



# SCHOOLCRAFT COUNTY ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE STRATEGY

PREPARED FOR SCHOOLCRAFT COUNTY, MICHIGAN

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TIP Strategies, Inc., is a privately held economic development consulting firm with offices in Austin and Seattle. TIP is committed to providing quality solutions for public sector and private sector clients. Established in 1995, the firm's primary focus is economic development strategic planning.

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# INTRODUCTION



## OVERVIEW

The Central Upper Peninsula (central UP) of Michigan boasts remarkable assets. Despite its distance from major urban centers, the region's natural beauty, higher education institutions, and emerging technology assets stand out both within Michigan and the nation. Facilities and attractions, such as the historic lighthouses, Manistique River, the northern shore of Lake Michigan, and the Lake Effect Arts collaborative, are among the assets that distinguish the region.



Image courtesy CUPPAD

As forestry and mining workforces decline, the Upper Peninsula is moving rapidly to facilitate a broader economic recovery. This recovery will rely on technology, tourism and an expansion of homegrown businesses. There are, as elsewhere in the nation, significant headwinds. These include the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, limited childcare for working parents, a limited housing supply, and the continued outmigration of talented young people.

Schoolcraft County is an important asset for the region. A commitment to greater resilience is crucial for broad and equitable recovery. This plan seeks to assemble relevant data, provide a set of strategies that are specific and actionable, and set out a robust implementation schedule. The approach taken to the planning process relies heavily on regional collaboration and ongoing community leadership. The resulting framework sets the stage for positive economic change to happen.

## ABOUT THIS WORK

TIP Strategies (TIP) was engaged by the Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission (CUPPAD) to prepare an economic recovery and resilience strategy for Marquette County (the County). The work was intended to serve as the starting point for a larger effort that will encompass the six counties served by CUPPAD: Alger, Delta, Dickinson, Marquette, Menominee, and Schoolcraft.

In addition to crafting the Marquette County strategy, TIP was engaged to conduct a region-wide kickoff event for the initiative and to provide training, templates, and other tools that will enable the remaining five counties to prepare their own county-level plans for creating more resilient and sustainable economies. Once finalized, the six county-based strategies can be aggregated and incorporated as a component of the region's comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS).

The planning process was conducted in three phases: discovery, opportunity, and implementation.

- 1. DISCOVERY:** Conducted over 10 individual interviews with economic development stakeholders in Schoolcraft County and the central UP. Facilitated three roundtable discussions with important constituencies and attended various events to better understand relevant topics and roles.

### ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS FACILITATED

- Community Development
- Workforce and Labor
- Community Image and Placemaking
- Infrastructure
- Regional Positioning and Marketing

### MEETINGS ATTENDED

- Central UP Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
- Schoolcraft County Economic Resiliency Workshops
- City of Manistique Master Plan Kick-off Event

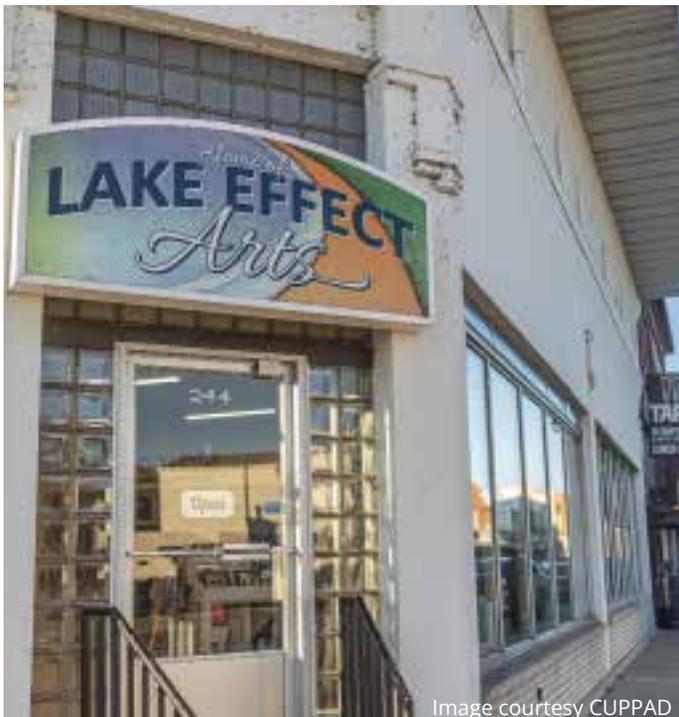
- 2. OPPORTUNITY:** Identified major priorities for the strategic plan. Created a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. Vision, mission, and strategies were developed based on input from discovery.

**3. IMPLEMENTATION:** Developed strategies, action items, tactical recommendations, and suggested performance metrics.

The County should not view this strategic plan as a static document, but rather as one that invites revisions and amendments as conditions change. Now, more than ever, stakeholders should take a dynamic approach to implementation—one that revisits this plan on a regular basis to measure progress and to reprioritize strategies and actions as needed.

## THE CHALLENGE

*Schoolcraft County and the Central Upper Peninsula region stand at an economic crossroads.* It's abundantly clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted economies throughout the country and around the world. In times of great economic distress, communities must focus on both near-term recovery and long-term resilience to weather the storm. The County and the region cannot afford to carry on with business as usual.



Even without the crisis, the central UP has significant problems to address, compounding the urgency of the situation. The need for economic diversification has never been greater. The ongoing decline of traditional resource-based industries, like mining, has already caused significant closures and accompanying job losses, a downward trend that is projected to continue.

At the same time, the overall population of the region has also been declining, making an increased emphasis on talent development, retention, and attraction critical if the region is to move forward. However, housing availability and affordability are growing challenges for new and existing residents in Schoolcraft County, driven in part by the area's sizable percentage of seasonally occupied homes.

An important part of building up the local workforce is ensuring that those workers' needs can be met. The market for affordable and accessible childcare has supply and demand problems, including a lack of licensed providers, which can lead directly to women disproportionately leaving the labor force. Improving access to economic opportunity is an essential element of a resilient economy. Bolstering workforce diversity helps form a stronger foundation for equitable and inclusive practices, which can make the region more resilient and more appealing to outsiders.

Finally, ongoing and effective collaboration among the region's economic development organizations (EDOs) must be strengthened and maintained. Historically, the regional planning process has been fragmented and duplicative, leading to concerns about overplanning. A more collaborative approach will be required to address Schoolcraft's challenges and leverage its strengths.



## THE RESPONSE

The *Schoolcraft County Economic Recovery and Resilience Strategy* builds on unique assets and opportunities within the region that can be leveraged for long-term prosperity. It lays out strategies and actions that will address the region's economic challenges effectively by leaning on these existing strengths.

To foster new investment, jobs, and businesses, the region can use its renowned outdoor recreation assets and natural amenities to bring in tourists and new residents. The creation of the proposed UP Regional Outdoor Recreation Innovation District could play a substantial role in that effort. The attraction and retention of remote workers is another opportunity that would draw on the region's outdoor recreation assets. However, success will require making greater investments in housing and broadband infrastructure, marketing the advantages of the UP to these potential

remote workers, and enhancing the Discover Manistique initiative as a vehicle for attraction.

