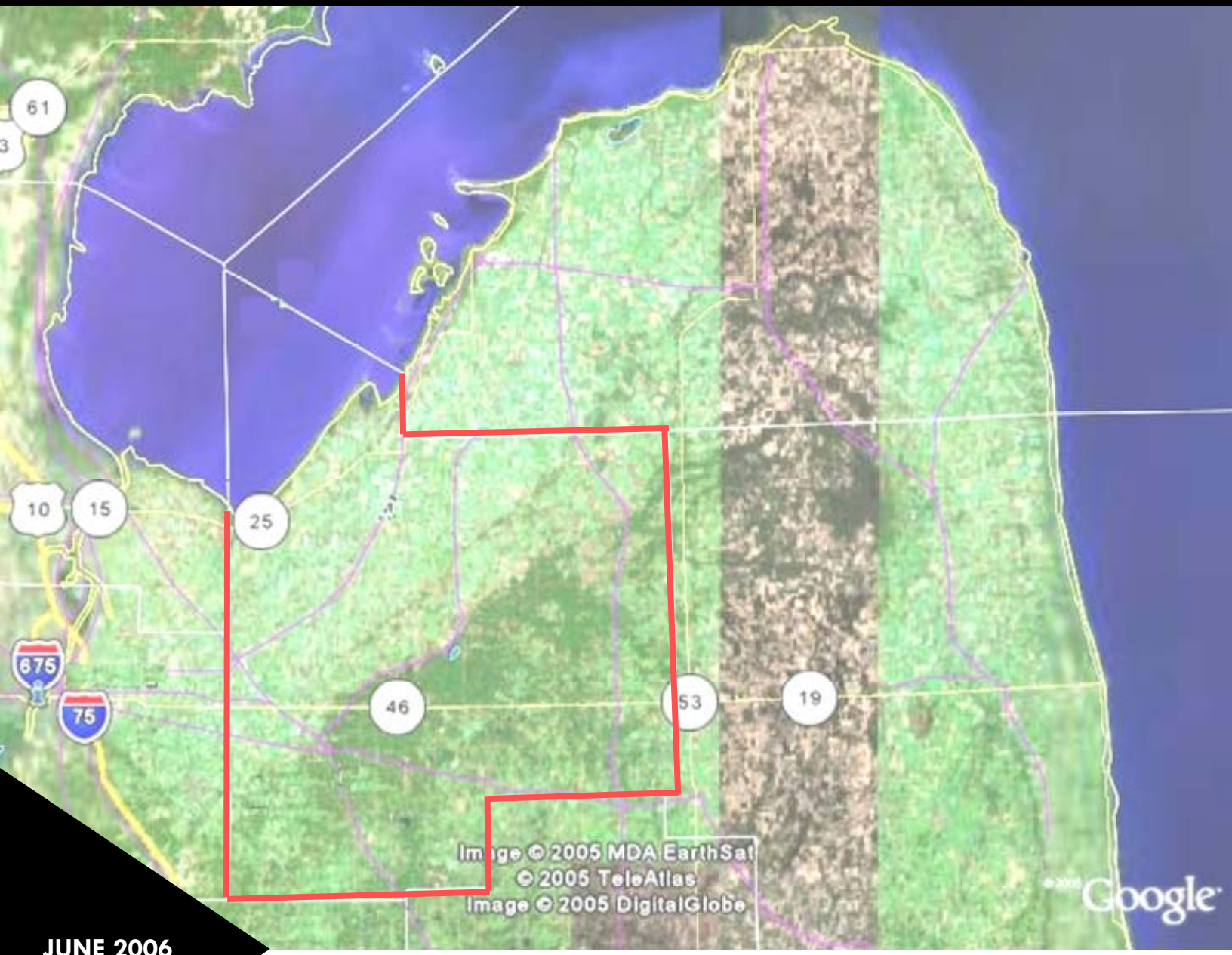
TUSCOLA COUNTY COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT TEAM REPORT

TYING IT TOGETHER IN TUSCOLA



JUNE 2006

CAT Community Assessment Team

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

TYING IT TOGETHER IN TUSCOLA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on observations made by the Community Assessment Team (CAT) during its visit to Tuscola County in December 2005. The CAT process began with an application from members of the community to MSU Extension. The application described the community's situation and listed questions that community members wanted the CAT to address. The application was reviewed by the CAT advisory committee. The CAT then sent a small delegation to meet with the application committee to clarify questions raised in the application and recruited team members with skills appropriate to the community's needs. The full CAT visit involved two days of input gathering from a variety of small and large meetings with residents and tours of the community. The team then analyzed, debated and categorized the information to produce a preliminary verbal report to the community. Finally, the team reflected on its preliminary recommendations and wrote the final report (this document). The community is invited to receive a follow-up visit about six months after the issuance of this report. The full report is available and accessible at the following web site: http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cdnr/tuscolacatreport.pdf.

The major focus of Tuscola County's application and subsequent questions was ways to improve and enhance its economic development. In general, the team found that Tuscola County is doing an excellent job with traditional approaches to economic development and recommends that these activities continue. In addition to the current economic development tools and strategies, new methods for reenergizing the economic development base have emerged in recent years. Such new methods include but are not limited to entrepreneurship, intergovernmental cooperation and enhancing quality of life. Quality of life issues should not be overlooked—they are an important factor for rebuilding, sustaining and maintaining an economically viable and vibrant community. A more inclusive approach can help Tuscola County achieve its economic development goals while strengthening other, non-economic aspects of the community. The team's major recommendations are:

- Reduce economic leakages from Tuscola County—out-shopping, entertainment and energy, in particular.
- Take steps to improve the cultural, tourism and recreation sectors of the local economy.
- Work to improve community support for entrepreneurship at all scales of business.
- Develop value-added agricultural enterprises.
- Implement programs to create positive youth experiences, which in turn encourage youth to remain in and/or return to Tuscola County.
- Increase the activity of educational institutions in training future entrepreneurs and meeting the skill needs of employers.
- Enhance sectors that provide services and support to senior citizens as a job creation strategy.

During the CAT visit, it was repeatedly affirmed that the major economic development arm for Tuscola County is the Tuscola County Economic Development Corporation (EDC). The CAT recommends that the Tuscola County Economic Development Corporation Board of Directors

provide leadership for the overall guidance and direction for implementation and evaluation of the recommendations contained in this document. During the visit, it was evident as well that numerous public and private entities should be invited to partner with the Tuscola County Economic Development Corporation in its quest to implement and evaluate the recommendations contained in this strategic master plan. Potential partners include but are not limited to the Tuscola County Board of Commissioners, MSU Extension—Tuscola County, the Tuscola County Farm Bureau, the Human Development Commission, the Tuscola County Community Foundation, the Tuscola County Planning Commission, the Thumb Area Tourism Council, all local units of government (township, village and city), Tuscola 2011, Inc., Lead Tuscola, the Tuscola Technology Center, the Tuscola Intermediate School District and all school districts serving Tuscola County, the chambers of commerce, local economic development corporations, downtown development authorities, the Tuscola Area Airport Authority, the Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center, Rural Partners of Michigan, the East Central Michigan Planning and Development Regional Commission, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, the Michigan Department of Agriculture, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Travel Michigan, financial institutions, real estate professionals, Tuscola Trails, Davenport University, Baker College, other institutions of higher education serving Tuscola County, and community-based and faith-based organizations.

The team recognizes that it has developed a snapshot picture of Tuscola County at one point in time. Tuscola County's situation is continually evolving, and events may override the community's ability to implement certain recommendations. The CAT suggests that the Tuscola County Economic Development Corporation and public/private partner organizations, agencies and individuals scrutinize the recommendations, debate them, adapt them, prioritize and take ownership of them. We recommend that the community adopt a mix of long and short-term strategies for addressing its economic development goals. It is important that Tuscola County celebrate its short-term accomplishments as a means to build, maintain and sustain energy for addressing longer term goals that are so critical to overall community success and well-being. The CAT visit and report are just two steps on the road to tying together all the various pieces of the puzzle that all communities face—i.e., the many dimensions of sustaining and building a high quality of life in a world of change.

The team thanks Jessica Kindler from Sebewaing, Katie Schriber from Millington, Laura Muz from Caro, Kayla Gainforth from Sebewaing, Joe Chrysler from Millington and Karmen Jackson from Caro for photos of Tuscola County points of interest used in this report. Finally, the CAT wishes to express its sincerest appreciation to the Tuscola CAT coordinating team: Dr. Hal Hudson, county Extension director, MSU Extension—Tuscola County; Jim McLoskey, executive director, Tuscola County Economic Development Corporation; Margie White-Cormier, Tuscola County clerk; and Michael Hoagland, Tuscola County controller/administrator. The Community Assessment Team visit would not have been possible without the financial support provided by Community Bank, the Tuscola County Farm Bureau and the Human Development Commission. The Tuscola County Board of Commissioners provided authorization by encouraging the greater Tuscola County community to fully engage and participate in the CAT needs assessment process. This report would not have been possible without the extensive participation of many organizations, agencies and individuals too numerous to mention.

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INTRODUCTION: THE TUSCOLA COUNTY COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT TEAM PROCESS

Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) has offered communities throughout the state access to **Community Assessment Team** (CAT) services since 1996. The service is part of MSU Extension's mission to connect communities to the university, partner agencies and individuals who have knowledge and abilities to advise communities on various aspects of their development. It should be noted at the outset that MSU Extension coordinates these visits and assembles the reports. Because Extension is an entity with no jurisdiction in Tuscola County, the recommendations contained in this report are **advisory** only. It is up to the residents of Tuscola County to decide which recommendations to implement as priorities, which to implement later, which to adapt and which to ignore. The community defines the parameters to be addressed in the visit through an application to the program. The application format is described at: http://web1.msue.msu.edu/cdnr/commteam.htm.

Members of the application and host committee for Tuscola County's CAT visit were: Tuscola County Extension Director Hal Hudson, Tuscola County Economic Development Director James McLoskey, Tuscola County Controller/ Administrator Michael Hoagland and Tuscola County Clerk Margie White-Cormier. The team wishes to thank the committee members for their highly effective and successful organization of the many facets of the application and subsequent activities.

Members of the Tuscola County host committee.

After receiving the application from Tuscola County, the CAT sent a small leadership team to do a pre-visit with the application/host committee and other Tuscola County residents to gain a better understanding of the issues at hand and gather more background information. After the previsit, CAT began recruiting members for the full team visit, December 13-15, 2005.

The full Community Assessment Team was made up of the following individuals (full team contact information is available in Appendix 1):

LEADERS

- Liz Szymanski, CAT liaison, MSU Extension, education.
- Dave Ivan, CAT coordinator, MSU Extension, economic Development, and CAT report co-editor.

MEMBERS

- Maggie Bethel, MSU Extension, education issues.
- John Beck, MSU School of Labor and Industrial Relations.
- Dr. Diane Doberneck, MSU Community Economic Development Program.
- Dr. Bill Kimball, MSU Extension (retired), community development.
- Dr. Bill Knudson, MSU Product Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources.
- Dave Lorenz, vice president, Michigan Economic Development Corp., Travel Michigan.
- Dr. Scott Loveridge, MSU Extension, community economic dev., and CAT report co-editor.
- Paul McConaughy, MSU Extension Family and Consumer Sciences, senior issues.
- Dr. Rick Paulson, Associate Chair, MSU Department of Community Agriculture, Recreation and Resource studies, recreation.
- Dave Smyth, MSU Extension/Michigan Economic Development Corp., Travel Michigan.
- Dr. Tracy Weber, private sector, tourism.

The team's activities during the visit began with an orientation and reception on the afternoon of Dec. 13. On Dec. 14, the team conducted listening sessions in small groups around the following themes: Camp Tuscola, manufacturing and retail, tourism, agriculture/value-added, elder communities/senior issues, banking and real estate, municipal issues, education, entrepreneurship/ small business, facilities reuse, recreation/trails and youth issues. In the evening of Dec. 14, the team organized discussions in a community forum to which all residents of the county were invited through press releases and targeted mailings. On Dec. 15, the team conducted some additional site visits and prepared and delivered its preliminary report. (A complete schedule of team activities is provided in Appendix 2). Subsequent to the visit, the team's oral report was transcribed by Catherine Patterson, secretary, MSU Extension —Tuscola County. The report's co-editors then developed a preliminary report from the transcript, which was distributed to team members for review, comment and supplementary material. The draft report was also distributed to the Tuscola County CAT host committee for review and comment prior to its general release.

The rest of this report is organized as follows. First, we provide some general observations about outflows from Tuscola's economic sectors and the overall consequences of those outflows. Second, we outline strategies for strengthening performance of Tuscola's entrepreneurs and the performance of downtown retail areas. Third, we address how to build the local economy through recreation and tourism. Fourth, we explore how Tuscola could continue to build upon its already well-organized and entrepreneurial agricultural sector. Sixth, we discuss options for enhancing services to seniors and why this could be a key economic sector for the future. Next we present how attention to youth opportunities can help Tuscola increase its ability to prepare young people for future roles in the local economy and help retain them as they decide where they will make their homes as adults. A discussion of how to strengthen the economy via the educational sector is followed by some concluding remarks.

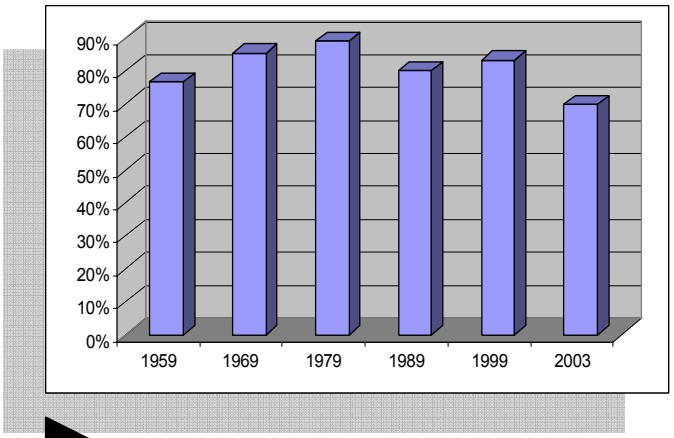
CROSS-CUTTING THEME I: TUSCOLA COUNTY'S LEAKY-BUCKET ECONOMY

Scott Loveridge

The team made an observation that was consistent across many of the discussions and input we gathered from the individuals, groups and the community forum: that, given its resources, Tuscola County is relatively good at bringing money in but not very good at keeping it here. An analogy is a leaky bucket. One can pour water into a bucket, but if the bucket has large holes, the water level will not rise unless the volume of water flowing in is huge. Tuscola County has a solid economic base in manufacturing and agriculture and attracts about $275 million per year in transfer payments. The local leadership is doing very good work in keeping those sectors strong despite challenges of globalization, lack of highway access and the other normal challenges facing rural areas. The agriculture and manufacturing sectors help dollars flow into the area.

