

# Welcome to the Future of Shiawassee County

## Shiawassee In Motion 1.0

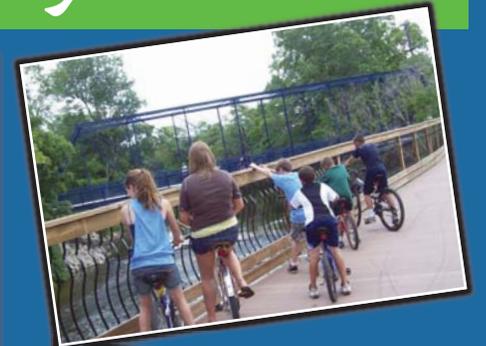
### **A comprehensive plan that sets a path for our region to head in some new and exciting directions.**

Our county has an exciting opportunity to reinvent itself and put its communities, businesses, people and assets on the map. Shiawassee in Motion 1.0 is the result of more than nine months of open, public planning sessions with county residents, business owners, community leaders, elected officials, students and up-and-coming entrepreneurs coming together, working jointly, and developing a common mission.

In this report, we share why we engaged in this important effort, who participated, what we learned and where we hope to go from here. You'll find a mix of challenging and innovative suggestions, some of which are strong calls for changing the way we do business and attract new investment to our county. We think you'll also find that there is something for everyone to relate to, and we hope you will be moved to find a way to get involved. After all, our goal is to put all sectors of our county in motion!

It has been said that, *"the only way to control your future is to create it."* This quote has officially been attributed to an unknown author, but many have taken credit for it over the years. Nonetheless, we hope it will now become a battle cry for a new, more vibrant future for Shiawassee County. This is your plan. We hope you will join in making it a reality.

With eyes toward the future,  
The Shiawassee Regional Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Committee



## A “new future?” But why?

Shiawassee County can follow the same path as before and continue to wait for the 1950s to return, or it can position itself to succeed in the “New Economy. “

The differences between the Old and New Economy are glaring and suggest a whole new mindset for growth and prosperity. What has worked in the past may not necessarily work now. In the New Economy, talent-driven, small entrepreneurial companies are replacing large, stable companies as engines of economic prosperity and growth. Personalized, quality products are replacing mass-produced, quantity products as the products of choice in the marketplace and for a community to support. A changing dynamic environment is more attractive to knowledge workers -- individuals who are valued for their ability to act and communicate with knowledge within a specific subject area - - than the rigid and predictive environment some old economy

businesses – such as manufacturing – may have demanded. Information, innovation and empowerment are replacing control and discipline as the usual model for success and prosperity.



## Together, we can move forward

A basic premise of this plan is that data, tools and analysis are essential, but not enough. Regional development requires public and private leaders who are open to change, who share a strategic vision and who build enduring partnerships to achieve that vision.

To promote innovation, we need new habits to think and act together. In region after region, the central challenge involves moving people out of old patterns of thought and behavior. The best way to move past these old traps is to form new collaborations across organizational and political boundaries.

The irony is, of course, that these boundaries are, for the most part, no longer boundaries at all. In a world of global competition and the Internet, traditional boundaries – often drawn decades

ago -- simply limit our thinking of what is possible. When you think about it, submitting our thinking to these boundaries doesn't make much sense. It's a little like driving your car by looking in the rear-view mirror.



*“The visioning process was important –and successful–in bringing together a cross-section of people representing our communities, to share their concerns and ideas for our county. I found it somewhat surprising, and encouraging, that we found so many common themes; that we were already thinking along the same lines for increased visibility and prosperity. That common ground will provide good impetus to move the process forward to action.”*

**-Janet Wilt (retired)  
Shiawassee American  
Red Cross Council Member,  
Owosso First United Methodist Church**

# Our Vision

**Shiawassee County and its people will be a region with increased and sustainable prosperity recognized as a model and destination in the Great Lakes region.**

## Our challenges can be transformative

The following are foundational elements that we must have as a region to be successful in the New Economy. These are the base upon which we will build broad focus areas. These elements reflect the broader vision of what Shiawassee County needs to become in order to meet its economic purpose within the greater region:

- We will encourage community involvement in decisionmaking.
- We will be welcoming and value a diversity of backgrounds and ideas.
- We will support and invest in all types of mobility, such as public transportation options and better walkability within communities.
- We will promote green practices and creation of strong linkages between cities, agriculture and our natural resources.
- We will support and invest in a 21st-century educational system which encourages lifelong learning.
- We will encourage government and community cooperation, flexibility and adaptability.
- We will foster innovation to support a growing economy and entrepreneurship.

