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DELTA COUNTY ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE STRATEGY

PREPARED FOR DELTA COUNTY, MICHIGAN



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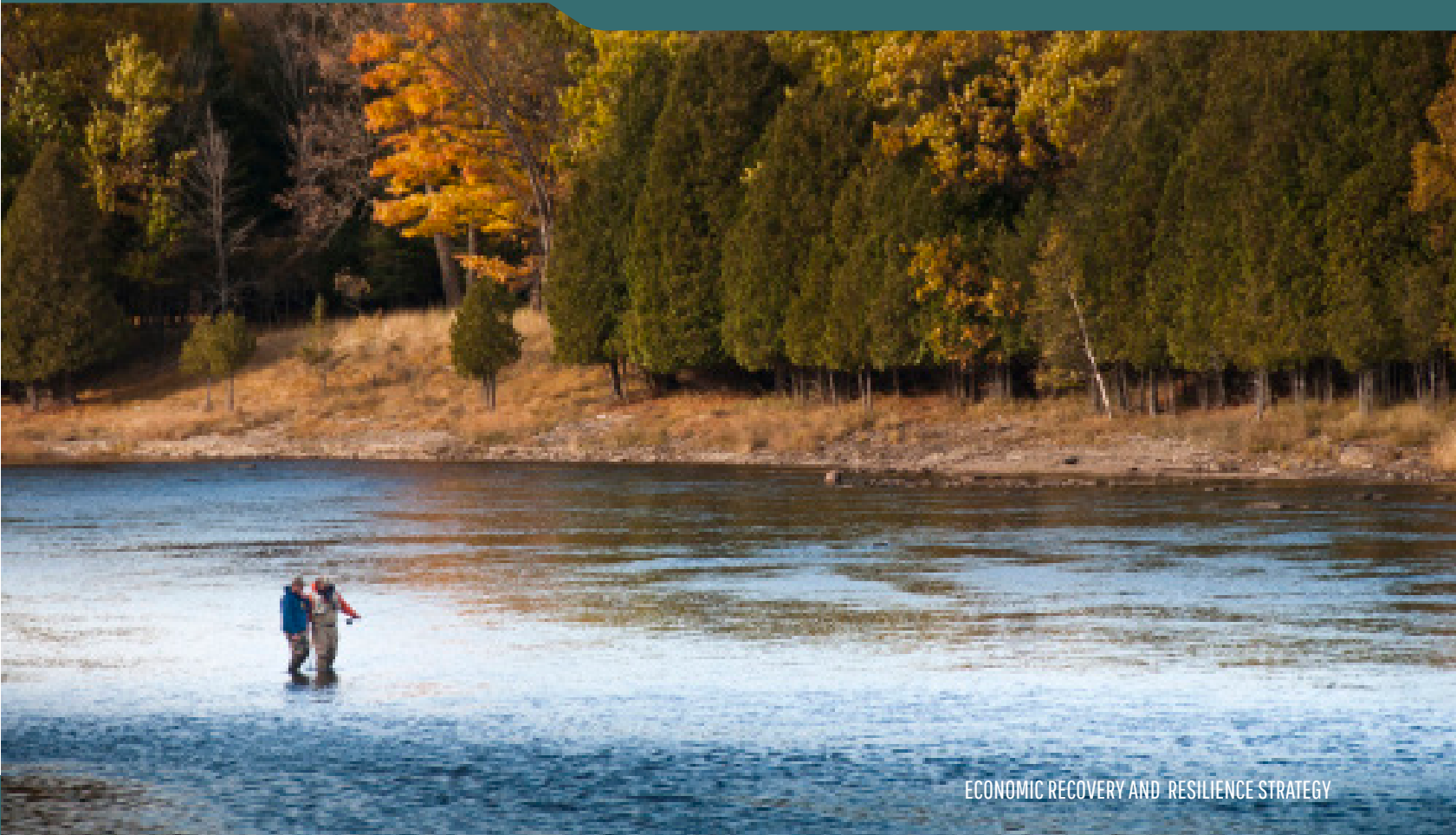
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INTRODUCTION

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, such as the Delta County Airport, Bay College, and the UP State Fair Grounds are among the assets that distinguish the county.



Image courtesy CUPPAD

As forestry and mining decline, the Upper Peninsula is moving rapidly to facilitate a broader economic recovery. This recovery will rely on technology, and also on 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, a limited housing supply, and the continued outmigration of talented young people.

Delta County and the City of Escanaba are an important economic hub for the region. A commitment to greater resilience is crucial to a 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 collaborative 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 12 individual interviews with economic development stakeholders in Delta County and the central UP. Facilitated six roundtable discussions with important constituencies and attended various events to better understand relevant topics and roles.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS FACILITATED

- Community Development, Community Image
- Local Government and Planning
- Workforce and Talent
- Housing and Education
- Tourism Businesses
- Large Employers

MEETINGS ATTENDED

- UP-Wide Broadband Webinar
- Delta County Economic Resiliency Workshops
- Delta Hannahville Task Force
- Delta County EDA Meetings

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

Delta 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 ore 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 Delta 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 Delta's challenges and leverage its strengths.



THE RESPONSE

The *Delta 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 nearby proposed UP Outdoor Recreation Innovation District in Marquette 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 *Visit Escanaba* initiative as a potential vehicle for attraction.

