



ROGERS CITY

TRIVISON

GRAND BLANC

FRON

JACKSON

# OUR FUTURE COMMUNITIES START HERE

PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FOR  
GROWTH & ADVANCEMENT IN MICHIGAN



**INTRODUCTION**

**14**



**PREPARING  
COMMUNITIES  
FOR PROSPERITY**

**18**



**BENEFITS OF  
PREDEVELOPMENT  
ASSISTANCE**

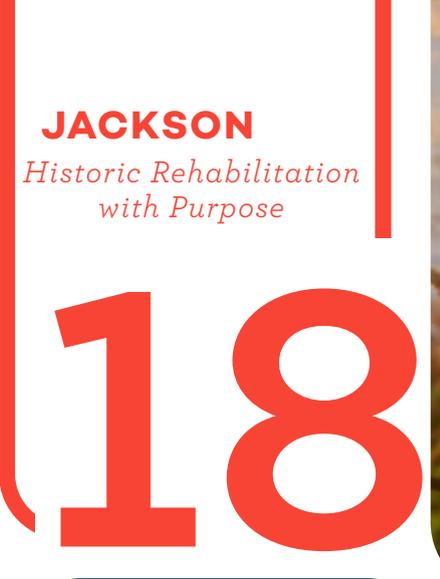
**16**



**FARMINGTON**

*Cultivating Unused Space*

**22**



**JACKSON**

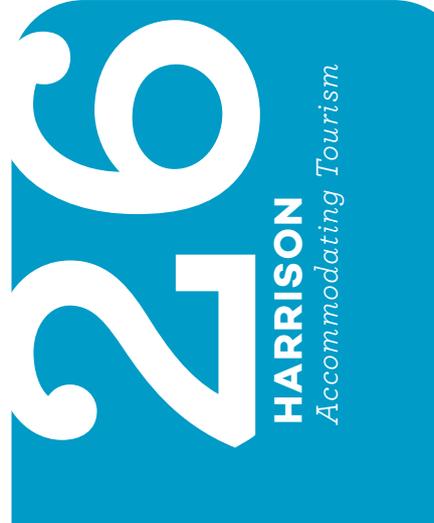
*Historic Rehabilitation  
with Purpose*

**18**



**ACCESSING  
PREDEVELOPMENT  
ASSISTANCE**

**30**



**HARRISON**

*Accommodating Tourism*

**26**

36

**ALLEGAN**  
*Enhancing Downtown*

**ROGERS CITY**  
*Reimagining Vacant Spaces*

**LAINGSBURG**  
*Blight Removal  
Strategic Planning*

**GRAND BLANC**  
*Creating Opportunities*

50

4

46

4

52

**POSITIONING  
MICHIGAN  
FOR THE FUTURE**

40

**BUMPS  
IN THE  
ROAD**



# INTRODUCTION



Michigan, known for its bountiful Great Lakes shorelines, delicious cherries and apples, and automobile innovation, is a place with so much to offer to its communities. From beautiful landscapes and local shopping to flavorful food and city adventures, there are countless ways people with varied interests can grow, prosper, and find reasons to plant roots in Michigan.

**And with the right vision and foundational work, Michigan can become more attractive to residents.**

The Michigan Municipal League (the League) and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) have a history of fruitful partnerships aimed at advancing the economic and social well-being of communities across the state. Through collaborative efforts, we have facilitated the development and implementation of initiatives that promote local economic growth, infrastructure enhancement, and community revitalization.



This dedication spurred the partnership between the MEDC and the League to provide the **predevelopment assistance partnership**, a benefit for certified Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC). Since 2017, we have pursued those goals by partnering to help communities create effective action plans for development of priority sites and providing resources across the state.

Whether it be increased capacity for public dialogue or expert consulting to maintain momentum on redevelopment projects, our teams have been on the ground with projects that make great Michigan places. We have aspired to empower our community leaders to take more confident steps toward creating vibrant places, increasing economic strength, and building sustainable communities.



Whether they're working to preserve cultural treasures while supporting local economies or generating public assets for community wealth and fostering affordable housing opportunities, these communities are focused on implementing their community supported visions.

Seven certified Redevelopment Ready Communities are featured here that embody these goals. They are driven by the spirit of transformation and provide a blueprint for revitalization in urban cities and small towns.

They've grown, and succeeded, adapted to obstacles with flexibility and overcame challenges in the face of adversity. No matter where they are in the process, every community is playing a significant role in creating long-term prosperity for generations to come.

This is what we want for all Michigan communities—to make them better for the people who are here and the people who have yet to call this extraordinary place home—because we love where you live.



# PREPARING COMMUNITIES FOR PROSPERITY

## FOUR PILLARS

The predevelopment assistance partnership is supported by the Redevelopment Ready Communities toolkit's four pillars: guiding principles, mission, vision, and customer experience. These pillars allow for a customized experience without sacrificing results or impact.

Population, staff capacity, existing development patterns, financial capacity, and other factors vary by community. RRC's tailored approach places community needs as a priority and acknowledges the call for individual solutions.

**What do these four pillars mean, and how are they put into action?**

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The **guiding principles** inform how RRC is designed and implemented at programmatic and local levels. RRC work is:

- Community driven
- Predictable
- Implementable
- Proactive
- Equitable
- Collaborative

## MISSION

RRC's **mission** is to empower communities in shaping their future through building a strong foundation of planning, zoning, and economic development best practices.

## VISION

To become “redevelopment ready,” a community must have a clear **vision** for the future, established through collaborative community planning, and understand the actions and tools necessary to achieve that vision.

## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Participants in the RRC program can expect a **customer experience** that includes building productive relationships with community planners, who provide access to a wide range of resources; challenging norms and capturing development momentum during critical stages to ensure long-term prosperity; and receiving support throughout the process of reaching and maintaining certification.



## BEST PRACTICES

Developed by experts in the public and private sector, the **RRC toolkit's Six Best Practices** are the standard for establishing a community-driven and predictable development process. All participating communities receive a thorough assessment with the best practices acting as the toolkit's North Star.

