

Tri-County Regional Growth Plan:  
*Choices for Our Future...*  
*Reassessment*



Michigan State University  
Urban & Regional Planning Practicum - Spring 2011

Anita Blout, Benjamin Glendening, Jared Talaga,  
Jon Matle, Matthew Williams, & Qiao Xu

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## Executive Summary

The regional growth reassessment project focuses on the Tri-County Regional Growth Initiative. The borders of the initiative are limited to Clinton, Eaton and Ingham counties and all connected communities. In partnership with the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission and Harmony Gmazel (TCRPC Land Use Planner, AICP), the MSU Urban and Regional Planning Practicum Team has reassessed Tri-County's existing *Regional Growth: Choices for Our Future*, which was adopted in 2005. The client asked the team to formulate a method for reassessing this initiative and to offer recommendations for improvement based off the findings.

The team reviewed TCPRC documents and current implementation activities being carried out throughout the region. The documents included: the RGI Summary Report, the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan, 2004 Focus Group Visual Choice Summary findings, the Greening Mid-Michigan project, the Urban Service Boundary project, and the Land Use and Health Resource Team. Information obtained from these is beneficial to understanding the scope of the reassessment process.

The RGI Reassessment Team based the reassessment on the RGI's five core themes and twenty-nine principles. The team evaluated the effectiveness and level of implementation of these themes and principles could be completed through a survey sent to individual community planning offices, face to face interviews with regional stakeholders, and a RGI Reassessment Workshop conducted by the team.

Creating and completing the team's survey was essential to the success of the project. The Reassessment team went through the process of formulating specific questions for the survey. The survey included questions that gauged the profile of respondents, questions that pertained to the RGI's 5 themes and 29 principles and questions that offered respondents a chance to give feedback specifically related to their perceived successes of the RGI and how it has shaped their local land use policy. The questions consisted of multiple choice, sliding scale and open-ended responses. There were 53 surveys sent out and the team received 33 responses for a response rate of 62%. These responses were analyzed and used to make recommendations to the client.

The team conducted personal interviews with select scenario planning and regional growth experts, local developers, and two communities that have yet to formally adopt the Regional Growth Initiative. These interviews were conducted in order to obtain a more comprehensive view of the extent, strengths, limitations and outreach of the plan. Experts shared their working knowledge of the current applicability, appropriateness and level of integration of the RGI's themes and principles, and also gave insight on possible points of improvement for the plan. Throughout the developer interviews, the team sought insight on finding out whether or not communities are integrating the RGI at a policy level, and if these developers are adopting the principles set forth in the RGI. Based on their

responses, developers indicated that they are not educated on the RGI or its subsequent programs. Lastly, representatives reported on the barriers keeping their communities from formally adopting it. Through this set of interviews, interviewees reported that there is a lack of education of the RGI and room for improvement on communication between local planners.

In mid-April 2011, a RGI Reassessment Workshop was held where the team presented the project's findings to date and the team's preliminary recommendations. The goal of the round table discussions was to receive public input and to further back up our recommendations. Also obtained through this process was an updated consensus of the state of the RGI among local planning professionals.

A culmination of all the findings and analyses from the online survey, personal interviews, and the RGI Reassessment Workshop led to a comprehensive, well formulated list of recommendations for the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission to consider. These included:

- Ongoing Updates to the RGI
- Increase Awareness & Involvement in the RGI
- Enhance the RGI's Image
- Emerging Concerns in Tri-County Region

Throughout the reassessment process, the practicum team received useful and pertinent insight on how to promote the RGI and increase its effectiveness. Susan Pigg describes the RGI as a "living, breathing entity, with the ability to adapt and grow," and through projects to revisit it such as this, the RGI can hone in on its intended purpose and its goals and objectives can come to fruition. Based on survey responses, communities in the Tri-County region are aligning themselves with the principles put forth in the RGI and are thinking regionally, as opposed to individually. Experts, developers, and representatives of communities reported benefits to a regional mindset, and focus group participants responded with the idea that things that benefit their community also benefit the region, and things that benefit the region will benefit their community. Mid-Michigan is a unique region with assets that are specific to its communities, and maintaining the advantages, while diminishing the disadvantages, is important to all regional stakeholders. With recommendations coming from an extensive online survey, personal interviews, and research on similar regional growth efforts, the Reassessment team intends to help TCRPC build upon their projects in the future implementation of the RGI, allowing the Tri-County region to maintain its unique assets and quality of life.

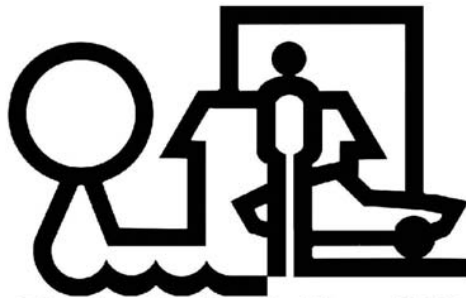
## Part I: Introduction

### The Practicum Team

This report was compiled by a team of Michigan State University, Urban and Regional Planning students to fulfill the requirements of their senior planning practicum course. Urban and Regional Planning is an accredited field of study offered by the School of Planning, Design and Construction. Undergraduate and graduate planning students comprise the group. In order to graduate, the student must complete and pass this course where they work closely with a client who has presented a planning project in their respective discipline. The faculty in Urban and Regional Planning are unanimous in their support of the practicum as an important method for integrating knowledge acquired in previous planning courses to real world situations. This experience is essential in the progression from student to trained practitioner. In order to complete this report, the students worked with their client, the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC).

### Client Profile

The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission is a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) entity recognized by the state of Michigan. The TCRPC supports the mid-Michigan region comprised of Clinton, Eaton and Ingham counties. TCRPC began in 1956 as one of



Planning for People Since 1956

adopted by TCRPC in 2005.

the first MPOs in the nation. The Commission promotes six main program areas including transportation planning, land use planning, economic development, environmental planning and data systems management. The transportation and land use programs promote a scenario based planning initiative as the basis for all major policy decisions for TCRPC. This initiative, known as Regional Growth Choices for Our Future, was

The TCRPC's Mission Statement is as follows:

“The mission of the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission is to provide professional planning, coordinating and advisory services to local governments, state and federal agencies and the public in order to preserve and enhance quality of life in mid-Michigan.”

## Project Goal

The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission has asked the MSU Urban Practicum Group (Regional Growth Initiative Reassessment Team) to review “Regional Growth: Choices for Our Future,” and to assess its successes, and to identify shortcomings within the Regional Growth Initiative.

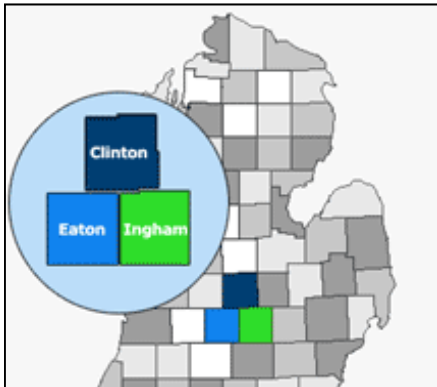
The Regional Growth Initiative (RGI) is comprised of demographic and land use analyses culminating in 29 principles for shaping land use policies, which were categorized into 5 themes. In order to efficiently assess the success of the Regional Growth Initiative and its guiding themes and principles, the RGI Reassessment Team has:

1. Summarized the projects to date that have occurred as implementation activities of the RGI.
2. Conducted an online survey of communities in the region to assess their utilization and understanding of the RGI.
3. Team members also conducted face-to-face interviews with local RGI stakeholders identified by TCRPC, including: planning experts in the region who’ve had significant involvement in the creation of the plan, as well as developers in the region, and communities who have yet to adopt the plan.
4. Reviewed the 2004 Visual Choice preferences obtained from original public input sessions.

By revisiting the Regional Growth Plan after 5 years, the RGI Reassessment Team intends to assist the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission by making recommendations to make the RGI a more succinct, attractive and effective initiative.

## Part II: RGI Background & Related Activities

The Tri-County region is located in Mid-Michigan and includes the Lansing Metropolitan area, as well as Ingham, Eaton and Clinton Counties (Figure 1). In 2000 the region's



population was 447,734 and by 2035 the population of the region is projected to be 561,705. The population growth between 1990 and 2000 occurred mainly in urban fringe areas, while city centers either remained stagnant or lost population (Figure 2). In addition, between 1978 and 1999, approximately 100 square miles of additional agricultural land was developed into primarily residential uses (Figure 3). This converted agricultural land is equal to about 3.3 townships, or greater than one township per county.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1: (Source: <http://www.greaterlansingurbanservice.org>)

The effect of this land use transformation manifests itself in the form of land use planning, social equity and public policy issues, as well as environmental degradation. If this trend continues, conversion of land into urbanized area will occur more rapidly than population growth. If available resources are not proportionate to the rate of growth, the area will not be able to remain economically or environmentally sustainable. New development outside of existing urban areas presents large costs for communities by requiring expensive public utilities expansion, increased strain on fire and police services, and all the while existing infrastructure is being underutilized and neglected.

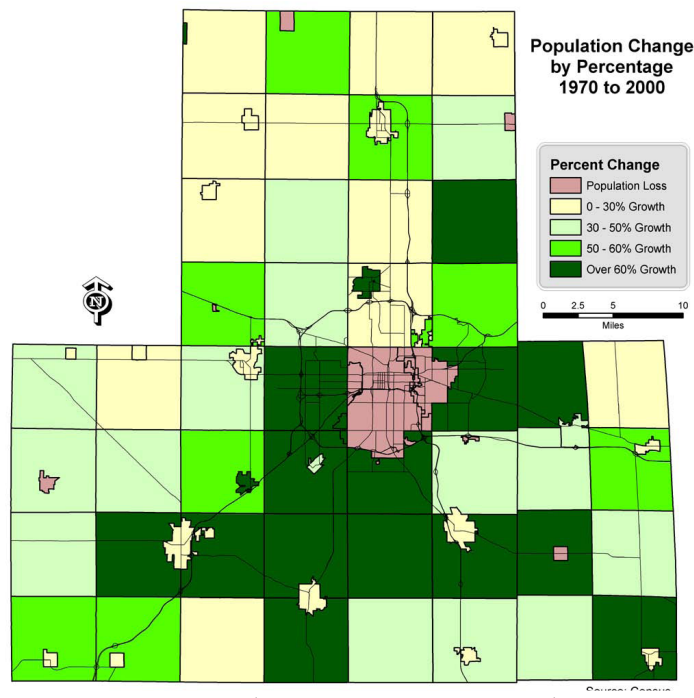


Figure 2: (pg. 5, RGI Summary Report)

<sup>1</sup> (Residential Change, 1978-1999, p. 7. "Tri-County Regional Growth: Choices for Our Future" Summary Report for the Lansing Metropolitan Area).



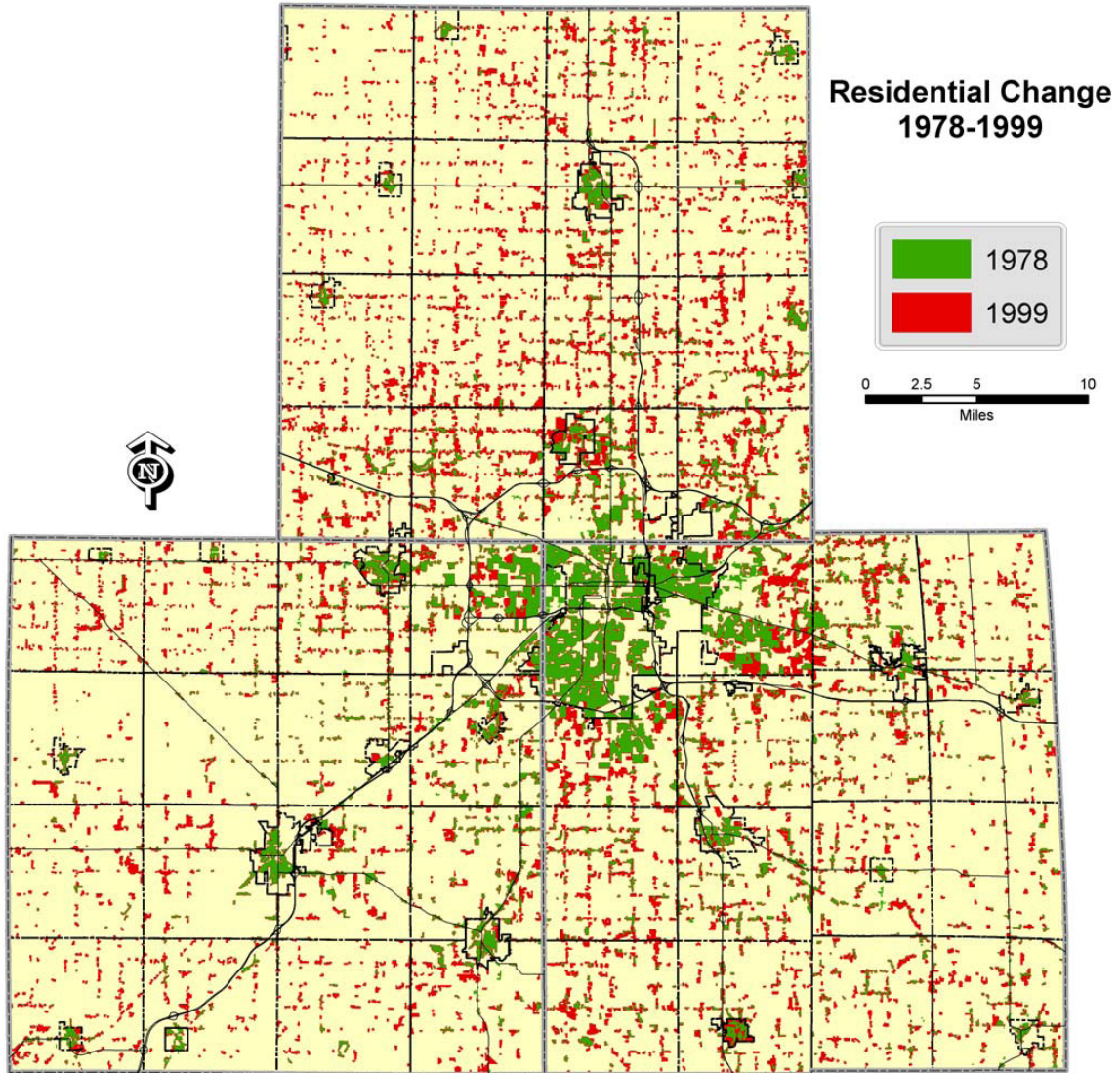


Figure 3: (pg. 7, RGI Summary Report)

## Tri-County Regional Growth Initiative Creation

Regional cooperation is the key to controlling excessive build out, and through implementing regional visions and policies the quality of life for citizens of the region can be preserved and maintained. To address the challenge of transforming the Tri-County region into a sustainable region and to maintaining a higher quality of life, the TCRPC formulated the “*Tri-County Regional Growth: Choices for Our Future*” Summary Report in 2005.

