Greater Gratiot Development, Inc.

ANNUAL REPORT 2026



Growing Gratiot. Supporting Business.
Building Opportunity. Strengthening Community.

Executive Summary

Overview

Over the past year, GGDI successfully led and supported numerous economic development initiatives focused on business growth, redevelopment, housing, workforce development, talent attraction, and long-term community planning. Key accomplishments included advancing a major Brownfield Land Bank project, securing MI Sites Bronze designation, facilitating redevelopment and industrial expansion opportunities, leading implementation of the Gratiot Countywide Master Plan, strengthening regional housing and childcare initiatives, expanding business retention efforts, and enhancing community engagement through strategic partnerships, outreach, and marketing efforts. These initiatives position Gratiot County for continued economic growth while strengthening relationships among businesses, municipalities, educational institutions, and regional stakeholders.

GGDI played a leadership role in regional housing, childcare, and talent attraction initiatives, including development of a Brownfield Housing TIF policy, partnerships with the Region G Housing Partnership, promotion of childcare workforce grants, and support for regional talent recruitment efforts such as the Regional Livability Guide, talent attraction website, and 40 Under 40 recognition program. These efforts helped position Gratiot County for future growth while addressing critical workforce and quality-of-life needs.

A major focus of the year was guiding the Gratiot Countywide Master Plan through approvals and transitioning the effort toward implementation. GGDI worked closely with local governments, community organizations, educational institutions, businesses, and state partners to build support and identify actionable strategies aligned with the plan's goals.

Additionally, GGDI staff strengthened relationships with employers, municipalities, legislators, and regional partners through business retention visits, community engagement activities, legislative outreach, marketing initiatives, and workforce development programs. These efforts enhanced GGDI's visibility and impact, culminating in GGDI being recognized as the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce Non-Profit of Excellence, reflecting the organization's leadership and contributions to the county's economic and community development success.



Kasey Zehner

Kasey Zehner
President

> *"This community has always been my home, and I'm thrilled to be in a role that allows me to positively contribute to its current success and future growth.*

Our Local Impact

Much of our work cannot be captured by numbers alone. These figures help illustrate the scale and value of GGDI's long-term impact in Gratiot County, along with several highlights from 2026.

LONG-TERM IMPACT | *Since 1978*

$2.4 B
Invested by GGDI-assisted projects since 1978

$19 M
Grant revenue received with GGDI assistance

5,380
Jobs created/retained by GGDI projects

$29
For every $1 GGDI receives through the millage

32%
Portion of County's tax base assisted by GGDI projects

2026 HIGHLIGHTS | *This Past Year*

37
Businesses/organizations provided direct assistance

15.6%
Increase of population aged 25-31 (2nd in MI)

67%
Overall voter approval, with the millage passing in every township and municipality

2026 Board of Directors

Greg Mapes, Chairperson	City of Alma
Kevin Collison, Vice Chairperson	Banking/Commercial Lending
Pam Munderloh, Secretary	Member-at-large
Kevin Beeson, Treasurer	Township Association
Bill Henderson, At-large Official	Manufacturing
Joe Bowen, At-large Official	Manufacturing
Aeric Ripley	City of Alma
Jamey Conn	City of Ithaca
Brett Baublitz	City of Ithaca
Kurt Giles	City of St. Louis
Josh Leppien	City of St. Louis
Tim Dolehanty	Gratiot County Administrator
Dave Owens	Gratiot County Commissioner
Chuck Seeley	Village of Breckenridge
Sam Smith	Business
Chuck Sherwin	Healthcare
Shana Dancer	Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce
Adam Geers	Agribusiness
Hannah Reeves	Agriculture
Tim Schaub	Value-Added Agriculture
Marci Browne	Real Estate: Residential
Adam Vibber	Real Estate: Commercial
Bob Balzer	Utilities
Gary Melow	Utilities-Alternative Energy
Paul Hungerford	Education : K-12
Carla Jensen	Education : Higher Education
Doug Bush	Education : Vocational Education
Brian Goward	Member-at-large
Joy O'Neill	Member-at-large
Bob Studt	Member-at-large
Chelsea Holmes Matz	Member-at-large
Steve Bakker	Member-at-large
Karla Childers	Member-at-large
Curtis Dancer	Member-at-large



How Economic Development Happens



Opportunity

Gratiot County is fortunate to have advantages not afforded to every community. Our central location, access to major transportation corridors, and rail infrastructure make the county a prime location for manufacturing, agriculture, and value-added agricultural industries.