Image courtesy MSU Community Development Program

There is also a growing commuter population; these people also bring dollars into the area through their wages. The problem is that the money flows right back out in many ways. The team's assessment is that the leaky economy may be a major contributing factor to Tuscola County's lackluster economic performance compared with the rest of the United States over the past 20 years, as shown in the chart at right: after peaking at about 85 percent of national income in 1979, Tuscola's per capita income has recently been less than 70 percent of that of the rest of the nation.



Tuscola County per capita income as a percent of U.S. per capita income.

Plugging the leaks in Tuscola County would mean that dollars could circulate in the area longer, creating more jobs and local wealth. The goods and services that people are seeking elsewhere could well be provided within Tuscola County. The team is not recommending that residents be browbeaten to keep their dollars local. Rhetoric and social pressure alone will not be effective. The goods and services must compete in quality and price with what is available elsewhere. If

quality and price are similar, people will naturally begin to keep more of their expenditures local.

The team identified some of the major sources of leaks:

1. **Out-shopping**. Many local residents leave the county to make basic retail purchases.
2. **Energy**. Tuscola County is Michigan's largest producer of ethanol, but one cannot purchase E85 (85 percent ethanol fuel) in the county. Tuscola County is located in a high potential wind area, but schools, county buildings and entrepreneurs do not seem to be taking advantage of the availability of improved "small wind" systems. Coal-fired plants provide electricity, so dollars flow to mining groups outside of Michigan. Even without wind, basic weatherization and energy conservation measures in public buildings could reduce dollar outflows and provide some relief as state revenue sharing to local governments is phased out. The state energy office has information on financing schemes that can help pay upfront costs of energy conservation measures.
3. **Recreation.** There may be opportunities to further develop recreation here that residents currently enjoy elsewhere. If residents recreate locally, associated expenditures are more likely to stay local as well.
4. **Professional services.** Some entrepreneurs reported paying very high interest rates to financial institutions located outside the county. If local banks could better adapt their lending to these entrepreneurs' needs, both the entrepreneurial sector and the banking sector could be strengthened. Entrepreneurs also mentioned seeking accounting and law services outside of the county.
5. **Medical services.** The team heard many observations about the need to seek medical services in nearby communities outside the county. Strengthening this sector could reduce leakages while at the same time making the area more attractive for seniors.
6. **Young people.** The county appears to be sending young adults away from the area. This is a major problem because young talent is the source of new jobs in today's economy.

This report will make more detailed recommendations about how to deal with some of these leakages in subsequent sections of the report. But the team wanted to highlight this problem of leakages as a recurrent theme that deserves consideration across all sectors.

CROSS-CUTTING THEME II: NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

Scott Loveridge

The team noted in several instances where new or strengthened local collaborative networks could help Tuscola adjust to changing circumstances and achieve goals. Networks of individuals with similar or complementary interests can help improve communications within the county, allowing it to seize opportunities or respond to crises as they arise. Within Tuscola County, a sector with a network that appears to be functioning at a high level is agriculture. The team was impressed with the vision, leadership and shared goals that members of this community articulated. The agricultural community could serve as a model for other sectors. The team noted a need for better communication and network building among educators, senior service providers, manufacturers and the retail/tourism/recreation/historic preservation sectors.

Looking to the future.

Team work session in Vassar.

Local leadership development efforts might focus their efforts on "seeding" these networks through rotational targeting of members of each sector to form cohorts that experience the programs as a group. Organizing leadership development efforts in this way enables the programs to be tailored with examples and group projects that are particularly relevant to that sector's cohort. The team noted a willingness of individuals in these sectors to work together. What is lacking is a convener, a leader who can play the role of establishing new traditions of enhanced communications. Tuscola's leadership development group could take on that role temporarily until the group communications routines and traditions become established. Within each sector, the goals that might be achieved through networking differ, and we articulate these within the various sections of the report.

NEW VENTURE DEVELOPMENT, DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING REUSE

Dave Ivan, Bill Kimball, Tracy Weber, John Beck, Diane Doberneck

As counties and, increasingly, multi-county alliances with a regional focus attempt to diversify their economic base, a common question is: "How should we make our economic development activities more effective?"

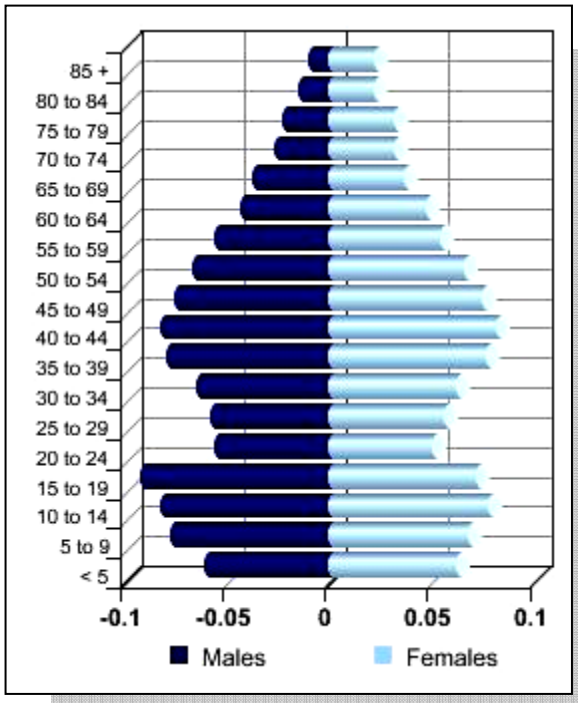
The American Economic Development Council defines economic development as *a process that strives for the accumulation of wealth*. This relatively simple definition essentially identifies virtually everybody in the community as having a stake in the economic development process. Perhaps a more pragmatic definition, developed by the Michigan Economic Developers Association (MEDA), is:

- Retention of existing business and industry.
- Expansion of existing business and industry.
- Attraction of new business and industry in a coordinated and complementary manner.

Inherent in all of the above activities are counseling, troubleshooting and developing a structure whereby community members can identify new opportunities or challenges and assign follow-through responsibility.

As in any strategic planning process, a crucial starting place is an examination of the existing environmental strengths and the identification of key, persistent issues as expressed by the entire range of stakeholders in the county. Only then can a shared community vision be created that guides the community toward its goal of effective economic development.

Throughout the CAT focus groups and other sessions, the team repeatedly heard a desire from the community to diversify its current traditional and agricultural base – a worthwhile objective, given the challenges these sectors are facing. It was noted that the sugar beet sector, in particular, is facing threats due to sugar's status as a protected commodity and potential trade stance changes on the federal level.



Tuscola County Population Distribution, 2000

The team also heard deep concerns about the youth out-migration from the county because of limited economic opportunities. Citizen impressions are confirmed by the sizable decline in the Tuscola County young adult population compared with middle-aged and youth numbers, as shown in the chart on the previous page (source: U.S. census). The census data clearly illustrate that young adults are not finding as many opportunities as in the past to allow them to stay in the community, to pursue an economic future, to get married and raise families. In addition, bankers and real estate agents indicate that young adults are having difficulty making mortgage payments to purchase houses. Lack of affordable housing, given current wages for young adults, is in short supply.

THE COMMUNITY'S INPUT

- Need to diversify a primarily agriculture and manufacturing economy
- Youth migration due to limited economic opportunities
- Lack of coordinated approaches to new ventures beyond the EDC
- Lead Tuscola program offers continuing potential for developing individual capacity and joint efforts
- Entrepreneurial culture may be weak
- Desire to reuse underutilized buildings

Despite concerns and frustrations among community stakeholders, the team repeatedly heard positive comments about the Tuscola County EDC. Given the resources allocated to the organization, the community was pleased with the accomplishments. The team also gathered positive information about the **Lead Tuscola** program, which offers the community potential for continuing to develop individual capacity and collaboration. The team encourages the community to research other successful leadership programs to identify ways to capitalize on and expand the benefits of this program. One model to consider is the highly successful program in neighboring Saginaw County, which is coordinated by the Saginaw Chamber of Commerce.

Enhancing economic development coordination in pursuing new ventures, particularly entrepreneurial ventures, was a shortcoming expressed by some individuals. The entrepreneurial culture may be weak in Tuscola County. The team heard comments about the community being risk-adverse and not supportive of individuals willing to try new business options. Finally, the team heard strong desires to reuse underutilized and/or vacant facilities within the county.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Though the CAT repeatedly heard of the community's desire to increase the number of new business ventures, it is crucial to pause and reflect on some key questions:

- Is there a network of entrepreneurs existing today for peer-to-peer support and idea generation? This is key to building a successful entrepreneurial environment.

- Does the community support businesses that are risk takers? The team heard mixed reports about that commitment during the CAT's interaction with business leaders.

- Are knowledge clusters identified and fostered within the community?

- Is there a club-based entrepreneurship program with opportunities for the youth of the community?

- Are informal coaching opportunities available for those small business operators who reside/work in the remote areas of the county other than in Caro, Vassar or Cass City so that they feel connected and supported?

- Are regulations favorable for start-up businesses, expansions or transitions from one generation to the next?

We encourage readers to refer to the complete set of community-supported entrepreneurship questions in Appendix 3. The above questions are highlighted to illustrate that a community's desire to become more entrepreneurial is not simply a matter of flipping a switch; rather, it is a culture that must deliberately nurtured. The culture has many dimensions that a community must consider and develop if it wants to be more successful in promoting entrepreneurial/new venture development.

The CAT recommends establishing a **flexible manufacturing network.** Tuscola has a strong manufacturing base; it is critical to continue developing that sector even as the community seeks to diversify its economic base. The development of this network is important for several reasons. First, members of the network can learn from one another. Tuscola's manufacturing firms are competing with the world, not one another. As they learn how to cope with the changing network, knowledge sharing makes the whole sector stronger. Secondly, the network can help members better communicate issues and concerns affecting the entire sector back to the community, thus increasing the probability that issues will be addressed. Third, network members may not have the capacity to respond to new opportunities individually but could effectively respond to certain kinds of market openings if they have established trust and communications prior to the joint venture. Fourth, network members may find, in certain instances, that they can become suppliers for one another, reducing local leakages from the economy. A manufacturing network is an example of a kind of **knowledge cluster** referenced above. Establishing a network is fairly low-cost, and CAT member John Beck, who is part of the MSU School of Labor and Industrial Relations, has experience working with flexible manufacturing networks and is prepared to assist Tuscola County as it implements this recommendation.

Cadillac is an example of a Michigan community with a strong manufacturing council. The council provides peer-to-peer support, networking opportunities, and resource allocation and resource sharing that are important to the success of local businesses. Community leaders and representatives of the manufacturing sector should consider a visit to Cadillac to speak with members of this group.

Given the manufacturing expertise in Tuscola County, an opportunity to become the manufacturing center for wind energy-related components (blades, turbines, etc.) may exist. With the county's potential for wind, it may be a suitable place to manufacture, test and innovate wind energy products in addition to generating wind energy (see ag value-added section). Other high wind potential areas of the United States, especially the Dakotas, simply lack the manufacturing base that is present in Tuscola and so cannot take advantage of the opportunity.

The team also recommends identifying **a business education coordinator.** The CAT recognizes that tight funding likely precludes hiring a new individual, but the community may wish to assign responsibilities to an individual in an existing community organization to facilitate the development of business through education. An excellent model is the Saginaw Business Education Partnership model (www.scbep.org). The Saginaw partnership includes Davenport University, an institution that currently operates in Tuscola County. Davenport is familiar with working in that type of environment and can build upon experiences in Saginaw County to provide the same type of linkages in Tuscola County. (For more information on why this kind of activity is important, refer to the education section of this report.)

Additional new business ventures may also arise through small business development enrichment courses at the Tuscola ISD Technology Center. Courses utilizing the NxLevel and/or Fast-Trac curricula have proven successful in other communities in providing knowledge about overcoming the challenges of starting a new business as well as networking opportunities.

Tuscola should consider designating a **business ombudsman** to facilitate accessing resources, provide permitting assistance, and assist with other challenges an individual may encounter when starting or expanding a business. The team heard repeatedly about individuals who were frustrated and/or experienced numerous difficulties in trying to expand their businesses or open new establishments. This type of "one-stop shop" of assistance can play a major role in creating a positive business environment within the community.

NEW VENTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a manufacturing council to strengthen networking and identify available resources.
- Explore the possibility of an education coordinator position to facilitate development of business through education (Saginaw Business and Education Partnership model: www.scbep.org).
- Explore small business development enrichment courses at Tuscola ISD Technology Center (NxLevel, Fast-Trac).
- Consider designating a business ombudsman to facilitate accessing of resources, permitting assistance, etc.
- Investigate developing a countywide cultural economic development strategy.

The team recommends capitalizing on the cultural assets within the county through a comprehensive **cultural economic development plan**. This recommendation is discussed further in the recreation and tourism section of the report. It is noted here because of its importance as part of an economic diversification strategy. Although cultural economic development creates a few jobs, equally or more importantly it can create an atmosphere that encourages businesses that have no direct relationship with cultural economic development to locate in Tuscola County simply because the owners find the area to be an interesting place in which to live.

The team did not hear evidence of the community's involvement in regional economic development alliances. Given its Thumb location, Tuscola County needs to strengthen its affiliation with regional economic development alliances in Saginaw, Flint and Port Huron.

The team also explored opportunities to enhance downtown vitality. Downtowns are considered the "face" of a community. It is important that downtowns convey a sense of vitality as part of a comprehensive economic development strategy. If a firm is considering relocating to Tuscola County, the condition of the downtown can influence that decision. In fact, some communities (e.g., Tecumseh) focus their economic development efforts in their downtown area.

Creative use of a downtown asset.

Vassar recently received state funding to conduct a HyettPalma study of its downtown area. Given the similarities of many communities in the county, the study results from HyettPalma, one of the leading downtown development consulting firms in the country, could serve as a resource for other communities.