The mission of the RGI is to:

...actively engage the region’s citizens to examine implications of regional land use and other growth trends on the region's future. The project formulated consensus on a shared vision of regional growth in order to assure an improved future regional quality of life.<sup>2</sup>

During the planning phases (1999-2004) of the Summary Report, roughly 1,500 public representatives, including academia, private sector, government representatives and citizens gave input on how they saw the Tri-County region growing, and how to properly create a regional vision. What came out of this process was a report that spoke to the future land use of Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties. TCRPC created stakeholder and steering committees as well as selected a consultant team to gather data that was then applied to develop two potential regional growth scenarios (“Business as Usual” and “Wise Growth” future development scenarios). A preferred regional vision (the “Wise Growth” scenario) was then selected as a result of 13 town hall forums, public and leader opinion surveys, a toll free hotline, and a series of focus groups for citizens from urban, fringe, and rural areas of the region. The product of this was a Technical Report, and derived from that was the summary report – who’s foundation was an outline of five themes, twenty-nine principles. A policy map was also prepared depicting the preferred alternative. This process is depicted in Figure 4.

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<sup>2</sup> ([http://tri-co.org/tricounty\\_website/1a\\_statement.htm](http://tri-co.org/tricounty_website/1a_statement.htm)).

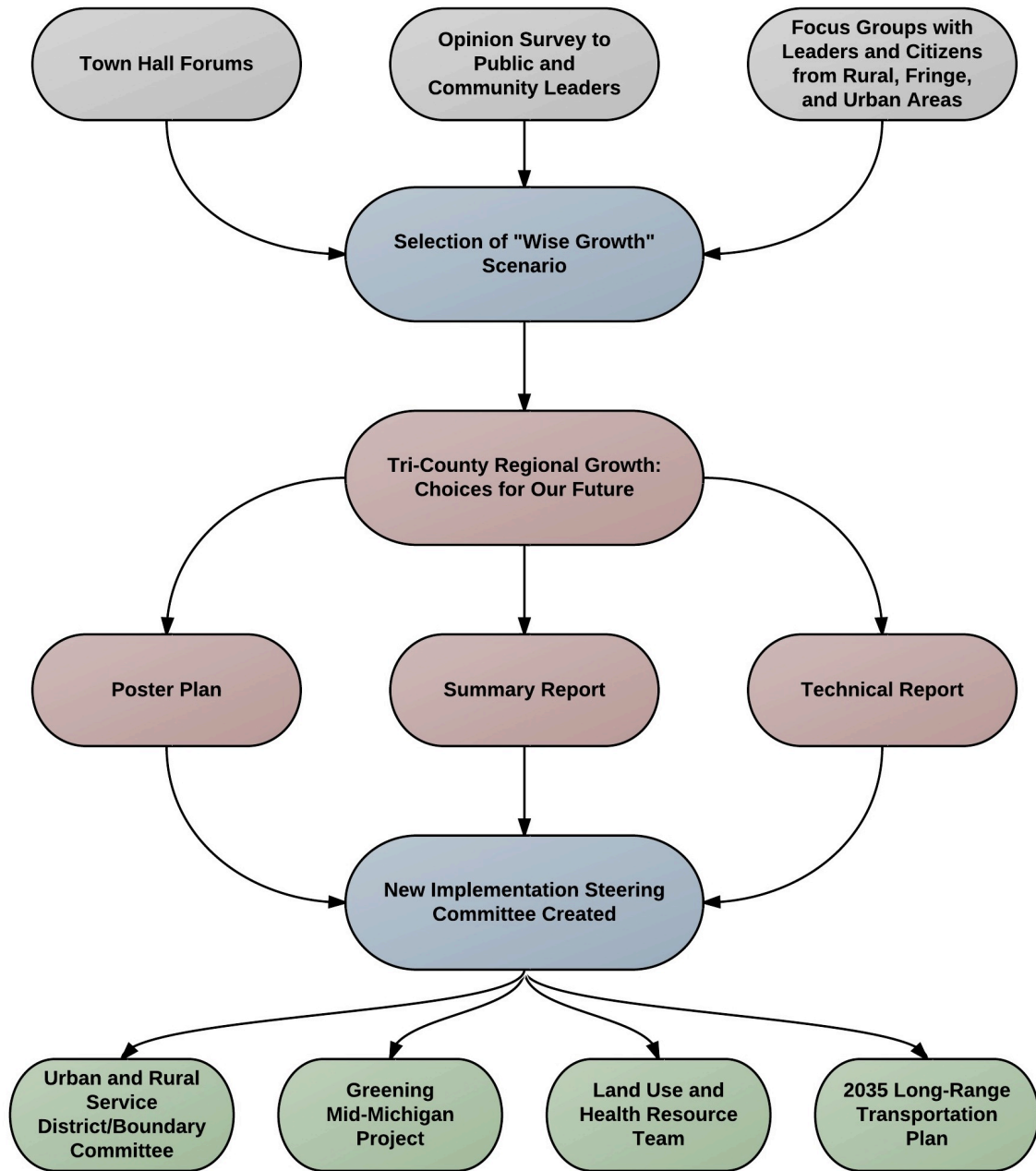


Figure 4: Tri-county Regional Growth Project Progress Flow Chart

## Current Implementation Activities

Since 2005, the RGI has been moving through the implementation phases, which are slated to continue through 2035. The themes and principles are being considered and applied by local units of government and the region’s residents, and elements of the project are being integrated at the local land use decision making level to further implement the preferred regional vision. In 2005, TCRPC formed an Implementation Steering Committee to focus on specific principles contained in the action and implementation plan (Figure 4).

Through implementing the RGI, the Long-Range Transportation Plan incorporated the RGI into its analysis, and the Governor’s Land Use Leadership Council Report adopted principles of smart growth that are consistent with the RGI’s themes, and principles. There are also other state initiatives being influenced by the RGI, such as statewide “Cool Communities” conference, the Michigan Transportation Summit, and the statewide “Design Healthy, Livable Communities” conferences. Thus far, the results of the regional growth initiative’s formulation are being applied to local community planning efforts throughout the region (Figure 5). Among all the related activities, three programs have been initiated including: Urban and Rural Service District/Urban Service Boundary Committee, Greening Mid-Michigan, and Land Use and Health Resource Team.

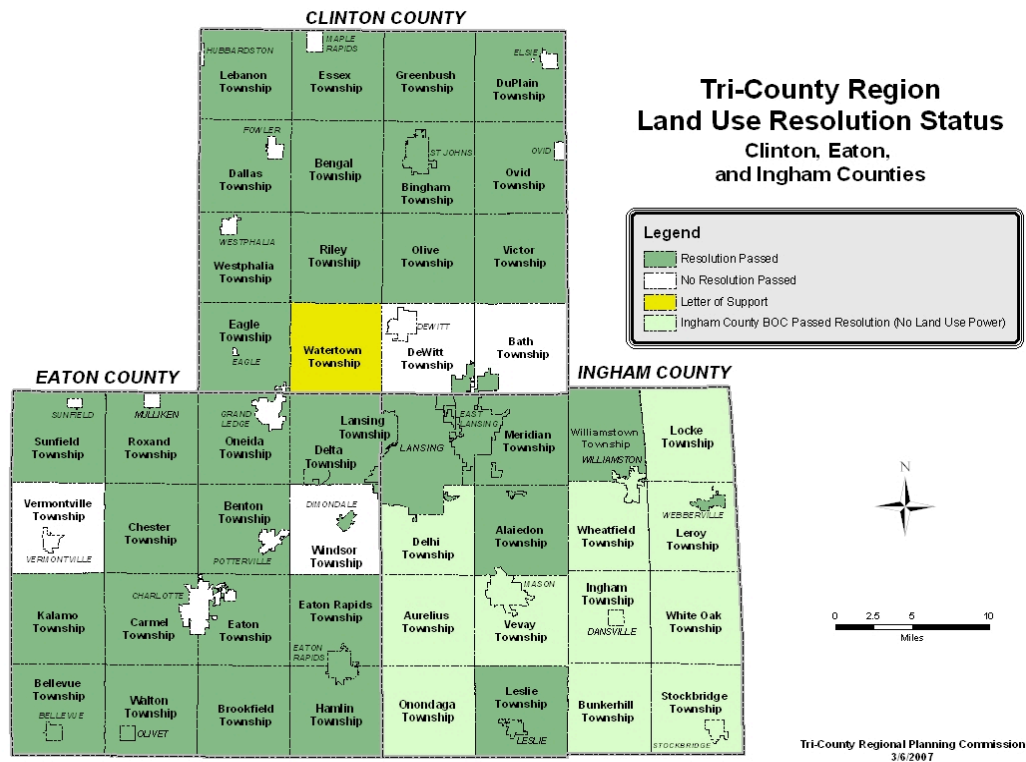


Figure 5: (Source: <http://www.greaterlansingurbanservice.org>)

## **Urban and Rural Service District/Boundary Committee**

An urban service boundary (USB) is a regional planning tool that attempts to direct development inside identified boundary lines to promote higher density in already urbanized areas. The committee has developed a study, “The Tri-County Urban Service Boundary,” that outlines a feasible strategy for implementing an urban service boundary within the Committee membership’s jurisdictional boundaries. The Committee members include Lansing, East Lansing, and the nine urbanized townships surrounding the two cities. Clinton, Eaton and Ingham Counties, and a few outlying county jurisdictions such as Williamstown Township and the City of Mason are also part of this committee. The purpose of the Study was to promote the creation of urban service boundaries in the region that enhance the redevelopment of existing urbanized areas, protect rural resources and to encourage joint efforts, shared services, and costs between two or more communities.<sup>3</sup> If fully implemented, a USB would promote many key principles of the RGI.

## **Land Use and Health Resource Team**

In the Tri- County region, the major expansion of urbanized areas has led to changes in land use and corresponding health consequences for urban, fringe, and rural residents. Sprawling development brings with it dramatic increases in traffic injuries and fatalities, vehicle miles traveled, air pollutants, and health disparities. Other consequences are increased reliance on automobiles, larger distances between homes and destinations, and reduced engagement in physical activity, which increases the risk for obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Considering such negative health trends and strong community concerns that arose during the 2003 town hall meetings, the Ingham County Health Department (ICHHD) formed a regional Land Use and Health Resource Team (LUHRT) to comprehensively address the link between land use policy and public health issues.

The purpose of the LUHRT is to educate local planners and policy-makers on the impact of the built environment on health and to facilitate positive policy and environmental policy changes. LUHRT consists of three core players: the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission; faculty from the MSU Extension, MSU departments including urban planning, resource development, remote sensing, urban affairs, among others, and staff from the ICHHD. Also new relationships were formed with non-traditional partners such as the City of Lansing, Meridian Township, developers and builders, and the Greater Lansing African American Health Institute.

LUHRT is promoting a successful strategy used in the environmental health assessment process- the health impact assessment (HIA) tool comprised of three components: Checklist,

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<sup>3</sup> (Source: [www.greaterlansingurbanservice.org](http://www.greaterlansingurbanservice.org))

Matrix, and GIS data. HIA was piloted by Meridian Township in 2004–2005 to review new development projects. The pilot test demonstrated that the tool does enhance walkability through changes in the design of proposed development plans and will likely increase physical activity in the future. Overall the team recognizes that using the HIA can influence growth, facilitate change in the right direction, and improve public health status. Thus far, HIA has been mainly used to review development projects, while in the future it may be used for policies and other programs.<sup>4</sup>

LUHRT also provides an avenue for promoting complete street poling at the local level. The City of Lansing, City of East Lansing, and Lansing Charter Township are currently active in complete streets programming.

## **Greening Mid-Michigan**

The Greater Lansing metropolitan area and outlying communities are made up of nearly 500,000 people. According to the Summary Report, population growth and development in this region has shifted over the years from the urban centers to the rural farmlands (Appendix A – Pg. 7). This major expansion of urbanized areas led to mass changes in land use and corresponding health consequences for urban, suburban, and rural residents (Figure 3). The need for Green Infrastructure planning became evident once these changing historic land use patterns were understood.

