

Economic Development & Diversification

MARQUETTE 2049 CLIMATE CHANGE LEARNING CIRCLE SUMMARY

October 9, 2024

Circle Overview

The Marquette 2049 Learning Circle series is intended to encourage people in our community to engage in proactive planning in anticipation of the consequences of climate change. The participants of this learning circle identified and examined how economic diversification and development might evolve in our region during an era of rapid climate change. Participants shared their ideal vision for Marquette over the next 25 years and identified key issues and stakeholders involved in making that vision a reality. This conversation was focused on building a shared foundation that enables the Marquette community to face climate-driven challenges while sustaining economic development and diversification.

What is Our Ideal Vision For the Future?

During this learning circle, the participants were asked to share their ideal future for economic development and diversification within Marquette County over the next 25 years. These are the main themes that characterize the participants' "ideal vision" for the future:

An innovative, self-sustaining economy: There will be a strong economic community with many small businesses and a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. Marquette County will be self-sufficient meaning that production of food and other materials, recycling, and waste will remain within the County. Residents will be able to capitalize on innovative and sustainable ideas for products and services that are renewable. Marquette will continue to be a creative community, with artists and musicians, who help to stimulate the local economy. The Upper Peninsula will be known as the remote working hub of Michigan. More workers will be able to stay in the area and invest in the economy.

Wages & benefits that support workers' needs: There will be a variety of supportive services for the average worker, including healthcare, childcare, transportation, and affordable housing. Increased wages for workers will provide access to housing in the area, support the local economy, and help to support growing families. These types of jobs will also provide paid training and support mid-career shifts for workers with different backgrounds.

Socially and economically vibrant, equitable, and diverse: The community's economic atmosphere will be characterized by diversity, which will drive economic growth. There will be access to multiple types of high-wage job opportunities and a variety of career paths for the next-generation workforce. The ideal future also includes a diverse workforce, with opportunities for citizens from a variety of educational and trade backgrounds. These different industries will be large, successful, and able to give back to the community.

An economy that focuses on preserving the environment: All of the businesses will be environmentally conscientious with a focus on protecting water, maintaining healthy forests, and reducing waste. Our community will secure funding to protect our local environment. There will

be a transition from industries that extract natural resources to green economy trades (e.g., life cycle analysis and recycling of batteries, solar panels, and EVs). The buildings of the future will be green as well, with energy-efficient and sustainable materials - the economic ecosystem will be built on an environmental ethic that prioritizes preserving the environment.

An economic development plan that focuses on commercial space and the surrounding area: The future of economic development in our area needs to be focused on creating structured growth with development across corridors, reaching Ishpeming and Gwinn. Our rural areas will need to plan for higher-density development and smart travel between these corridors. Using smart zoning and code adjustments, residents will have easy access to necessities (housing, food, healthcare, etc.). The future will include many entities working together to create responsible development designed for residents (not just tourists) in our region.

Combined, these elements will create a resilient economy that could withstand unexpected changes, due to climate change. The economy will be sustainable through every season, with winter walkability, multi-season recreation opportunities, and seasonal diets that are supported by local farms. We envision a future with a resilient economy that doesn't compromise but works with our environment.

What Key Issues Might Impact Our Shared Vision?

Funding: Every table discussed the issue of funding, and how to structure funding to support a variety of economic development in the region. Some small businesses in our community are still feeling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic or the effects of recent changes in weather patterns (e.g., related to tourism operations). Entrepreneurs may need more support to be able to start an innovative and sustainable local business. We might also need more funds to support the local outdoor economy, from trail maintenance and upkeep to visitor services. Some participants noted that the current local government funding models may not be sufficient for the needs of future businesses in our area.

Demographic Shifts: When thinking about the future economy in the community, it is important to think about who will be living here to support that economy. Currently, the population in Marquette is aging and fewer young people remain in the area after graduation. While this area needs a healthy working class, many members of the next generation feel like there are limited opportunities in Marquette and very few jobs that would allow them to afford to live here. Participants asked: how can we attract people to the Marquette area while still supporting them? At the same time, there may be an influx of climate migrants in the area because of the relatively clean and plentiful natural resources available. Such in-migration may bring a variety of skill sets and talents to the area as well. Finally, tourism is a major factor in the local economy and we need to make sure that careers in this sector support workers so that they can afford to live and work in this area full-time, year-round.

Development Plans: Multiple factors affect development planning, and increasingly issues such as gentrification or larger businesses buying out smaller businesses are on the public radar. Additionally, it can be challenging to attract the businesses necessary to support all residents'

needs in a rural area. A variety of residents have a variety of needs and preferences, which can make planning challenging. A systems-thinking approach can help to address different citizen needs and zoning issues when creating a development plan.

Climate Change: In an era of rapid climate change, many issues will affect the economy. First, Marquette has access to the world's largest supply of fresh water, and this may become an even more sought-after commodity. Second, climate change is affecting the outdoor recreation industry and we will see local impacts of that. Third, climate change may drive development in rural areas, which would also impact Marquette. Additionally, climatic changes are already extending the growing season in our region. Climate change may bring more intense storms to the area so developers and planners need to consider the potential impact of extreme weather events on buildings and infrastructure. Current infrastructure might need upgrades if changes in storm and weather patterns continue. Some industries such as mining and forestry that economically support this region, could also see changes in demands with a switch to a green economy dependent upon renewable energy.

What Can We Do Today?

Increased education: Increased education for children, community members, local business owners, and local leaders is important in reaching the "ideal vision" discussed. Introducing climate change-related issues in public schools will help children understand these topics and decision-making later in life. Educating community members on the economic opportunities available in Marquette is important in growing the economy. Educating local business owners on what opportunities to improve their business are available, such as funding, will help generate momentum to move toward the ideal vision. Focusing on different research topics such as collecting data about infrastructure capacity will further educate local leaders and inform planning decisions.

Increased communication: To help educate our community, it is important to create a trustworthy channel of communication. Having a neutral, trusted organization that can support and share grant and funding opportunities is key. Having different methods of communication such as printed materials, emails, and social media posts are necessary to meet different segments of the population. It is important to increase communication between different agencies so they can support each other. Having space for different businesses to connect such as a local government economic summit would be beneficial in reaching the ideal vision.

Support Local Businesses: There are many ways to support local businesses, which will help create a self-sustaining economy. Buying products from local businesses and incentivizing sustainable practices will help make progress toward the "ideal" vision. Larger local businesses are also key to stimulating the regional economy.

Proactive Policy: It is important to think proactively about what is economically viable in our community. Having general guidelines for development proposals (e.g., accepted impact on the

environment, contribution to diversity, etc) will be helpful in building a sustainable economic ecosystem.

Creating Partnerships: Different types of partnerships between public and private businesses can generate more support for local businesses. Creating partnerships between organizations can help to drive sustainable economic development in Marquette County. Having strong partnerships and connections between Northern Michigan University and regional industries can also help support the County in attracting the next-generation work force.