

Gratiot County
U. S. A.

2002 Strategic Plan

“Great Things in the Palm of Your Hand”

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The Gratiot Community Yesterday

Although fur trappers had been taking advantage of the Gratiot County's bountiful wildlife since the early 1800s, the first permanent settlers - Arnold Payne, his wife and 13 children - didn't arrive until 1846, 15 years after the county was founded. The first road suitable for transporting goods ran from Maple Rapids to just north of St. Louis where a group of German missionaries had established the Bethany Lutheran Indian Mission in 1848. The first great migration to the county occurred in 1854 when the "Graduation Act" was passed selling unclaimed 40 acre parcels of property for 50 cents an acre. The population rapidly increased and large tracks of land were cleared for school houses, churches, homes and roads. In the early 1850s, the communities of Alma, Ithaca and St. Louis were platted and became incorporated a few years later.

The Pine and Maple rivers provided the first main transportation routes into Gratiot County until railroads began serving the area during the 1870s, about the same time the famous Plank Road was built between St. Louis and Saginaw. By that time access to Gratiot County was becoming much easier from any part of the state which led to the establishment of a number of small communities, such as Ashley, Bannister, Middleton, Perrinton, North Star, Riverdale, Breckenridge, Pompeii, Forest Hill and Elm Hall along the rail lines. During this period of growth people from across the United States came to the Magnetic Mineral Springs Bath House at the Park Hotel and Sanitarium in St. Louis. They came seeking the reported healing powers of its "magic waters."

Lumbering was the area's first major industry with large sawmills processing the wooden timbers harvested in the vast woodlots and shipping them off to other parts of the state. As the land was cleared, however, it was discovered that the forests had been shielding some of the most fertile soil in Michigan and farming soon became the county's economic backbone. In nearly every community sawmills gave way to flour and grist mills. Large sugar beet processing plants were built in Alma and St. Louis, and crops such as wheat, corn and varieties of beans flourished.

As Michigan has evolved so has Gratiot County's economy. Since the Republic Truck Plant operated in Alma during the 1920s the automotive industry has played an integral role in providing jobs for area residents. Local factories still manufacture parts for several major auto manufacturers. Mobile home plants were major employers in the 1950s and 60s when the first 'manufactured trailer homes' were introduced. The area was once also one of Michigan's leading petroleum producers.

A number of other products are also currently built in Gratiot County including jet aircraft engine components, wooden building trusses, pontoon boats, carbide cutting tools, grain cleaning equipment, and vacuformed, injected and extruded plastics, among many others. Combined, the three Michigan Department of Corrections facilities are the area's largest employer.

The Gratiot Community Today

About half the county's 42,000 residents live in the cities of Alma, St. Louis, and Ithaca, and the villages of Breckenridge, Ashley and Perrinton. The remainder are spread throughout 16 townships and the smaller hamlets of Riverdale, Sumner, Middleton, Elm Hall, Elwell, Wheeler, Pompeii, Bannister and North Star.

Since the first settlers arrived during the 1840s, agriculture has been a key component of Gratiot County's economy. It still accounts for about 70 percent of all land use. The rich, fertile soil is ideal for growing dry beans, corn, sugar beets, soybeans and wheat. Beef cattle and dairy farms comprise the largest portion of the area's livestock operations. Farming has created a number of spin-off business opportunities, including elevators, commodity distributors, sugar beet transfer stations, fuel suppliers and implement dealers that have boosted the local economy.

Gratiot County has also been fertile ground for employers looking to fill new industrial or commercial jobs. Manufacturers building molded plastic parts, automobile accessories, recreational products and other precision made equipment have found a highly trained and motivated workforce at their disposal.

Even though Gratiot County is located near several "big cities" and tourist meccas, cultural and leisure time activities are available locally. Major retailers and viable downtown business districts provide shopping to meet most needs. The Gratiot County Players, Alma Symphony Orchestra, Alma College's Heritage Center for the Performing Arts, Evening in the Park series and several community festivals are just some of the entertainment options provided locally throughout the year. Adult and youth sports leagues, three community swimming pools, six golf courses, more than 20 public parks, two state game areas, in-line skate park, two bowling centers and two roller-skating rinks are just some of the recreational activities offered locally.

When it comes right down to it, however, people are drawn to Gratiot County because its small-town charm and rural ambiance make it a great place to raise a family. Each year there are a number of heartwarming stories about people helping people. Many times a group of farmers will band together to plant or harvest the crops of a neighbor who is ill or injured and can't do the job himself. Then there are those who initiate fund-raising campaigns to help pay the medical bills for a child or adult stricken with a life-threatening disease. Many of these good deeds occur without much publicity but they don't go unnoticed or unappreciated. After all, that's what a "community" is all about.

Gratiot County Tomorrow

Potential Trends

1. Completion of U.S. 27 between St. Johns and Ithaca as a limited access highway, creating development pressure in the county.
2. Competition from neighboring counties, regional economic development entities and the Internet for business.
3. Increasing community awareness about workforce issues related to substance abuse, quality and dependability.
4. Competing with contemporary urban centers for residents and workers.
5. Lack of adequate broadband communications infrastructure putting rural areas at an expanding disadvantage..
6. Access to education and training more critical to future employment.
7. Growing importance of the healthcare industry to the county and state.
8. Decreasing public funds for recreation systems and opportunities.
9. The demise or consolidation of locally-owned agricultural markets and infrastructure is driving a movement to larger producers with on-farm storage and transportation.

Issues

Key issues in the county were identified and formed the basis of committees for development of the Strategic Plan.

Economic Development:

Maintaining the economic vitality of the county in the midst of a changing business base.

Education: Ensuring all citizens are given appropriate educational opportunities to ensure a good quality of life.