The team recommends expanding youth opportunities in downtown areas as a potential mechanism to increase traffic counts downtown. A downtown youth center can serve as a community gathering place for the younger generation (see youth section of report for the Cuppa Joe Java example). Consider using high school arts as a mechanism to fill downtown store vacancies, where students can show or sell decorative art, even if on a seasonal basis. The community of Unionville has experienced success in this arena and serves as a potential model to review.

The team also recommends a community opportunity assessment to identify potential new businesses for the downtown and other areas. What types of business do citizens want in Tuscola County? The team asked this question in one of the open forum sessions and received a number of very positive responses. The listing of community suggestions is included in Appendix 6. If members of the community want a business, would they be likely to support it? A more sophisticated approach to business analysis is the Market Based Downtown Assessment Tool, available through the University of Wisconsin Extension Service. This tool can be accessed through the Tuscola County Extension office. It utilizes commercial market data, demographic data—including purchasing behavior—with a GIS modeling program to map the likelihood of success for businesses on the basis of consumer buying habits. The tool may provide assistance in filling downtown storefront vacancies.

The Small Town Design program can help envision new uses for vacant stores.

Capitalizing on the historic legacies in redevelopment efforts and developing unifying themes that respect and enhance the character of the downtown should also be considered. A program

through MSU Extension, Small Town Design Initiative, can help communities learn how to enhance downtown character. Learn about the STDI at: http://www.ssc.msu.edu/%7Ela/smalltowns/.

The team also heard concerns from retail business owners about competition from large chains that are introducing big-box retailing into Tuscola County. As big boxes appear within the county, the vibrancy of small retailers, who often serve as the supply of local entrepreneurs, is of concern. Research has shown that big-box chains bring opportunities as well as challenges. Small retailers facing competition from large chains should adapt their product lines and focus on service. Dr. Ken Stone, retired economist at Iowa State University, has created a number of publications that can assist small retailers in adapting to new competition. Accessing these works and providing seminars for local retail owners should be a priority, perhaps of the local chamber of commerce.

There is also an opportunity to enhance the small business assistance program offered through the chamber. Business owners are experiencing challenges in health care and purchasing. Are there opportunities to increase small business efficiencies via the chamber to help pool the resources of its various members? Many chambers offer these types of services, but the team did not see any evidence of this type of programming in Tuscola County. An additional opportunity may exist for the chamber to sponsor a business expo that focuses on both the internal customer—the businesses—and the external customers—community members. Many other regional chambers have also successfully offered training and educational programs for the business community. Programs on topics such as customer service can aid small business operators to compete with big-box competitors.

The traffic generated by big-box retailers also creates opportunities for non-competitive businesses. For example, in Caro, the now vacant grocery store next to Wal-Mart might be examined for the feasibility of an entertainment-related business or set of businesses that could keep people in town longer when they come to shop at Wal-Mart. The longer the stay, the more likely it is that they will patronize other businesses in the area.

The discussion on the vacant grocery story is an appropriate segue into the next set of recommendations on underutilized facilities. The team learned about Camp Tuscola and the Regional Center as one of the underutilized facilities that should be examined. Our considerations start with some general observations.

Our on-site tour of Camp Tuscola and subsequent discussions with state corrections staff members revealed a number of challenges. One potential barrier, for example, is that electricity and gas are currently provided through a special state arrangement, not via the same channels that other facilities use for electricity. The uncertainty of a clear title, particularly as it relates to utility and other easements, underscores the importance of the county negotiating the purchase of the facility to allow for a future two-way (county and developer) vs. three-way (state-county-developer) sales transaction. A complicated purchase agreement involving the state and its approval processes could deter many potential investors.

Consideration should also be given to the necessary zoning/rezoning that may be necessary to market the facility successfully. Investors will often go elsewhere rather than trying to conduct rezoning if they find they are limited in the potential reuses of the facility. Consideration should also be given to potential tax abatement opportunities to enhance the facility's marketability.

Some possible uses to consider for Camp Tuscola:

- County correctional facility, possibly for probation violators, where minimal security is needed.
- Document storage facility. The facility's current layout, coupled with the security systems already in place, may lend itself to potential reuse as a storage facility.
- Conference center/reception hall. Although this option would use only a portion of the large facility, the need for such a facility within the community was expressed at public forums during the CAT visit.
- Farmers' market that could serve as a regional food wholesale market.
- Food distribution center.
- Materials logistics site for international shipments. Given the site's proximity to both the Canadian border (Port Huron) and the airport, the site may lend itself as a holding facility for international shipments. Additional study would be necessary to determine feasibility.

The Camp Tuscola site is not the only site the team considered. The other buildings of concern are the vacant downtown buildings. Many of these buildings are valuable historic assets that can help define Tuscola's special character. Potential collaborations between the Tuscola County EDC, the MEDC, local DDAs and the chamber may offer opportunities to allow incubators and microenterprises. The village of Jonesville has successfully played a key role in developing retail incubators in its downtown district.

Any potential subsidies should include protection clauses to ensure that a business is required to stay for a certain length of time, rather than quickly moving into another tax-abated or subsidized property. The team heard concerns regarding the outside purchase of historic downtown properties solely for tax benefits. The community should be empowered to act on downtown buildings that are left unattended or poorly maintained (using the maintenance code and/or brownfield tools).

Stronger consideration should also be given to incentive programs to assist building owners with rehabilitation. A number of communities in Michigan have successfully offered façade and interior improvement grants that encourage building owners to remove existing plywood and/or metal coverings applied in the 1960s to more historic facades. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, especially its Main Street Program, may be of interest (www.nationaltrust.org and www.mainstreet.org).

At the open community forum, the team asked participants for their ideas on how to reuse facilities. We received some very positive suggestions that may attract broader community support:

- Agricultural museum that unites the county's town and agricultural heritage. Coopersville, in western Michigan, has an excellent agricultural museum in its downtown district.
- Farmers' market, possibly open the entire year, or regional wholesale market.

- Art incubator or arts live/work center. A number of communities are pursuing the arts community as part of their cultural economic development plan.

- Antique mall/store with an eBay listing/storefront. The antiques industry has experienced major challenges in recent years because of the online availability of antiques on eBay. Any potential antiques business must recognize the new climate and position itself within this online environment.

The full listing of community suggestions for facility reuse can be found in Appendix 6. Members of the community were asked whether it is better to hold storefronts for retail businesses or rent them, on a first-come, first-served basis, to other businesses, such as professional services firms. The team recommends renting vacant storefronts to professional service firms, when available, rather than maintaining an empty storefront. If demand for retail space grows in the future, rents will rise accordingly and professional offices will likely relocate to less central locations, creating space for retail establishments.

An example of effective reuse.

In the interim, professional offices will help maintain downtown buildings, help provide potential customers (their own staff plus their clientele) for the nearby retail establishments, and will be more likely to be active in broader efforts to assist downtown development than an absentee owner. The team noted leakages in professional services locally, so encouraging firms to have a downtown presence may reduce the outflow of dollars to out-of-county communities.

In summary, many practical approaches can be used to help create new ventures in manufacturing and downtown development.

MSU Extension's office in Tuscola County.

PLENTIFUL OPPORTUNITIES IN TOURISM AND RECREATION

Dave Smyth, Dave Lorenz, Rick Paulsen, Bill Kimball

This section of the report will first discuss tourism development opportunities and then recreation. The two are related in that a strong recreational system can enhance tourism and vice versa. Tourism focuses on bringing people in from the outside. It also focuses on creating opportunities that keep people who would otherwise be tourists elsewhere enjoying themselves locally. Helping people to find local satisfaction instead of going elsewhere to enjoy themselves is a way of plugging economic leakages by encouraging recreation/tourism dollars to be locally spent. Recreation focuses on opportunities for people to enjoy themselves locally when they might just stay home otherwise.

The Octagon Barn, an asset for cultural tourism development.

Team members inspect the inside of the Octagon Barn.

The team suggests an overarching principle for effective tourism development: build the community that local residents want. Don't reach for things that people think visitors might want. Find out what the people of Tuscola want. Tourism can be a good economic development strategy. If visitors see quality of life, they are more likely to come for repeat visits. Some may buy second homes in Tuscola. If they have second homes in Tuscola, they might retire or move their businesses here, providing additional economic development. Mississippi is focusing some economic development efforts on attracting people who are retired or are going to be retiring. It is a mistake to try to be all things to all people. If a business builds a water park, that could be good for the community and the local economy, but it would be a mistake to try to use tax or other incentives to recruit a water park if it doesn't fit the community's vision for itself. Focus on Tuscola's strengths in developing the local tourism industry.

The team used databases made available by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to develop tourism profiles for the entire Thumb region (Huron, Sanilac and Tuscola counties) and

Tuscola County. The basic data are provided by D.K. Shifflet & Associates Ltd.* The estimates say 85 percent of Tuscola County visitors are from Michigan. The Michigan average is 56 percent. So Tuscola has a much higher percentage of visitors coming from Michigan than the rest of the state. The Thumb region (three counties) gets 5 percent of the Detroit leisure travel market; Grand Traverse County also gets 5 percent. Travelers must leave the Interstate to get to Tuscola so 5 percent of the Detroit market should be considered quite good. Roughly 70 percent of Tuscola County visitors are here to visit friends and relatives. This may be an opportunity because people who are visiting their friends and relatives are often looking for additional local recreation or tourism opportunities. The team recommends Tuscola explore promoting "tourist in your own town" ideas.

Shifflet data indicate that Tuscola County receives an estimated 365,000 visitor days a year. These are mostly day visitors and overnight visitors who come for leisure purposes. Tuscola County receives very little business visitation. Research shows each visitor will spend at least $50 per day, which would translate into about $18 million per year. The $18 million estimate is small compared with some of the other Tuscola County economic sectors, but it is a good base to build on. When visitors from outside of the county spend money in the county on meals and lodging, it is an export as far as the county is concerned—it is the sale of a product to someone from outside the county.

The tourism product is the visitor's experience. This experience is provided by the existing assets of a community and services rendered by various service providers—for example, lodging establishments, restaurants and gas stations. This means tourism is an industry of fragmented producers that requires participants to work together in assembling the products. Another aspect of tourism is that the customer, *the visitor*, participates in producing his or her own experience. The extent of the customer's participation varies, depending on many factors.

In light of the fragmentation of the provision of services and the customer's participation in producing the experience or product, a key overriding need in tourism development is readily available information for both the attractors and service providers *and to the current and potential visitor* or the resident who might take advantage of experiential opportunities. To develop and improve the Tuscola County tourism product, the team felt the greatest need in tourism is ***coordination*** that focuses on assembling information and distributing it to providers of the tourism experience. The tourism providers need generally to understand the nature of one another's businesses so they can develop packages, partner with one another and work together to improve the overall tourism product. If all tourism-related businesses operate completely independently, then the sector will have difficulty growing. Some great opportunities need to be put together—the identification and exploitation of these opportunities will accelerate information coordination and collection.

To begin leveraging the existing leadership, energy and enthusiasm for tourism we detected in the county, the team recommends formation of a countywide tourism working group (TWG). This group would be devoted to developing tourism in the county and taking advantage of the flow of visitors that occurs in the surrounding region. The TWG should cover at least the entire county and possibly the region. This group should use some type of subgroup or subcommittee to work simultaneously on the development of agri-tourism in the county. Agri-tourism should not be viewed as a discrete opportunity but as integral to Tuscola County's tourism product.

* DK Shifflet & Associates surveys 125,000 households a month to develop visitor information databases. Because the information is based on statistical sampling procedure, the estimates include normal sampling error.

The TWG can help people understand the county and its tourism possibilities. The first order of business for the TWG is an inventory of tourism assets and opportunities. An inventory of tourism facilities, attractions and events is essential. Provisions should be made for continual maintenance and addition to the inventory. There also should be some understandable rules about what is contained in the inventory. The inventory should be housed in the database specified in the recommendation below concerning one database and two web sites.

COMMUNITY ASSETS & TOURISM

Why inventory assets?

- To preserve what you have currently that is good.
- To engage in future planning that develops quality of life for all in the community.
- To target markets that take advantage of existing assets and at the same time NOT bring in visitors whose expectations are not going to be met with the assets you have.

A related team recommendation is to develop a central electronic database that would serve both tourism and recreational interests. This database would house the inventory developed in the previous recommendation. This might be done with a web site. The main idea is to create a single database that could be accessed by a tourism web site as well as a recreation web site--and possibly other sites--for informational purposes. The objective of a web-based database would be to inform local people and potential visitors about events and points of interest. The data report that visiting family is Tuscola County's major source of visitors. One function a database serves is to make it easier to publicize all events. Publicizing all events on any given weekend is important. It does not matter which town is hosting the event, because people will travel. Having opportunities and choices available provides a rich community environment. Connecting a facility provider and an experience provider† is another advantage. Knowing what is here will spur creativity and generate new ideas and new products and packages. Provisions must be made for the continual updating of the database, deleting outdated material and adding new material. There should be a designated person or entity responsible for maintaining the database once the inventory and maintenance rules are established.

The team discussed web access by the people of the community and outside the community. The "Thumb Tourism" web site (http://www.thumbtourism.com/) is a good beginning that needs more details. This web site is one of several existing sites that can become key resources for informing people about Tuscola County tourism opportunities. Tuscola County's tourism market is not just the Detroit or Flint areas but the rest of the United States and the world. The World Wide Web is the world's window into Tuscola County events and entertainment options. So the web should be looked at as a great opportunity to communicate and be approached very thoughtfully.

The web site should leverage Travel Michigan's site, michigan.org. The site operators should make sure that their listings are all in michigan.org and that the links and information on michigan.org all go back to their site, thereby driving more traffic to their site.

Any marketing or promotional plan should include methods to get the word out about the tourism web site. Just creating a web site does not necessarily guarantee traffic to the site.

† An experience provider may be a golf course, a cultural site such as the octagonal barn or an event of some type, such as the Pumpkin Festival.

The tourism working group can also function to help businesses that don't view themselves as part of the tourism system to realize that they benefit from tourism. The downtown retail establishments in each community could be visited by tourists to shop or buy goods for their trip. It is important for everybody in the community to understand what their relationship to tourism is and what the benefits of tourism are. The TWG can serve this educational function by keeping business communities up-to-date on tourism-related activities and processes.