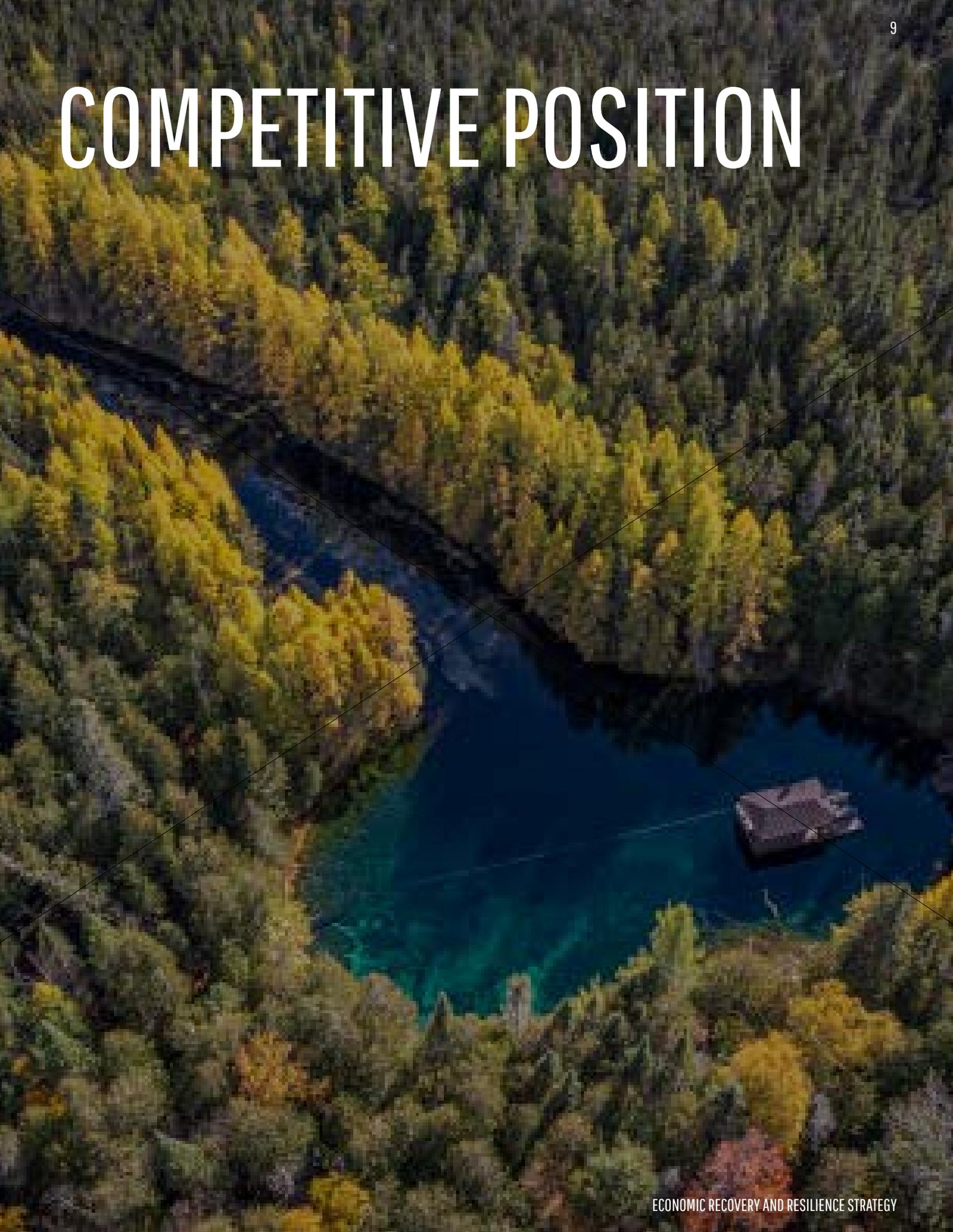
Perhaps less well-known, but equally important, is the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Manistique, which stands ready to change and grow. There are resources available for new startup creation, but leadership needs to implement strategies to broaden the search for both homegrown and external entrepreneurs.

A challenge mentioned previously is the need for greater regional collaboration. A collective approach will be required to tackle difficult problems, like housing affordability and the preservation of natural assets and resources in the wake of increased tourism. Organizations like CUPPAD and Schoolcraft County Tourism and Commerce (SCTC), in conjunction with city and County officials, have the necessary tools available to actualize economic recovery and resilience and the desire to work together more closely, if they can turn that desire into action.

To implement and sustain the strategies outlined in this plan, leadership must make use of all available funding sources. In this regard, the region has several advantages. Via the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), federal funding is flowing to the UP from agencies like the US Economic Development Administration (EDA). These funds can help support existing and new projects and programs. Pursuing other opportunities, like state grants, could supplement this influx of fiscal support.



# COMPETITIVE POSITION



# ECONOMIC CONTEXT

TIP prepared a targeted assessment of factors that define the region’s overall competitiveness and are of greatest concern to economic decision-makers. Some of the most significant trends from that analysis, which looked at demographics, employment sectors, workforce characteristics, housing, and regional connectivity, are presented here. The full results were delivered in electronic format (Tableau) and were posted to the [CUPPAD website](#).

## Strong Fundamentals in the Central UP

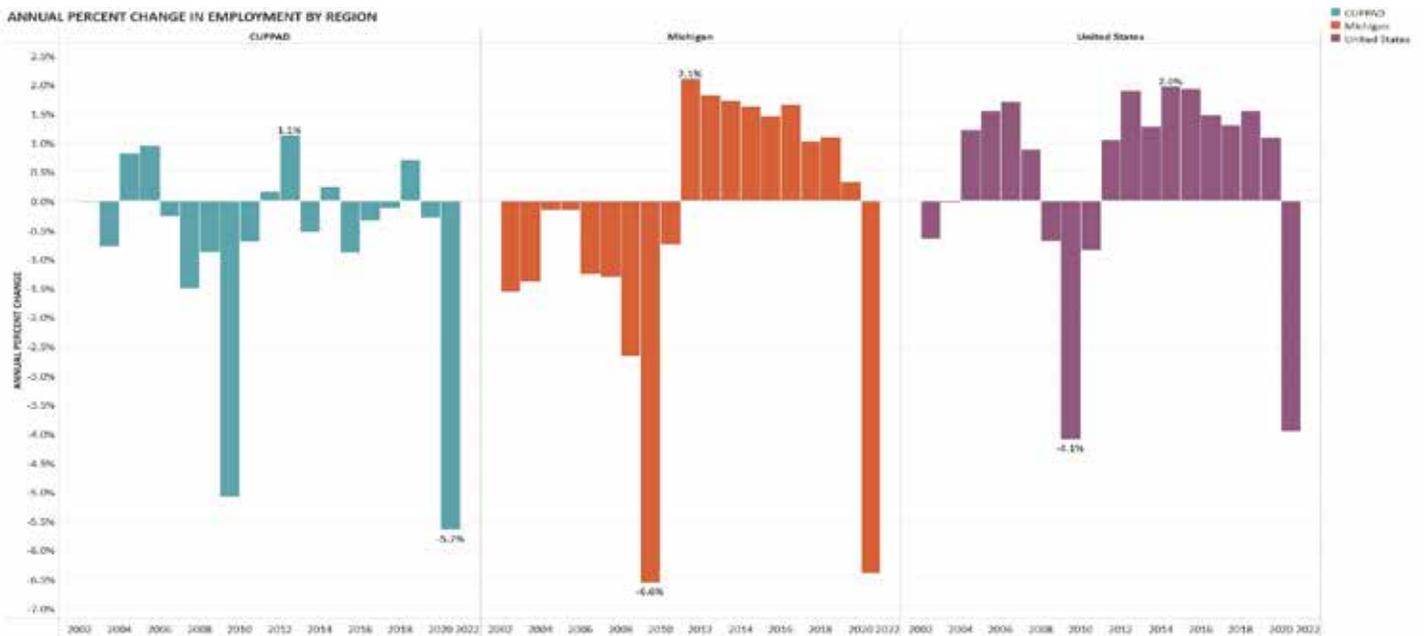
The six-county region served by the CUPPAD Regional Commission has struggled to keep pace with the economic diversification and growth of the state and the nation. Despite these struggles, the central region has several assets that could provide opportunities for revitalization. In Schoolcraft County, Manistique is the largest city and economic center, housing only 4.2 percent of the region’s jobs but boasting a 3 percent remote worker rate, compared to the 3.7 percent in the region and 4 percent in the state. The County is relatively well-educated when compared to the region and the state. 45 percent of county residents have graduated high school and almost a quarter of the population have had some college education. Only about 10 percent

of people in the County have obtained a Graduate or Bachelor’s degree, compared to about 20 percent in the region and the state. Some of the most significant assets of Schoolcraft County include the year-round attractions, the Lake Michigan shoreline, and the quaint walkable downtown of Manistique.

## The Impact of COVID-19

Even before the pandemic, the region was experiencing a degree of economic decline. The Great Recession hit the region hard in 2009, causing employment in the central UP counties to drop more than 5 percent, and it has not significantly recovered since then. All central UP counties saw a 5 to 6 percent decrease in employment from 2019 to 2020 (over 4,000 jobs in total), on par with state and national trends. It remains to be seen if the pandemic drove an increase in remote work, but the region had low work-from-home rates (3 to 4 percent) in 2019, which trailed the national average of 5 percent. The ability to work from home is closely related to the availability of broadband infrastructure. Although Schoolcraft County is on par with the state and the nation for share of households with computers and internet connectivity, the rest of the region falls behind: more than 15 percent of households do not have a computer, and almost 25 percent do not have reliable internet access.

FIGURE 1. ANNUAL PERCENT CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT BY REGION



Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); Economic Modeling Specialists International (Emsi) 2021.2—Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.

