TRAVERSE CONNECT · REGIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Grand Traverse Regional Readiness Index

PURPOSE, DESIGN, AND USE

This paper is the companion research document behind Traverse Connect's Grand Traverse Regional Readiness Index, the interactive, continuously updated tool that scores Grand Traverse County and its 16 cities, townships, and villages against a transparent, evidence-based rubric.

The Index is a live platform with periodic updates and scores revisited as new public records surface. What follows documents why it was built, how the scoring methodology works, and of its findings as of October 2026, as the evidentiary case for the tool and a complete reference for those who prefer to have both in the same document.

EXPLORE THE LIVE INDEX

Visit the Grand Traverse Regional Readiness Index webpage to view current scores for Grand Traverse County and each of its 16 cities, townships, and villages, compare jurisdictions, and track updates as new data is released.

traverseconnect.com/grand-traverse-regional-readiness-index

Prepared by Traverse Connect

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Traverse City region is one of Michigan's fastest-growing regions, and that growth is projected to continue. Grand Traverse County's population has grown 25% over the past 25 years and nearly 150% since 1970. State projections show the county growing 5.5% by 2035, more than three times Michigan's projected pace. Growth at this scale is an opportunity for the regional economy, and making the most of it depends on coordination and preparation, with local governments working together across boundaries, current plans and zoning, infrastructure capacity in place ahead of demand, the tools to support businesses, and housing supply that meets and paces demand.

The Grand Traverse Regional Readiness Index is Traverse Connect's response: a transparent, evidence-based tool, maintained as a living interactive scorecard, that scores the county and each of its 16 local governments across five equally weighted categories: Regional Collaboration, Zoning & Land Use, Infrastructure Readiness, Business Climate, and Housing Supply. Every score traces back to a cited public record, not to opinion or characterization.

The question the Index is built to answer

How does this jurisdiction's readiness compare to its peers, whether that is Grand Traverse County against other fast-growing Michigan counties, or one township against others with a similar economic and land-use profile?

Applied at the county level, the Index shows Grand Traverse trailing Ottawa, Washtenaw, and Livingston counties, Michigan's other fast-growing counties, in every category except Business Climate (where it edges out Livingston) and on the overall average, with the gap narrowest on Infrastructure Readiness and widest on Housing Supply. Applied inside the county, the same rubric scores all 16 jurisdictions, grouped into three peer tiers by economic and land-use character (Commercial Core, Expansion Belt, and Rural Communities), so that a small township is measured against comparable peers, not against Traverse City.

The purpose of the Index is not to rank winners and losers. It exists to give elected officials, local staff, and private-sector leaders a shared, factual starting point for three things: prioritizing which projects and policy changes matter most, directing technical assistance and investment where it will make a positive impact, and grounding that conversation in specific examples of communities in Michigan and beyond that have already solved similar problems. The Index includes eight recommendations, ranked by priority and proposing leadership at the appropriate level, each tied to a documented gap and, in most cases, a proven solution elsewhere.

This white paper explains why the Index was built, how its scoring methodology works, how Traverse Connect intends for elected officials, staff, and the public to use it, what the Index currently reveals, and the technical assistance Traverse Connect offers to help local units act on its recommendations. Two appendices collect examples from Michigan and the U.S. worth studying.

1 WHY THE REGION NEEDS A READINESS INDEX

Few places in Michigan are growing like the Traverse City region. Grand Traverse County has increased its population by 25% over the past 25 years, and the Grand Traverse region has grown at more than three times the statewide rate over the last decade. State forecasts expect this momentum to hold through 2035, keeping the region ahead of Michigan as a whole. Growth at this pace will keep testing how well local governments can plan, serve, and coordinate The communities that prepare for it now will be the ones that help shape it.

GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY

Population growth, past 25 years

+25%

Nearly +150% since 1970
Michigan: +2% over the same 25 years

TRAVERSE CITY MSA

Population growth, past 10 years

+5.6%

Michigan: +1.7%. More than three times the statewide rate

GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY

Projected population growth

+3.2% BY 2030

+5.5% BY 2035

Michigan: +1.1% by 2030, +1.5% by 2035

TRAVERSE CITY MSA

Projected population growth

+2.9% BY 2030

+4.9% BY 2035

More than three times Michigan's projected pace by 2035

Past growth: U.S. Census Bureau decennial census and Vintage 2024 Population Estimates (MSA figure 2014 to 2024, via MCDA). Projections: Michigan Center for Data and Analytics, County Population Projections through 2050 (Vintage 2024), measured from 2025. Traverse City MSA includes Grand Traverse, Benzie, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties.

