Quality-of-Life and Amenity Assets

What are quality-of-life assets? These are assets that offer access to richness of experience, culture, entertainment and recreation in a region.

Planning around quality-of-life assets allows the packaging of a region’s unique personality and marketing of a climate that can attract and retain targeted high-impact people and businesses. The knowledge-driven economy tends to agglomerate in areas with a mix of quality-of-life assets because that is among the key factors that knowledge workers demand.

Michigan has a broad array of quality-of-life assets related to its high levels of green infrastructure and recreation, as well as its urban opportunities. The challenge is to create the places in Michigan that can become focal points for attraction of talent, and the growth opportunities for which talent can be the primary driver.

This section illustrates the richness of Michigan and is meant to set the context for collaboration around Michigan’s quality-of-life assets.
Amusement and Recreation businesses cover everything from ski resorts to bowling alleys. These businesses are key to keeping residents entertained and provide opportunities for tourism. The locations of these businesses reflect the presence of enabling fundamentals. Planning for new amusement and recreational activity must consider other regional assets, and must also involve regional goals tied to new visions about entertainment. More important, communities and regions need to know what the future direction of entertainment demand will be.

Sources:
Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” (Shapefile), 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/.
Amusement and Recreation: Employment per Capita

Amusement and recreation service employment per capita provides a stronger indication of the size of the businesses, as opposed to the number of businesses per capita. Places with high amusement and recreation employment per capita indicate these places are potential destination points for people, not just from inside the community, but from outside the community and state. Amusement and recreation employment clusters strongly in the northwestern Lower Peninsula, around the Detroit Metro area, in specific places with tourists in the Upper Peninsula and in other scattered locations.

Sources:
Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” [Shapefile], 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/.

While amusement and recreation employment indicates the concentration of establishments, sales per capita provides an alternate indicator of economic activity more closely focused on the economics of those establishments. The contrast between these suggests where capacity exists for enhancing economic activity. Whether a region wants to expand jobs or income opportunities will determine what strategies are appropriate.

Sources:
Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” [Shapefile], 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/.

Drinking establishments are most often found in urban areas. They contribute to the nightlife and culture of a community. Drinking establishments are also often where people can watch musical acts perform, and are important to the entertainment and tourism sectors. Per capita, drinking establishments are highly concentrated at the top of the Thumb, Upper Peninsula and the northeastern and northwestern Lower Peninsula.

Drinking Places: Businesses per Capita

Sources:
Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” [Shapefile], 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/.
Restaurants cluster highly in areas with tourism, and are a key part of the service economy. A large number of restaurants per capita in an area can indicate that people there have higher levels of disposable income; for example, in the northwestern region of Detroit. Michigan's West Coast also features strong restaurant activity. Promoting restaurant diversity as a part of a region’s branding effort can add to place allure.

Sources:
Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” [Shapefile], 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/.
Museums, Art Galleries, Botanical and Zoological Gardens: Per Capita

Museums, art galleries, botanical and zoological gardens can contribute to culture and quality of life. High-quality museums and art galleries can attract people from surrounding communities and beyond. They are also of interest to the knowledge workers that are increasingly being tied to economic activity. When located in places active in tourism, museums and art galleries can drive tourism, while capturing more tourism spending. In Michigan, museums, art galleries, botanical and zoological gardens tend to be concentrated in metropolitan areas.

Sources:
Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” [Shapefile], 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/.
Museums, Art Galleries, Botanical and Zoological Gardens: Sales per Capita

Museums provide a sense of place, culture and history. Larger museums tend to be located in cities and tourism-active places, but smaller communities also feature museums. Large museum sales are generated in Detroit and Grand Rapids, as well as Kalamazoo and along the West Coast of the state. High sales in these areas suggest an active presence, which can be further leveraged.

Sources:
Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” [Shapefile], 2007. Available at: [http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/].
Hospitals are important to community health and well-being and are often centers of research and economic activity. Hospitals are more heavily concentrated in areas with greater population and bring quality jobs to a community. Having a hospital nearby is particularly important to retirees and families with young children. Large hospitals provide their host communities with a regional draw of patients, doctors, nurses and service providers whose economic impacts are significantly high.

**For-Profit Hospitals: Per Capita**

Sources:
Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” [Shapefile], 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/.

A greater number of hospital employees often translates into better care for individuals in a community and a larger hospital footprint for the region. Hospital employees are counted where the hospitals are located, not where the employees live. So, high numbers show regional impact, not just local impact. Healthcare is becoming more and more relied upon and is important in modern-day life. The degree of knowledge needed to work within a hospital is generally high and can contribute to the health of a community both through care and hospital employee earnings spent.

For-Profit Hospitals: Employment per Capita

Sources:
Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” [Shapefile], 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mcgi/.
Median household income is one of the leading indicators of economic health within a region. The ability to purchase goods and services increases the quality of life of those spending the money and translates into economic benefits for businesses in the community. Household purchasing power is relatively high in the metro areas of Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids, the West Coast of the state and the northwestern corner of the Lower Peninsula.

Source:
Per Capita Income

Per capita income is one of the most often cited indicators of the economic health of a community. Per capita income tends to be greater in urban areas than in rural areas, illustrating the difference in buying power of people, and in economic activity between metro areas and non-metro areas when normalized for living costs, which tend to be lower in rural areas. Chronically economically challenged cities like Detroit, however, tend to feature low per capita income.

Source:
For most households in the United States—and this holds true for Michigan—the largest investment people have is in their homes. It follows that the highest debt they have is also in their homes. The greater the home value, the greater the wealth of a community. Places where home values are high also tend to be the stronger real estate markets, long-term. Median home value is highest in those places where other assets are present. Because there is a high demand to live in asset-rich areas and the home values are higher there, home values represent a major community indicator of prosperity, but may also indicate deficiencies in affordability and ownership access.

For those communities that do not fall into an urban area, it is illuminating to see how close they are to urban areas. Urban areas offer entertainment and commerce that are not always available for those living in rural communities. People travel to urban areas to attend sporting events and concerts, and to spend a night out at area restaurants and other urban attraction and amenity delivery points. Some people also prefer to live in communities surrounding urban areas because they enjoy the near-rural setting, but also enjoy the employment opportunities at places in close proximity to urban areas. There are many communities outside of the urban area surrounding Detroit with large populations that depend on jobs within the Detroit urban area. The same applies to Traverse City, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Ann Arbor, Lansing/East Lansing, and other cities.

Sources:
Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” [Shapefile], 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdli/.

Effective management of the various elements of quality of life presented are key to Michigan transitioning into the New Economy. These include the enhancement of recreational opportunities, cultural opportunities and the access to entertainment as part of a strategy to develop vibrant communities.

Other than in healthcare, Michigan is awash with quality-of-life assets and these are broadly distributed around the state. There are clusters that stand out in western Michigan, along the Fruit Belt in the Traverse City Area and in the Detroit Metro area.

Michigan has always had a strong domestic tourism economy; however, with proper strategy, planning and marketing, this can be greatly augmented to build a nationally connected economy. The abundance of quality-of-life assets in Michigan may actually have limited the state’s ability to explore emerging economic diversification strategies. It is difficult to tell the story of an asset-rich state that does not have the economic outcomes that match.

Regions in Michigan should closely examine quality-of-life assets to determine how local communities can work to foster and leverage these in packaging national destination points for tourism, knowledge workers and high-tech companies.