**PLANS AND ENGAGEMENT**

**ZONING**

**DEVELOPMENT REVIEW**

**BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT +  
MARKETING**

**PRIORITY REDEVELOPMENT SITES**

Together, these best practices address key elements of community and economic redevelopment and prepare leaders for intricate and multifaceted development projects.

# PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIP

Through predevelopment assistance, communities are offered additional technical assistance and support tailored to the local redevelopment priorities they have identified during the RRC journey.

Achieving RRC certification takes time and collaboration. Aligning local review processes, revising Master Plans, and articulating a consensus on the direction a community wants to go takes time, and isn't always a simple or linear effort. In addition to the RRC best practices, MEDC has provided training, technical assistance, and guidance to communities moving through the process, with the League serving as a sounding board and resource partner.



MEDC's Redevelopment Services Team (RSTeam) is the next frontier of the Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) program. Upon RRC certification, communities across the state engage with the RSTeam to receive personal and direct one-on-one professional support to assist in the redevelopment of their priority Redevelopment Ready Sites. The RSTeam provides tailored technical assistance support to each community, including: baseline site consultation, redevelopment assistance, design/build scenarios, priority site promotion, and developer matchmaking.





Once a community achieves RRC Certification, an accomplishment in itself, predevelopment assistance is activated to support implementation of the community's development vision. Intended to inspire and maintain momentum at the local level, the predevelopment assistance partnership offers communities additional technical assistance and support tailored to the local redevelopment priorities they have identified during the RRC journey.

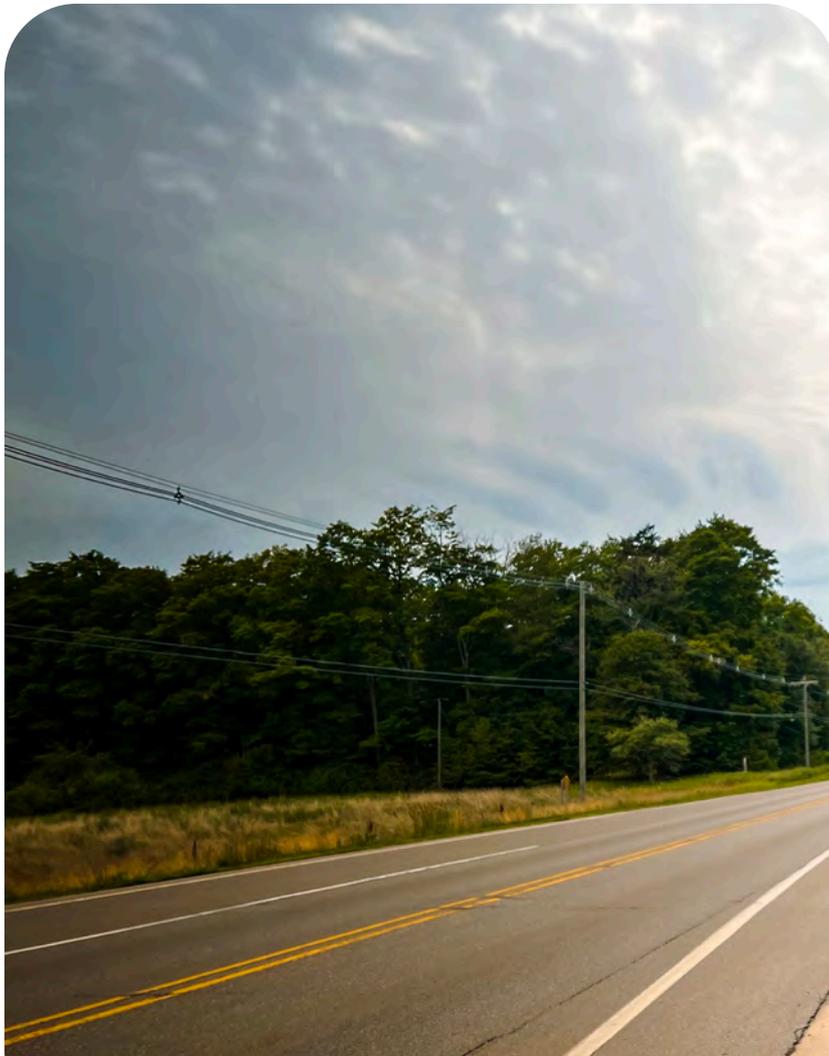
To accelerate action on those priorities, each certified community receives access to the Redevelopment Services Team to receive support and field expertise in site consultation and analysis, RFP/RFQ development,

design/build scenarios, environmental assessments, marketing assistance, and developer matchmaking.

MEDC's Redevelopment Services Team works with communities to select priority sites that are ripe for new investment and understand the support needed to act on that opportunity. League staff are then tagged in to assemble and manage a team to provide that support. Whether it be an environmental assessment or market study, creating architectural schematics or request for qualifications (RFQ) in marketing a site, professional staff are there to support the certified Redevelopment Ready Community free of charge.

Michigan's growth is a joint venture that requires harmony among partners and communities—and harmony is at the heart of our contribution. Through our relationships with local leaders, education, counsel, and partner networks, MEDC and the League have supported communities across the state in setting the tone for investment that advances local priorities.





# BENEFITS OF PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Since the partnership between the League and MEDC has been established, we've been involved in roughly 85 projects for more than 50 communities.

Hotel development, neighborhood housing and landscaping development, building restoration and rehabilitation, and mixed-use building development are just some of the types of projects we've assisted with and continue to offer our support to.

These initiatives aren't just projects, they're ideas turned into action that will provide community residents with more walkability, updated housing options, new and lively restaurants, retail stores, open park space for family fun, and coworking options for remote workers. And we worked with these communities every step of the way.

To bring these project stories to life for you, we want you to hear directly from the communities and the benefits they've experienced along the way. Don't take our word for it, take theirs!





*Historic Rehabilitation with Purpose*

# JACKSON

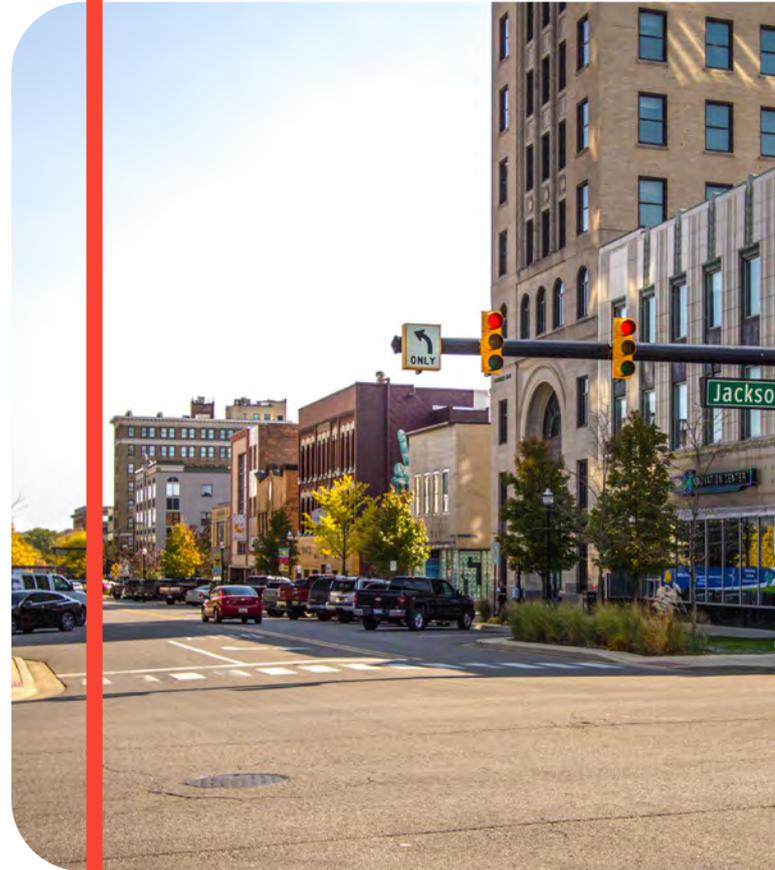
In south central Michigan, you'll find the bustling city of Jackson. With a landscape fit for kayaking, fishing, birdwatching, and hiking, Jackson is perfect for those who love nature and being outdoors. Even with expansive rolling hills and sparkling lakes, Jackson is packed with history, arts, and culture.

Situated halfway between the port of Detroit and Lake Michigan, Jackson was traditionally part of a trade route known as the Potawatomi Trail, which connected Indigenous peoples. It was later a contender for State Capitol due to its central location in the lower portion of the state. Eventually, the city became a key junction in railroad lines and was favored by industry for its logistic advantages at the crossroads of interstate travel.

More and more people are migrating to this city and calling it home, with its impressive 19 golf courses, historic districts filled with museums, and award-winning wineries and famous attractions including the Bright Walls Murals, an interactive illuminated fountain known as The Cascades, and the Michigan Shakespeare Festival.

Downtown Jackson recently debuted the Social District, a designated area of restaurants and bars where patrons can enjoy drinks and food outdoors. This new and fun way for the community to mingle draws more activity to the area.

**With all this economic growth, there was the perfect opportunity to expand the city's housing and commercial offerings.**



# JACKSON

Scott Fleming, CEO of the Jackson Anchor Initiative, saw potential in the historic Hayes Hotel—a 10-story building that has been vacant downtown for nearly two decades, with the city looking to sell the property for almost as long.

Restoration of this property would be a tremendous undertaking with significant costs, making the redevelopment infeasible. But Fleming and the city of Jackson didn't give up on the property. There were too many benefits the city would gain from restoring the Hayes Hotel. They refused to abandon the vision of creating 91 apartments atop retail, restaurant, and event space.

Redeveloping the Hayes Hotel will create jobs, economic growth, and community wealth. Offering residential units at market rate will make them accessible to more residents.

The great news is the Hayes has finally sold.

## **OPPORTUNITY:**

Expand housing and commercial offerings by renovating the historic 10-story Hayes Hotel into market-rate apartments, retail, restaurant, and event space.

## **OBSTACLE:**

Finding a buyer with the capital and expertise to invest in historic renovations.

## **PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:**

Provided support to develop and deploy a Request for Developer Qualifications (RFQ) including a community-supported vision and market analysis.

## **COMMUNITY PROGRESS:**

Renovations will commence in early 2024, creating jobs, economic growth, and community wealth.

“The Hayes development will be a tremendous project for the city. With the approved sale, downtown Jackson will experience a major economic impact.”

– *Scott Fleming, CEO, Jackson Anchor Initiative*



The City of Jackson and other stakeholders, including Jackson Anchor Initiative, were connected to the predevelopment assistance partnership and received the support from MEDC to develop a viable restoration vision, promote the site via RFQ, and attract a reputable and able development team to take on the project.

"[The League] was great," Fleming said. "[They] helped kick this off and get the project moving."

The long-awaited renovations are set to commence in early 2024. Restoration of the Hayes Hotel is a legacy project that will be celebrated for decades to come.



*Cultivating Unused Space*

# FARMINGTON

**OPPORTUNITY:**

Revitalize downtown through historic-conscious restoration for the community's financial and recreational gain.

**PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:**

Onsite visits, visioning package, and strategic counsel for progress management.

**OBSTACLE:**

Gaining lender buy-in and managing property owner expectations.

**COMMUNITY PROGRESS:**

Redevelopment pace leaps ahead with predevelopment aid, driving fiscal growth and higher downtown occupancy.

Many cities located around Detroit are frequently lumped together under the “metro Detroit” label, giving the impression that they’re all the same and all one place. However, metro Detroit actually includes more than 60 cities across several counties. These cities are unique and provide diverse economic and recreational opportunities in a concentrated area.

Nestled between two of metro Detroit’s larger cities—Livonia and Farmington Hills—lies a smaller city: Farmington.

Historic districts and Victorian-era homes are part of Farmington’s enchanting makeup, along with six parks—Shiawassee, Drake, Women’s, Memorial, Flanders, and Downtown Riley—where the city hosts

annual events and residents invite friends and family to stroll the walking trails.