*“Our community has been through these visioning and stakeholder exercises previously. The result was a lot of great ideas without a lot of focus. This plan includes components from all sectors and addresses a cross section of factors that comprise the way of life, economic development, and core values essential to the beliefs of the people who live here. It is a roadmap for success. We need to be wise enough now to follow the map.”*

**-Pam Harkema  
Community Resident  
& Entrepreneur**

As part of an asset-based economic development strategy, it is critical to document the negative issues that stand in the way of progress but hold great potential for significant transformation.

If negatives are transformed into positives, the opportunity to launch the region forward increases exponentially.

These are some of the negative assets that were identified during the public visioning process in Shiawassee County:

- **Government silos** whereby cities and townships work independently rather than together
- **Labor force issues**, such as lack of workers trained in new technologies
- **Lack of education attainment**
- **Reluctancy to take economic risks**
- **Lack of youth attractors**, such as nightlife, unique restaurants and cultural opportunities
- **Losing youth** and talent
- **Lack of unified voice**
- **Lack of civic participation**
- **Fading investment in social capital**, such as personal networks and other one-to-one connections
- **Economic activity not diverse**



# Successful Economies Are Built On Unique Assets

In the New Economy, strategic assets can be defined as a set of unique resources (and the mix of resources) that can be highlighted to make a region distinct in attracting resilient and sustainable growth and worldwide business opportunities. Only regions with strategies that match their assets and their vision can prosper in the New Economy.

Winners are those regions that leverage existing assets and build new, unique and compatible ones –things you can't take away.

The following are Shiawassee County's strategic assets that can be leveraged in the New Economy.

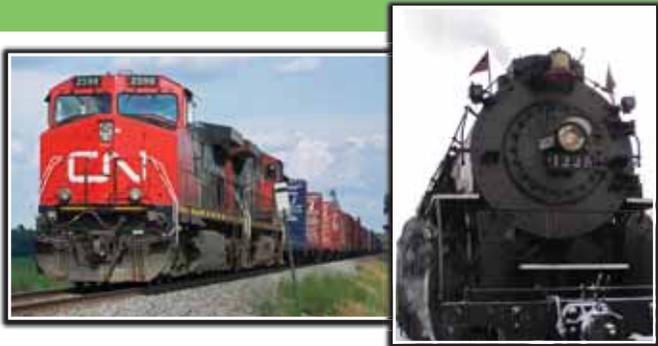
## “Place” Components in Small Towns

Our small towns and urban areas have the building blocks of places that attract people to their communities: arts; unique, locally owned retail and service establishments; restaurants; parks and places that are not home or work where you can meet friends.



## Trains

The rail industry/infrastructure is well developed and rich in history, and there is associated tourism and economic activity.



## Memorial Healthcare

Memorial Healthcare continues to be an anchor for employment and quality of life for the region and shows promise to provide for job growth as healthcare demand grows.



## Nonprofit Network

Shiawassee County has a strong network of nonprofit and service organizations that collaborate and form partnerships to provide services to the residents of the county.

## Safe Small Cities & Towns

Shiawassee County has lower crime rates than most of its neighboring counties and is made up of safe, friendly small towns and cities.



## Rivers

The Shiawassee, Maple and Looking Glass Rivers are tremendous natural resources that define our communities, provide scenic beauty and offer recreational opportunities. They have sufficient flow for recreational boating and fishing. Although their make-up and flow can vary with soil shifting after storms, and dams sometimes deaden the current and affect aquatic life and water quality adversely, the county's rivers are a significant asset.



## Location

Being in the middle of three metro areas (Lansing, Flint and Saginaw/Midland) places the county close to regional service-business development and education opportunities for commuters.