Traverse Connect's role is to provide resources, technical assistance, and support, working alongside local units of government as a partner to strengthen their readiness. The Index gives elected officials and private-sector leaders a shared, factual basis, tied to public records and to comparable examples from Michigan and beyond, for prioritizing the steps that will help the region prepare for continued growth.

2 HOW THE INDEX IS DESIGNED

■ 2.1 Five Categories, Equally Weighted

The Index weighs five categories equally because each captures a different, non-substitutable lever of regional readiness: planning capacity, physical capacity, business support capacity, market supply, and coordination capacity. Good roads cannot offset weak zoning, and incentives can't offset thin housing supply; all five must move together.

⬡ Regional Collaboration — 20%, coordination capacity

No single municipality has the land, budget, or authority to solve region-scale problems, like public utilities, transit, and workforce, alone. Jurisdictions that formalize joint management bodies convert fragmented capacity into shared leverage instead of competing for the same limited resources.

Scoring rubric: Participation in intergovernmental joint bodies across nine service domains (water/sewer, fire/EMS, 911, planning & zoning, economic development, land bank/brownfield, transit, parks, assessing), with added weight for demonstrated formal joint authorities and a smaller bonus for any PA 425 revenue-sharing agreement.

Source: county board & authority rosters / joint-body articles

○ Zoning & Land Use — 20%, planning capacity

Zoning is the gate every project has to pass through first. A modern, flexible code turns market demand into approved projects quickly and predictably. An outdated one forces case-by-case negotiation that adds cost and delay and quietly rations what gets built, regardless of demand.

Scoring rubric: Master plan currency (adopted within 5 years); zoning ordinance modernity (rewrite, form-based code, or overlays); Redevelopment Ready Communities engagement (Certified > Essentials > none); and mixed-use or flexibility allowed by-right.

Source: local master plans / MEDC Redevelopment Ready Communities / State Zoning database

◎ Infrastructure Readiness — 20%, physical capacity

Water and sewer capacity, broadband, shovel-ready sites, and roads are the physical prerequisites for any new project. Public infrastructure has years-long lead times, so a jurisdiction without infrastructure already in place can't fast-track its way around gaps when a project is proposed.

Scoring rubric: Public sewer coverage; public water coverage; broadband availability (100/20 Mbps fixed); and shovel-ready sites plus road and corridor investment (local road funding, funded road and non-motorized projects, and corridor or access management plans).

Source: EGLE / USDA / FCC broadband map / Grand Traverse County Road Commission / MDOT / local budgets and minutes

◆ **Business Climate — 20%, support capacity**

Tax base diversity, incentive tools, and a track record of landing and retaining investment show whether a jurisdiction can close deals, not just attract interest.

Scoring rubric: Incentive tools available (DDA / TIF / BRA / CIA); commercial tax base, corridor, or anchor; business activity and registrations; and a named redevelopment pipeline or RRC sites.

Source: MI SOS / MEDC / State Treasury / Census Business Formation Statistics

△ **Housing Supply — 20%, market capacity**

Housing supply keeps a workforce within commuting range of local jobs. When permitting activity and housing diversity (ADUs, missing middle) fall behind the growth of regional population and employment, rising housing costs become a barrier to business growth and their ability to retain and attract talent.

Scoring rubric: Density and missing-middle housing permitted; ADU allowance and ease; recent permit and building activity; and buildable land plus a pro-housing posture.

Source: Census Building Permits / American Community Survey / MSHDA

■ 2.2 From Evidence to a Score

Four of the five categories, Zoning & Land Use, Infrastructure Readiness, Business Climate, and Housing Supply, are each built from four evidence sub-factors, rated 0 to 5 against the public record. Those ratings are compiled and placed on a 0-100 scale for the category. Within Infrastructure Readiness, the fourth sub-factor weighs site readiness alongside local road and corridor investment such as a township road millage or cost-share with the County Road Commission, funded road, intersection, trail, and sidewalk projects, and corridor or access management plans with MDOT or the Road Commission. Because Michigan townships do not own their roads, the Index credits the transportation choices a jurisdiction actually controls rather than pavement condition.