But we can’t forget about downtown, a district full of small-town charm. Many buildings have maintained their historic integrity without losing sight of the future, offering modern amenities. This merging of old and new has provided community leaders with inspiration to continue this type of development within the downtown area.

Kate Knight, executive director of the city’s Downtown Development Authority, sees new development as an opportunity to invigorate the community and bring value aesthetically, financially, and recreationally to Farmington.



# FARMINGTON

In a desirable, high-traffic corridor of downtown sits a property in need of a major overhaul. Previously a family-run dental lab, this site provides Knight with the space to transform what is now unused land into a mixed-use development offering residential and commercial units.

The vision to revive this site requires perseverance when obstacles arise—because they will.

“Managing the expectations of the property owner was sometimes difficult,” Knight said. “They were taking a leap of faith with us and felt invested in the vision we shared for downtown. ... We’ve [also] had to field negativity from a few commercial brokers who scoffed at the vision and said we were dreaming.”

It was a dream that will soon become a reality, as the property has been sold to a new development firm looking to bring the established vision to life.

**“Don't sit back and wait for the perfect developer to find you. Having multiple channels to share the community story is necessary to boost the project ... take advantage of a developer showcase. Host multiple tours of the project and surrounding area.”**

*—Kate Knight, Executive Director, Farmington Downtown Development Authority*



It's not a quick progression from vision to development, but the reward comes from putting in the extra effort to keep the momentum going—a benefit of being involved with the predevelopment assistance partnership.

Knight said she is grateful for the support received through the predevelopment assistance partnership as it increased the pace of the redevelopment process. Onsite visits, visioning package creation, and other program opportunities were integral in getting Farmington's plans to where they are now, with expectations to add more projects to the roster in the near future.

"We are seeing the kind of development that we'd want to see in the next five to 10 years happening now," Knight said. "A brewery, pharmacy, and new eateries, all building off investment help from the public sector."

The reimagining of a 50-year-old family business will soon become a part of Farmington's redevelopment celebrations, creating jobs and contributing to the city's fiscal growth and increasing its current 97% downtown occupancy rate to even greater heights.



*Accommodating Tourism*

# HARRISON

Whether one enjoys relaxing on the water, getting close to nature on campgrounds, competing in friendly golf matches, or hitting the slopes during the snowy winter season, all are possible in the city of Harrison.

Harrison takes pride in being a part of Clare County—“Where the North Begins”—and being home to “20 lakes in 20 minutes.” While it’s a large city within the county, Harrison is a small town that offers a certain lifestyle for those who want to get away from the hustle and bustle that comes with metropolitan living.

Despite its small-town size, Harrison offers a long list of activities. The endless water sports on Budd Lake's 175 acres, the Clare County Fair in July, the Frostbite Winter Festival, and the Harrison Car & Bike Show are among the many year-round events and activities in Harrison that keep residents engaged. However, these are also points of interest that could appeal to and attract visitors throughout Michigan, or even across the core Midwestern states.



Growing tourism in Harrison is an essential goal for City Manager Justin Cavanaugh, as it will stimulate growth and prosperity in the community.

The only dilemma? Tourism requires accommodations—something this small town has long desired, and it’s a desire Cavanaugh hopes to fulfill.

**Developing a hotel is a massive undertaking, requiring buy-in from city officials and associations as well as finding investors to support and finance the endeavor. This is something Harrison has struggled with, but it hasn’t deterred Cavanaugh.**

# HARRISON

“The primary challenge [we’ve faced] has been the difficulty in finding investors who are genuinely excited about the opportunity. However, by refusing to give up, maintaining ongoing conversations with potential individuals, refining the project proposal, and seeking external support, we remain committed to finding a path forward and realizing the vision of economic development in the City of Harrison.”

– Justin Cavanaugh, Harrison City Manager

## **OPPORTUNITY:**

Grow tourism and provide local amenities to attract those who come to the region to visit.

## **OBSTACLE:**

Finding investors who were interested in and excited about developing a new hotel in a smaller town.

## **PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:**

Provided a project feasibility study to understand the best development strategy based on what the community could realistically support.

## **COMMUNITY PROGRESS:**

Data-backed vision boosts buy-in, propels economic development, and advance the city as a travel destination.

With help from the predevelopment assistance partnership, Harrison had a hotel feasibility study completed by the Core Distinction Group, a hospitality consulting firm that specializes in comprehensive hotel feasibility market studies. This study revealed that Harrison has the capacity to support a 49-room hotel—a big win for Cavanaugh in proving the city’s case to get investors on board and receive community support to undertake the development of a new hotel.

**A hotel is just the beginning of Harrison’s economic development.**

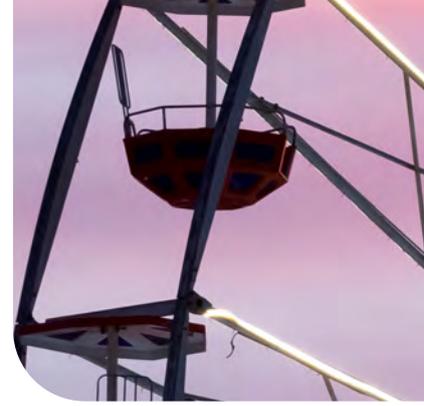
“The benefits of a hotel in Harrison are manifold,” Cavanaugh said. “It would generate tax revenue that could be reinvested in improving infrastructure, enhancing public services, and supporting community development projects. Furthermore, a hotel in Harrison would stimulate the growth of ancillary businesses, such as restaurants, cafes, and retail shops, which would cater to the needs and preferences of hotel guests and visitors.”

Cavanaugh’s vision is to enhance the community’s pride in Harrison, improve the quality of life, and promote the city as a vibrant destination anyone could appreciate. Harrison has a rich heritage with a variety of cultural offerings and possesses natural beauty. A new hotel to welcome tourists to experience this distinct identity puts Harrison on the right path to see this vision through to fruition—a path they are now on, thanks to the predevelopment assistance partnership.