## Transportation Infrastructure

The region is rich in transportation infrastructure as it sits next to the I-69 freeway corridor and is also linked by various state highways. Three rail lines run through the county and form a connection point in Durand.



## Baker College

With many talented professional educators and a diverse curriculum, Baker College is a shining example of adaptation to existing conditions and is a foundation for improvement in the area's educational environment.



## Rural Landscape & Farmland

Large parcels of farmland and undisturbed natural areas are plentiful within the county and represent significant advantages going forward both for agriculture and recreation.



## Our Focus Areas

There are strategic building blocks that will guide the region as it moves forward. Each building block addresses a specific issue that is critically important to support the economic development of the region. Within each of the focus areas are initiatives that reflect desired outcomes of these broad

strategies. The initiatives identified with each of the areas are the result of public input sessions that focused on strategies based on the assets and the vision elements discussed in earlier workshops. These ideas are by no means the only ones that can be generated, however, especially if we work together.

### 1. Improve collaboration, cooperation and communication between governments

This framework broadly defines economic development as:

- workforce development
- community development
- urban and regional planning
- tourism and cultural development

Successful regional growth requires the consideration, involvement and coordination of all those who stand to benefit rather than the compartmentalization that has typically occurred in the past. We must improve the delivery and result of government services by focusing them at the regional level and making them more anticipatory, more responsive, more efficient, more cost effective and more collaborative.

- Create Shiawassee Intergovernmental Collaborative.
- Strengthen collaboration between school districts and consolidate services where efficient.
- Move toward uniform zoning standards, language and permits across all units of government in the county.

### 2. Assist, accelerate & attract business, and support innovation & entrepreneurs

A robust, focused and dependable regional business development effort is essential to assist existing businesses and maintain existing jobs; grow new jobs by accelerating business growth; and attract new businesses and jobs to the region. Needed is a set of targeted business services designed to assist existing businesses, accelerate the growth of emergent businesses, and **attract** new businesses.

Entrepreneurs have led the United States out of every recession in the last 100 years and, in

2007, companies less than five years old created nearly two-thirds of net new jobs. **Nurturing an entrepreneurial culture and supporting small business entry and expansion efforts is critical to Shiawassee County's economic diversification and job growth.** Numerous organizations provide services and programs to support these ventures. Due to the dispersed nature of these providers, however, it can be difficult for entrepreneurs to locate needed resources.

- Create business incubators and business assistance centers in downtowns. Leverage existing talent to provide services.
- Expand "Live Here, Work Here" assistance program (Growing Hometown Futures, for example, which seeks to bring former county residents and their businesses back to the area, or encourage alumni to start businesses here).
- Offer more resources for those wishing to start a business.

An important part of the economic development road map is the focus on specific industrial "clusters" that hold particular opportunity for the region. Clusters are interrelated businesses that co-locate regionally, feed off one another and compete effectively. Frequently clusters develop on their own; however, they can be nurtured. Clusters share specialized infrastructure, labor markets and services, and are faced with common opportunities and threats. Business clusters are a driving force in the New Economy. Clusters spur innovation. Clusters are less vulnerable than sectors, however, because talent remains even if a particular company leaves.

*"It offers the opportunity to raise the standard of living and quality of life in our township. This can be made possible by initiating collaborative efforts to unify Shiawassee County's economic mission, improving the business climate, encouraging entrepreneurship, and cultivating talent through educational initiatives."*

**-Les Loynes  
Supervisor,  
Fairfield Township**



## Our Focus Areas

These clusters are the areas of focus for assistance, acceleration and attraction:

- Agriculture and Agribusiness
- Tourism and Culture
- Advanced and Flexible Manufacturing
- Logistics

These clusters were identified through public meeting prioritization which focused on data and assets, and specialized studies called location quotient analysis, occupation cluster analysis, firm composition and growth analysis.