Regional Collaboration is scored differently, because collaboration shows up as participation, not as a static condition. It inventories a jurisdiction's role across nine intergovernmental service domains: water and sewer, fire and EMS, 911 dispatch, planning and zoning, economic development, land bank and brownfield authority, transit, parks and recreation, and shared assessing. Each domain is rated 0 to 3, and a bonus applies only when a domain is rated 3, “fully consolidated delivery,” sized to that domain's own weight; a domain rated 2, “formal joint authority,” is already credited in the base weighted sum and draws no separate bonus. A smaller bonus is available for a confirmed PA 425 conditional land transfer and revenue-sharing agreement, though as of this review none of the 16 local units have one.

The five category scores, all on the 0-100 scale, average into one overall Readiness Score. The score is a visible sum of its parts: users can trace a jurisdiction's overall number back to the five categories that produced it, and each category back to the sub-factors and sources behind it.

■ 2.3 What the Score Is Built to Answer

The Index is designed to answer a relative question: how does this jurisdiction's readiness compare to its peers, whether that is Grand Traverse County against other fast-growing Michigan counties, or one township against others with a similar economic and land-use profile? It is not designed to produce a precise, standalone rating, and a score should be read as a ranking tool and a conversation starter, not a judgment on any single municipality’s effort.

Every score traces back to a cited public record: an ordinance, a master plan, a permit record, or an authority's own records. Where the evidence is incomplete or a finding required judgment, the Index flags it rather than presenting an estimate.

3 WHAT THE INDEX SHOWS TODAY

■ 3.1 Grand Traverse County Among Its Michigan Peers

Michigan Peer County Comparison

Grand Traverse County is benchmarked against Ottawa, Washtenaw, and Livingston, the Michigan counties facing the most comparable population and housing pressures, across five equally-weighted criteria: Regional Collaboration, Zoning & Land Use, Infrastructure Readiness, Business Climate, and Housing Supply.

Category	Grand Traverse	Ottawa	Washtenaw	Livingston
Regional Collaboration	4th 55	2nd 70	1st 72	3rd 55
Zoning & Land Use	4th 62	2nd 82	1st 88	3rd 68
Infrastructure Readiness	4th 65	1st 88	2nd 85	3rd 72
Business Climate	3rd 65	2nd 88	1st 92	4th 62
Housing Supply	4th 38	2nd 55	3rd 40	1st 60
Overall Average	4th 57	1st 77	2nd 75	3rd 63

Scores 0-100 based on publicly available data · Rankings within peer group only · Updated annually.

Grand Traverse currently ranks last of the four counties on Regional Collaboration, Zoning & Land Use, Infrastructure Readiness, and Housing Supply, and third on Business Climate, edging out Livingston. The gap is narrowest on Infrastructure Readiness and widest on Housing Supply, where Grand Traverse County trails the others by at least 17 points. These differences are a starting point for learning what has worked in comparable counties, not a final determination.

■ 3.2 Sixteen Jurisdictions, Three Peer Tiers

Grand Traverse County

REGIONAL READINESS INDEX

Assessment of 16 jurisdictions across the same five equally-weighted criteria, grouped into three peer tiers by economic and land-use character, so that jurisdictions are compared against their true peers..

▲ outperforming — pacing ▼ underperforming

Performance reflects a jurisdiction's readiness score relative to its own tier peers, adjusted for size and capacity, not on a fixed grading scale. A village outperforming its tier can carry more useful lessons for the rest of the county than a larger entity merely keeping pace.

Commercial Core

The county's three largest, most commercially anchored jurisdictions: development tools already in place or being actively built, major redevelopment sites, and the biggest population and tax base in the county.

Jurisdiction	Type	Population	Score	Performance
Traverse City	City	15,678	**79/100**	— pacing
Garfield Township	Township	19,499	**79/100**	— pacing
East Bay Township	Township	11,589	**77/100**	— pacing

Expansion Belt

Communities absorbing real growth pressure radiating out from the core, whether through highway-corridor development (Blair, Acme, Whitewater), lakefront residential growth (Long Lake), an active downtown redevelopment pipeline (Kingsley), or steady residential growth around the Village of Kingsley (Paradise).