### An Aging Region

The central region and the UP as a whole has been experiencing a population decline. With families having less children than in previous years, the continued outmigration of young people, and the large number of senior citizens already in the area, the region is rapidly aging. The median age of Schoolcraft county residents is the highest of the counties in the central region at 52 years old. Marquette County's is the lowest at 39 years old, with surrounding counties hovering around 50 years old. Fewer than 21 percent of central region households have children (this share can be as low as 15 percent in some counties), compared to 26 percent of Michigan households and 28 percent of US households.

### Housing and Affordability

In Schoolcraft County, housing is generally more affordable than their neighboring counties. Median value of owner-occupied housing units in Schoolcraft County is about \$123,000. When compared to the City of Manistique, the median value of owner-occupied housing lowers to about \$67,000. However, Schoolcraft County and Manistique both experience a small number of housing units with 88% of units being single-family homes in the county, and 75% in the city. In keeping with the trends in the surrounding region, Schoolcraft County has a disproportionate number of older homes that may require renovation or rehabilitation, making homeownership a heavy burden.

FIGURE 2. AGE PROPORTIONS, 2019  
Population by share of broad age groups

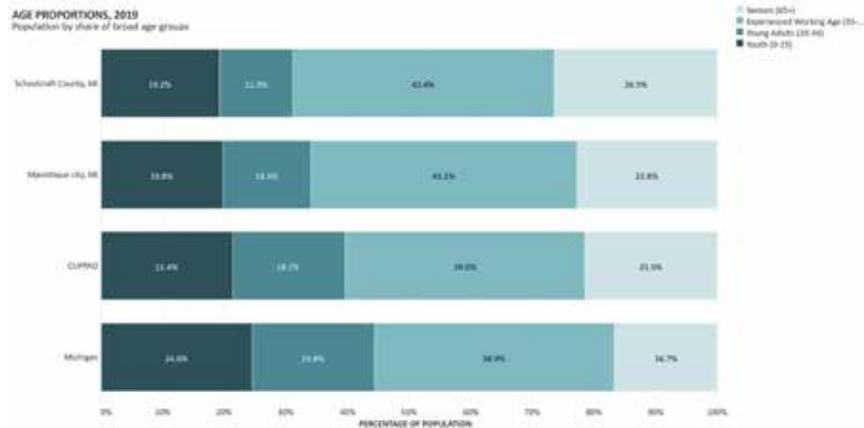
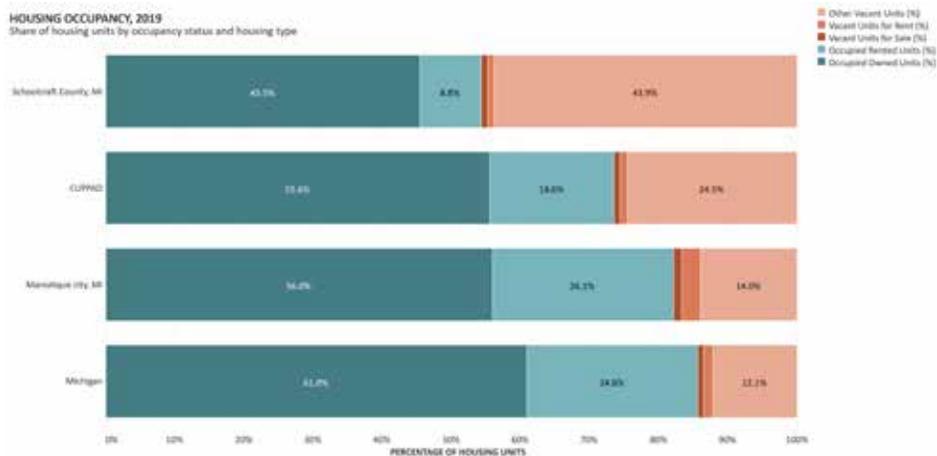


FIGURE 3. HOUSING OCCUPANCY, 2019  
Share of housing units by occupancy status and housing type



Sources: (Both) American Community Survey, 2019 5-year sample; TIP Strategies, Inc.  
Notes: Share of units that are vacant and for rent or for sale is estimated using homeowner and rental vacancy rates. The share of other vacant units includes the remaining vacant housing units that cannot be identified as for sale or for rent. A housing unit is considered vacant if it is unoccupied for more than two months (e.g., vacation homes and cabins).

### Gone for the Winter

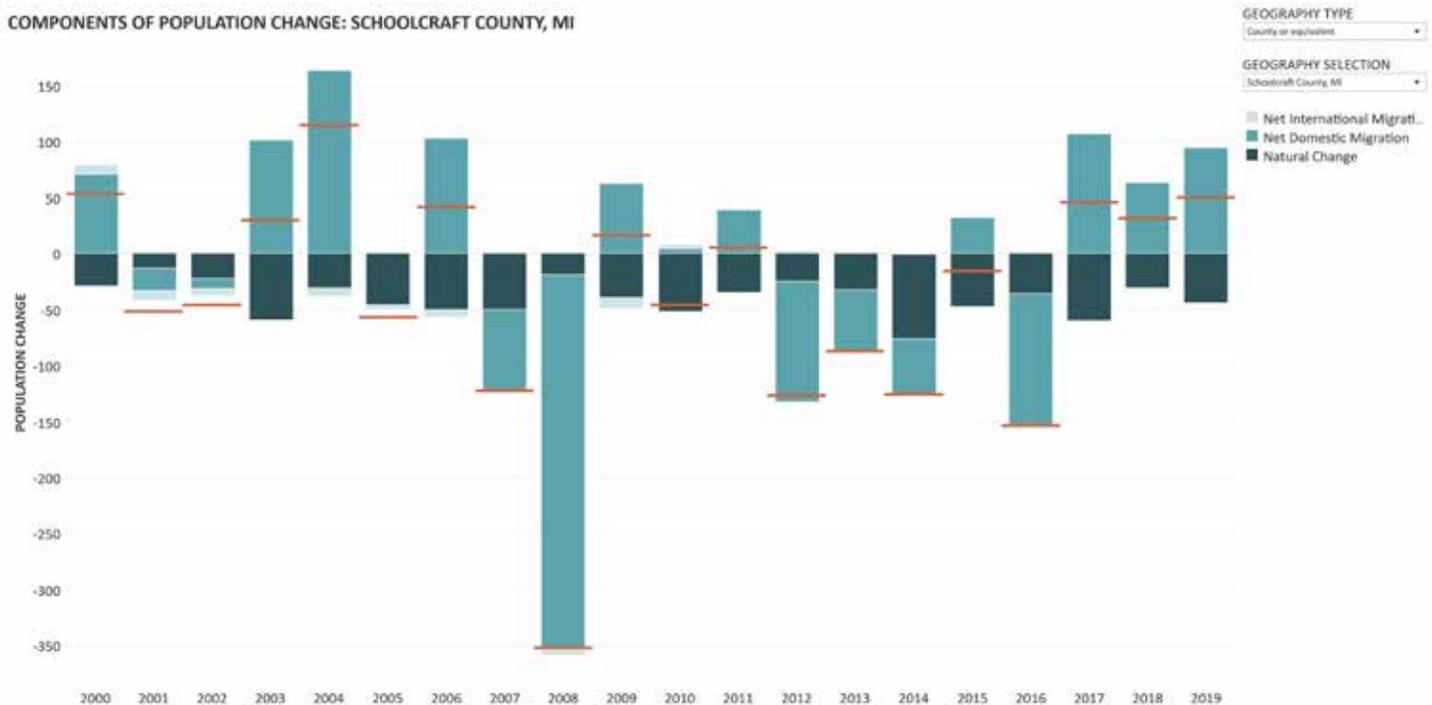
Vacancy rates also show a wide disparity. Only 14 percent of housing units in the city of Manistique and 12 percent in the state were vacant in 2019, contrasting with 24.5 percent of the stock in the central UP region. In Schoolcraft County specifically, the vacancy rate was almost 45 percent, meaning that almost half of the housing units in the county are vacant. The latter reflects a significant portion of homes in the region (particularly the more rural areas) that are seasonally occupied or rented out. The tourism industry is one of the region's greatest strengths by far, and many visitors often take advantage of these seasonally vacant homes, as opposed to boosting hotel occupancy. Central UP residents do enjoy lower median home values and rent than the state or the nation, but these seasonal vacancies translate to a scarcity of units available to buy. As part of the effort to attract more

permanent residents to the region, local EDOs should facilitate residential construction at price points that could accommodate young families.

