

# HEALTH, HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION

LEARNING CIRCLE GUIDE

September 11, 2024

## Circle Overview

Climate change may create demographic shifts and population changes that will influence infrastructure and services in our community. The goal of this learning circle was to identify and examine climate-related concerns that might affect transportation (e.g., roads, bridges, EV charging, public transit, etc), housing (e.g., zoning, affordability, unhoused populations, etc.), and public health (e.g., medical facilities, accessibility, illness and vulnerabilities, etc.).

Participants also discussed possible next steps and key organizations to be involved in continuing the conversation about these critical issues. The table conversations focused on building the groundwork for a long-term planning process that will enable Marquette to cope with climate-driven changes affecting public services and related infrastructure.

## What is Our Ideal Vision For the Future?

**Social & Cultural Aspects of Our Community:** Participants shared a vision for the social and cultural dynamics in our community. By 2049, there would be healthy lifestyles and less severe illness and hospitalizations. More youth and next-generation citizens will stay in and buy into the community, along with an engaged and active retired population that leverages their expertise. There would be diverse members of the community living in similar areas. The community overall would support proactive climate resiliency projects. Part of a proactive climate resilience project for example would include growing the local economy so we are less dependent on goods that have traveled long distances.

**Sustainable Infrastructure that Supports Healthcare, Transportation, and Housing:** Sustainable infrastructure would include electrification and efficiency in homes and our energy systems. The houses would be built out of sustainable materials. In addition to creating new infrastructure there would be adaptive reuse of existing structures for housing. With the need for more infrastructure in the health care and housing, an expansion of municipal sewer and water. Infrastructure to support public transportation, for example a light rail, would be a part of the ideal vision for the future. In addition there are multiple additions to support a mixed transit system such as electric bike and scooter infrastructure. Transportation services would connect rural communities to the city and will be reliable and timely. This change from car dependent transportation would create cleaner air, impacting public health.

**Affordability in Healthcare, Transportation and Housing Services:** The ideal vision for the future of Marquette includes affordability across all sectors - housing, transportation, and healthcare. An intergovernmental group could identify key sites to promote developing affordable housing. Since there is a need for more funding to create affordable transportation there could be road funding tied into other initiatives or money refunded from the gas tax. The priority will include being able to attract and retain young professionals, older generations and everyone in between with affordable public services.

**High-Density Community:** Participants discussed the feasibility of transportation, housing, and impacts on healthcare in a higher-density community. Changes in local zoning laws might permit more efficient use of the land available and potentially create more affordability. Another idea would be utilizing existing infrastructure, and creating mixed-use housing structures. There would be a more diverse community with different community members living in the same area. This has the potential for the neighborly mindset of checking in on each other, with the ability of others to help those in need. This would help decrease sprawl outside of the Marquette area which makes transportation more feasible. With a higher density community, there would be more sidewalks which also increases walkability and bikeability.

## **What Key Issues Might Impact Our Shared Vision?**

**Public Health and Wellbeing:** Community members' public health and wellbeing could impact the community's ability to reach our shared vision. Due to climate change there are more public health problems such as vector borne diseases, food shortages, and trauma due to weather events. There needs to be more healthcare specialists in the Upper Peninsula to support the community now, but especially when there is an increase in need for public services due to climate migrants or climate change impacts. In regards to community planning there is a concern that citizens would not be able to discuss their needs from their local community when their health is their main concern. Marquette residents are typically connected to their natural environment, which leads to problems in their mental sanity if they can no longer spend time outside.

**Funding:** Finding the funding to support our shared vision will be a challenge. There is steep competition for properties as well as rising property taxes and rental rates. Related to roads, there needs to be a change to the gas tax, which currently funds roads in Michigan, but with the focus on EVs and EV funding we need to find a way to fund road infrastructure and maintenance. Finally, communities might find that they are competing for grants and/or business development, and we want to take a county-wide systems view in order to understand how aspects of this issue affect the entire region.

**Mind-Set:** There are differing mindsets about the future of our community. For example it is currently part of American culture to want a single family home and travel in single-occupancy vehicles. However, some people want more walkable communities and well-funded public transportation. With different generations and leaders promoting a paradigm shift from the dominant cultural mindset, we might see opportunities (and challenges).

**Policy & Planning:** To create our ideal community there is a need for policy and planning. As previously mentioned there needs to be a balance between increasing housing supply, as well as protecting the natural environment. There is a lack of cross state transportation in the country, which would be needed to increase public transportation efforts within the community. In order to create this there needs to be a high amount of communication and coordination between many different municipalities which can be challenging in the already busy work day. To create a future together there needs to be attentive listening to the community when writing these plans. This can be a challenge if citizens do not have the capacity (potentially due to housing, transportation, or public health needs) to give feedback on what they are looking for in their community.

**Creating Infrastructure:** The current infrastructure within the community could be a barrier to creating a more sustainable future. There is a lack of regional and local infrastructure to support some of these changes such as expanding housing, public health resources, and public transportation. To expand and to adapt for demographic shifts and pressures, we need to figure out how to optimize our infrastructure for shared access to water resources, wastewater treatment facilities, landfills, schools and roads.

## **What Can We Do Today?**

Participants discussed what they can do today to ensure we meet our ideal visions for the future. Participants focused on how to continue this conversation, and who else should be included.

**Economic Solutions:** Some economic solutions that can be created include streamlining projects with grant funding to tackle multiple project needs in one area at a time. The city/community partners can continue to expand access to home energy efficiency improvements. Identifying existing sites that have available municipal services and infrastructure that is available for development would have the community grow closer to affordable housing. This includes expanding the grid system without the burden or price of creating new infrastructure. The final idea to tackle the funding problem would be to incentivize sustainable behavior and punish or tax unsustainable behavior.

**Political Participation:** Encouraging citizens to participate politically in order to lobby for our ideal future. Lobbying as municipalities rather than corporations, and to lobby and vote for initiatives that have a long-term impact helps push policy and planning documents. Citizens should vote for local leaders who support climate action and will implement solutions for our housing, transportation, and healthcare systems.

**Education:** Educating the community, policy leaders, and younger generations in schools about impacts of climate change, specifically regarding public health, housing, and transportation will help create a sustainable mindset for future generations. If climate change is taught as a public health emergency which has solutions, citizens would be more engaged in participating. Are there regional planning or development models that other communities have already developed

to help provide sustainable public services? The power of knowledge is important in learning what can be done to create the community that the Marquette citizens envision.

**Proactive Policy:** A local, state, and federal policy shift to create proactive policy is an important step to reaching Marquette's sustainable and equitable future. It is important to overcome the mistakes when looking at past planning policies, and focus on this opportunity to create a community plan together. This would come at the cost of a shift from the for profit mindset. There would be a focus on looking at zoning ordinances, infrastructure, services and transportation on a regional basis which would lead to a sustainable community for a wider area.

**Collaboration with a Diverse Group of People:** To create a "for the people" plan there needs to be collaboration and communication across the county. This would give leaders the opportunity to leverage resources, collective advocacy, and understand the value in building partnerships. It is important to have different policy makers meet in person to discuss their overlapping topics. Which is equally as important as having community members such as students & young people, educators, and the general public at these conversations to discuss with policy makers about what they need. If there is a lack of these members, it is important to ask why they are not contributing.