# ACCESSING PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Each community engaged in RRC is at a different stage in their unique journey, however, they all follow the same building blocks to achieve RRC Certification which opens the door to accessing predevelopment assistance.





# THE RRC PROCESS CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING STEPS:



## SET UP FOR SUCCESS

Prior to official engagement, it is helpful to coordinate a steering committee or team to review the RRC Best Practices Handbook and **determine if RRC is the right fit for your community.**

## ENGAGEMENT

Formal engagement indicates **your community's desire to work toward reaching an RRC level.** To begin, you should contact the RRC Team to access customized guidance through the engagement process.



## COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT + ONBOARDING

A Community Snapshot will be provided to you by your RRC Community Planner, **establishing where the community is currently aligned with the RRC Best Practices and what criteria are missing.** Once you are formally evaluated, your RRC Community Planner will reach out to schedule an onboarding session to introduce the community to our resources, reaffirm the process, and answer any questions about the baseline evaluation.



## INCORPORATE MISSING RRC BEST PRACTICES

Now is the time to work closely with your RRC Community Planner to **meet the best practices that have been identified as missing.** Additionally, each community has access to a variety of resources and tools to assist you in reaching your desired level of engagement.

The RRC Planner will work with the community to establish new benefits available to it based on the level it achieved (Essentials or certified).



## REDEVELOPMENT READY SITES

The Redevelopment Services Team (RSTeam) provides tailored assistance for certified Redevelopment Ready Communities, with experienced and dedicated staff focused on a proactive approach to site redevelopment. Target sites and their needs change over time, but the purpose of the RSTeam is to increase local capacity to carry out this work, help community partners increase

their confidence with professional support, and above all, maintain momentum for the ongoing process of making Michigan communities great places to live.

Certified Redevelopment Ready Communities have access to predevelopment assistance, which can be used to remove barriers or add marketability to a chosen priority redevelopment site.



## GOAL ACHIEVED + MAINTENANCE + RENEWAL

The process of continual improvement does not stop once a community has obtained its certification level. Once you have fully aligned with the RRC Best Practices, your RRC Community Planner will work with you to identify new benefits available and set up a plan for annual best practice maintenance.

Communities go through designation renewal every five years to ensure continued best practice alignment.

**RRC recognizes every community faces unique challenges; this isn't a cookie cutter process. The RRC team embraces flexibility to ensure communities move forward at their own pace.**



*Enhancing Downtown*

# ALLEGAN

**OPPORTUNITY:**

Attract downtown visitors and build community wealth through the development of a mixed-use multistory building.

**OBSTACLE:**

Pandemic shutdowns caused delays and developer turnover, impacting community buy-in and the crucial public vote for progress.

**PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:**

Helped to rebuild the relationships needed to integrate the vision of redevelopment and preservation along with securing the funding needed to transform the area.

**COMMUNITY PROGRESS:**

Continues to maintain its collaborative efforts with local property owners and community leaders to carry on with residential renovations.

Nestled by the picturesque shores of the Kalamazoo River, the charming town of Allegan beckons visitors to embark on an inland adventure in the heart of west Michigan. City Manager Joel Dye believed a site on the river, with its celebrated riverfront views, scenic beauty, and historic Second Street Bridge, was an ideal spot to grow Allegan's vibrant



downtown community. The downtown district offers a captivating juxtaposition of modern amenities and traditional architecture with enchanting shops, boutiques, and local businesses lining the streets. For a small community, Allegan's dreams are big. Dye's initial vision was to develop a multistory, mixed-use building or hotel to attract visitors to the scenic downtown.

But, like any project, this endeavor would encounter its fair share of struggles.

From COVID-19 shutdown delays to an unexpected change in developers, the project was stuck in a cycle of taking one step forward and two steps back. Originally, Dye set out to combine this parcel with part of an adjacent park, which required a public vote. Without that vote, the relationship with the Allegan community needed to be restored with a new developer at the helm.



# ALLEGAN

The predevelopment assistance partnership played an instrumental role in pulling the community together and rebuilding the relationships needed to integrate the vision of those who wanted the hotel and the development and those who wanted to preserve the immediate area in its current condition.

“After the failed vote to utilize part of the adjacent park, we have worked through our Public Spaces Commission and a small citizen group to plan improvements to the adjacent park that will benefit both the park and the hotel,” Dye said. “This end result will create a new public space for both visitors of the hotel and the residents of Allegan to enjoy.” Dye worked with the League and the MEDC to pivot, bringing in a second developer and securing the funding needed to transform the project into

an economic benefit as well as a local win. The development is now employing its Community Revitalization Program grant, awarded by the MEDC, to bring the project to fruition. Construction is expected to begin in the fall of 2023.

Allegan has also been able to collaborate with local property owners and the state to revitalize the second floors of existing buildings into residential units. Since 2018, there have been 16 new units successfully established with two more in progress. Alongside the development of second-story residential spaces, Dye has observed the revitalization of numerous downtown buildings.



**“You have to be committed. Development in towns that have not experienced historical development like more prosperous towns does not just happen. It takes a certain level of grit and determination. It helps enormously when you get locals willing to make the investments, but even then, you have to keep grinding.”**

*– Joel Dye, Allegan City Manager*



*Blight Removal Strategic Planning*

# LAINGSBURG



Laingsburg maintains its identity as an appealing residential enclave, catering to those in search of a serene and intimate living environment that is still within close proximity to an urban area. The bedroom community provides tranquil atmosphere and prides itself on being a close-knit community for its visitors and residents. Lush greenery and rolling hills paired with a beloved downtown area will be home to new middle-income housing within a walkable distance of all the town's amenities.

A journey that began in 2012, when the city acquired a grain elevator in the heart of Laingsburg’s historic center, has spanned more than a decade. Despite the longevity of this project, Clerk/Treasurer Paula Willoughby remains optimistic as she embraces each obstacle and navigates processes with versatility.