Environmental: There are several areas in the county in need of environmental remediation.

Land Use: Development pressure from U.S. 27 and neighboring counties will continue to present challenges for the county.

Quality of Life: Changes in the community and the economy require new diligence in maintaining a basic quality of life for all citizens.

Recreation: A lack of a variety of recreational choices in the county affects the quality of life and the ability of businesses to attract new talent to the area.

Transportation: Gaps remain in transportation systems that support the needs of residents as well as commercial and industrial sectors of the county.

Youth: Creating employment, recreational and educational opportunities for youth in Gratiot County that will enhance the quality of life for them and fellow citizens.

Gratiot County Vision

Overall Vision Facilitator:

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Vision

In the year 2007, Gratiot County will be a cohesive community of people enjoying distinct, but interrelated urban and rural living environments; where the natural surroundings and important agricultural resources are protected; and where opportunities abound to live and work in a safe atmosphere, allowing people to enjoy the benefits of well-paying jobs, varying housing choices, excellent public services, superb education, quality health care, ample cultural and leisure opportunities and a healthy family environment.

This will be achieved by:

- 1. Economic Development:** Retain, expand and attract business and industry and participate in activities which enhance the economic climate within the Gratiot Community.
- 2. Educational Quality:** Provide a network in which schools, government and the private sector can communicate and collaborate to ensure that all of our citizens are given appropriate educational opportunities.
- 3. Environmental Issues:** Provide for environmental awareness today and into the future of Gratiot County, by using a coordinated effort among units of government, farmers, the industrial community, citizen groups, and other interested parties. Which will ultimately remediate all contaminated sites and make them produce again in one form or another, making all of Gratiot County a safe place now and into the future.
- 4. Land Use:** Provide for the growth and development of economic opportunities in Gratiot County through designed land use and coordinated planning among units of governments and interested parties while enhancing the quality of life of our citizens.
- 5. Quality of Life:**
To improve the quality of life for all citizens in Gratiot County by removing barriers that impede individuals from reaching their full potential.
- 6. Recreation:** A comprehensive community recreation system in Gratiot County serving all residents.
- 7. Transportation:** Assure, through consensus, a vision for Gratiot County that maximizes our resources and provides a superior quality of life by providing transportation opportunities to support the residential, commercial and variety of industry's needs in the county.
- 8. Youth Network Communication:** To promote a safe and healthy environment for the youth of Gratiot County by providing, facilitating, coordinating, and communicating appropriate social and learning opportunities.
- 9. Communicating the Vision:** The Gratiot County Strategic Plan becomes a living document in which residents take ownership in and work to achieve its vision and goals—ultimately creating a Gratiot County Community that local residents take pride in and guests find as a desirable place to visit.

1. Economic Development

Vision

Retain, expand and attract business and industry and participate in activities which enhance the economic climate within the Gratiot Community.

Vision Facilitator

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Guiding Principles

1. Retention of existing business and industry.
2. Expansion of existing business and industry and encouraging related spin-offs.
3. Counseling of business and industry.
4. Recruitment of new business and industry primarily through:
 - a. Growth from mid-Michigan's existing business and industry base.
 - b. Identification of emerging market opportunities and encouraging entrepreneurial activity.
 - c. Participation in the State of Michigan and Michigan Economic Development Corporation attraction programs.
5. Create opportunities that allow a high quality of life for Gratiot County residents.

GOAL 1

Market Gratiot County as a great place to live, work and operate a business.

Strategy A

The Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce will create a marketing program that promotes Gratiot County to visitors, prospective residents and current residents.

Tasks:

1. Finish the new county Web site and establish a process to keep it current.
2. Consolidate/Coordinate with various informational and promotional websites in Gratiot County
3. Produce a short brochure that can be used as an introduction to Gratiot County.
4. Produce a comprehensive community guide for Gratiot County.
5. Develop a countywide theme to help promote an identity for Gratiot County.
6. Develop a better understanding of the Gratiot area commercial, service and industrial markets.
7. Work with the local media to help promote Gratiot County as a great place to live and work.

Community Call to Action:

1. Take pride in Gratiot County and communicate it to your friends and family.

Strategy B

Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. will continue to create marketing tools to promote the advantages of doing business in Gratiot County.

Tasks:

1. Redesign existing promotional materials to compliment what the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce creates to promote Gratiot County.
2. Expand the Greater Gratiot Development Web site and ensure it complements and links with other County Web sites and MEDC's Web site.

GOAL 2

Continue to equip the local workforce with the necessary skills to meet the changing needs of the Gratiot County economy.

Strategy A

Strengthen the work ethic in the county.

Task:

1. Strengthen and expand support of the "Character Counts" program in schools.

Community Call to Action:

1. Boost awareness of the "Character Counts" program in the community and encourage support and participation in the program.
2. Reinforce work ethic, character and other values in our community to support what is taught in the "Character Counts" program.

Strategy B

Assess the availability of workers in the local labor pool and identify any barriers that may hinder employers from filling vacant positions.

Tasks:

1. Analyze current and projected skill and education deficit and areas.
2. Analyze underemployed workforce in Gratiot County

Community Call to Action:

1. Strengthen the working relationship with the Workforce Investment Board
2. Work with the Workforce Investment Board, Greater Gratiot Development, the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce, and other interested parties to conduct or hire an underemployment study.

Strategy C

Build a stronger alliance between the Chamber of Commerce, Business and Schools.

Task:

1. Expand the Chamber's Business/School Alliance and subsequent opportunities for students to learn from local businesses.

Community Call to Action:

1. Support the Business & School Alliance by offering opportunities for students to experience the business world and work expectations.
2. Increase awareness and participation in the Business & School Alliance.