As a result of the RGI a need for “Open Space and Resource Protection,” was identified, and four main principles were offered for communities to follow in order to achieve this goal within the RGI. The four principles under this heading of open and resource protection are as follows:

- Farmland, Open Space & Other Natural Resources Protection
- Greenways & Walkability
- Parks & Recreation Expansion and Linkage
- Historic Preservation & Cultural Facilities

These principles were the impetus for the creation of the Greening Mid-Michigan (GMM). “Green Infrastructure differs from other conservation approaches, because it works in concert with land development, growth management, recreation planning, and built infrastructure planning, such as roads, bridges, and utilities.”<sup>5</sup> The benefits of this project will be numerous in regards to the environment, human health, healthy communities and health of the local economy.

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<sup>4</sup> (Roof & Glandon, 2008)

<sup>5</sup> Greening Mid Michigan Poster

The creation of the GMM was first spearheaded by the LUHRT and in the latter stages of the project the TCRPC along with Michigan Natural Features Inventory worked through data collection, public participation workshops, and outreach efforts to make the GMM a reality.

Currently, GMM is in an ongoing planning phase with the TCRPC staff reaching out to educate policy makers in the Tri-County region of the necessity for green infrastructure.<sup>6</sup>

## **2035 Long-Range Transportation Plan**

In order to keep up with increasing demands on Tri-County’s current transportation systems, the TCRPC adopted the 2035 Long-Range Transportation Plan. This plan, adopted in 2005 comprehensively examined Tri-County’s transportation network, projected population and employment numbers for the region, identified current transportation deficiencies, created a list of goals (below), and produced a regional growth policy plan poster which will direct future transportation development.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Accessibility                         | 10. Public Involvement                      |
| 2. Mobility Options                      | 11. Transit                                 |
| 3. Safety                                | 12. Parking/Parking Management              |
| 4. System Efficiency                     | 13. Community Impact                        |
| 5. Climate Change &Energy Sustainability | 14. Intermodal                              |
| 6. Other Environmental Impacts           | 15. Non-Motorized                           |
| 7. Land                                  | 16. Management Systems                      |
| 8. Financial Considerations              | 17. Airport Issues                          |
| 9. Economic Development                  | 18. Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) |

TCRPC’s adopted mission statement:

“Provide and maintain a safe, sustainable multi-modal transportation system for the efficient movement of people and goods which supports regional land use goals from the Regional Growth project, economic development, and promotes environmental quality and enhances quality of life.”

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<sup>6</sup> (Source: [www.greenmidmichigan.org](http://www.greenmidmichigan.org))

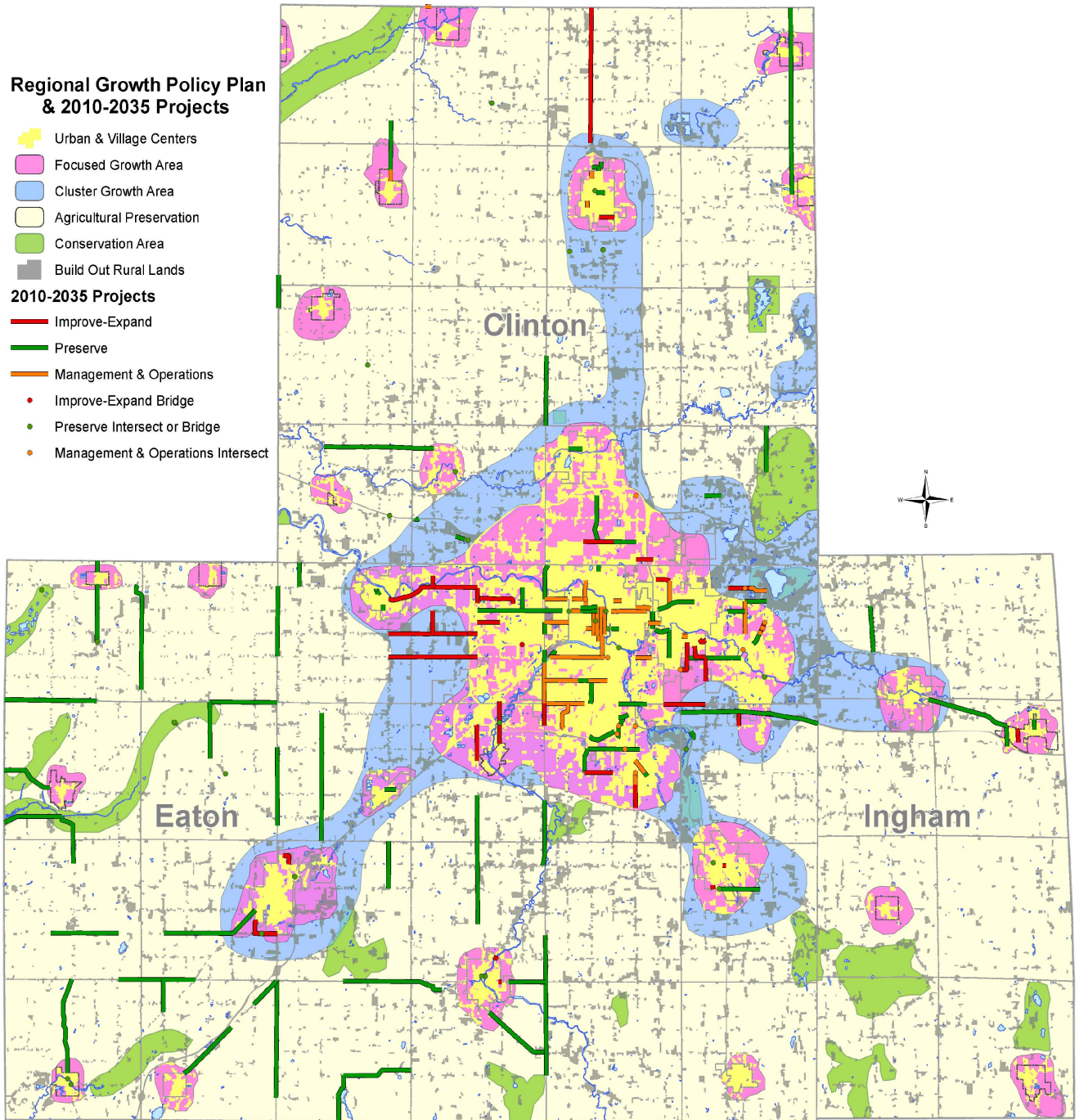


Figure 6: Adopted Land Use Policy Map (Source: [www.greaterlansingurbanservice.com](http://www.greaterlansingurbanservice.com))



## Part III: Practicum Framework & Methods

### Practicum Framework

This practicum project is intended to: investigate how the Tri-County Regional Growth Initiative has been implemented at both regional and local levels since 2005, identify what outcomes have been achieved, as well as what challenges have become the major obstacles to full implementation the RGI principles in Tri-County communities, and to explore the possible strategies to make substantiated connections between the original plan and the implementation of its principles. This analysis was based on responses from a strategic online survey sent out to key government members in the Tri-County area. Also, experts, developers and non-adopting communities were interviewed to gain a comprehensive view of the RGI. A workshop was held where members of the community, both citizens and officials were able to voice their thoughts (in a round table discussion format) on the project after six years of implementation activities, as well as react to the reassessments findings and recommendations and to give the RGI Reassessment Team public feedback additional insight into the RGI. Figure 7 depicts the project framework and methods for the reassessment.

### Methods

The information and data included in the reassessment came from a number of channels, including documents directly from our client at the TCRPC. Some data was cited or summarized from the RGI Summary Report, Poster Plan, and Technical Report, as well as the related surveys and focus groups conducted to formulate those reports. To comprehensively assess the outcome from the implementation of the RGI, primary data was collected from the online survey and from interviews with RGI stakeholders. Also, the follow-up workshop was held on April 14th, 2011 to collect additional input from the public.

From the end of February to the end of March 2011, the online survey was made available to local units of government that were identified by TCRPC throughout the Tri-County to collect their feedback about their implementation of the themes and principles of the RGI. There were 53 questionnaires sent out to local units of government within the tri-county region. The survey included three parts: Part I included 5 questions about basic community description information; Part II included 76 questions, which pertain to the level of integration of the RGI's 5 themes and 29 principles. Part III offered respondents the chance to give feedback specifically related to the perceived successes of the RGI and how it has shaped respective local policy.

In addition to the survey data, interviews were completed from the last week of February to the end of March 2011, to collect viewpoints from experts, developers, and government officials representing communities who have yet to adopt the RGI. All the interviews were designed in the form of open-ended questions to acquire more detailed information from various perspectives.

The final stage in data collection for this reassessment included a public input workshop conducted by the RGI Reassessment Team. The team presented a summarized analysis of the survey and interviews, and gained more public input on their findings, which helps to validate the survey, interviews and recommendations. This workshop was held on April 14, 2011; community officials who also participated in the online survey were in attendance, as well as some general public stakeholders. During the workshop, the data analysis results was revealed to the participants, an open discussion was organized, and based on responses the practicum team came to a consensus on attendees thoughts on the RGI, as well as thoughts on their reassessment efforts.

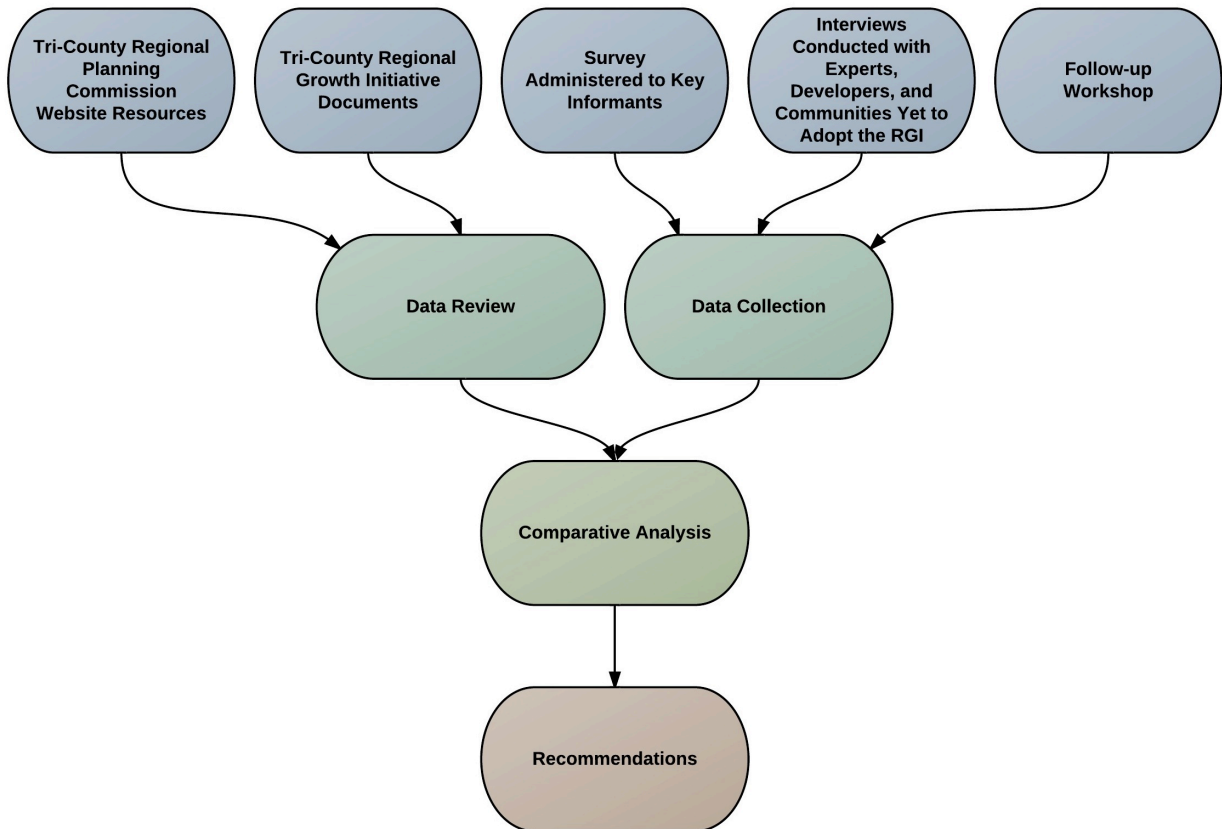


Figure 7: Tri-County Regional Growth Initiative Reassessment Project Framework and Methods

## Part IV: MSU Practicum Data Collection and Analysis

### Online Survey to Key Informants

Based on the RGI’s 5 themes and 29 principles, an online survey questionnaire was designed to assess the respondents’ community behavior as it pertains to the region, as well as the RGI specifically. The first part of the survey included 5 questions gauged the profile of respondents, while the second part included 76 questions, which pertain to the RGI’s 5 themes and 29 principles and the third part contains 12 questions which offered respondents a chance to give feedback specifically related to their perceived successes of the RGI and how it has shaped their local policy.

The survey was conducted from the end of February to the end of March 2011. 53 copies of online survey questionnaires were sent out to the key informants within the Tri-County region, and 33 responses were gathered.

### Section 1: Profile of Respondents

The online survey received a broad array of respondents, including cities, villages, townships and civic organizations. When asked if the respondents were elected officials or if they were administrative staff, there was a split of 58% and 42%, respectively. Also, to gauge the sizes of the populations that respondents’ jurisdictions contain, the survey asked how large respondent’s community populations were, with the largest response being less than 10,000. These responses are indicated in Table 1 below.