Jurisdiction	Type	Population	Score	Performance
Kingsley Village ★ MOST IMPROVED	Village	1,431	**73/100**	▲ outperforming
Acme Township	Township	4,456	**64/100**	▲ outperforming
Blair Township	Township	8,994	**60/100**	— pacing
Green Lake Township	Township	6,703	**49/100**	— pacing
Whitewater Township	Township	2,688	**45/100**	— pacing
Long Lake Township	Township	9,956	**40/100**	▼ underperforming
Paradise Township	Township	4,952	**32/100**	▼ underperforming

Rural Communities

Limited commercial base, modest or preservation-minded growth, and in most cases too little staff capacity to run planning or utilities independently. Peninsula Township is a population outlier and manages growth by choice, not by capacity constraint, in an effort to preserve its agricultural identity.

Jurisdiction	Type	Population	Score	Performance
Fife Lake Township	Township	1,526	**44/100**	▲ outperforming
Fife Lake Village	Village	456	**44/100**	▲ outperforming
Grant Township	Township	1,212	**29/100**	— pacing
Union Township	Township	514	**26/100**	— pacing
Mayfield Township	Township	1,786	**31/100**	▼ underperforming
Peninsula Township	Township	6,068	**39/100**	▼ underperforming

Performance reflects a jurisdiction's scoring in relation to the size and capacity of that unit of government compared with its peer group.

★ WHY KINGSLEY IS MOST IMPROVED

Kingsley Village posted the most significant improvement of any jurisdiction in the Index, reaching 73/100 and outperforming its Expansion Belt peers. Much of that gain traces to planning and zoning. In May 2026, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation certified Kingsley as a Redevelopment Ready Community, the top tier in the Index's rubric, building on a master plan updated in 2025. Grant funding has been central to the rest: the Village has secured more than $3.7 million in county, state, and federal grants for lead service line replacement, water main upgrades, the South Brownson Avenue reconstruction, and the Brownson Memorial Park renovation.

4 HOW THE INDEX SHOULD BE USED

■ 4.1 Audience and Purpose

The Index is built for three overlapping audiences: elected officials and municipal staff deciding what to prioritize, private-sector and civic leaders making the case for investment, and Traverse Connect's own staff directing technical assistance where it makes the greatest positive impact. For all three, the goal is the same: replace opinion and anecdote with a shared, factual starting point.

■ 4.2 Eight Recommendations, Ranked by Priority

Recommendations

RANKED PRIORITIES FOR THE COUNTY AND LOCAL UNITS

Eight recommendations in two tiers. The top five are where Grand Traverse County and its local units of government can make the most progress soonest. Tier Two covers longer-term structural changes that require foundational work now. Each name who should lead, and county commitments carry dates.

Top Five Recommendations

Near-term moves with the highest payoff, ranked in order.

1 **Confirm EPIC-GT interoperability directly with participating jurisdictions, or migrate to BS&A, by defined checkpoints** Decision needed · High impact

WHO LEADS Grand Traverse County

Grand Traverse County reports incremental progress toward EPIC-GT adoption. By April 30, 2027, the county should publish a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction interoperability and adoption timeline developed with the participating townships. By December 31, 2027, it should either confirm full adoption across all 16 jurisdictions or, if functionality is still an issue, consider moving to BS&A or a similar platform.

2 **Build a countywide planning, zoning, and permitting coordination, anchored by the new Community Development Department** Higher effort · High impact

WHO LEADS Grand Traverse County, with all local units

By June 30, 2027, the new Community Development Department should adopt a standing, voluntary workgroup, with participating local units and a shared work plan, where they align zoning updates, share planning and permitting staff and data, and adopt electronic permitting together. Local units should use it to extend models that already work rather than planning in isolation, with transportation investment following the shared land-use work.

3 **Formalize PA 425 and joint-service agreements in Kingsley/Paradise and the Fife Lakes, with county facilitation** Fast · High impact

WHO LEADS Kingsley, Paradise, and the Fife Lakes, with county facilitation

Kingsley sits entirely inside Paradise Township; a joint planning commission plus shared assessing or public works would keep the two from zoning the same boundaries in opposing directions. Fife Lake Village and Township already share a sewer authority and a zoning administrator, and the next step is a written interlocal agreement with clear cost sharing. Consolidation is still worth revisiting after the August 2026 vote fell short. The county should ask both pairs by March 31, 2027, whether they want to pursue a PA 425 pilot and begin a defined facilitation role within 90 days of confirmed interest.

