



Thriving Communities: Moving from Ideas to Action

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Michigan Association of Mayors
August 2024

We love where you live.

Agenda

- Discuss what is a 'thriving community', recognizing the concept and how it informs our work.
- Understanding how tradeoffs influence our decision-making and how negative outcomes can be avoided with meaningful community engagement
- Activities that will help us put these principles into practice!





Part I: What is a thriving community?

We love where you live—and we want it to thrive

Policy

For “the general improvement of every branch of municipal administration”

Partnerships

Conveners of place, stewards of community

Placemaking

This place matters and is worth investing in—together

People



Building on a year of discussions and a decade of work

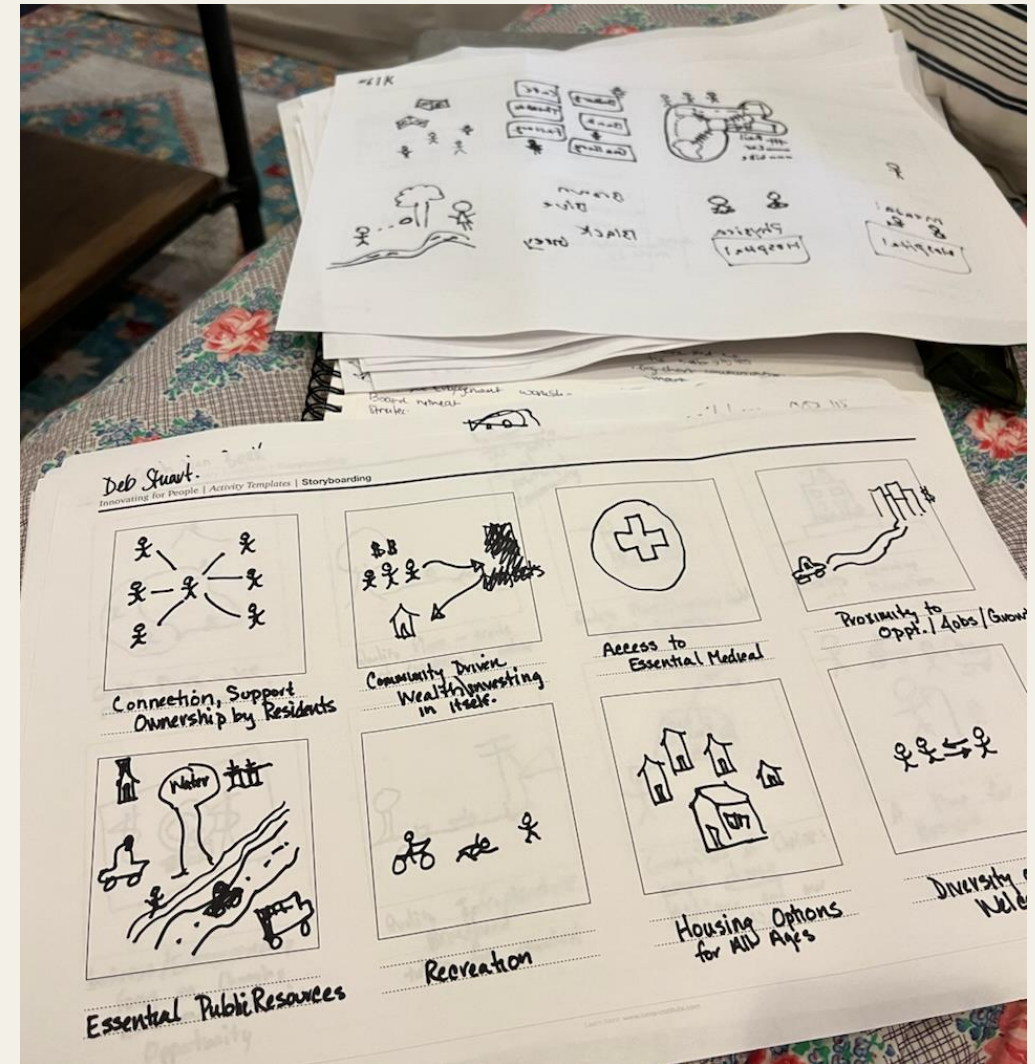
- Staff Activities + Dialogues
- Ongoing conversations w/ Board, members
- The League's work in 'Placemaking'
- Community Wealth Building
- ServeMICity → MI Funding Hub
- Coalition for a Strong and Prosperous MI
- Growing Michigan Together Council

community schools & parks	renewable energy opportunities	an inviting downtown	employment & housing options	neighborhoods, not just developed subdivisions	walkable (sidewalks, lighting, businesses within reasonable distance)	safety (well lit, vacant properties maintained, hazards repaired, public safety presence)
housing for all	regional transit	jobs	recreation & green space	walkability & housing transformation (office-to-housing)	sustainability/climate mitigation & adaptation	public safety / safe streets
senior services	celebrations	greenspace	quality infrastructure	willing to change	help neighboring communities	great schools
regional connections	autonomous vehicles	vibrant places / placemaking	solar / windmill / climate resilience	Arts & culture	density / diverse economic base	safe w/ crime prevention and engagement
employment opportunity especially within the community	numerous local businesses, few big box stores or chains (no dollar store)	diverse housing	hospital	mental health services	transportation	diverse commerce (bakery, café, bank, theater, gallery, factory)
quality places - trails and connection to nature	quality infrastructure; broadband taken for granted	quality places - community wealth - great downtowns	communities of choice: people choose michigan and our cities	lifelong learning and education	a place for everyone	balanced budget

What is a thriving community?

A **thriving community** embodies connection, accessibility, and opportunity for its residents. It fosters a mindset of inspiration and optimism among leaders, prioritizing trust and belonging in everyday municipal decisions.

It is **placemaking**, it is **community wealth building**, it is **growing Michigan together**, it is **resilience**.





**What does a thriving
community look like?**

We mean that literally.

You get to draw it!

A thriving community...

- **Public Health and Safety:** Provides effective response and reduces exposure to harm, increasing physical and mental health and safety; supporting access to housing, food, and health care; and reducing disparities in quality of life.
- **Infrastructure:** Encompasses fundamental facilities, services, and systems serving an area's economy and population.
- **Financial Security:** Ensures fiscal health at the municipal, institutional, commercial, familial, and individual levels, fostering economic resilience and sustained prosperity through economic and community development.
- **Sustainability:** Manages natural resources and supports environmental stewardship to ensure long-term harmony between the built and natural environment, leveraging them as public assets.
- **Lifelong Learning:** Recognizes education and training as a continuous journey from early childhood through adulthood, encompassing K–12 education, post-secondary pathways, and ongoing opportunities for adult learners, teachers, and mentors of all ages.
- **Arts and Culture:** Respects, celebrates, and recognizes cultural identities, traditions, historical contexts, and creative outputs as critical assets that strengthen the social fabric of a community.
- **Trust and Belonging:** Anchors and connects: emphasizing trust in neighbors, community leaders, local governments, and other partners; building the connection between community members and the places they inhabit; offering participatory agency to enhance access to resources and social networks.

Why are we doing this?

- We believe it is past time to challenge the limited conventional view of a place's success.
 - For too long, the criteria decision-makers have used to determine success excludes indicators that evaluate the full human experience.
- Powered by our application of Community Wealth Building, the 'thriving communities' framework builds on the League's placemaking work to explore success holistically and broadens the discussion to consider all the ways place supports an individuals' personal well-being and experience.

“Thriving” isn’t one size fits all.

Because we’re looking at the human experience to define a thriving place, the actions might look different for every community because of that community’s circumstances and priorities.

The goal of this work is to expand the viewpoint of what defines success and to empower municipal leaders with adequate resources and tools to support local decision-making, build cross-community partnerships, and back your priorities.





Part II: Understanding Tradeoffs Within Community Engagement

Tradeoffs

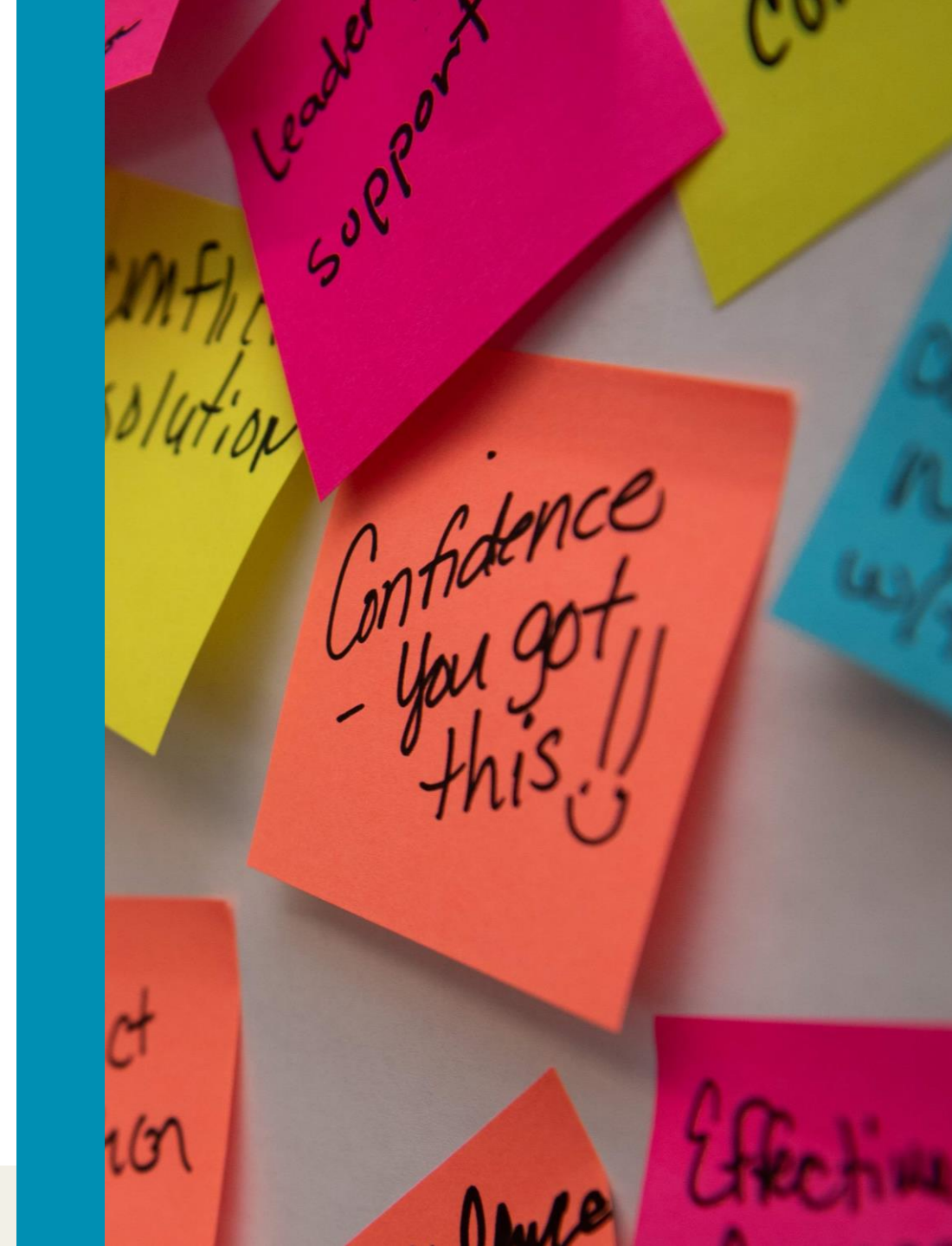
The immediate and long-term consequences of a decision, behavior, action or inaction.

Defining Tradeoffs

With each decision that we make, there is a tradeoff.

Tradeoffs are more than pros and cons, **they are the consequences of a decision, action, or inaction and are experienced in every decision** - big or small - even when making positive change.

When we are reconciling potential impacts of our decisions, we should ask ourselves “What else could this potentially impact? Is it worth it?” When we decide if something is worth it or not we are balancing tradeoffs with the potential benefits of the outcome.



Tradeoffs in Pursuit of Thriving Communities

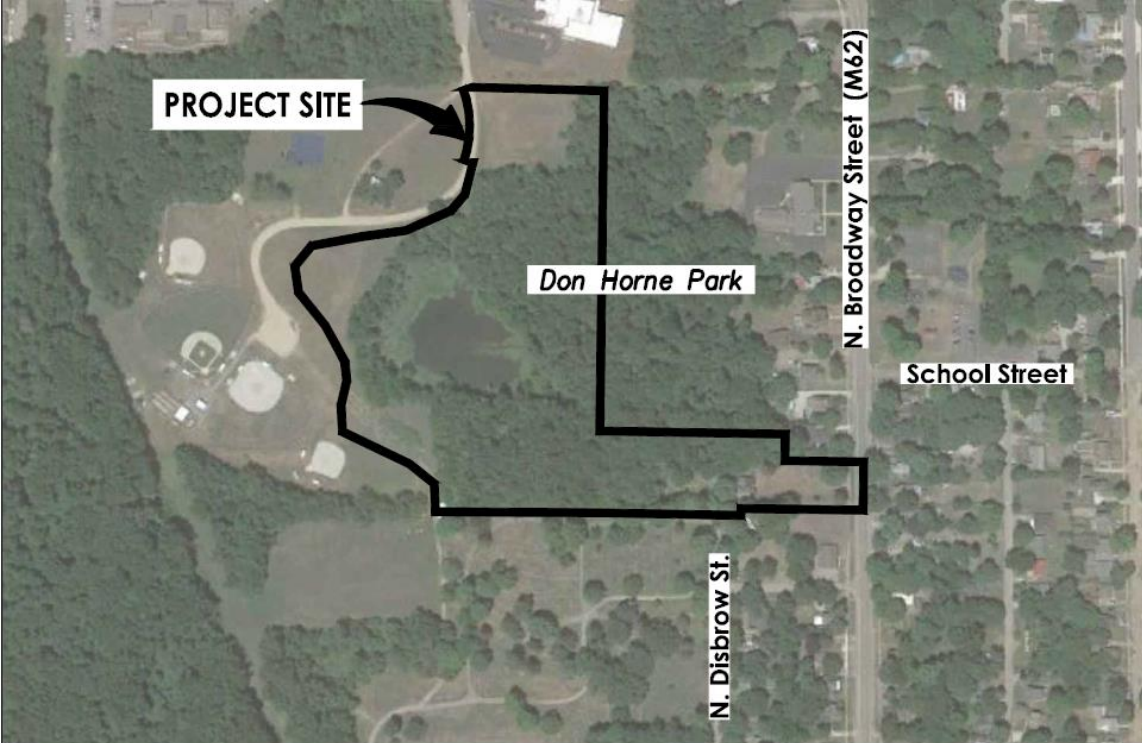
The decisions you make as municipal leaders aim to achieve success in the areas that contribute to creating a thriving place.

People are more likely to accept change when the tradeoffs feel worth it. ***If the tradeoffs feel unsustainable, the change becomes unsustainable.***

When people make choices different from what we expect or want, they may be weighing tradeoffs differently.

Likewise, when people have tradeoffs thrust upon them, forced tradeoffs are difficult to accept or adapt to.

The outcomes of changes pressure people to make determinations on whether “***is this place right for me?***”



Tradeoffs Example

The Village of Cassopolis is currently undertaking a large-scale housing project utilizing Pattern Book Homes to increase both multi-unit and single-family housing options for the community.

The Village has turned down offers with developers who are unwilling to adjust plans to meet community needs because it is prioritizing ***what the community wants and needs*** over what is the highest bid or easiest for the municipality or a developer.

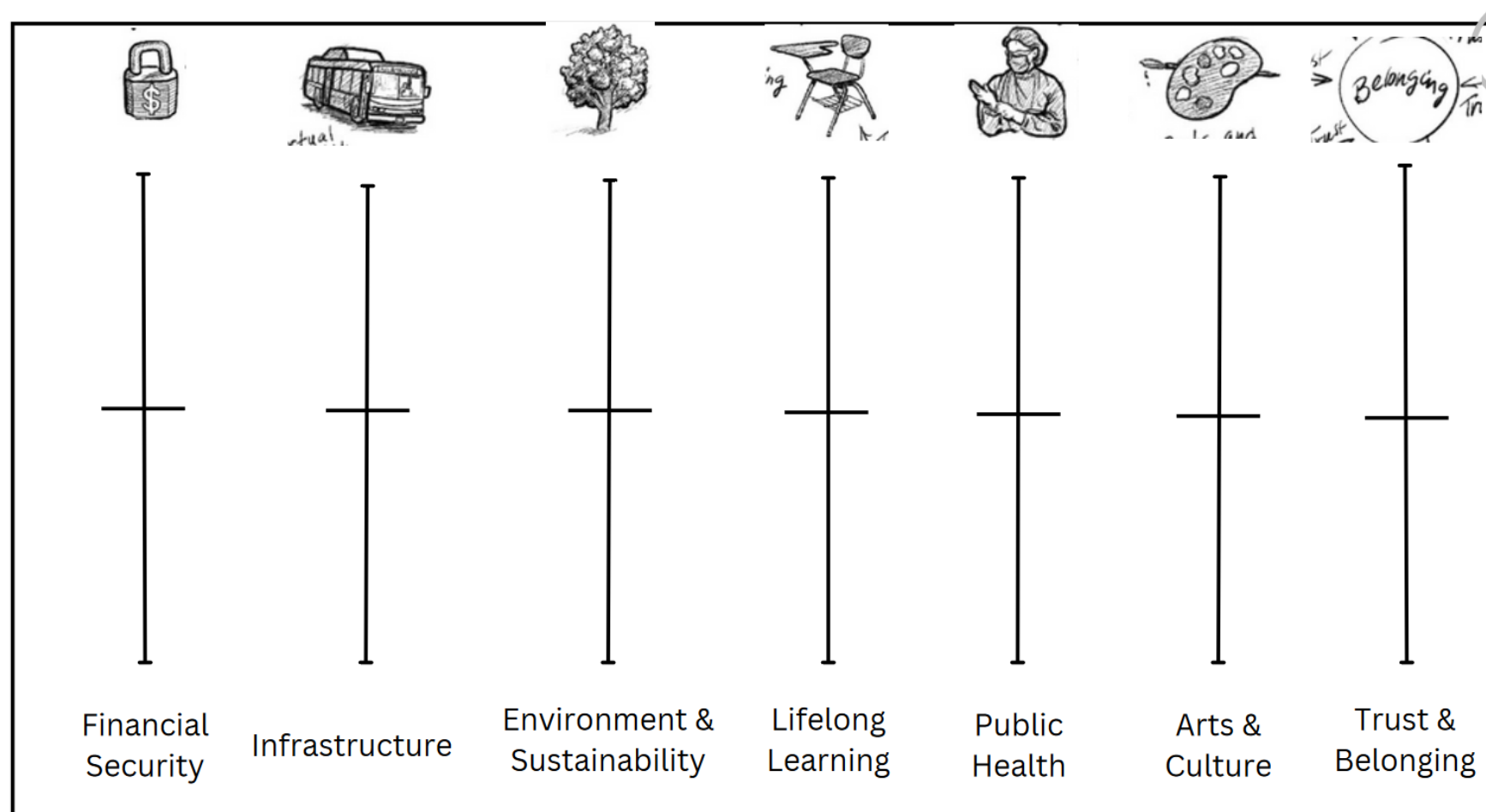
This means taking on financial risk and driving hard bargains, but the ***tradeoffs*** of this risk outweigh the ***social costs*** of just going with the highest development bid.

Tradeoffs visualized via The Equalizer: scenario

- A new housing development is proposed that would add a mix of senior-oriented apartments and modestly-priced for-sale townhomes.
- The development would replace a vacant and blighted gas station, and the wooded lot behind it.
- The developer has requested a 30-year TIF to cover costs of brownfield remediation and to keep housing prices affordable.
- The project would make pedestrian improvements at a busy intersection, and would also address some long-standing stormwater problems.

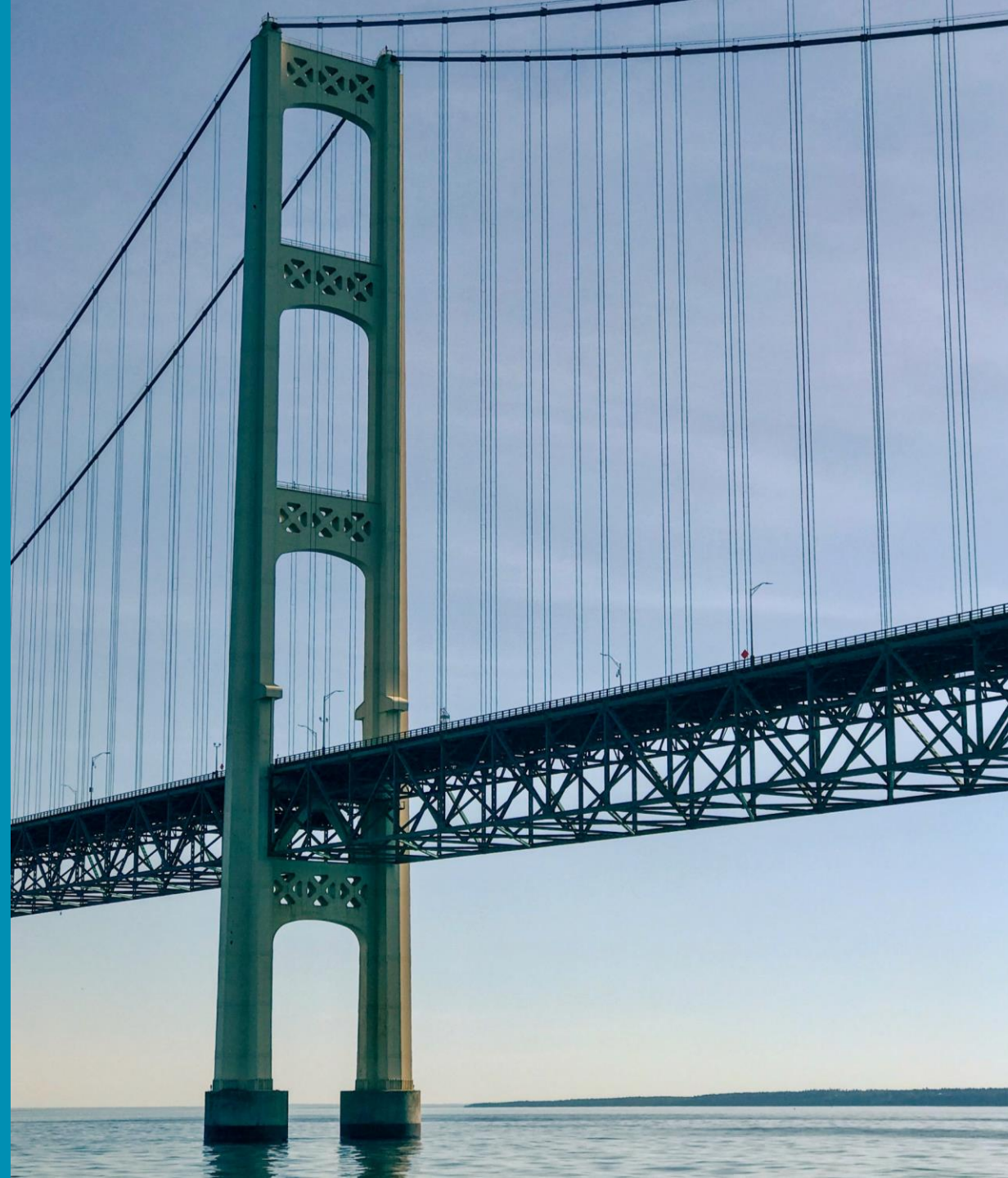
How does this move the needle(s)?

- Which levels does this project move, and in which direction from the current baseline?



The Responsibility of Elected Officials to Understand Tradeoffs

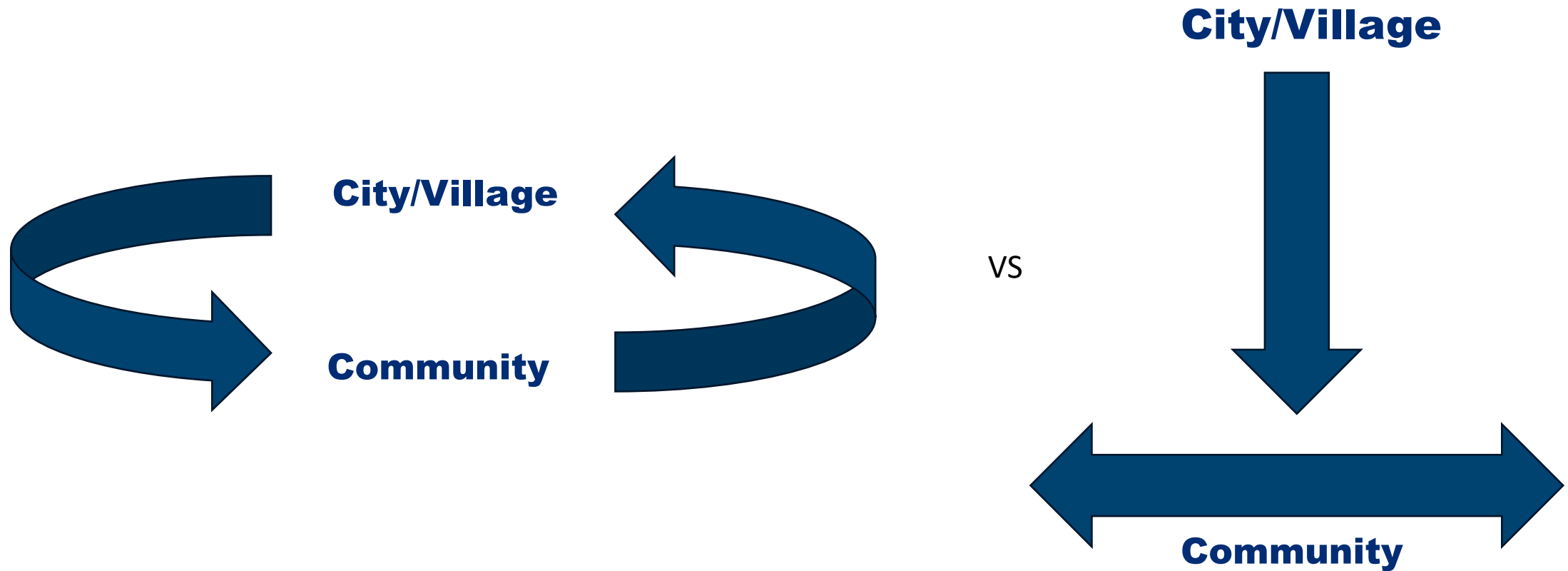
- Elected officials should strive to understand the full scope of tradeoffs for all parties.
- In your role, you have the capacity to be a convener and ensure that participating perspectives are heard and validated.
- Assumptions are limiting! Often elected officials embrace the need to “fix” the issue, but often from an individual perspective and not with the collective awareness of the tradeoffs for all involved.