### 3. Support, develop and leverage natural areas and assets

One of the keys to attracting the right mix of talent is to provide a place that is attractive to the creative class. This requires building on the natural amenities in a region. These include fixed assets such as farmland and strategic assets such as parks and open space, river access and outdoor recreation opportunities. "Green infrastructure," as these assets are known, becomes part of the persona of a place, but it is hard to create if the fixed natural assets are not present to begin with.

- Enhance awareness of Shiawassee and other river amenities.
- Develop a green infrastructure plan for the county.
- Create an agricultural economic development plan countywide.
- Design a comprehensive parks and recreation plan for the county.

### 4. Talent Creation and Retention

**Regional competitiveness begins with talent.** Thus, regions need to develop systems that equip public and private leaders with 21st-century skills, along with continued support of the "human" capital of workers and entrepreneurs throughout the region.

*"I attended all of the visioning sessions because I believe Shiawassee County needs to rethink its position in the region, state and nation. Knowing that we have many natural resources - river, agriculture, safe rural communities, etc. - and man-made resources - train capital, transportation hub, quaint cities & villages, etc. - is one thing. Getting that word out to potential entrepreneurs and residents is another."*

**-Larry Alpert  
SATA Manager**

We must do a better job of producing a globally competent future workforce with the attitudinal, critical thinking and intellectual skills to efficiently produce and adapt as necessary to changing economic circumstances. This will require us to develop and implement initiatives to infuse a culture of lifelong education by increasing parents' and students' recognition that education is essential for future prosperity for themselves and the region.

Successful regions are capable of converting this brainpower into wealth through effective innovation and entrepreneurship networks. Innovation is increasingly a regional phenomenon, and competitive regions are building effective innovation systems that create the climate in which new ideas sprout at rapid rates. Innovation provides the process and entrepreneurship provides the temperament and skills to translate ideas into wealth through new products, new services and new markets. A region's networks also define the support systems that underpin entrepreneurial success.

- Expand and promote county-wide career center.
- Increase entrepreneurial and skilled trades education in K-12 school systems.
- Support, expand and invest in a system of early childhood education.

### 5. Placemaking

Placemaking is all about creating unique and vibrant places to enhance our quality of life and to attract talent and businesses. Collectively, a metropolitan area comprises dozens of unique places, such as arts centers, sports venues, walkable downtowns and neighborhoods, restaurants and nightlife, among many others.

Regions must invest in the planning and infrastructure to create quality, connected places. Talent and high-growth companies are mobile. They can locate virtually anywhere.



## Our Focus Areas

They will choose to locate in regions that value connected, safe, convenient and healthy places to live and work. Connectivity requires infrastructure to facilitate internal and external communications: strategic transportation links and information technology connections. Connectivity extends beyond these physical connections, however, to activities that explicitly focus on building networks among people.

If a region wants to strategically improve its economic conditions, however, it should start by targeting a smaller set of places in the region that could benefit from improvement to make them more attractive for employees, tourists, business owners and young knowledge workers. The resulting improvements to place will be attractive to citizens of all ages.

- Create a train-based cultural tourism network countywide.
- Expand and reinforce arts and cultural opportunities throughout the county.
- Improve mobility (transportation) options beyond the automobile that connect destinations.
- Create a youth-based activity center, such as an aquatic center.

### 6. Market, brand and promote the county as a region with one voice

Successful regions tell their story through powerful experiences and effective marketing. Branding not only creates value for the region's products for international buyers, it also creates the sense of identity necessary to spur collaboration. Frankenmuth serves as a powerful example of

*"With the opening of the Lebowsky Theater and the continuing operation of the Studio Theater, the focus of the Owosso Community Players will be on providing Shiawassee County and mid-Michigan with a performing arts center. The sub-regional plan is essential to featuring and enhancing the entertainment opportunities here."*

**-Linda Keenan  
Executive Director,  
Owosso Community Players**

successful branding that has given beer, sausage and a Bavarian tourist destination distinct market value that has translated into a much stronger regional economy over time. International branding expert Simon Anholt has coined the term "competitive identity" to more clearly represent the importance of place-branding in the global arena (2007).