4 **Coordinate the east and west corridors** Higher effort · High impact

WHO LEADS Green Lake and Blair (west); East Bay, Acme, and Whitewater (east)

The county's west corridor (US-31 from Interlochen through Chums Corner in Blair Township) and the east corridor (East Bay's US-31 shoreline through Acme and along M-72 toward the Kalkaska County line) are each being planned node by node. Each needs one coordinated effort, through a shared corridor authority or service agreement, covering water and sewer feasibility, access management, and placemaking.

5 **Stand up a proactive business community engagement function** Fast · Medium impact

WHO LEADS Local units, with business partners

Business Climate scores reflect the tools a jurisdiction uses, but the business community has documented concerns that local commissions and staff aren't receptive to its needs. An ombudsman-style function, whether housed at Traverse Connect, the local MTA group, or elsewhere, should actively seek out business feedback and give businesses one consistent channel for both general concerns and jurisdiction-specific disputes.

Tier Two: Longer-Term Structural Changes

Bigger governance and service changes with structural payoff. They take longer, so the groundwork should start now.

6 **Modernize and expand the DPW into a full countywide utility** Slower · Structural payoff

WHO LEADS County BPW and member jurisdictions

The county DPW is limited and under strain. Expand it into the full countywide water and sewer authority its enabling statute already allows. Garfield, East Bay, Acme, and Traverse City have standing to push the governance review forward, and Blair, which owns its own water and sewer outright, is the clearest next member.

7 **Coordinate a joint PA 425 corridor tax-sharing framework** Slower · Structural payoff

WHO LEADS Traverse City with Garfield, East Bay, Blair, Acme, and Long Lake

Garfield, East Bay, Blair, Acme, and Long Lake should build one PA 425 conditional-transfer and revenue-sharing framework with Traverse City for corridor sites instead of separate one-off deals. The point is sharing the corridor's tax base and coordinating growth, not utility access, which all five already have.

8 **Pursue a countywide fire and EMS authority, sub-regional consolidation as the fallback** Slower · Structural payoff

WHO LEADS County and local fire and EMS providers

A countywide fire and EMS authority, extending the model Metro Fire (Garfield, Acme, and East Bay) already proved, would spread staffing and equipment costs across the widest possible base and give Traverse City a coordinated alternative to building its own ambulance service. Southern and western sub-regional authorities are the fallback.

Recommendations are ranked by priority, weighing effort and impact, not by jurisdiction size · Reviewed periodically as underlying facts change.

■ 4.3 Using the Index Responsibly

A Readiness score is a starting point for a conversation, not a final determination. Three principles govern how Traverse Connect intends the Index to be used.

It Ranks, It Does Not Rate

A score exists to compare one jurisdiction's readiness to its peers, not to serve as a precise, standalone measurement. Two jurisdictions a couple of points apart are, in practical terms, tied.

It Is Current, Not Fixed

The Index is updated as new public records surface, and jurisdiction-level detail is revisited whenever underlying facts change. A score reflects the record on the date it was reviewed, not as a concrete determination..

It Flags What It Does Not Know

Where evidence is incomplete or a finding required judgment rather than a documented record, the Index notes this rather than presenting an estimate as settled fact.

5 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The Index shows where each jurisdiction stands and what would move it forward. Taking action requires staff time, funding, and specialized expertise that many of the county's local units, particularly in the Expansion Belt and Rural Communities tiers, do not have in-house. Traverse Connect can provide technical assistance to local units of government that choose to enroll in its Regional Readiness partnership, either through a service agreement or as dues-paying members of Traverse Connect at a qualifying level. Enrolled jurisdictions receive support to implement the recommendations in Section 4.2 and the improvements identified in their scoring categories.

Kingsley Village shows what that kind of support can unlock. Working with partners including the county Land Bank Authority, which supplied funding and grant-writing capacity for the Brownson & Main redevelopment, the Village has secured more than $3.7 million in grant-funded projects and earned Redevelopment Ready Communities certification, making it the most improved jurisdiction in this year's Index.