What is the population range of the jurisdiction you represent?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
< 10,000	48.4%	15
10,000 - 40,000	32.3%	10
40,000 - 80,000	9.7%	3
> 80,000	9.7%	3
	<b>Answered question</b>	<b>31</b>
	<b>Skipped question</b>	<b>2</b>

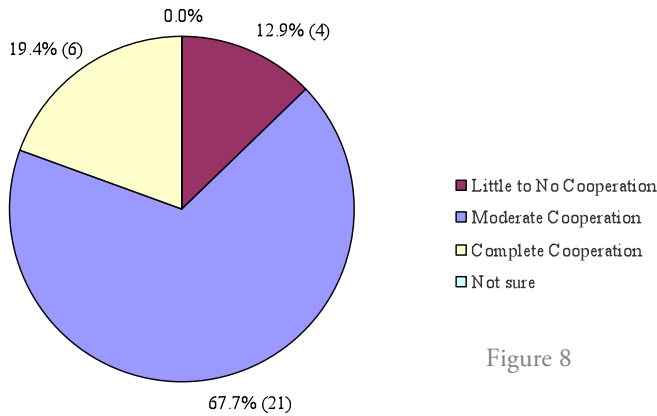
Table 1

The final two questions of this section were aimed to gauge the impact that each community feels it has on the other communities adjacent. 56% of municipalities felt that their community was slightly influential on surrounding areas, while another 31% felt that the surrounding communities are “very much affected” by their jurisdiction. This adds up to 87% of respondents believing that their actions affect some parts of the region, or the region as a whole. Lastly, when asked how many surrounding communities would fall under this effect, 61% of respondents said that “4 or more communities,” “the county their jurisdiction is in,” or “the entire Tri-County area” are effected by their decision making.

## Section 2: “Government” Survey Responses

The survey questions in this section examine governmental cooperation based on the RGI’s theme of Government. The data indicates that most of the local governments have worked actively in balancing local and regional issues.

When asked, “How well do you feel your jurisdiction is coordinating its land use decisions with other jurisdictions to help accomplish your goals?” there were 31 responses given,



among which 67.7% felt their jurisdiction fell within the level of “Moderate Cooperation”, while 19.4% felt that they have achieved levels of “Complete Cooperation” (Figure 8). It is indicated that most of the communities within the Tri-County region have sought to coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions in sharing infrastructures and facilities. This can be seen from the examples provided of ongoing

Figure 8

coordination and cooperation in their communities, which focus mainly on sharing infrastructure, and fire services (Appendix C – Pg. 7).

In response to the question “How well is coordinated planning and policy development integrated into your local land use decision making?” (Appendix C – Pg. 8) there were 28 responses given, among which 85.7% of respondents felt that had “Moderately Integrated” coordinated planning, while 3.6% of respondents reported that they had “Not At All Integrated” these methods. These responses indicate that a majority of the communities who responded pay attention to coordinating their plans or policies with neighboring jurisdictions.

When asked the question, “Is your community concerning itself with regional issues, beyond the scope of your local boundaries and policies?” there were 27 responses given, with 88.9% of respondents regarding that their community is concerning itself with regional issues, beyond the scope of their local boundaries and policies (Table 2).

Is your community concerning itself with regional issues, beyond the scope of your local boundaries and policies?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	88.9%	24
No	3.7%	1
Not sure	7.4%	2
<b>Answered question</b>		<b>27</b>
<b>Skipped question</b>		<b>6</b>

Table 2

A large majority of respondents indicated that their communities have moderately integrated coordinated plan or policies, with 63% of the respondents providing an example of their communities' concern with regional issues, focusing on Urban Service Boundaries, shared fire, sewer, and emergency services, the CATA project, as well as airport development.

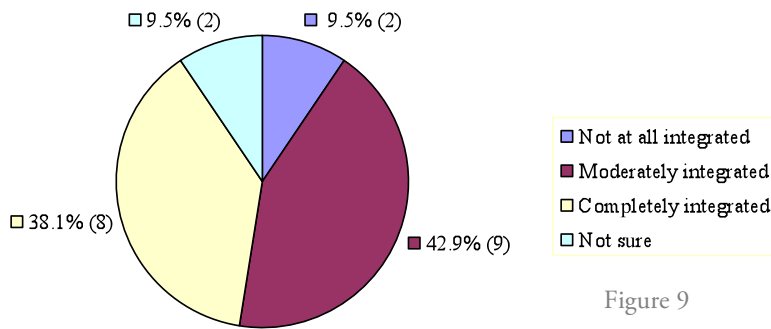


Figure 9

For the question, “How well does your community integrate continuous and meaningful opportunities for broad citizen and stakeholder participation related to land use decisions?” (Appendix C – Pg. 12) there were 21 responses given, among which 42.9% reported “Moderately

Integrated” stakeholder participation, and 38.1% reported that they had “Completely Integrated” this sort of stakeholder involvement (Figure 9). It is indicated from the examples given, which 52.4% of the respondents provided, that the majority of the communities have provided more than a moderate level of opportunities for public participation, through organizing informational public meetings, community forums, and public surveys to obtain public input for master plans, as well as a non-motorized transportation plan. However, it is indicated by some of the negative responses that the effectiveness of public participation may be difficult to achieve for some communities.

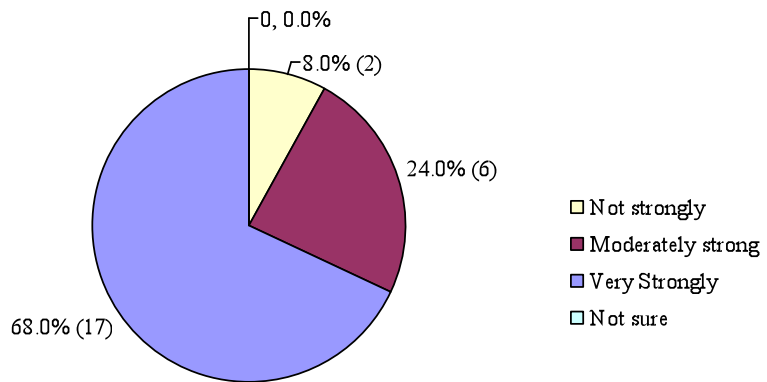
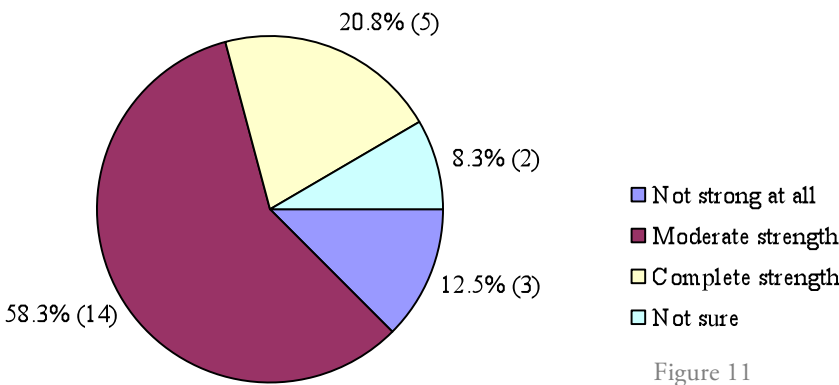


Figure 10

When asked the question, “How strongly do you agree that residents in your community are being provided with efficient, predictable and fair services?” there were 25 responses given, among which 68.0% of the respondents reported agreeing “Very Strongly” that their community is providing fair services, and 24% of respondents reported that they’re providing services at a “Moderately Strongly” level (Figure 10). This indicates that 92% of the respondents considered that their communities are doing well in providing efficient, predictable and fair services to their residents.

In response to the question, “How strongly do you agree that your community benefits from existing regional forums, committees or regional advocacy?” there were 24 responses given,



among which 58.3% of the respondents reported “Moderate Strength” in the benefits their community receives from advocacy, and 20.8% reported “Complete Strength” in this regard (Figure 11). The examples

Figure 11

provided by 54.2% of respondents mainly focused on regional forums or regional advocacy activities in their community, focusing on trails and greenways planning, as well as the Urban Service Boundary Committee.

When asked the question, “Within your community, do you feel as though growth and development have occurred in a socially equitable manner, balancing the needs of the community, developers and the neighboring jurisdictions?” there were 24 responses given, among which 58.3% of the respondents indicated that they are “Moderately” balancing their community’s growth needs, and 37.5% reported “Completely” balancing these needs (Appendix C – Pg. 12). 41.7% of the respondents provided an example of equitable growth or development in their community, focusing on non-motorized facilities, City Markets, the Accident Fund project, and the General Motors Delta/Lansing Plant projects.

Conversely, some respondents stated that equitable growth or development did not occur in their community, which respondents largely accredited to lack of policy, which comprised 40% of the responses, and lack of funding, which comprised another 40% of responses.

In response the question, “In the past 5 years, has your community publicly prioritized and strategized your capital improvement plans?” there were 22 responses given, among which half of the respondents answer positively, while 40.9% of the respondents answer negatively (Table 3). When asked about specific examples of these plans, the positive answers, which were 36.4% of respondents provided, mainly focused on sidewalk and street improvement, and parks, recreation, and open space plan, while seldom emphasizing other fields.

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	50.0%	11
No	40.9%	9
Not sure	9.1%	2
<b><i>Answered question</i></b>		<b>22</b>
<b><i>Skipped question</i></b>		<b>11</b>

Table 3

Thus, in terms of the survey questions on the Government theme, most of the communities have reported that they are paying attention to and have implemented some intergovernmental programs to achieve the regional cooperation and coordination. The largest source of dissent was surrounding the question gauging capital improvement projects, which 40.9% respondents have said that they are not publicly prioritizing or properly strategizing their plans, though most respondents consider that they are doing well in promoting public participation. There were also reports of inequitable growth or development still occurring in some communities, which respondents reported is mainly due to lack of policy and lack of funding.

### Section 3: “Healthy Economy and Healthy Environment” Survey Responses

When evaluating the respondents’ attitudes on their community’s policies, plans, and ordinances on the economy and environment, the responses indicate that communities are predominantly taking actions to promote a healthy economy and a healthy environment.

Officials were asked how they felt their community has made progress toward protecting the natural environment (land, air, and water) through plans, policy, and ordinances. A majority (86.4%) of the participants agreed that their community is implementing the necessary plans, policies, and ordinances to protect the natural environment.

<b>Do you feel as though your community has made progress toward protecting the natural environment (land, air, and water) through plans, policy, or ordinances?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	86.4%	19
No	4.5%	1
Not sure	9.1%	2
<b><i>Answered question</i></b>		<b>22</b>
<b><i>Skipped question</i></b>		<b>11</b>

Table 4

Those who stated that their community has made progress toward protecting the natural environment provided examples of implementation activities that support this theme. These examples center on “green zone” ordinances, “greenspace” plans, land preservation plans, land clearing ordinances, wetland protection ordinances, storm water management, farmland protection, soil erosion ordinances, and open space plans.

The one community that stated their community has not made any progress toward protecting the natural environment expressed that environmental protection could be integrated into urban service boundaries. A lack of policy was the reasoning they felt their community has yet to implement policies, plans, or ordinances promoting environmental protection.

Out of the responses, 31.8% of the respondents stated that their community completely cooperates with surrounding communities in order to address the changing regional waste management needs (reuse, reduction, recycling and disposal of solid waste). The remainder of respondents were split evenly, with 22.7% claiming no cooperation, another 22.7% having moderate cooperation, and another 22.7% were not sure.



<b>How well has your community cooperated with surrounding communities in order to address the changing regional waste management needs (reuse, reduction, recycling and disposal of solid waste)?</b>					
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>No cooperation</b>	<b>Moderate cooperation</b>	<b>Complete cooperation</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Level of Cooperation	22.7%	22.7%	31.8%	22.7%	22
<i>Answered question</i>					<b>22</b>
<i>Skipped question</i>					<b>11</b>

Table 5

Participants were asked to share a brief example of how their community has cooperated with surrounding communities to address the changing regional waste management needs, and recycling programs seem to be the most popular way of working with surrounding communities.

A large portion of the respondents (40.9%) stated that their community has a moderate level of seeking out a balance of renewable and nonrenewable resources to guide future utility expansion. Less than one third (27.3%) stated that their community has a very low or nonexistent level of balance of renewable and nonrenewable resources to guide future utility expansion, and 31.8% of respondents were unsure.

<b>At what level do you feel your community has sought out a balance of renewable and nonrenewable resources to guide future utility expansion?</b>					
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>None or low level</b>	<b>Medium level</b>	<b>High level</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Level	27.3%	40.9%	0.0%	31.8%	22
<i>Answered question</i>					<b>22</b>
<i>Skipped question</i>					<b>11</b>

Table 6

Respondents gave some examples of ways in which they sought out a balance of renewable and nonrenewable resources to guide future utility expansion included a variety of activities, including ground water heat pumps, LED lighting in commercial areas, wind energy ordinances, and reusing treated wastewater instead of potable water for services within plants.

Those respondents who reported that they are not seeking to balance renewable and nonrenewable resources to guide future utility expansion were asked what the barriers were from doing so, and 75% reported lack of policy, as well as a lack of funding.

Respondents were asked what level has their community emphasized and balanced the housing needs of all the residents in its region. Many respondents expressed moderate emphasis, with 25% of respondents saying that their community has placed a low emphasis

on the balance of housing needs, another 25% indicated that their community has placed a high emphasis, and remaining 10% was unsure.

<b>How well do you think your community has emphasized the housing needs of all residents in the region and fairly addressed balancing the needs of housing in the region?</b>					
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Low emphasis</b>	<b>Moderate emphasis</b>	<b>High emphasis</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Level of emphasis	25%	40%	25%	10%	20
<b><i>Answered question</i></b>					<b>20</b>
<b><i>Skipped question</i></b>					<b>13</b>

Table 7

Those who expressed having placed emphasis on the housing needs of all residents in the region and balancing the needs of housing in the region have provided specific examples of how they have done so. These examples center on a variety of housing options for all types of family structures, and a few financing options for families who need assistance.

