



# Hillsdale County, Mi

## Community Visioning and Economic Development Plan

---

**Final Plan**

**Date** June 2005

Jarret Consulting Services



Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc.

# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements ..... iii**

**Executive Summary ..... iv**

**Introduction - Planning Process ..... vi**

**Community Profile and Trends ..... 1**

**Community Stakeholder Report ..... 13**

**Community Visioning Report Summary ..... 20**

**Summary of Industrial/Agricultural Survey Results ..... 24**

**Summary of High School Student Survey Results ..... 26**

**Business Districts Assessments and Strategies ..... 28**

**Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction ..... 61**

**Center for Entrepreneurship ..... 75**

**Branding Hillsdale County ..... 79**

**Management Plan ..... 81**

**Appendix A: Community Visioning Session Results ..... A-1**

**Appendix B: Community Leader and Stakeholder Interview Report ..... B-1**

**Appendix C: Relevant Funding Programs ..... C-1**

**Appendix D: Hillsdale County Industrial Survey Results ..... D-1**

**Appendix E: Hillsdale County High School Student Survey Results ..... E-1**

**Appendix F: One-Year Action Plan ..... F-1**



## Acknowledgements

### Hillsdale County Economic Growth Group

This Plan was prepared by the Hillsdale County Economic Growth Group. The membership of this group included:

- Penny Alcock** - Savarino's Next Door
- Kim Benedict** - Hillsdale Daily News
- Dan Bisher** - Hillsdale College & WCSR
- Dave Cleveland** - Silo's Fun Park
- Professor Charles Davies** - Hillsdale College
- Karri Doty** - Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce
- Judy Gabriele** - Hillsdale Community Health Center
- Julie Games** - Keller Williams
- Parke Hayes** - Hillsdale County Commissioner and Hillsdale City Clerk
- Bob Henthorne** - Hillsdale Intermediate School District
- Tammy Houser** - Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce
- Patrice Hudson** - Community Action Agency
- Wes Kelley** - Hillsdale Board of Public Utilities
- Christine Quinn** - South Central Michigan Works!
- Reb Turner** - Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission
- Steve Vear** - Vear Enterprises
- Mike Venturini** - Munro House
- Gretchen Vondran** - Time Services
- Jay Williams** - Southern Michigan Bank & Trust
- Scott Wiseley** - Time Services

*The financial support of this project from the following individuals, organizations, and businesses is gratefully acknowledged.*

*Aquila  
 Becker & Scrivens  
 Braman Roofing  
 Cambria Tool  
 City of Hillsdale  
 Comcast  
 Community Action Agency  
 County National Bank  
 Curves for Women  
 D.J.'s Family Restaurant  
 Days Inn  
 Domino's Pizza  
 Drews Place  
 Richard Ehnis, PhD.  
 Foulke Construction  
 H.J. Gelzer & Son, Inc.  
 Hillsdale BPU  
 Hillsdale College  
 Hillsdale Community Health Center  
 Hillsdale Comm. Schools – Mr. Richard Ames  
 Hillsdale County Commissioners  
 Hillsdale County Farm Bureau  
 Hillsdale County Intermediate School District  
 Hillsdale County Senior Services Center  
 Hillsdale Daily News  
 Hillsdale Veterinary Hospital  
 Historic Homes of Hillsdale  
 Horse & Carriage Bed & Breakfast  
 Hospice of Hillsdale County  
 Human Services Network  
 Jackson Community College  
 Keller Williams Realty  
 Ken Stillwell Ford Lincoln Mercury  
 Lifeways  
 Litchfield Grain Company  
 MEDC – Michigan Economic Dev. Comm.  
 Mark's Electrical Service  
 Dr. Colin Mayers, DDS, MS, PC  
 Mennell Milling  
 Michigan South Central Power Agency  
 Nash Drugs, Inc.  
 Nyloncraft  
 Pennington Gas Service  
 Pittsford Township  
 Powers Clothing  
 Practical Computer Solutions  
 Christine Quinn  
 Richards Motors Sales  
 Ryan & Bradshaw  
 RX Optical  
 Savarino's  
 South Central Michigan Works!  
 T.I. Automotive  
 Time Services  
 Tip Off Shopping Guide  
 Glenn Zeigler*



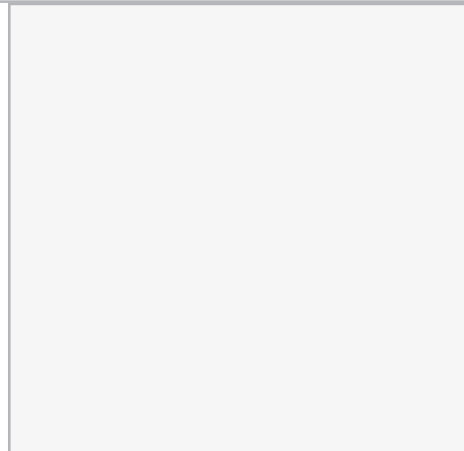
## Executive Summary

For more than six months, the Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce's Economic Growth Group (EGG) met to chart a new course for economic development. In recent years, plant closures, downsizings, and a generally sluggish national economy highlighted the need to re-assess local economic development efforts. The planning process used to chart this new course of action was a highly participatory one. Members of the EGG group felt strongly that meaningful, broad and extensive participation was needed. Therefore, substantial efforts were made to reach out to many segments of the community to create ownership and to make sure that all voices were heard and recorded.

