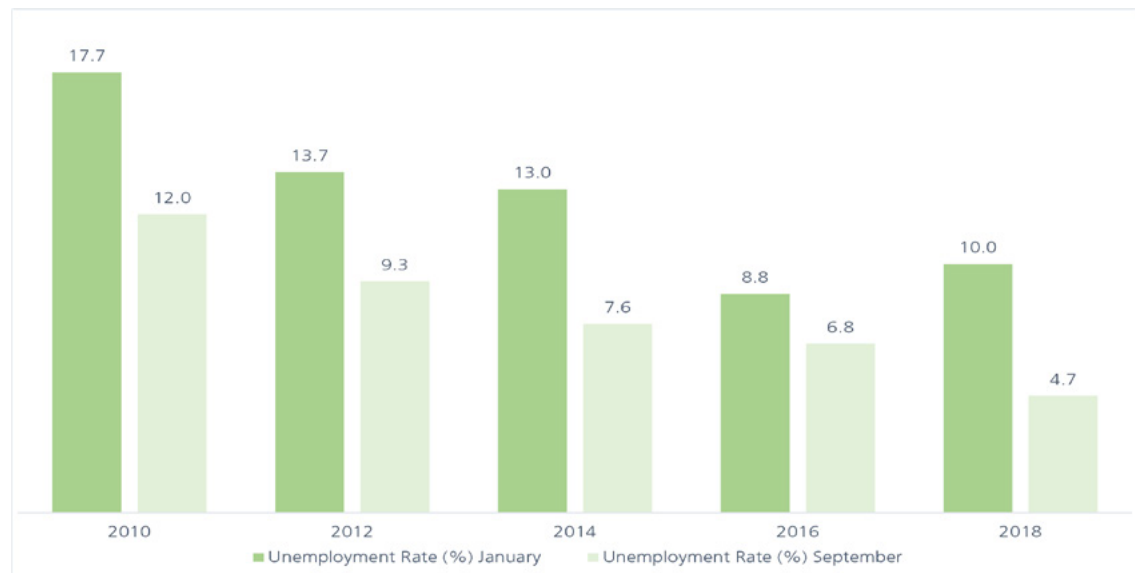
Household incomes in West Branch are modest relative to the State of Michigan overall. ACS data suggests that the City's median annual household income was \$29,010 in 2017, about half the figure statewide (\$52,668) in the same year. A major segment of the community (43% of households) has very low incomes of less than \$25,000 annually, while approximately another third (33.6%) has annual incomes between \$25,000 and \$49,999. These low-income households are vulnerable to economic downturn as well as personal emergencies and likely correspond with the community's retirees and service-sector workers. Meanwhile, a relatively small portion of households (16.5%) had moderate annual incomes between \$50,000 and \$99,999; only a small share (6.6%) had incomes of over \$100,000 annually. These moderate-income households are likely the community's healthcare and manufacturing workers.

With West Branch's low incomes, poverty is a persistent economic challenge. The United States Census Bureau determines

poverty status for households by comparing their annual incomes with the number of individuals in the household. Approximately 630 West Branch individuals, more than one-quarter of the community, were in poverty status in 2017. The graph "Poverty" shows that the City's share of impoverished residents was far higher than the share statewide that year. Further, the community's poverty is concentrated among youth; nearly half of residents under 18 years old, about 240 individuals, were in poverty status. Consequently, over one-third (38%) of impoverished West Branch residents were under 18 years old. The community also has a relatively large share of households characterized by a single female householder with children under 18 years old (estimated 94), and over half of these households were in poverty.

United Way organizations in Michigan also track ALICE households (asset limited, income constrained, employed). These households earn incomes above the poverty threshold, but still struggle with basic needs including childcare, healthcare, and nutrition. Often, they do not have savings or long-term assets. The share

FIGURE 6: OGEMAW COUNTY UNEMPLOYMENT



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Saint Louis

of ALICE households has risen statewide since the Great Recession, as wage growth has not kept pace with the rising costs of nutrition, childcare, education, and other consumer goods. According to 2015 data, financially vulnerable households in either poverty or ALICE status made up an estimated 61% of West Branch’s total in that year.¹⁹

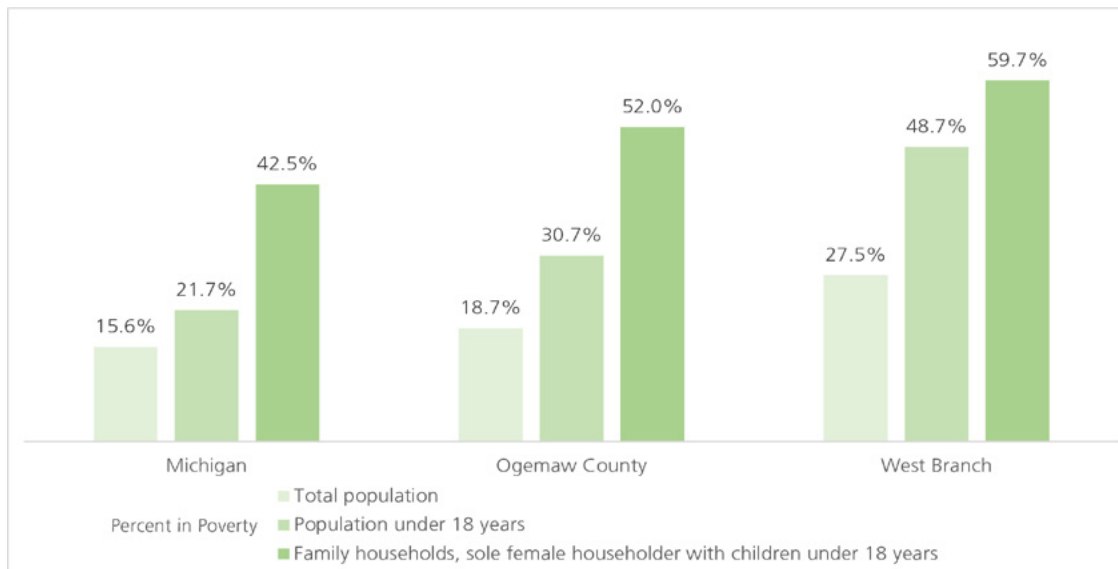
Retail Markets

The Environmental Systems Research Institute’s (ESRI) proprietary software estimates the number and type of commercial establishments by geography. The table “Commercial Establishments” shows these figures in the City of West Branch and in West Branch Township which encompasses two miles of Cook Road, the area’s major freeway exit, between I-75 and the City. The interstate has an estimated daily traffic count of nearly 10,000 vehicles. Therefore, businesses in the City and Township have the potential to attract patrons from long-distance traffic in addition to residents’ spending.²⁰ ESRI’s software also estimates the gap between local supply and demand across retail markets, which is shown for

the City in the graph “City of West Branch Annual Surplus and Leakage.” Surplus markets are those in which community businesses garner annual sales in excess of residents’ spending on the corresponding products. Conversely, “leakage” markets are those wherein residents’ annual spending on a particular product market exceeds City businesses’ sales of those products.

The table “Commercial Establishments” shows that the City of West Branch had fewer businesses overall than West Branch Township - 51 establishments compared with 71, respectively. Businesses in the City tilt heavily toward low-end service and retail establishments. “Miscellaneous retailers”, including florists, discount retail, and used merchandise stores, was the single largest commercial segment in the community; about one quarter (25.4%) of establishments were in this category. Likewise, “general merchandise stores”, which includes variety and dollar stores, also comprised another substantial share (7.8%) of City businesses. Both segments were among the highest-grossing surplus commercial markets in the community; City businesses accumulated over \$5

FIGURE 7: POVERTY



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017

million and nearly \$15 million in sales in excess of community residents' spending in those two markets, respectively.

These figures suggest that discount retail, superstores, and variety stores hold a prominent position in West Branch's commercial tapestry. While affordable retail certainly has an important role in a community of modest incomes, an abundance of these stores may have drawbacks. Namely, national chain retailers leverage scale economies in logistics and supply chains that enable them lower prices and divert spending that might otherwise occur at local businesses. Further, these chains often construct low-quality and impermanent structures that could impair land values in the long run. If promoting small business is a goal in West Branch, the community could consider zoning provisions to limit these businesses. Limiting permissible building footprints or allowable building setbacks, or mandating architectural quality could discourage large-scale chains and ensure that new construction enhances the community.

Nearly one-fifth of the City of West Branch's establishments, a total of ten businesses, were "health & personal care stores". This retail segment has increased over the years as the number of chain pharmacies has grown and the share of local businesses has fallen. Stores in this category accrued an estimated \$7.5 million in excess of local spending and signify another surplus market. Automotive-related establishments, including "motor vehicle parts dealers" and "gasoline stations", comprised another 10% of West Branch businesses. Abundant automotive businesses are common in northern Michigan business districts; however, their inappropriate siting can cause harm. Specifically, these establishments can segment otherwise inviting pedestrian environments and degrade the density of commercial districts that are designed for entertainment, food service, and retail uses. The City could consider limiting automotive accessory establishments in its Central Business District zoning, which encompasses downtown properties.

TABLE 6: COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS

RETAIL MARKET	WEST BRANCH CITY ESTABLISHMENTS		WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP ESTABLISHMENTS	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
MOTOR VEHICLE & PARTS DEALERS	2	3.9	5	7
FURNITURE & HOME FURNISHINGS STORES	2	3.9	1	1.4
ELECTRONICS AND APPLIANCE STORES	1	1.9	4	5.6
BUILDING MATERIALS, GARDEN EQUIPMENT, & SUPPLY STORES	3	5.8	5	7
FOOD & BEVERAGE STORES	2	3.9	9	12.6
HEALTH & PERSONAL CARES STORES	10	19.6	3	4.2
GASOLINE STATIONS	3	5.8	3	4.2
CLOTHING & CLOTHES ACCESSORIES STORES	2	3.9	8	11.2
SPORTING GOODS, HOBBY, BOOK & MUSIC STORES	1	1.9	0	0.0
GENERAL MERCHANDISE STORES	4	7.8	3	4.2
MISCELLANEOUS STORE RETAILERS	13	25.4	9	12.6
NONSTORE RETAILERS	0	0.0	2	2.8
FOOD SERVICES & DRINKING PLACES	8	15.6	19	26.7
TOTAL	51	100.0	71	100.0

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Meanwhile, specialized retail traditionally located in downtowns (including “clothing stores,” “home furnishings stores,” and “sporting goods, hobby, book, and music stores”) comprised a small share (5%) of City of West Branch businesses. Further, the latter of these two markets were among the community’s leakage markets wherein residents spent more annually than local businesses earned. This is perhaps symptomatic of the community’s declining shopping and retail scene. If promoting a vibrant business district is a goal, some actions are under the City’s control, such as the physical environment and construction of buildings along Houghton Avenue. The City of West Branch should codify design standards for buildings, deploy wayfinding signage, and enhance its streets to promote an inviting pedestrian environment. These actions could enhance the district’s desirability as a “place” to visit.

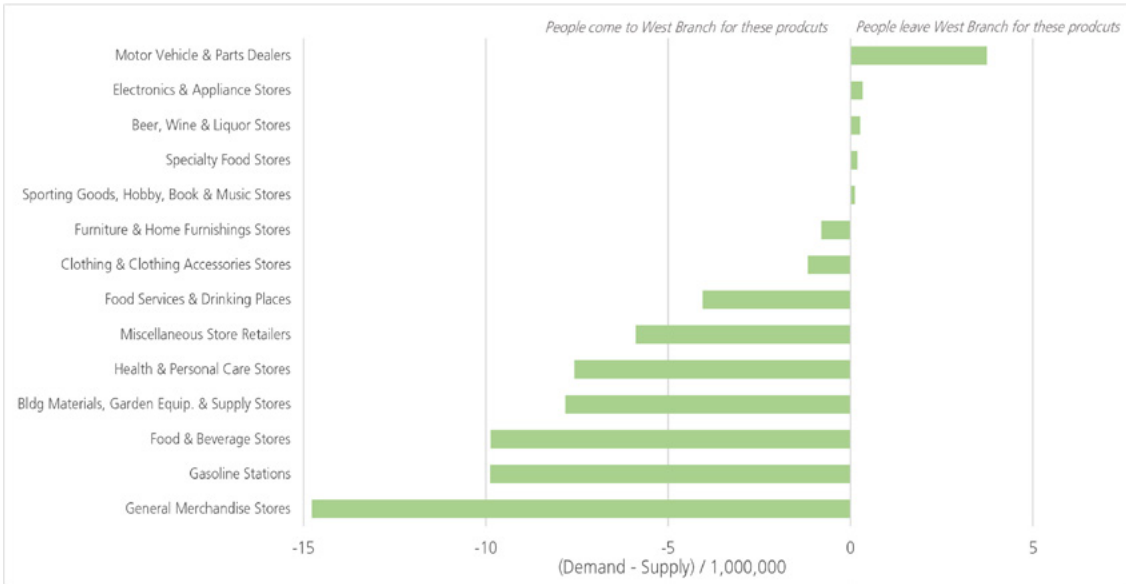
The City of West Branch has a modest number of restaurants; an estimated eight businesses were categorized as “food

services and drinking places.” This number has increased as new craft beverage and food establishments opened downtown preceding 2020. Restaurants are also among the City’s surplus commercial markets; these businesses earned over \$4 million in annual sales in excess of residents’ spending, which suggests that existing businesses are relatively prosperous. That notwithstanding, West Branch Township has over twice as many food service and drinking establishments as the City. Correspondingly, the Township’s surplus in that market (over \$11 million) was over twice that of the City’s. The City and local economic organizations could work to promote food service businesses to residents and nonresidents alike, as long-distance traffic comprises the car travel on I-75.

Broadband

Internet connectivity allows modern businesses to operate efficiently and, therefore, is an increasingly important quality-of-life factor. That said, high-

FIGURE 8: CITY OF WEST BRANCH ANNUAL SURPLUS AND LEAKAGE



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

speed internet is limited in some areas of northern Michigan; in places where it is available, slow adoption and lack of knowledge among residents impedes use. In 2017, 62.9% of the 1,084 households in West Branch had a broadband subscription, lower than the share of households statewide (76.3%) in the same year. The website “Broadband Now” indicates that three to four providers deliver cable or DSL broadband service in the City of West Branch. Meanwhile, three providers, including Spectrum and AT&T, offer residential and commercial service at maximum speeds of over 25 megabits per second in the West Branch zip code, often considered a benchmark for adequate service.²¹

Despite having adequate baseline service, barriers inhibit broadband adoption and use. In 2014, Ogemaw County partnered with the State of Michigan to complete a technology action plan which assessed access to broadband throughout the County. The study defined insufficient speeds, competitor variety, and a lack of public computers as barriers to broadband use, particularly for low-income households.²² The plan defined strategies for communities to improve broadband access, including the expansion of wireless hotspots to improve mobile broadband availability, and the establishment of a “Community Technology Academy” to expand public computers. The City of West Branch should review the strategies in the technology plan and partner with organizations to implement them.

ECONOMIC RESOURCES

The City of West Branch has a variety of resources and organizations that support the community's economy. This section inventories these resources, including educational and workforce development entities, business support resources, and tax incentive programs.

Kirtland Community College

Kirtland Community College has campuses in Roscommon and Grayling, approximately 40 miles northwest of the City of West Branch, and is the major

postsecondary educational resource in the area. The college offers a variety of associates degree programs and technical certifications in automotive technologies, computer information systems, health sciences including nursing, and industrial technologies including welding, fabricating, and HVAC.²³ The college also offers four-year degree transfer programs. Additionally, its in-district tuition rates are some of the lowest in the state.

Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation and Michigan Works!

The Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation supports the local economy by linking municipalities and businesses, assisting firms with site selection, and functioning as a clearinghouse of information. The organization operates under a board of directors appointed by the Ogemaw County Board of Commissioners and employs a part-time business director. This professional role is the result of a partnership with the Michigan Works! Office in West Branch, which improves the workforce by connecting job seekers and employers.