### Population Decline and Recent Rebound

While Michigan has seen a modest population increase over the past 30 years, the central region has struggled to retain population. From 1981 to 2019, the total regional population declined from 184,500 to 167,700, with every county losing residents. Schoolcraft County saw a significant decrease in 2008, losing 350 residents to migration. The early 2010's also show an outmigration, but not so severe. The population has grown in recent years but has not reached the same pre-2008 levels. It is important to the region to retain (or regain) young talented people who may leave for college or for better employment opportunities elsewhere.

FIGURE 4. COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE: SCHOOLCRAFT COUNTY



Sources: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program; Moody's Analytics; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Notes: Natural change is the difference between annual births and deaths. The 2010 components are estimated based on a 12-month projection of the second quarter (the period between the Census and the mid-year estimate) that is not seasonally adjusted. Total population change includes a residual (a change in population that cannot be attributed to any specific demographic component), which is not shown here but is included in the net population change shown by the tan bars (—).

**Industry Strengths and Weaknesses**

Though overall regional employment is on a slow downward trend, some sectors have shown modest gains in recent years, such as transportation, warehousing, professional services, and corporate operations.

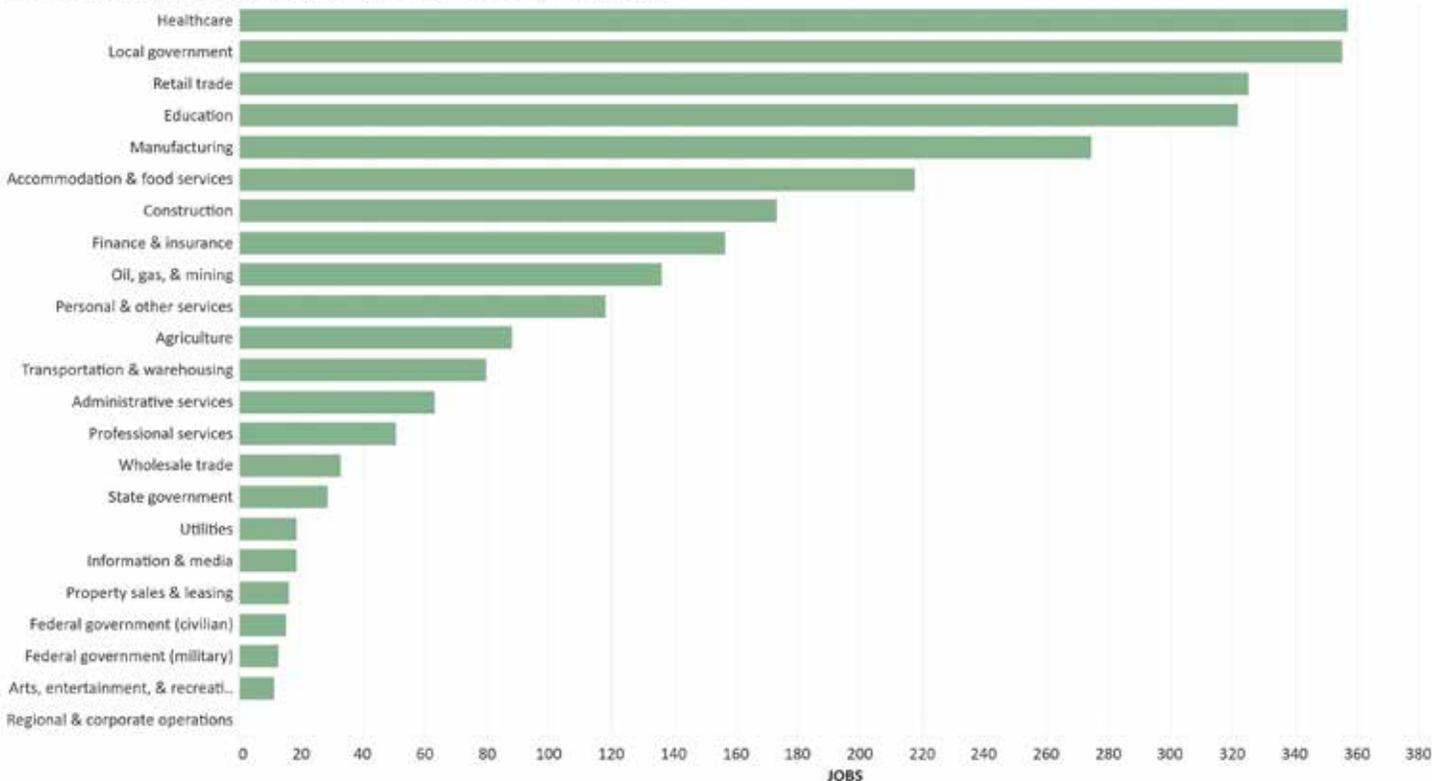
Despite significant setbacks—such as mine closures that resulted in the loss of hundreds of jobs in the region - there are some strong sectors present. Healthcare is by far the most dominant sector in Schoolcraft County, employing almost 400 workers. The sector also employs nearly 4,000 more workers in Dickinson and Delta Counties combined. In total, healthcare accounts for 14 percent of jobs in the central region, but the sector did experience a net loss in 2020. While not as prominent in Schoolcraft County, manufacturing employs nearly 7,000 people in Dickinson, Delta, and Menominee Counties.

This sector rebounded well in the central UP counties after 2008 and saw employment gains through 2019. The next top industry sectors after healthcare are local government, retail trades, and education.

However, there is cause for concern in other industries. While office support, sales, and food preparation occupations are among the largest across the region, these positions have also seen consistent declines before and after the COVID-19 pandemic began. Transportation, government positions, and arts & recreation are surprisingly low, signaling there may be room to grow in these areas such as Schoolcraft County, which sees a lot of tourist activity, and being relatively easy to get to and from, from all sides of the UP.

**FIGURE 5. 2020 EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY SECTOR, SCHOOLCRAFT COUNTY**

**2020 EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY SECTOR: SCHOOLCRAFT COUNTY, MI**



Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); Emsi 2021.2—QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.

### Occupational Migration Flows Vary by Sector

Schoolcraft County is unique among counties in the central UP in that most occupational migration flows out of the County. This means that Schoolcraft County is a net exporter of workers for most sectors, supplying workers for nearby counties. Office and Administrative Support, Sales, and Production and Food Preparation are the top occupations experiencing this export. Schoolcraft County hasn't had any in-migration for work since 2019 in the Healthcare sectors. This heavily suggests there is work to be done on local employment and occupational opportunities. Mining still accounts for 11 percent of regional employment in the County,

with Agriculture coming in a close second at 10 percent regional employment. Manufacturing, Administrative positions, and Healthcare were the only occupational sectors to experience growth in 2020.

## SWOT ANALYSIS

The following figure provides a summary of Schoolcraft County's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis). The SWOT analysis was developed based on direct input from internal and external stakeholders and the economic context analysis.

FIGURE 6. SCHOOLCRAFT COUNTY SWOT

 <b>STRENGTHS</b>	 <b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thriving tourism industry</li> <li>• Natural outdoor recreation assets</li> <li>• Quality of life/place</li> <li>• Excellent healthcare system</li> <li>• Strong entrepreneurial spirit</li> <li>• Lake Michigan water supply and shoreline</li> <li>• Strong Tribal presence in community</li> <li>• Strong work ethic among Yoopers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of economic diversification (historically dependent on resource-based industries)</li> <li>• Lack of proactive local leadership</li> <li>• Lower average wages and lack of skilled trades jobs</li> <li>• Aging population</li> <li>• Lack of childcare services</li> <li>• Insufficient housing stock</li> <li>• Lack of strategic planning for the future</li> <li>• Lack of racial/ethnic diversity</li> </ul>
 <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	 <b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attracting new residents, particularly families and remote workers</li> <li>• Unified branding and messaging</li> <li>• Expansion of neighboring industries</li> <li>• Industry diversification and innovation</li> <li>• Building value-added agricultural processing</li> <li>• Connecting with an EV circle tour around the UP (EV infrastructure)</li> <li>• Expanding broadband infrastructure</li> <li>• Underdeveloped outdoor recreational venues and activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged impact of COVID-19, especially on local small businesses</li> <li>• Continued downward employment trends</li> <li>• Increasing scarcity of affordable housing</li> <li>• Labor/talent shortage, especially in the service and trades sectors</li> <li>• Absence of regional collaboration on shared challenges and opportunities</li> <li>• Low wages</li> <li>• Declining school enrollment</li> <li>• Unsustainable growth of the tourism sector</li> </ul>

# RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN

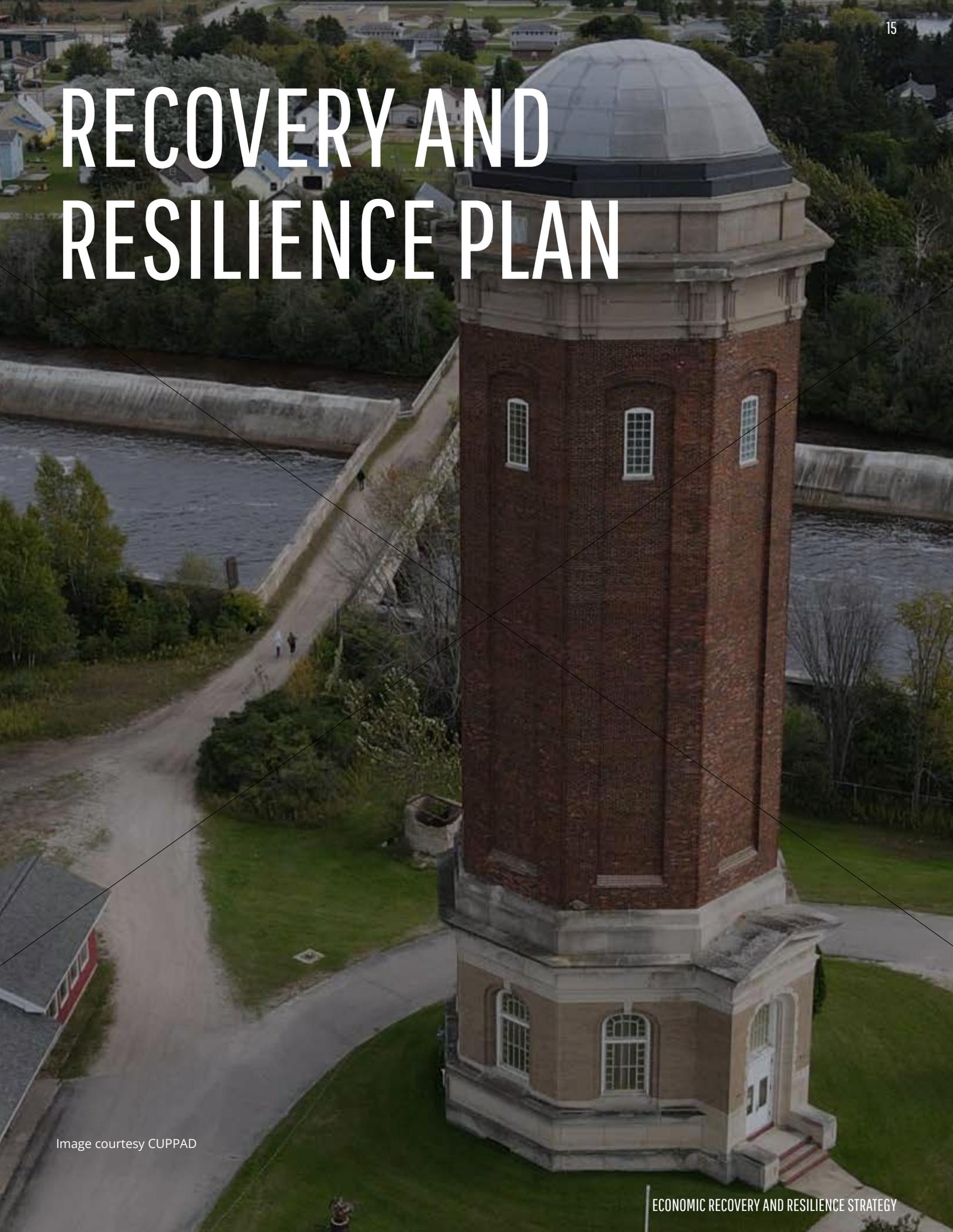


Image courtesy CUPPAD

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES.** Guiding principles reflect the values of a community. In the context of an economic development strategy, they are a set of statements expressing how a community defines economic development. These principles guide every action to achieve the excellence that is being sought. This

strategic plan's guiding principles are designed as crosscutting themes and reference points for the goals and strategies. Each principle is forward-looking and helps point the community toward growth and improvement. A set of core guiding principles is essential for evaluating bold ideas and potential strategies that could improve the economic future of Schoolcraft County.

FIGURE 7. GUIDING PRINCIPLES



## PUBLIC / PRIVATE COLLABORATION

A powerful approach for achieving common goals by leveraging the unique strengths and resources of both sectors.



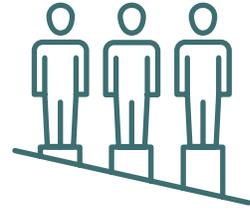
## EMPOWERMENT & CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Essential components for creating sustainable and inclusive communities that can effectively address their own needs and challenges.



## SUSTAINABILITY

Drive economic growth in a manner that preserves the region's unique attributes and resources.



## EQUITY & INCLUSIVITY

Provide greater opportunities for all residents and communities in Schoolcraft County and the central UP.

**GOALS.** The *Schoolcraft County Economic Recovery and Resilience Strategy* is built around five major goals. The set of strategies and tactics assembled under each goal is meant to provide an actionable plan for strengthening, broadening, and expanding the County's economic base over the long term.

CUPPAD is confident these goals and the associated strategies represent the right recommendations for local leadership to implement at scale and enhance economic prosperity in Schoolcraft County. Although distinct economic facets, these five goals will work in tandem, producing synergies that lead directly to a more prosperous and sustainable economy for the County.

FIGURE 8. GOALS

- 1. INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP—** Drive the County and the region into the future.
- 2. TALENT ATTRACTION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT—** Align the needs of employers with the supply of skilled workers.
- 3. INFRASTRUCTURE AND SITES—** Ensure the sustained capacity of the region's economy with critical developments.
- 4. QUALITY OF PLACE—** Enhance the brand perception of the region for residents and visitors.
- 5. REGIONAL POSITIONING AND MARKETING—** Extend the Midwestern and national reach of the community's assets.

# GOAL 1. FOSTER INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Drive the County and the region into the future.

Economic development efforts in 2021 and beyond cannot rely solely on established industries and ways of doing business as usual. Promoting and supporting disruptive innovation is a vital part of future economic growth, and the accompanying culture of entrepreneurship is its driving engine. Traditionally reliant on sectors like tourism and mining, the local business environment is in dire need of vibrant growth in new areas.

New initiatives like the establishment of an UP Outdoor Recreation Innovation District have the potential to accelerate the region's economic progression by building on existing assets to foster a more diverse, resilient, and sustainable economy. An innovation district is a specified geographic area where established companies cluster with startups, incubators, and accelerators to foster business creation and commercialization that leverage the district's economic assets. In Schoolcraft and the central UP, the outdoor recreation industry is exactly the kind of existing asset that could drive innovation and entrepreneurship in this sort of ecosystem, with abundant natural resources (like proximity to Lake Michigan and expanses of scenic, undeveloped land), and available activities for all four seasons.

In 2021 Regional partners sought an ARPA Build Back Better Regional Challenge grant to fund a strategic plan for creating the district and its component projects. By developing this innovation district concept with critical partners like the Innovate Marquette SmartZone (IMQT), Northern Michigan University (NMU), Keweenaw Bay Indian Community (KBIC), Upper Peninsula Michigan Works! (UPMW), and the Lake Superior Community Partnership (LSCP), local leadership stands to gain tremendously from the opportunity. While the grant application was ultimately not selected for Phase 2 funding, it is imperative for the region to explore other funding options and implement the core ideas of the initiative, such as smart/connected trail systems and harbors, future mobility, transit-oriented development, and maximizing the use of water assets.

The actions recommended under this goal are designed to build entrepreneurial infrastructure in the County,

while aggressively moving forward new initiatives. Schoolcraft County already possesses possible valuable assets that can push the community toward a more innovative and entrepreneurial economy, but there is work to be done to enhance and actualize these assets more fully. Schoolcraft Tourism and Commerce and other regional economic development organizations like IMQT and InvestUP can form the backbone of these efforts. If leadership can more effectively capitalize on these strengths, the central UP is poised to become a formidable force for innovation and entrepreneurship in the upper Midwest.