■ 5.1 Grant Program Support

Traverse Connect will partner with enrolled local municipalities to identify and pursue funding, beginning with infrastructure needs such as sewer, water, broadband, and roads.

Traverse Connect and each municipality can match the jurisdiction's Index gaps to available state and federal programs, working from a shared calendar of deadlines and match requirements. Where neighbors share a need, Traverse Connect can help them pursue a joint application.

Once a municipality identifies a program to pursue, Traverse Connect can work with local staff to shape the application strategy: how the project fits the program's priorities, how to present the need using Index data, and what the program requires. Traverse Connect can review drafts before submission, help coordinate letters of support from partners across the region, and support reporting after an award.

■ 5.2 Planning, Coordination, and Other Assistance

Many of the Index's most impactful recommendations depend on two or more governments agreeing to act together, which can require outside convening. Traverse Connect serves this dedicated regional convener role and can bring enrolled jurisdictions together around shared planning, zoning, infrastructure, and permitting improvements.

Traverse Connect can organize the countywide coordination workgroup described in Recommendation 2, including a common standard for how jurisdictions respond to businesses and residents looking to locate or grow here. For the joint-service and PA 425 agreements in Recommendation 3, it can facilitate discussions and provide model agreements, rather than

each township drafting its own. Traverse Connect can also convene the east and west corridor groups in Recommendation 4 and the relevant jurisdictions for the longer-horizon reforms.

Traverse Connect will continue to act as the consistent point of contact for the business community to share concerns about local approvals and to gather feedback through quarterly and annual surveys. Small competitive awards may help enrolled jurisdictions complete planning, zoning, or technical work tied to a gap the Index documents. Periodic Index updates and re-scoring will document progress for jurisdictions undergoing reforms.

■ 5.3 How to Request Assistance

Local government administrators can contact Traverse Connect directly to enroll in the Regional Readiness partnership through a service agreement or as dues-paying members of Traverse Connect at a qualifying level. A jurisdiction then begins the process by stating its interest through a board resolution or by joining a formal partnership agreement with neighboring units, thereby making the jurisdiction eligible for coordinated support.

Requests for assistance are then submitted to Traverse Connect with the gap the jurisdiction wants to address and the help it is requesting, such as finding a grant, drafting a joint agreement, or updating a plan or an ordinance. Traverse Connect may also secure additional outside funding to provide technical assistance grants awarded competitively to local jurisdictions that submit joint collaboration projects in conjunction with other local units of government.

Priority goes to requests tied to a documented Index gap, to joint requests from two or more jurisdictions, and to projects ready to begin. Jurisdictions can also send corrections or new information to the Index at any time, as the evidence-based tool depends on the records local staff provides.

6 GOVERNANCE AND MAINTENANCE

The Grand Traverse Regional Readiness Index is built and maintained by Traverse Connect. Every score traces to a specific public record: zoning ordinances and master plans, permit and building activity, authority rosters and meeting minutes, U.S. Census and American Community Survey data, and state and federal sources including Michigan's Redevelopment Ready Communities program, the FCC's broadband availability map, County Road Commission and MDOT project and corridor records, and business registration records from the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. Where a jurisdiction's record is not provided on a given measure, the Index notes this rather than filling the gap with an assumption.

The Michigan county comparison is reviewed annually; jurisdiction-level scores, recommendations, and sources are revisited on an ongoing basis as new public records surface. Traverse Connect welcomes corrections and updated information directly from the jurisdictions the Index scores: an evidence-based tool is only as good as the record it draws from, and local unit staff members are often the fastest way to close a gap the public record has not yet caught up to.

7 CONCLUSION

None of the gaps the Grand Traverse Regional Readiness Index surfaces are unique to this region, and none of the fixes are hypothetical. Traverse Connect built the Index to give the region's elected officials, staff, and private sector a common, evidence-based place to start that work: one rubric applied consistently, one set of sources anyone can check, and one shared vocabulary for what readiness requires. The work ahead is coordination and follow-through, not invention.

That work cannot wait. Grand Traverse County has grown by roughly 25 percent over the past 25 years, and projections show that growth continuing. The pressure it places on housing, infrastructure, and land use is not going away; the only question is whether the region shapes that growth or simply absorbs it. Traverse Connect stands ready to help, offering data, technical assistance, and convening support to every jurisdiction prepared to act on what the Index shows.

