



2025 – 2028 Strategic Plan

Our Path Forward – Striving for Excellence

Table of Contents

(hover your mouse over a section, and “control + click” to move to the desired section)

Letter from Chief Judge and Court Administrator	ii
Strategy Planning Team	iii
Overview	1
Mission, Vision, and Core Values	2
Strategic Focus Areas (SFAs), Goals, and Strategies	3
SFA 1: Enhance Access, Services, and Programs	4
SFA 2: Prioritize Timely and Fair Resolution	6
SFA 3: Strengthen Organizational Culture and Build a Modern Workforce	8
SFA 4: Modernize Court Infrastructure – Facilities, Security, Technology	10
SFA 5: Bolster Public Trust and Preserve Judicial Branch Independence	12
Appendices.....	14
A: Trends Analysis with Future Scenarios / Narratives	
B: Organizational Assessment	

Additional Resources: -

- External Trends
<https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/17thcc/pdfs/17CC-External-Trends-6.6.24.pdf>
- Internal Trends
<https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/17thcc/pdfs/17CC-Internal-Trends-6.6.24.pdf>
- 2024 Strategic Planning Survey – Results and Findings
<https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/17thcc/pdfs/17CC-SP-Survey-Report-8.1.24.pdf>



STATE OF MICHIGAN
17TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT

ANDREW M. THALHAMMER
CIRCUIT COURT ADMINISTRATOR

SANDRA M. VANDERHYDE
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR

SUITE 3200 B
180 OTTAWA AVENUE NW
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49503-2751

Dear Valued Partners, Employees, and Citizens,

I am excited to present to you our new strategic plan, which will guide us over the next three years as we strive to enhance our services and better serve the citizens of Kent County.

Our Collaborative Journey

Over the past six months, we have worked together to develop this plan through a thorough and inclusive process that included:

- A comprehensive SWOT analysis to identify our strengths and areas for growth
- Feedback from partners, stakeholders, court users, and employees through surveys
- A careful review of our performance measures
- Engaging discussions during executive leadership retreats

This collaborative effort has resulted in a thoughtful and strategic approach that builds on our strengths, addresses our challenges, and positions us for improved performance and public service.

Key Strategic Focus Areas

Our strategic plan focuses on five key areas that will shape our work moving forward:

1. **Enhanced Access and Services**
 - Making our court more accessible to everyone in the community.
2. **Timely and Fair Case Resolution**
 - Prioritizing efficiency to ensure cases are resolved fairly and promptly.
3. **Strengthening Culture and Modernizing Workforce**
 - Fostering a supportive work environment that encourages growth and innovation.
4. **Modernizing Court Infrastructure**
 - Upgrading our facilities and technology to better serve our needs.
5. **Bolstering Public Trust**
 - Building stronger connections with the community to enhance transparency and accountability.

Next Steps

In the coming weeks, we will be rolling out a detailed Operational Plan with our priorities in each focus area. Some judges and members of the planning committee will be scheduling team meetings to discuss how these initiatives will impact our daily work. I am confident that this strategic plan will not only improve our operations but also strengthen the services we provide to citizens of Kent County. Thank you for your continued support and dedication as we embark on this important journey together.

PHONE: (616) 632-5137 • FAX: (616) 632-5130

Strategy Planning Team

Hon. Deborah McNabb Chief Judge	Hon. Terence Ackert Judge
Hon. George J. Quist Judge	Andy Thalhammer Circuit Court Administrator
Sandra Vanderhyde Deputy Circuit Court Administrator	Sherah Richard Finance Director
Melissa Mortensen Office Administrator	Nichole Russell Circuit Court Admin. Services Supervisor
Nick Little Trial Service Manager	Ethan Leppanen Pre-Trial Release & Work Crew Supervisor
Heather Blodgett Court Services Manager	Tim Nelson Juvenile Detention Center Superintendent
Chris Burgess Juvenile Services Manager	Dan Stob Project Manager
Huemartin Robinson Juvenile Detention Assistant Superintendent	Michelle Crowe Assistant Friend of the Court
Traci Schenkel Friend of the Court	Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey Consultant, PRAXIS Consulting, Inc.

2025 – 2028 Strategic Plan

November 2024

Overview

The 17th Judicial Circuit Court (Court) in Kent County, Michigan is pleased to present its inaugural 2025 – 2028 Strategic Plan, “*Our Path Forward – Striving for Excellence.*” 2024 proved to be the right time for the Court to embark on a strategic planning process; it provided time to pause, assess, and think strategically and creatively about the future.