Strategy D

Boost awareness of existing training facilities in Gratiot County.

Task:

1. Increase awareness of the GTEC facility.

GOAL 3

Diversify the industrial base to create more job opportunities and to create more stability during economic downturns.

Strategy A

Create a hospitality class available locally to educate workers on the industry in order to energize a local spirit of hospitality and to create more job opportunities.

Task:

1. Work with MSU, CMU, Alma College, or interested community colleges to develop locally available hospitality courses and a degree program.
2. Partner with local hospitality businesses to offer employment opportunities for hospitality graduates.
3. Partner with local hospitality businesses to offer specific courses on hospitality that would help them improve the quality of their service.

Community Call to Action:

1. Promote the hospitality industry as a potential career to high school students.
2. Establish a Customer Choice award to reward hospitality businesses that promote high quality service.

Strategy B

Create a vibrant retail sector in Gratiot County that offers more employment opportunities and makes the area more attractive to businesses and residents.

Tasks:

1. The Chamber of Commerce will help local retail outlets establish a Web presence that can supplement their storefront sales.
2. Offer business courses that will help strengthen existing businesses and encourage the establishment of new businesses.
3. Conduct a community shopping/dining survey to identify retail/hospitality needs and ways to better serve the community.
4. The Alma, St. Louis and Ithaca Downtown Development Authorities will identify gaps in retail and hospitality businesses and develop a plan to fill those gaps to better serve residents. (Women's clothing store, bagel store, "nice" restaurant to take clients to, specialty coffee shop and computer shop were specific items mentioned in the community input session.)

5. The Chamber of Commerce will strengthen existing retail outlets by assisting with promotion and designing co-op marketing opportunities.
6. The Chamber of Commerce will work with the DDAs to seek ways to pool buying power in order to help member businesses lower their cost of doing business in the county.
7. The Chamber of Commerce will help each DDA develop a vision for the downtown areas that will help them market each respective downtown and strategize on how to keep them vibrant, attractive and successful.

Strategy C

Explore the need to add / build another spec building and consider the incubator concept again.

Task:

1. Seek input from the business and financial community on the feasibility of the projects.

Community Call to Action:

1. Patronize local retail/hospitality outlets.
2. Attend businesses courses to strengthen your business and the community.
3. Tell the DDAs what types of stores and restaurants you would like to see in the community.
4. Promote local shopping opportunities to friends and family.

Strategy D

Continue expand business educational efforts

Tasks:

1. Continue to offer FastTrak entrepreneurial training opportunities.
2. Explore heightened services through statewide SBA Small Business Development Center.

GOAL 4

Build a greater understanding of the magnitude of Health Care Services and related business activities in Gratiot County.

Strategy A

Create an awareness campaign of Health Care Services business in Gratiot County.

Tasks:

1. The Chamber of Commerce create a profile of the Health Care Service business in Gratiot County that details employment, supporting businesses and anticipated growth areas.
2. Look for opportunities to increase awareness of Health Services in Gratiot County in local media.

Strategy B

Encourage the expansion of training in Health Care careers.

Tasks:

1. Work with local medical providers to assess existing and projected underserved employment positions.
2. Use the assessment to begin discussion with education providers.
3. Use the assessment as an awareness tool to inform K-12 students, adults seeking upgrade or retraining opportunities.

Community Call to Action:

1. Understand the significant, positive impact medical services has on Gratiot County.

GOAL 5

Strengthen the industrial sector of the Gratiot County economy.

Strategy A

Create a Manufacturers Council to help retain, expand and attract industrial businesses.

Tasks:

1. The Chamber of Commerce will create a Manufacturers Council that can advise the Chamber, Greater Gratiot Development and the community on issues that need to be addressed.
2. Greater Gratiot Development will dialogue with the Council to identify suppliers or businesses that are needed in the area to help support the manufacturers.

Strategy B

The Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce will identify ways to enhance member benefits to industrial businesses and work to attract more representatives from this sector.

Task:

1. Actively seek membership from industrial businesses in the county through targeted promotions.

Strategy C

Create a Business Retention Specialist position in Greater Gratiot Development.

Tasks:

1. Identify a way to annually fund this position.
2. Stress its importance in light of businesses leaving the community.
3. Highlight how this position would help provide more internal promotion of Gratiot County.

GOAL 6

Strengthen the agricultural industry in Gratiot County with opportunities that have a positive impact on producers and the community.

Strategy A

Create more value-added opportunities within the county by assisting producers with the development of business plans, providing entrepreneurial training and assisting the exploration of the business feasibility of ideas.

Tasks:

1. Offer increased business education opportunities to producers.
2. Partner with Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Small Business Development Center Network, MDOA, MEDC and others.

Community Call to Action:

Participate in business education opportunities.

Strategy B

Make the area more attractive for value-added agri-business locating in and around Gratiot County.

Tasks:

1. Identify appropriate areas with the appropriate people for value-added opportunities. Address concerns about water use and waste management.
2. Support and retain the remaining agricultural infrastructure through creative building of assets to support value-added opportunities.

Community Call to Action:

Help identify and support appropriate locations for value-added businesses.

Strategy C

Create land use policy that retains the capacity to farm in the future.

Tasks:

1. Assist local planning and zoning in the preservation of agricultural land by structuring logical growth opportunities around existing municipal services or low production soil areas.
2. Broaden land use knowledge amongst decision makers and the public
3. Educate the community on the direct and indirect impact agriculture has on the Gratiot community including tax base and direct and indirect employment.

Community Call to Action:

Understand the direct and indirect impact agriculture has on the Gratiot community.

GOAL 7

Establish alliances with neighboring counties to strengthen economic development opportunities and to compete with regionalization throughout the state, nation and the world.

Strategy A

Create a Central Michigan Economic Development Alliance CMEDA with participation from Gratiot, Montcalm, Clinton, Saginaw and Isabella counties.

Task:

1. Greater Gratiot Development will research regional alliances and establish a framework to create the CMEDA.

Strategy B

Transform the U.S. 27 Association (established for the completion of the limited access freeway between St. Johns and Ithaca) into a long-term economic development tool for the U.S. 27 corridor.

Task:

Encourage a long-term vision for the group that keeps the group viable beyond the completion of the U.S. 27 limited access freeway.

Community Call to Action:

1. Support and promote the importance of completing U.S. 27.

GOAL 8

Enhance the Gratiot County infrastructure to meet the changing needs of residents and businesses.

Strategy A

Create a county infrastructure plan.

Tasks:

1. Determine needed upgrades and expansions to water, sewer, energy and telecommunications infrastructures to make Gratiot County more attractive to businesses and residents.
2. Develop a long-term plan for infrastructure improvements and identify potential funding sources.
3. Advocate the county planning office proposed in the Land Use committee.

GOAL 9

Increase the ability of Gratiot County to attract and retain technology-based businesses.

Strategy A

Create a technology certification program for high school students.

Task:

1. Greater Gratiot Development will partner with area businesses, colleges and the RESD to create a certification program that will help fill local needs for technology skills.

Strategy B

Develop a plan to upgrade the telecommunications infrastructure in Gratiot County to make the county competitive with other regions.

Tasks:

1. Work with the Cable Consortium to create a plan to enhance the telecommunications infrastructure in Gratiot County.

2. Seek funding to contract with a firm to conduct an assessment of the current telecommunications infrastructure in the county/mid Michigan area and a list of needed improvements to make the system competitive with other areas.

Community Call to Action:

1. Increase the use of technology with existing businesses in Gratiot County

GOAL 10

Reutilize brownfield sites and industrial areas to create new opportunities for businesses and residents.

Strategy A

Continue to reclaim brownfield sites for new development in the county.

Tasks:

1. Create a strategy for bringing the Total Refinery site and the former Sugar Beet site into development status.
2. Continue to market vacant and potential vacant sites, such as Oxford Automotive, for new uses.
3. Work with St. Louis with EPA Pilot Brownfield Taskforce identifying and characterizing redevelopment opportunities within St. Louis.
4. Work with city of Alma assisting in implementation of SEP (Supplemental and Environmental Project) resulting from Total Petroleum settlement.
5. Continue application through Clean Michigan Initiative funds for the identification and cleanup of additional Gratiot County sites.

Community Call to Action:

1. Utilize and promote the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority of the County Gratiot as an incentive tool to assist the municipalities, local businesses, and new business opportunities to encourage reuse of brownfields.

Strategy B

Redevelop the riverfront and accompanying recreational trails.

Tasks:

1. Create a Riverfront task force to help create a vision for development along the river that will make it attractive for hospitality firms and recreation.
2. Create a plan to promote the river for recreation through events and the publication of information.
3. Explore business opportunities that will be created with the development of the Fred Meijer – Heartland Trail to Elwell and beyond.

Community Call to Action:

1. Energize interested community groups to keep the river attractive and navigable for recreation and to promote/establish river-related events.

Strategy C

Redevelop the gravel pits and County parks to take advantage of the potential offered by creating a lake in the county.

Task:

1. Create a development plan for the lake to make it attractive for housing and recreation.

2. Educational Quality

Vision:

“Provide a network in which schools, government and the private sector can communicate and collaborate to ensure that all of our citizens are given appropriate educational opportunities.”

Vision Facilitator

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Guiding Principles

1. The education of our citizens is a major key to the societal and economic health of our county.
2. Appropriate educational choice is the right of all citizens.
3. Quality schools are maintained through the establishment of high educational standards.
4. Funding for activities and programming outside of the school schedule should come from the community, not from the school’s general operating budget.

GOAL 1

Continued collaboration among schools.

Strategy

Board administrations representatives from each district come together to discuss individual strategic plans and common needs.

Tasks

1. Encourage cooperation between districts.
2. Investigate ways to share programming and resources.
3. Develop county wide alternative education program.
4. Continue to develop safe and orderly environment within county schools.

Community Call to Action:

Continue to utilize Linkers, Superintendent’s Association, administrative breakfast program and local school board associations, in order to keep the lines of communication between school districts open.

GOAL 2

Establish a strategic plan in each local educational agency.

Strategy

Utilize local Boards, administration, staff and community members in the development of local district strategic plans.

Task

1. Provide county wide resource personnel to aid local districts in the development of strategic plans.

GOAL 3

Develop, promote and incorporate a K-12 “Career Pathways” educational program throughout the county.

Strategy

County wide K-12 districts begin the implementation of “Career Pathways” program.

Tasks

1. Work with GIRESD in the continued development of “Career Pathways”.
2. Develop a business/education alliance.
3. Recruit area businesses and industry personnel to work with area teachers in the development and promotion of programming.
4. Partner with GTEC in the development of programs within the “pathways.”
5. Partner with post secondary institutions to develop and align programs with “pathways.”
6. Expand cooperative education programs within the county.

GOAL 4

Create and/or promote policy and practices that will build responsibility, pride and respect for self, others, school and community.

Strategy

1. Promote the “Character Counts” concept to each district.
2. Promote the “Character Counts” concept in each city, village and township.
3. Develop and promote community service activities within each school.

Tasks

1. Coordinate *Career Pathways*, *Business/Education Alliance* and *Cooperative Education* efforts.
2. Provide professional development and community enrichment opportunities for staff and community members.
3. Promote “Make a Difference Day” in the schools and community.
4. Purchase and display character education banners for the community.

GOAL 5

Promote life long learning experiences throughout the county.

Strategy

1. Develop closer ties with local and regional colleges and universities.
2. Develop local career-based programming.
3. Develop cooperative community education opportunities

Task

1. Develop a multi-jurisdictional authority.

3. Environmental Issues

Vision:

“To provide for environmental awareness today and into the future of Gratiot County, by using a coordinated effort among units of government, farmers, the industrial community, citizen groups, and other interested parties. Which will ultimately remediate all contaminated sites and make them produce again in one form or another, making all of Gratiot County a safe place now and into the future.”

Vision Facilitator

Name:

Address:

Phone:

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Guiding Principals

1. Identify areas of contamination within Gratiot County.
2. Redevelopment of brownfields and other developed areas before building on green space and premium farmland.
3. Create a framework to provide businesses easier access to environmental agencies and financing to make these Brownfield’s economically feasible.
4. Address the issue of underground water supply for farming and rural residents.
5. Development of a recycling program Countywide.

Goal 1

Create a framework to facilitate the clean up of contaminated sites and prevent future sites from becoming contaminated.

1. Identify all sites of contamination.
2. Look at how units of government, industry, farmers, citizens groups, and other interested individual’s work together today and modify the relationships to produce a more productive communication stream.
3. Develop a system that can be easily followed from the beginning “identification of a site” to the final “clean up of the site”.

Strategy

1. Build on what is already being done within the communities and coordinate all these recourses in the most effective way.
2. At the County Level develop a centralized office to record Contaminated sites and the clean up of all projects.
3. Utilize the County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority to help finance projects.

Tasks

1. Create a system of procedures from the beginning of the identification, financing and physically cleaning up a contaminated site.
2. Use the Brownfield Redevelopment Committee as a starting point, may not need to move beyond that/or development of a sub-committee of the BRC.

3. Sub Committee would be responsible for development of easy to follow policy manual in dealing with brownfields or contaminated sites.
4. Set up a system of recording sites and the process of cleaning them up.

Goal 2

Coordinate development in regard to water usage for farmers and rural residents.

Strategy

Develop a committee of Farmers, Township Residents, Township offices and County offices to deal with water and animal waste issues.

Tasks

1. Create a consortium to develop an agreement with Gratiot Area Farmers and Rural Residents that must be followed now and into the future.
2. Work with Land Use Committee to focus where housing could be developed and where farming should be maintained.
3. Work with State Offices to find water sources and recommend the best use for that water and incorporate this information in future development of Rural Lands.

Goal 3

Examine a County Wide Recycling Area/Collection Point.

Strategy

Bring together representatives from all over Gratiot County, to form a committee to assess the feasibility of a County-wide Recycling Center/Collection Point.

Tasks

1. Instruct the “feasibility” group to put together a proposed plan for a Gratiot Area Recycling Area.
2. Work with Gratiot County Communities who already have programs in place.
3. Examine other Communities outside of the county who have County Wide Collection Points.

4. Land Use

Vision:

“To provide for the growth and development of economic opportunities in Gratiot County through designed land use and coordinated planning among units of governments and interested parties while enhancing the quality of life of our citizens.”

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Guiding Principles

1. Development that enhances the quality of life.
2. Live, work and shop in areas that make sense.
3. Maintain the county’s rural character and attractive viewsapes.
4. Preserve prime farmland.
5. Encourage complimentary land use between competing interests
6. Optimize traffic flow and other development issues that enhance the quality of life.

Goal 1

Create a tool to facilitate planning decisions that will:

1. Recognize and help plan for growth along and away from major arteries.
2. Identify opportunities and problems that will require policy and/or political decisions.
3. Assist in the decision-making process to identify land uses for rural preservation, residential, commercial and industrial growth.
4. Identify infrastructure “trigger points” to maximize efficient expansions, usage and identify growth needs.

Strategy

Build on the current county GIS to detail:

1. Existing land use
2. Existing zoning (with agreed upon categories)
3. All weather roads
4. Planned all weather roads
5. Selected soil types
6. Existing infrastructure:
 - a. water
 - b. sewer
 - c. gas (at some minimum)
 - d. electric (minimum 46 kV or larger transmission lines)
7. Population
8. Other identified overlays

Tasks

Create a task force of representatives of municipal entities, which will provide input into the existing GIS. The initial representatives should be from the cities, villages, county and townships in the immediate growth corridors. Encourage additional representatives from the expanding growth areas to participate. The task force would:

1. Develop a proposal to implement a GIS system including a cost estimate, funding mechanism and timetable.
2. Create a recommendation for who will be responsible for maintaining the system and keeping the data current.
3. Make realtors, bankers and developers aware of the system during and after implementation.

Community Call to Action:

Goal 2

Coordinate planning among units of government and interested parties for designed land use.

Strategy A

Create a forum for sharing information and coordinating planning between the county, townships, municipalities and interested parties.

Tasks

The Gratiot County MSU Extension will develop a coalition of local units of government and other interested parties to foster communication and sharing of land use strategies within the county. The coalition would:

1. Locate best practices for development from other areas and share with local governments through venues such as the Gratiot County Township Association.
2. Offer resources for local planning commissions.
3. Share development experiences between local governments in the county.
4. Work toward a countywide approach to the protection and development of land resources.

Community Call to Action:

Offer the Citizen Planner workshop, from Feb. - May, 2002, to citizens through the MSU Extension Service.

Strategy B

Update the Gratiot County Master Plan.

Tasks

1. Encourage revisions so that the township plans work with the county plan.
2. Coordinate zoning between the county, townships and cities.

Goal 3

Create a countywide planning office in 3-5 years.