Perhaps less well-known, but equally important, is the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Escanaba, which stands ready to grow. There are regional 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 the Lake Superior Community Partnership (LSCP), 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 Delta County

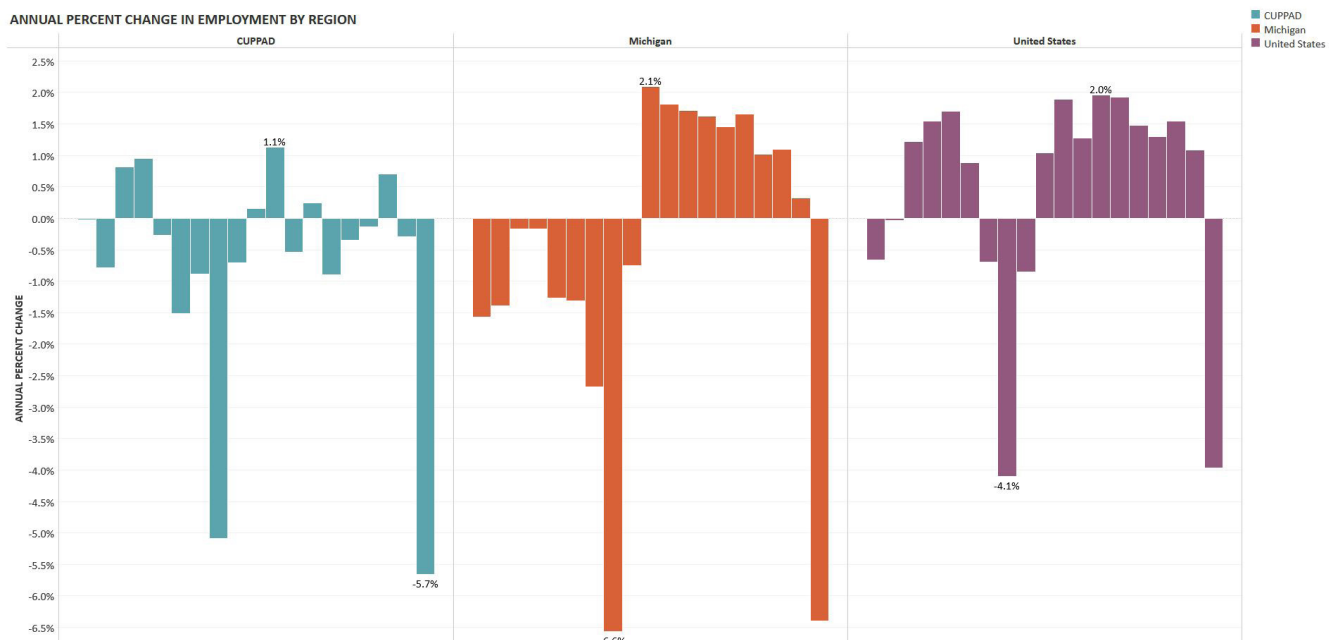
The six-county region served by the CUPPAD Regional Commission has struggled to keep pace with the economic diversification and growth of the state and the nation. Despite these struggles, the central region has several assets that could provide opportunities for revitalization. Delta County has the second largest regional labor force (16,000) and houses more than 20 percent of the region's 68,000 jobs. Delta is also the second most educated county than the region as a whole, with one-third of its residents having attained at least a bachelor's degree (compared with just 25 percent of adults in the six counties combined). The most

significant asset is the presence of Bay College, a major higher education and career training institution that helps draw talent to the region.

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. Delta County is lagging behind the state averages in terms of number of households with computers and internet connectivity; almost 20 percent of households do not have a computer and almost 25 percent of Delta County residents 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.
Notes: The CUPPAD region includes Alger, Delta, Dickinson, Marquette, Menominee, and Schoolcraft Counties in Michigan. Minimum and maximum percentage change years are labeled.

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 Delta residents follows regional trends at 47 years old, with other surrounding counties hovering around 50 years old. The surrounding region's older population trends also mean fewer children. Fewer than 21 percent of central region households have children (this can be as low as 15 percent in some counties), compared to 26 percent of Michigan households and 28 percent of US households.

Outdated Housing and Lack of Rentals

In Delta County, housing is generally more affordable than their neighboring counties. Median value of owner-occupied housing units in Delta County is about \$115,000. When compared to the City of Escanaba, the median value of owner-occupied housing lowers to about \$86,000. However, Delta County and Escanaba both experience a small number of housing units with 80% of units being single-family homes in the county, and 65% in the city. In keeping with the trends in the surrounding region, Delta County has a disproportionate number of older homes that may require renovation or rehabilitation, making homeownership a heavy burden. Escanaba has a high percentage of rentals (almost 40%) but virtually no availability at the time of this publication.

