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- Les Cheneaux Area Chamber of Commerce
- Upward Initiative
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1  Forming a Regional Growth Strategy
3  Proud to be from the EUP
5  Taking Action, Making Changes
6  Enhancing the Business Climate
10  The Importance of Place
13  People Power
15  Taking the Next Steps
Since its inception in 1968, the EUP Regional Planning & Development Commission has built bridges between communities, governmental agencies, entrepreneurs, and regional investors in Chippewa, Luce, and Mackinac counties. This penchant for collaboration and networking has kept EUPRPDC keenly focused on future opportunities for thoughtful growth and development in the region. With that focus in mind, we offer this Regional Growth Strategy for the Eastern Upper Peninsula.

In 2010, the Land Policy Institute and Michigan State University Extension launched the Michigan Prosperity Initiative – an effort to assess the rapidly-changing economy and move Michigan back on the path to prosperity. Training sessions were held throughout the state and the EUPRPDC coordinated a series of brainstorming workshops attended by more than 100 individuals from the three-county area.

The resulting Regional Growth Strategy, outlined in these pages, is equal parts inspiration, road map, and springboard for the forward vision of the Eastern Upper Peninsula. What lies ahead? With the continued commitment of so many regional partners and a well-defined vision, the possibilities are limitless.
Between April 19, 2010 and June 16, 2010, Michigan State University led 100 training programs throughout the state, including the EUP. These free sessions were designed to help community members discover how they can help their respective communities and the region. Three-part, New Economy sessions were progressive in nature, each building on the information discussed in the previous session. More than 100 individuals attended New Economy 101, which reviewed how Michigan got into its current economic rut, and what it will take to get out. Nearly 50 attended New Economy 201, designed for key stakeholders with a desire to learn how to develop regional economic development strategies. That led participants to New Economy 301, where they were trained on underutilized economic tools for analysis and how to apply them to concrete actions needed to improve prosperity both locally and regionally.

The pursuit of prosperity was a common thread throughout the sessions, including review and discussion of the six pillars of prosperity proffered by People and Land – a non-profit organization focused on growth and change in Michigan. Those six pillars are actually sectors that PAL believes will be instrumental to the state’s future success:

1. Attractive Cities and Neighborhoods
2. Highly Competitive Schools and Lifelong Learning Opportunities
3. Knowledge-Based Technologies
4. Thriving Agriculture
5. Natural Resources for Recreation and Job Creation
6. Inclusive and Entrepreneurial Culture

How does the EUP connect to those six pillars? What sectors must we focus upon and thrive within for success here? In the final session – New Economy 301 – participants spent time reviewing the region’s assets, discussing goals, and ultimately developing common themes from which strategies emerged. Participants were invited to continue this work on a committee of EUPRPDC and many continue today to pursue the goals of the Regional Growth Strategy.

IT ALL STARTED....
Ask any EUP resident what they love about life in this area and prepare yourself for a long list. We are a proud bunch - proud of our three beautiful Great Lakes, our stunning landscapes, and our friendly people. The place we call home is the vacation dream realized by hundreds of thousands of people annually. It’s the place people escape to when elsewhere they are dealing with traffic congestion, sweltering heat, or simply the doldrums. It’s also the place where a spark of an idea evolved into a nationally-known manufacturing plant, where resourceful people developed inventions used all over the world, and where our Native American roots have taught us that sustainability – in business and in life – is a must. EUP residents know balance, perhaps taking cues from the nature that surrounds us. We know hard work but also know the importance of family. It is, in fact, the desire to succeed professionally and personally that leads the community leaders of the EUP to reach further, strive for more, and pursue a vision for the future. **WE HAVE A LOT. BUT WE ALSO WANT MORE.**
THE MANY ASSETS OF THE EUP

Blessed with an embarrassment of riches. That’s what we are in the EUP, where both our natural and man-made assets are many. The most obvious of our assets are those that present themselves around every bend in the river, down every country road, and every scenic overlook – our natural assets.

- Forest: 80% of the EUP’s land surface is forested
- Water: 3 Great Lakes and numerous inland lakes and rivers
- Space: Less than 1% of the EUP is urbanized and wide-open sky is abundant
- Scenic Beauty: From the famous Tahquamenon Falls to the little-known Mission Point overlook, fabulous vistas are plentiful.
- Wildlife & Fisheries: Plentiful wildlife, birds, and fish are the reality for hunters, anglers, and photographers alike.
- No Natural Disasters: Nearly non-existent incidences of flooding, tornadoes, etc
- Public Access Land: 47% of land in the EUP is publicly-owned
- Seasonality: Four distinct seasons and a pleasant climate are a notable assets

Sound planning and infrastructure picks up where Mother Nature leaves off, providing additional assets to the EUP.