Municipal Tax Incentives

The City of West Branch is authorized under Michigan's Public Act 198 of 1974 to offer property tax abatements to industrial firms seeking to locate in the City. The municipality grants incentives at the discretion of City Council to encourage business growth, retention, and attraction, and to increase the availability of local jobs.²⁴ Supporting and expanding the City's tax incentives for industrial expansion was established as a community priority in the City's 2019 master plan.²⁵

West Branch Area Chamber of Commerce

The West Branch Area Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit membership-based organization with the purpose to attract, retain, and promote business in the West Branch area. The organization provides resource sharing and promotional opportunities for local businesses and hosts networking events, including

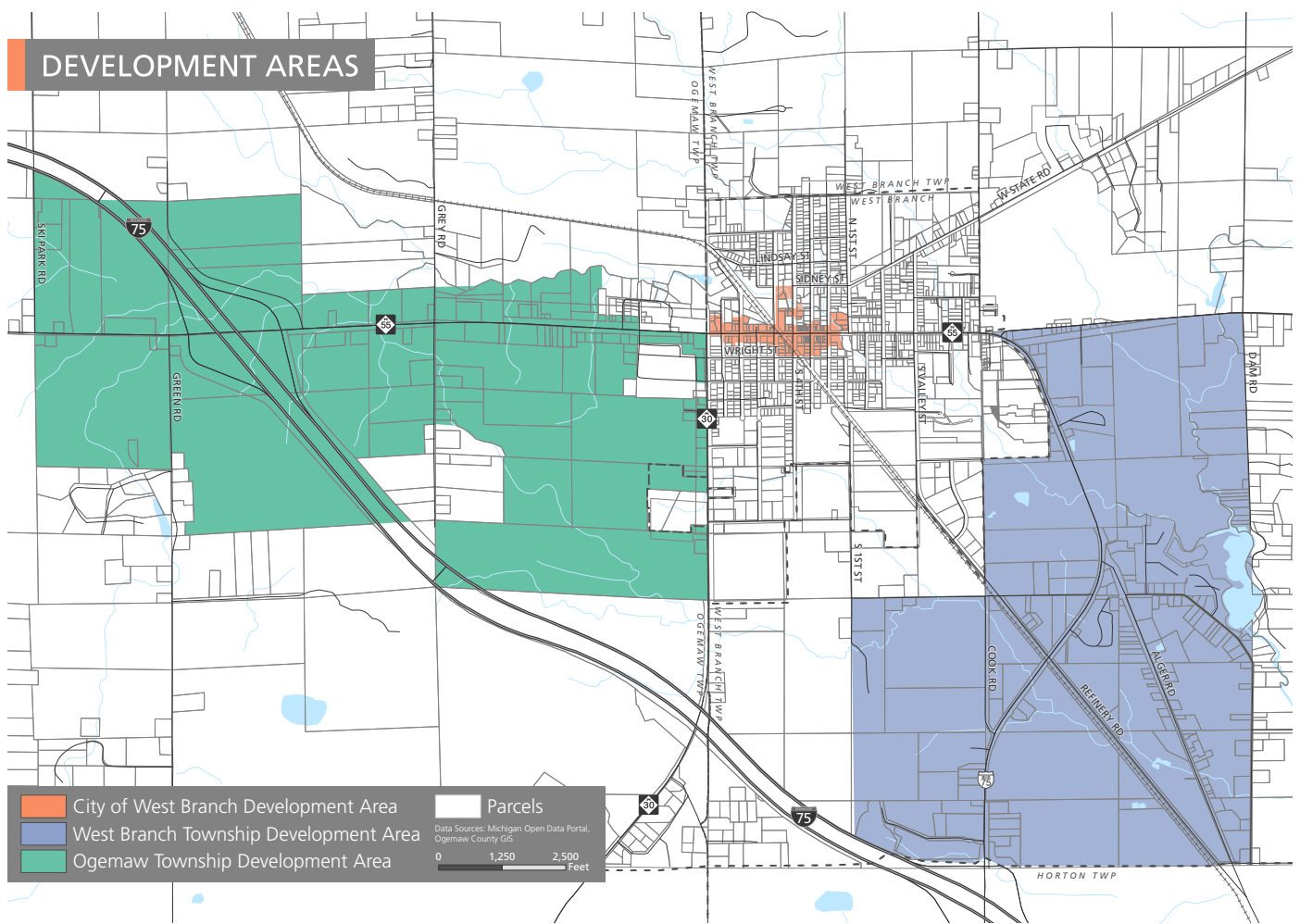
“business after hours” and “chamber connections.”²⁶

Downtown Development Authorities

The City of West Branch and West Branch and Ogemaw Townships each have separate downtown development authorities (DDAs). The map “downtown development authorities” shows the geographic extent of each one, while individual DDA maps for each community show each on a refined geographic scale. The City of West Branch DDA extends for approximately a half-mile along seven blocks M-55 in the community’s downtown. The West Branch Township

DDA district encompasses land around the I-75 business route, and the Ogemaw Township DDA is along M-55 east of the City. Each organization is a volunteer board with the purpose to promote commerce through beautification, historic preservation, and economic development initiatives. The DDAs undertake tax increment financing, wherein future increases in property tax revenue are captured from properties in their districts to finance these projects. The City of West Branch DDA created a new Downtown Victorian Park prior to 2020 and manages the district’s lighting, flowers, street seating, and other streetscape elements.²⁷

MAP 1: DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITIES

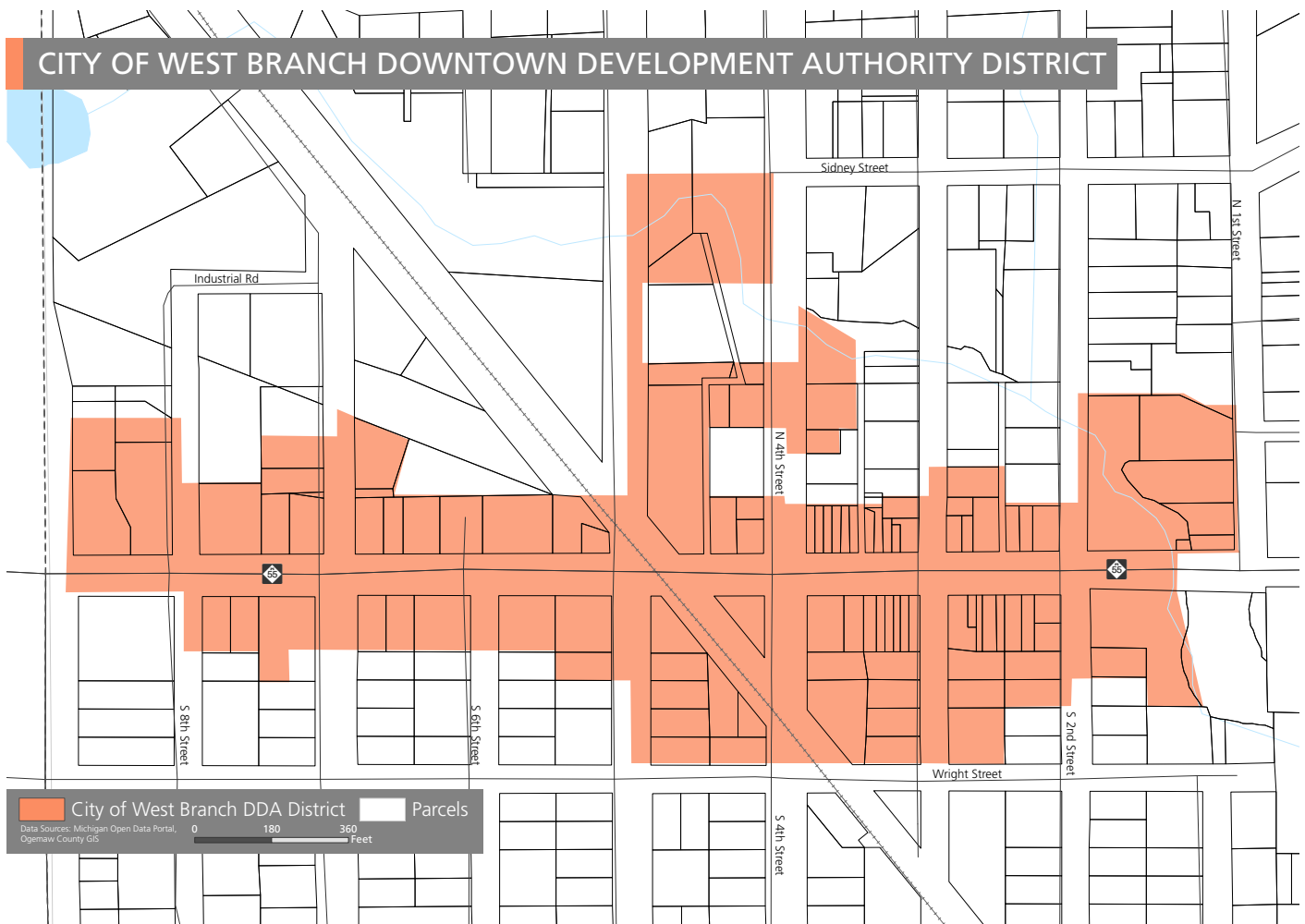


Tax Revenue Potential

An important aspect of the community's fiscal health is understanding where tax revenue is generated and which properties contribute the most to tax revenue. This information is shown in West Branch in the map "Tax Revenue Generating Power Per Acre". The color of each City property conveys the dollar amount of tax revenue it generates per unit area. This value is determined by dividing the taxable value of each property by its acreage. Properties in blue generate greater average tax revenue per acre, relative to the average City property, while those in orange generate less tax revenue

per acre. High tax revenue generating areas include the commercial properties in the City's southeast, most of which fall under the City's "General Business District" zoning. This zoning designation permits regional-serving retail and service uses and promotes automobile access to properties along major roadways.²⁸ The City's downtown commercial lots along M-55 are also high tax revenue generating per acre. This area has small lots, which makes their value per unit of land particularly high. Many of these properties are under the City's "Central Business District" zoning, which allows for a variety of commercial service and retail uses and promotes pedestrian access to structures.²⁹ Most of these downtown

MAP 2: CITY OF WEST BRANCH DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY



properties also within the City's DDA district, which means the organization can collect increases in tax revenue. Several industrial properties in the City's south are also high tax revenue generating.

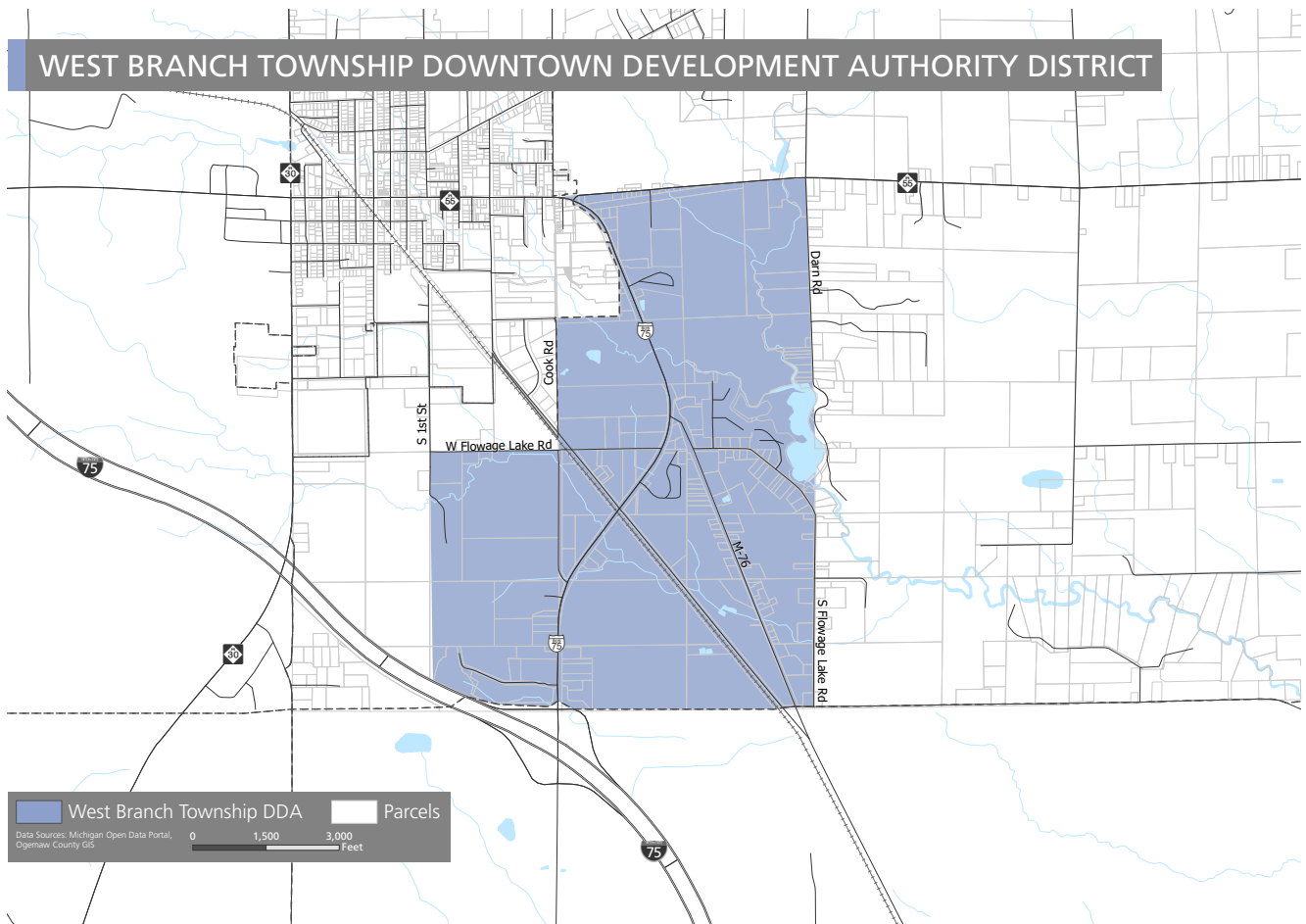
The table "State Equalized Value in West Branch" shows the equalized value of City of West Branch properties following the Great Recession between 2012 and 2015, the year most recent assessment data is available. State equalized value refers to the value of properties as calculated by local governments for tax assessments, which equals 50% of their true market value, as mandated by Michigan law. The table's bottom row is the equalized value across all property types, regardless of

TABLE 7: STATE EQUALIZED VALUE IN WEST BRANCH

REAL PROPERTY TYPE	STATE EQUALIZED VALUE (\$)	
	2012	2015
COMMERCIAL	32,024,500	34,461,500
INDUSTRIAL	2,811,100	2,789,700
RESIDENTIAL	26,828,400	24,548,500
TOTAL REAL PROPERTY	61,664,000	61,799,700