A Strategic Planning Team, an internal committee appointed by Chief Judge Deborah McNabb, developed the Strategic Plan with facilitation and consulting assistance from Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey, CEO of PRAXIS Consulting, Inc. (Denver, Colorado). The Team analyzed external and internal trends and considered the long-term implications of the trends on the Court. The Team also used feedback and suggestions from strategic planning surveys to assess the Court’s strengths and areas for improvement. The voices of external partners, stakeholders, court users, judicial officers, and court employees were heard and considered. All was used to shape the future direction and priorities of the Court.

This inaugural Strategic Plan includes:

1. Updated mission and vision statements, and core values of the Court.
2. Strategic focus areas (SFAs), which are areas of strategic and long-term importance.
3. Long-range goals and strategies for making improvements and changes.

Below are the Court’s SFAs. All are equally important in the Court fulfilling its mission and working toward its vision of the future.



See the Court’s Annual Operational Plan for the strategic initiatives / priority projects being worked on each year.

Mission, Vision, and Core Values

17th JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT

Mission

The 17th Circuit Court resolves disputes, upholds laws, protects rights, and provides restorative and rehabilitative services.



Vision

The 17th Circuit Court is a model, future-ready court that provides high quality services and inspires public trust and confidence.

Core Values

We are:

Accessible

Responsive

Timely

Impartial

Innovative

Trustworthy



Strategic Focus Areas (SFAs), Goals, and Strategies

Strategic focus areas (SFAs) are vitally important to the future of an organization; they are areas the Court will focus on to fulfill its mission and work toward its vision of the future. The SFAs listed below were derived following an extensive review of trends and an organizational assessment using strategic planning survey findings.

The trends analysis, a summary of which is included in Appendix A, and the organizational assessment, a summary which is included in Appendix B, revealed the Court must adapt to the ever-changing times including the needs of court users, an increasingly diverse community, the changing expectations of the workforce, and declining trust and confidence in the judicial branch. The Court also needs to be innovative in using new and emerging technologies, prioritize timely and fair resolution of legal matters, and modernize and strengthen its infrastructure.

In sum, working on the five SFAs in the years ahead will ensure the Court is adaptive to the emerging needs of the public and communities across Kent County, responsive to changing expectations, and effective and innovative in the delivery of justice.



Brief descriptions along with long-range goals and comprehensive strategies for each SFA are presented below. See the Court's Annual Operational Plan for specific initiatives being worked on in each area.

SFA 1: Enhance Access, Services, and Programs

Description: The Court, which includes all departments of the 17th Judicial Circuit Court including the Friend of the Court's Office, Juvenile Court, and Court Services, is committed to enhancing access, services, and programs for litigants, youth, and families across Kent County. Making the Court more accessible for all people, helping court users navigate the legal process, and making the Court more understandable are high priorities in the years ahead. Additionally, it is also essential for the Court and community and justice system partners to be responsive to court users' needs and provide programs that support and help them succeed.

Summary of Survey Findings. These priorities are supported by the results of the strategic planning surveys. Specifically, partners, judicial officers, and court employees:

1. Indicated some court users have difficulties accessing / using the Court (e.g., self-represented, non-English speaking, elderly, disabled, people who lack transportation to court facilities, cost of litigation).
2. Indicated many court users have difficulties understanding what they need to do to complete their court business or handle their legal matter (e.g., procedures are difficult to understand, the legal process is confusing, litigants sometimes do not know what they need to do next or after a court hearing to comply with the Court's order).
3. Provided many suggestions for improving access, services, and personal / navigational assistance to court users. Examples included: enhance self-help and language assistance; improve electronic / online access to court information and case files; improve the website and virtual access to the Court; expand services to rural areas of the County; simplify instructions and forms; and extend court hours, to name a few.
4. Suggested the Court and justice system and community partners need to enhance and expand programs to assist court users. Examples included specialty courts, mental health services, substance use/mis-use services, housing, employment, education, and counseling.

Long Range Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: All court users will be able to access and navigate the Court.