Those communities that reported having placed low emphasis on the housing needs of all residents in the region and balancing the needs of the housing in the region were asked what the barriers were, to which 75% respondents reported that there was a lack of public support for such plans.

Respondents were asked to express how well their community has balanced economic development, workforce development, and environmental protection, with 35% of respondents reporting that they have moderately balanced these three things, 20% reported little to no balance, 15% reported completely balanced, and 30% reported that they were not sure.

<b>How well has your community balanced economic development, workforce development and environmental protection?</b>					
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Little or No balance</b>	<b>Moderately balanced</b>	<b>Completely balanced</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Level of balance	20.0%	35.0%	15.0%	30.0%	20
<b><i>Answered question</i></b>					<b>20</b>
<b><i>Skipped question</i></b>					<b>13</b>

Table 8

Respondents were asked to give examples of how they have balanced economic development, workforce development, and environmental protection. One community stated that their county is currently administering an EPA grant, and participating with local units of government and local regional economic development groups to enhance economic development and workforce through the county. Those who stated that their community is

not balancing economic development, workforce development, and environmental development were asked what the contributing factors were. One community stated that their community's mission does not encompass workforce development, and another community expressed that they are an elder community with retirees, and therefore there are only a few jobs available.

Within the theme of "Healthy Economy and Healthy Environment", most principles received responses lacking decisiveness to one side of the scale or the other. The principle that garnered the most support was the principle speaking to environmental protection, which 86.4% of respondents regarded as something they were working toward. As a whole, the theme of "Healthy Economy and Healthy Environment" features principles that are primarily moderately agreed upon, leaning favorably.

## Section 4: “Transportation and Other Infrastructure” Survey Responses

In response to first the question on transportation, which was “Do you believe your community has made a priority of preserving and enhancing its current transportation network over further expansion of the transportation network?” there were 20 responses received, among which 35% of the respondents answered positively, while 35% of the respondents answered negatively, and a quarter of the respondents reported being not sure. 35% of the respondents provided examples, focusing on off-road and on-road pedestrian or bicycle pathways.

Answer Options	No	Maybe	Yes	Not sure	Response Count
Percentage of Respondents	35%	5%	35%	25%	20
<i>Answered question</i>					<b>20</b>
<i>Skipped question</i>					<b>13</b>

Table 9

Out of those surveyed, 75% of those responded negatively indicated that the reason for lack of priority in preserving and enhancing current transportation network in their communities lies in lack of policy, rather than lack of public support, or lack of funding.

When asked the question, “Has your jurisdiction created any partnerships or worked the enhancement or creation of any new public facilities (police, fire stations, museums, etc.)?” there were 22 responses received, among which 63.6% of the respondents answer positively, while 36.4% of the respondents answered negatively. Respondents indicated that most of their communities have made efforts in improving public facilities in inter-jurisdiction areas. Examples were provided by 50% of respondents, and the examples focused on fire and police services.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	63.6%	14
No	36.4%	8
Not sure	0.0%	0
<i>Answered question</i>		<b>22</b>
<i>Skipped question</i>		<b>11</b>

Table 10

Also, when asked, “How well has your jurisdiction communicated with surrounding municipalities to satisfy this goal?” there were 17 responses received, among which 41.2% of the respondents indicated a level of “High cooperation”, and 29.4% of respondents indicated a level of “Moderate cooperation” (Figure 12).

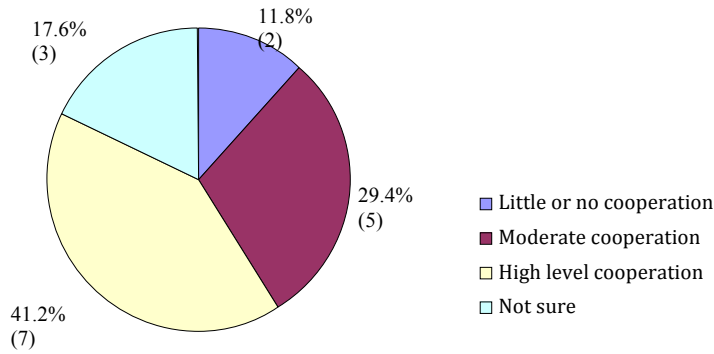


Figure 12

Out of the responses given, 75% of respondents indicated that the primary barrier preventing them from cooperating with neighboring communities in terms of their transportation network is a lack of public support, while the remaining 25% accredit it to a lack of policy.

In response to the question “Has your community worked in cooperation with other municipalities in the region for disaster planning?” there were 22 responses received, among which 81.8% of the respondents answered positively, and 9.1% of the respondents answered negatively. The majority of the respondents reported doing well in inter-jurisdictional cooperation in disaster planning, and the examples given by 59.1% of respondents focused on hazard mitigation, and emergency management.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	81.8%	18
No	9.1%	2
Not sure	9.1%	2
<b>Answered question</b>		<b>22</b>
<b>Skipped question</b>		<b>11</b>

Table 11

Also, when asked, “How well has your jurisdiction communicated with surrounding communities to satisfy this goal?” there were 21 responses received, among which 42.9% of the respondents indicated that they are doing “Very well”, and 33.3% of respondents reported that they are doing “Moderately well” (Figure 13).

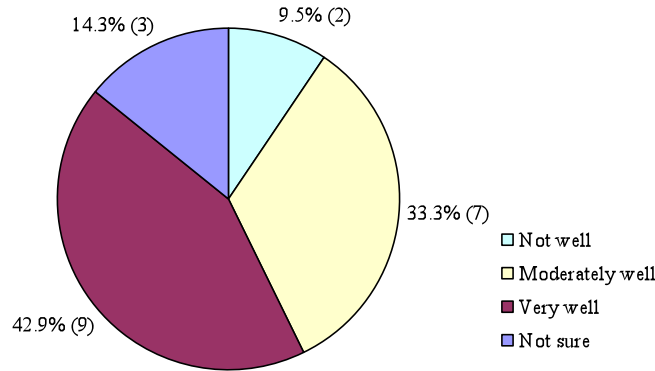


Figure 13

In terms of those giving negative answers, 100% of those respondents believe that the lack of cooperation in disaster planning in their communities is due to lack of policy, rather than other than lack of funding, or lack of public support.

In summation of the responses on the theme of Transportation and Other Infrastructure, communities are actively communicating with one another to form partnerships with service infrastructure such as fire, police and public facilities. In addition to these partnerships, communities are fostering partnerships with each other in terms of disaster planning and hazard mitigation, as 81.8% of respondents indicated. The largest point of dissent within this theme was on the subject of enhancing existing road infrastructure instead of developing more road infrastructure, with an even amount of respondents reporting that they are doing so and reporting that they are not doing so.

## Section 5: “Open Space and Resource Protection” Survey Reponses

When assessing the survey questions concerning the theme of Open Space & Resource Protection, most of the respondents reported that they were actively pursuing the principles represented within the questions.

When asked the question, “Do you believe your community has specifically protected farmland and other natural resources in a sustainable and fiscally responsible fashion?” the answers showed that 72.7% of respondents reported “Yes”, while 9.1% said “No” and 18.2% were unsure, as seen in Table 12.

<b>Do you believe your community has specifically protected farmland and other natural resources in a sustainable and fiscally responsible fashion?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	72.7%	16
No	9.1%	2
Not sure	18.2%	4
<b><i>Answered question</i></b>		<b>22</b>
<b><i>Skipped question</i></b>		<b>11</b>

Table 12

The examples that respondents gave on how they are accomplishing this goal, responses ranged from communities purchasing development rights of open-space plots of land, the use of agricultural zoning in rural areas to promote Open Space Preservation Programs, as well as to development projects promoting infill development (Appendix C – Pg. 29). The communities who responded negatively to this question said that they were representing urbanized areas and the question was not applicable to their jurisdiction.

As in Table 13, almost all communities are considering walkability and bike access within their upcoming projects with an emphasis being placed on connecting the current green infrastructure of their respective communities:

<b>Have you considered any projects in which walkability and/or bike access has been improved or expanded? More specifically, have these enhancements been aimed at connecting parks or other recreational facilities within your community?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	90.9%	20
No	9.1%	2
Not sure	0.0%	0
<b>Answered question</b>		<b>22</b>
<b>Skipped question</b>		<b>11</b>

Table 13

The next question in the survey related to strides the communities have made in their green space and park linkages. A principle within the theme of Open Space and Resource Protection focuses on linking green spaces with non-motorized transportation. When asked how much emphasis these communities placed on this principle, 81.8% of respondents reported placing “Moderate” or “Complete” emphasis of the principle in their non-motorized system plan.

<b>How much emphasis has your community placed on the linkage of parks and recreation facilities through greenways and the regional non-motorized system plan?</b>					
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Little to No emphasis</b>	<b>Moderate emphasis</b>	<b>Complete emphasis</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Level of Emphasis	13.6%	54.5%	27.3%	4.5%	22
<b>Answered question</b>					<b>22</b>
<b>Skipped question</b>					<b>11</b>

Table 14

For this question, there was a space provided for respondents to give an example of the efforts they’ve made in greenway planning and walkability. Some respondents cited parks and recreation plans, while others reported sidewalk and bike path expansion and improvements, but many respondents commented on the lack of funding for these areas specifically. This issue is highlighted by this direct quote from one of the communities, “Constituents have a strong desire for these activities to take place, however, local and county leadership struggle to support [due] to lack of funding.”

Lastly, the principle of historic and cultural facilities preservation was addressed. Out of the responses given, 40.9% of respondents reported that they are making efforts in the area of



preservation. To see specific examples, please see (Appendix C – Pg. 31). When asked why they haven't made efforts towards this principle, two communities cited a lack of policy, three reported that they had a lack of funding, and one jurisdiction reported a lack of public support.

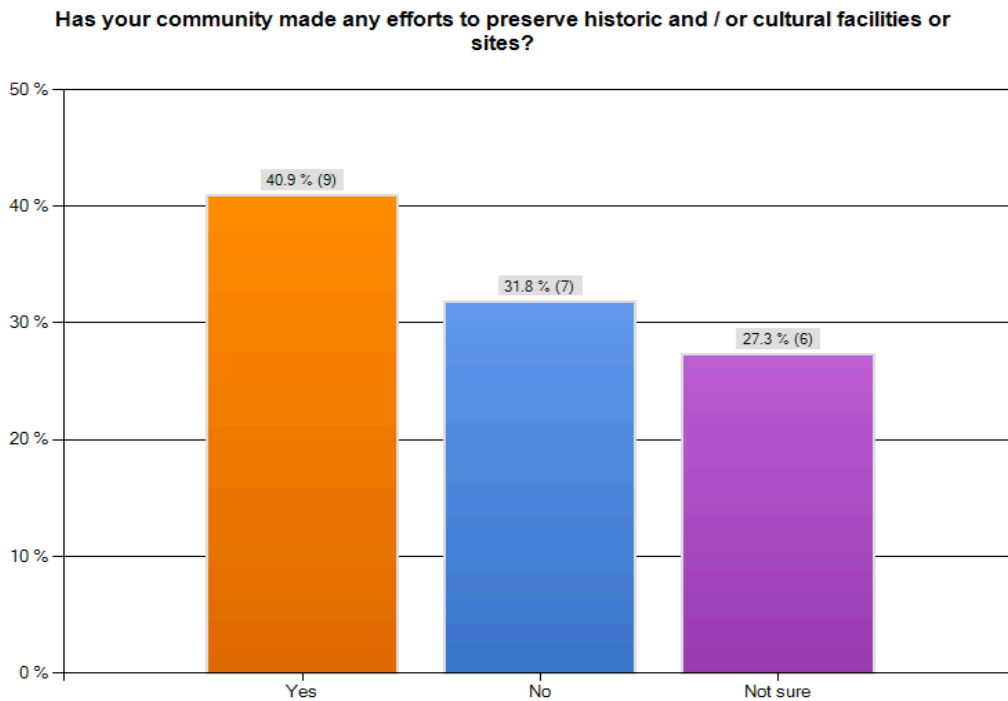


Figure 14

On the whole, respondents reported some of the highest levels of agreement with the principles in the theme of Open Space and Resource Preservation out of the entire survey. In response to the principle on walkability, 90.9% of respondents reported that they are undertaking projects to increase the walkability and bike accessibility of their communities. The largest source of dissent within this theme was on the principle of historical preservation, which 31.8% of respondents not working toward. When asked for the barriers from actively preserving the historic and cultural facilities, communities reported lacking policy, funding, and public support for such ventures.

## Section 6: “Growth and Redevelopment” Survey Responses

The questions in the “Growth and Redevelopment” section of the survey sought to gauge local participation in planning and programs that promote these two issues. Examples of these programs and policy include compact settlement, transitional edges and cluster development areas, phased growth agricultural economy, strengthening the urban core, focused growth viable neighborhoods and high density/mixed uses. When asked how well communities are encouraging compact settlement, responses were evenly split, with equal amounts of respondents reporting, “Yes” and “No”.

<b>Has your community encouraged compact settlement by establishing urban and rural service areas in cooperation with neighboring jurisdictions?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	40.0%	8
No	40.0%	8
Not sure	20.0%	4
<i>Answered question</i>		<b>20</b>
<i>Skipped question</i>		<b>13</b>

Table 15

To focus growth and keep new development centered in urbanized areas, respondents were asked how much of an effort is being made to strengthen the urban core. Of those who responded, 59.1% of respondents have reported that they have made efforts to minimize strip development and focus on cluster development, as shown in Table 16.