Source: Ogemaw County Equalization

MAP 3: WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

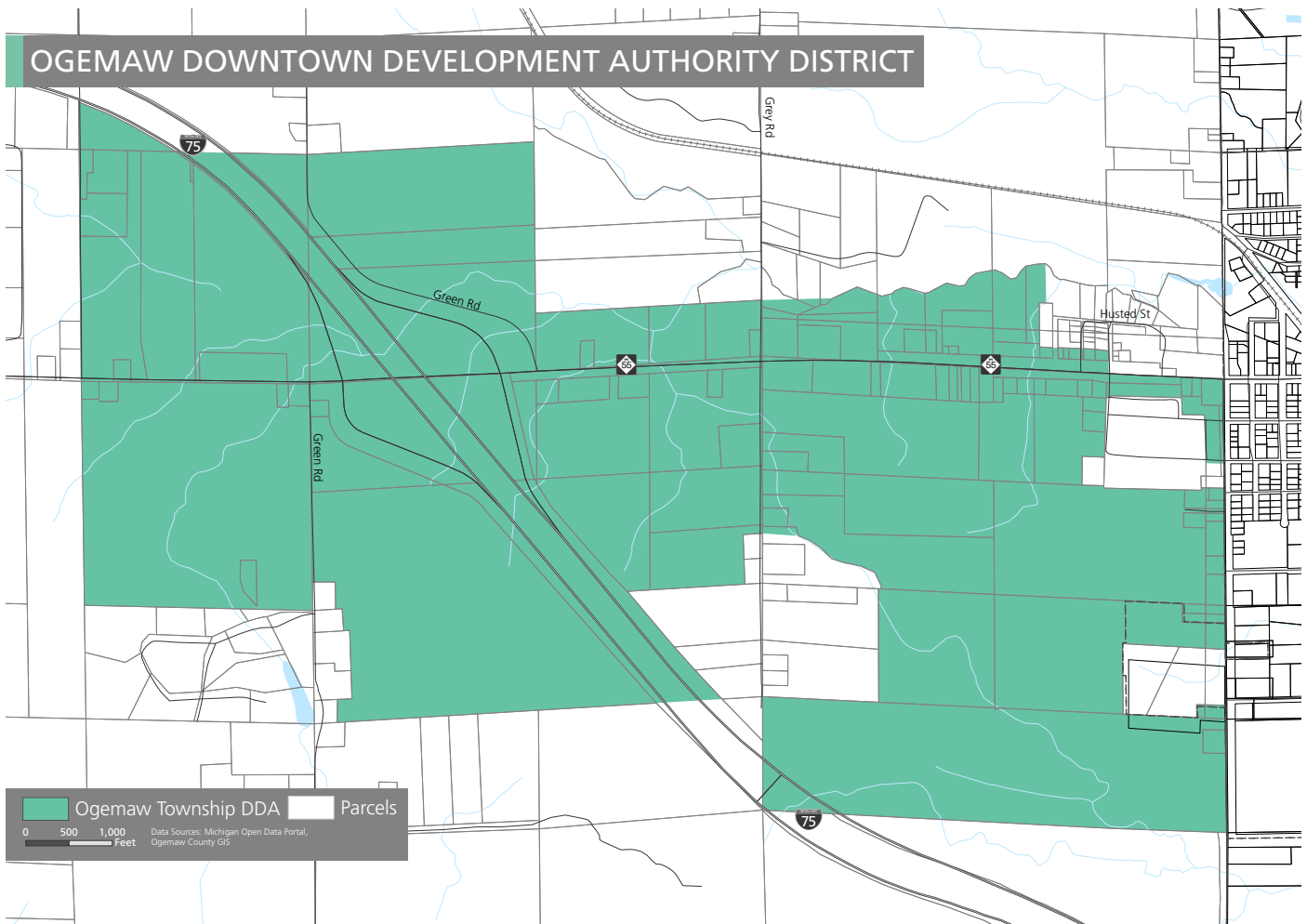


use, and shows that overall value of City property rose tepidly by \$135,700 (less than 1% increase) between these years. This overall value increase came exclusively from the City's commercial properties; the equalized value of parcels in this category grew by over \$2 million in that timeframe, a change of 7.5%. Meanwhile, the value of industrial property declined slightly (less than 1% decrease), and residential property lost value most rapidly (8.5% decrease). This pattern contrasts with those across the State of Michigan overall, where residential property values generally rebounded following the recession.

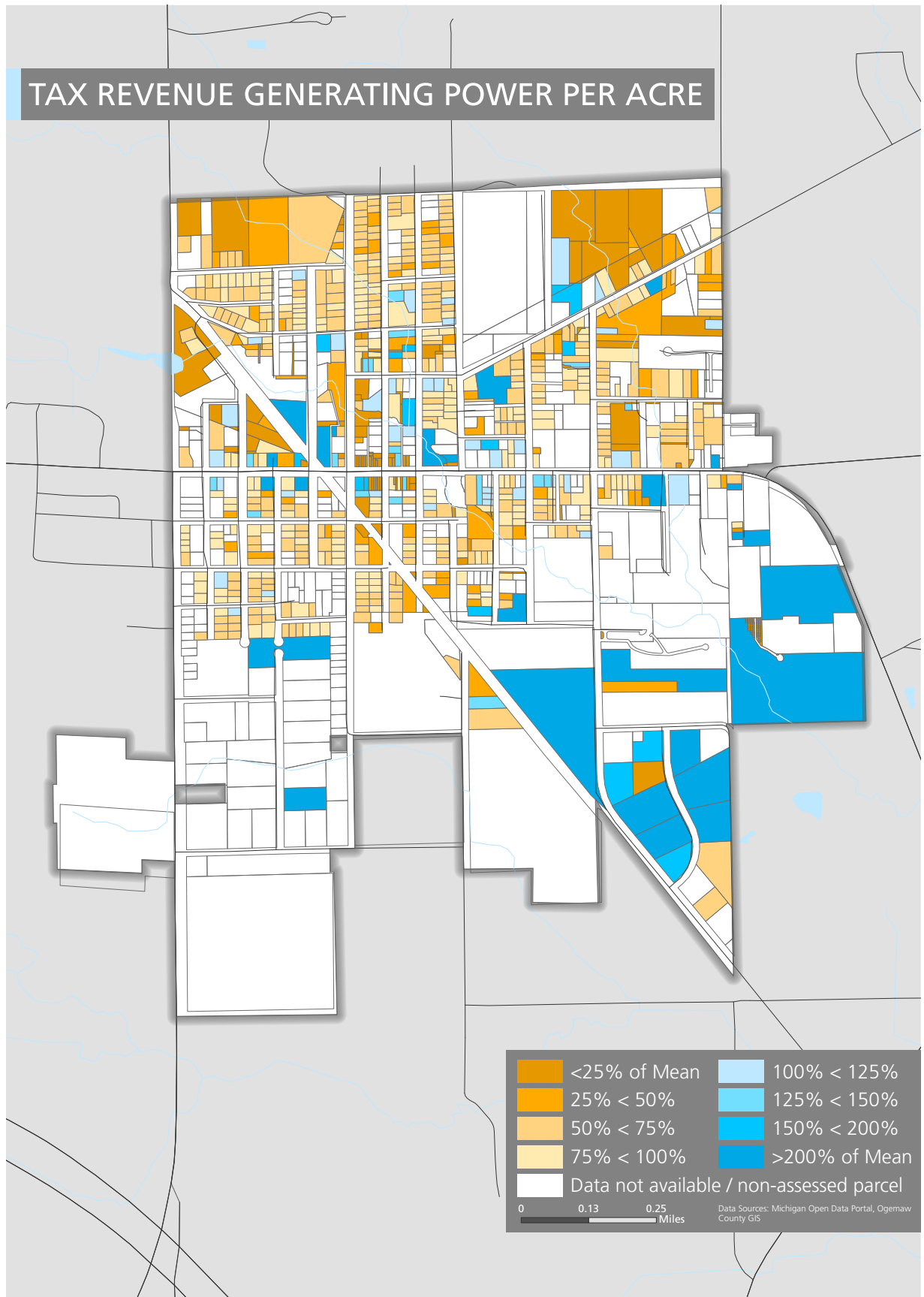
CHILDCARE

Recent increases in the cost of childcare has increasingly pervasive economic impacts. In 2018, the average annual costs of center-based care in Michigan were estimated at \$10,281 for an infant, while the costs were around \$17,561 for two children.³⁰ By comparison, these two figures would swallow 20% and 36% of the State's median annual household income (\$52,668), respectively. One result is that young residents are waiting longer to start families, or are having fewer children when they do which contributes

MAP 4: OGEMAW TOWNSHIP DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY



MAP 5: TAX REVENUE GENERATING POWER PER ACRE



to population loss. Another outcome is that low-income households, many of whom work busy work schedules and often need childcare services most, are unable to access them. In 2019, the director of Lansing facility reported that weak public subsidy programs often don't cover the costs for modest-income families and that many have ceased enrollment in the program as a result.³¹ Inadequate childcare services also affect employers. The executive of a Ludington area company recounted that a lack of available childcare for employees' families limited their work schedules.

Relatedly, parts of the state struggle with baseline availability of childcare services. A 2018 study by the Center For American Progress defined "childcare deserts" across the United States - areas with few licensed child care providers relative to the number of children under 5 years old. Although the West Branch census tract does not qualify as a desert, it still has a shortage of facilities; there were eight licensed childcare providers in 2018, amounting to a capacity of 112, a stark deficit in services to support 269 residents under the age of five years in the same geography.³² Rural areas are some of the most underserved as three in five rural communities in the United States lacked childcare in 2019.

Childcare Survey

The City of West Branch administered a survey to area residents in 2019 to assess access to childcare services and understand households' needs. The survey was designed as a 28-question form and was available online through the website SurveyMonkey, which allowed respondents to submit candid answers on their own schedules. The survey garnered a total of 275 responses from area residents. Most of the respondents (72.3%) had children under the age of 12 years or were expecting children. All respondents answered questions regarding the quality and availability of local childcare services.

Several questions asked how households currently use childcare services. 77% of respondents with children under 12 years,

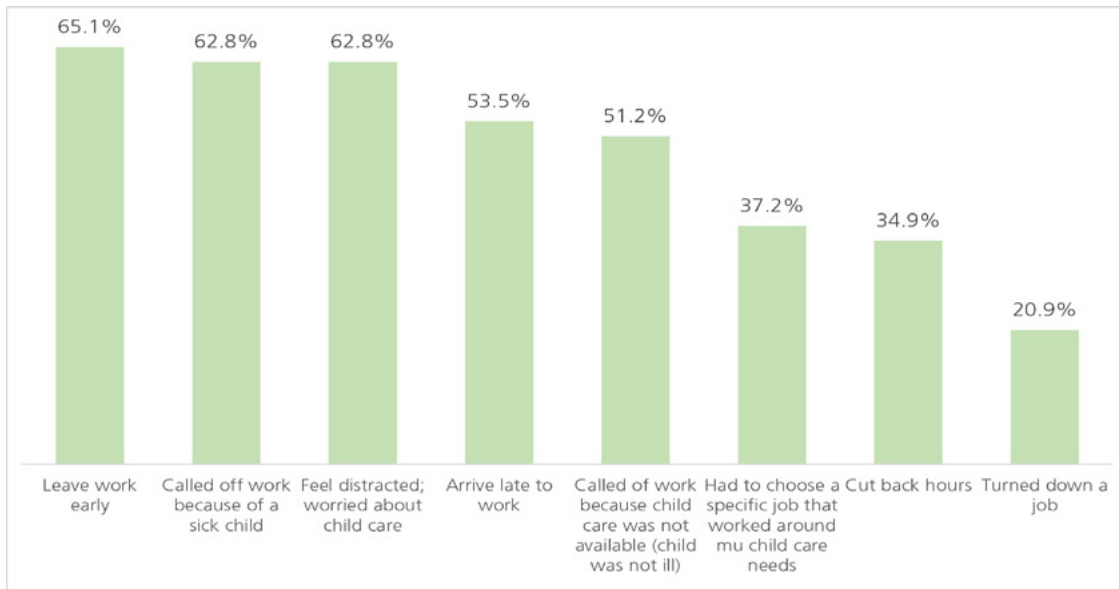
or expecting children, used childcare services. Moreover, among the 167 respondents that answered the question "How many days a week do you normally use childcare?", more than three quarters (76.4%) indicated three days per week or more, while over half (52.7%) indicated five days per week or more. When asked how many hours each day they use childcare, a large share (62.8%) indicated eight or more hours a day, while the vast majority (85.5%) indicated four hours or more a day. The survey also asked the type of childcare that respondents use most often. "Relative" was the single most common response, garnering 40.8% of the total. Using family for childcare often eases the financial burden which makes it a common strategy. Responses indicating professional facilities such as "Licensed child care center" or "Licensed childcare family home or group home" also garnered a nearly equally large share (39%) of responses to the question.

Many respondents indicated some dissatisfaction with their childcare services, while others reported that inadequate service causes financial challenges. When asked "Are you satisfied with your current childcare?", nearly one third (31.45%) indicated "No" while the remaining 68.5% replied "yes." When asked to indicate the reasons for dissatisfaction, 136 respondents replied to the question. "Hours and days available" was the most frequent answer, garnering votes from 32.3% of respondents, while "Cost" was also frequently selected, earning votes from over one quarter (26.47%) of respondents. Survey takers recounted that complications with childcare also affected their job performance, as shown in figure 9. The question allowed respondents to select all the actions they had taken. The responses show that inadequate childcare affects the availability of workers and work performance. Other questions show that cost is a major issue; over half of the respondents reported spending \$100 per week or more on childcare. This would amount to \$4,800 annually if a household used childcare for an entire year. That annual expense would, in turn, be 16% of the median annual household income in West Branch.

The results of the 2019 childcare survey show that the City of West Branch should work with local partners to expand childcare services in the community. Lowering costs and widening service hours

could decrease the economic burden for households and increase the workforce's availability. Further, adequate childcare services could enhance the community's appeal for new households.

FIGURE 9: ACTIONS RESULTING FROM UNAVAILABLE OR INADEQUATE CHILDCARE



Source: 2019 West Branch Childcare Survey

SECTOR ANALYSIS

Economies are diverse and complex web of relationships. Products on the shelf often go through multiple stages of manufacturing, source materials globally, and are designed, engineered, and built by many people. IMPLAN, an input-output economic modeling tool, was used to illustrate the interdependency of sectors in the 48661 zip code. The analysis was performed at a zip code scale to better capture a regional economy while retaining relevance to the City of West Branch, the economic center of the zip code. In total, 190 of 546 unique industries were included in the analysis. Data used in the analysis was sourced from various governmental sources including the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Census Bureau, and Internal Revenue Service. IMPLAN models upstream economic activity, including the resources, supply, and manufacturing of goods and services. It does not model sales, use, and disposal activity.

INPLAN models several elements of economic output, including labor income, intermediate output, and value add as seen in the figure titled “Economic Output.”

“Intermediate inputs” include the purchase of goods and services used to produce other goods and services. For example, a computer manufacturing company would need to buy metal,

plastic, and electronic parts in order to produce the final computer, all of which would be considered intermediate inputs.

“Value Added” represents the contribution to the gross domestic product.

“Labor Income” is the total cost of labor and includes wages and all benefits.

“Proprietor Income” is the income of the corporation/proprietor.

“Taxes on Production & Imports” includes all taxes on goods and services including tariffs, property taxes, and sales taxes. Government subsidies and other tax exemptions are also included as negative values.

“Other Property Income” is the remaining dollars after taxes, labor income, and intermediate inputs are purchased, essentially profit.

Total economic output is the combined value of labor income, value added, and intermediate outputs. The illustration on the next page graphically depicts the various economic components that create the economic output model.