Strategies:

- a. Simplify and expand information and resources available to assist court users (e.g., instructions, procedures, forms, on the website, in multiple languages).
- b. Improve and expand both virtual and in-person assistance available to court users, and especially to self-represented and non-English speaking court users across the County.
- c. Involve court employees in simplifying information and streamlining processes and procedures.
- d. Use new and emerging technologies to enhance access and services (e.g., AI, chat bots, electronic payments, electronic signage, virtual and online services).

Goal 2: The Court, in collaboration with community partners, will provide programs and services that meet the needs of court users.

Strategies:

- a. Collect, use, and share data to enhance existing court and community programs and to identify emerging needs.
- b. Improve and expand court programming to meet existing and emerging needs of youth, families, and litigants.
- c. Advocate for and support partners working to expand and better coordinate community-based programs and services for justice-involved individuals, youth, and families.
- d. Implement best and promising practices that help court users succeed (e.g., diversion programs, specialty/problem solving courts, restorative justice approaches, trauma-informed practices).

SFA 2: Prioritize Timely and Fair Resolution

Description: The Court will take proactive steps to resolve legal matters / cases in a timely and fair manner. This includes improving scheduling, managing cases effectively, reducing the length of time it takes to resolve matters, reducing case backlogs, reducing wait times / starting court on time, streamlining workflow and procedures, and increasing consistency across courts/departments. Additionally, ensuring cases are handled effectively, treating all parties with respect, and making impartial and unbiased decisions will promote both procedural and outcome fairness for all people.

Prioritizing timely and fair resolution along with efficient and effective court operations are necessary for the Court to achieve its mission and vision for the future. All will assist in promoting fair and timely justice and build trust and confidence in the Court.

Summary of Survey Findings: The above areas were identified as areas for improvement according to the results of the strategic planning surveys. Specifically, feedback from partners, judicial officers, and court employees related to this strategic focus area (SFA) included the following.

1. Timely resolution was the top rated – most needed – improvement area by external partners and the third highest rated area for improvement by judicial officers and court employees. Areas within the Timeliness court performance category that received the highest ratings included “court employees provide information/services in a timely manner.” Areas rated the lowest included: “the reasonableness of wait times for scheduling and/or conducting hearings or for other appointments for services;” “court events starting on time;” and “cases/legal matters being resolved or handled in a reasonable amount of time.”
2. Equity and fair treatment also was among the five highest rated areas for improvement by both external partners and judicial officers/court employees. Areas within the Fairness court performance category that received the highest ratings included: “litigants and their attorneys are given an opportunity to be heard/present their case and “judicial officers treat court users with respect.” The lowest rates areas within the Fairness category included: “litigants understanding what they need to do when they leave the courtroom, courthouse, or virtual hearing;” and “judicial officers are fair (and perceived as fair) in deciding cases/legal matters.”
3. Suggestions for improvement included:
 - a. Improve timeliness by: improving scheduling, reducing wait times to get on the docket and for hearings to begin, eliminating mass scheduling and moving to on-time / staggered scheduling; posting daily dockets online; improving the timeliness of opinions and decisions, and more.
 - b. Improve fairness by: treating all people with respect; training judges on procedural fairness; eliminating biases related to women, people of color, and other marginalized groups.
 - c. Increase the use of virtual hearings for routine matters and consistency across the Court.
 - d. Streamline case processing and increase uniformity across court rooms.
 - e. Implement best practices to ensure juror diversity and improve the juror experience overall.
4. External partners and judicial officers/court employees suggested a “court of the future” should be innovative and make improvements in the aforementioned areas.

Long Range Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: The Court will surpass Michigan’s adopted time standards for all cases ensuring timely resolution of cases / legal matters.

Strategies:

- a. Reduce wait times (e.g., for court dates, start court proceedings on time, etc.).
- b. Use effective caseload management practices to reduce the time to disposition and case backlogs (e.g., triage cases, implement rocket dockets, set firm trial dates / limit continuances, use settlement conferences, judges control the pace of litigation).
- c. Simplify and standardize procedures across courtrooms (e.g., virtual hearings, forms)
- d. Leverage technology to improve processes and efficiency (e.g., go paperless, convert all documents to an electronic format).
- e. Prioritize and respond to internal and external communications in a timely manner.
- f. Increase understanding of judicial officers and staff about the time standards and efficient and effective court processes.

Goal 2: All departments of the Court will address and resolve matters in a fair and impartial manner.

