

Strategist: West Michigan similar to early Los Angeles The local Chamber of Commerce is told that the area's look and population show its potential for major growth.

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Abstract:

Rapid growth and urban sprawl are just a few of the developing problems Jay Peters and the West Michigan Strategic Alliance hope to manage -- and use to this region's advantage -- by developing a planning strategy for coastal communities stretching from Whitehall to South Haven, and Grand Haven to Grand Rapids.

"We're at 1.1 million people and could have 1.5 million by 2020," Peters said, noting this region's major population centers lie in a triangle between the cities of Grand Rapids, Muskegon and Holland. It's population that statistics show are sprawling toward each other.

Peters and others from the alliance, including Jim Brooks, alliance chairman, will be outlining the goals and planning information the group has gathered at a public meeting at 4:30 p.m. Thursday at the Muskegon Harbor Holiday Inn.

Full Text:

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WEST MICHIGAN -- West Michigan will never have the year-round sunny climate of Los Angeles, but one day it could share the problems of urban sprawl and traffic congestion with that oceanside city.

Rapid growth and urban sprawl are just a few of the developing problems Jay Peters and the West Michigan Strategic Alliance hope to manage -- and use to this region's advantage -- by developing a planning strategy for coastal communities stretching from Whitehall to South Haven, and Grand Haven to Grand Rapids.

"We have the potential to become an 'L.A. on the Lake,' " Peters said at Tuesday breakfast meeting of the Holland Area Chamber of Commerce.

Similar to West Michigan, Los Angeles 40 years ago was a 1 million population city surrounded by huge agricultural tracts and open space. Today, it is a sprawling mega-city connected by crowded freeways.

"We're at 1.1 million people and could have 1.5 million by 2020," Peters said, noting this region's major population centers lie in a triangle between the cities of Grand Rapids, Muskegon and Holland. It's population that statistics show are sprawling toward each other.

"Right now, we are the ninth-largest regional area in the upper Midwest, out of 12 areas that include Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Cleveland," Peters said. "The West

Michigan Strategic Alliance would like to create a unified idea of what we want to be and how to get there."

Peters and others from the alliance, including Jim Brooks, alliance chairman, will be outlining the goals and planning information the group has gathered at a public meeting at 4:30 p.m. Thursday at the Muskegon Harbor Holiday Inn.

The next meeting after that will be Oct. 30 in Grand Rapids. The meeting place shifts to Holland on Jan. 10.

The group has invited education and political leaders from across Muskegon and northern Ottawa counties to the event.

Also on hand will be Michael Gallis president of the North Carolina-based Michael Gallis & Associates Inc., which helps cities with development planning issues.

His company has been gathering data on West Michigan over the past year. Gallis will discuss a framework for decision making about the area's future.

"We want to make the public aware of the information we have gathered, and get community input on how we can work together as a region in planning our future," Peters said.

"We're looking to provide a regional view of West Michigan and a framework planning tool on how to think more as a regional metropolitan unit."

Right now, West Michigan has 90 independent government units from village councils and township planning boards to county governments - - all doing independent planning on their own little piece of the pie, Peters said.

The idea behind the alliance is to try to bring together information on land use, transportation, business development and a host of other community and regional issues that decision makers can use to start thinking regionally.

The goals of the alliance are to:

- 1. Create a shared vision of the region's future and its participation in the global economy.
- 2. Promote intergovernmental, business and organizational cooperation for regional development.
- 3. Create a resource book of information that can be used by decision makers in developing West Michigan's future.
- 4. Identify priorities and establish voluntary task forces for each priority.

"This is one step, one piece of the puzzle," Peters said. "If we're going to become an 'L.A. on the Lake,' we should have an idea of how we got there, and not let it come as a surprise."

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