As elected leaders we desire to...

- Build trust with and throughout our communities.
- To hold productive discourse with residents and stakeholders alike.
- Capture buy-in, support the development of trust and attract collaborators.

Successful engagement thrives on trust, communication, and collaboration



Intentional Engagement with Community Helps Us Recognize Tradeoffs

Community Engagement *always* begins with listening.

Listening is *required* to:

- Learn information
- Seek input
- To understand what influences others
- In contrast, when intentional listening doesn't occur, participants feel rejected and dismissed – less likely to involve themselves in partnership.
- Holding space to listen can also unpack past harms and traumas a help reset the foundation with trust.
 - This dialogue can be used to recognize and understand tradeoffs on all sides.



Part III: Partnering to Build Thriving Communities

Collaboration is the foundation for a thriving community

Municipal leaders act directly through their policies, budgets, and services but also hold the capacity to set the table for collaborations with all partners who drive a community's success.

Likewise, a thriving community is incomplete without the contributions of diverse partners and stakeholders that bring innovation and opportunity to a place.

The creation of agency builds the base for trust and belonging.



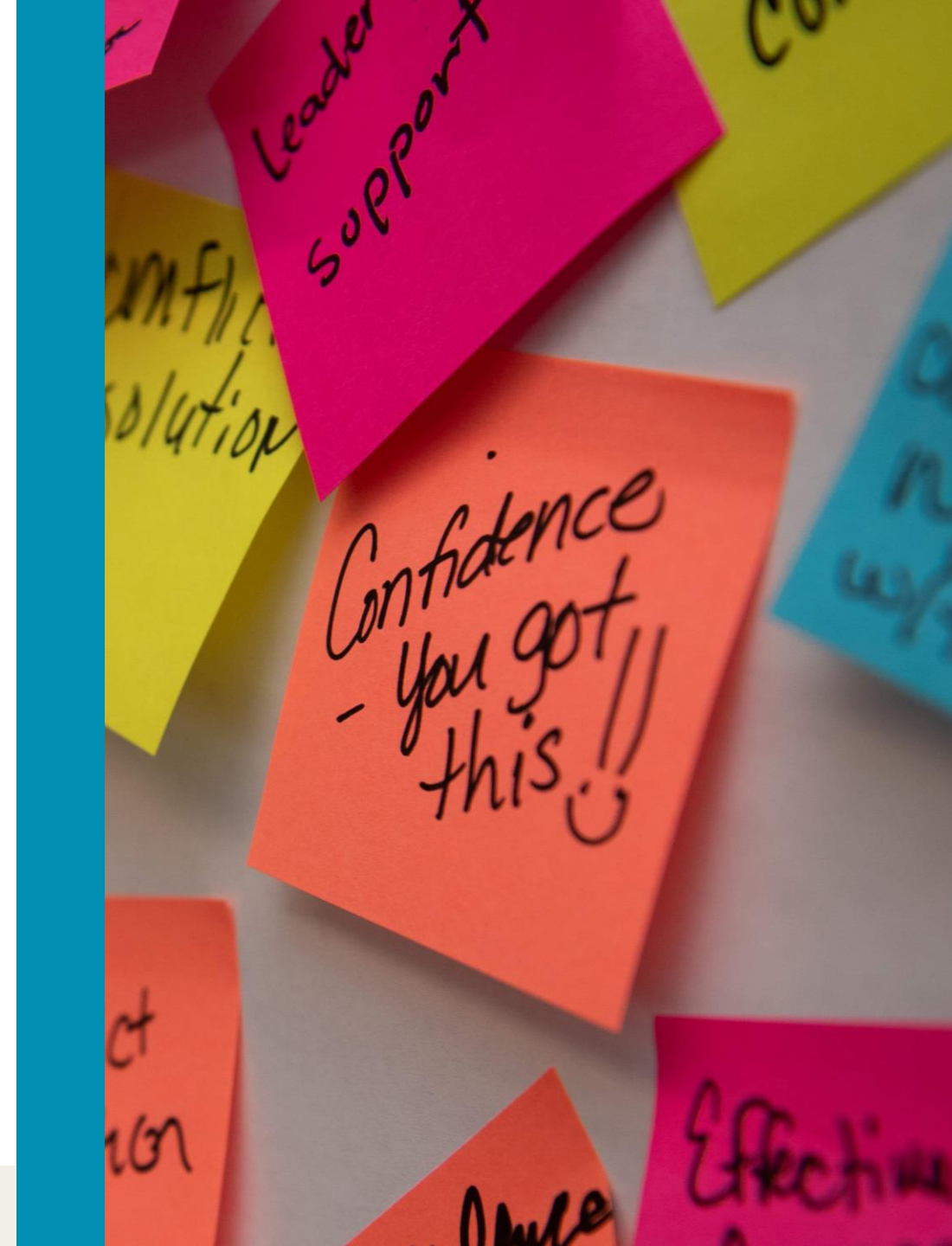


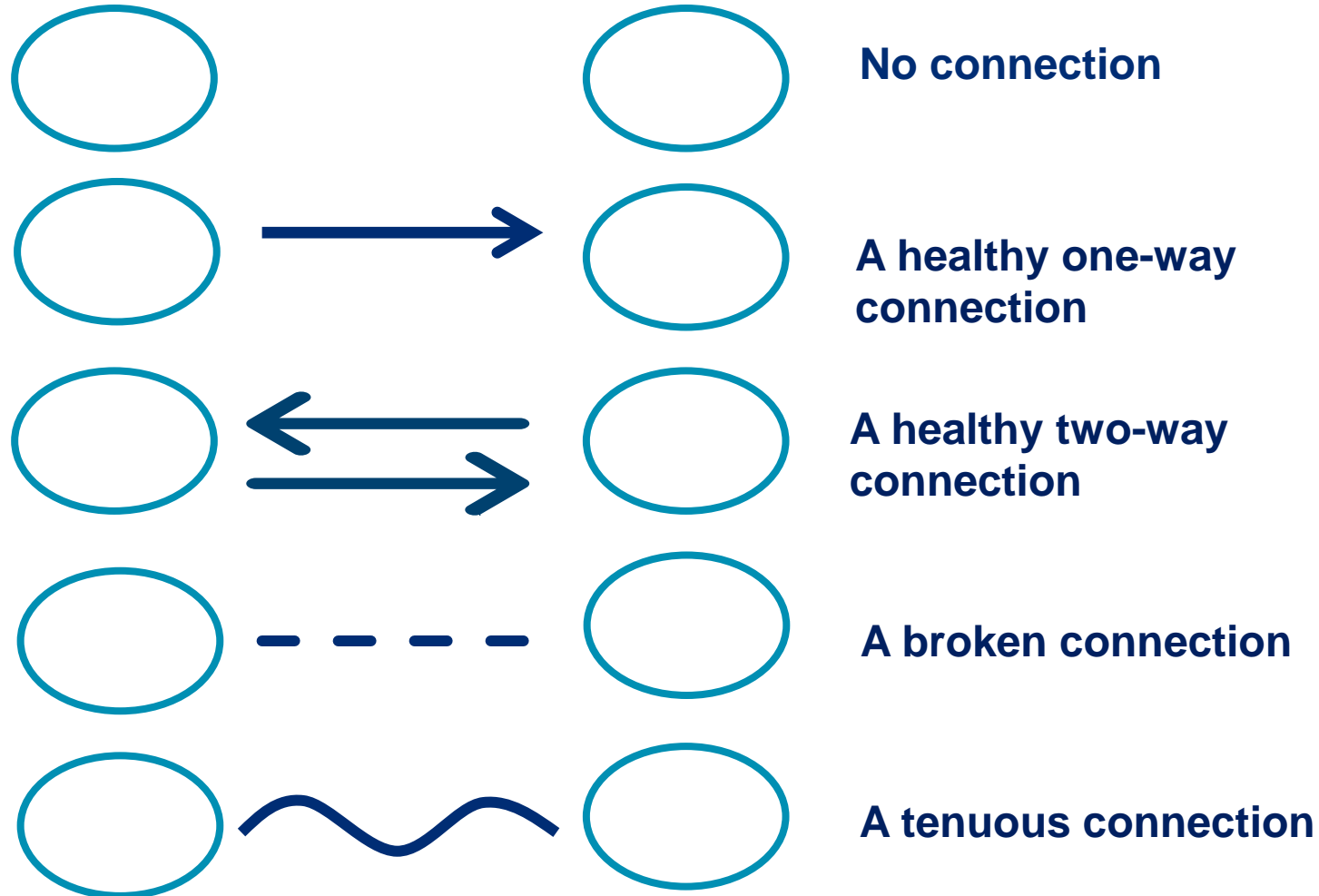
Capturing the Scope of Your Community

- Next, we are going to complete and activity where you will individually capture your potential partnership network within your community.
- We're often aware of the stakeholders that have the context and agency to be deeply engaged in the decision-making processes. In contrast, there are stakeholders that when limited in those factors are not immediately considered to be necessary to the process.

Capturing the Scope of Your Community cont'd

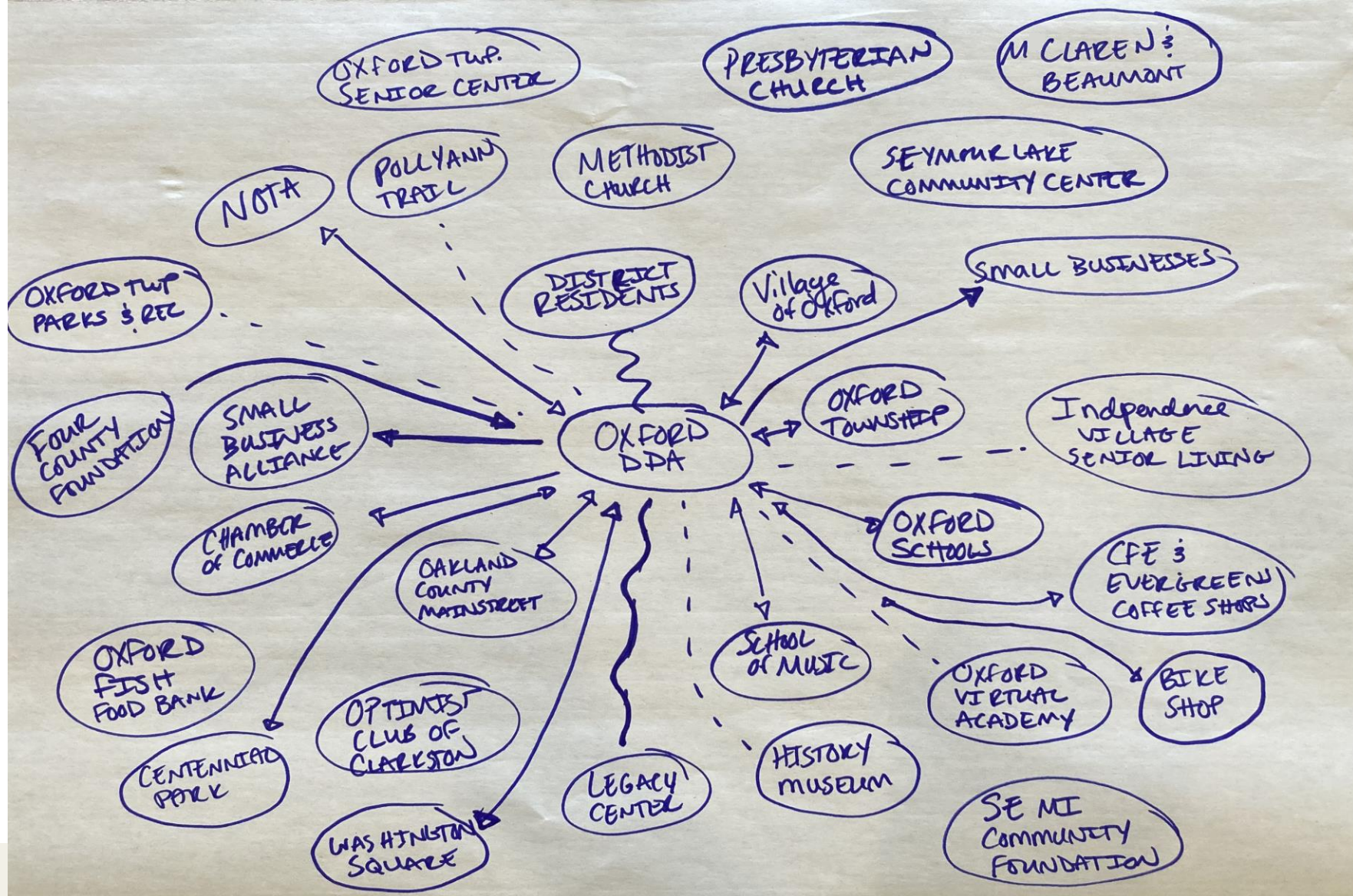
- This activity will help you evaluate the partners, influencers, collaborators and stakeholders that exist throughout your community.
- As leading decision-makers, awareness of your network allows you evaluate tradeoffs with a broader understanding of what potential outcomes may be.