Strategies:

- a. Treat all people with dignity and respect (e.g., recognize the humanity of all court users).
- b. Give all people an opportunity to be heard (e.g., an opportunity to explain their situation / tell their story).
- c. Explain rationale for judicial decisions.
- d. Help litigants understand what they need to do next to complete their court business and/or adhere to court orders.
- e. Communicate and hold attorneys practicing in Kent County to high service and professional standards.

SFA 3: Strengthen Organizational Culture and Build a Modern Workforce

Description: The Court realizes it must strengthen its organizational culture and prepare for a modern workforce to remain vibrant and relevant in the years ahead. Creating a unified and fulfilling organizational culture and preparing for a workforce of the future are high priorities for the Court. Focusing on these areas will help the Court recruit and retain a talented and satisfied workforce, foster a welcoming and engaging work environment, and deliver the highest quality of services to the people of Kent County.

Summary of Survey Findings: This strategic focus area (SFA) is supported by the findings and suggestions in the strategic planning surveys, which included the following.

1. Modernizing workplace and workforce practices was the second highest rated area for improvement by judicial officers and court employees.
2. Overall satisfaction working at the Court was rated highly by court employees. This is a strength from which to build upon in the future.
3. Court Culture and Strength of the Workplace also were rated quite high, but several areas for improvement emerged. The lowest rated questions in these areas were:
 - a. Court employees receive recognition or praise for doing good work.
 - b. Someone (e.g., supervisors, managers, others) talks to employees about their progress.
 - c. Employee wellbeing is a high priority at the Court.
 - d. I feel informed about what is going on in my workplace / the Court.
4. Suggestions for making the Court a better place to work included: improving hiring practices to ensure a diverse workforce; improving teamwork and a sense of community across the Court; providing training and development opportunities; increasing and valuing differences and diversity; strengthening and modernizing leadership and management practices; providing competitive pay and benefits; optimizing hybrid / flexible work schedules; improving the work environment, and more.
5. Employees also suggested a “court of the future” should pursue improvements in the aforementioned areas.

Long Range Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: The Court’s workforce will be unified and collaborative.

Strategies:

- a. Increase understanding across the Court about the roles and work of all departments and how departments and work impact others (e.g., define, train, educate).
- b. Build and promote inter and intradepartmental teamwork, collaboration, and problem solving.
- c. Provide opportunities and encourage courtwide networking and relationship building – connecting with colleagues across the Court.

-
- d. Build enthusiasm for a unified vision of the Court.
 - e. Model open and honest communication (e.g., share successes and failures, keep employees informed).

Goal 2: The Court's work environment will be welcoming, equitable, and fulfilling.

Strategies:

- a. Improve, welcome, and respect differences and diversity.
- b. Engage employees in making changes and improvements.
- c. Prioritize and promote employee wellbeing.
- d. Recognize and value employees for their contributions.
- e. Expand and provide equitable opportunities for training, development, and career advancement.
- f. Advocate for competitive compensation and benefits (with the funding unit).
- g. Manage and optimize flexible work opportunities without compromising quality of work and efficiency.

Goal 3: Judicial officers and employees will be competent to perform at the highest levels.

Strategies:

- a. Provide comprehensive onboarding and strengthen on-the-job training.
- b. Expand education, training, and development opportunities from local, state, and national providers (e.g., upskill / reskill the workforce; teach new skills; cross-train judicial officers and staff).
- c. Enhance employee performance through frequent feedback and coaching.
- d. Provide employees with the resources and tools they need to do their work well.

SFA 4: Modernize Court Infrastructure – Facilities, Security, Technology

Description: Modernizing the Court’s infrastructure – facilities, security, and technology – is vitally important for long-term success. The Court’s facilities must be accessible, welcoming, and meet current and future needs. Security must continually be strengthened, ensuring the Court remains safe and secure for all who use and work in the Court. The Court must continually modernize its technology to enhance access and services and ensure efficient and effective court operations.

Summary of Survey Findings: The above areas were identified as areas for improvement according to the results of the strategic planning surveys. Specifically, external partners, judicial officers, and court employees provided the following feedback related to the strategic focus area (SFA).

1. Technology was identified as one of the five, top-rated areas for improvement by external partners and judicial officers and court employees.
2. Judicial officers and court employees also identified safety and security as a top priority for future improvements.
3. Additionally, external partners and judicial officers/court employees suggested a “court of the future” should be innovative and be a leader in using technology, leveraging the existing and emerging technologies to enhance access, services, and operational efficiency.
4. Improvements to facilities, security, and parking also were needed for a “court of the future.” Survey respondents noted the importance of ensuring: adequate – professional, clean, and accessible – facilities, a safe and secure environment, and convenient, accessible, and affordable parking. Expanding access to all areas of the County along with repurposing space also were noted as necessary for preparing the Court for the future.