<b>Has your community made efforts in minimizing strip development, through cluster development and transitional zones between urban and rural areas?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	59.1%	13
No	31.8%	7
Not sure	9.1%	2
<i>Answered question</i>		<b>22</b>
<i>Skipped question</i>		<b>11</b>

Table 16

In general terms, 81% of respondents reported that their community is making moderate to complete effort toward strengthening urban core and downtown areas, in an effort to make their community, and the region as a whole, more competitive.

<b>Has your community made efforts to strengthen urban core areas and downtown areas to ensure that it is viable and competitive?</b>					
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>No effort</b>	<b>Moderate effort</b>	<b>Complete effort</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Percentage of Response	9%	36%	45%	9%	22
<i>Answered question</i>					<b>22</b>
<i>Skipped question</i>					<b>11</b>

Table 17

These responses indicate that communities in the Tri-County region are focusing on growth and redevelopment. By focusing growth in urban cores instead of the outlying suburban and rural areas of the region, respondents indicated that their communities can remain viable and competitive.

In summation, the communities who responded reporting being largely in favor of centralized urban core, and maintaining downtown areas. Respondents became split on the subject of establishing service areas for their jurisdiction, with 40% of respondents indicating favor to each “Yes” and “No”. In terms of discouraging strip development, 59.1% of communities reported enacting some sort of action against strip development, while 31.8% reported not doing so.

## Section 7: The Effectiveness of the Regional Growth Initiative

Lastly, the survey asked a series of questions to address the Regional Growth Initiative specifically, and the term “Regional Growth Plan” was mentioned for the first time in the survey instrument. The survey gauged the level of familiarity with the RGI, and as most communities were either involved in the formulation of the plan or are currently involved with its implementation activities, familiarity with it was quite high; at over 90% of respondents.

<b>Are you familiar with Tri-County Regional Planning Commission's Regional Growth: Choices for Our Future Report (also known as the "Growth Project," or "Growth Trends,")?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	90.5%	19
No	4.8%	1
Not sure	4.8%	1
<b><i>Answered question</i></b>		<b>21</b>
<b><i>Skipped question</i></b>		<b>12</b>

Table 18

Beyond just being familiar with the RGI, 60% had reported that their community had adopted the RGI in some capacity, and 30% of respondents were unsure whether or not they had done so.

<b>If Yes, did your community officially adopt the 2005 Tri-County Regional Growth Plan in the last 5 years to your knowledge?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	60.0%	12
No	10.0%	2
Don't know	30.0%	6
<b><i>Answered question</i></b>		<b>20</b>
<b><i>Skipped question</i></b>		<b>13</b>

Table 19

While communities who adopted the plan responded with benefits they’re experiencing, communities who didn’t adopt the plan responded saying that the plan was arbitrary, potentially in conflict with their existing plans. In fact, when asked, 57% of respondents who identified themselves as not adopting the RGI said that they weren’t sure if there even were

any benefits to its adoption. When asked if their communities were moving towards the principles written into the Regional Growth Initiative, respondents were overwhelmingly positive, with 64% saying that they are already moving toward the types of goals listed in the RGI.

<b>If you have not adopted the Growth Project, do you feel as though your jurisdiction is moving towards a sustainable and equitable growth pattern without the formal project being in place?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	63.6%	7
No	9.1%	1
Not sure	27.3%	3
<i>Answered question</i>		<b>11</b>
<i>Skipped question</i>		<b>22</b>

Table 20

When asked how to improve upon the RGI, respondents reported a number of suggestions. Respondents feel strongly about the Urban Service Boundary work that is occurring and want to see this program become strengthened, and the idea of promoting the region as a whole is something that most every respondent said would be advantageous (Appendix C – Pg. 45). One respondent voiced a concern that the idea of an equitable regional vision is intimidating, because not all communities in the region are of the same size, so the contributions of each community would have to be scaled accordingly. The RGI is an arm of the Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan, and when asked about the perceived success of the connection between the two, there were mixed reactions. However, one community said that they are using the connection between the RGI and the Long-Range Transportation Plan as a model for their Free-Standing Road Improvement Program (Appendix C – Pg. 46).

In summation, the communities who responded to the survey have had varying success with the Regional Growth Initiative and various opinions about the effectiveness of the RGI, as well as the concept of a regionally shared vision. Through this particular section of questions, it seems that many of the troubles with the RGI came from the simple act of it being thought of as a formal “plan”. Many of the communities doing work that is consistent with the RGI’s principles are the same communities who are resistant to officially adopting the plan.

## Synopsis of Survey Data

The following matrix (Table 21) is a summary of the online survey response rates of the agreement on the adoption level of the 29 principles of the RGI. In terms of this survey tool, there are two types of responses to these questions in the online survey. The first type of question has four response choices:

- “Complete”
- “Moderate”
- “Little to No”
- “Not Sure”.

The second type gave the respondent three Choices:

- “Yes”
- “No”
- “Not Sure”.

For purposes of this matrix, “Yes” responses are considered “Complete”, and “No” responses are considered “Little to No”.

Within each theme, the most remarkable characteristics of the responses to these questions are categorized into two groups: “Most Agreed Upon”, and “Most Dissent”, and the related classification criteria are as follows:

“Most Agreed Upon”: Since this covers two responses, “Complete” and “Moderate”, the matrix is divided into two subgroup, “Most Agreed on Moderate Level”, and “Most Agreed on Complete Level”. Within each theme, comparing the response rate of the aforementioned four choices to each principle, the principles that received the most responses indicating agreement on a “Moderate Level” are classified into “Most Agreed on Moderate Level”, and the principles that received more than 50% of agreement on the “Complete Level” are classified into “Most Agreed on Complete Level”.

“Most Dissent”: When analyzing whether or not the solutions of the principles are adopted, the percentage of the agreement on “Complete” and “Moderate” are combined. If this percentage total is less than 10% higher than the responses for “Little to No” agreement, this principle will be considered as “Most Dissent”.

Themes	Most Agreed on		Most Dissent
	Complete Level	Moderate Level	
<b>Government</b>	#3 – Issues of Greater than Local Concern #5 – Customer Satisfaction	#2 – Implementation Through Local Action	#8 – Capital Improvements Strategies
<b>Healthy Economy &amp; Healthy Environment</b>	#9 – Environmental Protection	#11 – Energy Consumption	No Significant Dissent Found
<b>Transportation &amp; Other Infrastructure</b>	#15 – Public Facilities #16 – Hazard Mitigation Planning & Emergency Management	#17 – Infrastructure Expansion and Replacement	No Significant Dissent Found
<b>Open Space &amp; Resource Protection</b>	#18 – Farmland, Open Space & Other Natural Resources Protection #19 – Greenways & Walkability	#20 – Parks & Recreation Expansion and Linkage	#21 – Historic Preservation & Cultural Facilities
<b>Growth &amp; Redevelopment</b>	#23 – Transitional Edges and Clustered Development Areas #28 – Viable Neighborhoods #29 – High Density/Mixed Use	#26 – Strengthening the Urban Core	#22 – Compact Settlement #24 – Phased Growth #27 – Focused Growth

Table 21

Respondents to the online survey question had a wide range of success with the Regional Growth Initiative and had various opinions about the effectiveness of the RGI, as well as the concept of a regionally accepted vision. The RGI is a voluntary plan, yet some respondents were concerned with the RGI in the belief that it was a formal plan. Survey respondents heavily supported the concepts of centralized urban cores, and maintaining downtown areas. On the topic of establishing service areas for their jurisdiction, respondents were split between being in favor and opposing service districts. Strip development was not supported, and many surveyed participants reported enacting some sort of action against strip development. Another theme that was largely supported was with the agreement with the principles in the Open Space and Resource Preservation. Walkability was viewed as an element of Open Space that is highly favored by a large majority of the respondents. Due to the lack of funding and public support, the agreement of historic preservation was split. Only some respondents stated that they were working towards some form of historic preservation. It was shown that communities are actively communicating with one another to form partnerships with service infrastructure such as fire, police and public facilities. Survey responses show that communities are also fostering partnerships with each other in areas such as disaster planning and hazard mitigation. When asked whether their community is enhancing existing road infrastructure or developing more road infrastructure, respondents were evenly split showing that some communities are reporting doing so, and others reporting that they are not doing so. When asked about the environmental protection, an overwhelming majority supported this principle and stated that this is something that they were working toward. Most communities have reported that they are paying attention to and have implemented some intergovernmental programs to achieve the regional cooperation and coordination.



## Interviews

Interviews were held from February 21<sup>st</sup> through March 24<sup>th</sup>; they were conducted with three different types of individuals (experts, developers, and communities who have not adopted the RGI) connected to the RGI who have knowledge and experience beyond the scope of our survey results. Specifically the team chose to interview Mark Wyckoff, Bill Rieske, Paul Hamilton and Sue Pigg within our experts section because of their expertise and familiarity with the plan. For the developers section, the team sought out Jason Kildea (Director of Commercial Development for the Gillispie Group) and Steve Purchase (Manager of the Motor Wheel Lofts) to find out how familiar developers are with the RGI, and whether or not their practices are influenced by the plan. Lastly, the team chose to seek feedback from Mike Chapell, President of the Village of Dimondale and Rod Taylor, Township Manager of Dewitt Charter Township in hopes of finding the communities' reasoning behind failing to adopt the RGI.

When interviewing the chosen experts, specific questions were asked pertaining to: their level of involvement with the plan, the themes and principles, and the overall effectiveness of the RGI. The interviewees provided valuable insight into things that could've been conducted differently during the creation of the plan, strengths and weaknesses of the plan, suggestions on how to improve the plan, and overall effectiveness and success of the plan to date.

Throughout the developer interviews the team asked questions aimed at finding out whether or not communities are integrating the RGI at a policy level, and if these developers are adopting the principles set forth in the RGI. In conversations with Dimondale and Dewitt Charter Township, the team's goal was to seek out a more comprehensive perspective of the RGI, and learn of the barriers keeping communities from formally adopting it. Through these interviews, the team was able to analyze the effectiveness of the RGI.

## Insight from Experts

All experts interviewed were integral parts of the creation of the RGI and they provided a well-informed comprehensive look into the strengths and weaknesses of the RGI. When asked about the appropriateness and strength of the themes and principles the answers varied, but most came to a consensus; that consensus being that there are concepts that could be added to make it a more all-inclusive outline. Yet, in general the experts reported that the RGI does what it was intended to do - it has succeeded at getting people to think and act more regionally. Two of the experts cited that not all the principles might be appropriate for all communities within the Tri-County area, being that some are entirely urban or entirely rural. This was duly noted and observed in some open ended responses from our survey results pertaining to the individual principles.

All the experts concurred that the plan is a success because before the plan, communities had an “individualistic mindset” when considering land use decisions, economic development opportunities and etc. There was a constant competition between Tri-County communities for growth and it made for an unattractive region to locate one’s business. The experts all believe the plan has changed communities’ attitudes and approach to the planning process. One of the experts was “amazed” at the effectiveness of the RGI as well as the attendance and cooperation that was displayed by all communities during the drafting stages of the project. The plan has had an extremely high adoption rate, far beyond anyone’s expectations, so in that sense the experts consider the plan to be effective.

One weakness of the plan is that it has no state statute authority backing the RGI, and since adoption and implementation is completely voluntary it reduces the effectiveness of the plan; this can only be addressed through a change in the state’s legislation. In order for this to happen there needs to be increased awareness and citizen action that could influence politicians.

One of the experts said the RGI could be a little more “pragmatic” in the sense that the plan seems to be more of a theoretical document and that it could gain some authority through adding elements of action steps and phasing. Two of the experts said that the plan could use an update, and that during the update process communities could be better informed of the plan via improving the website, branding, coordinating the timing of the release of the update and possibly creating a “guidance brochure” that would have a simplified version of the RGI represented for surrounding community planning departments and citizens.

When asked, “Do you think following the RGI is feasible for tri-county communities given the economic and/or political climate?” the expert’s opinions varied. One of the experts communicated that current economic circumstances have contributed to an understanding of the need for a different growth scenario, that wasn’t apparent before the economy went downhill. Therefore the communities may be more likely to adopt and carry out these “smart growth” principles in their everyday planning decisions. The other experts cited that given the current economic climate, municipalities do not have luxury of debating with developers nor do they have the funds to specifically follow all the principles. Yet, it was noted by all

experts that the cost of the “build-out” scenario would be unaffordable and unsustainable for the region and that once communities realize this, they will have no choice but to consciously or unconsciously follow the RGI.

Two of the experts commented on the geographic size of the Regional Growth Policy Map and that it was both too optimistic and too large considering growth, population and the timeframe. They said that the current map does not deter sprawl or promote density in the greater Lansing area.

Following are some points of agreement between experts:

- Effectiveness & Success of the RGI
- The need for legal backing to improve effectiveness
- The need for Phasing & Action Steps
- Improved Visibility thru Branding and Marketing (exploration of alternative medias)
- Educating new planning staff as well as refreshing senior staffers of the RGI

Following are some variation between experts’ opinions:

- The need for an update
- The intent of the RGI
- The ability of communities to follow the RGI
- The geographic area covered in the Regional Growth Policy Map

The RGI has gotten people to think more regionally, and now there is more cooperation and collaboration between communities. It has set the foundation for a regional movement to take hold and it has supplied an outline for regional sustainable growth to occur.