Community Partnership Mapping

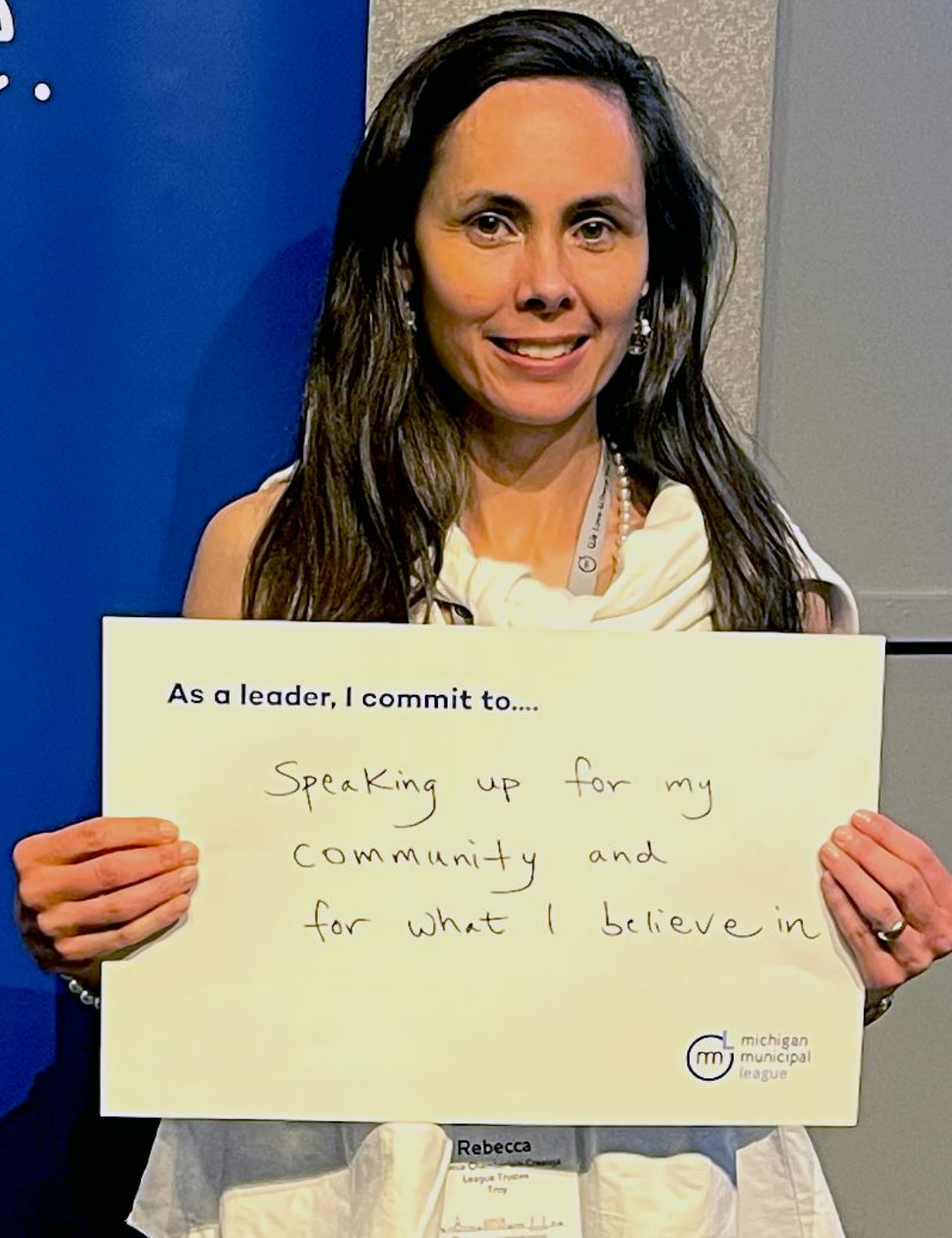
- Draw a map of potentials partners (organizations, stakeholders, constituency groups) within your community.
- Identify if you/your local government have strong, weak, or no relationships with these partners.
- If you/your municipality doesn't have a connection, does someone else on your map have one?
- Think outside the box! Try to include places and organizations that people different from yourself might find important.





Part IV: What's next on our thriving communities journey

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The road ahead

- Testing and refining the framework and tools.
- Identifying partners and resources
- Prototyping tools to support advocacy and local discussions
- Preparing for public rollout: Convention 2024