- Rail Connection to Wisconsin and Canada
- Excellent highways, both North/South and East/West, via I-75, M-28, and US-2
- Regional airport with service to Detroit, plus municipal airports able to handle jets and small planes
- Industrial parks located in each county
- Deepwater ports that accommodate both shipping vessels and passenger ships
- Cities with sewer and water services
- Institutions of higher education, like Lake Superior State University and Bay Mills Community College
- Comprehensive healthcare facilities, including three full-scale hospitals, numerous assisted living / nursing care facilities, private practice physicians, and specialty services.

Beyond nature and infrastructure are several other assets unique to the EUP.

- The importance of proximity to Canada and Wisconsin cannot be understated
- Populated areas with a unique sense of place: Sault Ste. Marie, St. Ignace, Newberry, and Mackinac Island
- Several of the state’s top tourist destinations are found here: Mackinac Island, Tahquamenon Falls, and the Soo Locks
- Native American tribes and reservations add unique culture, while casinos add entertainment
- Numerous security forces call the EUP home, including U.S. Border Patrol, U.S. Coast Guard, and U.S. Customs & Immigration
With a greater understanding of the New Economy and heightened awareness of the assets and challenges of both Michigan and the EUP, we developed nine action strategies to deliver the region from great to exceptional.

1. Develop economic gardening and entrepreneurial support programs.

2. Create a regional Capital Investment Group to foster entrepreneurial activities.

3. Foster regional collaboration among economic development organizations and local governments.

4. Strengthen economic ties throughout the Midwest and Northern Ontario.

5. Further develop the recreation/tourism cluster.

6. Define a positive identity for the region and market that identity.

7. Invest in improvements to the St. Marys River area with a focus on enhancing sense of place for people with an interest in nature, culture, and history.

8. Develop a 21st century vision for area infrastructure.

9. Advance the Higher Education Cluster in ways that benefit entrepreneurial activity and raise the educational attainment of the workforce.
The development of a strong regional business environment does not happen spontaneously and it does not happen in a vacuum. It is the result of giving people who are passionate about a business concept the tools and support they need to develop that concept into a successful, robust reality. Leadership within the business community, governmental agencies, workforce development programs and other contributors to the world of economic development must have a desire to create the kind of climate where entrepreneurs know they can garner support and expertise while being appreciated for their willingness to take a risk on a new or existing venture. The development of support services that currently do not exist in the EUP and the expansion of those that do are the first steps in creating a business climate with nationwide appeal.
Throughout the region, a number of partners possess expertise to help budding entrepreneurs and those looking to grow existing businesses. Additionally, there are a number of resources at our disposal that have not yet realized their full potential. From the Sault Ste. Marie/Lake Superior SmartZone to the “Creating Entrepreneurial Communities” effort between St. Ignace and Les Cheneaux, opportunities exist to create an environment that fosters the entrepreneurial spirit.

That environment begins with a dialogue between business owners and government leaders. What does business need to succeed in our region? What kind of mentoring, coaching, or training is needed? What successes can we learn from in other regions? A better understanding of the needs of both business and government will prepare the ground for a fertile entrepreneurial effort.

Support programs should focus on a wide variety of opportunities. Since web-based businesses and telecommuting opportunities are still new to the region, providing assistance in those areas is a forward-focused strategy that anticipates the future of business.

Engaging in a region-wide dialogue, developing existing initiatives further, and providing programs and support to ever-evolving business clusters like technology are a few of the ways we can and will create an entrepreneurial culture.
INCREASING CAPITAL FUNDING

Strategy 2. Create a regional Capital Investment Group to foster entrepreneurial activities.

Even with the most innovative minds, business cannot grow and flourish without capital. Investment in the region is needed and both existing businesses and start-ups often encounter obstacles when it comes to financing. As part of this action strategy, we will seek avenues to pursue and facilitate local capital development. We will actively work to attract investment both from outside and within the area for the benefit of new and existing businesses. This will lead to the creation of a capital investment group that will be promoted to entrepreneurs and will ultimately enhance the business climate.

SHAPING RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT

Strategy 3. Foster regional collaboration among economic development organizations and local governments.

At the heart of our plan is one word: collaboration. Talented people across the region are vigorously working to grow business, make wise planning decisions, and generally improve the economy. But they should not work in a vacuum. Combining efforts and sharing information leads to more efficiencies, wiser use of resources, and the basic synergy that leads a region from good to great. We are lucky - we have a head start on this with some degree of collaboration already underway, but there is more to be done.