## **Insight from Developers**

The next set of interviews involved private sector developers. These developers were chosen because they are prominent developers in the region who promote and practice “green” development and urban redevelopment. In talking to both developers it has become clear that there is a strong need for public outreach. Neither of these developers had prior knowledge of the Tri-County Regional Growth Initiative. One representative suggested that the TCRPC strengthen its public outreach to the public, municipalities, and other stakeholders (i.e. local businesses, developer, etc.).

Furthermore, the interviewees felt strongly about the lack of their role in the development and implementation of the RGI. They felt that developers and local businesses should be a part of the steering committee or have some input in the RGI’s principle selection to increase their input in the RGI, and help shape a more feasible regional initiative, given that they are essentially developing projects that can promote or reject the RGI’s goals and objectives.

The visual design preferences included in the 2004 focus groups covered the design of neighborhoods, housing, streetscapes, open green space, farmland, and street layouts. The developers also felt that they could greatly contribute to the design guidelines, as they are familiar with the market demands. Both of these representatives practice and promote “green” infrastructure (Low impact development, trails, sidewalks, native planning, pervious pavement, historic preservation, etc.). They stated that “green” infrastructure is crucial in projects and will continue to be implemented where it makes economical and environmental sense. In essence, these developers feel as though their profession was excluded from the design and creation of the RGI, and feel that they should be involved, not only in the implementation phase, but also in designing, creating and endorsing the initiative.

## **Insight from Non-Adoptive Communities**

The Village of Dimondale and Dewitt Charter Township are two communities that have opted not to formally adopt the RGI. Community representatives were asked to gauge their level of familiarity with the initiative. Among the communities, there was a lack of clarity about what the RGI was and what the implications of adopting it were. One of the communities wasn't familiar with the RGI at all, despite being a member of the Urban Service Boundary Committee, which is an activity that is a result of the RGI. Both of the representatives that were interviewed were largely unfamiliar with the RGI, as well as the benefits they would be eligible for if they were to officially adopt it.

After the representatives were introduced to the RGI, they had the chance to express some points that may be barriers to their community's adoption of the initiative. One representative felt that the adoption could conflict with their current master plan, while the other felt that cost could be too great. Another concern was that adoption of the RGI could be prevented by City Council, due to the fear that the term "equal communities" would require communities to invest equal costs, regardless of differences in size and budget. Lastly, a representative said that they "don't see it as needed. The state requires municipalities to inform and cooperate master plans, and the state has required us to cooperate with Act 425 and PA7".

While unfamiliar with the RGI per se, when asked if their current planning activities were consistent with the initiative's principles, the responses were mostly positive. Speaking simply to regional cooperation, one representative said "it's to everyone's benefit if everyone is friendly with their neighbors." While not all 29 principles were covered in the interviews, both communities were engaging in some form of shared cost techniques with other neighboring communities, so the intent of regional thinking that is promoted in the RGI is still being utilized in these communities, though they have yet to officially adopt the plan.

## Synopsis of Personal Interviews

The personal interviews from the stakeholders of the RGI, such as regional planning experts, representatives from development firms, and communities that have yet to formerly adopt the RGI, gave helpful insight to what they understood to have been strengths and weaknesses of the Tri-county Regional Growth Initiative. After assessing the personal interviews there were three main conclusions that can be drawn: the RGI is an effective plan for the tri-county region; the RGI needs legal backing to increase effectiveness; and lastly the RGI lacks proper educational outreach to key stakeholders.

Interviewees reported that the Regional Growth Initiative was an effective regional growth tool for the tri-county region. Experts felt that the plan was a success because before the plan was formed communities within the tri-county boundaries had an “individualistic mindset” and were only interested in policies, decisions, developments that directly affected their communities. It was noted that communities were in constant competition with one another for growth and it made for an unattractive region for business to want to locate here. Having a plan that promotes regionalism will help eliminate that individualistic mindset.

The second conclusion that was made from the personal interviews was that the Regional Growth Initiative needed legal backing to increase effectiveness and adoption from communities. Currently, the adoption and implementation of the RGI is completely voluntary and has no state statute authority. This lessens the effectiveness of the RGI. It was noted that in order to have legal backing, there needs to be an increase in awareness and citizen action which will eventually influence policy makers and politicians. This suggestion leads into the next conclusion that was drawn from the interviews.

Lastly the interviews suggested the TCRPC enhance the education of the RGI to stakeholders. Proper education would increase the support and adoption of the RGI. Representatives of development firms were unaware of the Regional Growth Initiative and the benefits that came with it. One of the communities that have yet to formerly adopt the RGI was under the impression that the RGI was a type of master plan that was going to conflict with their current master plan. Interviewees reported that the lack of education is hindering further growth of the RGI. Along with the need for enhanced education, experts remarked that the lack of marketing and branding of the RGI is hampering its growth. Other regional growth plans in the state have great branding and marketing strategies that makes it easy to read by planning professions, politicians, and community residents. Overall the Regional Growth Initiative is seen a great regional growth tool, but lacks certain elements that will increase the support and adoption of the Regional Growth Initiative.

## **Part V: Recommendations for increasing the impact of the RGI**

According to the results from the online survey, interviews with local experts, developers, and jurisdictions that have yet to adopt the RGI, as well as the feedback from RGI Reassessment Workshop, the Tri-County RGI has positively influenced the local planning and implementation process within the Tri-County region; however, there is still opportunity for improvement.

Below are several options that can be expanded upon that will help to reinforce the regional vision in local activities; they will also help to increase the quality of life for citizens in the Tri-County region. As a summary, the RGI Reassessment Team's recommendations are organized under four goals:

1. Ongoing Updates to the RGI
2. Increase Awareness & Involvement in the RGI
3. Enhance the RGI's Image
4. Emerging Concerns in Tri-County Region

## Recommendations Based on Respondents' Insight

### Goal 1: Ongoing Updates to the RGI

#### **Action 1.1: Revise principles to be more specific to the Tri-County region**

In an interview with an RGI expert, it was mentioned that the RGI does not address certain elements of sustainability. The expert referenced the “Three E’s (Environmental protection, Economic vitality and social Equity) of Sustainability,” a common tool used for analyzing sustainability. The RGI addresses environmental quality and protection, but fails to thoroughly address economic and social equity concerns.

Experts interviewed stated that not all the principles and themes in the RGI pertain to all Tri-County communities given that urban, rural, and suburban communities comprise the region. The experts stated that one weakness of the RGI is that it has no “state statute authority” backing it up, and since the adoption of the initiative is completely voluntary it reduces the effectiveness of the initiative. Fortunately, the Michigan State Legislative has recently acknowledged the importance of regionalism and its effects on “sense of place.” If the RGI incorporates the governor’s plan to strengthen Michigan’s regions, the RGI would gain more credibility and support<sup>7</sup>.

Based upon recommendations from an expert interview, the team looked at a Quality of Life Initiative Matrix from an issue of Planning & Zoning News, November 2008. The matrix located in Appendix F “allows community planners to see which initiatives provide resources for the Quality of Life concerns most relevant to their community and quickly identify the core principles of each initiative.”<sup>8</sup> It is our hope that the matrix could be used to assess the 29 guiding principles of the RGI and to locate areas that need to be strengthened upon, to better suit the needs of this region.

The Reassessment team has identified successful examples of regional planning efforts that have adequately addressed specific needs within their region. Both the West Michigan Strategic Alliance (WMSA) and the Grand Vision have developed concise, feasible and attractive plans that are easy to recreate. The action principles within these plans are specific to the region and offer detailed ways of implementation. The RGI’s themes and principles maybe revised and updated to be more concise and specific to the Tri-County region. Revamping the RGI’s themes and principles will give the initiative a new, more specific mission that will be better-suited and appealing to Tri-County communities.

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<sup>7</sup> March 21, 2011 Special Message from Governor Rick Snyder on Community Development and Local Government Reforms

<sup>8</sup> Planning & Zoning News, November 2008, pg. 9.



## Action 1.2: Create an Implementation Manual

Another way to improve the effectiveness of the plan would be to include a manual for the implementation of principles put forth within the RGI. While action steps were created for the RGI, they were not included in the Summary Report, which is the main resource for information on the initiative; nor are the action steps listed on TCRPC's website. Thus communities who may want to implement the principles in the RGI may not know how to go about doing so. The Summary Report should outline how communities can use this plan to improve their ability to effectively implement the ideas and principles of the RGI.

An example of a region that has formulated a regional growth plan (Flint Hills Regional Growth Plan) with a clear view for how it can be implemented in the Manhattan, Kansas

### Report Organization:

- *The Executive Summary features an overview of study results, including overall recommendations for all resource areas.*
- *The Section Summary at the beginning of each individual section contains more detail and information on the resource area examined, including community specific recommendations.*
- *The Section directly following each Section Summary provides the additional technical information used to develop recommendations, including supporting tables, graphics, and maps.*
- *The Supplemental Materials CD contains samples, model ordinances, and relevant plans.*
- *The Other Relevant Information section includes the list of acronyms used in the document, as well as the summary of the public survey.*
- *The Map Book contains all maps in 11" by 17" format.*

region, located west of Kansas City. This region in Kansas is similar in size and demographic make-up to the Tri-County Region. In 2008, the Flint Hills Regional Growth Plan was put into effect, and it was conducted in a similar way to TCRPC's formulation of RGI, featuring opinion polling through public and leadership focus groups.

The plan's executive summary includes a section entitled "How to Use this Report" in the introduction, and clearly lays out how to read the report and apply the ideas within the plan to varying communities throughout the region. By organizing it as shown to the left, a community can identify how to read the report and apply the ideas within it in a way that is specific to their community. The executive summary in the Flint Hills Regional Growth Plan (FHRGP) breaks down the contents of the rest of the report

into 12 sections, representing major resource areas. By doing this, the FHRGP is more accessible to a community who is looking to expand on one particular area, such as "Utilities and Infrastructure" or "Transportation and Transit" (See Appendix E). The FHRGP specifically refers to items such as form based codes and mental health care. Within each of these sections recommendations are listed for how communities can improve in each of these areas. This way of organizing the material gives communities involved recommendations on how to improve on each subject according to their needs. This is not present currently in Tri-County's RGI, because there is no clear method for application of the principles to individual communities, and the RGI's potential impact is therefore lessened.

## Goal 2: Increase Awareness & Involvement in the RGI

### **Action 2.1: Create a recognizable brand**

More and more communities are recognizing the need and benefits of creating a “sense of place.” One of the ways of achieving this, which is becoming quite popular, is the marketing technique of branding. Creating a regional brand would go a long way in supporting TCRPC’s efforts in regional planning initiatives, increasing its appeal and reinvigorating the department and initiative.

Currently, TCRPC has the Regional Growth: Summary Report, Urban Service Boundary, Land Use and Health Resource Team, Greening Mid-Michigan and the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan under its supervision. To formulate a regionally recognizable and attractive brand which all the current implementation activities could fall under would be ideal and truly beneficial. Here are some suggestions for an appropriate Tri-County regional brand:

1. Tri-County Regional Growth Initiative,
2. Mid-Michigan Movement or,
3. The Capital Region Vision

The creation of a brand will increase the recognition of the TCRPC and its associated activities, which in turn would better facilitate an understanding of the plan and increase regional education opportunities for all Tri-County stakeholders. With an array of regional stakeholders following a “movement” this would no doubt create a “sense of place” for the Tri-County region.

### **Action 2.2: Create an Action Brochure for Community Stakeholders**

Public knowledge and education of the RGI can be viewed as a weak area, and needs to be improved upon. The team sees the creation of a guidance brochure as a way to increase public knowledge and participation in the planning and implementation activities of the RGI. This brochure would aim to provide a brief overview of the RGI that can be absorbed in brief 2-5 minute period. The intent of this would be to provide the reader with a general understanding of the RGI’s key points, without losing the interest of the reader.

Due to the varying levels of understanding and connection to the RGI demonstrated by community stakeholders, the RGI Reassessment Team recommends creating 3 differing guidance brochures that will benefit the indentified stakeholders through simplified education of the RGI.

The first brochure would be for appointed official and administrative staff. This brochure would have a higher degree of language than the other two.

The second brochure would be created for the purpose of distributing to developers and other similar functioning organizations. This brochure would be heavy in content surrounding the visual choice survey and identified preferences from the 2004 public and leadership focus groups.

The third would be designed to educate the citizens, thus it would be the simplest in terms of language and content. By doing this it is our hope that a large portion of the general public would be able to gain a general understanding of the RGI.

### **Action 2.3: Diversification of Stakeholder Involvement**

Through the interview process with professionals and developers it became evident that the RGI lacks in a diversification of stakeholders in the initiative. The two developers, Gillispie Group and H Inc., had no previous knowledge of the RGI, therefore identifying the lack of diversification of stakeholders.

The Grand Vision, Grand Traverse regional planning initiative, is stronger in its diversification of stakeholders in the project. Through their increased diversification of stakeholders a more comprehensive future vision for the area was able to be developed.

The West Michigan Strategic Alliance, the regional planning initiative for West Michigan, also has included a great diversification of stakeholders in the development of a vision for the future of the region. Just as the RGI includes stakeholders from almost all jurisdictions in the geographic area the West Michigan Strategic Alliance does that and then some. Their array of stakeholders includes local business leaders, hospitals, non-profits, chamber of commerce's, community and economic development agencies, farmers, and an even further sampling of regional players. "The mission of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance is to be a catalyst for collaboration. West Michigan has begun to establish a reputation for its collaborative culture."<sup>9</sup>

It is the RGI Reassessment Team's recommendation that the RGI needs to expand the diversity of its stakeholders involved in the initiative. Through this diversification of stakeholders the RGI will be able to gain a more comprehensive vision for the future of the region, as well as increase the level of cooperation and collaboration on all regional issues, projects and initiatives.