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

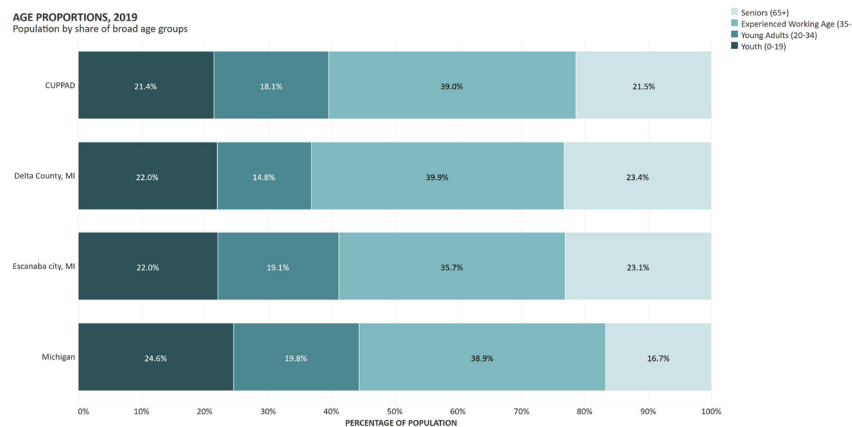
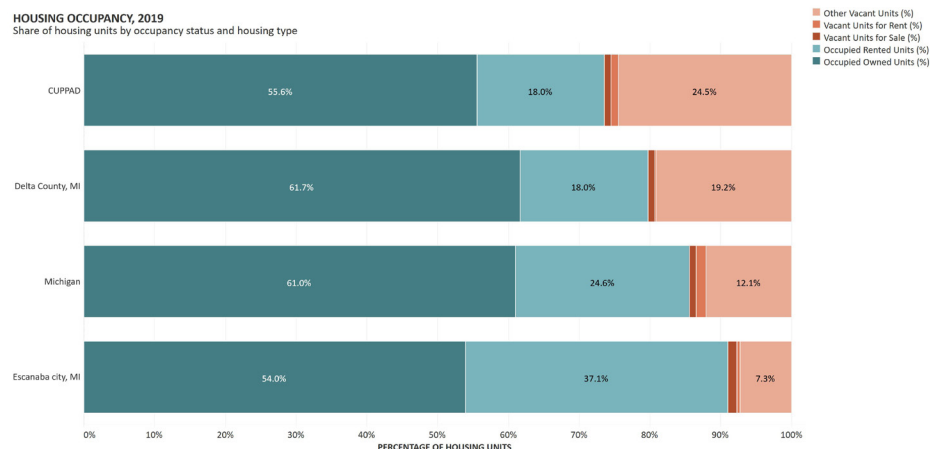


FIGURE 3. HOUSING OCCUPANCY, 2019
Share of housing units by occupancy status and housing type



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.

Gone for the Winter

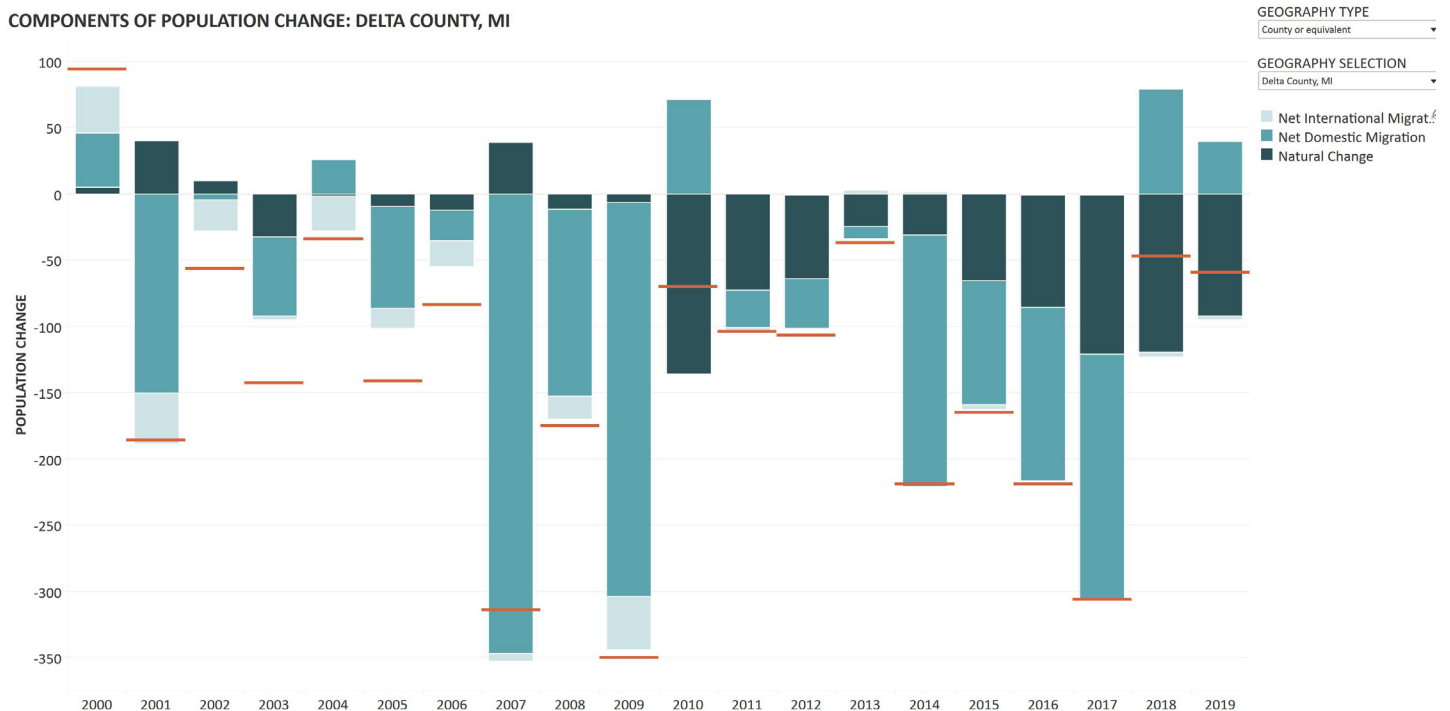
Vacancy rates also show a wide disparity. Only 7 percent of housing units in the city of Escanaba and 12 percent in the state were vacant in 2019, contrasting with 24.5 percent of the stock in the central UP region. In Delta County, the vacancy rate was 19 percent, meaning that almost a quarter of the housing units in the county are vacant. The latter reflects a significant portion of homes in the region 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. Delta County, however, saw a minor increase in population in the mid-nineties, losing much less than Marquette County. Population in Delta has been trending downwards over the past 40 years, but seems to be stabilizing in recent years at around 35 thousand.