SUCCESSFUL TOURISM STRATEGY

A successful tourism strategy needs to identify how to:

- Welcome, involve and satisfy **VISITORS.**
- Achieve a profitable **INDUSTRY.**
- Engage and benefit host **COMMUNITIES.**
- Protect and enhance the local **ENVIRONMENT.**

Adapted from *Tourism Planning Kit From Local Government*, July 2004, New Zealand Ministry of Tourism.

The county, cities, villages and townships should also consider, from a political standpoint, providing policy support. What can local government do to make things happen? How can we organize our laws and ordinances to facilitate business development and encourage entrepreneurship as mentioned in the new ventures section of this report? Also, such issues as traffic flow and signage depend on local government administration and ordinances.

After developing an inventory, the TWG could also develop a tourism plan, starting with the inventory of tourism assets and products, and identifying regular activities and events throughout the county. These baseline facts lead to a broader understanding of what exists and what might be possible. The community can use the inventory to move into developing an action plan or strategies on how to accomplish the goals it wishes to achieve.

Tourism strategies should take into account comparative advantages of the county and focus on markets that will be well-served by the tourism product in Tuscola County. Keep in mind that

Competitive advantage vs. comparative advantage are the two basic drivers for a destination's success.

- **Comparative advantage**: Success drivers related to resource endowments (what a destination inherits). Comparative advantage is based on the abundance of natural resources or advantages possessed by a destination. Comparative advantages are resource endowments:
  * Human resources.
  * Infrastructure and tourism superstructure.
  * Physical resources.
  * Historical and cultural resources.
  * Knowledge resources.
  * Size of the economy.
  * Capital resources.

- **Competitive advantage:** Success drivers that a destination creates through the way in which it chooses to deploy these resources. Competitive advantage is based only on the ability of a country/destination to deploy its resources so as to add value to those resources. Competitive advantages (resource deployments):
  * Audit and inventory.
  * Growth and development.
  * Maintenance.
  * Efficiency.
  * Effectiveness.

Source: Ritchie, B.J.R., & Crouch, G.I. 2000. "Are Destination Stars born or Made: Must a competitive destination have Star Genes?" Travel, Tourism, and Recreation Association Conference Proceedings

the tourism product is the visitor's experience. The tourism experience is produced by the service and product providers with whom the visitor comes into contact.

Another activity that a TWG should consider engaging in is the examination of other successful tourism projects to determine best practices. For example, the group could examine events such as the Frankenmuth Oktoberfest or the Woodward Avenue Dream Cruise.

Before starting plan development, the TWG should be sure that the key question has been asked: **Is tourism a viable strategy and is it desired by the community?** Only after that fundamental question is addressed can other questions be considered:

- Is tourism part of a larger strategy of economic, social and environmental diversification?
- What are the fiscal costs involved in embracing tourism (e.g., investment in medical facilities, waste disposal systems, parking lots, etc.)?
- Is tourism compatible with protecting the community's natural resources or it will degrade scenery and water quality, disrupt fish and wildlife, and increase trash and litter?
- Will tourism provide meaningful employment for local citizens? A quality product is authentic and avoids "tourist trap" development. The Octagon Barn is an example of an authentic tourism experience.

Tuscola County has *comparative advantages* (see above). It has historical and cultural resources such as the Octagon Barn, it has many successful events such as the annual Family Days at the Octagon Barn and the Pumpkin Festival, and it has a number of interesting small downtowns. The county also has attractive physical resources—a developing bicycle/walking trail system, undeveloped state land, Lake Huron shoreline, and attractive farms and countryside. Another major tourism comparative advantage is a strong agricultural industry that may offer agritourism opportunities.

Tuscola County's *competitive advantage* will come from continually maintaining a tourism and recreation database and using it to foster product development (providers) and to promote tourism to the appropriate retail markets (tourists).

The team heard about the need for enhanced connections with the media for promotion of tourism and recreation opportunities. One view of the media is to embrace media outlets as partners and to encourage them to be partners in developing tourism and other aspects of the county. The focus should be on local newspaper and radio outlets. Connecting people with information about tourism/recreation assets and events is also key to the use of media. Another element of a

TOURISM RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a central database serving as both a tourism and a recreation web site.
  Objectives include:
  - To inform local people and potential visitors.
  - To facilitate provider product development.
  - To develop and coordinate recreational programs.
  - To investigate state land use availability with DNR.
- Because of tourism and recreation overlap, planning in both spheres should be closely aligned.
- Explore and exploit strong ag tourism opportunities.

successful tourism development strategy is to recognize and celebrate success. As goals are achieved, people should be informed. Good news is often limited. So this is an opportunity to feed the media good news on a regular basis.

The team recommends facilitating recreation program development and coordination. Some of the non-profits may offer leisure and recreational activities. Knowing what others are doing can reduce duplication. Coordination will enhance the quality of life in communities and the county as a whole.

The team received many comments about the considerable acreage owned by the state in this county. A major point of concern is the lack of access to this land for a broad range of activities. So an obvious recommendation is to start dialog with the Department of Natural Resources about possibilities of accessing that land. Some sources of information are outlined in the box below.

Because of the overlap between tourism and recreation, planning in both spheres should be closely aligned. Events and activities in the county—private, non-profit or government—are all part of the base of the tourism product. It is useful to have those activities in the database and as part of long-term thinking about packaging tourism opportunities and tourism assets.

Lastly, the CAT urges the county to explore and exploit strong agricultural tourism opportunities. Because of the agricultural assets in this county, this was another point of discussion in several of the community input gathering sessions. One way of celebrating and recognizing those assets is to connect visitors to one of Tuscola County's prime industries. Many Americans are disconnected from our agricultural heritage and seek to return to those roots. Tuscola County has many attractive farm and country venues, it has much in the way of agricultural heritage, and it has a strong organic farming group. These assets all point to the conclusion that it would be wise to seize that opportunity.

MAPS & RULES

- **State Game Areas**
  http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10363-31657--,00.html
- **Tuscola State Game Area**
  http://www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/sga/tuscola.pdf
- **Vassar State Game Area**
  http://www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/sga/tuscola.pdf
- **Fish Point Area**
  http://www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/sga/fishptgen.pdf

Fish Point State Wildlife Area
Fish Point Field Office
7750 Ringle Road
Unionville, MI 48767
Phone: (989) 674-2511

Tuscola State Game Area
Cass City Field Office
4017 East Caro Road
Cass City, MI 48726
Phone: (989) 872-5300

GROWING TUSCOLA'S ECONOMY WITH AGRICULTURE

Bill Knudson

Agriculture is a key sector.

The community told the team that agriculture is an important part of the local economy. Some basic facts support the community's observations. In 2002, Tuscola County had 1,292 farms that generated $94 million in farm-level sales.‡ Including the on-farm employment with the ethanol plant and sugar facilities, agriculture and agriculture-related industries are the No. 1 industry in the county. According to the Michigan Department of Agriculture, Tuscola County ranks second in the state in dry beans and sugar beet production. Tuscola County ranks third in the state in corn and wheat production, but the county lags its neighbors in livestock production. This is another example of how the county's economy acts like a leaky bucket. The grain is produced here but shipped out instead of capturing value and profits in other ways.

For example, there are only 56 dairy farms in Tuscola County, compared with 216 in Sanilac County and 147 in Huron County. Tuscola County has 11,000 hogs compared with 64,000 hogs in Huron County. There are 18,000 cattle including dairy cows in Tuscola County compared with 89,000 in Huron and 53,000 in Sanilac.§

Tuscola County is to be congratulated for outstanding agricultural leadership in the state and among the counties. So the team's only recommendation here is to learn from the positive examples in agriculture and apply the same principles to other sectors. One of the very impressive things about Tuscola County is that the agricultural community is open to new opportunities. Compared with other counties team members have encountered, the leadership here appears to be less tradition-bound, more open to profit potentials, and not tied to specific commodities or crops grown.

‡ Michigan Department of Agriculture data. Farm-level sales do not include processing.

§ Livestock numbers based on Michigan Department of Agriculture publications.

Several opportunities are available for further development of the agricultural sector. The agricultural community seems to understand its own story but should focus more effort on communicating that story to other members of the community. Outreach to the wider community could be successful in expanding markets. Farmers' markets would be an example; perhaps a distribution center for specialty crops or a wholesaling center or a vegetable or specialty crop auction facility. These all are examples of outreach communication of what Tuscola County has to offer to the wider community. Additionally, the agricultural community could seek to partner with businesses that would have a vested interest in their success, such as working with the local schools and colleges to encourage culinary courses or with local restaurants to feature local products in a variety of creative ways. The community could also bring in chefs and have cooking contests or various other events related to food (thus agriculture).

In agriculture in general and farming in particular, individuals don't have a lot of control over the prices they receive. Generally farmers are what economists call price takers. To overcome that obstacle will require collaboration. One example would be forming additional cooperatives or working with other counties or developing strategic partnerships or strategic initiatives with processors or food manufacturers. Huron County is developing a kitchen incubator. Collaboration with that effort could benefit Tuscola County and is probably a better use of community resources than starting a competing kitchen incubator. The Thumb area probably lacks sufficient numbers of kitchen-based processing start-up businesses to fill two incubators. Tuscola could reconsider opening a local kitchen incubator if the Huron County incubator develops a waiting list. Some specific areas that could be targeted for more immediate development include:

- Interest in organic production among the farm community is well developed in Tuscola County. The market for organic products continues to grow much faster than the market for traditionally produced agricultural commodities.
- There appears to be broad interest in local bio-diesel production.
- Vegetable production might be expanded for farmers' markets of various shapes and sizes.

Begin the process with some asset mapping. What kinds of agricultural assets does the county have? It is important to determine what alternatives exist and what opportunities are being overlooked. Asset mapping is also important because, for example, if the county decides to increase its livestock production, siting issues will arise very quickly. Land use and community support are going to be very important if expanded livestock operations are planned.

Another important consideration related to asset mapping is to consider alternatives for sugar. The team received remarkably few comments about the future of sugar, but people should be asking the question "Is there going to be a future for the sugar industry in this state and in this county?" If the U.S. trade policy with respect to sugar changes, Tuscola County must be ready with alternatives to sugar production.

A larger farmers' market or expanded vegetable processing requires planning. The MSU Product Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources (http://www.aec.msu.edu/product/index.htm) can help with cooperative formation or other types of producer organizations to enhance marketing. Work to organize organic and conventional production and marketing. Most organic producers have small operations, and collective action would probably help increase their market access.

In many respects, Tuscola County has the opportunity to be the alternative energy capital of the state. The county already has some first mover advantages with ethanol production. There is also interest in this county and potential to grow soybeans for biodiesel production.

Wind energy systems are also a potential area for energy development. Dr. Steve Harsh from the MSU Agricultural Economics Department works with producers on wind energy systems; visit the web site he and others have created at: http://web1.msue.msu.edu/wind/. A recently released map from the State Energy Office is accessible from that site and shows that Tuscola County is home to some of the best land-based wind sites in Michigan. Agricultural producers elsewhere have successfully formed new businesses to place new generation utility-scale windmills on their land and sell power to the grid. Rising energy prices, a new Michigan law that requires utility companies to buy wind power from their customers and improved technology mean that a variety of scales of wind power systems may now be economically viable, depending on the quality of the site and power needs of the landowner.

Direct-to-consumer marketing is a possible growth area.

LAND USE, HOUSING AND NATURAL RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

Diane Doberneck, Dave Ivan

The team noted the pride that the people of Tuscola County have about their communities, the land and the environment. Land use can be a controversial subject, but the reason for planning and zoning is to protect the things we value the most. The people of Tuscola County told the team how much they value their agricultural land as well as their recreation and hunting land. Residents of Tuscola County hunt, hike, fish, boat; they enjoy being part of the land. We list below a few of the recurring themes in comments the team heard about land use:

- Insufficient communication and coordination among various levels of local government within the county.
- Lack of best practices in planning and zoning with citizen planners and planning officials.
- High growth of sprawl in some parts of the county, especially along the county's southern border and along the M15 and M24 corridors.
- Concerns about stewardship of agricultural and natural resources.

Disagreement among county residents about how to manage growth and preserve agricultural land is difficult to balance with the equally valid desire to make sure there are opportunities for farmers who want to sell part of their land for residential production and residential housing, for their retirement plan and for the new housing that is springing up. **How can Tuscola County have it all? How can Tuscola County preserve the thing its people love the most about Tuscola County—the land?**

Parts of the county are experiencing land pressures in different ways. So though some of the team's suggestions are countywide suggestions, it is important to note that different suggestions will be needed to manage the pressure for land development and sprawl in various parts of the county. For example, managing urban sprawl is most important in the southern part of the county and along the M15 and M24 corridors; preserving and improving the productivity of agricultural land and increasing the quality of natural resources is more important in other parts of the county. Randall Arendt's classic book, *Rural by Design* (1994), offers practical suggestions for managing growth effectively.

Because the location and style of new home construction are related to land use and zoning practices, the team heard concerns about housing—specifically, the lack of availability of a variety of housing types. It was clear that additional types of housing are needed to accommodate Tuscola County residents at various stages of life. For example, the current types of available housing need to be adjusted to accommodate seniors and retirees so that they may "age in place" and stay in Tuscola County. Construction of smaller houses, condominium townhouses and "mother-in-law" cottages represents an untapped potential. The team also heard grave concerns about the rapid increase in housing foreclosures among young people and first-

time home buyers, who cannot afford to buy homes on their starter salaries. Affordable housing is needed to accommodate those young people who wish to live in the county.

The team has four recommendations related to land use, housing and natural resources:

1. **Improve collaboration and communication around land use goals.**
   Opportunities exist to reduce the costs associated with government by working across jurisdictions on land use planning and zoning issues. The team noted that some local governments have already worked together on common goals with very positive outcomes—e.g., the Airport Authority. Another suggestion the team heard was to reinvigorate the county planning commission and/or to hire a professional planning/zoning official to be shared across jurisdictions.

   It is also important to increase public understanding about land use issues. The team heard general awareness and concern about land use issues from the residents but noted that some differing perceptions about how to go forward were a source of conflict. So it is not only important for planning officials to be thinking about these issues but absolutely essential to engage Tuscola County residents in dialog about their common goals in land use and how to accomplish them together.