The results of the IMPLAN Model for the 48661 zip code estimate that 190 of the 543 different industry sectors are represented in the zip code. The total economic output for the zip code is estimated at \$1.086 billion, employing

FIGURE 10: IMPAN ECONOMIC MODEL

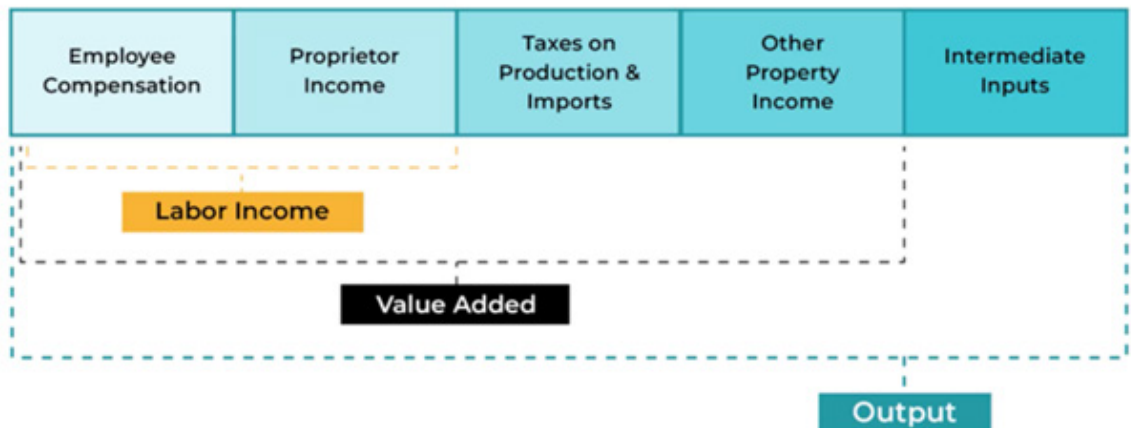


TABLE 8: 2021 TWENTY TOP EMPLOYERS BY INDUSTRY TYPE

Code	Industry	Emp	Z-Output	Z-Output %	Z-Output	State-Output	State-%	LQ		
509	Full-service restaurants	410	\$8,515,989.94	2.85%	\$31,015,536.71	\$20,567.46	\$24,145.82	\$12,521,308,929.73	0.98%	2.92
411	Retail - General merchandise stores	400	\$15,403,127.61	3.90%	\$42,366,382.18	\$38,724.55	\$1,617.63	\$8,959,397,411.24	0.70%	5.57
490	Hospitals	338	\$31,430,680.65	6.25%	\$67,964,183.67	\$95,418.22	(\$995,197.79)	\$40,071,696,002.65	3.13%	2.00
488	Home health care services	307	\$9,812,641.45	1.31%	\$14,281,666.52	\$33,109.39	\$24,123.49	\$2,815,863,449.58	0.22%	5.97
447	Other real estate	259	\$6,734,963.57	4.09%	\$44,398,993.28	\$53,675.85	\$23,747.64	\$45,937,216,796.73	3.59%	1.14
400	Wholesale - Other nondurable goods merchant wholesalers	257	\$14,734,762.92	7.67%	\$83,345,383.91	\$57,178.08	\$59,852.52	\$10,207,036,961.79	0.80%	9.62
510	Limited-service restaurants	200	\$4,669,529.24	1.72%	\$18,679,798.33	\$23,569.67	\$19,822.77	\$15,096,090,259.50	1.18%	1.46
413	Retail - Nonstore retailers	200	\$5,253,090.93	4.98%	\$54,111,600.68	\$43,281.41	\$2,535.48	\$15,287,478,074.05	1.19%	4.17
517	Personal care services	198	\$4,928,439.63	0.34%	\$3,743,571.34	\$31,521.79	\$20,130.33	\$1,006,323,657.10	0.08%	4.38
544	*Employment and payroll of local govt, other services	194	\$9,628,853.64	1.11%	\$12,047,670.09	\$49,653.57		\$9,829,581,344.41	0.77%	1.44
421	Couriers and messengers	184	\$3,441,104.29	0.90%	\$9,777,887.15	\$68,634.67	(\$695.38)	\$3,411,690,910.53	0.27%	3.38
491	Nursing and community care facilities	171	\$8,020,873.16	1.33%	\$14,449,726.74	\$50,151.69	\$1,137.67	\$5,927,924,108.55	0.46%	2.87
405	Retail - Building material and garden equipment and supplies stores	147	\$5,507,341.96	1.72%	\$18,737,272.50	\$37,984.36	\$13,635.55	\$6,891,010,996.65	0.54%	3.20
422	Warehousing and storage	135	\$9,292,827.63	1.57%	\$17,101,033.51	\$76,554.41	(\$7,644.39)	\$4,951,808,689.92	0.39%	4.07
409	Retail - Clothing and clothing accessories stores	130	\$3,063,441.76	1.33%	\$14,435,426.90	\$26,872.56	\$1,204.41	\$3,568,837,879.20	0.28%	4.76
512	Automotive repair and maintenance, except car washes	127	\$7,069,874.72	1.19%	\$12,939,595.85	\$59,116.25	\$46,841.87	\$6,998,944,229.00	0.55%	2.18
417	Truck transportation	113	\$7,189,843.75	2.25%	\$24,403,379.55	\$68,648.37	\$52,027.28	\$16,324,951,113.60	1.28%	1.76
541	* Employment and payroll of state govt, other services	112	\$10,206,392.14	1.15%	\$12,541,418.19	\$91,223.08		\$9,825,501,798.82	0.77%	1.50
412	Retail - Miscellaneous store retailers	107	\$1,978,349.28	0.45%	\$4,857,392.91	\$25,407.85	\$7,491.14	\$3,236,287,661.03	0.25%	1.77
408	Retail - Gasoline stores	105	\$2,449,010.79	1.44%	\$15,616,892.55	\$23,177.12	\$34,857.57	\$3,704,507,297.70	0.29%	4.97
521	Religious organizations	104	\$4,522,720.40	0.76%	\$8,245,498.47	\$45,945.10	\$10,276.88	\$6,549,595,835.40	0.51%	1.48
		4196			\$525,060,311.03					

Source: 2021 IMPLAN; Beckett & Raeder

TABLE 9: 2021 TWENTY TOP INDUSTRIES BY LOCATION QUOTIENT

Code	Industry	Emp	Zipcode-Output %		State-Output	State-%	LQ
133	Wood preservation	6	0.41%	\$7,981.17	\$172,343,430.18	0.01%	30.19
10	All other crop farming	34	0.10%	\$11,095.34	\$119,562,995.23	0.01%	11.10
238	Metal window and door manufacturing	14	0.37%	\$910.53	\$441,099,085.83	0.03%	10.62
12	Dairy cattle and milk production	56	2.35%	\$98,167.74	\$2,888,040,000.00	0.23%	10.44
400	Wholesale - Other nondurable goods merchant wholesalers	257	7.67%	\$59,852.52	\$10,207,036,961.79	0.80%	9.62
16	Commercial logging	27	0.26%	\$527.71	\$357,295,795.00	0.03%	9.29
11	Beef cattle ranching and farming, including feedlots and dual-purpose ranching and farming	36	0.41%	\$31,461.39	\$642,100,000.00	0.05%	8.10
38	Other nonmetallic minerals services	3	0.20%	\$5,543.10	\$356,462,814.03	0.03%	7.28
47	Electric power transmission and distribution	50	6.85%	\$184,949.24	\$13,051,366,826.89	1.02%	6.72
239	Sheet metal work manufacturing	23	0.63%	\$379.60	\$1,238,340,298.19	0.10%	6.55
37	Metal mining services	3	0.21%	\$5,543.59	\$442,299,629.05	0.03%	6.17
99	Coffee and tea manufacturing	5	0.25%	\$18,497.62	\$537,049,834.44	0.04%	6.04
488	Home health care services	307	1.31%	\$24,123.49	\$2,815,863,449.58	0.22%	5.97
411	Retail - General merchandise stores	400	3.90%	\$1,617.63	\$8,959,397,411.24	0.70%	5.57
408	Retail - Gasoline stores	105	1.44%	\$34,857.57	\$3,704,507,297.70	0.29%	4.97
409	Retail - Clothing and clothing accessories stores	130	1.33%	\$1,204.41	\$3,568,837,879.20	0.28%	4.76
433	Wired telecommunications carriers	55	1.93%	(\$1,726.44)	\$5,380,268,566.61	0.42%	4.60
23	Iron ore mining	6	0.16%	\$4,056.20	\$455,849,008.77	0.04%	4.46
20	Oil and gas extraction	14	1.12%	\$5,555.88	\$3,257,229,680.01	0.25%	4.40
517	Personal care services	198	0.34%	\$20,130.33	\$1,006,323,657.10	0.08%	4.38
262	Construction machinery manufacturing	4	0.25%	\$139,574.61	\$745,151,147.97	0.06%	4.29
		1734					

Source: 2021 IMPLAN; Beckett & Raeder



DOWNTOWN WEST BRANCH, MICHIGAN

7,086 individuals. The sector with the highest economic input (\$83.3 million) is the wholesale-non durable goods merchant wholesalers with an employment base of 257. This industry comprises establishments that are primarily engaged in the merchant wholesale distribution of farm supplies, such as animal feeds, fertilizers, agricultural chemicals, pesticides, plant seeds, and plant bulbs. The next highest economic output industry is electric power transmission and distribution with an economic output of \$74.5 million and 50 employees. This U.S. industry comprises electric power establishments primarily engaged in either 1). operating electric power distribution systems (i.e., consisting of lines, poles, meters, and wiring), or 2). operating as electric power brokers or agents that arrange the sale of electricity via power distribution systems operated by others.

Table 8, "2021 Twenty Top Employers by Industry Type" lists the highest industries by type based on employment. As noted, full service restaurants, retail-general merchandise stores, hospitals, and home health care top the list. The chart also indicates each of the top twenty industry types by economic output, a percent of the total zip code economic output, its location quotient, and growth rate compared to 2019.

Market Specialization

Market specialization is based on a locale's economic output or employment by industry type compared to the region, state, or nation. This analysis uses what is known as a location quotient. A location quotient (LQ) is an analytical statistic that measures a region's industrial specialization relative to a larger geographic unit. An LQ is computed as an industry's share of a regional total for some economic statistic (earnings, GDP by metropolitan area, employment, etc.) divided by the industry's share of the national total for the same statistic. For the 48661 zip code, the location quotient (LQ) compared the percentage of employment

by industry to the total employment within the 48661 zip code, and then compared this to the employment by industry type at the state level. The result of this computation renders the LQ. A LQ of 1.00 means that the percent of employment is equally represented at the zip code level and the state level. A LQ lower than 1.00 represents an under representation, and a LQ higher than 1.00 an over representation. Typically, a LQ above 1.50 or 2.00 indicates a degree of specialization. Figure 9, 2021 Twenty Top Industries by Location Quotient, lists those industries with a high LQ.

Although wood preservation has the highest LQ, it only contributes four tenths of one percent to the total economic output. Clusters of specialization involve agricultural related enterprises such as dairy cattle and milk production, wholesale-other nondurable goods, cattle ranching, and all other crop farming. These three industries contribute approximately \$114.4 million to the local economy. Another cluster is retail consisting of general merchandise stores, and clothing and clothing accessory stores. These two industries contribute approximately \$56.8 million to the local economy and provide 530 jobs.

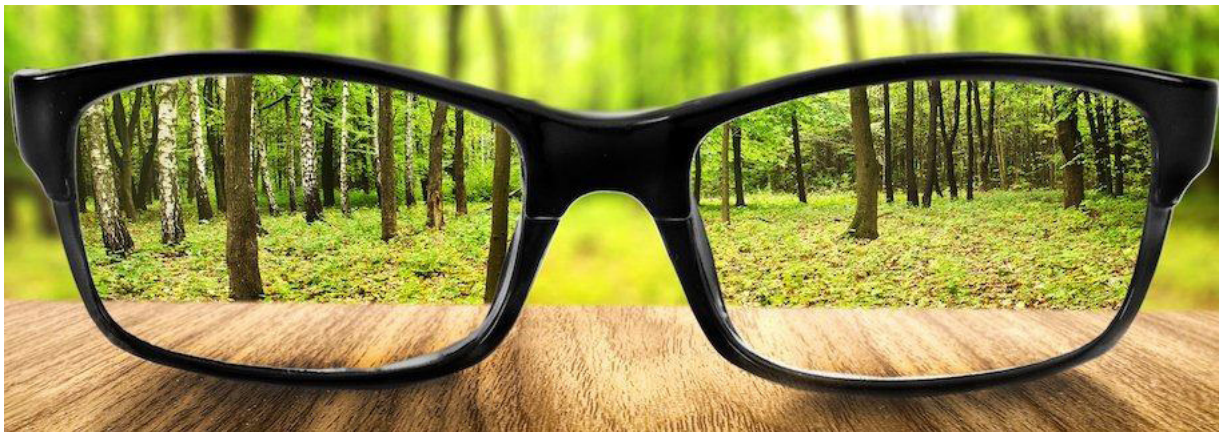
Although not in the top twenty industries by LQ, full-service restaurants contribute \$31.0 million to the local economy and employ 410 people. Coupled with retail-gas stations, this two inter-related business generate \$51.5 million in economic output and employ 515. Their presence in the West Branch market is also represented in the retail surplus and leakage analysis which shows West Branch as capturing significant sales from these businesses.

The IMPLAN analysis shows that the West Branch (48661) market is represented by a rural cluster of related businesses, and an urban cluster of retail and health care related businesses. Further, the City is positioned as the focal point of the market due to the predominance of retail, restaurant and health care.

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Where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18)

Source: Google Images; Tim Challis

3.0 VISION

SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT Survey

The acronym SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A SWOT analysis provides organizations with a mechanism to review internal strengths and weaknesses against external opportunities and threats. Internal strengths and weaknesses are typical under the control of the organization. In contrast, the external opportunities and threats are influences outside the power of the organization that have resulted from market trends, policies, or other elements that could be exploited or cause trouble.

A SWOT Analysis is often a preliminary step in the decision-making process leading to the creation of a strategic plan and a realistic action program. As part of the West Branch Strategic Plan, the SWOT Analysis was prepared digitally with an invitation to thirteen community stakeholders. Out of the thirteen (13) members, ten (10) members took the survey, which is a 77% return rate. The survey consisted of the following:

Based on the SWOT comments (Q.1 – Q.4), themes began to emerge and statements were grouped under themes, including Government, Housing, Health Care, Market/Economic Development, Child Care, Education, Labor, and People/Residents. Tables 10 through 13 on the following pages offer lists of individual responses for each SWOT category. Table 14 aggregates the major SWOT themes and significant observations into an aggregated table to compare S, W, O, and T. Finally, Tables 15 and 16 summarize the findings of Q.5 and Q.6

QUESTION	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Q.1-Q.4	TEXT BOX	SWOT ASSESSMENT Each question was a text box asking for terms or statements regarding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
Q.5	MATRIX Rating Scale	LOCAL CONDITIONS AND TRENDS A variety of statements on housing, child care, job creation, job skills, and downtown
Q.6	MATRIX Rating Scale	RELATIONSHIPS Explored relationships between local, county, and state agencies.

TABLE 10: STRENGTHS - WEST BRANCH AREA (INTERNAL)

GOVERNMENT

City Council – passionate, dedicated and pro-growth
Collaborative DDA's
Strong group of leaders

HEALTH CARE

2 Hospitals

INFRASTRUCTURE

Airport
Infrastructure in decent shape
Highways gateway to north outdoor activities

MARKET / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Vibrant downtown (2)
Historic downtown, zero lot lines
Strong business association
Active merchants
Growing business base
Progressive & active Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau
WB is the county hub
Location (2)
central to the State of MI
Downtown Community Events
Defined downtown district
Some significant businesses that serve as a draw for visitors
Hub (shopping, medical, restaurant, services) for people who live in surrounding rural areas

TOURISM

The various organization in the community work very well together in trying to create a culture of constant learning, growth and economic advancement (Chamber, Visitor's Bureau, Downtown Merchants, City, etc.).
Many events

PEOPLE

Volunteers
Community oriented people
Community comes together to support

RECREATION

River Walk and Irons Park
Trails connecting motels and hotels
Hunting, Fishing, Boating, and Hiking
State Land & Forests
Year-round tourist destination, Tons of recreation and things to do and offer
Golf Courses (4)
Natural Resources

TABLE 11: WEAKNESSES - WEST BRANCH AREA (INTERNAL)

GOVERNMENT

City has high taxes with little return

HOUSING

Need for middle range housing
Lack of Market Rate Housing
Need middle class housing or apartments
Lack of housing for young families

HEALTH CARE

No dermatologists
More mental health options

MARKET / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

limited "things" to do- nightlife, restaurants, not a lot of variety
Cooperation between businesses of all types
Lack of diversity in retail market downtown
"There is not enough here".
Lack of knowledge of what we have to offer

CHILD CARE

Need for affordable & available childcare
Lack of lachthkey daycare options during school year
Day Care

EDUCATION

No college
Low Education / Illiteracy
lack of a Christian education option for the High School level.
More education on interviews and how to present yourself

LABOR

Need more educational opportunities for unskilled labor
Lack of high paying jobs
Skills gap-many people do not want to improve themselves
Labor force with basic work skills, attendance, values, etc.
There is definitely a lack of skilled labor.
Finding and retaining qualified individuals for my company has proved to be quite challenging.
Skilled labor
Lack of manufacturing/industry jobs (2)

PEOPLE / RESIDENTS

Not enough young families
High levels of welfare
People living off system
People not taking advantage of opportunities
Not drawing young families because of housing
Too many drugs

TABLE 12: OPPORTUNITIES - WEST BRANCH AREA (EXTERNAL)

EDUCATION

How to leverage Kirtland Community College for local, accessible vocational training

GOVERNMENT

The City recently purchased a large lot to expand the industrial park in order to try and attract businesses to bring jobs to the area.

Opportunity zone

Brownfield Authority

Tax abatements in the two Industrial Parks.

Consider tax abatement as business attraction

HOUSING

Bedroom community for tri-city area and Grayling with the new plant

HEALTH CARE

Additional hospital should bring opportunity

New medical facility

Expanding hospital facility

Opportunity to be a medical destination

INFRASTRUCTURE

Airport could be a regional hub for passenger traffic

Ease of Highway Access - 2 Exits for I-75 (2)

City & Township Water/Sewer Hookup

Recent Road / Infrastructure Improvements

MARKET / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Farmers could develop co-op for creamery, direct to consumer meats, farmer markets etc

Create group or organization to actively recruit new businesses to community

More industrial development which brings more jobs

Signage to the opportunities we already have

Active chamber, townships, and city

RECREATION

Nature and outdoor activities are abundant

Availability of natural resources

TABLE 13: THREATS - WEST BRANCH AREA (EXTERNAL)

BROADBAND / INTERNET

- Lack of county wide high-speed internet.
- Lack of internet access high speed
- Ease of Access to High Speed Internet Services
- Lack of high-speed internet
- Broadband

EDUCATION

- Lack of higher paying jobs
- Community College relocated out of County
- Stable work force
- Lack of higher education facilities and training

FUNDING

- Shrinking revenue sharing from the State government.
- Lack of funding

GOVERNMENT

- Governmental units getting involved in housing/land purchases
- States directional policy regarding tourism
- Urban sprawl
- High taxes

INFRASTRUCTURE

- State road work focused in metro areas
- Infrastructure is aging

PEOPLE

- Illegal drug use

TABLE 14: SWOT SUMMARY BY CATEGORY

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
BROADBAND / INTERNET		
CHILD CARE		Need affordable & available childcare
EDUCATION		No local college; Kirtland left County; Lack of Christian high school education options
FUNDING		
GOVERNMENT	City Council that is dedicated and pro-growth; collaborative DDA's	City has high taxes; Reduced Public Safety
HEALTH CARE		No Dermatologists; Lack of mental health; Too many drugs
HOUSING	Affordable Housing	Need middle range housing; Lack of affordable housing; Lack of housing for young families
INFRASTRUCTURE	Airport, I-75 exits	
LABOR		More educational opportunities for unskilled labor; Lack of high paying jobs; Labor force with basic skills (attendance, values, etc.); Lack of skilled labor
MARKET / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	Vibrant and historic downtown; Progressive Chamber & CVB; Central location in State; County Hub for retail and restaurants; Strong downtown business association	Limited things to do; Lack of cooperation between businesses; Lack of knowledge of what the West Branch market offers
PEOPLE	Volunteers; Community-oriented	Not enough young families; High level of residents on welfare; Not drawing young families
RECREATION	Local parks; Hunting; Fishing; Boating; Golf Courses (4); Access to State and Federal Forests	

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS / CHALLENGES	
	Lack of county-wide high speed Internet	BROADBAND / INTERNET
		CHILD CARE
How to leverage Kirtland Community College	Community College relocated outside County; Stable workforce; Lack of higher education facilities and training	EDUCATION
	Shrinking revenue from State	FUNDING
City's purchase of property for housing; Opportunity Zone and Tax Abatements; Brownfield Authority; Industrial Park	Government getting involved in housing development; State's policy on tourism	GOVERNMENT
MyMichigan Healthrrrr and McLaren		HEALTH CARE
Bedroom community		HOUSING
Airport as regional hub for non-commercial (passenger) traffic; Exit 212 & 215 on I-75; City & Township water & sewer hook-up	State's focus on metro roads; infrastructure is aging; urban sprawl	INFRASTRUCTURE
		LABOR
Leveraging local farm community; Sporting goods store; additional industrial-related jobs; Signage (Wayfinding)		MARKET / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
	Illegal drug use	PEOPLE
Dog Park; Connecting trails from hotels and motels		RECREATION

Survey Results

The SWOT Analysis noted that the strengths for West Branch are focused on a proactive City Council and DDA, the community's access and adjacency to I-75 (Exit 212 and 215), the City's historic and vibrant downtown, location in relation to natural and recreational resources, and the local residents. On the other hand, weaknesses were noted as the need for more market rate housing and available childcare, especially very young children, no local college, the need for middle-range market housing, educational opportunities for unskilled workers, the absence of some medical specialties, and the reduced number of younger families living in, or moving into the community.

External opportunities noted the City's industrial development, the fact that both MyMichigan Health and McLaren Health Care have facilities in the City, the presence of two I-75 interchanges (Exit 212 and 215), the airport as a potential commerce and passenger hub, continued development of regional trails, and leveraging the local farm community. External threats focused on the lack of

high-speed Internet infrastructure, the lack of a community college, maintaining housing for a stable workforce, shrinking revenue from the State, the State's focus on metro, not rural roads, and the incidence of drug use and its associated impacts.

Because economic development relies on relationships and partnerships, the level of collaboration between the City and its potential partners is critical. Q.6 of the survey explored the current level of collaboration between the City and other entities. In terms of intergovernmental collaboration, it seems most respondents agreed that relationships between the local units of government and Ogemaw County could improve. This held true for County government, the Ogemaw County Land Bank, and the Ogemaw County Brownfield Authority. There was a strong consensus that the City and the Chamber of Commerce have a very beneficial relationship, and that collaboration between the City and its adjacent Township neighbors is good. Lastly, MEDC was given a higher collaboration rating than the Ogemaw County EDC, however since the survey collaboration has increased.

TABLE 15: LEVEL OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN UNITS OF GOVERNMENT

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	VERY POOR	TOTAL
CITY AND WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP	10.00%	40.00%	40.00%	10.00%	0.00%	10
CITY AND OGEMAW TOWNSHIP	20.00%	40.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
CITY AND OGEMAW COUNTY BOARD	0.00%	20.00%	10.00%	60.00%	10.00%	10
CITY AND THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE	60.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
CITY AND OGEMAW COUNTY EDC	0.00%	10.00%	60.00%	20.00%	10.00%	10
CITY AND MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION	10.00%	30.00%	60.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
CITY AND OGEMAW COUNTY BROWNFIELD AUTHORITY	0.00%	10.00%	40.00%	30.00%	20.00%	10
CITY AND OGEMAW COUNTY LAND BANK	0.00%	20.00%	30.00%	40.00%	10.00%	10

TABLE 16: CONSENSUS STATEMENTS ON LOCAL TOPICS

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
WEST BRANCH NEEDS CHILD CARE FOR CHILDREN LESS THAN 5 YEARS OF AGE.	60.00%	30.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS TO ATTRACT MORE MANUFACTURING FIRMS.	50.00%	40.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS MARKET RATE SINGLE FAMILY HOUSING.	30.00%	70.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS MARKET RATE APARTMENTS.	30.00%	60.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
DOWNTOWN WEST BRANCH HAS A GOOD MIX OF RESTAURANTS.	10.00%	90.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS TO HAVE A STRONGER COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESENCE.	30.00%	50.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS WORKFORCE HOUSING (HOUSING THAT IS AVAILABLE TO FAMILIES MAKING BETWEEN 60% AND 120% OF AREA MEDIAN INCOME)	30.00%	40.00%	30.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
WEST BRANCH NEEDS BETTER TOOLS TO ENFORCE BLIGHT AND OBSOLETE PROPERTIES.	30.00%	30.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10
DOWNTOWN WEST BRANCH HAS A GOOD MIX OF RETAIL STORES.	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	40.00%	0.00%	10
THE CITY, TOWNSHIP, AND COUNTY WORK COLLABORATIVELY TO SOLVE ISSUES	0.00%	40.0%	20.0%	40.00%	0.00%	10



4.0 FOCUS AREAS

Focus Areas

The review of existing conditions and the results of the SWOT analysis resulted in a list of focus areas that should be pursued as part of the economic development strategy. These include the following.

Housing

While the city is mostly built-out, there is a need for workforce housing within the West Branch area. Major employers in the community, especially manufacturing and health care, are experiencing job recruitment issues due to the lack of market-rate housing. The findings of the 2018 West Branch Housing Needs noted the following:

- The West Branch Area's ability to attract entry level households across the moderate-income and upper-income ranges is limited by a lack of supply for both rentals and homes for purchase, despite relatively reasonable price points across the community. These factors negate the strong level of placemaking assets found across the West Branch Area. In addition, an increasing senior segment and declining birthrates will lead a shift in the community's characteristics which may negatively impact the school system, tax base, employment base, and retail/service availability.
- Relatively few market-rate rental developments are present within the West Branch area. In addition, affordable rental developments for both open occupancy and senior occupancy are fully occupied and continue to draw strong traffic levels. Thus, future development should reflect primarily market rate options with a secondary consideration for additional affordable units to serve both the low-income and moderate-income household segments. The introduction of up to 40 units of market-rate rental housing is

strongly suggested, coupled with single-family homeownership options (single-family or duplex-style units) that reflect prevailing market conditions and demand levels.

- It is suggested that local leaders investigate the viability of forming a local entity (such as a community development corporation, 501(3)c, or similar organization) to develop housing within the community. Such an entity could be formed as a nonprofit, private/public organization, or private subsidiary of an existing organization (among other forms), potentially benefiting from direct and indirect contributions from the community. Such an entity would specifically address the needs of the community from a housing standpoint rather than pursuing the most profitable alternatives. This entity could also seek out a wide range of financing opportunities, select experienced consultants to aid in the development process, and allow for local control to remain within the community before, during, and after the development process is complete. Using such an entity may allow for cost reductions within the development process that would aid in establishing more affordable price points. The entity could also directly or informally partner with local employers to pre-lease or conditionally lease a set of units/homes for new arrivals to the community, reducing the pressure on these new residents to find a local residence.
- Long-term trends point to the need for additional senior housing options within the West Branch area. However, this demand should not be considered a primary need at this time. Future development plans for additional senior housing should be a primary need within the next five to ten years, but it is strongly recommended that a possible solution that addresses the need for workforce/market rate housing be considered first.

Child Care

Child care was noted as a critical community concern in 2018-19 during the state-initiated Project Rising Tide program. Based on the SWOT analysis and discussions with the City, this is still a critical and unresolved problem that is affecting the job market. The lack of child care is especially daunting for workers who are on flexible schedules, especially in the restaurant/hospitality and retail sectors. As noted in the IMPLAN economic model, the top employment by industry type is full-service restaurants and retail, which employ 810 employees with an economic output of \$73 million per year. This sector has experienced a growth rate of 73% and 64%, respectively, since 2019 and is expected to continue growing as development occurs at I-75 exits 212 and 215.

Higher Education

Post-high school educational opportunities are absent in the West Branch area. Kirtland Community College has closed the campus in Roscommon (23 miles from West Branch) and relocated to Grayling 42 miles away. As a result, college and career training opportunities are further which is compounded by winter driving conditions. The nearest MTEC (Michigan Technology Education Centers) is operated

by Kirtland Community College in Gaylord which is 70 miles north and a 1 ½ hour drive from West Branch. As a result, with the exception of remote learning opportunities, West Branch is in a higher education desert.

Transportation

According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), 66% of West Branch households commit between 36-45% of their annual income to housing and transportation costs. Another 33% commit between 54 to 66% of their income. Furthermore, 66% of households have between 1.0 to 1.5 cars which means travel to work can be a risk. CNT's location-efficiency metrics that evaluate places that are compact, close to jobs and services, with a variety of transportation choices, which allow people to spend less time, energy, and money on transportation, is 0% for the City of West Branch. This situation, coupled with a lack of child care, can result in issues for the employees and employers in the West Branch area.

Downtown West Branch

Downtown West Branch is the retail hub for Ogemaw County. The downtown provides an array of retail, office, and dining establishments. In 2024-2025, the



KIRTLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUS, GRAYLING MICHIGAN

downtown will undergo reconstruction of business route I-75 (Houghton Avenue) involving the reduction of 5-lanes to 3-lanes and the streetscape, resulting in larger sidewalks and better pedestrian crossings. This change will further enhance downtown as a pedestrian-scale, walkable downtown district. The housing needs assessment also indicates a market demand for upper-story apartments in the downtown which fits in with the historic context of the buildings.

Redevelopment Sites

The City of West Branch is practically built out, leaving few sites for infill redevelopment. Three sites were identified as potential redevelopment candidates, and these include the historic, former bicycle factory on 8th Street, behind Walgreens on W. Branch Drive, and the former mill site on N. 7th Street. The former bicycle factory has been acquired, and there are conceptual plans to utilize the property for light industry, indoor storage, and housing. The W. Branch Drive property can be developed as townhomes, complementing the housing development across the street.

Distributions and Logistics

The City is well positioned along the I-75 corridor to leverage opportunities for businesses seeking distribution, wholesale, and logistics operations. A two hour drive time from West Branch extends to St. Ignace to the north and down to Oakland County in southeast Michigan. In addition, the City has rail access via the Lake State Railway which extends north to Gaylord and Alpena and south to Plymouth where it connects with other rail lines to parts in the midwest.



DOWNTOWN WEST BRANCH RETAIL SHOPPING



5.0 STRATEGIES

STRATEGIES

The economic development strategy for the City of West Branch will require and rely on a number of stakeholders and partnerships. The focus areas confronting the City of West Branch comprise the same concerns of surrounding townships and Ogemaw County. The lack of workforce housing, minimal availability of child care, and few opportunities for post-high school education.

Efforts are being made to address these issues, and they are taking place on a collaborative basis. Some noteworthy stakeholders and initiatives occurring within the greater West Branch community include:

Ogemaw County Housing Committee

Recently formed by Ogemaw County, the housing committee includes representatives from Ogemaw County municipalities that meet to discuss housing issues and opportunities. The intent is address housing from a county perspective since the issue is prevalent through County and the State. The City of West Branch City Manager and Planning Commissioner are local representatives on the committee.

Ogemaw County Land Bank

The City of West Branch was instrumental in reactivating the Ogemaw County Land Bank. This was done to assist a potential housing development project on M-30 along the city's west boundary. The land bank is now positioned to assist with the disposition of tax foreclosed and blighted properties.

Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation (OCEDC)

The Ogemaw County EDC's mission is to support, promote, enhance and sustain economic development throughout the county. The OCEDC Board of Directors is comprised of regional and community leaders from both the public, non-profit, and private sectors. The organization provides business education and workforce development and is involved in solving the child care crisis. They partner with Michigan Works! Region 7B, Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), USDA Small Business Administration (SBA), USDA Rural Development Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM).

In 2023, the Ogemaw County EDC received a Rural Child Care Innovation Program (RCCIP) grant to gather data and find solutions for the childcare problem. The absence of child care was brought to light during the 2018-19 Project Rising Tide initiative funded by MEDC. Since that time, the EDC has advanced the project and now has a committee working on the project.

City of West Branch Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

In 2020, the City of West Branch established a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority pursuant to Act 381 of 1996, as amended. The purpose of the Authority is to assist with the remediation of environmentally challenged sites, assist with the removal and redevelopment of blighted properties, and the conversation of functionally obsolete properties to more productive use.



West Branch Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

The City of West Branch DDA was established in 1979 and later expanded in 1986. The DDA has an adopted Development Plan and Tax Increment Financing Plan which was updated in 2019 and identified over \$3 million in projects and program. Jointly, the West Branch, West Branch Township, and Ogemaw Township DDA's meet periodically to discuss projects and work toward common projects as trails, wayfinding and branding.

City of West Branch DDA projects include streetscape improvements, parking, construction of a public plaza, building and facade improvements, marketing vacant buildings, and coordinating a farmers market.

United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development Administration (USDA-RDA)

The City of West Branch has a working relationship with USDA-RDA who provides grants and loans for public facilities, equipment and infrastructure.

Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)

The City periodically reaches out to MEDC for technical assistance through its Community Assistance Team (CAT) representative to discuss economic-related projects and possible funding assistance. CAT representatives also have access to other development and real estate professional within MEDC that assist with a variety of redevelopment projects.



WEST BRANCH BRAND PROGRAM

HOUSING

Continue to recognize the lack of workforce housing as a County problem and work through the Ogemaw County Housing Committee to develop strategies to provide more housing opportunities.

Build a working relationship with the property owner on W. Branch Drive to determine their level of interest to market the property for duplex or multi-family housing.	City, working in collaboration with local Realtor	2024-2025
The opening of a Meijer Store on business loop I-75 near exit 215 will likely leverage more development opportunities. Working with Ogemaw Township identify potential properties that could accommodate new housing and determine the likelihood of infrastructure expansion. Consider when possible the use of Act 425 Conditional Land Transfer to assist with implementation.	City of West Branch and Ogemaw Township	2026-2028
Identify downtown building owners that would be interested in the conversion of upper story space to residential apartments. Work with MEDC of potential funding assistance.	City, West Branch DDA, and MEDC CAT	2025
Conduct an inventory throughout the City to determine the location and feasibility for single site residential infill. Utilize the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority to implement a tax increment financing plan to assist with the development of residential housing.	City and City of West Branch Brownfield Authority	2025-2027
Local health care is paramount to the City and County. Solicit McLaren Health System and MyMichigan Health Care to commit to renting apartments for nursing and physician staff in order to solicit a housing developer to build needed market rate apartments. Utilize tax incentives and abatements where possible to reduce development and construction costs.	City and County Housing Commission	2024-2025
Initiate targeted code enforcement using the International Property Maintenance Code to combat housing quality decline and lack of maintenance.	City	2025-2028

CHILD CARE

Work with the Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation to resolve the child care problem.

The lack of child care will impact local job vacancies and may lead to reduced hours, especially in the retail and restaurant sectors. Actively participate in OCEDC efforts to find child care options for local employers. Support, when needed, efforts to procure state and federal funding to provide these services.	City and the Ogemaw County EDC	On-Going
--	--------------------------------	----------

HIGHER EDUCATION

Kirtland Community College does not appear to be a partner to provide higher education and career training in Ogemaw County.

Retain the services of an educational consultant to determine the demand and feasibility to establish a small university center in West Branch that offers course and training from state universities, much like the University Center in Gaylord and Traverse City.	City and the Ogemaw County EDC	2025-2026
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LOGISTICS and DISTRIBUTION

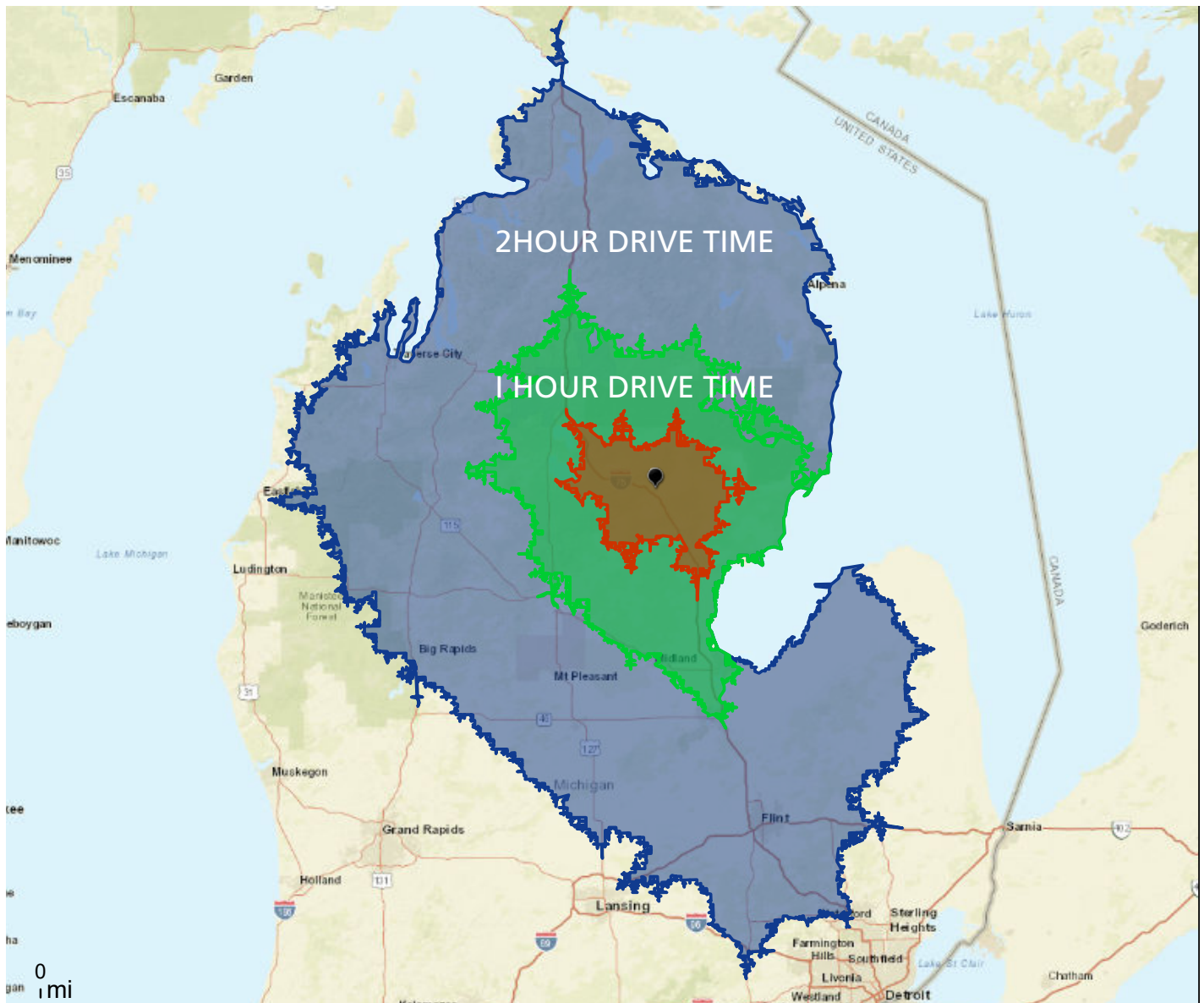
The City is located on the I-75 and Lake State Railroad. Within a 1 hour drive time, there are 536 manufacturing businesses, 440 wholesale operations, and 2,115 retail stores. This number exponentially increases to 3,000 manufacturing enterprises, 2,404 wholesale trade operations, and 11,326 retail businesses, which require shipping and deliveries. By 2028, within a 1 and 2 hour drive times of West Branch, there is anticipated to be 141,019 and 869,215 households, respectively. Again, with remote e-commerce shopping on the rise and daily household products and groceries growing with an increase in households, additional distribution and logistic centers will be required. Based on the City's location in central Michigan with dual exit access to I-75, the greater West Branch area should sell itself as a logistics and distribution center.

Create marketing materials with a focus on logistics and distribution opportunities. This material would highlight location, nearby markets (i.e. Bay City/Saginaw/Midland, Traverse City, Gaylord and Alpena), access, incentives, and workforce profile.

City and the
Ogemaw County
EDC

2025-2026

MAP 6: 30 MINUTE, 1 HOUR, AND 2 HOUR DRIVE TIMES

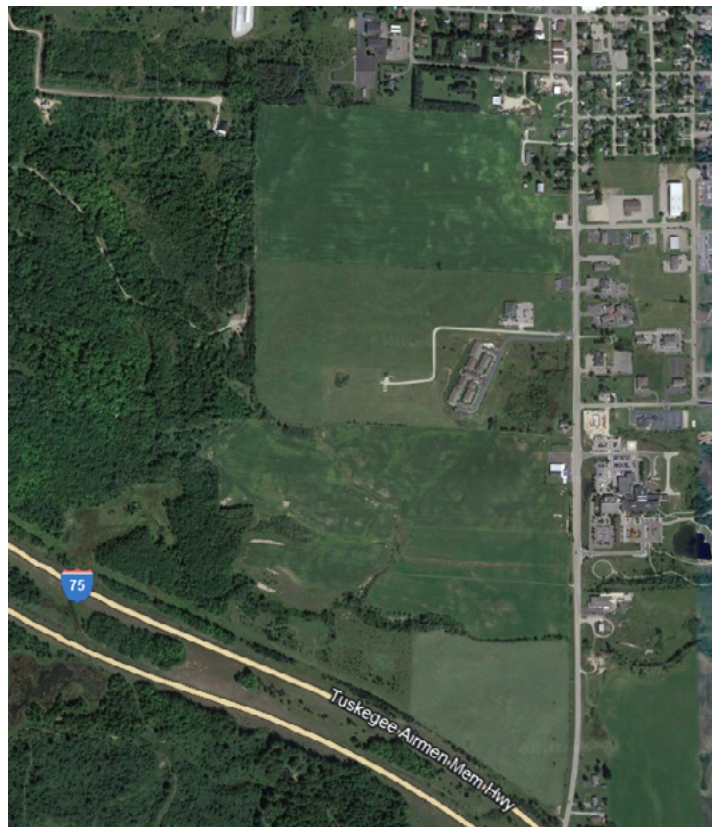


DEVELOPMENT and REDEVELOPMENT

The City of West Branch has limited opportunities to accommodate new residential development. There are several redevelopment sites identified that are all under private ownership as well as some single lot infill properties for single family homes. There are some properties available within the industrial areas of the City; however, larger development will likely occur outside the current city limits. The City and the adjacent townships recognize what is good for one is good for all, in terms of development. While the City is the governmental seat of Ogemaw County and supports a viable downtown, West Branch Township has maximized opportunities at the I-75 exit 212 interchange for retail / restaurant operations that cater to transient highway traffic, and big (Walmart) and medium (Aldi) box retail stores. Ogemaw Township is now the recipient of a Meijers Store at the I-75 exit 215 interchange and this investment will like be followed in the future by additional stores, food service businesses, and possibly another hotel.

Continuation of the I-75 business loop wayfinding system that connects I-75 exit 212 with exit 215, and runs through West Branch Township, the City of West Branch, and Ogemaw Township based on the West Branch branding program.	City of West Branch DDA, West Branch Township DDA, and Ogemaw Township DDA	2024-2026
The City of West should collaborate with Ogemaw Township on the possible extension of water and sanitary sewer to assist with planned growth on the City's east boundary along M-30. Further, the City and Township should consider continuation of Act 425 Conditional Land Transfers to provide infrastructure and other public facilities.	City of West Branch and Ogemaw Township	Ongoing
The City and Ogemaw Township should jointly prepare an M-30 corridor plan that manages potential growth along this corridor, and recommends flexible zoning provisions that encourages quality development.	City of West Branch and Ogemaw Township	2024-2025

FIGURE 11: M-30 CORRIDOR



SUPPLEMENTAL

6.0 SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS



Retail Demand Outlook

48661 (West Branch) 2
48661 (West Branch)
Geography: ZIP Code

Prepared by Beckett & Raeder, Inc.

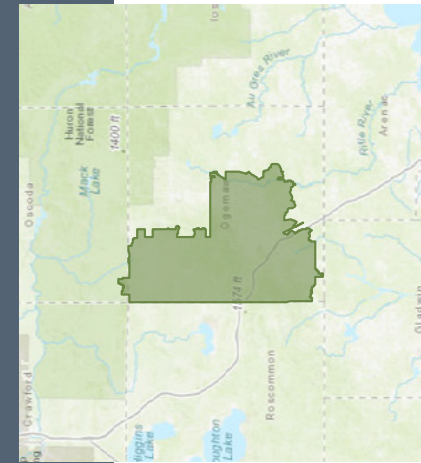
Top Tapestry Segments	Percen	Demographic Summary	2023	2028
Rural Resort Dwellers (6E)	29.0%	Population	10,463	10,397
Small Town Sincerity (12C)	27.2%	Households	4,602	4,611
Rooted Rural (10B)	23.3%	Families	2,925	2,919
Midlife Constants (5E)	12.4%	Median Age	48.2	48.8
Southern Satellites (10A)	8.2%	Median Household	\$52,545	\$60,514
		2023	2028	Projected
		Consumer Spending	Forecasted Demand	Spending Growth
Apparel and Services		\$6,382,802	\$7,352,166	\$969,364
Men's		\$1,155,317	\$1,330,676	\$175,359
Women's		\$2,205,768	\$2,540,476	\$334,708
Children's		\$1,008,927	\$1,162,189	\$153,262
Footwear		\$1,393,921	\$1,605,369	\$211,448
Watches & Jewelry		\$491,675	\$566,967	\$75,292
Apparel Products and Services (1)		\$127,195	\$146,489	\$19,294
Computer				
Computers and Hardware for Home Use		\$705,212	\$811,993	\$106,781
Portable Memory		\$14,655	\$16,865	\$2,210
Computer Software		\$39,947	\$45,944	\$5,997
Computer Accessories		\$75,762	\$87,192	\$11,430
Entertainment & Recreation		\$13,472,459	\$15,508,896	\$2,036,437
Fees and Admissions		\$1,760,197	\$2,027,380	\$267,183
Membership Fees for Clubs (2)		\$718,698	\$827,902	\$109,204
Fees for Participant Sports, excl. Trips		\$299,802	\$345,184	\$45,382
Tickets to Theatre/Operas/Concerts		\$141,533	\$163,055	\$21,522
Tickets to Movies		\$63,550	\$73,188	\$9,638
Tickets to Parks or Museums		\$76,800	\$88,495	\$11,695
Admission to Sporting Events, excl. Trips		\$154,421	\$177,943	\$23,522
Fees for Recreational Lessons		\$303,185	\$349,069	\$45,884
Dating Services		\$2,207	\$2,544	\$337
TV/Video/Audio		\$5,007,134	\$5,766,018	\$758,884
Cable and Satellite Television Services		\$3,476,778	\$4,003,789	\$527,011
Televisions		\$483,768	\$556,969	\$73,201
Satellite Dishes		\$5,829	\$6,724	\$895
VCRs, Video Cameras, and DVD Players		\$14,399	\$16,579	\$2,180
Miscellaneous Video Equipment		\$30,444	\$35,088	\$4,644
Video Cassettes and DVDs		\$19,996	\$23,019	\$3,023
Video Game Hardware/Accessories		\$126,041	\$145,125	\$19,084
Video Game Software		\$58,309	\$67,135	\$8,826
Rental/Streaming/Downloaded Video		\$374,199	\$430,843	\$56,644
Installation of Televisions		\$3,850	\$4,428	\$578
Audio (3)		\$399,278	\$459,875	\$60,597
Rental and Repair of TV/Radio/Sound Equipment		\$14,244	\$16,443	\$2,199
Pets		\$3,999,284	\$4,600,871	\$601,587
Toys/Games/Crafts/Hobbies (4)		\$535,945	\$616,856	\$80,911
Recreational Vehicles and Fees (5)		\$654,451	\$753,023	\$98,572
Sports/Recreation/Exercise Equipment (6)		\$901,399	\$1,037,919	\$136,520
Photo Equipment and Supplies (7)		\$133,099	\$153,222	\$20,123
Reading (8)		\$406,368	\$467,732	\$61,364
Catered Affairs (9)		\$74,582	\$85,874	\$11,292
Food		\$34,744,895	\$40,013,504	\$5,268,609
Food at Home		\$23,374,878	\$26,917,113	\$3,542,235
Bakery and Cereal Products		\$3,068,633	\$3,533,884	\$465,251
Meats, Poultry, Fish, and Eggs		\$5,035,890	\$5,799,618	\$763,728
Dairy Products		\$2,324,025	\$2,675,448	\$351,423
Fruits and Vegetables		\$4,400,338	\$5,066,940	\$666,602
Snacks and Other Food at Home (10)		\$8,545,991	\$9,841,223	\$1,295,232
Food Away from Home		\$11,370,017	\$13,096,391	\$1,726,374
Alcoholic Beverages		\$1,943,868	\$2,237,946	\$294,078

Data Note: The Consumer Spending data is household-based and represents the amount spent for a product or service by all households in an area. Detail may not sum to totals due to rounding. This report is not a comprehensive list of all consumer spending variables therefore the variables in each section may not sum to totals.
Source: Esri forecasts for 2023 and 2028; Consumer Spending data are derived from the 2019 and 2020 Consumer Expenditure Surveys, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

At Risk Population

48661 (West Branch) 3
 48661 (West Branch)
 Geography: ZIP Code

Prepared by Beckett & Reeder, Inc.