FIGURE 4. COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE: DELTA 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 a specific event).

Industry Strengths and Weaknesses

Though overall regional employment is on a slow downward trend, some sectors in Delta County have shown modest gains in recent years, such as retail trade services, manufacturing, health care, and education.

Despite significant setbacks—such as mine closures that resulted in the loss of nearly 800 jobs in the region since 2001 (with over 400 positions shed in 2015 alone)—there are some strong sectors present in the region. Retail is by far the most dominant sector in Delta County, employing over 2,500 workers. The busy summer tourism season accounts for many of these positions.

Manufacturing has grown in the central UP over the last few years, employing over 2,000 workers in Delta County. Healthcare accounts for 14 percent of jobs in the central region, employing 1,900 workers in the county and is the third strongest industry. Education is also a leading industry in the county, due to the presence of Bay College

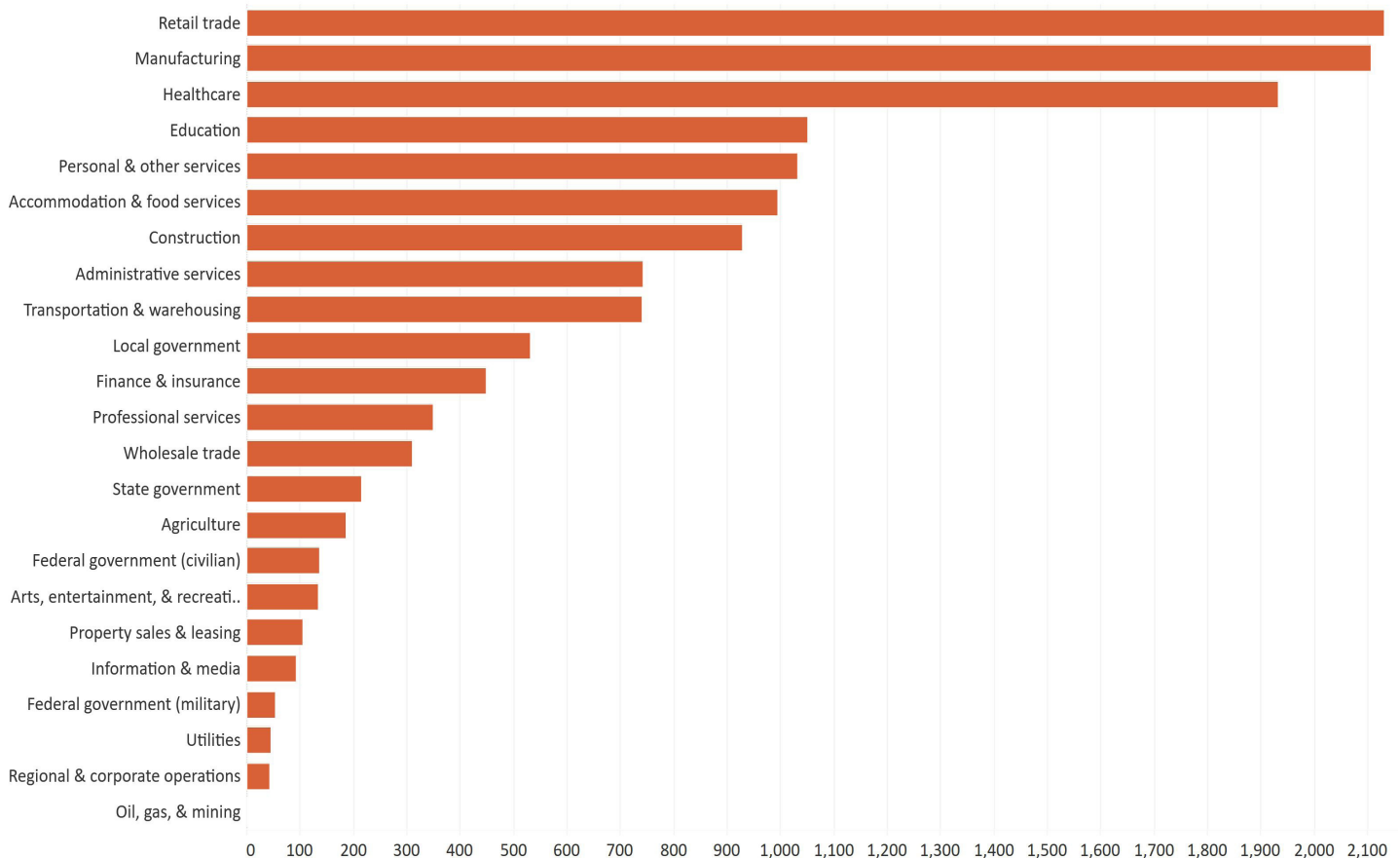
and their Career Technical Education (CTE) resources, which also serves as a pipeline for other industries.