As part of this action strategy, we vow to:

• Work together to gather and share data across the region

• Engage in regional capacity-building activities to improve leadership and service

• Prepare, adopt and annually update a regional strategic growth plan with the involvement of our regional stakeholders, as well as others from throughout the state, utilizing resources both governmental and non-profit

Whether spurred from the political scene or the financial challenges of the state, people are clamoring for collaboration and more efficient use of resources. Through this strategy, we will be responsive to those who demand efficiency while strengthening our economic development efforts.
DIVERSIFYING AND GLOBALLY CONNECTING BUSINESS

Strategy 4. Strengthen economic ties throughout the Midwest and Northern Ontario.

An asset is only an asset if you properly leverage it. Stakeholders in the region agree that our proximity to larger markets in Canada, Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan’s Lower Peninsula is an asset. But have we done all we can to maximize that proximity? To strengthen those ties and build those relationships? This action strategy demands that we dig deeper into what possibilities exist with our neighboring markets and prepare the region’s entrepreneurs to act upon them. No longer is distance a barrier. Taking full advantage of the global economy may begin closer to home for many entrepreneurs.

Strategy 5. Further develop the recreation/tourism cluster.

In the EUP, there are many things we do well. Tourism tops that list. Blessed with incredible natural assets and a genuine excitement to share those assets with the world, creating great visitor experiences has been our hallmark and it reflects on our economy. The leisure and tourism industry accounted for 13.3 percent of all employment in the EUP in 2008, compared to 5.7 percent statewide – demonstrating the importance of this sector to the region. Stakeholders brainstorming the future of the EUP agree, however, that more can be done.

These efforts begin with identifying all of the elements of the tourism and recreation cluster throughout the region. Once inventoried, pursuing further development of some elements and more actively integrating others into the tourism experience are priorities.

Ideas abound for enhancing the tourism cluster.
- Convene a tourism summit and pursue region-wide market research
- Collaborate/coordinate to create region-wide offerings to keep visitors longer
- Build and cross-promote daytrips throughout the region
- Connect visitors and locals to available historic, artistic, and cultural offerings
- Promote the development of cruise ship traffic at U.P. ports
- Improve community entry-point aesthetics and way-finding tools
- Identify those parts of the region that may need improvement and work with leaders in those areas to achieve improvement

Efforts to enhance the tourism/recreation cluster pay dividends in other ways. With a nod to placemaking strategies, we know that investment in recreation, culture, pleasant public spaces, and related improvements appeal not only to visitors, but to those considering the EUP for a second home, business, or family relocation.
THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE

Talented people are looking for quality places to live and work. While each of us may define quality differently, those who specialize in attracting talent know that people pay attention to the amenities – from recreation, to transportation, to entertainment – before deciding where to relocate. Creating quality places is known as “placemaking” and is defined as “the use of strategic assets, talent attractors and sustainable growth levers to create attractive and sustainable high energy, high amenity, high impact, high income communities that can succeed in the New Economy.” (Michigan Land Policy Institute, 2008) The Project for Public Spaces offers key words as “meaningful” and “pleasant” and “safe” to describe memorable places. It can, they explain, “be a park, a square, a downtown, a street corner, a market, a residential street, a garden, or a wide variety of other public destinations.” (MSUE power point, 2010) With these thoughts on mind, we challenged our stakeholders and ourselves to think about the quality places in the EUP.
MARKETING EACH REGION

Strategy 6. Define a positive identity for the region and market that identity.

Many of the EUP’s individual communities and attractions have established identities. Newberry is the moose capitol, Mackinac Island conjures up visions of historic forts and horses, Sault Ste. Marie is about the Soo Locks and St. Ignace’s identity is intertwined with the mighty Mackinac Bridge. But when you think of the region as a whole…what is our identity? The EUP lacks an articulated, positive identity. Inroads have been made in recent years, with initiatives like The Great Waters and The Inland Seashore – but these focus on specific sub-sectors of the region – namely nature and maritime assets.

Marketing the region must begin with defining our identity. How will we positively describe ourselves to investors, entrepreneurs and visitors? Taken as a whole – what story must be told of our region to best convey who we are and what we have to offer?

This action strategy demands a process of developing our identity, in fact our brand, as the EUP and then marketing that identity with advertising campaigns and other outreach efforts within the region and beyond.

Those efforts must be pursued in tandem with other steps that impact our identity, like customer service training that emphasizes a welcoming attitude, renewed commitment to successful downtown districts, and a positive focus on the four-season appeal of the EUP.

STRENGTHENING QUALITY OF PLACE

Strategy 7. Invest in improvements to the St. Marys River area with a focus on enhancing sense of place for people with an interest in nature, culture, and history.