Many things were learned during the public input phase of this work. At the four community visioning sessions, the general public expressed views that focused on needs such as: ensuring greater collaboration, diversifying the local economy, enhancing leadership and entrepreneurship, unifying marketing, developing art and culture as an economic engine, and improving infrastructure. Local industries were also surveyed, and it was learned that while many are optimistic about the future in terms of increasing business, many are concerned about the increasing cost of doing business such as workman's compensation, health care, property taxes, utilities and labor. Another key issue expressed was the fact that while increased business activity will likely lead to higher employment levels, anticipated gains are unlikely to totally offset past losses. Efforts to define local attitudes also included a survey of local high school seniors to determine how the next generation views local circumstances. Many of these future community leaders expressed desires to relocate to other places, and many indicated that they are at least somewhat likely to someday start their own businesses. Finally, focus group sessions in each of the downtowns and business districts throughout Hillsdale County provided insights into the unique local opportunities and challenges of each of these areas.

This public input, together with analysis of socio-economic trends at the local, state and national levels, helped form the basis for new economic development strategies for Hillsdale County. These strategies were developed by members of the EGG group and were refined in extensive work sessions. Apart from the individualized strategies for each business district, some of the key overarching county-wide strategies include the following:

1. While Hillsdale County must continue to do everything possible to attract new industry from outside, it must also look inward at opportunities to establish and grow local businesses. These initiatives might include everything from new technology to art and culture-related activities. To support these local endeavors and build on local conservative values, a new Center for Entrepreneurship, including a busi-



ness incubator, is recommended to spur small business development.

2. Economic Development should rise to a higher level from an organizational perspective. Now, economic development functions are somewhat fragmented. A new umbrella organization called the Hillsdale County Economic Development Partnership is needed to help make sure that efforts are coordinated and all resources are spent as efficiently as possible. With this, responsibilities of the Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce are to be broadened and expressly oriented toward business development activities in addition to a new Convention and Visitor's Bureau. Similarly, the responsibilities of the Industrial Development Commission are also to be broadened and oriented toward real estate development, including supporting the improvement of the County's downtowns and business districts.
3. Certain areas in Hillsdale County present opportunities for focused and larger scale redevelopment efforts. Once such area is west of downtown Hillsdale, and can serve as a model for other economic development initiatives.
4. The uniqueness of Hillsdale County is something to be celebrated. The notoriety of Hillsdale College, puts the area in the national spotlight, and can serve as a foundation for an identified brand for consistent marketing and messaging in economic development efforts, to be carried out with the aid of a new Convention and Visitor's Bureau.
5. Arts and culture are a component of the economic development strategy, and include the creation of an art, culture, and entertainment district. Related efforts include assisting antique businesses in Allen to form an association to more effectively market the area as a destination.



## Introduction - Planning Process

The Hillsdale County Community Visioning and Economic Development Plan is the result of a process that involved extensive and broad community participation from many sectors of the community. The consultant team consisting of Jarret Consulting Services and Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc. worked closely with members of the Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce's Economic Growth Group (EGG) through all phases of the planning process. In addition, perspectives and recommendations were gathered from the community through the following:

- Community profile and trends analysis. A review and analysis of past reports and data sources was conducted to better understand the County's changing economic characteristics and quality of life. This analysis is included as part of this document.
- Stakeholder interviews. Interviews were conducted with approximately thirty community stakeholders, offering a wide range of perspectives and experiences. A Stakeholder Interview Report is included within this document;
- Visioning meetings. Four Visioning sessions were held throughout the County to help assess local attitudes, needs, and desires regarding economic development in Hillsdale County. These sessions, along with other elements of the process, shaped an overall Vision for the County. A report providing the results of the visioning process is also included in this document.
- Focus groups. The consultants facilitated eleven focus groups, nine of which were targeted to the downtowns and business districts within the County. These sessions were helpful in defining strengths, weakness, visions and strategies for the respective districts. An additional focus group was compromised of industrial representatives, while another session consisted of government administrators.
- Industrial survey. A survey was conducted of industries located within the County to assist in further defining economic development issues. The survey results are included in this report.
- High school student survey. A survey of high school students was also conducted to gain some perspective on the attitudes of local youth. These survey results are included in this document.



Based upon this process, an overall long-term vision was defined and long-term goals and strategies were crafted to attain this vision. These goals and strategies included the following:

- Enhancement of the downtowns and business districts within the County;
- Industrial retention and expansion;
- Industrial attraction;
- Designation of an Economic Renewal Corridor;
- Tourism;
- Agriculture;
- Art, Culture and Entertainment;
- Establishment of a Center for Entrepreneurship to support small business development;
- Branding Hillsdale County;
- A more collaborative and comprehensive organizational structure for carrying out the economic development vision and plan.

First year actions are identified as an initial work plan to carryout the five-year vision. This element of the plan includes a detailed work plan and milestones to guide the community's actions over the next year to initiate the process of attaining the community's economic development vision.