Connection

For many businesses, an expansion, relocation, or new development may be their first time navigating the process. With nearly 50 years of experience, GGDI connects businesses with the right people, organizations, resources, and mentors to help move projects forward.



Resources

Having the right tools can make all the difference. GGDI maintains strong relationships with state and local partners that provide training, funding, expertise, and other resources to help turn plans into reality. We stay involved throughout the process to give each project the best opportunity for success.



Project

No project is too big or too small. From a downtown bakery to a multi-million-dollar industrial or agricultural investment, every project brings unique challenges. GGDI is here to help navigate those challenges and support growth every step of the way.



Impact

Not every impact can be measured in dollars and cents, but GGDI tracks the local economic impact of the projects we support. From jobs created and retained to investment and tax base growth, we measure how projects contribute to Gratiot County's long-term success.

Investments & Projects

Businesses & Industry

Provided support to more than **37 local businesses**, assisting with needs ranging from tax incentives to job growth and retention. A few examples are highlighted below.

- **Alma Tire**- Site location assistance, Brownfield Redevelopment assistance
- **Highland Optics Manufacturing**- Consultation and assistance securing $140,000 in MEDC incentives
- **Phillips Cidery and Pizzeria**- Assistance securing EGLE grant, tax incentive, general business consultation
- **Powder Coat of Central MI**- Advised on building sale to meet business needs and goals
- **Plasti-Paint, Inc**- Assisted in the transition of new owner, Engineered Plastic Components
- **Apex Marine**- Assisted in the transition to new owner, Whisper Marine



HOUSING...MORE TO COME!

Established a relationship with Allen Edwin Homes and identified potential development opportunities in four Gratiot County communities, laying the groundwork for future single-family housing investment.

BUSINESS ATTRACTION

We received the MI Site Readiness grant of **$55,000** to develop conceptual drawings and secure necessary site studies. Earned **MI Site Readiness Bronze Designation** for West Hoffman Road.



Gratiot County Land Bank Authority

Gratiot County Land Bank Authority

GGDI led administration of the Gratiot County Land Bank this past year, including the demolition of a blighted building in Downtown Alma to prepare the site for a potential future passenger rail stop. The project strengthened our experience coordinating with state and local partners, utilities, and contractors, while also supporting a local contractor for the demolition.

Who We Worked With

Municipal and Local Governments

Working hand in hand with all **23 local municipalities** is crucial for project success. We have continued to strengthen our relationships to ensure success in the short and long term.

GGDI led the countywide Master Plan initiative for all 23 municipalities, providing administrative support, increasing public engagement, and partnering with Alma College on a First-Year Seminar focused on advancing Master Plan goals.



Regional, State, and Development Partners

Understanding available resources and maintaining strong partner relationships are critical to long-term competitiveness and success.

- MEDC
- Great Lakes Bay Michigan Works!
- Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center
- CMURC Business Hub
- SBDC
- MMDC
- Citizens Research Council
- Region 5 Economic Development Partners
- Michigan State Land Bank Authority



Childcare

Helped secure Michigan Early Childhood Education Wage Initiative funding for **8 facilities**, impacting **28 positions ($118,000)**

Community, Education, and Talent Partners

Partnerships with local organizations strengthen our workforce and talent retention.

- Alma College
- Gratiot Young Professionals Network
- Mid-Michigan Manufacturers Association
- Gratiot Area Chamber
- United Way of Greater Central Michigan
- Ithaca High School
- Watershed Institute
- SheLeads / GACC partners

Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

The Brownfield Redevelopment Authority of the County of Gratiot
BRACG

We continued administration of the Gratiot County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and invested in consulting support from Samantha R. Mariuz, MPA, EDFP, of Fleis & VandenBrink. Her expertise has strengthened our ability to navigate expanded Housing TIF opportunities, provided valuable training to the Authority, and helped advance future housing projects for success.

Community Involvement

This past year provided many opportunities for our team to give back to the community.
Team involvement includes:

- Ithaca Rotary
- Alma/St. Louis Rotary Club
- Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce
- Gratiot Community Foundation
- Mid-Michigan Manufacturers Association
- Gratiot Young Professionals Network
- Gratiot Community Airport Advisory Committee



Bart and Shelly handing out farm animals for adoption at the GCFFY in July.



Shelly, Shana (board member), Kasey, and Steve (board member) volunteering at Rural Urban Day in June.



Bart serves as a Chamber Ambassador, helping celebrate local businesses at ribbon cuttings throughout the year.

Time to Celebrate!

This past year, we were honored to receive the Non-Profit of Excellence Award at the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce Community Celebration. In a community filled with so many outstanding nonprofit organizations, we were proud to make it to the winner's circle at this year's derby-themed celebration.





Industry Awards

We also had the opportunity to present several area businesses with Industrial Awards at the Good Morning, Gratiot Breakfast Awards ceremony, recognizing their continued investment in our community. Honorees included Avalon & Tahoe Manufacturing, Alma Container Corporation, Capital Steel and Wire, DTE, and Trinity Truck and Trailer. Together, these projects represented more than $108 million in investment, created and retained local jobs, expanded manufacturing capacity, and supported significant renewable energy development across Gratiot County.



Marketing

Our marketing strategy focuses on strong community involvement and a growing online presence. We aim to position GGDI as a trusted resource for local businesses and organizations while also promoting Gratiot County to prospective businesses. Investments in high-quality photography and video have strengthened our ability to market both GGDI and the county as a whole.

GGDI Video



Watch Here

Gratiot County Promotional Video



Watch Here

GGDI on Facebook

114K
Facebook views

28k
Facebook viewers

2,800
Facebook interactions

1. Remain Top of Mind

Our goal for 2027 is to keep GGDI top of mind throughout Gratiot County by remaining visible, engaged, and supportive in our communities. We will continue sharing timely updates and educational content through Facebook while expanding other communication efforts to increase awareness of GGDI's services, demonstrate our impact, and ensure people think of us when opportunities or needs arise.

2. Increase Ag Engagement

Agriculture is a cornerstone of Gratiot County. In 2027, we will strengthen our involvement with agricultural organizations, build relationships, and expand partnerships that support the broader community. By demonstrating GGDI's continued commitment to agriculture and strengthening our connection with MSU Extension, we can reinforce the value of these services and help build long-term support for future millage funding.

3. Continue Growth

In 2027, we will continue to grow our online audience, redesign our website, and expand our library of high-quality marketing materials to strengthen GGDI's visibility, improve access to resources, showcase Gratiot County, and more effectively tell the story of our communities, businesses, and impact.

Future Goals & Strategy

Our future goals are to strengthen relationships throughout Gratiot County by engaging with all 23 municipalities, staying connected with the Board of Commissioners, and remaining responsive to community concerns. We will continue using tools such as GGDI 101 presentation to increase awareness of our services, maintain strong relationships with legislative partners to ensure Gratiot County has a voice, and regularly review internal processes to improve efficiency and better serve the Gratiot community.



Expand Business Retention Visits & Communication

Expand business retention visits and communication to strengthen relationships with existing businesses, demonstrate GGDI's value, and remain a top-of-mind resource for operational needs, growth opportunities, and ongoing support.

Modernize GGDI's Website & Community Marketing Resources

Redesign GGDI's website to improve access to business support services, develop fresh marketing materials, and create a shared database of community assets and resources that partners can use to consistently promote Gratiot County.

Implement Strategic Planning Priorities

Leverage relationships and insights gained through the Master Planning process to continue advancing priorities within the plan's key pillars. Recent successes in housing, childcare, and talent development provide strong momentum for continued progress.

Strengthen GGDI's Community Presence & Partnerships

Build on the momentum of the millage education cycle by remaining actively engaged across Gratiot County, demonstrating GGDI's value to local communities, and strengthening partnerships with local, regional, and state resources.

















Greater Gratiot Development, Inc
136 S. Main Street, Ithaca, MI 48847
(989) 875-2083
www.ggdi.gratiot.org