*"We are thrilled to see the high energy level and commitment by so many people to the planning process to identify and address the needs in Shiawassee County. Memorial Healthcare believes our region has the assets, enthusiasm, and teamwork to put this plan in place. We look forward to partnering with so many to build a stronger, more vibrant Shiawassee County."*

**-Jim Full  
President & CEO,  
Memorial Healthcare**

By developing a competitive identity, a region does much more for itself than simply "marketing." The process of branding requires many of the same steps needed for region-building, strategic planning and regional investment alignment: developing common goals, creating a common vision (e.g., "who we are" and "what we represent to the world"), discovering regional strengths and so on. **Success projects positive images to both residents and outsiders; they in turn create a "buzz" that retains and attracts brainpower.** A region's brand represents the stories that citizens of a region tell about themselves. The stories create a shared understanding of the region's distinct identity and its economic potential. Increasingly, regional leadership requires the skills of telling engaging stories and compelling narratives linking a region's past strengths to its future opportunities.

- Create a one-stop-shop for all information on community assets and services.
- Expand the role of the convention and visitors' bureau.
- Market "third places" in communities (i.e., where people, often entrepreneurs, go to socialize, network and brainstorm).



## So what's next?

Shiawassee in Motion 1.0 is clearly visionary. There are many new and innovative ideas as well as calls for change that may be difficult and take time. But the communities throughout Shiawassee County have shown their ability to rally together time and time again. We are now at a crossroads with an opportunity to choose how we will again rally together.

Thank you to the many, many organizations and individuals who have participated in this well-planned, well-managed and intentional process. Thank you to Glenn Pape, land use educator with MSU Extension's Greening Michigan Institute and the MSU Land Policy Institute, for his leadership, knowledge and research. Thanks to the Shiawassee Regional Chamber of Commerce for coordinating the initiative. And thanks to the Cook Family Foundation for its generous funding of the planning process. Voices have been heard and ideas are on the table. The results will speak for themselves.

The next step is to develop an implementation plan for Shiawassee in Motion 1.0. Many hands and minds are at work right now to make that happen. But remember: this is a community effort. If you'd like to be involved, even in a small way, we'd love to have you. For more information, contact The Shiawassee Regional Chamber of Commerce at 989-723-5149 or visit [www.shiawasseechamber.org](http://www.shiawasseechamber.org).

**See you in motion soon!**



***"The only way to control your future is to create it."***

**Are you ready?**

**[shiawasseechamber.org](http://shiawasseechamber.org)  
[www.facebook.com/shiawasseechamber](https://www.facebook.com/shiawasseechamber)  
[cookfamilyfoundation.org](http://cookfamilyfoundation.org)**

## The People & Process Behind the Plan

A very diverse group of individuals and organizations helped develop Shiawassee in Motion 1.0. Most volunteered their time or were funded by a grant from the Cook Family Foundation.

Glenn Pape, MSU Land Policy Institute  
 Research, visioning and planning facilitator

Shiawassee Regional Chamber of Commerce  
 Program Coordinator

- Cities and townships throughout the county
- Healthcare, human service and community nonprofits
- K-12 and higher education students & representatives
- Transportation and mobility industries
- Manufacturers and investors
- Economic and small business developers
- Current and emerging entrepreneurs
- Marketing communication professionals
- Regional elected officials
- Financial institutions
- Community foundations
- Shiawassee Regional Chamber, Convention & Visitors' Bureau and Economic Development Partnership board members
- Laingsburg Business & Community Association and Durand-Area Chamber representatives
- Area festival and event representatives

*"The subregional plan provided an avenue for citizens of Shiawassee County to weigh in on issues that affect all of us today. The information outlined within Shiawassee in Motion 1.0 captures our collaborative ideas and visions to assist in social and economic stabilization and future opportunities for our residents, businesses and those who lead us."*

**-Amy J. Roddy  
 City Manager, City of Durand**

These people came together in community visioning sessions, focus groups and town hall meetings. MSU researchers conducted demographic studies, looked at business growth and retention, new and lost jobs, financial and other data, and compared Shiawassee County to other regions of the state and country. The Shiawassee in Motion 1.0 plan was then created by combining the quantitative, scientific research with the goals and visions of the very people who live, work and contribute here.



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