

THE POWER OF PLACE

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Detroit
International
Riverwalk

Community development and economic development: improving one, improves the other. This is not intended to be a debate, but rather an attempt to provoke thought and fortitude for investing in Michigan's recreational assets, particularly trails.

Why are people and businesses drawn to certain communities? The first thought would naturally be because of one's workplace, and that's not incorrect. However, because of the pandemic and the so called "Great Resignation" the growth of the remote workforce has enabled people to work and live just about anywhere. As a result of this flexibility, what people are seeking from their jobs and their communities are changing. They want trails, parks, and open spaces.

"Work-life balance" has grown from a buzz word into common practice. If one's job no longer restricts one's community of choice, then the focus shifts to the life side of "work-life balance". Where is the best place to put down roots? Next door to a park or within a mile of a trailhead? Communities are now given the opportunity to shine; to put their best assets on display and recruit prospective residents in search of their forever homes.

Community seekers, driven by a need for an improved quality of life, are searching for places that offer transportation options, walkability and access to public lands and open spaces. What was once considered a mere bonus is now being demanded as a "must have" when choosing where to live.

"Convenience to family and friends was the second most important factor in influencing neighborhood choice after quality of the neighborhood, surpass..." (National Association of Realtors, Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers 2020).

Michigan's profile makes an exceptionally strong case for individuals and families who

"The future is not someplace we are going to, but a place we are creating. The paths to it are not found, they are made."

— JANE GARVEY, DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION FROM 1993—97

are relocating, in search of an improved quality of life while desiring a healthy work-life balance. Michigan is flush with natural resources, vast open space, local parks, and endless trails making it a 4-season recreational destination – and potentially a final destination for those in that pursuit of the perfect neighborhood chock-full of the outdoor amenities.

Take the Detroit Riverfront for example; with a mission of developing access to the Detroit International Riverfront, 5.5 miles for riverfront property has been improved and activated with plazas, pavilions, and greenspaces. This world class attraction and part of the Iron Belle Trail, provides a critical sense of place for urban dwellers, and offers a higher quality of life by connecting people to the outdoors.

Or, another instance, LAFF Pathway in Genesee County (see page 149), connects 4 neighboring communities with non-motorized pathways which has been proven to improve public safety, provide a safe route to its local public school, offers alternative forms of transportation and endless recreational opportunities to their residents.

Other examples of communities that have taken this initiative and made significant investments are showcased throughout this magazine. Their efforts are commended, and they serve as role models for

other communities throughout Michigan.

Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance is committed to aiding and supporting communities that make these necessary and timely investments in the recreational, transportation, water infrastructure. As the statewide voice for nonmotorized trail users, this commitment fuels the mission of helping people build, connect, and promote trails for a healthier and more prosperous Michigan – through economic and community development.

If not now, then when? It's time to invest in placemaking and activating our community spaces. Aside from attracting new residents and a talented workforce, it's an investment that will pay dividends for Michigander's physical, mental and community health – for generations to come.



LAFF Pathway connects
4 communities in southern
Genesee County (See page 149).