Placemaking is a concept familiar to planners for decades but has only recently become part of Michigan’s economic lexicon. According to the Project for Public Spaces, it involves “looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work and play in a particular space, to discover their needs and aspirations. This information is then used to create a common vision for that place.” (www.pps.org/articles/what_is_placemaking)

Strengthening our sense of place in the EUP will take on a number of meanings, including:

- Maintaining access to green spaces in our more populated communities
- Encouraging mixed-use development to create vibrant districts
- Targeting catalytic investments in key urban, suburban, and rural places
- Developing design guidelines that serve to link urban and rural areas visually, culturally, and functionally

Stakeholders agree that topping the action list for EUP placemaking strategy is the St. Mary’s River. Investing in access to the river and the ways in which people utilize it to interact with the nature, culture, and history is a high priority. This may involve changes as visible as pedestrian and bicycle friendly access, or as behind-the-scenes as zoning changes to preserve working waterfronts that function successfully beside public uses.

Successful placemaking means involving citizens, stakeholders, and government leaders in discussions about community assets and how they inspire us. Those special places will not only meet the needs of our current residents, but also capture the imagination of those interested in investing in the region.
OPTIMIZING INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT


Our infrastructure assets are many - air service, deepwater ports, highway systems, rail access, and more. The EUP is built on a solid infrastructure foundation, but like any investment, we must be mindful of whether it suits future needs.

Stakeholders agree that the highest priority should be placed on significantly expanding the information technology infrastructure. Providing broadband access to those areas that are either underserved or completely without broadband service is critical to future success. Cellular service in the region is also in need of improvement if we are to be competitive with our more metropolitan counterparts when recruiting business investment.

We must also maintain the regional infrastructure that exists. That involves identifying repair needs and developing a regional capital improvement plan to accomplish needed maintenance. That includes rehabilitation of our deepwater port. It also includes maintaining the limited public transportation that currently exists, with an eye to expansion.

Beyond maintaining what we have, there are many infrastructure improvements that would enhance our communities and the region. Development of a regional capital improvement plan for further expansion to, or improvement of, infrastructure would provide focus to this undertaking. That plan may include developing a long-term air service strategy for the region. It may also involve the conversion of M-28 and US-2 to four-lane separated highways. Planning for rail service expansion is also critical to a 21st century vision.
The EUP has two primary options when it comes to the search for talented people: train and educate the native sons and daughters of the region and attract new talent from outside the area. To focus on one and not the other is to let a precious resource slip from our fingers. But how do we keep our graduates from leaving the region and how do we entice others to choose our region? With a community college, state university, and vocations schools within our borders, the raw materials exist to connect people to skills and skilled people to careers. Strengthening existing ties and making new connections is how we will succeed in educating our future workforce. Those who come from outside our region find opportunities for personal and professional advancement from the same institutions, underlining the need for stronger bonds between education and economic development.
EDUCATING OUR FUTURE WORKFORCE

Strategy 9. Advance the Higher Education Cluster in ways that benefit entrepreneurial activity and raise the educational attainment of the workforce.

The EUP is fortunate to be home to Lake Superior State University – Michigan’s smallest state university. Once again, an asset is only an asset if we leverage it properly. LSSU and Bay Mills Community College are uniquely qualified to work with local workforce development leaders to provide continuing education to local entrepreneurs, increase the educational attainment of workers in the area, and graduate future professionals and tradespeople who will use their skills and expertise in the EUP.

Partnering with our local institutions of higher learning, as well as with those outside the immediate region, is critical to our future success. Taking information obtained from employers about their workforce needs and matching those to programs and services provided by educators is one necessary step. Engaging trade schools across the region to build our skilled trades and building on existing health care worker training programs is also important. There are numerous workforce development programs available, so part of our action in this area involves connecting workers and programs.

BEYOND THE TOP 9

The Action Strategies outlined represent the common themes that emerged when considering future prosperity in the region, but beyond the top 9 were several others that warrant mention and will also be on our radar in the future:

• Green Economy: With biomass plants and turbine farms in our present or immediate future, it is clear that alternative energy and a sustainable green economy will be part of future planning in the EUP.

• Population Trends: Strategies to retain our current population and grow the population via sought-after groups like highly-educated retirees are important.

• Business Incubation: Actively marketing the region’s industrial incubators and offering services that complement incubation is a sound strategy for business growth.
EUP Regional Planning and Development Commission is committed to a leadership role in the implementation of these Regional Growth Strategies. We cannot, however, achieve success alone. We are pleased that several of the stakeholders who helped develop these strategies have opted to become involved via the Regional Economic Development Advisory Committee (REDAC), which is now the central force working with EUPRPDC staff to move the process forward. As part of this process, we will continue to reach out to stakeholders within the region, as well as any organizations, foundations, or business enterprises outside the regional that may figure into our success.