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<sup>9</sup> West Michigan Strategic Alliance website.

## **Recommendations Addressing Contemporary Issues in the Tri-County Region**

Goal 3: Enhance the RGI's Image

### **Action 3.1: Redesign RGI Summary Report**

The Summary Report for the Regional Growth Initiative is the document that receives the most notoriety, and as such, should be as user friendly and accessible as possible. In the current Summary Report, a large amount of quantitative information is given to the reader, and without the proper context, the document is only accessible to those with a planning background. When redesigning the Summary Report, it should remain informative while being accessible to the average citizen; similar to the Grand Vision's plan, which presents information pertinent to implementation of the plan. The Grand Vision's document is presented in an aesthetically pleasing manner, and is more likely to be taken into consideration. Making changes to the presentation of the RGI's most circulated document could have a lasting impact on the amount in which the plan is used, as well as the level of diversity of the types of stakeholder who are likely to participate.

### **Action 3.2: Update TCRPC Website**

Going further into the accessibility of the RGI, having an up-to-date and interactive website would make the information compiled by TCRPC more available to potential viewers, at any time of day. Having online resources available to the public will reduce the need for print materials to be paid for and distributed, making the process of producing supplemental materials more cost efficient, as well as more environmentally friendly. With an aesthetically pleasing and navigable website, TCRPC will gain the ability to virally promote their activities related to the RGI and increase community involvement, especially to a younger demographic.

### **Action 3.3: Explore Alternative Media Outlets**

3.3.1: Explore Advertising opportunities (Local cable channels, movie previews)

3.3.2: Expand social networking (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

3.3.3: Weekly City Pulse & Lansing State Journal updates

### **Action 3.4: New Focus Group to Update Visual Preferences**

Another recommendation for the TCRPC to consider is hosting another visual choice preference survey. The focus groups held in 2004 that helped form the Regional Growth

Initiative were given visual illustrations that showed a range of design choices representing how citizens would prefer the region to grow. The focus group participants were then asked to vote on which design choice based on their preferences

The results from the voting showed those participants preferred:

- Rural land use patterns, environmental preservation and agriculture land preservation
- Large single family residential lots and small single urban/ village family residential lots
- Development in urban core areas
- Traditional suburban development and higher density clustered development
- Mixed-uses

Some of the visual choice preferences contradict one another and the results don't give a clear portrayal of what participants want to see come from the RGI. The results from 2004 show the preferences from that period, but does not completely reflect the more sustainable and environmental conscious resident of 2011. The visual choices should now offer options that reflect redevelopment of urban core areas, sustainable residential lifestyles, and viable mixed-use development. The environmental and agriculture visual choices still reflect the concerns and needs of contemporary residents.

## Goal 4: Emerging Concerns in Tri-County Region

### Action 4.1: Add a Population Loss Scenario Plan to the RGI

Although current census data shows that all Ingham (+.5%), Eaton (+4%) and Clinton (+16.4%) counties gained population, while the urban cores of these counties lost population (i.e. the city of Lansing, the largest population in the Tri-County area, had a 4.3% decline in population).<sup>10</sup> This data justifies the need for a population loss scenario plan as a part of the RGI. As a whole the State of Michigan was the only state to lose population between 2000 and 2010.

Regions with a loss of population need to address the issues that accompany this phenomenon. One of the biggest issues we see arising is a loss in tax base and thus tighter fiscal restraints placed on local governments. If such issues can be addressed now before further population loss occurs, the negative externalities may be able to be minimized.

### Action 4.2: Explicitly address Food Systems concerns

“Scholars are increasingly recognizing the connections between food and agriculture systems and a set of broader outcomes, such as public health, the environment, civic engagement and economic opportunity.”<sup>11</sup> Because of this increased awareness of the connections between



food and the broader array of outcomes, there is a need to take into account and address food issues in regional planning initiatives. Michigan’s agriculture sectors hold great opportunities for growth and prosperity in terms of the set of broader outcomes, thus improving the overall quality of life for its citizens and in turn their communities.

<sup>10</sup> 2010 U.S. Census Bureau Data

<sup>11</sup> The Food System as an Economic Drive: Strategies and applications for Michigan from the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems at Michigan State University

“Michigan has the second most diverse agricultural production in the country, and yet 59% of our residents (distributed across each of our 83 counties) live in a place that has inadequate access to the food they need for a healthy daily diet (based on public health recommendations).”<sup>12</sup> This means not only addressing food, but the entire region’s food system as a whole.

Michigan’s Governor Rick Snyder recently released a special message on Community Development and Local Government Reforms. Throughout his message he again and again reiterates the need for regional government cooperation and “place making” in order for communities to succeed in today’s tough economic climate. “A community without place amenities will have a difficult time attracting and retaining talented workers and entrepreneurs, or being attractive to business.”<sup>13</sup> Utilizing Michigan’s diverse agriculture sector and food system as a tool for regional “place making” is something that has often been overlooked in the past. “Communities rarely see opportunities for development in the food and farming connections that make up their local food system.”<sup>14</sup> When it comes down to it everyone needs food in order to sustain life, and in turn spends roughly ten percent of their disposable income on food.<sup>15</sup> In our current centralized food system produce travels on average 1,500 miles<sup>16</sup> to reach the Tri County region; as a direct result of this, the consumer’s dollar is dispersed throughout those 1,500 miles leaving little in the Tri County region. “Identifying the local and regional economic development potential of ‘relocalizing’ our food supply is a strategy that is beginning to percolate throughout the ‘local food movement’ as a means to both enlist a broader array of actors, and as a tool for generating resources in this effort.”<sup>17</sup> The development of a community based food system in the Tri County region can be utilized as one of many tools for developing a “sense of place” for the region and its citizens. “When local agriculture and food production are integrated in community, food becomes part of a community’s problem-solving capacity rather than just a commodity that’s bought and sold.”

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<sup>12</sup> The Michigan Good Food Charter, April 2010 from the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems at Michigan State University

<sup>13</sup> March 21, 2011 Special Message from Governor Rick Snyder on Community Development and Local Government Reforms

<sup>14</sup> Food Connections: Capital Area Community Food Profile from the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems at Michigan State University

<sup>15</sup> United States Department of Agriculture Report referenced in a Salem, OR newspaper article *Americans Spend Less than 10 Percent of Disposable Income on Food*

<sup>16</sup> Food Connections: Capital Area Community Food Profile from the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems at Michigan State University

<sup>17</sup> The Food System as an Economic Drive: Strategies and applications for Michigan from the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems at Michigan State University

Upon realizing the potential that a community based food system holds, the Reassessment Team feels that the RGI does not properly address food system issues in the 29 guiding principles. Principles need to be revised or added to address food system issues, especially in today's world where issues of sustainability are of such a great concern. "To create a good food system, we cannot deal with food system components separately as we have done in the past. We need to recognize that all components in a system work together and affect one another, and act appropriately."<sup>18</sup>

**The Capital area spends \$1.1 billion annually on food and beverages. How much of this stays within the local community?**

Various other regional growth initiatives in Michigan and around the nation have recognized the potential that food systems hold for improving the overall health of the region and for its citizens. One such regional growth initiative in Michigan is the Grand Traverse's region the Grand Vision. Similar to the Tri-County RGI, the Grand Vision too has 29 guiding principles for directing the region to their preferred vision. However, within their 29 guiding principles they included 2 principles that directly address food system issues. These two examples were taken from the Grand Vision:

**Preserve agriculture as a viable economic practice.** Farm markets, roadside stands, and the scenic views that farms and orchards afford are iconic parts of our landscape. Our farms, orchards and vineyards produce crops for local, domestic and international markets. The vitality of our region's agriculture is due in part to the ample acreage that is available for our diverse farming practices. People are working consistently to protect farmland, enhance the affordability of farms, make farming more profitable, and create and sustain supporting transportation and processing infrastructure. The actions demonstrate a collective commitment to agriculture and have raised confidence that these lands will sustain a long-term environment and infrastructure where agriculture can prosper.

**Increase investment in agriculture and food-related jobs.** Agriculture expands annually as new markets are created for local crops. Local farmers' markets and other local food initiatives improve revenues to producers and create a growing tourism attraction. Creative partnerships with tour companies have also increased agritourism. Green energy initiatives increasingly demand corn and other agricultural products for potential fuel sources.<sup>19</sup>

Though these principles are specific to the Grand Traverse region they provide a solid example of principles the RGI might consider adopting, but based off the Tri-County region's available agricultural resources.

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<sup>18</sup> The Michigan Good Food Charter, April 2010 from the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems at Michigan State University

<sup>19</sup> The Grand Vision, April 2009 Report



## **Part VI: RGI Reassessment Workshop**

A workshop was held on Thursday April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011 in order to reach out to constituents of the Tri-County area and obtain feedback on the progress of the RGI, and its reassessment process. Fourteen planning professionals and one student from the region attended the workshop. After introductions from Sue Pigg, Bill Rieske, and Harmony Gmazel (all representing the TCRPC), the RGI Reassessment Team gave a presentation covering the work of the project to date and proposed recommendations by the team. The workshop then continued by splitting participants into three roundtable discussions (five participants per table) where the introductory question was posed: “What role has the RGI played in your local or county plans and programs over the past 6 years?”

Team members led a productive and comprehensive discussion, where insight and suggestions were obtained pertaining to the effectiveness of the RGI. The subsequent questions posed were specifically geared to obtain their opinions on the appropriateness of the team’s recommendations.

- ❖ Goal 1: Ongoing Updates to the RGI
  - Action 1.1 Revise principles to be more specific to the tri-county region’s needs
  - Action 1.2 Create an Implementation Manual
- ❖ Goal 2: Increase Awareness & Involvement in RGI
  - Action 2.1 Create a recognizable brand
  - Action 2.2 Create an action brochure for community stakeholders
  - Action 2.3 Diversification of stakeholder involvement
- ❖ Goal 3: Enhance the RGI’s image
  - Action 3.1 Redesign the RGI Summary Report
  - Action 3.2 Update TCRPC website
  - Action 3.3 Explore alternative media outlets
  - Action 3.4 New Focus Group to update Visual Preferences
- ❖ Goal 4: Concerns in Tri-County Region
  - Action 4.1 Add a Population Loss Scenario Plan to the RGI

- Action 4.2 Explicitly address Food Systems concerns

Many of the participants identified the RGI as a valuable document for continuing sustainable land uses in the future. One individual stated that the RGI is a “good base” for building principles in his own community’s master plan, while another said that he had used the RGI’s themes and principles to examine and update his community’s master plan even though his community has yet to adopt the RGI. Each round table showed through recorded comments that the RGI is currently a valuable and relevant document, yet it could be strengthened through an update process, and that the update process would continue to keep the plan as a part of “public dialogue.” A few individuals showed that they use the plan as a reference for grant funding and that the document is also used for regulation justification. Goal 1’s actions, if implemented, would benefit and further the aforementioned projects.

There were multiple comments that showed the lack of education in relation to the plan, even among current planning professionals. A few participants shared in discussion that they had never heard of the initiative until they actually attended a TCRPC meeting, and that previously the document was just something that “sat on the shelf,” and all tables agreed that there needs to be more awareness and communication via local planners. These concerns are directly addressed by Goal 2 and its actions.

Another popular topic amongst the round table discussions was the need for increased media coverage via local newspaper articles (i.e. City Pulse, Lansing State Journal, Capital Times and the State News), commercials and social networking medias. These concerns directly support Action 3.3.

The last and one the most prominent issues addressed at the workshop was Action 4.2’s concern of food systems. Many planners and specifically Lansing school district’s food service planner showed much interest and concern on this topic. A representative of Sparrow Hospital’s Nutrition Department was also in attendance, and strongly in favor of RGI’s update containing language that speaks to food systems. Overall, the workshop was a success for the RGI Reassessment Team, and represented public participation and backing for the team’s recommendations.

## **Reassessment Project Conclusions**

Throughout the reassessment process, the practicum team received useful and pertinent insight on how to promote the RGI and increase its effectiveness. Susan Pigg describes the RGI as a “living, breathing entity, with the ability to adapt and grow,” and through projects to revisit it such as this, the RGI can hone in on its intended purpose and its goals and objectives can come to fruition. Based on survey responses, communities in the Tri-County region are aligning themselves with the principles put forth in the RGI and are thinking regionally, as opposed to individually. Experts, developers, and representatives of communities reported benefits to a regional mindset, and focus group participants responded with the idea that things that benefit their community also benefit the region, and things that benefit the region will benefit their community. Mid-Michigan is a unique region with assets that are specific to its communities, and maintaining the advantages, while diminishing the disadvantages, is important to all regional stakeholders. With recommendations coming from an extensive online survey, personal interviews, and research on similar regional growth efforts, the Reassessment team intends to help TCRPC build upon their projects in the future implementation of the RGI, allowing the Tri-County region to maintain its unique assets and quality of life.

**Appendix A:**

**Tri-County Regional Growth: Choices for Our Future –  
Summary Report**

**Appendix B:**

**2004 TCRPC Focus Group - Visual Choice Analysis**

## **Appendix C:**

### **Respondent Results from Online Survey**

## **Appendix D:**

### **Profile of Personal Interview Respondents**

**Appendix E:**

**Flint Hills Regional Growth Plan – Executive Summary**



## **Appendix F:**

### **Quality of Life Initiative Matrix**

**Appendix G:**

**2010 Michigan Census Data for Clinton, Eaton and Ingham  
Counties**