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. Between 2015 and 2020, Delta County lost over 800 jobs in these three occupational groups. Modest job gains in healthcare support, food services, and construction occupations in the same period have been outweighed by those losses, contributing to the overall downward employment trend.

Overall, Delta County has significant strengths in retail, manufacturing, and healthcare; yet has room to grow in education, food service, construction, and in other industries that draw in visitors such as arts, culture, entertainment, and outdoor recreation.

FIGURE 5. 2020 EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY SECTOR, DELTA COUNTY

2020 EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY SECTOR: DELTA COUNTY, MI



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

Occupational Migration Flows Vary by Sector

Delta County tends to import its workers in Transportation and Material Moving, Construction and Extraction, and Management, while exporting Protective Service, Food Prep, and Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance workers. These worker flows have a small net magnitude with the net worker flow staying in the +/-100 range, meaning the flow could be easily reversed. The demand for housing construction and renovation cited previously suggests construction occupations will play a key role in the economic future of Delta County and the region. The current demand for workers in the skilled construction trades exceeds available supply. This imbalance, coupled with soaring

prices for building materials, causes new home construction to be slow and expensive. Delta County has a positive flow of construction workers, which makes it an ideal example for this industry.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The following figure provides a summary of Delta 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. DELTA COUNTY SWOT

 <h3>STRENGTHS</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thriving tourism industry • Natural outdoor recreation assets • Quality of life/place • Deep water port • Low cost of living • Higher education institutions and successful talent pipeline initiative • Increased civic engagement among public and students • Great Lakes water supply • Strong work ethic among Yoopers 	 <h3>WEAKNESSES</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of economic diversification (historically dependent on resource-based industries) • Housing availability/affordability • Lower average wages compared to other Midwest metros • Main street corridors are neglected and unappealing • Lack of childcare services • Limited electrical grid capacity • Presence of underperforming and blighted commercial space • Lack of racial/ethnic diversity
 <h3>OPPORTUNITIES</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracting new residents and remote workers • Expanding renewable energy generation • Industry diversification and innovation • Building value-added agricultural processing • Climate haven/ safe zone • Expanding broadband infrastructure • Outdoor recreation investment and development • Establishing a brand and speaking with one voice as a region 	 <h3>THREATS</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged impact of COVID-19, especially on local small businesses • Continued downward employment trends • Increasing scarcity of affordable housing • Labor/talent shortage, especially in the service and trades sectors • Absence of regional collaboration on shared challenges and opportunities • Aging infrastructure • Shrinking middle class • Unsustainable growth of the tourism sector

RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



Image courtesy CURPAD

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 Delta County.

FIGURE 7. GUIDING PRINCIPLES



GOALS. The *Delta 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 Delta 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. 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 county'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 Delta County 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 regional 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, the Shophouse Park project was recently granted \$3 million from the Michigan Strategic Fund and will move forward in the coming years. Projects such as this one, that focus on innovative approaches to bolstering unique regional industries, will become more common and influential. It is imperative for the region to explore and implement the core ideas of the initiative, such as smart and

connected trail systems and harbors, future mobility and electrification, transit-oriented development, and maximizing the use of water assets.

The actions recommended under this goal are designed to build on existing entrepreneurial infrastructure in the county and region, while aggressively moving forward new initiatives. Delta 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. The Delta Economic Development Alliance, the City of Escanaba, and regional partners like UP Michigan Works and CUPPAD can lead and assist on 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 mining to service, tourism, and recreation innovation industries.
 - 1.1.1.** Collaborate with regional partners to develop a feasibility test for a technology and innovation facility/ district and a soft landing hub for new products and ideas.
 - 1.1.2.** Promote entrepreneurial success stories within the community and region.
 - 1.1.3.** Pursue state and federal grants to drive development throughout the new district.
 - 1.1.4.** Identify and collaborate with local entrepreneurs who could take advantage of the new district designation.
 - 1.1.5.** Create a revolving loan fund to help outdoor recreation businesses access to capital, particularly new and emerging concepts that traditional lenders are less likely to finance.
 - 1.1.6.** 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.

- 1.1.7.** Emphasize and pursue innovation opportunities specifically related to outdoor mobility throughout the product and service supply chain.
- 1.1.8.** 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 regional assets such as Innovate Marquette SmartZone (IMQT), Bay College, Michigan State University Extension (MSUe) and UP Michigan Works to foster the growth of the region's entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem. Focus on cultivating innovations in sustainability, accessibility, and creativity, with secure connected platforms intertwined in all innovation bandwidths.

- 1.2.1.** Focus on cultivating innovation hubs designed for small businesses and startups to develop and test innovative products in the following industries.

DETAILS

- Outdoor recreation: Capitalize on the forward momentum of outdoor innovation and mobility, including electrification and smart trails.
- Sustainability: Consider modeling a sustainability hub after the SHINE institute at NMU, including an entrepreneurial incubator and accelerator.
- Tech-art and Creative: Partner with Bay College and their Entrepreneurial Small Business Program, the Bonifas Fine Arts Center, and other educational institutions to create a hub for tech-art and creative exploits.

- 1.2.2.** 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.

- 1.2.3.** Collaborate with local business leaders to create a venture capital network map.
- 1.2.4.** Assist in expanding entrepreneurial and innovative efforts at Bay College, including programming and mentorship, connecting these efforts to local high schools.

1.3. Create a soft landing space and support program within Delta County for young emerging businesses located inside and outside of the community. See the Ann Arbor SPARK text box on page 15 for a description of a similar program in development in Michigan.