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

- 1.1.** Prepare and plan for industry diversification and shift from resource extraction based to service, tourism, and innovation industries.
  - 1.1.1.** Collaborate with regional partners to develop a feasibility test for a technology and innovation facility and soft landing hub.
  - 1.1.2.** Pursue state and federal grants to drive development of such a facility.
  - 1.1.3.** Identify and collaborate with local entrepreneurs who could take advantage of and help guide development of an innovation hub and soft landing space.
  - 1.1.4.** Create a revolving loan fund to help tourism, healthcare tech, and new businesses access capital, particularly new and emerging concepts that traditional lenders are less likely to finance.
  - 1.1.5.** Map all available public and private sites within the district that are ready for development or redevelopment and display them in a one-stop-shop web portal.
  - 1.1.6.** Emphasize and pursue innovation opportunities on the emerging outdoor innovation district in the region.
  - 1.1.7.** Use the Superior Watershed Partnership

(SWP) technical and practical experience to fund and implement sustainable nature tourism and outdoor recreation projects with local, state, federal, and tribal partners.

- 1.2.** Leverage partnerships with higher education institutions and neighboring smartzones growth of the region's entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem.
  - 1.2.1.** Focus on cultivating innovation hubs in sustainability, accessibility, and creativity.

### DETAILS

Tech-art and creative. Establish the ground zero development at Lake Effect Community Arts, including an entrepreneurial incubator and accelerator.

- 1.2.2.** Pursue partnerships with Bay College, NMU, Lake Superior State University (LSSU) on innovation and entrepreneurship activities.
- 1.2.3.** Create a multifaceted venture fund focused on product innovations and technologies developed at the three innovation hubs by small businesses and startup ventures in the community.
- 1.2.4.** Facilitate ongoing communication and resource sharing with the other 3 SmartZones in the UP to further inform best practices.
- 1.3.** Create a soft landing space and support program within Schoolcraft County for young emerging businesses located inside and outside of the community. See the Ann Arbor SPARK text box on page 19 for a description of a similar program in development in Michigan.
- 1.4.** Collaborate with the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians, NMU Center for Rural Health, UP Food Exchange, and the Michigan State University (MSU) Product Center to drive local innovation in the value-added processing industry.
  - 1.4.1.** Support the agribusiness and food processing industries with new and maintained support resources,

particularly training and mentorship in entrepreneurial development.

- 1.4.2.** Construct or redevelop food system infrastructures, possibly including a facility that houses and incubates local food-based businesses.

- 1.5.** Facilitate collaboration between InvestUP and local EDOs to foster a regional voice in innovation.

- 1.5.1.** Assess the area's specific competitive advantages and business climate to establish the communities' position in the region.

- 1.6.** Partner with local and regional organizations to design reverse-pitch competitions to engage central UP businesses and organizations with needs for innovation.

### DETAILS

In a reverse-pitch competition, established businesses pitch a challenge to entrepreneurs and solicit solutions. Businesses and communities have their challenges addressed while entrepreneurs benefit from establishing connections and increased awareness about their startups.

- 1.7.** Connect such competitions to the development and growth of the proposed innovation district, including the application of technologies to make the districts more accessible, sustainable, and attractive to residents, businesses, and visitors.
  - 1.7.1.** Focus competitions on finding solutions to regional issues, such as sustainability, housing, and other community challenges, through social entrepreneurship.
- 1.8.** Support youth entrepreneurship programs at the local level to foster a culture of innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit. Entrepreneurship education is especially important for helping the County's low-income and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) youth to develop skills and knowledge that will support their future success and benefit their communities.

## ANN ARBOR SPARK

For more than 15 years, Ann Arbor SPARK has served the greater Ann Arbor, Michigan, region, which includes Washtenaw and Livingston Counties. SPARK is a nonprofit economic development organization that fosters regional growth through business attraction, retention, and creation. The bi-county area has a long history of tech development, due in large part to the presence of the University of Michigan. Capitalizing on this, SPARK has created a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem within the region.

In 2020, SPARK's entrepreneurial services team assisted more than 267 innovation startups through their programs and facilities, which include fully equipped coworking spaces across two innovation centers (SPARK Central and SPARK East), mentorships with regional business leaders, a2Tech360 (an annual tech and entrepreneurial conference), entrepreneur bootcamp, student internship programs, and funding programs specifically for nascent companies. In addition to federal and state funding, SPARK manages SPARK Capital, the statewide coinvestment fund that provides up to \$250,000 for qualifying companies.

SPARK has also created a soft landing program for young emerging companies located outside of the Ann Arbor region. The program includes providing companies with market-entry work, meeting areas, and conference spaces.

A full case study on Ann Arbor Spark is featured in Appendix B.

Source: <https://annarborusa.org/>

- 1.9. Increase business attraction, retention, and expansion efforts on emerging innovative sectors, such as out-door recreation, industrialized hemp, water quality, food and beverage manufacturing, green energy, and medicinal foods.

### DETAILS

The National Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education provides resources and technical assistance for entrepreneurial education (<https://www.entre-ed.org/>).

- 1.10. Tell entrepreneurial success stories. An important component of building an entrepreneurial culture is making residents aware of how entrepreneurship can help to drive the economy. This message is best communicated by raising awareness of business success stories, both internally and in target markets.
  - 1.10.1. Utilize social media aggressively to publicize successes.
  - 1.10.2. Market success stories through existing entrepreneurship networks and partner organizations.

## GOAL 2. TALENT ATTRACTION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Align the needs of employers with the supply of skilled workers.

In order to create a growing economy, organizational leadership must both expand the local labor force and train its existing workers for the economic drivers of the future. Schoolcraft County runs the risk of continuing its trend of population stagnation if it does not successfully recruit and retain residents. Similarly, it runs the risk of relying too heavily on increasingly outdated occupations and sectors. The purpose of the following Talent Attraction & Workforce Development strategies is to counteract these risks.

Certain local initiatives and institutions, such as Discover Manistique, Schoolcraft County Tourism and Commerce (SCTC), and the Schoolcraft Memorial Hospital are already making valuable contributions to the County's talent and workforce, but the following strategies emphasize the need for their capacity and services to develop and expand. Other strategies would be new for Schoolcraft County, such as incentives targeted at attracting remote workers, which is a necessary tactic in the post-COVID climate of pervasive work-from-home opportunities. If the County wants to be the home for these (often high wage) workers, actions like this would be impactful. The development of a pipeline of talent is critical to the growth and vitality of emerging industries in the region, including the outdoor recreation cluster. The K-12 school system will also play a pivotal role in workforce development if properly utilized by collaborating closely with industry, particularly in trades. Talent attraction and retention also depend significantly on quality of place improvements, as outlined in Goal 4, Quality of Place.

Other strategies and actions rely on local and regional partners, particularly UP Michigan Works! agencies to assist in placing potential transplants into appropriate positions. School partnerships should also be leveraged in order to cultivate talent and prepare students to enter the workforce at the local level.

### STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

- 2.1.** Introduce talent attraction initiatives and new resident services within tourism campaigns such as Discover Manistique.
  - 2.1.1.** Expand the SCTC's Discover Manistique website to include employment resources and opportunities, higher education institutions and schools, and other assets for employment assistance like UP Michigan Works.
  - 2.1.2.** Create a welcome guide for new and potential residents and have this readily available on the website.
  - 2.1.3.** Support a story-sharing initiative on social media to share success stories of people who returned to the area or who are new transplants.
- 2.2.** Develop an incentives program focused on attracting remote workers.
  - 2.2.1.** Research and analyze similar incentives strategies in communities nationwide that have resulted in significant in-migration of remote workers, such as the Tulsa Remote cash grant program in Oklahoma.
  - 2.2.2.** Create an attraction program specifically focused on attracting young families.
  - 2.2.3.** Create local coworking spaces and market them to remote workers, traveling businesspeople, or those who work while on vacation.
- 2.3.** Address the insufficiency of the retention of existing residents.
  - 2.3.1.** Collaborate with local employers to identify wage/cost-of-living gaps that drive employees to higher-wage jobs outside of the region.
  - 2.3.2.** Support the talent recruitment efforts of local employers by providing them with marketing resources that effectively

promote Schoolcraft County to potential employees. Marketing materials should cover topics of interest, including housing, education, entertainment, and recreation.

- 2.4.** Utilize Upper Peninsula Michigan Works! to develop the talent infrastructure and career pathways for the outdoor recreation cluster and other sectors critical to the region's economy.

## DETAILS

Upper Peninsula Michigan Works! promotes and addresses the needs of businesses for current and future work-ready talent, in support of a strong and resilient economy.

