WUPPDR Welcomes Dylan Jones

Dylan Jones joined WUPPDR as Planning Technician in December 2016. He was born in Austin Texas, and raised in the Lower Peninsula. Dylan later moved to the U.P. to study at Northern Michigan University in 2012. Dylan grew to love and appreciate the U.P. and all it had to offer with his degree in environmental studies and sustainability. He hopes to use his education to assist in environmental and recreation projects.

Dylan is leading WUPPDR’s Placemaking Support Program which will help fund creative and strategic projects that will spark future development. This will help make the western U.P. more attractive to businesses and talented individuals. He’s also helping to develop a Western U.P. trail asset inventory though the Regional Prosperity Initiative.

The fourth year of the Western U.P. Regional Prosperity Initiative has been funded and is now underway.

The Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI) was begun by the State of Michigan in 2014 as a means to encourage regional collaboration of organizations in a time of dwindling resources, overlapping goals, and competing priorities. Competitive funding has been made available since 2014 for regional and metropolitan planning organizations that have chosen to apply. The Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR), the planning and economic development organization serving the six western counties of the U.P., has been awarded $181,000 for 2017.

Over the last three years, WUPPDR has facilitated regular meetings of the Regional Prosperity Collaborative, the leadership group for RPI, to plan for and implement priority projects to benefit the regional economy and to promote efficiencies. A five-year plan was developed in 2014, and seven priority projects were funded for implementation in 2015 and 2016. In 2017, two of those projects will continue and six new projects will begin.

Projects

- Energy Efficiency & Clean Energy Outreach
- Brownfield & Blight Priority Database and Mapping
- Western U.P. Trails Database
- Placemaking Support
- Regional Geographic Information System (GIS)
- Broadband Connectivity
- Pure Michigan Regional Marketing Campaign for the U.P.
WUPPDR Awarded USDA Funds to Assist With Energy Efficiency Audits

WUPPDR has received a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to assist businesses in the Western Upper Peninsula with reducing their energy expenses. The $58,875 award, through the USDA’s Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), will be used to establish the Western Upper Peninsula Energy Audit Program (WUPEAP) which seeks to address the region’s high energy cost, a major challenge, to economic sustainability for many local employers.

Partnering with Michigan Energy Options, a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing communities’ access to energy efficiency and renewable energy, WUPPDR will use REAP funds to subsidize up to 25 energy audits for small businesses in the Western Upper Peninsula. An energy audit is a process that can help businesses understand their energy usage and provide recommendations for energy savings upgrades. Energy audits can review common energy conservation measures (ECM) such as lighting and building envelope improvements, as well as more advanced ECMs like smart thermostats, building control technologies, and renewable energy. The WUPEAP program will scale the audits to meet the needs of participating businesses. REAP funds will be used to pay up to 75% of the energy audit’s cost.

One of the unique features of the WUPEAP program is its focus on closing the gap between businesses receiving energy audits and acting upon the audit’s recommendations. WUPEAP will specifically focus on businesses whose energy expenses represent a high percentage of their operating expenses as these businesses are more likely to act upon the audit’s suggested ECMs. In addition to receiving a report with specific energy efficiency recommendations and cost saving projections, participating businesses will be connected with existing resources to help finance energy efficiency investments.

For more information on WUPEAP, please contact Brad Barnett, Regional Planner, at bbarnett@wuppdr.org.

GOISD Career and Technical Education Survey Helps Identify Potential New Programs

WUPPDR, in partnership with the Gogebic-Ontonagon Intermediate School District’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, surveyed local high school students and businesses to identify interest in additional CTE programs. The student survey focused on asking high school students to indicate future participation in existing CTE programs and gauge interest in adding new CTE programs. The business survey focused on identifying skill and talent needs. The results showed students were most likely to participate in the existing Welding, Certified Nursing Assistant, and Computer Programming/Robotics programs, and were interested in participating in Culinary Arts and Engineering programs if offered. Results from the business survey indicated the addition of Business Management, Construction Trades, Finance, Truck Technician, Electrical Engineering, and Marketing. CTE programs would help train a skilled workforce to meet the current talent needs in the region.

For more information contact Brad Barnett, Regional Planner, at bbarnett@wuppdr.org.