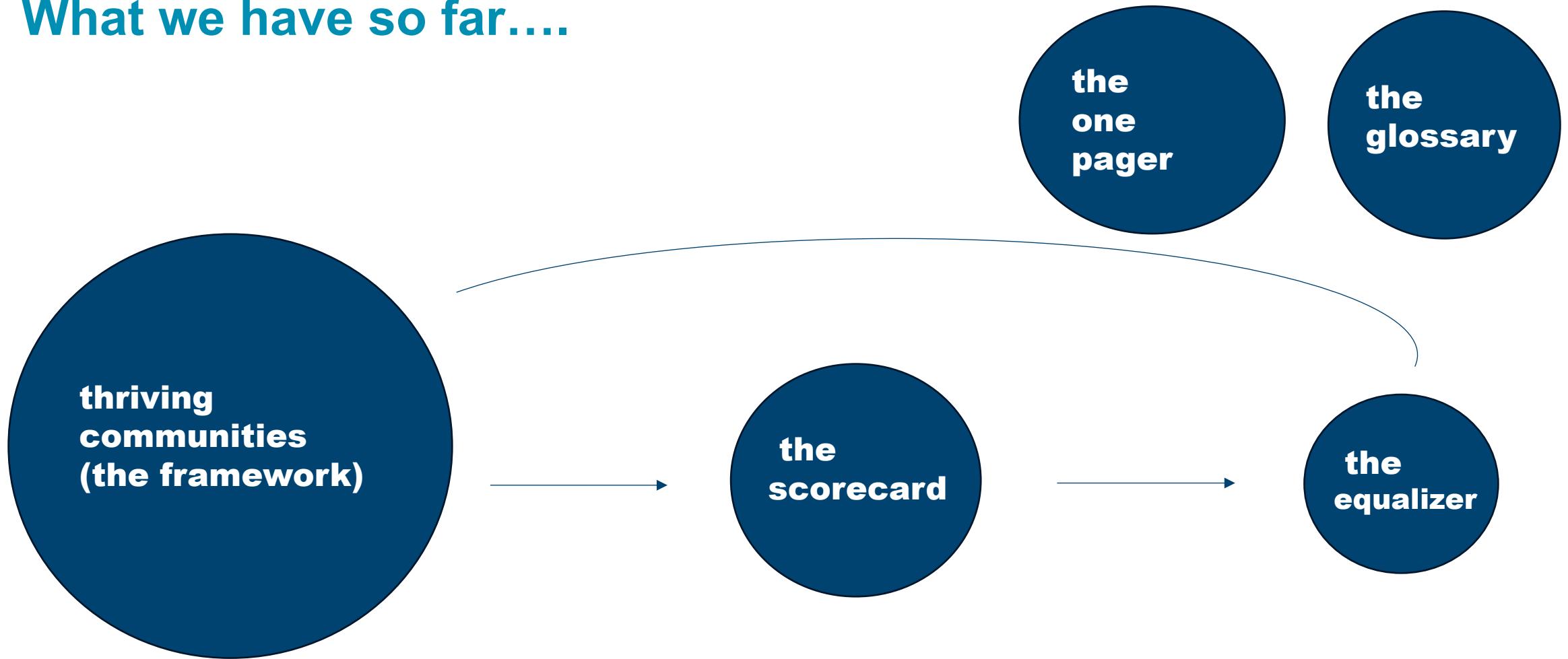
Join us at Convention!

Our thriving communities debut to the broader membership.

- General sessions by Dan Gilmartin and Ethan Kent
- Breakout and booth activities with us! (Tell a friend.)



What we have so far....





Things we're working on

Legislative Scorecard: A state-level tool to broaden policy conversations beyond traditional, single-dimension economic metrics.

- Show how Michigan measures up—and where the state needs to step up
- Support the “how” of our advocacy agenda by showing the “why” that we’re working towards



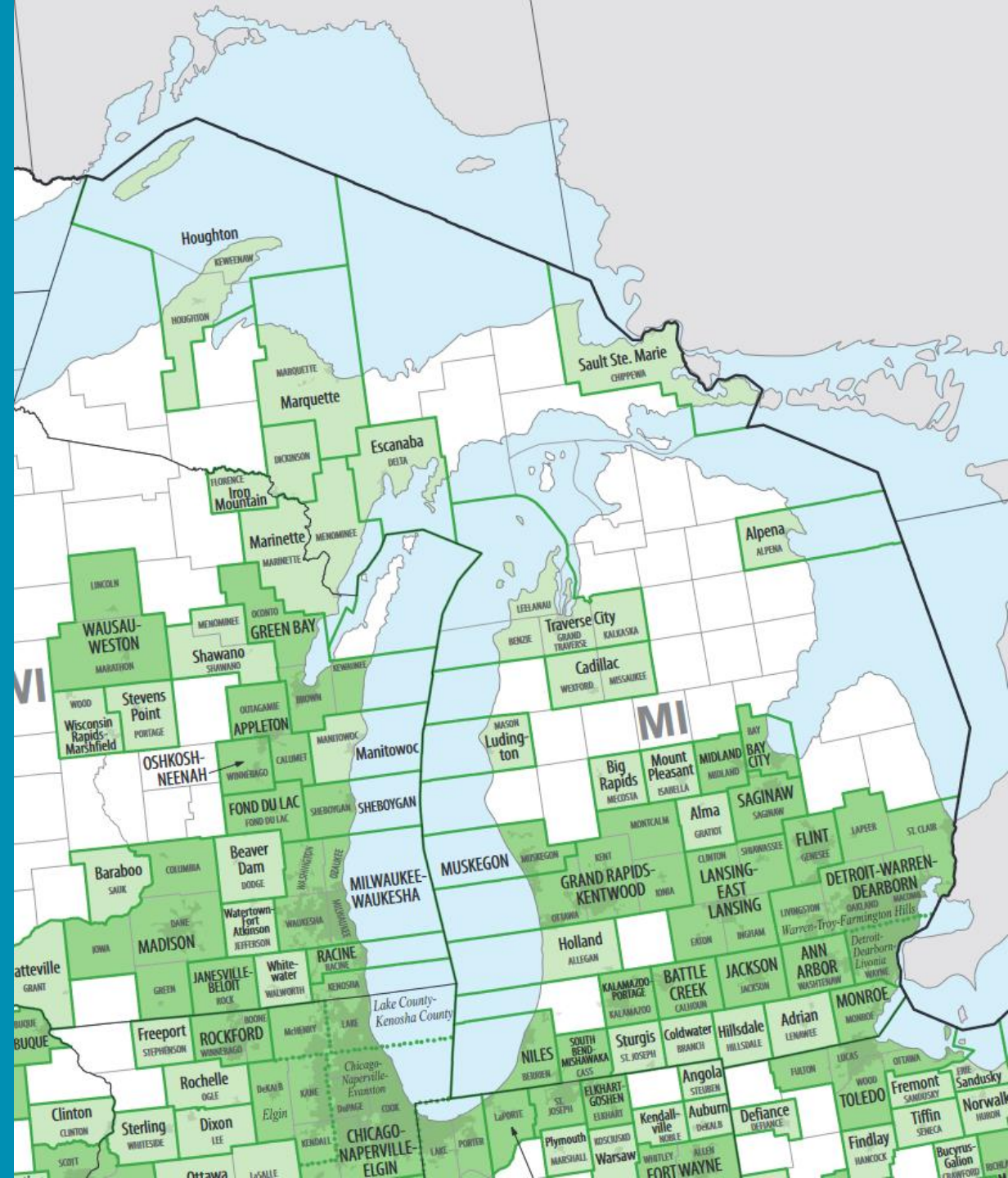
“The Equalizer”: A local tool to help evaluate impacts and tradeoffs when making decisions.

- Local actions have interconnected outcomes and tradeoffs between focus areas—let’s make those visible
- Your community will have different priorities than your neighbors—you need to set your own levels to get the desired mix

Peer community identification:

Data scan of 39 metro- and micropolitan areas in Michigan and 929 nationally across 1980 to present

- What places are similar to our communities, large and small?
- What can we learn through those comparisons? What makes our places stand out, and where can we learn from others?
- With support of Data Driven Detroit and Johnson Center at GVSU





Thank You!