APPENDIX A MICHIGAN EXAMPLES DOING IT WELL

Michigan communities showing strong practice in each of the Index's five categories, offered as working models to study alongside the scores in Section 3.

⬡ Regional Collaboration

DOING IT WELL

Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission

A single countywide planning body, not a standalone city or township department, that coordinates land use, community and economic development (including CDBG funding and redevelopment planning), and long-range planning strategy ("Our Future Genesee") across Genesee County's cities and townships, replacing dozens of separate efforts with one shared platform.

○ Zoning & Land Use

DOING IT WELL

Wexford Joint Planning Commission

Organized under Michigan's Joint Municipal Planning Act, the WJPC runs a single planning commission and zoning ordinance for ten member townships across Wexford County (Antioch, Boon, Cherry Grove, Hanover, Liberty, Selma, Slagle, South Branch, Springville, and Wexford) instead of each administering its own code and hearing its own variances.

◎ Infrastructure Readiness

DOING IT WELL

Great Lakes Water Authority

Formed in 2015 through a lease agreement between the City of Detroit and Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties, GLWA now provides wholesale water and sewer service to 127 municipalities, cities and townships alike, across eight southeast Michigan counties, replacing a single city-owned system with one regional utility jointly governed by its member communities.

◆ Business Climate

DOING IT WELL

Ottawa County Department of Strategic Impact

Consolidates economic development, planning, and community engagement into one office, giving the county a single, coordinated front door for site selection, incentives, and business retention across its cities and townships, rather than each competing separately for the same investment.

△ Housing Supply

DOING IT WELL

Washtenaw County Office of Community & Economic Development

Runs a county-administered affordable housing program that directs public funding toward housing projects across Washtenaw's cities and townships: a direct government function and policy choice, not a separate nonprofit doing the work at arm's length.

Examples are illustrative, drawn from public reporting, not a scored or comprehensive ranking.

National Peer Benchmarking

OUT-OF-STATE PLACES WORTH STUDYING

Micropolitan and small-metro regional service hubs with a similar mix of tourism, professional services, and a growing tech/innovation sector. None are perfect matches but each is included for one or two specific, transferable lessons, not as a wholesale model. All six have a significant university presence, which every one of these local economies leans on.

For scale: Grand Traverse County, population 95,238; the Traverse City MSA (Grand Traverse, Benzie, Kalkaska & Leelanau counties), population 153,448 (2020 Census); Northwestern Michigan College, 4,054 students (2024-25).

Population and enrollment figures are the most recent available as of this review (2025 estimates / 2024-25 academic year) · Updated periodically as these communities change.

Bozeman, MT

Population: City 58,814 · Gallatin County 128,740 (2025 est.) | University: Montana State University, ~17,165 students (record fall 2025 enrollment)

A ranching/university town turned Montana's leading tech and photonics hub: MSU research spinoffs (e.g., Bridger Photonics) and a legacy startup and acquisition business cycle (RightNow Technologies, sold to Oracle in 2012) seeded a real local investor and talent base. Healthcare, outdoor recreation, and a fast-growing airport (BZN) round it out; in-migration and housing costs are now the prominent strains on it local economy, closely mirroring Grand Traverse County.

> WHAT GT COUNTY CAN LEARN
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> On December 16, 2025, the City Commission gave final adoption to Ordinance 2151, replacing the entire Chapter 38 Unified Development Code and zoning map in one multi-year, Community Development Department-led rewrite, consolidating zoning districts and diversifying by-right housing types. A single, dated “replace-not-patch” rewrite gives builders and residents a hard date to plan around.

Source: City of Bozeman: Unified Development Code Adopted · Bozeman Daily Chronicle: UDC adoption coverage (December 17, 2025)

Findlay, OH

Population: City 40,313 (2020 Census; 2023 est. 40,139) | University: University of Findlay, ~4,100 students, private liberal-arts

A small city that punches far above its weight for corporate headquarters and large-scale capital investment: Marathon Petroleum has been headquartered there since 1990, and the local Whirlpool plant is the world's largest dishwasher-manufacturing facility by production. Best Buy, Lowe's, and Campbell Soup operate major distribution centers there too.