1.4. Collaborate with the Hannahville Indian Community, NMU Center for Rural Health, Partridge Creek Farm, Food Start UP, 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.** Assist in developing a regional platform that catalogs and connects commercial kitchen and equipment available for rent.
- 1.4.3.** Construct or redevelop a facility that houses and incubates local food-based businesses depending on demand.
- 1.4.4.** Assist local educational institutions in integrating agricultural career and value added food processing practices.

- 1.5.** Facilitate collaboration between Bay College, local entrepreneurs, and 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.

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/>

- 1.6.** 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.

- 1.6.1.** Connect such competitions to the local economic development including the application of technologies to make the community more accessible, sustainable, and attractive to residents, businesses, and visitors.

- 1.6.2.** Focus competitions on finding solutions to regional issues, such as sustainability, housing, and other community challenges, through social entrepreneurship.
- 1.7.** 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.
- 1.8.** Increase business attraction, retention, and expansion efforts on emerging innovative sectors, such as outdoor recreation, industrialized hemp, cannabis processing and packaging, water quality, food and beverage manufacturing, green energy, and medicinal foods.
- 1.9.** 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.
 - 1.9.1.** Utilize social media aggressively to publicize successes.
 - 1.9.2.** Market success stories through existing entrepreneurship networks and partner organizations.

DETAILS

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



Image courtesy CUPPAD

GOAL 2. TALENT ATTRACTION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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

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. Delta 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 Delta County Economic Development Alliance (Delta EDA), UP Michigan Works, and the Visit Escanaba campaign 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 Delta 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.

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, skills, mentorships, and to prepare students to enter the workforce at the local level.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

- 2.1. Introduce active talent attraction initiatives within the Delta EDA and the Visit Escanaba campaign.
 - 2.1.1. Expand and connect the Delta EDA website and the Visit Escanaba website, to include employment resources, such as workliveup.com, and UP Michigan Works programs.
 - 2.1.2. Create a welcome guide for new and potential residents and have this readily available on the website or websites.
 - 2.1.3. Support a story-sharing initiative on local news, publications like UPword, and 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 and marketing family-friendly events and attractions.
 - 2.2.3. Create local coworking spaces and market them at discounted rates to potentially migrating and visiting remote workers.
- 2.3. Address the insufficiency of 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 Delta 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 or underperforming industries.
 - 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 Delta EDA, the Visit Escanaba campaign, 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 tools, such as SocialToaster (<https://socialtoaster.com>) or LinkedIn (<https://linkedin.com>) to engage these ambassadors and push content to their networks.
 - 2.5.4.** Capitalize on alumni stories from local schools such as the Escanaba High School and Bay College.
- 2.6.** Build and expand upon the resources and networks offered by the Delta EDA 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 UP State Fair and Yooper Fest to market the region to visitors as a relocation 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 Upper Peninsula Michigan Works!, Delta EDA, and regional educational institutions to organize/expand sector councils in critical industries such as manufacturing, forestry, 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 and top local employers.

- 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 to host annual internship fairs in local high schools to expand student awareness of specific local 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.

- 2.9.1.** Promote these events to middle and high school students, and college students. Leverage the economic value of Bay College by raising awareness of new degree programs for in-demand skills (e.g., healthcare, cybersecurity).
- 2.9.2.** Market these mission-critical programs aggressively in Bay College mail literature to prospective students.
- 2.9.3.** Assess the capacity and resources of these specific programs and evaluate the need for additional faculty and support staff.

- 2.10.** Partner with Michigan Works! and Pure Michigan Talent Connect ([mitalent.org](https://www.mitalent.org)) to increase awareness of their Business Resource Network (BRN) and the Jobs for Michigan's Graduates (JMG) youth initiative (<https://www.mitalent.org/business-resource-network>).

- 2.10.1.** Provide more information to companies

on benefits of participating in a BRN and support services through Success Coaches.

- 2.10.2.** Provide more information to incoming and graduating students on Jobs for Michigan's Graduates (JMG) program through Michigan Works! organizations (<https://gstmiworks.org/jmg/>).

- 2.11.** 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.

- 2.11.1.** 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.

- 2.11.2.** 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, Innovation and Entrepreneurship) and businesses, efficient and reliable infrastructure must be a priority for local decision-makers. In this regard, Delta 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 EDOs in the area should pursue these aggressively via well-structured and comprehensive applications wherever possible. The recommendations under this goal will form the catalyst of a brighter economic future for Delta 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, the IJA and the pending federal infrastructure stimulus.

3.1.2. Work with local broadband installation providers and state entities, like MIHI and Connected Nation Michigan, to facilitate first/last mile service to rural areas in the region.

3.1.3. Evaluate and consider alternative delivery mechanisms, such as aerial or Starlink services, to address the challenges of digging trenches in rocky terrain.

3.2. Support and replicate the proposed Lake Superior Community Partnership initiative to establish a regional site development readiness program.

DETAILS

This initiative will engage local governments, property owners, and other partners to identify and resolve site-specific needs relative to zoning, infrastructure, tax abatements, or incentives that impact economic development opportunities in the Upper Peninsula.

3.3. 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).

3.3.1. Compose list of redevelopment ready sites with priority projects and possible future uses with the needs of the community in mind.

3.4. 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.

3.4.1. 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.

- 3.4.2.** Reestablish RRC Certification in Escanaba and Gladstone cities for access to the benefits listed in the Redevelopment Ready Communities Program.