<https://upmichiganworks.org/>

- 2.4.1.** Provide localized and regionwide data and company connections.
- 2.4.2.** Support upskilling for current or new talent in electrification occupations via workforce development funding.
- 2.4.3.** Leverage current and focused collaborations to help existing UP businesses find ways to diversify their current customers and products.
- 2.4.4.** Build and support a talent pipeline utilizing existing tools, partnerships, strategies, and the Talent Pipeline Management process from the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation.
- 2.4.5.** Work with local schools and education providers to identify and fund development of programs that provide the skills needed in a new industry.
- 2.4.6.** Develop career pathways to increase opportunities in jobs that will increase income levels for prosperous employment.
- 2.5.** Create a digital ambassadors program that utilizes a network of connectors who share positive stories about the region online and through social media. Local young professionals should be a primary source for ambassadors.
- 2.5.1.** Coordinate with Discover Manistique and other local business development organizations to drive this program forward.
- 2.5.2.** Provide information and marketing resources to educate ambassadors about the opportunities in the region.
- 2.5.3.** Use a digital talent share application tool to engage these ambassadors and push content to their networks.
- 2.5.4.** Capitalize on alumni stories from local schools such as the Manistique High School, Bay College, or LSSU.
- 2.6.** Build and expand upon the resources and networks offered by the Schoolcraft Tourism & Commerce (STC) to support talent and industry attractions.
- 2.6.1.** Partner with local and regional EDOs to develop programs and marketing for attracting new talent.
- 2.6.2.** Create a conference and meeting strategy to target occupations and professional member organizations, especially those connected with emerging regional industries, such as outdoor recreation.
- 2.6.3.** Leverage existing local events such as Folk Fest to market the region to visitors as a relocations destination.
- 2.6.4.** Work with local EDOs, travel organizations, and schools to develop marketing materials and content for talent attraction.
- 2.7.** Promote the formation and expansion of industry sector councils to ensure the critical workforce and business competitiveness needs of each sector are addressed.
- 2.7.1.** Work with the Schoolcraft Tourism and Commerce and regional educational institutions to organize/expand sector councils in critical industries, such as manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, and outdoor recreation.
- 2.7.2.** Pursue state and federal funding for technical assistance trainings tailored to

the region from industry leaders in the identified sectors.

**2.8.** Expand work-based learning experiences for youth, especially in critical occupations.

**2.8.1.** Work with the K–12 school system to develop new experiential education initiatives at all levels.

**2.8.2.** Coordinate with career/college counseling departments in high schools to promote apprenticeship models that can be completed before graduation.

**2.8.3.** Collaborate with major area employers such as Schoolcraft Memorial Hospital to host annual internship fairs in local high schools to expand student awareness of specific occupational opportunities.

**2.9.** Expand the reach of the NMU-led Manufacturing Talent Consortium and events like Manufacturing Day to better inform young adults about opportunities in the industry.

**2.10.** Work with local employment assets, such as Schoolcraft Memorial Hospital, to leverage available trainings, workforce engagement practices, and professional development services to engage and retain current valuable workers.

**2.11.** Support public outreach fostered by local institutions such as Limestone Federal Credit Union or county libraries for programs such as financial and digital literacy.

**2.12.** Support the SCTC and other organizations in supporting and educating local business owners in vital areas such as budgeting and succession planning.

**2.13.** Leverage the economic value of Northern Michigan University by raising awareness of new degree programs for in-demand skills (e.g., SISU, cybersecurity).

**2.13.1.** Market these mission-critical programs aggressively in NMU mail literature to prospective students.

**2.13.2.** Assess the capacity and resources of these specific programs and evaluate the need for additional faculty and support staff.

**2.14.** Provide greater financial support and wraparound services to enable low-income adults and students to participate in workforce training, hands-on work experiences, and internships.

**2.14.1.** Provide wraparound case management and support services to sustain participants through training, including training stipends or part-time work, childcare and transportation support, and connections to necessary human services, including healthcare.

\*This will require intensive collaboration between human service organizations to unify case management and focus community resources on helping participants make it through training.

**2.14.2.** Provide greater financial support and wraparound services to enable low-income students to participate in hands-on experiences and internships.

\*For many low-income and disadvantaged youth, the ability to complete job training programs depends on overcoming financial and life barriers. Greater access to services, such as mentoring, academic tutoring, or housing and transportation assistance, is vital to overcoming existing barriers to students being able to participate in work-based learning programs.

## GOAL 3. INFRASTRUCTURE AND SITES

Ensure the sustained capacity of the region's economy with critical developments.

Economic growth and prosperity in the central UP is significantly impacted by the quality of the region's infrastructure and sites. First-class infrastructure is essential for retaining existing employers and residents and for competing for new investment. Workplaces, destinations, and cultural amenities mean little if a community does not have the ability to access them effectively. Likewise, geographic location and other competitive advantages are eroded if not accompanied by sustainable and intentional redevelopment of sites to accommodate new economic needs. To attract and retain both talent (as outlined in Goal 1) and businesses, efficient and reliable infrastructure must be a priority for local decision-makers. In this regard, Schoolcraft County needs work.

Whether it's broadband connectivity, commercial air travel, railway development, or the public bus system, significant adjustments need to take place to carry the County forward. However, the County does possess the wherewithal to make these adjustments if leadership can coalesce around shared needs and opportunities. This expanded collaboration will more effectively influence the various local and state political decisions that affect the development and funding of new and improved infrastructure. Although partially out of the County's control, federal grants (e.g., ARPA) also present an exciting opportunity to make these strides, and economic development organizations in the area should pursue these aggressively via well-structured and comprehensive applications wherever possible. The recommendations below will form the backbone of a brighter economic future for Schoolcraft County by improving its local transportation, digital accessibility, and the flow of goods and dollars.

### STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

- 3.1.** Maintain and expand broadband infrastructure across the central UP, using federal and state funding.
  - 3.1.1.** Produce a comprehensive review of potential outside funding sources, such as ARPA and the pending federal infrastructure stimulus.

- 3.1.2.** Work with local broadband installation providers and state entities like Michigan High Speed Internet Office to facilitate first/last mile service to rural areas in the region.
- 3.1.3.** Develop capacity for pursuing BEAD funding to install fiber internet across the county.
- 3.2.** Accelerate brownfield redevelopment and recover lands for reuse by utilizing the resources and expertise of other national land revitalization and brownfield initiatives (e.g., the US Environmental Protection Agency Partnership for Sustainable Communities, Groundwork USA, RE-Powering America's Land).
- 3.3.** Collaborate with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation Build Ready Sites Program to expand and enhance the available stock and pipeline of shovel-ready industrial developments.
  - 3.3.1.** Increase competitive applications for the program's Build Ready Sites Grant initiative, which awards up to \$75,000 per project with a required local match.
  - 3.3.2.** Continue efforts to apply and receive certification from the Michigan Redevelopment Ready Communities program.
- 3.4.** Better leverage Schoolcraft County's suite of incentives and programs that are available.

### DETAILS

Examples of potential tools including the following.

- Tax increment financing (TIF) local districts
- Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) federal program
- Historic tax credit (HTC) local and federal programs

- New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) federal program
- Community development financial institution (CDFI) local loans
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) federal loan program
- The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding programs
- Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program (Section 108) federal loan

**3.5.** Improve the generation, affordability, and reliability of renewable energy resources.

**3.5.1.** Generate a comprehensive study of the region's existing renewable energy assets and future opportunities, following guidance from the UP Energy Task Force.

**3.5.2.** Set a goal of growing the region's renewable energy production to 10 percent of all energy sources by 2025.

**3.5.3.** Support the development of electric vehicle charging stations throughout the county to meet growing demand and to support the region's connected EV initiatives.

**3.6.** Continue to develop, promote, and connect the various trail systems in and around Schoolcraft County.

**3.6.1.** Evaluate potential funding streams (grants) to support the initiative.

**3.6.2.** Install wireless infrastructure at key access points along the trail.

**3.6.3.** Install electric charging stations at the same key access points.

**3.6.4.** Utilize the new network for data collection for usage and economic impact.

**3.7.** Develop a comprehensive strategy around public transportation in the region.

**3.7.1.** Evaluate the funding and capacity of the public transit system.

**3.7.2.** Collaborate with MDOT, tribal leaders, local EDOs, and SCTA to generate a mobility management plan to improve local public transit.

**3.7.3.** Ensure that all improvements to public transit are made with accessibility for the elderly and those with special needs in mind.

**3.7.4.** Facilitate information-sharing and resources between the cities of Escanaba, Manistique, and Gladstone as a hub-and-spoke model for new circulatory routes.