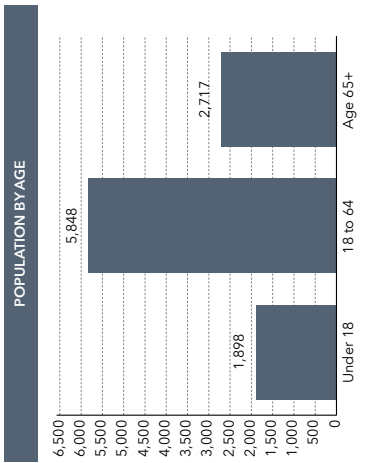
AT RISK POPULATION PROFILE

48661 (West Branch) 3



Geography: ZIP Code

10,463	4,602	2.24	48.2	\$52,545	\$161,573	63	126	15
Population	Households	Avg Size Household	Median Age	Median Household Income	Median Home Value	Wealth Index	Housing Affordability	Diversity Index
1,609	2,717	277	277					
Households With Disability	Population 65+	Households Without Vehicle	Households Without Vehicle					
AT RISK POPULATION								
			POVERTY AND LANGUAGE					
13%	601	0	Households Below the Poverty Level	Households Below the Poverty Level	Pop 65+ Speak Spanish & No English			
POPULATION AND BUSINESSES								
			6,236					
12,151	646	6,236	Total Employees					
Daytime Population	Total Businesses	Total Employees						



Source: This infographic contains data provided by Esri (2023, 2028), ACS (2017-2021), Esri-Data Axle (2023).
 Source: This infographic contains data provided by Esri (2023, 2028), ACS (2017-2021), Esri-Data Axle (2023).
 © 2024 Esri

What's in My Community?

48661 (West Branch) 2

48661 (West Branch)

Geography: ZIP Code

Prepared by Beckett & Raeder, Inc.

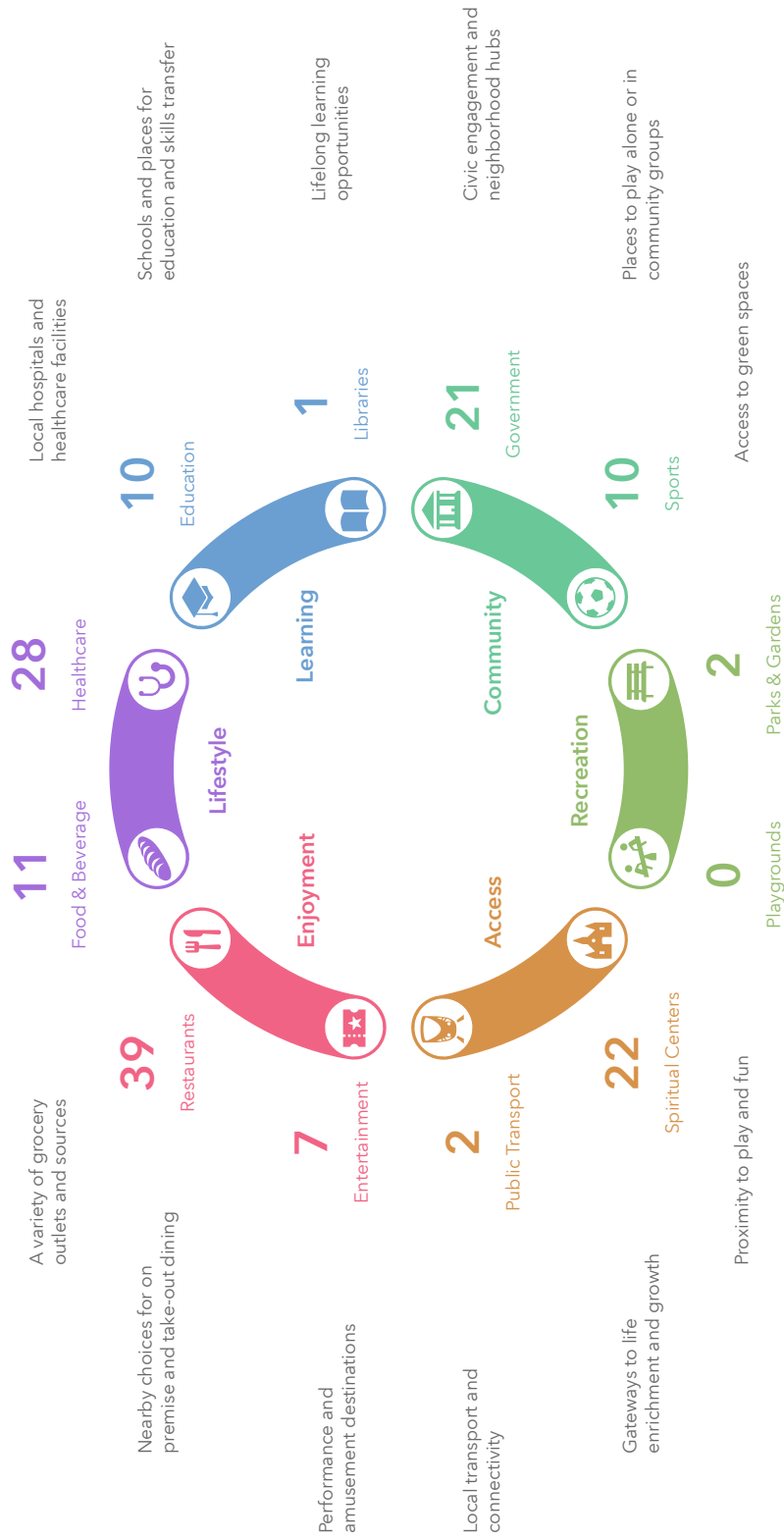


What's in My Community?

Places that make your life richer and community better

48661 (West Branch) 2

48661 (West Branch) 2



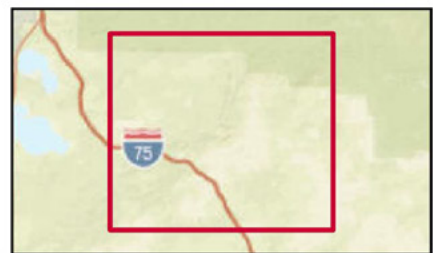
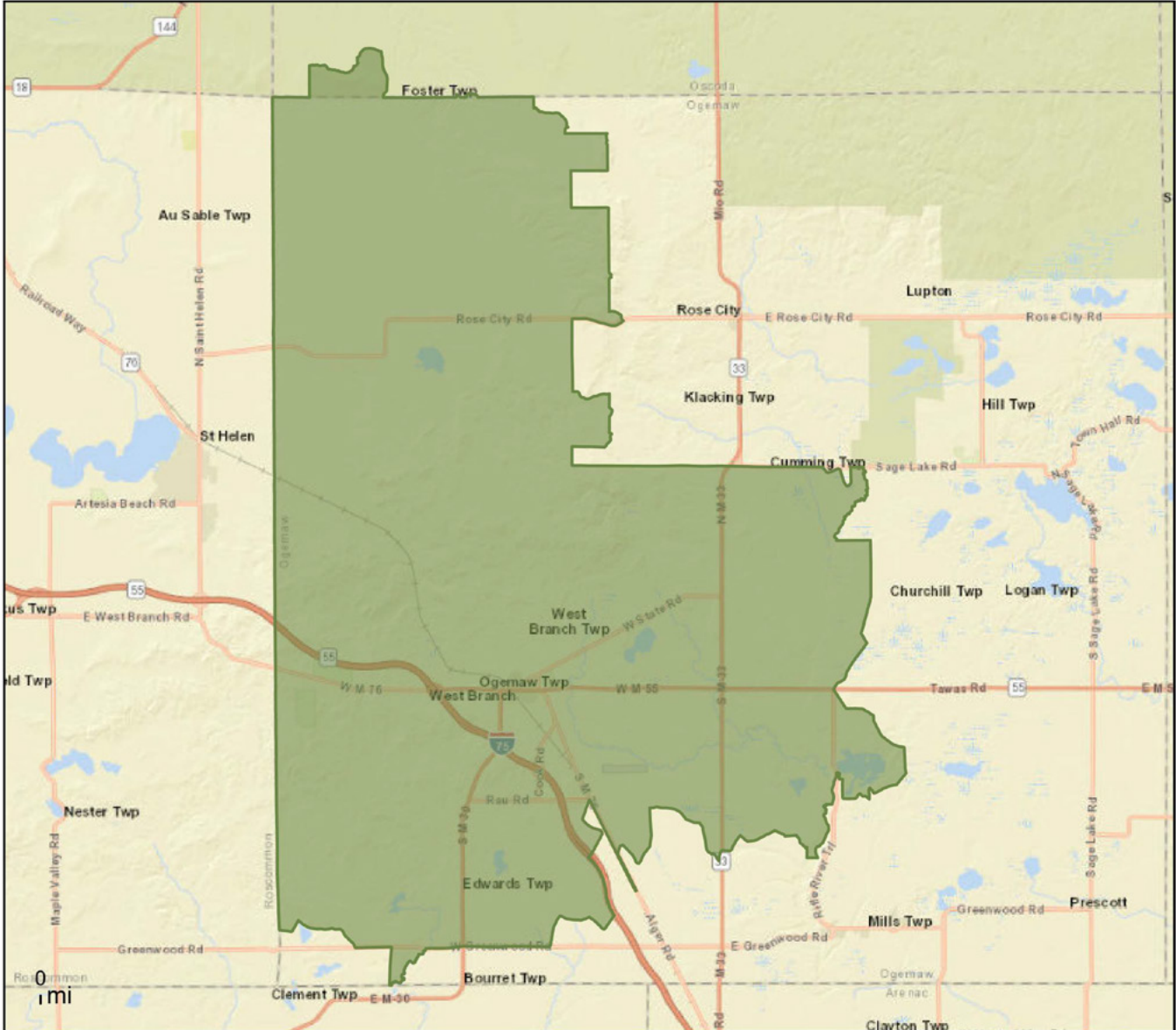
This infographic was inspired by the visionary [Plan Melbourne](#) and the hyper proximity 20-minute neighbourhoods concept. Points of interest are grouped into civic themes which contribute to livability and community engagement.

Points of interest are sourced from [Foursquare](#) and updated quarterly. Each category shows a max of 1250 locations.

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48661 (West Branch) 2
48661 (West Branch)
Geography: ZIP Code

Prepared by Beckett & Raeder, Inc.

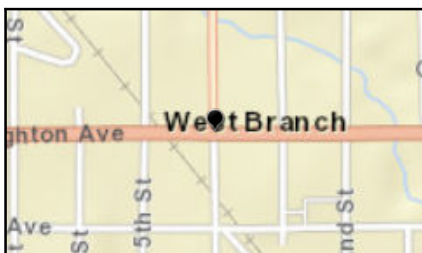
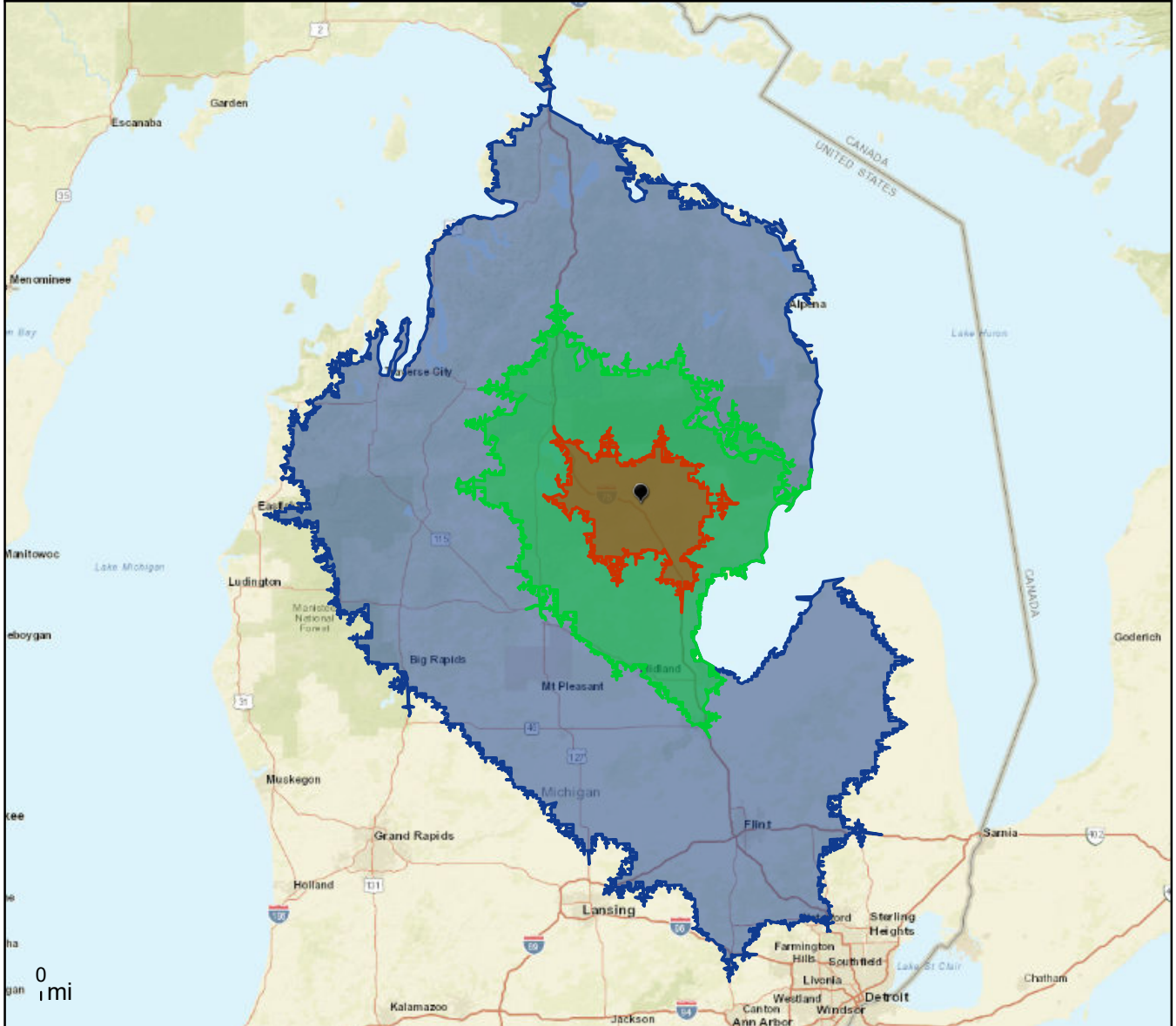


February 08, 2024

Site Map

100-114 N 4th St 3
100-114 N 4th St, West Branch, Michigan, 48661
Drive time: 30, 60, 120 minute radii

Prepared by Beckett & Raeder, Inc.
Latitude: 44.27630
Longitude: -84.23987



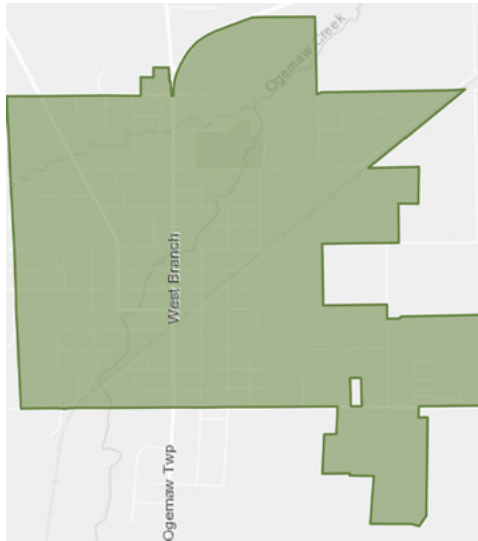
March 20, 2024

Business Analyst

City of West Branch

West Branch City, MI
 West Branch City, MI (2685580)
 Geography: Place

Prepared by Beckett & Raeder, Inc.