2. **Plan proactively, not reactively.**
   In land use planning, it is important to be one step ahead of the changes that are coming. In particular, zoning ordinances must be updated to help prepare for coming changes and changing community priorities. The community provided very positive suggestions for land use policy change in the CAT's open forum. The suggestions included updating ordinances and plans, adopting Smart Growth principles and pursuing mixed-use development (mixing retail and various housing types together). Mixed-use development can be very positive for seniors. Seniors like mixed-use housing because they don't have to travel as far to shop, eat or recreate. Managing growth proactively can lower costs of government infrastructure and services. Sewer and water lines are shorter, lighting is more condensed and costs of maintaining sidewalks and bus lines are lower than in current development patterns. Along the same lines, encouraging redevelopment of sites that already were developed once can reduce government costs. Such sites include brownfields (contamination on land can be reduced or isolated; obsolete buildings can be adapted or replaced). Another target for redevelopment might be second stories of downtown buildings. Reuse of existing sites translates into preservation of outlying areas because it reduces the pressure to develop new sites. Finally, there was some discussion about making sure existing buildings and structures are safe; as mentioned in the new ventures

Older downtown buildings are resources.

section of our report, abandoned or derelict buildings might need to be dealt with in some way.

3. **Increase stewardship of agricultural and natural resources**.
Tuscola County is already doing admirable work in this area, but three main areas of concern remain. One area is water quality. One of the things that the youth brought up was frustration about not being able to swim or fish in the Cass River because of high *E. coli* counts in the water. If Tuscola County wants to attract tourists to enjoy the river, the water must be clean. MSU Professor Joan Rose may be able to help with determining the source of the *E. coli* (and other) river contaminants. To quote from her web site (http://www.fw.msu.edu/people/RoseJoan/JoanRose.htm):

> Dr. Rose is an international expert in public health water microbiology addressing the relationship between water quality and human health including a focus on water pollution, water and wastewater treatment and public policies. Her research has investigated microorganisms involved in waterborne disease including enteric viruses (enteroviruses and noroviruses), protozoa (specifically Cryptosporidium and Giardia), and bacteria (*E.coli*). Her work involves development of new methods for detection of these microbes in the environment, particularly molecular methods such as microarray technology and environmental surveys of ambient surface and ground waters as well as at wastewater and drinking water treatment facilities.

Another recommendation is to continue to identify and remediate existing brownfields throughout the county. Tuscola has already made headway in this area. The team reviewed one brownfield redevelopment application and was very impressed with the level of detail. Finally, efforts should be made to continue existing efforts to promote soil conservation practices so that agriculture can remain an effective driver of Tuscola County's economy.

4. **Increase the variety of housing options**.
Think about ways in which planning and policies and local jurisdictions and governments might accommodate some non-traditional housing. Encourage elder-friendly housing options that will accommodate residents as they "age in place" through various stages of life. Second, think about encouraging affordable housing for first-time home buyers, young families and seniors. The team heard about the new need for affordable housing that would allow the county's young people or people on fixed incomes to stay in the county in suitable apartments or homes. Another suggestion about housing was to update the building codes, at least in some areas, to encourage more handicapper- or senior-friendly housing. When people purchase their homes, they do not often think of their needs as seniors later on. If the house was originally constructed as senior-friendly, they can stay in their homes much longer, reducing the overall costs of senior care in the county. A final suggestion about updating building codes related to the preservation of open or recreational space in the design of new subdivisions and neighborhoods. Nearby trails or small parks are often cited as one indication of a high quality of life.

THE BOOMERS ARE COMING!

Paul McConaughy

The boomers are coming to Tuscola County--and everywhere else. Beginning on January 1, 2006, the Baby Boom generation began to turn 60! That should be reason for concern, but as a society we have 20 to 25 years to get ready for the time when high percentages of this large population group will begin to require intensive senior services. So the boomers are coming, but there is time to get ready. The team heard concerns related to three groups of seniors:

- Today's seniors who have needs and how to care for them.
- Today's vital seniors, the people who are active, involved and engaged.
- Tomorrow's seniors with needs.

Although the team was asked to explore economic opportunities related to seniors, most of the community's concerns were articulated in terms of care needs. So this section of the report addresses both needs and economic opportunities. What follows is a selection of the comments the team heard from the community:

- Care of seniors requires information; though individuals are collecting information they need to do their jobs, they are not sharing the information. In Tuscola County, there appears to be no mechanism for sharing information so that others can take advantage of it.
- There are opportunities to take advantage of the leadership skills that area seniors have to promote economic growth.
- Although a transportation system is available, it is not a countywide system—some people are isolated.
- Planning efforts, as mentioned above, are not taking into account the future needs of seniors. The area housing stock is old. People want to stay in the houses they are in, but area houses are very old and therefore difficult to modify to meet the needs of seniors.
- People who are aging are interested in lifelong learning, but opportunities are limited.
- Great services are available in Tuscola County, but many have waiting lists.
- A change is going on in the care community. People used to go into nursing homes and stay there. Now they go into nursing homes or care centers for a short period of time and then move back to their own homes. This means there are new opportunities in home health care.
- In the area of transfer payments, seniors in the community are not accessing all of the government payments that are available to them. These include the earned income tax credit (EITC), the homestead credit and food stamps. This means that money is not available to be spent here in your community.

The list above is a set of observations that can also be considered recommendations. As Tuscola improves its services to seniors, celebrate the accomplishments by and for seniors.

So how does improving services for seniors fit into an overall local economic development strategy? It starts by viewing seniors as ***an industry***. Seniors bring money in from outside the community and spend it in the community. Revisiting how we view seniors brings a better understanding of how they can benefit the community. The first real benefit is the knowledge and skills that the seniors have. The Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) is a volunteer program through which seniors provide advice and mentoring to entrepreneurs. Senior volunteers can be connected as mentors to students. ***Silver industries*** is a booming area in entrepreneurship. Silver industry is defined as businesses started by seniors who have retired but still want to be productively engaged, as well as industries that are created by people to meet the needs of seniors. Tuscola County may have an opportunity with available facilities to develop a senior business entrepreneur incubator somewhere in the community.

Another economic development opportunity is to explore how to get some contractors to develop the special expertise necessary to modify existing homes in Tuscola County to make them more senior-friendly. People in Tuscola County are very independent. They are going to want to stay in their homes, so making their homes better for them can be a source of jobs and income.

There are also economic opportunities to develop services that seniors are going to need, such as snow removal and lawn care, home maintenance and housekeeping. All of those provide the opportunity for employment development. Additional home health services are obviously going to be needed.

Several states have developed economic gains around a program called Elder Hostel. Michigan doesn't have many Elder Hostel activities. However, there is increasing interest in activities such as "birding," and Saginaw Bay hosts significant bird populations and migrations. An Elder Hostel around birding or special sites such as the Octagon Barn might be feasible.

Some members of the community expressed interest in retirement housing or continuing care retirement communities around the Saginaw Bay. Continuing care retirement communities accommodate individuals throughout their retirement as their needs change with the aging process.

Beyond these economic development-related recommendations, the team also recommends these general senior service improvements:

- Establish a program to ensure that seniors receive all the federal and state benefits to which they are entitled.
- Create an inventory of the services that are available in a central source for storing that information.
- Improve countywide transportation services.
- Create a senior services network.

It is possible that the team may have already catalyzed formation of the senior services network. At the conclusion of our focus group session to gain input from service providers, attendees agreed to continue meeting to work on common goals. It is a positive first step. As Tuscola moves forward with enriching everyone's lives by improving services to seniors, celebrate such small steps along with the major accomplishments.

YOUTH…WILL THEY STAY OR WILL THEY GO?

Maggie Bethel

The title of this section of the report is drawn from a question community members posed during the open community forum. The citizens of Tuscola are concerned about retaining youth in this community, and it is an appropriate concern, as the population pyramid for Tuscola County shown in the "New Ventures" section of the report demonstrates. Youth are important to economic development in various ways.

First, youth drive many of the modern family's consumption decisions, so if youth are looking elsewhere for their purchases, leakages from the economy occur. Second, but more importantly, youth are the source of creative energy that drives formation and growth of new industries in an area. If an area is losing most of its talented youth, critically damaging leakage from the local economy is occurring. Economic development research shows that today's economy is quite different from that of 20 to 30 years ago. More and more, talented people choose where they want to live and then create their own jobs in that location. They grow their own economy. If a community's talent exits and is not replaced with new people, the economy will grow elsewhere. So it is critical in today's world to create environments that talented people will find attractive. To create environments that youth find attractive, it is important to engage them, to find out what they want and make them part of the solution.

The team gathered input about the youth from educators and from the youth themselves. The team conducted a traditional focus group with representatives of various educational establishments. To get the youth perspective, the team used a technique called participatory photography. The team gave the youth cameras and asked them to take pictures that tell us about their communities. The youth gave us mixed views of their community. They love their community, but most of them plan to move on, some to gain experience elsewhere and come back; others plan to leave forever. A few plan to continue living in Tuscola County, pursuing their family traditions. So this means the community must pursue several strategies. Among the challenges are how to help more young adults decide they want to stay, how to help people who would like to come back make the transition and how to help those who have decided to stay be successful.

It is important to realize that some young adults won't come back. The community must still help prepare them for productive lives elsewhere. Communities that fail to do this will fail to attract families to recharge the population base, and the leaky bucket will go dry.

How do communities say, "Welcome back!!" to all of those who lived in this county at one time or another and that may want to reestablish lives here? How do communities build on nostalgia and create a desire for homecoming? There is something about roots that attract many people back to the places where they grew up.

There is something in Tuscola County that they want, but life gets in the way. What is the strategy to get them to come back at some point or to increase the draw to come back sooner? How does the community also make it possible for a young person who has her dreams set on establishing a business realize her dream? The key is to connect to youth who have dreams set and make sure they have support systems that enable them to fulfill their ambitions. That is part of whether they will stay or go. It is about making sure that leaders know about those youth so they can connect to them early on.

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF YOUTH

Youth are proud of their schools.

It is important to reflect on what the youth communicated about their community and focus on those things that are important to them. They are proud of their sports teams. Attention to their teams, with positive publicity and community support, will be noted by teens. The youth are proud of their churches and youth programs. Two church programs in particular seem to be doing a great job of connecting with youth. One is in Millington and the other is the Colwood Church. They draw literally hundreds of youth to their outreach programs with weekly open youth-oriented programs. How do these churches get so many youth to participate? They offer contemporary programs that use music, technology, video games and the language of the youth. They have outreach workers who listen to youth. The CAT is not suggesting that programs have to be faith-based, but it is recommended that various youth-serving groups consider the models, the tools and the methods that these two churches are using and consider replicating them in communities that are deficient in outlets for youth. Youth emphasized there are not enough recreational and social opportunities for them in this county.

The youth are proud of their libraries when there is access to Internet service, computers and updated resources. The youth like their parks and the county fair and natural resource-based amenities. The team met youth who had a depth of knowledge about community-based resources—a refreshing knowledge base from teenagers. The youth spoke about things such as airports and fertile ground and good hunting. They were proud of agriculture in Tuscola County.

Libraries provide positive outlets for youth.

They had a depth of understanding of economic development and golf courses and the social and cultural aspects of the community that demonstrated maturity beyond their years, which is a testament to their parents and the school system. The youth think of community sponsorship and support when they go out and fund-raise for causes that interest them. It is an important aspect for their activities, and it's vital in the community.

The youth are proud of the medical care facility. They think that it is important that senior citizens get supported in the community. But they are worried about certain kinds of medical support that aren't available. They pointed out the lack of birthing facilities in the county and state that most people go out of the county if they have serious injuries needing treatment. The youth acknowledged the existence of local hospitals but are concerned about depth of care in some cases.

Other issues and concerns that Tuscola County youth shared with the team included:

Schools. They are concerned about the conditions of some of their school buildings. They indicated that this communicates a message to them about how much the community values the kids and their education. They are concerned about outdated technology in the schools. They said that they have better technology in their homes than in the school library.

Downtowns. Seeing closed retail stores depresses the youth and sends a message to them about their future in this community.

Students value their sports teams.

Jobs. They said that layoffs in the community frighten them. They worry about their friends, their families; how they would ever re-create the world they have here.

Drug use. They discussed drug, alcohol and tobacco use among their peers. They definitely were opposed to drug use and were concerned about the high percentage of their peers who they believe are users of alcohol or illegal drugs.

Social outlets. They are very concerned about the availability of social outlets. They said outside of school, 4-H and the church, there are not a lot of social outlets. They talked about needing to travel to Bay City, or Saginaw to go to the movies. Developing healthy recreational alternatives is important.

Pollution. They notice pollution and natural resource degradation, especially poor water quality in the Cass River. They noticed a lack of leadership in dealing with the issue.

Lack of respect for community property. The youth were put off by kids in their community who abuse community resources such as parks. Here again, they notice when adults are not taking leadership to address the problem.

What youth want. They want a safe and secure environment. They like the fact that, for the most part, they do feel safe and secure in Tuscola County. They do want a voice and a chance to influence decisions that affect them. A few were able to give examples of where they can participate in decision-making, but in some communities, they don't feel they have a voice or that their concerns are even understood. The youth want more positive outlets for out-of-school time, current technology and up-to-date school facilities, and the opportunity and support to pursue their dreams.

THE TEAM RECOMMENDS

Area churches have positive models for youth engagement.

1. Develop new and replicate current successful models for youth outreach that are found in the Millington and Colwood churches, where there are community youth-centers.

2. Provide more support for youth entrepreneurship. A business called "Cuppa Joe Java" in Michigan's Upper Peninsula is a coffee shop run co-llaboratively by seniors and youth. The youth are acquiring skills in running this coffee shop, and the senior citizens love it. It's a wonderful inter-generational example, using a vacant storefront. Plenty of opportunities exist for collaboration between faith-based organizations, local businesses, government agencies and the EDC to establish entrepreneurial support systems.

3. Model more authentic youth-based leadership. Provide youth with active seats on boards and committees in local government and structure other ways to involve them in community leadership roles.

4. Youth mentoring and community service systems are community-building systems! Encourage local service clubs and others to become mentors and youth leaders for youth. If by sixth grade youth haven't been matched one to one with an adult role model, create checkpoint systems so that matches can be made. Create similar systems for assuring that youth are involved in community service projects and community service learning.