5. Quality of Life

Vision:

To improve the quality of life for all citizens in Gratiot County by removing barriers that impede individuals from reaching their full potential.

Vision Facilitator

Craig Zeese

Gratiot County Commission on Aging

515 S. Pine River, Ithaca, MI 48847

Phone: 989-875-5246

Fax: 989-875-5281

Guiding Principles:

- Life long learning is the key to opportunity.
- Opportunity is the key to reaching one's full potential.
- Everyone is to be treated with dignity and respect.
- All individuals have value.

Goal 1

Facilitate the establishment of a broad-based, comprehensive needs profile.

Strategy

Mobilize community leaders and organizations to ensure the creation of a comprehensive needs profile.

Tasks:

1. Identify the research organization to complete the comprehensive needs profile.
2. Secure funding sources to achieve this objective.
3. Analyze, identify and prioritize the comprehensive needs profile findings.

Community call to action:

1. Mobilize the community to address the findings
2. Utilize the necessary community groups to develop and implement a strategy to address these needs.
3. Report progress at annual strategic planning meetings.

Goal 2

Establish a coordinated safety net for community residents.

Strategy A

Create a centralized, user-friendly clearinghouse to help people access extensive resources to include food, clothing, safe housing and health care.

Tasks:

1. Annually offer MSU Extension's "Life in the State of Poverty" simulation to sensitize service providers, community leaders, employers and elected officials to help them understand what it's like to live in a low-income family.

2. Create a centralized clearinghouse to help people access extensive resources to include food, clothing, safe housing and health care.
3. Market the clearinghouse to county residents through a Web site, bulletin board postings, newsletters and other community vehicles.
4. Establish a toll-free phone number to locate services.

Community Call to Action:

1. Attend “Life in the State of Poverty” simulation when offered.
2. Publicize the clearinghouse when it’s established.

Strategy B

Create a community services centralized resource system.

Tasks:

1. Develop a database to collect, store and share information and services.
2. Develop a way to coordinate meetings and community services to maximize efficiency.

Community Call to Action:

Educate the community regarding the benefits of a community services centralized resource system.

Goal 3

Equip individuals with the skills needed to obtain employment that meets their individuals needs.

Strategy

Provide information needed on training and educational opportunities.

Tasks:

1. Create a communications plan that provides information on training and educational opportunities.
2. Inform individuals about funding resources available for training and/or educational opportunities.
3. Encourage employers to offer incentives for employees to enroll in training and/or educational opportunities.
4. Publicize the successes of the training and educational tasks.

Community Call to Action:

1. Publicize the funding opportunities for training and educational programs.
2. Promote participation in training and educational programs.

Goal 4

Increase recreational opportunities.

Strategy:

Work with the Strategic Plan Recreation Committee to ensure Quality of Life concerns are addressed.

Goal 5

Help meet childcare needs of the Gratiot County Community.

Strategy:

Work with the Strategic Plan Youth Development Committee to ensure Quality of Life concerns are addressed.

6. Recreation

Vision: A comprehensive community recreation system in Gratiot County serving all residents.

Overall Vision Facilitator:

Mike Matlotsz
RESA Superintendent
1131 E. Center, P.O. Box 310
Ithaca, MI 48847
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Fax: 989-875-7531
E-mail: mmatlosz@edzone.net

Facilitator for Authority Group:

Phil Moore
City of Alma
PO Box 278
Alma, MI 48801
Phone: 989-463-8336
Fax: 989-463-5574

Facilitator for Anchor Facility:

Dave Roslund
401 S. St. Johns
Ithaca, MI 48847
Phone: 989-875-4700
Fax: 989-875-5022

Guiding Principals

1. Increase the quality of life of citizens through increased health and recreational opportunities
2. Be cost effective, eliminate redundancies, and realize economies of scale
3. Create greater utilization of existing area facilities
4. Increase the economic potential of the area (be an attractive place to live and visit)
5. Increase the recreation consumer base
6. Reduce the reliance on any single funding source by utilizing creative financing possibilities

Goal 1

Maximize existing recreational opportunities in Gratiot County

Strategy:

Form a multi-jurisdictional recreation authority that includes the schools, cities, townships, and not for profit agencies.

Task:

The organizational structure subgroup will continue to operate, hold discussions and answer questions on how to form an authority. This will include identifying an

organizational structure, identifying potential programs and activities, identifying potential assets, and securing legal opinions to answer technical questions related to creating an authority.

Community Call to Action:

The community should attend meetings of the recreation authority group to give input. The community should utilize the programs and services offered by the authority once created.

Goal 2

Create new recreational opportunities in Gratiot County

Strategy:

Construct an anchor facility in Gratiot County that would provide recreation, fitness and wellness programs/activities needed by areas residents but currently not available.

Task:

The anchor facility subgroup will continue to operate, hold discussions and answer questions on how to finance a facility, where to build a facility and what programs/services the facility will offer.

Community Call to Action:

The community should attend meetings of the anchor facility subgroup to give input. The community should help with fundraising/donations to engage a recreation facility planner. The community should participate in surveys of to help discover the unmet recreation needs of the County. The community should utilize the programs and services offered by the anchor facility once built.

7. Transportation

Vision:

Assure, through consensus, a vision for Gratiot County that maximizes our resources and provides a superior quality of life by providing transportation opportunities to support the residential, commercial and variety of industry's needs in the county.