Originally, the vision was to remove the blighted elevator—including the grain bins and structures—to enrich the downtown landscape. Following the completion of the demolition project, the city set its sights on securing grants to construct a new library, create additional parking, and erect contemporary apartments. But without funding, the property remained vacant. The long, narrow site continued to face hindrances in attracting investors due to an abandoned railway and possible environmental issues exacerbated by the absence of city water.

Driven by the initial perspective and supported by the predevelopment assistance partnership, the project team embraced adaptability, forging ahead toward progress. Support from the predevelopment assistance partnership enabled Laingsburg to address environmental concerns and craft an economic development strategy aimed at attracting businesses to occupy the vacant commercial buildings.



# LAINGSBURG

“Businesses will grow and new opportunities will arise from the increased residential density. The development will create a visually pleasing, welcoming area for visitors as they enter downtown.”

– Paula Willoughby,  
Laingsburg Clerk/Treasurer



## **OPPORTUNITY:**

Increase residential density to attract more businesses and visitors.

## **OBSTACLE:**

High property costs and environmental concerns hindered investor and funding acquisition.

## **PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:**

Providing strategic counsel, flexibility, and financial aid for overcoming challenges and prioritizing sites.

## **COMMUNITY PROGRESS:**

Progress and gained knowledge led the community to redefine their vision and focus on an economic development strategy to attract businesses for vacant commercial buildings instead of constructing new spaces.



The city's boards and commission recognized the potential, and in the past five years, numerous developers approached the city with proposals to build multifamily housing units on the site. However, none of these ventures came to fruition until December 2022. The City of Laingsburg now has the exciting prospect of 18 single-family homes for future residents.

"I was unaware of the predevelopment assistance partnership at first, so just having the opportunity to utilize their expertise and have a team of people who would listen and let me bounce ideas off of them was completely unexpected," Willoughby said. "The funding that they have provided to assist with our priority sites and the reach that they have through their partnerships with other organizations has helped us keep moving our projects forward."

Willoughby takes pride in the development's future to create a unique identity and sense of community for Laingsburg. The Community Economic Development Association of Michigan's (CEDAM) Community Development Fellowship, funded by the MEDC, awarded the City of Laingsburg a fellow to actively engage the Michigan Main Street Program, with the aims of establishing a baseline for economic development and measuring the strategies for success.



# BUMPS IN THE ROAD

Redevelopment starts the path to building strong, diverse neighborhoods that can attract and keep the workforce and start and grow businesses but these improvements are not met without their fair share of challenges.

This process often requires significant financial resources to acquire properties, demolish existing structures or construct new buildings. Securing funding and managing costs can be a major challenge, especially in cases where the economic viability of the project is uncertain.

As a community evolves, the simple passing of time and degradation of materials necessitates infrastructure upgrades to support the increased demand. This can include improvements to transportation networks, water systems, and electrical grids. Coordinating with relevant agencies and ensuring adequate infrastructure is in place can be a significant barrier to many communities, especially small and rural ones.

Developers can face resistance from community members concerned about the logistics of construction or the impact on the heart and character of the place they call home.

The communities that engage with RRC have access to a network of resources and tools and receive the necessary support to overcome these obstacles and help advance projects forward.





*Creating Opportunities*

# GRAND BLANC



Just outside of Flint is Grand Blanc, part of Michigan's largest county park system. While this suburb isn't along Michigan's sought-after coastlines, its access to 11,000 acres of trails and creeks are impressive.\* While community members are able to take advantage of the city's attractive landscapes and plentiful parks—a benefit that not all communities have—housing and revitalized businesses are needed in the downtown area.

Wendy Jean-Buhrer, Grand Blanc's City Manager, wants downtown to thrive just as much as the parks. Grand Blanc is a small city that hasn't had many economic incentives, so to achieve the vision of prosperity, redevelopment plans needed to be unique while still addressing the needs of the community.

Smaller cities frequently mean fewer resources, but this doesn't mean community leaders can't move the needle to make a change when facing such obstacles.

The predevelopment assistance partnership connected Grand Blanc's community leaders to a developer and helped the city receive development funding; however, when the idea of a multi-use building was first presented, it wasn't initially given the green light.

The developer wanted to see a larger development than what was planned. A great deal of land was available for purchase, and to make the impact the city wanted, they had to go big. Patience and extra steps were required to reimagine, revise, and replan the city's new development—all things Jean-Buhrer is grateful to the program for.

**“These extra steps opened the door for a better opportunity and will be well worth it in the end.”**

*– Wendy Jean-Buhrer,  
Grand Blanc City Manager*

*\*This sentence has been corrected since the original print.*

# GRAND BLANC

And how exactly did this reimagining evolve? In the form of the highly anticipated Garden Building.

When complete, the 30,000-square-foot Garden Building will be exactly what the community has been yearning for. Jean-Buhrer is hopeful the multi-use four-story building with retail, dining, residential, office, and event space will attract tourists and connoisseurs—and it doesn't hurt that in addition to all the perks this space will offer, there is a planned European-style biergarten that will have a perfect view of Physician's Park and will be the first biergarten in Genesee County.



**OPPORTUNITY:**

Create economic development in the downtown area with increased residential offerings and revitalized businesses.

**OBSTACLE:**

Utilizing limited resources to find a developer that believes in redevelopment in small cities.

**PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:**

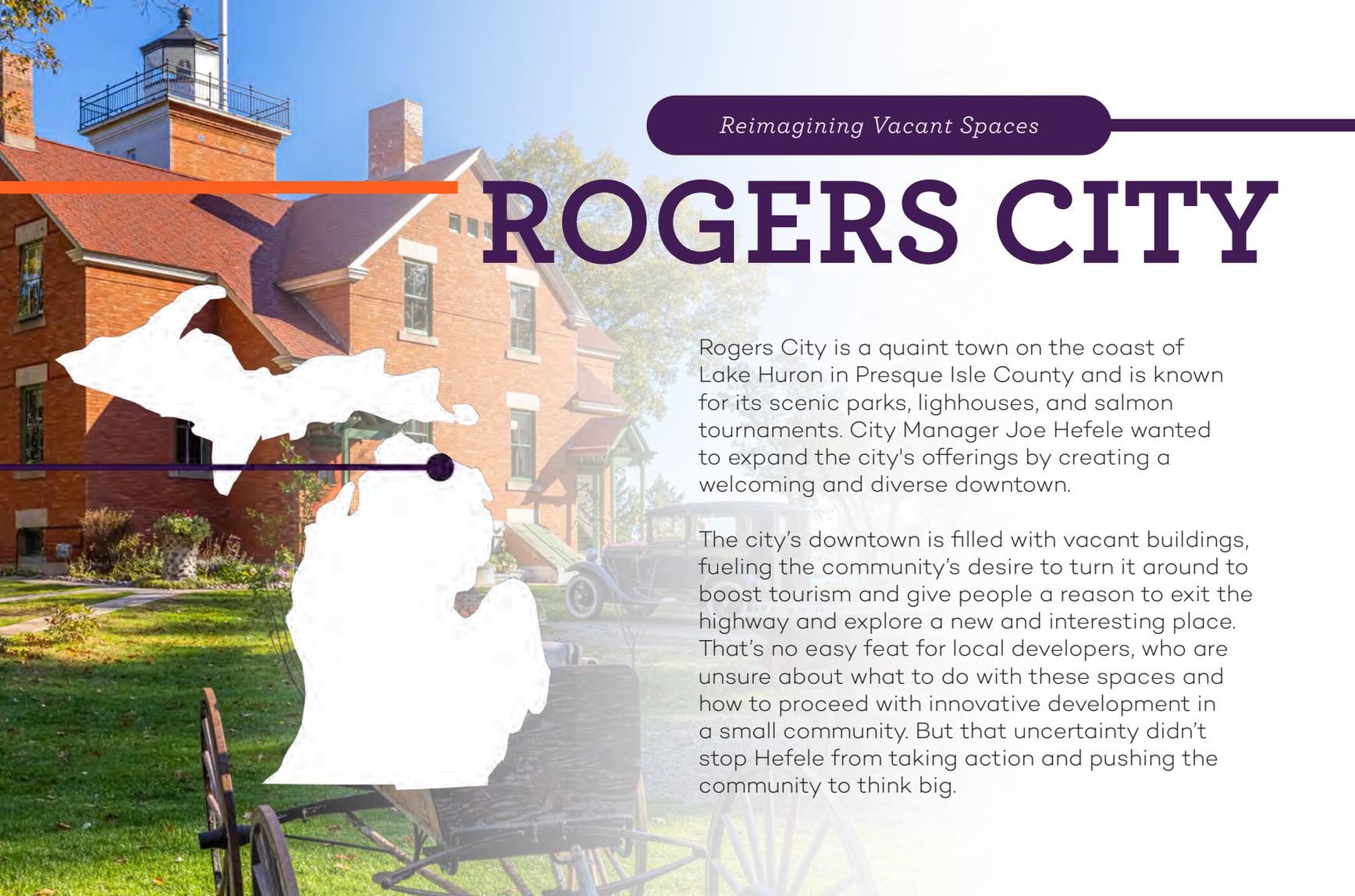
Linked leaders with developer, secured funding, and supported problem solving for project success.

**COMMUNITY PROGRESS:**

Positioned to complete the 30,000-square-foot Garden Building, featuring a versatile four-story structure with retail, dining, residential, office, and event spaces.



The recreational benefits are undeniable, but the Garden Building will be so much more than a fun hangout. It is projected to create upwards of 50 jobs and nearly 30 livable units, boosting the city's economy in a way that will positively affect its residents.



*Reimagining Vacant Spaces*

# ROGERS CITY

Rogers City is a quaint town on the coast of Lake Huron in Presque Isle County and is known for its scenic parks, lighthouses, and salmon tournaments. City Manager Joe Hefele wanted to expand the city's offerings by creating a welcoming and diverse downtown.

The city's downtown is filled with vacant buildings, fueling the community's desire to turn it around to boost tourism and give people a reason to exit the highway and explore a new and interesting place. That's no easy feat for local developers, who are unsure about what to do with these spaces and how to proceed with innovative development in a small community. But that uncertainty didn't stop Hefele from taking action and pushing the community to think big.



His vision to rehabilitate vacant storefronts and bring vibrant retail shops, imaginative dining, and recreational spaces to the community received buy-in from community residents and leaders, which has been essential in Rogers City's planned transformation. Without it, projects might have been abandoned due to the challenges faced since beginning their redevelopment journey.

From high construction costs to halts in development, there were many hurdles to overcome—some of which are still in the process of finding solutions.

When asked what the biggest challenge has been thus far for this community, Hefele responded, "Sky-high construction costs ... Construction bids come in much higher than expected and at a level that greatly threatens the feasibility of the project itself, particularly in a small community where profit margins are tight to begin with." Hefele hopes the city's plans to complete multiple projects at once will result in more moderately priced estimates as a bundled or grouped cost.

# ROGERS CITY



Utilizing predevelopment assistance has helped tremendously with lowering costs to offset the budget hit caused by construction. Vital concept and design outputs with affordable options have aided in projects moving forward. Rogers City was connected with an architect who provided community leaders with renderings, realistic cost estimates, and plans for additional projects beyond what's already in the works. Several sites have also been able to submit grant applications—something that would not have been possible without the program.

According to Hefele, small communities should be prepared for these types of obstacles and should expect to put in tons of work—work that will be worth it in the long run.

**OPPORTUNITY:**

Revitalize vacant spaces to boost tourism and the local economy as a vibrant exploration destination.

**OBSTACLE:**

Excessive construction costs burden the community.

**PREDEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:**

Reducing costs and community impact by offering strategic counsel, connecting to resources, and facilitating problem solving with economical solutions.

**COMMUNITY PROGRESS:**

Seven sites under construction, with more to come.

“Things often happen in fits and starts. Community leaders must be patient and remain positive despite the hurdles.”