BECOMING THE B.E.S.T.* - EDUCATION'S ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (*Best in Education Skills and Training)

Maggie Bethel, Liz Szymanski

Youth and education are closely aligned, but the scope and impact of education go well beyond youth. We no longer live in a world where the majority of people can stay in the same occupation for 30 to 40 years. The economy is constantly churning as old jobs are abandoned and new jobs are created. Even among those who are fortunate enough to find a satisfying occupation that has staying power, technology is constantly changing how people perform their work.

Education, economic development and government are linked.

A time of change in Tuscola's history. More change is coming. The workforce must be ready.

On-the-job training can help meet some of the needs to keep pace with the changes in the workplace, but a strong local educational system sets the stage at the K-12 level by creating dynamic individuals who are flexible enough to adapt to the changing demands of the economy. Investments beyond high school are necessary to help people transition to completely new careers as new opportunities emerge or as individuals find their way in life. The quality of the local education system is definitely a consideration when businesses are choosing a new location. So education and economic development are linked in very important ways.

What is Best in Education Skills and Training (BEST) for Tuscola County's youth and citizens? The team first inventoried basic assets for education. In general, Tuscola County has very good assets for a community of its size. The major assets include both two- and four-year programs at the postsecondary level, the ISD and the Technology Center. The team detected great relationships with business and industry for entrepreneurial training, for apprenticeships and for co-op programs. Vocational

agriculture programs are absent at the secondary level, even though potential for growth in agriculture industries is significant, so current efforts to reestablish programs at the Skill Center are endorsed and should be supported by community leadership. Some signs of interest in entrepreneurial training at the secondary level and with the Technology Center exist, but people need to be able to access entrepreneurial training across the life span. It is recommended that opportunities for networking around entrepreneurship be created in the community (see the new business venture section). Connections need to be stimulated among the small business community, retired professionals, bankers, educators, manufacturers and others. Entrepreneurial training should be widely available and connected holistically throughout the community.

Some school districts are planning for facilities and other infrastructure investments, but others struggle with outdated facilities and technologies. It is noted that the college completion rate for those who attend the Technology Center is very high, but that the college completion rate for Tuscola County as a whole is lower than the state average. It is important to raise the college-going rate because jobs of the future will certainly require advanced training. The community needs to understand the critical connection between education and economic development and work to raise college completion rates. The Technology Center's Career Pathways program is a statewide model. These factors, along with the access to advanced degree programs in the community/region, indicate the community has resources to toward this goal.

The team also recommends assessing how to enlarge the scope of programs offered through existing facilities by partnering with educational partners in the expanded region and beyond. Though it may not be economically feasible for an existing local institution to set up an entire program to help small numbers of people develop highly specialized skills, it may be possible to use distance education technologies to provide access to small numbers of students. Expand access to online programs and make sure that, from the employers' standpoint, assistance is available when and where it is needed. For example, CAT member Liz Szymanski can help with access to some MSU programs that could be offered to students seeking postsecondary education in Tuscola County. Many other major educational institutions in the state also offer distance-based courses. Periodic needs-based inventories of the business community and employers by the education community are necessary to determine gaps in the job skills and preparations programs at all levels—secondary, postsecondary, higher education and work force training programs.

When people listed their "one great hope" at the team's open community forum, what came back was jobs, jobs, jobs. Does this county have sufficient daycare to allow those who want to work outside the home to have careers? It is important to make sure that workers have adequate access to quality childcare. If there is not enough daycare, quality people will leave the work force. This hurts business—not only the employers but other types of businesses that might get some of the money that comes through the extra purchasing power of the person who parents and also works outside the home. Daycare also creates small and home-based business opportunities.

In addition to daycare, the team also recommends that Tuscola County do an inventory of availability of preschool slots. Are there slots available for the diversity of needs of kids who would benefit from developmental programs? Are children adequately screened for special needs before kindergarten? Are children entering kindergarten school-ready? If kids are not, then they are already behind. If kids are behind in first and second grades, they likely will be behind in later years, and that will create lifelong problems. Attention to education really starts before kindergarten.

When the team met with educators, Steve Ley from the Tuscola Technology Center made reference to the "new three R's" of education. Instead of the old "reading, writing and 'rithmetic," education must now focus on rigor, relationships and relevancy. The team could not agree more. There is a need to inventory what is taught in K-12. The new three R's should be reflected through the entire K-12 system. Every child should receive a customized counseling plan that has a significant level of parental understanding, involvement and endorsement. This concept ties back to our earlier recommendation that every kid needs an adult mentor and community service experiences. Here the team is recommending the same thing: to make sure that each kid has an educational plan adjusted to his or her needs and to make sure the plan has rigor, relationship and relevancy.

The team heard that Tuscola County has good technical and trade training. The team recommends that the providers make parents more aware of what is available. This marketing of the technical and trade programs needs to be done jointly by the ISD, the Tech Center and local school systems in the lower elementary grades to remove historical stereotypes and create new images and excitement. New communication methods must instill the expectation that the logical and necessary step after K-12 education for **every** young person is participation in an advanced career-training program.

The team had a wonderful experience when meeting with Tuscola County education professionals. The educators expressed value in their exchange and agreed that an education council for the education providers serving the county is needed to dialog and foster creative partnerships. The council should include education providers outside the county who serve Tuscola County as well as those located within the county's borders. This generative dialogue promises to stimulate co-operation, cultivate planning for longer range needs, leverage scarce resources and better sequence educational experiences for consumers. It is important to create this forum in the near future and, at appropriate intervals, integrate it with other community networks.

The responsibility for planning for education does not rest solely with education providers. Positioning Tuscola County as the **B.E.S.T.** requires activating parents, kids, teens and employers, also. Parents must become advocates for their child's career paths and learn of appropriate age and stage opportunities for the kids within their communities. Kids must be encouraged to dream, plan and explore career and employment options throughout their youth. Teens must develop avenues of interest related to career paths and develop a realistic vision of realizing their goals. Career path exploration happens all the time, not just during school time. Career goal exploration is something that young people must be stimulated to explore by 4-H, boys and girls clubs, scouts—wherever they are

B.E.S.T. Coalitions to Mobilize Around Education Issues

- Mayor/city commissioners
- County commissioners
- Chambers of commerce
- Business and industry leaders
- ISDs
- School superintendents and counselors
- Youth-serving organizations
- Service groups such as Rotary, Lions, etc.
- Faith-based groups
- Economic development organizations
- Higher education institutions in the community
- Libraries
- PTAs
- Daycare/childcare providers
- Local college alumni groups

encouraged to dream about their careers. Career inspiration can come from many, many places.

Employers must understand how to position for future labor needs by influencing training programs. Employers should have regular contact with the education establishments to assure career-ready graduates relevant to their employment needs. There are roles for the entire community in mobilizing the community around education.

With well-organized community education coalitions and a reasoned action plan, an approach might be made to a community foundation or granting agency to fund and launch a community campaign to raise the rates of advanced career preparation and training plus college attendance in the county. This could be done by individual coalitions in communities across the county uniting and setting goals and developing a proposal or establishing one overarching coalition.

Examples of goals that might be set by Tuscola County communities:

Where childhood memories are built.

- Setting an expectation that all high school students should be provided college preparatory classes.
- Making sure that advanced placement classes are available to those seeking this learning experience.
- Ensuring that all high school students early in their tenure participate in several structured postsecondary training or college visits.
- Ensuring that all high school students and their parents fill out postsecondary training or college financial aid forms.
- Encouraging the development of programs for students to gain job training or college credit while in high school.
- Linking adult basic literacy and GED design and delivery with the community college.
- Taking steps to support students willing to return to their home communities as teachers, nurses or other professionals, or to start new businesses.

Tuscola County can become the B.E.S.T.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Dr. Hal Hudson, Jim McLoskey

The CAT was asked to address a variety of issues facing Tuscola County. Although the issue questions posed to the CAT touched a number of topical areas, the recommendations focused on key thematic areas: economic development, facility reuse, tourism, land use, value-added agriculture, senior citizens and youth.

A summary of the key recommendations follows.

RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY FOLLOW-UP

1. Downtown development: Small Town Design Initiative, Warren Rauhe
2. Water quality: Dr. Joan Rose
3. Entrepreneurship: Service Corps of Retired Executives
4. Wind energy: Dr. Steve Harsh
5. Flexible manufacturing network development: Dr. John Beck

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Consider all aspects of developing an entrepreneurial community by examining key questions necessary for success.
- Establish a flexible manufacturing network to support the county's manufacturing industry.
- Consider establishing a business ombudsman to assist new and/or expanding businesses.
- Explore a cultural economic development strategy for the county.
- Strengthen alliances with regional economic development agencies/organizations
- Increase communication at all levels with public/private partners.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

- Explore opportunities to connect with high school arts programs as a mechanism to utilize unoccupied retail spaces and increase pedestrian traffic downtown.
- Expand the small business assistance program through chambers of commerce to assist small-business operators with common needs, such as insurance, advertising, etc.
- Consider use of the market-based downtown assessment tool to identify best potential new retail establishments within the downtown core.

FACILITY REUSE

- The marketability and subsequent potential reuse of the former Camp Tuscola facility rest with the ability of the county, or a private developer, to gain a clear title, guarantee adequate infrastructure (electricity, gas, water) and provide a financial incentives package.
- Potential reuses of the Camp Tuscola facility include but are not limited to: alternative correctional uses, document storage facility, conference center/reception hall and regional farmers' market.

TOURISM

- Focus on Tuscola County's strengths in developing the local tourism industry.
- Explore promoting a "tourists in your own town" program.
- Explore formation of a countywide tourism working group to capitalize on opportunities and develop new strategies.
- Continue to foster a relationship with the newly formed Thumb Area Tourism Council in marketing Tuscola County tourism and recreational interests in the greater Thumb area.
- Develop a central database of tourism and recreational interests such as the newly formed database compiled by the Thumb Area Tourism Council.
- Establish a dialog with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources on expanded access to state-owned land in the county.

VALUE-ADDED AGRICULTURE

- Utilize an asset-mapping exercise to identify current agricultural assets and potential alternative value-added agriculture opportunities.
- Explore alternatives to sugar beet production, given current market and trade uncertainty.
- Capitalize on alternative energy opportunities.
- Explore opportunities to diversify agricultural production and processing.

LAND USE AND HOUSING

- Use existing cross-jurisdictional cooperation agreements as models for other collaborative opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation within the county.
- Ensure zoning ordinances are consistent and up-to-date with the Tuscola County General Development Plan.
- Continue aggressive use of land use development tools, such as brownfield remediation, to encourage redevelopment of underutilized sites in the county.
- Increase stewardship of the
- agricultural and natural resources within the county, especially water and soil conservation.
- Explore mechanisms to increase the variety of housing options available to current and future county residents at various stages of life.

SENIOR CITIZENS

- Establish a program to ensure that senior citizens receive all of the federal and state benefits to which they are entitled.
- Create an inventory of current senior citizen services and identify a central inventory source.
- Utilize data to assist in creating a senior citizens services and support network.
- Expand countywide transportation services to include all parts of Tuscola County.

Tuscola County Medical Care Facility is an asset for seniors.

YOUTH

- Replicate current successful models for youth outreach identified in the faith community.
- Increase support for youth entrepreneurship at all educational levels.
- Design authentic leadership opportunities in community decision making for youth.
- Increase youth-adult interface by developing mentoring systems.

YOUTH AND EDUCATION

- Expand the scope of educational programs offered through existing facilities by partnering with educational institutions outside of the county.
- Conduct a countywide inventory of daycare and preschool facilities to identify potential gaps and service opportunities.
- Continue and expand the countywide education council.
- Communicate the importance of engaging the entire community in mobilizing around a complete educational system.

The reader will note that the list of potential strategies that Tuscola County may consider using to achieve its community and economic development goals is extensive. It is possible some strategies may have been attempted before, but they should be revisited when considering current options and leadership. Before prioritizing the recommendations and moving into implementation, community leaders should disseminate this report widely for community input and debate. The CAT notes that it has focused on economic development in its recommendations, but many of the suggested strategies are equally important to the goals of enhancing the quality of life and enriching the social fabric of Tuscola County. Above all, successful economic development begins with a solid sense of community, which leads to commitment by residents to work to build a life that enhances local assets and diminishes its liabilities.

CAT Community Assessment Team

APPENDIX 1

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TUSCOLA COUNTY CAT SCHEDULE

Tuesday, December 13 – Thursday, December 15, 2005

Prepared by organizational team of:
Hal Hudson, Ph.D., County Extension Director, MSU Extension, Tuscola County
James McLoskey, Economic Development Corporation Director, Tuscola County
Mike Hoagland, County Controller/Administrator, Tuscola County
Margie White-Cormier, County Clerk, Tuscola County

Tuesday, December 13, 2005

Time Slot	Activity
3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	CAT arrives at Tuscola Technology Center, 1401 Cleaver Road in Caro, for briefing with Elizabeth Szymanski, facilitator.
4:00 – 6:00 p.m.	Reception, presentation and roundtable discussion hosted by the Tuscola County Board of Commissioners at Tuscola Technology Center, 1401 Cleaver Road in Caro. A presentation acquainting CAT members with Tuscola County will be given by the organizational team of Mike Hoagland, James McLoskey, Margie White-Cormier and Hal Hudson. Questions will be posed for discussion with the CAT. Key community contacts (hosts) will be invited to participate in the reception/roundtable discussion.
6:00 – 8:30 p.m.	Key community contacts (hosts) take CAT members out to dinner to discuss community and economic development strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. CAT members will lead dinner discussions.

Wednesday, December 14, 2005

Time Slot	Activity
7:15 – 8:00 a.m.	Continental breakfast for CAT members at Tuscola Technology Center.
8:00 – 9:30 a.m.	*Tours/discussion groups by topic area and host: Camp Tuscola – Gerald Peterson, chair, Tuscola County Board of Commissioners. Mfg. and retail – Steve Erickson, Millington village manager, and James McLoskey, EDC director. Tourism – Chuck Frost, executive director, Thumb Area Tourism Council.
9:30 – 11:00 a.m.	*Tours/discussion groups by topic area and host: Agriculture/value-added – David Pratt, MSU Extension educator, field crops. Elder communities – Steve Cormier, HDC research and development director. Banking and real estate – Robert Sugden, senior vice president, Community Bank, and David Osentoski, Osentoski Realty and Auctioneering.
11:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Travel time to Vassar.
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Reception and roundtable discussion hosted by the Tuscola County Economic Development Corporation at Betty Lou's Restaurant, 194 E. Huron Ave. in Vassar.
1:00 – 1:30 p.m.	Travel time from Vassar to various locations in county.
1:30 – 3:00 p.m.	*Tours/discussion groups by topic area and host: Municipal issues – James T. Wickman, III, Mayville village manager. Education – Steve Ley, Tuscola Technology Center.

