

News Release
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New Project to Help Communities Move Forward With The Grand Vision

TRAVERSE CITY, MI— The Northwest Michigan Council of Governments (NWMCOG) has begun a large-scale project for the six-county region of Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, and Wexford. Titled *Framework for Our Future*, the project is a grassroots effort to help local decision makers define and implement The Grand Vision in their communities.

“Local governments tell us that they need something much more specific when it comes to The Grand Vision,” said Matt McCauley, Director of Regional Planning & Community Development at NWMCOG. “The original Grand Vision process provided a vision for the future – what the priority issues are – but communities are struggling with how to make it happen.”

Getting at the *how* is the primary point of the Framework for Our Future project. The six guiding principles established by The Grand Vision are big-picture vision statements, but the action steps are not as well defined. According to McCauley, this has caused many to assume that The Grand Vision did not provide everything it was intended to. But it is really up to each community to create its own action steps that reflect its unique character and interests. “The Framework project is a way that local governments, business leaders, citizens, and local organizations can work together, share best practices, and determine which planning and implementation tools are best suited for them,” McCauley said.

NWMCOG and fifteen partner organizations began the project in mid-2012. The first phase was to conduct research and collect data related to the four primary issue areas: Transportation, Housing, Commercial Corridors, and Energy. This data collection included gathering inventories, reports, plans, and other existing sources of information. It also included two widespread surveys: a web-based survey on priorities around energy production, and a random sample telephone survey about the public’s perception of The Grand Vision. Results of these surveys are available on The Grand Vision web site, thegrandvision.org, and are being analyzed in relation to the project as a whole.

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The process continues next month with opportunities for public input. NWMCOG will host six Input Expos in April – one in each of The Grand Vision counties. These Input Expos will give community members a chance to share their ideas, concerns, and suggestions for community development.

“We want people to tell us not only what they’d like to see in their communities, but how to make it happen,” said NWMCOG Regional Planner Sarah Lucas. “If you feel passionate about a topic, like transit or affordable housing, give us strategies and action steps for your community.” The Input Expos will feature activities that will help community members turn their ideas into strategies. A list of discussion topics is available at nwm.org/framework. All of the input gathered at the events will be included in the final Framework product.

The Input Expos will also feature information and a variety of resources around housing, transportation, commercial corridors, and energy, along with some of the projects, strategies and activities that have occurred around those issues. “The expos will be a chance for the public to learn key facts about these issues, hear about successful strategies and projects from throughout the region, and get updates on survey results and other project activities,” Lucas said.

The Input Expos run from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. in an open house format. Dates and locations are:

Monday, April 22: Benzie (Mills Community House)
Tuesday, April 23: Kalkaska (Kaliseum)
Wednesday, April 24: Wexford (Cadillac Junior High School)
Thursday, April 25: Antrim (Bellaire Senior Center)
Monday, April 29: Leelanau (Leelanau Hort. Research Center)
Tuesday, April 30: Grand Traverse (Hagerty Center)

Pre-registration is not required, but is encouraged. Go to nwm.org/framework to RSVP. All events are free to attend. Door prizes, refreshments and childcare will be provided.

While the Input Expos provide an in-person venue for community members to interact, there is a web-based opportunity for citizen input as well. The Framework for Our Future project is the first to use a new, local, public input web site called “Let’s Decide How.” Any member of the public can share ideas, concerns, and suggestions, and carry on conversations related to community development. Go to letsdecidehow.org to sign up and participate.

Funding for Framework for Our Future is provided by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, with in-kind funding provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Michigan Department of Transportation, and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

For more information on the project, the Input Expos, and the Lets Decide How web site, visit nwm.org/framework.

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NOTE to Media: Images are oftentimes available upon request by e-mailing Tom White at tomwhite@nwm.cog.mi.us and stating preferences for resolution (300 dpi?), file format (.tif? .jpg?) and file size (1MB or less?). Or, phone (231) 929-5044. Check our online Media Room at: nwm.org/media

Founded in 1974, the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments (NWMCOG) facilitates and manages various programs and services for the 10-county region. These programs include Northwest Michigan Works, YouthBuild, Small Business & Technology Development Center, Procurement Technical Assistance Center, various business services, and many different regional planning initiatives in response to our communities' requests and needs. You will see the broad spectrum of workforce, business and community services NWMCOG offers if you visit our web site, nwm.org

NWMCOG's member counties are: Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford.