Houghton County Recognized as Certified Connected Community

As part of WUPPDR’s Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI) process, Technology Action Plans are being developed for the western six counties to help address inadequate broadband Internet service. Connect Michigan, a partner of the Michigan Public Service Commission, has been assisting in this effort. A technology assessment was completed to gauge the level of existing technology infrastructure, followed by recommendations for action. Houghton County met the “Certified” benchmark after completing the assessment. One benefit of Certification status is that it will make Houghton County a more attractive place for businesses and people moving to the area.

On June 19, the Portage Lake District Library (PLDL) hosted a ceremony that celebrated Houghton County as a Certified Connected Community. Speakers offered insight on how broadband affects their organizations and the western UP as a whole, including WUPPDR Executive Director Kim Stoker, Portage Lake District Library Director Shawn Leche, Asparagus Keweenaw Director of Marketing Dave Olson, and State Representative Scott Dianda.

Along with recognition as a Certified Connected Community, Houghton County’s Technology Action Plan was released. Plans have also been completed for Keweenaw and Gogebic counties, while Ontonagon, Iron, and Baraga are in development. The completed plans are available to view at www.wuppdr.org/rpi/meeting-resources. For more information about WUPPDR’s efforts to address inadequate broadband in the six-county Western Upper Peninsula region, please contact Erik Powers at 906.482.7205 ext. 315 or epowers@wuppdr.org.

A Final Letter from the Executive Director

Houghton County’s “Certified Connected Community” status at the PLDL. From left: Erik Powers, Cheryl Fahrner, Tom Stephenson of Connect Michigan, Kim Stoker, Rep. Scott Dianda (D), PLDL Director Shawn Leche

Involved persons celebrate Houghton County’s “Certified Connected Community” status at the PLDL.

Erik Powers, Executive Director

I wish you all the best in the coming years.

Kim J. Stoker

Executive Director
Western U.P. RPI Collaborative Connects for Status Updates

On June 30, the Western U.P. Regional Prosperity Collaborative (RPI) held its bimonthly meeting in Hancock. Also participating were sites in Ironwood and Escanaba via videoconference. The meeting’s chief purpose was to report progress on the six priority projects; summaries of those reports follow.

Economic Development Service Delivery (EDSD)

WUPPDR is one of eight organizations that are partnering to more effectively deliver economic & business development services throughout the region. Services and information are being integrated and delivered by staff at Michigan Works! service centers in each county that has one. WUPPDR now partially funds Mike Ross of Michigan Works! to accept and track inquiries for business assistance and to coordinate this system. Informational meetings regarding EDSD are being held with stakeholders in each county as relationships continue to strengthen, and media attention will be sought as the EDSD system becomes more functional.

Connect Michigan Technology Action Plans

Plans to promote and improve broadband Internet access have been completed in Gogebic, Houghton, and Keweenaw counties, and the progress continues on plans for Ontonagon, Iron, and Baraga counties. To learn more, contact Erik Powers. (See front-page article on the Houghton County connectivity celebration.)

Target Market Analyses (TMAs)

A Target Market Analyses (TMA) measures market potential for housing types in a community, taking into consideration the entire range of households and potential housing formats. A shift from WUPPDR’s original RPI proposal to develop a regional housing study, TMAs will be more valuable in leveraging state housing funds. In conjunction with its Central and Eastern U.P. counterparts, WUPPDR will contract with a consultant to have TMAs completed for each county. A request for proposals will be distributed to qualified consultants during July. Contact Jerry Wuorenmaa to learn more.

Career & Technical Education (CTE) Asset Mapping

CTE — training in career-oriented fields — is currently a focus of regional, state, and national attention as an alternative to a college degree. WUPPDR is collecting information about CTE programs and resources, or “assets,” available from educators in the region. The results will be integrated into an asset map for the entire U.P. Results will also contribute to a U.P.-wide CTE marketing strategy being funded and implemented by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and Central Upper Peninsula Planning & Development (CUPPAD).

Regional Chamber Alliance

The nine chambers of commerce in the six Western U.P. counties assemble regularly to work on common goals and complement each other’s assets and resources. The chambers gather bimonthly in a host county that rotates for each “Thirsty Thursday” meeting — a social and business event where regional issues and potential business-focused events are discussed. Currently, the alliance is developing a steering committee to take a more organized approach to event planning and coordination, with aid from WUPPDR and the Keweenaw Chamber.

Lasco Joins WUPPDR as Project Manager

The newest WUPPDR staff member is Steve Lasco, Project Manager. Steve came on board with WUPPDR in May, 2015. A native of Antioch, IL, Steve spent 25 years in California and Nevada, working as a technical and marketing communicator and exploring the vast and diverse American West. While living in Carson City, NV, Steve served five years on that city’s Parks & Recreation Commission, including stints as Chair and Vice Chair. The American history buff moved to The Upper Peninsula in 2012 to reunite with a long-distance lady friend. Steve’s working knowledge of technical communications, grants, park and trail projects, and public forums provides WUPPDR with a unique skill set to support the Regional Prosperity Initiative and offer master planning, recreation/park planning, and asset management services to its members. He attended Bradley University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is passionate about cycling, baseball, reading, music, outdoor activities, and companion animals. Contact Steve at 906.482.7206 ext. 314 or at slasco@wuppdr.org.

WUPPDR Commission Meeting Schedule

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