- 3.5.** Better leverage and publicize Delta County's Opportunity Zone for new investment.

- 3.5.1.** Create a new website dedicated to highlighted advantages and opportunities associated with investing in the county's Opportunity Zone.

DETAILS

The website could include the following.

- A map showing where the Opportunity Zone is located.
- A prospectus describing each Opportunity Zone.
- A list of potential benefits of investing in the Opportunity Zone, such as the easing of zoning rules, population demographics, and various other business incentives.
- A catalog giving details of Opportunity Zone-ready projects.

- 3.5.2.** Consider dedicating a specific personnel at the city of Escanaba to work on the Opportunity Zone.

- 3.5.3.** Develop marketing materials for the Opportunity Zone.

- 3.5.4.** Host tours of the Opportunity Zone for potential investors.

- 3.5.5.** Consider additional incentives for each Opportunity Zone to make them more attractive to potential investors.

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
- Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program (Section 108) federal loan

- 3.6.** Increase the number of commercial flights into and out of the Delta County Airport (ESC).

- 3.6.1.** Renovate and update existing terminals as necessary.

- 3.6.2.** Promote the airport to existing airlines as a prime destination in the Midwest.

- 3.6.3.** Explore the use of financial incentives for airlines to add flights through ESC.

- 3.7.** Redevelop inactive freight rail lines for new uses.

- 3.7.1.** Evaluate the potential of publicly owned rail lines for innovative purposes.

- 3.7.2.** Generate a comprehensive map of the of privately owned rail lines and develop relationships with the key decision-makers.

- 3.7.3.** Work with major local distribution employers to assess the costs and benefits of transitioning from trucking to rail shipping.

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

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

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

3.8.3. Support the development of strategically located electric vehicle charging stations throughout the county to meet growing demand.

3.9. Continue efforts to improve and connect non-motorized trails throughout the county.

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

3.9.2. Install wireless infrastructure at key access points along the trail.

3.9.3. Install electric charging stations at the same key access points.

3.9.4. Utilize the new network for data collection regarding usage and economic advantages.

3.10. Invest and support further deepwater port and supporting infrastructure development to ensure longevity and resiliency.

3.10.1. Beautify the port gateway by collaborating with local tourism authorities and businesses to enhance tourists' first impression and to provide a

unique experience.

3.10.2. Provide transportation services to and from the port for cruise ship passengers.

3.10.3. Increase port activity by strengthening international partnerships, exploring market possibilities, and sharing best practices and joint initiatives where appropriate.

3.10.4. Continue to improve port infrastructure, streamline logistics processes, and offer competitive services and incentives to shipping companies.

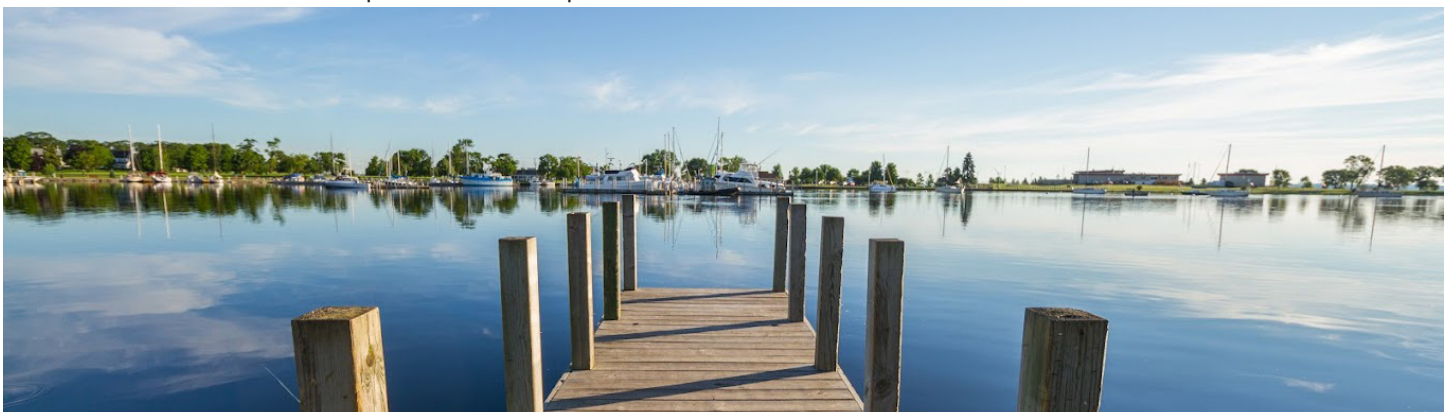
3.11. Develop a comprehensive strategy around public transportation in the region.

3.11.1. Evaluate the funding and capacity of the public bus system with a particular focus on the expansion of the driver workforce.

3.11.2. Collaborate with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), tribal leaders, local EDOs, and the Delta Area Transit Authority (DATA) to generate a mobility management plan to improve local public transit over the next 5 years.