Vision Facilitator

Gratiot County Road Commission,
200 Commerce Drive, PO Box 187,
Ithaca, MI 48847

Phone: 989-875-3811

Fax: 989-875-2831

E-mail: gratiotcrc@nethawk.com

Guiding Principles

1. Minimize traffic congestion
2. Optimize economic opportunity
3. Mobility for all citizens
4. Diversify transportation systems

Goal 1

Coordinate transportation development and usage

Strategy A

Develop coordinated five-year plan for all road agencies in the county, including MDOT

Task:

1. Implement transportation plans through local rural and urban task force meetings and update annually

Strategy B

Create an awareness of need for additional interchanges on US-27 improvements

Task:

1. Encourage construction of an interchange on Buchanan Road when US-27 is designed. This will allow the full development potential of the designated Renaissance Subzones located in the area and safe travel for farming equipment.

Strategy C

Coordinate with the County Land Use Plan

Task:

1. Encourage coordinating commercial development along proposed "All Season" routes being developed by the Gratiot County Road Commission.
2. Encourage residential land use development by improving residential road development that is consistent with the County Master Plan

Goal 2

Generate awareness of importance of the airport to business and industry in the county and encourage future development of the facility

Strategy A

Develop public relation pieces to make the general public as well as business and industry leaders of the current and potential use of the airport

Task:

1. Write articles for local media.
2. Encourage Chamber of Commerce include airport information in publications.
3. Encourage the airport to have annual open house for publicity.

Strategy B

Implement a capital improvement plan for the airport operations

Task:

1. Have Airport Board submit plan for funding that includes a GPS/VOR approach system, rehabilitating the terminal building, and improving taxiways and extending runways.

Goal 3

Encourage transit development countywide

Strategy A.

Develop effective use of transit systems.

Tasks:

1. Create a group to study transit needs and efficiency of operations.
2. Apply for grant funds to subsidize transit costs

Strategy B

Expand the voluntary transportation system for those citizens that are dependant on such a system.

Tasks:

1. Identify potential users and survey what needs they have
2. Work with Family Independence Agency and Commission on Aging and similar groups to coordinate a system
3. Publish a list of providers for the community

8. Youth Network Communication

Vision:

To promote a safe and healthy environment for the youth of Gratiot County by providing, facilitating, coordinating, and communicating appropriate social and learning opportunities.

Vision Owner:

Gratiot Collaborative Council

Bill Dilts – Prevention Coordinator

Address: 1131 East Center Street P.O. Box 310

Ithaca, MI

Phone: 989-875-6095

Fax: 989-875-2858

e-mail: bdilts@edzone.net

Guiding Principles:

1. Safety of youth in programs is of primary importance.
2. Increase positive developmental assets by providing organized alternative activities.

Goal 1

Establish a countywide communications network, which will facilitate youth involvement throughout the county.

Strategies

1. Develop and initiate a countywide web page, which links all services and programs for easier end-user operation.
2. Provide countywide access of information included in existing media by placing the information on-line.
3. Investigate the establishment of a 2-1-1 system in Gratiot County to provide warm-line link to all human service agencies.

Tasks:

1. Investigation of web page systems is underway by the Gratiot Collaborative Council
2. Resource Development Committee. The 2-1-1 plan is also under development and will be investigated for implementation.

Community Call to Action:

Develop a countywide communications network for youth that works.

Goal 2

Provide an after school alternative for all school-aged children in each community.

Strategies:

1. Investigate the establishment of entities like Boys/Girls Clubs, Y Programs, 4H , etc.
2. Investigate the availability of transportation funding through MDOT for these activities.

Tasks:

1. The establishment of Boys/ Girls Clubs is under investigation by various schools in the county.
2. Transportation studies are being conducted under the auspices of Family Independence Agency and their Project Zero.
3. Bring together a representation of the student body of all area Gratiot County school districts to develop strategies and goals.

Community Call to Action:

Make our kids safe!

Goal 3

Explore programs in other counties and communities where collaborative efforts have produced youth oriented programs.

Strategies:

1. Communicate with other agencies throughout the state to locate communities with successful programs in place.
2. Visit programs in various areas of the state where family-based programs have been established.

Community Call to Action:

Let's see what others are doing!

Goal 4

It is the firm belief of this committee that a Community Wide Needs Assessment needs to be performed to better formulate the actual needs areas of the community's youth.

9. Communicating the Vision

Vision:

The Gratiot County Strategic Plan becomes a living document in which residents take ownership in and work to achieve its vision and goals—ultimately creating a Gratiot County Community that local residents take pride in and guests find as a desirable place to visit.

Vision Facilitator

Name: Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce Marketing Committee, Chris Thelen

Address:

Consumers Energy

1325 Wright Ave.

Alma, MI 48801

Phone: 989-466-4200

Fax: 989-466-4298

e-mail: cgthelen@cmsenergy.com

Guiding Principles:

1. High quality, contemporary design for all publications.
2. Integrated theme that allows for individualized community promotion.
3. Leverage technology to distribute information.
4. Provide relevant and timely information.

Goal 1

Launch the Gratiot County Strategic Plan to the community beginning in March, 2002.

Strategy:

Build stakeholder support for the plan by presenting the plan to Gratiot County officials, community leaders and local media.

Tasks:

1. Develop a presentation on the Gratiot County Strategic Plan that can be used to present to stakeholder groups.
2. Identify speakers to present and schedule presentations.
3. Create a handout that provides background on each Strategic Plan area of interest, ways for residents to get involved and a person or organization to contact.
4. Develop a media packet that provides an overview of the Strategic Plan and designate a spokesperson to deliver it to local media outlets.

Community Call to Action:

“Get involved with one of these areas and help build Gratiot County’s future.”

Goal 2

Build a countywide image of Gratiot County that local residents take pride in and guests find as an enticing place to visit, live and work.

Strategy

Develop a promotional theme for Gratiot County.