## GOAL 4. QUALITY OF PLACE

Enhance the brand perception of the region for residents and visitors.

Economically successful communities across the nation have one thing in common: people want to live there, and then they want to stay. Fostering a vibrant local culture depends on significant investment in all the facets that make a place desirable for current and potential residents. This means more than simply window-dressing. Natural beauty is, of course, important, but it is not sufficient to achieve the level of regional and national branding that Schoolcraft County seeks. Underpinning all the other goals in this plan is the quality of place that the County needs to create to be a truly thriving and attractive community.

It is no secret that Schoolcraft County and the Central UP in general are home to some truly exceptional cultural and natural assets. Outdoor recreation tourism is in many ways the lifeblood of the local economy, but there are other areas within quality of place considerations that need a substantial boost. Notably, housing availability and affordability ranked at the top of the list of immediate and long-term challenges in every stakeholder input session held with the consulting team. Without adequate housing options, the County is destined to remain a largely seasonal destination, rather than a year-round home. In addition, other amenities like trails, parks, and venues need to keep pace with the development of competing areas in the upper Midwest and the nation.

### STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

- 4.1.** Foster greater regional collaboration to expand the availability of diverse housing options across all price points and geographies.
  - 4.1.1.** Generate a comprehensive housing stock and affordability evaluation to inform all relevant strategic planning.
  - 4.1.2.** Understand the regional pressures on housing and how key projects such as the Soo Locks Construction and the Billerude Paper Mill will create additional pressures for the area housing demand.
  - 4.1.3.** Explore new tax incentives for new home construction.
  - 4.1.4.** Develop a strategy for the zoning and construction of workforce/middle class housing and rentals specifically.
- 4.2.** Conduct a feasibility study, working with regional and local partners, to connect trail systems in and around the County.
  - 4.2.1.** Work with non-motorized partners to map out current trail systems and possible connections.



- 4.2.2.** Collaborate with existing motorized trails (ie: snowmobiles) to make these connections for all trail users.
- 4.2.3.** Collaborate with accessibility-focused nonprofit organizations, such as SAIL, to ensure the trail is usable by all individuals.
- 4.3.** Assist in expansion of opportunities and activities offered by the intermediate school district to engage students in meaningful and purposeful civic improvements and ownership.
- 4.4.** Invest in other quality-of-place assets and amenities (e.g., parks, cultural, sports venues).
  - 4.4.1.** Identify publicly owned sites and pursue their redevelopment for cultural amenities.
  - 4.4.2.** Reach out Lake Effect Community Arts and to the local artist community and commission public art for shared spaces (murals, sculptures/installations, etc.).
  - 4.4.3.** Create a comprehensive map of existing public “third places,” such as parks, recreation centers, and libraries, to enhance advocacy efforts to maintain sustainable investment.
  - 4.4.4.** Seek grants to create or upgrade these public spaces for maximum appeal.
- 4.5.** Communicate the availability of relief funds for households through the Superior Watershed Partnership (grant from the Michigan Energy Assistance Program).
- 4.6.** Communicate the availability of relief funds for households through the Superior Watershed Partnership (grant from the Michigan Energy Assistance Program).
- 4.7.** Develop a waterfront resiliency plan to protect these important assets.
- 4.8.** Coordinate with major local employers and EDOs to prioritize and meet the employment needs of trailing spouses.
- 4.9.** Invest in family-friendly attractions and activities such as children’s museums, indoor activity centers, and other cultural amenities to engage families.
- 4.10.** Expand capacity of local childcare services by lobbying for revised licensing regulations to alleviate the burden on working parents.
  - 4.10.1.** Advocate at the municipal and state levels for adjusted legislation regarding permitting for childcare that encourages the formation of new service providers.
  - 4.10.2.** Explore new tax incentives and financial support for childcare providers who operate their small businesses out of their own homes. Appendix B contains a case study on an initiative that provides capital and business development services to childcare businesses serving low- and moderate-income families in rural counties in Minnesota with plans to expand to Michigan.
  - 4.10.3.** Explore the possibilities of employer-led day care and cooperative child care models.
- 4.11.** Review the findings and recommendations of the forthcoming UP Childcare Master Plan developed by the UP Child Care Task Force and consider implementing strategies and sharing with local childcare providers.
  - 4.11.1.** Dedicate incoming federal grant funding (if disbursed) to subsidize the cost of childcare services.

## GOAL 5. REGIONAL POSITIONING AND MARKETING

Extend the Midwestern and national reach of the community's assets.

Even if Schoolcraft County follows through on all the actionable recommendations in the other four goals and creates the conditions necessary for sustainable economic growth, it will need something further: effective external communications. Successful communities are not just well-oiled economic machines in a vacuum, but rather are known and recognized as such. How a city, county, or region is perceived by outsiders is as important as the reality it creates on the ground. To accomplish that level of recognition, local leaders must support and expand marketing efforts in creative ways. The following action items are targeted at that precise goal.

A common theme that arose in the stakeholder input process is the need for a more collaborative, coordinated, and focused brand messaging of Manistique and the Schoolcraft County to non-residents. Some marketing efforts already exist, such as Discover Manistique, but these could be strengthened, aligned, and their reach extended by facilitating ongoing collaboration with regional and local planning organizations like CUPPAD, SCTC, and other EDOs. With targeted outreach, Schoolcraft County certainly can capitalize on its unique natural attractions.

### STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

- 5.1.** Develop a regional marketing campaign targeted at national tourists (specifically repeat visitors) and entrepreneurs looking for outdoor recreational opportunities.
  - 5.1.1.** Collaborate with the state's Pure Michigan initiative to develop region-specific messaging.
  - 5.1.2.** Encourage local hotels and other lodging venues to conduct outreach to previous visitors.
  - 5.1.3.** Create and maintain database of seasonally occupied homes to get an average rate of occupancy in the busy summer months.
  - 5.1.4.** Implement this campaign on County websites and social media sites.
- 5.2.** Increase awareness of Schoolcraft County's non-motorized and motorized trail networks.
  - 5.2.1.** Use a passport challenge or similar event to get tourists, visitors, and residents out on the trails.
  - 5.2.2.** Consider a marketing campaign directed towards utilization of the trail network with regional connections.
- 5.3.** Grow regional awareness of annual local events such as Folk Fest, Tour Da Yoop, and others.
  - 5.3.1.** Identify and recruit local and regional vendors and partners that would benefit from exposure at these events.
  - 5.3.2.** Collaborate and coordinate with other regional and national events for maximum exposure and attendance.
- 5.4.** Enhance the efficacy and reach of destination marketing organizations such as Discover Manistique.
  - 5.4.1.** Evaluate the possibility of funding sources for the campaign.
  - 5.4.2.** Coordinate messaging throughout the City of Manistique and Schoolcraft County for a blended, cohesive, collaborative message that tells the story and shapes the areas identity.
  - 5.4.3.** The message should communicate the vision of the community and what it is to become as an affordable attractive place for workers and families.
  - 5.4.4.** Share information and strategies with regional partners such as Travel Marquette, Visit Escanaba, and the Superior Alliance for Independent Living (SAIL) to coordinate a successful and inclusive campaign.
  - 5.4.5.** Take ownership of diversifying the tourism industry by directing would-be

visitors to underutilized attractions.

- 5.4.6.** Generate a comprehensive map of major tourism assets to be featured on campaign websites.
- 5.5.** Increase coordination and function of local government through the development of a county-wide strategic plan that acknowledges the interconnectivity of local actions as well as those of economic development and community serve organizations.
- 5.6.** Align and coordinate regional marketing efforts to develop and implement consistent messaging.
  - 5.6.1.** Ensure ongoing collaboration between InvesetUP, CUPPAD, and other local EDOs on marketing efforts.
  - 5.6.2.** Leverage community and higher education leadership in marketing the County and region to young people.
- 5.7.** Actively manage Schoolcraft County's Wikipedia description to ensure that it accurately reflects the County's economic strengths and opportunities.

## WIKIPEDIA

When searching for information on communities using an online search engine, such as Google, Wikipedia entries often rank near the top of the search results. Consequently, Wikipedia is frequently the first (and sometimes only) source of information people will use to learn about a community. Currently, the Schoolcraft County description on Wikipedia is generic and offers little in terms of interesting information about the community for either businesses or visitors. To maximize the value of this free marketing resource, a local organization should be designated to register with Wikipedia to update and introduce new content and photos to the Schoolcraft County page.