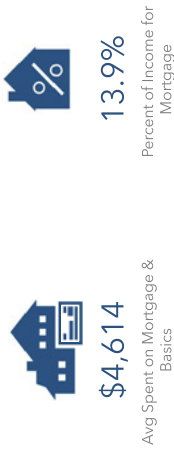


POPULATION TRENDS AND KEY INDICATORS

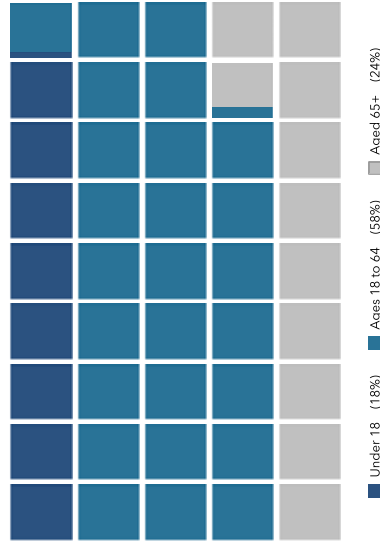
West Branch City, MI

Population	2,120	1,011	1.97	44.3	\$31,137	\$88,478	35	177	16
Avg Size Household	Households	Median Age	Median Household Income	Median Home Value	Wealth Index	Housing Affordability	Diversity Index		

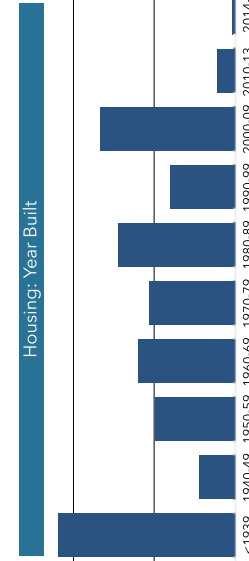
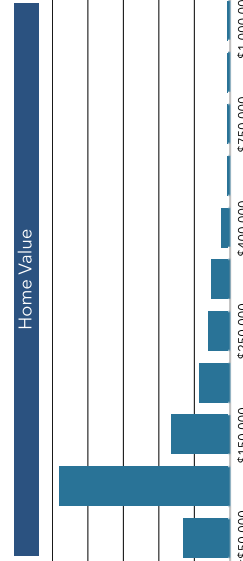
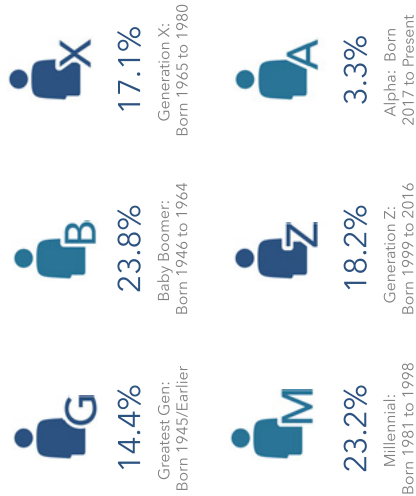
MORTGAGE INDICATORS



POPULATION BY AGE



POPULATION BY GENERATION



Beckett & Raeder

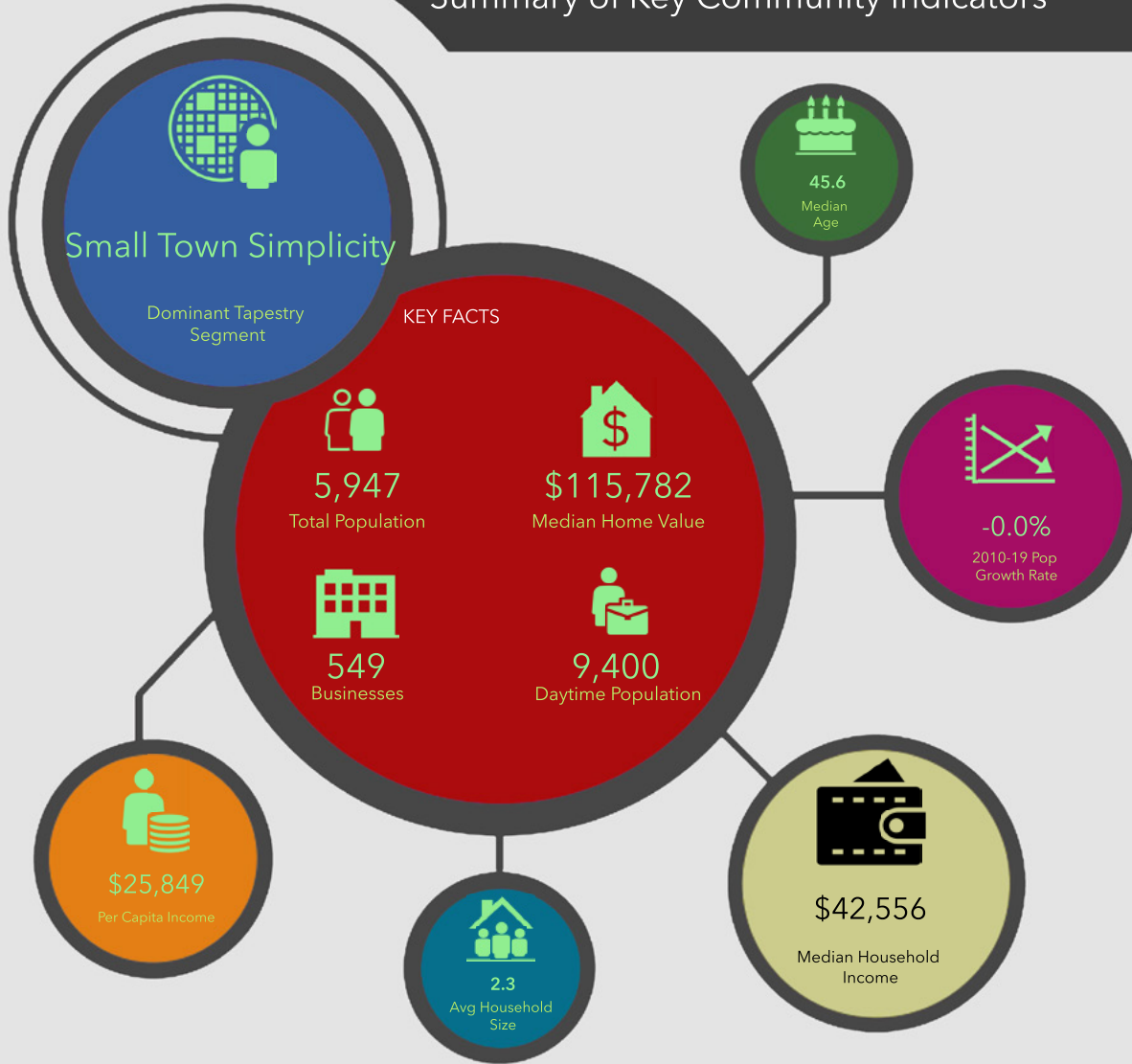
Source: This infographic contains data provided by American Community Survey (ACS), Esri, and Bureau of Labor Statistics. The vintage of the data is 2013-2017, 2019, 2024.

Greater West Branch Area

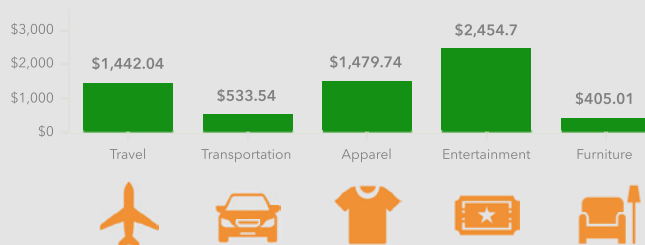
3 County Subdivisions
Ogemaw township, MI (2612960300) et al.
Geography: County Subdivision

Prepared by Beckett & Raeder, Inc.

Summary of Key Community Indicators



KEY SPENDING FACTS



Beckett & Raeder

© Esri 2019
Spending facts are average annual dollars per household

Source: This infographic contains data provided by Esri, Esri and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Esri and Infogroup. The vintage of the data is 2019, 2024.

100-114 N 4th St 3
100-114 N 4th St, West Branch, Michigan, 48661
Drive time: 30, 60, 120 minute radii

Prepared by Beckett & Raeder, Inc.
Latitude: 44.27630
Longitude: -84.23987

	30 minutes			60 minutes			120 minutes		
	Businesses Number	Employees Number	Percent	Businesses Number	Employees Number	Percent	Businesses Number	Employees Number	Percent
Data for all businesses in area									
Total Businesses:	1,844	15,873		12,974	75,074		13,849	13,849	1.5%
Total Employees:	15,873	42,219		163,110	905,594		905,594	905,594	3.8%
Total Residential Population:	42,219	38		316,650	2,064,823		2,064,823	2,064,823	10.0%
Employee/Residential Population Ratio (per 100 Residents)	38			52	44		44	44	0.6%
by SIC Codes									
Agriculture & Mining	66	329	2.1%	369	2,011	1.2%	2,427	13,849	1.5%
Construction	137	603	3.8%	844	5,805	3.6%	5,462	34,503	3.8%
Manufacturing	60	1,026	6.5%	498	17,763	10.9%	2,767	90,152	10.0%
Transportation	50	289	1.8%	413	7,097	4.4%	2,107	25,768	2.8%
Communication	12	62	0.4%	113	1,058	0.6%	612	5,349	0.6%
Utility	5	17	0.1%	57	530	0.3%	294	3,250	0.4%
Wholesale Trade	45	244	1.5%	442	6,423	3.9%	2,424	31,985	3.5%
Retail Trade Summary	450	5,035	31.7%	2,967	38,554	23.6%	16,035	205,027	22.6%
Home Improvement	34	512	3.2%	210	2,646	1.6%	1,204	15,180	1.7%
General Merchandise Stores	29	155	1.2%	155	4,331	2.7%	758	18,986	2.1%
Food Stores	53	752	4.7%	369	5,266	3.2%	1,947	32,331	3.6%
Auto Dealers & Gas Stations	87	829	5.2%	423	5,111	3.1%	2,183	26,141	2.9%
Apparel & Accessory Stores	10	39	0.2%	113	768	0.5%	671	4,108	0.5%
Furniture & Home Furnishings	22	64	0.4%	172	1,245	0.8%	920	6,290	0.7%
Eating & Drinking Places	104	1,539	9.7%	779	13,243	8.1%	4,256	70,713	7.8%
Miscellaneous Retail	111	649	4.1%	747	5,943	3.6%	4,096	31,277	3.5%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate Summary	149	689	4.3%	1,000	6,217	3.8%	6,179	42,150	4.7%
Banks, Savings & Lending Institutions	39	251	1.6%	239	2,110	1.3%	1,379	12,789	1.4%
Securities Brokers	8	25	0.2%	127	847	0.5%	813	4,069	0.4%
Insurance Carriers & Agents	32	148	0.9%	190	942	0.6%	1,303	8,371	0.9%
Real Estate, Holding, Other Investment Offices	69	265	1.7%	444	2,318	1.4%	2,685	16,920	1.9%
Services Summary	653	6,132	38.6%	5,038	67,542	41.4%	29,859	398,846	44.0%
Hotels & Lodging	47	374	2.4%	256	2,462	1.5%	1,090	17,655	1.9%
Automotive Services	62	234	1.5%	408	1,996	1.2%	2,386	11,809	1.3%
Movies & Amusements	33	277	1.7%	297	2,560	1.6%	1,836	25,086	2.8%
Health Services	127	2,058	13.0%	975	26,768	16.4%	5,305	138,523	15.3%
Legal Services	11	25	0.2%	130	722	0.4%	960	4,315	0.5%
Education Institutions & Libraries	35	1,546	9.7%	332	13,451	8.2%	2,031	73,729	8.1%
Other Services	338	1,618	10.2%	2,639	19,583	12.0%	16,250	127,729	14.1%
Government	169	1,404	8.8%	849	9,791	6.0%	3,878	51,982	5.7%
Unclassified Establishments	49	43	0.3%	385	320	0.2%	3,029	2,734	0.3%
Totals	1,844	15,873	100.0%	12,974	163,110	100.0%	75,074	905,594	100.0%

Source: Copyright 2023 Data Axle, Inc. All rights reserved. Esri Total Residential Population forecasts for 2023.
Date Note: Data on the Business Summary report is calculated using Esri's Data Allocation method which uses census block groups to allocate business summary data to custom areas.

100-114 N 4th St 2
 100-114 N 4th St, West Branch, Michigan, 48661
 Drive time: 60, 120, 180 minute radii

Prepared by Beckett & Raeder, Inc.
 Latitude: 44.27629
 Longitude: -84.23988

	60 minutes	120 minutes	180 minutes
Population			
2010 Population	334,149	2,109,435	8,852,374
2020 Population	321,570	2,082,844	9,029,003
2023 Population	319,976	2,077,656	9,043,239
2028 Population	317,224	2,065,265	9,023,718
2010-2020 Annual Rate	-0.38%	-0.13%	0.20%
2020-2023 Annual Rate	-0.15%	-0.08%	0.05%
2023-2028 Annual Rate	-0.17%	-0.12%	-0.04%
2020 Male Population	49.5%	49.5%	49.2%
2020 Female Population	50.5%	50.5%	50.8%
2020 Median Age	46.3	43.3	39.8
2023 Male Population	49.8%	49.7%	49.2%
2023 Female Population	50.2%	50.3%	50.8%
2023 Median Age	46.7	43.5	40.9

In the identified area, the current year population is 9,043,239. In 2020, the Census count in the area was 9,029,003. The rate of change since 2020 was 0.05% annually. The five-year projection for the population in the area is 9,023,718 representing a change of -0.04% annually from 2023 to 2028. Currently, the population is 49.2% male and 50.8% female.

Median Age

The median age in this area is 40.9, compared to U.S. median age of 39.1.

Race and Ethnicity

2023 White Alone	87.2%	83.7%	71.8%
2023 Black Alone	4.4%	7.0%	15.2%
2023 American Indian/Alaska Native Alone	0.5%	0.7%	0.6%
2023 Asian Alone	0.8%	1.0%	3.6%
2023 Pacific Islander Alone	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2023 Other Race	1.3%	1.5%	2.2%
2023 Two or More Races	5.7%	6.1%	6.6%
2023 Hispanic Origin (Any Race)	4.7%	4.7%	5.9%

Persons of Hispanic origin represent 5.9% of the population in the identified area compared to 19.4% of the U.S. population. Persons of Hispanic Origin may be of any race. The Diversity Index, which measures the probability that two people from the same area will be from different race/ethnic groups, is 51.6 in the identified area, compared to 72.1 for the U.S. as a whole.

Households

2023 Wealth Index	66	79	92
2010 Households	139,431	837,535	3,465,099
2020 Households	139,769	857,191	3,618,840
2023 Households	140,352	863,231	3,651,554
2028 Households	141,019	869,215	3,684,283
2010-2020 Annual Rate	0.02%	0.23%	0.44%
2020-2023 Annual Rate	0.13%	0.22%	0.28%
2023-2028 Annual Rate	0.09%	0.14%	0.18%
2023 Average Household Size	2.24	2.36	2.42

The household count in this area has changed from 3,618,840 in 2020 to 3,651,554 in the current year, a change of 0.28% annually. The five-year projection of households is 3,684,283, a change of 0.18% annually from the current year total. Average household size is currently 2.42, compared to 2.44 in the year 2020. The number of families in the current year is 2,304,750 in the specified area.

Data Note: Income is expressed in current dollars. Housing Affordability Index and Percent of Income for Mortgage calculations are only available for areas with 50 or more owner-occupied housing units. The Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Esri forecasts for 2023 and 2028. Esri converted Census 2010 into 2020 geography and Census 2020 data.