Tasks:

1. Develop a Gratiot County theme by Dec. 2002.
2. Publish a new “slim” brochure by Sept. 2001 to promote Gratiot County.
3. Publish a comprehensive Gratiot County promotional brochure by Jan. 2002
4. Update the Gratiot County, Greater Gratiot Development and Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce Web sites to reflect the new theme by Dec. 2002.
5. Develop a Gratiot County theme logo that can be used on signs, publications, clothing, pins, cups and other promotional pieces.

Community Call to Action:

“Take pride in Gratiot County and make it contagious.”

Community Call to Action

Gratiot County's future will be determined in part by the extent in which residents of the county take ownership in this plan and help to make the goals a reality. Here are specific ways you can get involved in making this plan a reality.

Overall Gratiot County Strategic Plan Vision Facilitator:

Brian Smith, Gratiot County Administrator,

Gratiot County, 214 E. Center Street, Ithaca, MI 48847

Phone: 989-875-5282; **Fax:** 989-875-5284; **e-mail:** bsmith@co.gratito.mi.us

Specific Areas for Involvement

1. Economic Development

Vision Facilitator

Don Schurr

Greater Gratiot Development Corp.

136 South Main

Ithaca, MI 48847

Phone: 517-875-2083

Fax: 517-875-2990

e-mail: don.schurr@gratiot.org

Community Call To Action:

1. Boost awareness of the "Character Counts" program in the community and encourage support and participation in the program.
2. Reinforce work ethic, character and other values in our community to support what is taught in the "Character Counts" program.
3. Strengthen the working relationship with the Workforce Investment Board
4. Work with the Workforce Investment Board, Greater Gratiot Development, the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce, and other interested parties to conduct or hire an underemployment study.
5. Support the Business & School Alliance by offering opportunities for students to experience the business world and work expectations.
6. Increase awareness and participation in the Business & School Alliance.
7. Promote the hospitality industry as a potential career to high school students.
8. Establish a Customer Choice award to reward hospitality businesses that promote high quality service.
9. Patronize local retail/hospitality outlets.
10. Attend businesses courses to strengthen your business and the community.
11. Tell the DDAs what types of stores and restaurants you would like to see in the community.
12. Promote local shopping opportunities to friends and family.
13. Understand the significant, positive impact medical services has on Gratiot County.
14. Support and promote the importance of completing U.S. 27.
15. Increase the use of technology with existing businesses in Gratiot County
16. Utilize and promote the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority of the County Gratiot as an incentive tool to assist the municipalities, local businesses, and new business opportunities to encourage reuse of brownfields.
17. Energize interested community groups to keep the river attractive and navigable for recreation and to promote/establish river-related events.

2. Educational Quality

Vision Facilitator

Name: Charles H. Schnetzler
710 N. Union
Ithaca, MI 48847
Phone: 989-875-4538
Fax: 989-875-4538
e-mail: cschnetz@ithacaschools.net

Community Call to Action:

Continue to utilize Linkers, Superintendent's Association, administrative breakfast program and local school board associations, in order to keep the lines of communication between school districts open.

3. Environmental Issues

Vision Facilitator

Name: (To Be Determined)
Address:
Phone:
Fax:
e-mail:

4. Land Use

Vision Facilitator

Dan Rossman
MSU Extension
214 E. Center St.
Ithaca, MI
Phone: 989-875-5233
Fax: 989-875-5289
e-mail: rossman@msue.msu.edu

Community Call to Action:

1. Offer the Citizen Planner workshop, from Feb. May, 2002, to citizens through the Cooperative Extension Service.

5. Quality of Life

Vision Facilitator

Craig Zeese
Gratiot County Commission on Aging
515 S. Pine River, Ithaca, MI 48847
Phone: 989-875-5246
Fax: 989-875-5281

Community Call to Action:

1. Attend "Life in the State of Poverty" simulation when offered.
2. Publicize the clearinghouse when it's established.
3. Educate the community regarding the benefits of a community services centralized resource system.
4. Publicize the funding opportunities for training and educational programs.
5. Promote participation in training and educational programs.

6. Recreation

Overall Vision Facilitator

Mike Matlotsz
RESA Superintendent
1131 E. Center, P.O. Box 310
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Facilitator for Anchor Facility:

Dave Roslund
401 S. St. Johns
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989-875-4700 Phone
989-875-5022 Fax

Community Call to Action:

1. The community should attend meetings of the recreation authority group to give input. The community should utilize the programs and services offered by the authority once created.

2. The community should attend meetings of the anchor facility subgroup to give input. The community should help with fundraising/donations to engage a recreation facility planner. The community should participate in surveys of to help discover the unmet recreation needs of the County. The community should utilize the programs and services offered by the anchor facility once built.

7. Transportation

Vision Facilitator

Gratiot County Road Commission,
200 Commerce Drive, PO Box 187,
Ithaca, MI 48847

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E-mail: gratiotcrc@nethawk.com

8. Youth Network

Communication

Vision Facilitator:

Gratiot Collaborative Council
Bill Dilts – Prevention Coordinator
1131 East Center Street P.O. Box 310
Ithaca, MI 48847

Phone: 989-875-6095

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Community Call to Action:

1. Develop a countywide communications network for youth that works.
2. Make our kids safe!
3. Let's see what others are doing!

9. Communicating the Vision

Vision Facilitator

Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce
Marketing Committee

Chris Thelen, Area Manager

Consumers Energy

1325 Wright Ave.

Alma, MI 48801

Phone: 989-466-4200

Fax: 989-466-4298

e-mail: cgthelen@cmsenergy.com

Community Call to Action:

1. Get involved with one of these areas and help build Gratiot County's future.
2. Take pride in Gratiot County and make it contagious.

2002 Gratiot County Strategic Plan Participants

The following is a list of people who helped develop the strategic plan.