	Entrepreneurship/small business– Tim Hardesty, HDC Community Development Corp. director
3:00 – 4:30 p.m.	Tours/discussion groups by topic area and host: *Facilities reuse discussion – Tom Striffler, Caro village president. Recreation/trails – Jason Davis, Tuscola Trails. Youth issues – Michelle Peel, Extension educator, 4-H Youth Development.
4:30 – 6:30 p.m.	Team planning time and dinner at Tuscola Technology Center.
6:30 – 7:00 p.m.	Final preparations for community forum.
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Community forum at Tuscola Technology Center.
9:00 – 10:00 p.m.	Team debriefing and preliminary topic assignments with Scott Loveridge.

*Tom Striffler and John Beck will begin touring some reuse sites beginning at 8 a.m. Group discussion at 3 p.m.

Thursday, December 15, 2005

Time Slot	**Activity**
7:15 – 8:00 a.m.	Continental breakfast for CAT members at Tuscola Technology Center.
8:00 a.m. – Noon	Team decides where further investigation is necessary and seeks out information from community resources and individuals. Some possibilities include: • Recreation sites investigation. • Follow-up discussions relative to value-added agriculture.
Noon – 1:00 p.m.	Lunch at Tuscola Technology Center.
1:00 – 4:00 p.m.	CAT planning in preparation for the report out to the community.
4:00 – 5:00 p.m.	CAT reports out to the community, Tuscola Technology Center. Tuscola County Board of Commissioners, key community contacts (hosts), as well as public invited to attend.

CHECKLIST FOR COMMUNITY ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Gleanings from Research Reported in a Special Issue of the Journal of the Community Development Society[**]

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, *The Journal of the Community Development Society* published a special issue on entrepreneurship in community development. The contributions included conceptual works, case studies and surveys. Though the serious practitioner will want to read the entire volume, what follows are some key questions drawn from the research reported in the special issue that summarizes the findings in a way that can help steer constructive community discussion about how to strengthen existing entrepreneurial support systems.

COMMUNITY & NETWORKS

1. Is there a network of entrepreneurs for peer-to-peer support and idea generation?[6]

2. Is there a locally based and locally controlled single-mission organization focused on improving the community's entrepreneurial climate?[4]

3. Are activities to support entrepreneurs well coordinated across service providers?[6]

4. Is there an ombudsman or mentor who can help guide micro-businesses through all the early steps of business formation and growth?[7]

5. Is there a mechanism for learning about and acting upon emerging needs of the community's entrepreneurs?[7,10]

6. Does the community welcome newcomers?[6]

7. Are entrepreneurs counseled on appropriate ways to use social capital and avoid social capital traps?[5]

8. Are knowledge clusters (networks of people who know a lot about a type of product, a specific part of the production and marketing process, or how to support entrepreneurs) identified and fostered?[3]

9. Are knowledge clusters engaged in inter-cluster learning and exchange?[3]

[**] Compiled by Scott Loveridge

10. Does the community deliberately foster growth of leaders who can play a positive role in the development process?[7]

11. Does the community's current leadership have a vision for entrepreneurship?[1]

12. Does the community support businesses that are risk takers?[1]

13. Are the community's infrastructure investments, including telecommunications, sufficient to support entrepreneurs?[7]

FINANCE AND REGULATIONS

14. Are bank loans available for start-ups?[6,7]

15. Does the community help entrepreneurs understand finance, record keeping and government regulations?[7]

16. Are regulations favorable for start-ups, expansions and transitions?[6,10]

17. Are local regulations applied fairly and consistently?[10]

TRAINING AND MENTORING SYSTEMS

18. Do activities focus on entrepreneurs or businesses?[6,7]

19. Is sufficient attention given to increasing the supply of entrepreneurs?[6,9]

20. Does the educational system support entrepreneurship?[1,2]

21. Are there club-based entrepreneurship development opportunities for youth?[1]

22. Do local enterprise managers help train youth for business ownership through internship-type opportunities?[1]

23. Do local enterprises encourage and support spinoffs?[8]

24. Do local enterprises rotate responsibilities so that more people can learn the whole operation?[8]

25. Do local business owners actively encourage the rest of the family to be part of their business?[8]

26. Do local enterprise managers actively mentor youth who are not employees?[1]

27. Are entrepreneurial support activities driven by funding agencies or the clients?[6]

28. Are assistance programs tailored to the business owner's technical, managerial, entrepreneurial and personal skill sets?[7]

29. Do programs for entrepreneurs focus on training or implementation?[6,10]

30. Are entrepreneurial support systems customized to the community's unique situation?[6]

31. Are support systems geared for all phases of the business life cycle (birth, small, medium, large, spin-off and succession)?[4,1]

32. Do entrepreneurs and the community-based organizations that support them make full use of advanced products and processes?[3]

33. Do informal coaching systems foster smaller and more remotely located businesses?[1]

34. Does the community provide assistance with marketing?[7]

35. Does the community provide assistance with employee management?[7]

36. Does the community help entrepreneurs expand the geographic area of their market?[7]

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FLIP CHARTS FROM BREAKOUT SESSIONS

RETAIL/MANUFACTURING SESSION

- Incubator Project – Millington
  - retail or manufacturing
- Small Bus/Retail
  - Easy permits, Tax Abatements – Industrial Park
- Different groups butt heads
  - role of government in retail, downtown vs. rest of community
- Small Business Pressures
  - tax issues, local government
- Get foot traffic downtown
  - retail vs. professional
- Road construction hurt Caro
  - need tax break
- New Orleans hurt bus
- Caro stores now close earlier
  - some close Saturday
- Caro Business Association – spin off of Chamber
- Parking full → Caro
  - County seat, County employees park in places for retail
- Turnover of new stores – here and gone
- Need gift shops and clothing
- Residents don't buy clothing in downtown Caro – shop in Saginaw
- Cooperative advertising?
  - worked for parts store
- Fiberglass composites – success
  - custom work, logos for displays, bikes, motorcycles
- DEQ may hurt composites
- Product liability/workers comp
- High turnover – hard to find trained workers

- Mayville Grocery Store-

Issues	Focusing
-turnover -insurance -taxes -healthcare	On higher quality – value added

- Lack of public media at edge of county
- M-24 expansion = opportunity but concern that residents would take land for retail
- Taxes – workers comp

- Newcomers don't find store – shop out of county. Traditional customers are loyal.
- New people accustomed to "name" stores
- Small communities meet
  - M15 heritage route, web site, joint advertising
- Mayville – out-shopping to Lapeer
  - need new niche
- Cheap Building → Store fronts as rental units for apartments upstairs
- Dollar store – antique store
- CDC manufacturer → warehouse operation. Don't have industrial park.
- Mayville – few properties zoned industrial – owned by churches.
- Bodice Park
- Sunflower Festival = very successful
- Perception of small business as less attractive
- Single bus tax
- Real estate prices dropping
  - housing, lots of properties for sale, people not working, long commute
  - commercial prices high, vacant land stable
- Health care – seniors
- Interest rates increasing → different for small business
- Credit card interest rate, cap removed – 35% interest
- Tax abatements work well
  - custom precision tooling, non-auto, diesel, jet, medical, easy to find retail in Caro, congestion a problem
- EDC – small marketing budget
  - help with small business, starting small business classes, entrepreneur conference
- Try for block grant – to redo downtown?
- Wife was from area, wanted to raise kids in small town
- Regional/county/state city manager
  - meetings to share ideas
- EPC Revolving loan program

ELDER SESSION

- Caregivers don't self-declare
- HDC as connecting point
- Medical care facility now much more than a place to die – expanded set of services, eg. post-op.
- Some patients move to Assisted living
  - place to enjoy rest of life, new facility
- New focus = rehab → home and community-based services
- State program – nursing home transition to community
- 150 people waiting for transition program
- Tuscola county has great elder care facilities – hospice care → good range of services
- People voted millage for facility
- Tuscola county services – providers are very person-focused
- Tuscola close to a lot of amenities and services
- Crime rates low except yesterday
- Neighbor helping neighbor
- Towns support community hospitals

- Grocery stores deliver to senior homes
- People don't have to leave for advanced healthcare services like heart cath.
- Strange feeling – would rather go to urban areas for care.
- People want to come back "home" to go into assisted living – want to be close to families
- Trying to retrofit homes
- Home assessments
  - slip/fall, collaboration with organizations to let know services available
- Housing stock getting older
- How get pro-active = before slip/fall
- Elder friendly building codes?
- Core housing – people don't want to leave
- Economic Opportunities
  - young old, old old
- College grads leaving → seniors move away to be close
- Seniors as part of workforce
- Some come too late – need lots of support services
- State tax structure not favorable for small business
- Seniors need a product they relate to
- Property prices/ taxes low
- Niche products, customer service → small business success
- Thumb as next Traverse City
  - services as people pass through
- Thumb businesses don't promote to tourists
- Small marina
- Biggest growth in 80+ age group
- Will need to prioritize care toward older
- Need to educate 50 year olds
  - savings, housing
- Market potential → growing care givers who provide community-based care
- Slip and fall training
- What is there for elder entertainment
  - restaurants, malls, life-long learning
- Need to keep them active, socialized
- Senior advocacy group meeting
- Providers sometimes compete
- As senior population grows, private services will arrive
- Tuscola county offers many types of housing/healthcare choices
- Box lunch and movie
- Senior fair at Vassar high school
- Camaraderie at meal sites
- Close retail important for seniors
  - men's store has closed
- Congregant meal sites that serve low income seniors stay open – others close

AGRICULTURE SESSION

- Adaptive
  - profit motivated (nontraditional)
- Good with niche marketing
- Early Adopters
- Potential organic production growth
- Risk takers
- Strong leadership
- Diverse agriculture
- Willing to create markets
- Make livestock a priority (organic meat and dairy products)

Opportunities

1) Livestock
   a) source of manure
   b) use of feed grain
2) Custom manure applicators
3) Fresh water aquaculture
4) Agri-Energy
   a) corn burners – value, clean
   b) biodiversity – soybean crushing
   c) methane digesters
   d) wind
5) Nutraceuticals
6) Develop need chains
   a) schools
   b) farmers markets
7) Agri-Tourism
   a) consumer responsive
   b) provide experience
8) Big enough to sell some products
9) Organics
   a) consumers willing to pay a higher price.
   b) Develop a critical mass of producers
   c) Livestock-dairy
   d) Retailing-distribution
10) Specialty meat processing
11) Ethnic community
   a) Islamic
   b) Kosher
   c) Asian
   d) Hispanic (especially Mexican)

ENTREPRENEURIAL SESSION

Customers

1) Aging
2) Not local
3) Expansion in the south end of the county
   a) customers not aging

b) people moving in from southeast MI

How do you attract new customers?

1) Expand services
2) Open houses
3) Advertising
4) Special events
   a) Harvest Festival
   b) Christmas
   c) Red Hat Day

Entrepreneurial Culture – NO

What skills do potential Entrepreneurs need? And can they get them locally?

1) Business and Market planning – yes
2) Passion for your business
3) Involved in community – yes (basis for competitive advantage)
4) Personal touch
5) Uniqueness
6) Salesmanship
7) Time
8) Realistic expectations (see #2)
9) If you are successful, responsibilities and roles change – no
10) Flexibility
11) Family support – no
12) High speed internet

Potential for developing businesses that are world class, or would work in Tuscola county.

1) Navy beans
2) High level of service
3) Storage, fire and water proof
4) Tea house

Innovation – What resources are needed to foster new businesses or innovation in existing business.

1) Advertising – too expensive
2) Market the small town shopping experiences, specialty shops
3) Collective purchasing of some inputs
   a. energy
   b. advertising
   c. health care
4) capital
5) Infrastructure
6) Cooperation between different units of governments

EDUCATION SESSION (Maggie)

Growth

- Listen to business to make sure we are connecting to what is needed to be delivered by the education community. Advisory committee is great…need to do more of Alignment. Meeting employment needs of the area.

- How can we support entrepreneurship, small businesses?
  - coordinate services to grow the business community.
- How can the Education community educate the community about the changes in education market – what is here, what the options are?
- Develop more 2 + 2 + 2 models, 3 + 1 programs
- Clear articulation agreements – with good parent understanding is critical.

Returning Adult Learners
- What is "traditional"?
- Lots of resources spent on remediation are an issue.

ANOTHER SET OF FLIP CHARTS
- Tech center – asset
  -Good job with junior and seniors, 29 program, also adults –extended learning center
- Apprenticeships – relationships with business and industries with colleges.
- Technical education is good – placement is good!!
- Davenport – internships, coop, agreements
- round out experiences – businesses open to placements
- Career pathway program
  - good track record, great statewide model – gaining recognition
- College ready grads – career tech education 65% go on to college – higher completion rate
- Relationship
  - Retraining working with Michigan Works and business for putting people into needed programs strong coordination and collaboration
  - Career Expo/Exposure – ideas for options, college night
  - Articulation process – move kids forward not laterally
- Entrepreneurship program
  - experiential program, good motivation
- Cooperative education, job shadowing, local business, dual enrollment
- Options are very positive
- Advisory structures are very important and a strong asset. Partnerships are important for sharing equipment, training, sharing assessments, interviewing

Growth
- More apprenticeships
- How can we document application of skills in applied programs in academic settings (credit for what they know)
- Adult return learner challenges testing and remediation
- Disconnect between high school standard and college standard

RECREATION/TRAILS SESSION (Rick)
- Think B16 (ie. 10 mile trail project)
- Innovation/cooperation needed
- Consider use of community foundation funds
- Need a plan – county wide
- Inventory resources
- County, village water access locations- but underutilized
- Rural experiences/farm – tourism opportunities
- Package experiences

- Capitalize on water resources
- Caro ice area
- Need more communication (like this meeting)
- Look for non-monetary resources
- Why are you here?
  - Dan- network/partner/packager
- What to do?