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

3.11.4. Facilitate information-sharing and resources between the cities of Escanaba 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 move 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 approach means more than simply creating a favorable impression. Natural beauty is, of course, important, but it is not sufficient to achieve the level of national branding that Delta 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 Delta County and the central UP are home to some truly exceptional cultural and natural assets. Outdoor recreation tourism certainly represents a significant part of the local economy. However, 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.** Explore new tax incentives for new home construction.
 - 4.1.3.** Collaborate with Bay College to facilitate increased student housing developments or high quality rentals.
 - 4.1.4.** Develop a strategy for the zoning and construction of workforce/middle-class housing, specifically.
- 4.2.** Beautify community gateways and downtown thoroughfares to become welcoming and easy to navigate for visitors.
- 4.3.** Expand and connect the local trails to serve as a key component of the regional push towards recreation and innovation industries.
 - 4.3.1.** Market the trail to all communities surrounding Escanaba along the route.
 - 4.3.2.** Work with local hotels to include information about the trail in all check-in materials.
 - 4.3.3.** Collaborate with accessibility-focused nonprofit organizations to ensure the trail is usable by all individuals.
- 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.** Identify priority sites that will have the biggest impact on visitors.
 - 4.4.3.** Reach out to the local artist community and commission public art for shared spaces (murals, sculptures/installations, etc.).
 - 4.4.4.** Collaborate with the Great Lakes Sports Commission to evaluate existing sports-related assets and new opportunities for venue and event expansion.
 - 4.4.5.** Create a comprehensive map of existing public third places (spaces where people spend time between work and home), such as parks, recreation centers, and libraries, to enhance advocacy efforts to maintain sustainable investment.
- 4.5.** Expand lodging capacity and options for incoming recreation tourists to meet demand.

- 4.5.1. Survey local hotel management to evaluate staffing/workforce needs required to expand and sustain capacity.
- 4.5.2. Reach out to Airbnb to request access to travel data on tourists who stay in their properties.
- 4.5.3. Set ambitious goals of a 10 percent increase in total hotel rooms and a 10 percent increase in average annual occupancy over the next 5 years.
- 4.6. Communicate the availability of relief funds for households through the Superior Watershed Partnership (grant from the Michigan Energy Assistance Program).
- 4.7. Coordinate with major local employers and EDOs to prioritize and meet the employment needs of trailing spouses (individuals who follow their partner because of a work assignment).
- 4.8. Expand capacity of local childcare services by lobbying for revised licensing regulations to alleviate the burden on working parents.
 - 4.8.1. Advocate at the municipal and state levels for adjusted legislation regarding permitting for childcare that encourages the formation of new service providers.
 - 4.8.2. 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.
 - 4.8.3. Dedicate incoming federal grant funding (if disbursed) to subsidize the cost of childcare services.
- 4.9. Support LSCP efforts to serve as an urban programs connector to build an effective bridge between Michigan's urban and rural economies by serving as a liaison to industry and economic development partners throughout the state.



Image courtesy CUPPAD

GOAL 5. REGIONAL POSITIONING AND MARKETING

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

Even if Delta County follows through on all the actionable recommendations in the other four goals in this plan and creates the conditions necessary for sustainable economic growth, it will need something further: effective external communications. Successful communities are *known and recognized* as such. How a city, county, or region is perceived by outsiders is as important as the reality it creates. To accomplish that level of recognition, local leaders must support and expand marketing efforts in creative ways. The following strategies and actions 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 Delta County and the central UP to nonresidents. Some marketing efforts already exist, such as Visit Escanaba, but these could be strengthened, aligned, and their reach extended by facilitating ongoing planning efforts among organizations like the LSCP, CUPPAD, and other local EDOs. Furthermore, large-scale, national-level tourist events, like the UP State Fair, present a critical opportunity to bring more attention (and people) to the community. With more targeted outreach, Escanaba 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.** Survey local homeowners who reside in Escanaba and Gladstone seasonally to create and maintain a database of average occupancy during peak tourism periods.
 - 5.1.3.** Encourage local hotels and other lodging venues such as Air BnBs, to conduct outreach to previous visitors.
- 5.2.** Increase awareness of the Delta County Non-motorized Trails (DTN).
 - 5.2.1.** Operate the DTN Passport Challenge with local partners on at least a biannual basis.
 - 5.2.2.** Grow the ambassador program by seeking additional volunteers.
- 5.3.** Grow awareness of large annual tourist events, like the UP State Fair and YooperFest.
 - 5.3.1.** Identify and recruit vendors and partners who would benefit from exposure at these events.
 - 5.3.2.** Coordinate with other similar events' decision-makers across the region and possibly nation.
- 5.4.** Enhance the efficacy and reach of Visit Escanaba
 - 5.4.1.** Evaluate the possibility of new revenue streams, such as grants available through the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), dedicated to expanding Visit Escanaba capacity, staffing, and initiatives.
 - 5.4.2.** Continue collaboration with the Superior Alliance for Independent Living (SAIL) to drive progress in accessibility efforts.
 - 5.4.3.** Take ownership of diversifying the tourism industry by directing visitors to underutilized attractions.
 - 5.4.4.** Generate a comprehensive map of major current and future tourism assets to be featured on Visit Escanaba's public-facing website.
 - 5.4.5.** Promote the #VisitEscanaba social media campaign.

- 5.5.** Align and coordinate regional marketing efforts to develop and implement consistent messaging.
 - 5.5.1.** Ensure ongoing collaboration between InvestUP, CUPPAD, and other local EDOs on marketing efforts.
 - 5.5.2.** Leverage Bay College leadership in marketing the County and region to young people.
 - 5.5.3.** Coordinate with SWP regarding existing Great Lakes partnerships and programs, including international collaboration with Canadian communities, organizations, and agencies.
- 5.6.** Actively manage Delta 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 Delta 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 Delta County page.



Image courtesy of CUPPAD