> **WHAT GT COUNTY CAN LEARN**
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> The Hancock Regional Planning Commission: a joint City of Findlay/Hancock County government planning office administers county subdivision regulations, provides zoning assistance directly to townships and villages, and reviews TIF districts and Enterprise Zones under one public roof, instead of each small township building its own planning capacity.

Source: Hancock Regional Planning Commission · Findlay, Ohio: Wikipedia (top employers, university)

Bend, OR

Population: City 107,342 · Bend-Redmond MSA (Deschutes County) 257,814 (2024-25) | University: Oregon State University-Cascades, ~1,401 students (small branch campus, targeting 3,000–5,000)

Milken Institute's #4 Best-Performing Small City in the U.S. (2025). Healthcare, retail, and professional/scientific/technical services lead private employment, layered onto a strong post-pandemic remote-work in-migration wave. Like Traverse City, Bend's economy is trying to balance a booming tourism identity with building a growing, year-round, high-wage professional sector.

> **WHAT GT COUNTY CAN LEARN**
>
> The City of Bend's own Growth Management Division is running a transparent, staff-led one-time Urban Growth Boundary expansion under Oregon Senate Bill 1537: a public, state-authorized land-use process that gives builders and residents predictability instead of ad hoc annexation fights.

Source: City of Bend: One-Time Urban Growth Boundary Expansion (SB 1537)

Burlington, VT

Population: City 44,019 · Burlington-South Burlington MSA 227,846 (2024-25) | University: University of Vermont, ~13,861 degree-seeking students, R1 research / land-grant institution

The mature version of the 'lifestyle-capital' model: healthcare/education (anchored by UVM and its medical center) and manufacturing (GlobalFoundries' large semiconductor fabrication facility in nearby Essex Junction) provide a real year-round wage base, with high-end tourism and a growing startup scene layered on top. Burlington's has established its economic balance with more firm footing than Traverse City has yet reached.

WHAT GT COUNTY CAN LEARN

PlanBTV is the City of Burlington's own Office of City Planning initiative, not a one-off consultant study; it fed a rewritten downtown zoning code and, as of “planBTV 2050” (launched April 30, 2026, uniting four city departments for the first time), is still actively converting comprehensive-plan goals into zoning-text changes on housing, mobility and economic development.

Source: City of Burlington: planBTV 2050 · WPTZ: “Burlington launches planBTV 2050 to shape city's future” (April 30, 2026)

Asheville, NC

Population: City 93,523 · Asheville MSA (4 counties) 414,711 (2024-25) | University: UNC Asheville, ~3,030 total enrollment (down from ~3,600 in 2018)

Though larger than Traverse City, Asheville is the clearest structural parallel. It is the economic engine for a vast rural/mountainous region, as Traverse City anchors Northwest Michigan. A strong regional healthcare concentration and a deliberately built food/beverage/arts economic-development strategy (Asheville brands itself “Beer City USA”) are core identity pillars; Hurricane Helene recovery (September 2024) is a major current overlay.

WHAT GT COUNTY CAN LEARN

The City of Asheville's own Development Services Department runs a single Permit Application Center and online development portal, and, since Hurricane Helene, stood up a government-run Floodplain Assistance Support Team (FAST) with a dedicated Development Liaison role: a public permitting department absorbing a disaster response in-house rather than outsourcing it.

Source: City of Asheville: Development Services · City of Asheville: Floodplain Assistance Support Team (FAST)

Bellingham, WA

Population: City 95,860 (2024 est.) · Whatcom County MSA 236,392 (2025 est.) | University: Western Washington University, ~14,710 students (Fall 2024)

Bellingham pairs a working port and tourism economy (San Juan Islands, Mt. Baker, 50 miles from Vancouver) with a research university and a growing professional-services and tech base, all under sustained in-migration pressure from Seattle and Vancouver spillover. Housing affordability has been a top civic issue for years, closely paralleling the amenity-driven cost pressures Traverse City faces.

WHAT GT COUNTY CAN LEARN

In January 2025, Whatcom County amended its long-standing Economic Development Investment (EDI) sales tax to make affordable and workforce housing an eligible use for the first time: repurposing existing economic-development tax capacity into a housing tool instead of asking voters to approve a new tax.

Source: Cascadia Daily News: "Whatcom County to invest $6.6M in housing, infrastructure projects" (September 11, 2025)