Day trips, activities, add businesses

- Product development vs. product promotion
- Communication/Coordination (also of advertising) vs. promotion
- Detroit origin increasing
- Agri-Tourism
  - Pumpkin, Barn, Organic farm, U-pick directories, Tree farms, Orchards
- Camp Tuscola-
  - Elder hostel, Nature science cap, Dorm housing (bicyclists, golfers, hunters), Corporate training
- Trail system

COMMUNITY FORUM: ONE GREAT HOPE FLIPCHARTS

- Job growth and availability of jobs to keep young people in communities
- Environment for entrepreneurialism to capture risk-takers and "can-do" financing attitude
- High paying jobs to make Tuscola a good place to work, live and play
- Improve education standards and boost self-esteem to give kids confidence to be a success
- Expand recreational opportunities for kids and adults
- Government cooperation and stewardship of public funds to foster friendly environment for job creation, youth and seniors
- Increase in tourism, what we do best
  - growth use of shoreline, marketing in what we have available
  - growth in jobs while maintaining small town atmosphere
- Economic stability through structured growth, balanced housing, cost-effective service delivery that meets the needs of residents
- Develop small business, tourism, education and health that will lead to well-being for everyone. SUSTAINABILITY
- Our children will be able to grow up to be educated, employed and raise their children in a safe, economically secure lifestyle
- Inter-government cooperation (county and townships), more jobs, agribusiness, bring youth back (after college) and make sure they have same opportunities.

COMMUNITY FORUM: GALLERY WALK FLIPCHARTS

LAND USE

Issues	*Next Steps*
Save agriculture – find way to not have all land sold for housing, urban sprawl	Find way to make small farms viable. Countywide land-use plan with multi-jurisdiction begin.
Design communities to control costs associated with infrastructure associated with sprawl- controlled growth	Land use council? County planning commission, control splits
Preserve water quality.	Laws, regulations, public understanding
Develop plan for recreational activities	Snowmobile trail Vanderbuilt, Unionville along bay. Go through state land – business opponents? Continue projects like bike trails and bridges, example cross country skiing
Coordinate similar zoning activities between similar areas – inter-township for example	County or county association of townships, cities, villages
State land in county 2nd to none	More access, open trails, 4-wheelers, campers use land, horse trails – business
Control residential growth to preserve good farmland	Make sure people don't build in big lots (Frankenmuth as an example). Controversial
Encourage business lands to build on existing sites – reuse and reclaim	
Well trained county planning zoning administrators, especially for subdivisions and more control act	4-5 townships to hire skilled person together
Preserve/replenish/stewards of land	Implement crop rotation to build top soil, follow periods of no tilling
Lack public understanding of demands for 40 acres	Need people clustered
Integration of public open space, blighted property, services	Need explanations and public understanding. Need planners to promote this in plans and zoning

HOUSING

Issues	*Next Steps*
Make sure recreation is nearby	Rails and trails
Shy away from concentrated low income housing	Encourage economically integrated including scattered sites – no senior ghettos
Senior groups – to facilitate aging in	Planning – sustainability, recreation, sharing

place	resources, transportation
Buyer's market	Jobs/opportunities, education, tourism, vocation spot
More inspection for quality	
Site housing near infrastructure and amenities plan!	
Re-use upper floors of downtown buildings for residential	Make sure it's safe
Innovative Housing Technologies - smaller houses, "mother-in-law" units	Zoning and building codes should encourage not discourage
Affordable housing - supportive, special needs	Housing programs and grants for county
Homeless	Programs, grants, churches, more funding to get housing/rooms that are affordable
Foreclosure prevention counseling for 1st time mortgage	Requirement for debt management and mortgage counseling, budgeting, economizing
Attractive community – safe tidy communities	Simplify process to permit and build housing
Availability of financing for manufactured housing	
Houses build for future, especially to accommodate seniors	Condo complexes with all senior aspects taken care of.

AG RELATED

Top Opportunities	***Next Steps***
Hydroponics	Improve marketing/ PR Advertising
Biodiesel	Feasibility/Marketing Study/Market to school
E85 stations	Find investment/ is there a market policy
Dairies/ Livestock Feed	Identify interested stations/ distributors
Corn burners	Partnerships between local government/MSU/etc Corn store Manufacturing
Aquaculture	R & D in Aquaculture
Organics	
Agri-tainment, Agri-Tourism, Agri-History	Improve marketing/Promote local Ag festivals, school trips to farms, Teach in Vo-Ag classes
Anaerobic Digesters	R&D
Gardening/Community gardens	Teach in Vo-Ag classes
Expand processing	
Farmers Market	Location Advertising Local Support
Increase access to foreign markets	Reduce tariffs/ Produce for foreign consumers
Ag zoning	Make PEQ more responsible
Ag Incubators	Find Financing
Effective Master plan	
Alternative uses of DDGs and other by-products	
Renaissance zones for Ag	
All Michigan product store	Find location/Marketing promotion about store
Orchards	

Lease land to community gardening/greenhouse vegetables	
Dry bean processing, soy bean processing	
Cooperative to share equipment	
Develop U-pick	Feasibility study
Wind Power	

QUALITY OF LIFE FOR SENIORS

Opportunities	***Next Steps***
Sustainable supply of people	
Transportation	Coordinated and expanded – county wide
Healthcare – affordable – self funded, Rx coverage, area accessible	
Aging in place – staying in own residence	
Activities – structured socialization opportunities	ditto
Senior center community services	Respite care – creates jobs for caretakers
Coordination of school building for services	
Functioning community – feeling important	Include in volunteer projects like Habitat – provide inspiration
Coordination of mentoring services RSVP	Publicize
Preventative Health Care – keep active	Exercise Program
Intergenerational Center	HDC plan – drafted
Quality control of prepared meals – Meals on Wheels	
Providing security – scams, communities keep track of single seniors	Affordable gated neighborhoods
Businesses provide incentives	HDC – low income
Education regarding Rx drugs	
Government programs – heating etc, simplify	
Recreation just for seniors	Continuum of services different levels – of living
Financial literacy	Educate seniors regarding property (taxes property)
Better access to specialized doctors	
Consumer directed service delivery	Ask how you want it - clear
Barrier free housing design	More retirement living - developers
Talent bank	Share with other generations
Pets for seniors	
Regeneration of health, body, mind and spirit	

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Opportunities	***Next Steps***
Consolidate services	Start discussion to overcome “turf” claims

Develop listing of current programs Educate citizens of scope of services	Inform people o what's available and where
Good relations with public (from government employees)	Ongoing forums/customer service skills
Make government more responsible for what they are doing	Focus on service aspect of responsibilities. ex. plowing streets
Make it easy for individuals to start business	Simply consolidate permitting process (1-stop shopping)
Consolidating resources	Authorities/clearing houses
Regular communications between local, county, tri-county, and state	Inter-government contracts, best spent money is with the lowest possible level.
Restructuring ID top public priorities Infrastructure improvements for education	(e.g. policing) survey
Regional land-use Contracting with other entities, create creative partnerships	Build on current success (e.g. health department, Vasser Canine Creative financing)
Government get "new entrepreneurship" Government invest in own community Part-time legislation Enhance training of government officials	Willing to cooperate with business
Regionalization of services in thumb. Disaster/emergency readiness E-government Government grants for businesses Health education	Jail facility. e.g. animal control with Sanilac Prioritize most important issues
Youth Action committee	Public service announcements/cable access Newspaper Interact with local government services Lead Tuscola Job shadowing Apprentice work

TOURISM

Opportunities	***Next Steps***
Riverfront Development	Advertising, promotion, marketing
Campsite	
State Land (hunting, hiking, rides) Huron Shore Need Canoeing in Cass (quality)	
Zoo	
Health Technology	Preventative
Theme (niche)	Brainstorm on ideas
Music/Song	Place
Festivals/pumpkin, etc. Rotating events/moving to different communities	Focus of ----?/competitive advantage
Cross country skiing, snow shoeing	Develop trails in county – advertise in Detroit

	metro area
Nature education Bed and Breakfasts – need more Hotels Caro- theater, movie	
Regional Information Clearinghouse for tourism activities. County level Aquarium	
Vineyard, pet farm	
U-pick experience farm life	
Arts Colony/---?	
Conference center Coffee houses Tuscola prison?	
Destination for hiking, etc	
M-15 garage sale type of activity	
County wide – Taste of Tuscola	
Tourism Co-op → Marketing collaboration. Farmer's markets/U-pick	
Larger farmer's market	

UNDER-UTILIZED BUILDINGS

Opportunities	**Next Steps**
Use of Comp. Tuscola and Caro Reg. buildings.	Document transfer process.
Emphasis for youth	Develop collaborative church and school efforts, community centers, recreation and gaming (ping pong and pool)
Increase retail use	Collaboration between existing retailers
Increase local financial assistance	Adjusting State and Federal reg. Improved use of DDF.
Develop niches	Email survey to determine preference. Use DDF to begin efforts over incentives.
Develop themes for downtowns	
Ag museum, Art incubator, Farmer's market, Small business incubator Historic emphasis	
Establish a database on the buildings	System for prioritizing building availability
---? Acts for demolition	DDA Leadership
Requirements on length of use after tax abatement	State legislator of DDA following
DDA, EDC and local chambers to subsidize rentals for micro enterprises	

RECREATION

Top Activities	*Things to Develop*
▸ Walking, biking destination, hunting (duck, pheasants, deer) ▸ Canoeing (Cass River) ▸ Adult softball, Little League baseball, Little League football ▸ Camping ▸ Cross country skiing ▸ Snow shoeing ▸ In-line skating ▸ Pool and ping pong for adults and youth (cheap) ▸ Free movies at night at the library ▸ Elementary school plays. ▸ Enjoying state land, walking/hiking ▸ Color tours ▸ Train excursions ▸ Horseback riding ▸ Skateboard park	▸ County park, camping ▸ State land development – utilization – state laws. ▸ Preventative health activities (focus on healthy lifestyles) ▸ Youth/teenage sports ▸ Youth/teenage dances ▸ Community center ▸ Trails ▸ Inline skating, paved trail ▸ Activities for kids ▸ Social activities ▸ Ice rink/roller skating rink ▸ Youth and family ▸ Environmental education programs ▸ Motorize trails (CRV?) ▸ Awareness/Communication of recreation opportunities in communities ▸ Greater use of State Land ▸ 30,000 A+ ▸ Local park resources → marketing outside community ▸ Advertise recreation opportunities available in each community (Information clearing house at county level) ▸ A county-wide event ▸ Fitness center, racket sports

YOUTH

Opportunities	*Next Steps*
Recreational programs	Determine recreational needs
Community Center for youth	Feasibility study for community center
Government partnerships (youth work with government)	Student liaisons On BOARDS
Skill Development	Teach citizenship/leadership
Life skills	Schools, churches, community centers, 4-H teach how to manage money. Inter-generational cooperation
Volunteering in programs needs an opportunity to be successful	Inter-generational programs Create mentoring opportunities between youth and seniors. Youth take care of seniors.
Jobs to make money	Create environments/alternatives for success
Get kids more involved in local gov	Have local officials go in and talk to kids
Job shadow, all age groups	Summer jobs, community service, paid and unpaid
Mentoring in Agriculture/ All areas	Pair up youth with adults in Ag community.
Dance at firehall or similar activities for	Plan event.

youth	
Develop teams for kids. Goal orientation	Plan programs for teamwork
Recognition for progress	More positive recognition
Diversity awareness	
Recognize talents (fine arts in communities)	Ex. Cass city band and dancers. Cross programs to see further opportunities and recognition.
Need more family centered activities, drop-in center	Pool, ping pong center with senior citizens Running it in empty building
Get kids in service clubs (Jaycees)	Plan opportunities, shadowing
Work ethic program	Teach values/work ethic
Finance education	Teach investment/basic handling of money.
Promote higher education for youth.	Business involvement, what's out there and available.
Beef up school system.	More space for scheduling events.
Internships by businesses for kids	Private/public partnerships

NEW BUSINESS VENTURES

Top Opportunities	***Next Steps***
Motels, rest, shopping. Keep local people here for fun.	Open state land reservations. New campground, Swimming
Bio-diesel soy bean processing	Feasibility/financing
Organic farm market, beat mean	Retail/farm market
Other types of injection molding	
New crops	Finding market-what is demand
Local valve added, homemade jam	What are regs/distribution
New hockey rink	Investor-funding
Canoe livery	Get business person-cooperation, DNR DEQ
Conference center and weddings	Market study and investors
Art and craft market	Organize group-local government partnership
Senior service/health, Co-locate with existing facilities	Inventory existing services
Hunting sporting good store	Zoning/federal regulations
High tech	Zoning-business environment
Store for youth	Survey youth – involve in government
Senior care coop	Survey caregivers
Neighborhood friendly Senior/youth facilities	Zoning
Solar panels – heating, wind turbines	Feasibility study
E-tail	Pick product, train local entrepreneurs
Youth jobs working with seniors	
Convert schools to senior facilities	
Wind energy generation	Feasibility
Mexican restaurant or other ethnic	
Soup place	Store downtown – investors
Made in Michigan store	Storefront – marketing. Determine niche in different areas
E85 stations	

Health centers – spas, preventative health, health restaurants	
Nature – stress relieving tours and bed and breakfasts.	

EDUCATION

Opportunities	*Next Steps*
Diversification of types of programs Baker and Davenport (4 yr and 2yr programs) - more programs, more vocational ed programs, trade schools programs, more lifelong programs, senior caregiver programs (social attitudes towards)	Affordable education-Higher quality K-12 Better scanning for where kids should be - - accountability of K-12 system Assistance of single parents (Pell grants, early ID of problems). Better communication of what is here
Be able to earn college credit during high school	Volunteerism of kids, service learning.
Entrepreneurship education – all age levels	Financing
Middle Age, Senior citizen – needs computer skills, Business willing to teach trades	Intergenerational sharing
Support Ag Vo-Tech skills center program	Advisory committee
Cooperative agreements in purchasing such as textbook, equipment, materials	Communication between schools
Savings programs (starting at elementary school age) for college	Survey of need – matching occupation with programs offered
Job shadowing opportunities-fantasy versus true opportunities Financial literacy training IDAs and Secondary Ed levels Technology access-public Preschool programs – (research what is here)	
Senior RSVP–use w/ kids to teach	
Work ethics issues	
Education access to second shifters – internet courses	
Parent involvement – parents need to know and understand their role	
Social promotion issue not acceptable	
Counseling is essential for making good choices	
Recognition programs to encourage kids who are involved with business and who are successful.	
Organic foods, local grown produce and foods.	

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

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