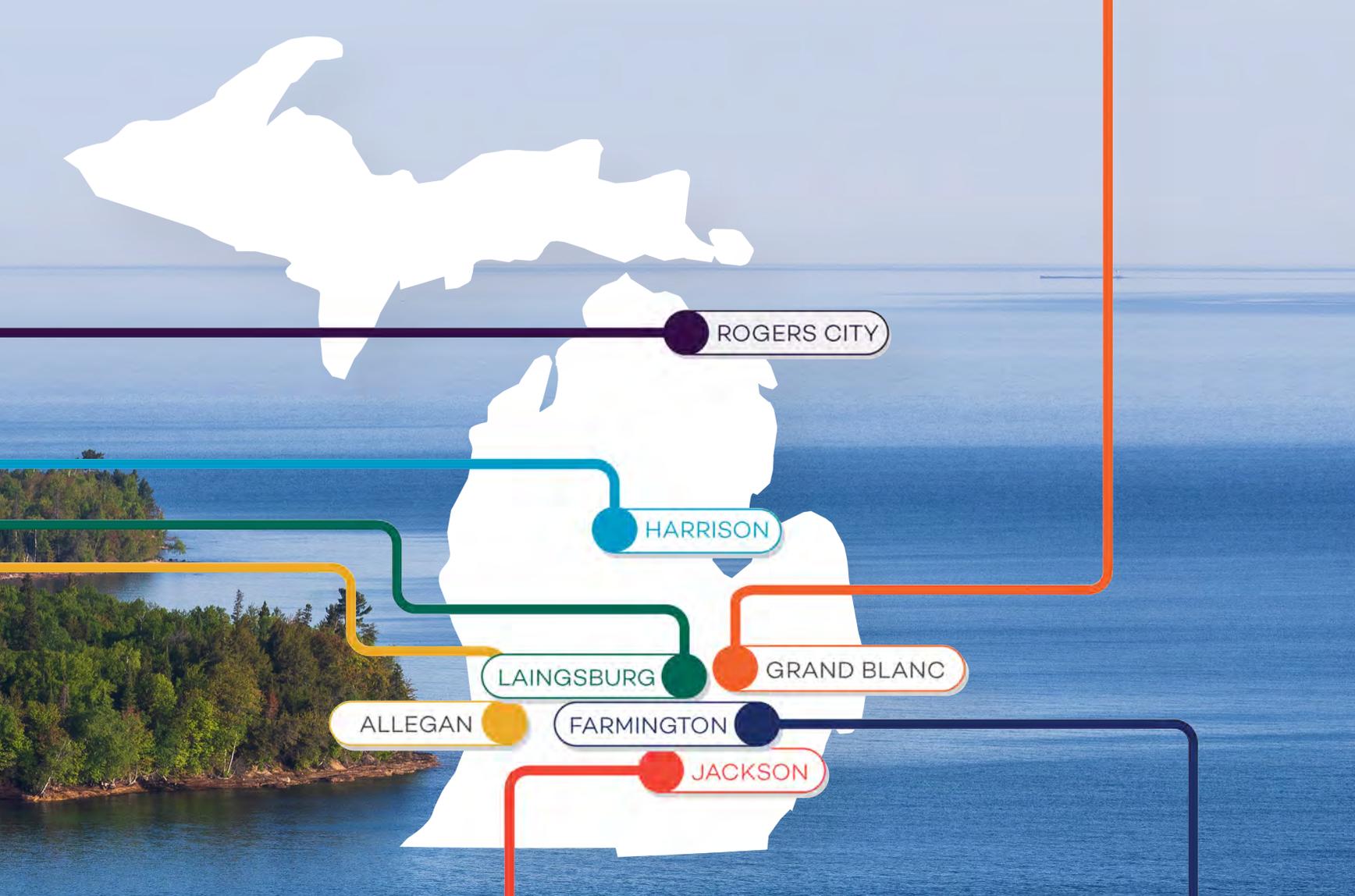
– Joe Hefele, Rogers City Manager

He goes on to say that failures will occur, they're inevitable, but there is no growth without risk. Community leaders must face these challenges head-on, dust themselves off when things don't go as planned, and take the next calculated risk if they are to grow.

The future for Rogers City is just blossoming into what will be. Seven sites are under construction within the program, but Hefele has high hopes for even more. Restoring an old high school and converting it into modern residential units is another project on the horizon, with hotels, and public gathering places not far behind.

# POSITIONING MICHIGAN FOR THE FUTURE

No matter the size of the community, or the amount of redevelopment that has happened in the past, all Michigan communities have the opportunity to grow economically and increase their quality of life. This evolution is a marathon that takes perseverance, creativity, and strategy to be fruitful—and the outcome makes the challenges worthwhile.



ROGERS CITY

HARRISON

LAINGSBURG

GRAND BLANC

ALLEGAN

FARMINGTON

JACKSON

## Growth and Success

### JACKSON

*Historic  
Rehabilitation  
With Purpose*

### FARMINGTON

*Cultivating  
Unused Space*

### HARRISON

*Accommodating  
Tourism*

While different communities face different obstacles before and during this journey, they don't have to complete this venture alone. Predevelopment assistance is the first step in making Michigan's future brighter. Collaboration, resources, and guidance that otherwise wouldn't have been available or easily attainable are what make this assistance so valuable—and are ultimately the pivotal factors in moving community progression forward.

**Adaptability/Flexibility**

**ALLEGAN**

*Enhancing  
Downtown*

**Challenges and How to Overcome**

**GRAND BLANC**

*Creating  
Opportunities*

**LAINGSBURG**

*Blight Removal  
Strategic Planning*

**ROGERS CITY**

*Reimagining  
Vacant Spaces*



## BY THE NUMBERS

50+

Michigan communities served within the predevelopment assistance partnership.

85+

Projects involving the League and MEDC partnership.

30+

Consultants engaged with the RRC toolkit.

Dreams are a mark of ambition.  
The MEDC and the League  
are passionate about helping  
communities achieve these goals.



1675 Green Rd,  
Ann Arbor, MI 48105



**MICHIGAN  
ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT  
CORPORATION**

300 N. WASHINGTON SQ.,  
LANSING, MI 48913



SEPTEMBER 2023