Long Range Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: The Court’s facilities and space will meet current needs and allow for future growth.

Strategies:

- a. Work with partners to modernize public areas so the Court is more accessible and user-friendly.
- b. Repurpose and reconfigure existing space to better suit current and future needs (e.g., reconfigure under-utilized space) in collaboration with county partners.
- c. Plan for future growth in Kent County, expanding services to all areas of the County.
- d. Advocate and build support for facility and space enhancements with county partners.

Goal 2: The Court's facilities will be welcoming, safe, and accessible.

Strategies:

- a. Work with the County to ensure professional, clean, and accessible facilities / workspace.
- b. Continually enhance courthouse security and emergency preparedness in collaboration with partners.
- c. Use technology to make the courthouse easier to navigate (e.g., by helping court users find the correct location (e.g., digital signage, kiosks, videos on website).
- d. Provide assistance to people who come to the courthouse (e.g., information desk, wayfinding assistance).

Goal 3: The Court will be a leader in using technology to enhance access, services, and operational effectiveness.

Strategies:

- a. Network with other courts and industry experts to learn about existing and emerging technologies.
- b. Invest in and use new / innovative technologies to ensure seamless access and efficient court operations.
- c. Continually improve cyber security and defend against threats and attacks (e.g., protect data and personal and confidential information).
- d. Train judicial officers and employees to use new technologies.
- e. Ensure the Court has the IT support needed to maintain and use technology.

SFA 5: Bolster Public Trust and Preserve Judicial Branch Independence

Description: Trust and confidence in government institutions around the country including the courts are declining. The Court is committed to elevating the public's trust in the 17th Judicial Circuit Court by educating the public about the Court and the third branch of government (e.g., the judicial branch's role in society, what it can and cannot do); connecting with communities and building positive public relations; and being more transparent.

The Court is also committed to enhancing collaborative relations with county, justice system, and community partners to better meet the needs of the people of Kent County. Finally, maintaining judicial branch independence is the cornerstone of the Michigan and US constitutions. The 17th Judicial Circuit Court will remain neutral and independent, adhere to the highest ethical standards, and thereby bolster trust and confidence in the Court.

Summary of Survey Findings: The survey findings mirrored the reports nationally of declining trust and confidence in all aspects of government including the courts. Feedback from external partners, judicial officers, and court employees related to strategic focus area (SFA) included the following.

1. Improving the public's trust in the Court / judicial system was among the five highest rated areas for improvement by external partners.
2. External partners noted that a "court of the future" should build public trust by increasing accountability and transparency and be proactive and visible in the community. The Court's image needs to be improved generally but specifically among marginalized communities. Finally, bench officers must individually apply the law fairly and eliminate biases.
3. Honoring the MI and US constitutions and particularly, the three separate and independent branches of government, also is a high priority for the Court.

Long Range Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: The public will trust and have confidence in the 17th Judicial Circuit Court.

Strategies:

- a. Adhere to and demonstrate the highest ethical and professional standards.
- b. Educate and share impactful experiences with the public about the Court (e.g., civics 101, how the positive impact on court users/litigants).
- c. Connect with, build trusting relationships with, and solicit input from communities across Kent County (e.g., participate in community events, reach out to communities).
- d. Be transparent while maintaining and safeguarding confidentiality and sensitive data / information.
- e. Collaborate with legal and community partners to promote confidence in the Court / judicial branch.
- f. Pursue and strengthen media relations.

Goal 2: The Court will maintain judicial branch independence consistent with the Michigan and US Constitutions.

Strategies:

- a. Educate stakeholders and the public of the Court's role as a separate branch of government.
- b. Defend against encroachment from other branches while maintaining a collaborative approach.
- c. Explain rationale for administrative and operational decisions by the Court's leadership and judiciary.
- d. Seek support and assistance from justice system and legal partners to advocate for separation of powers between the 3 branches of government.

Appendices

Appendix A: Trends Analysis – External and Internal

A trends analysis helps organizations understand the external and internal landscapes and anticipate and prepare for future implications (of the trends) on the organization. It also helps an organization consider future opportunities and potential threats.

The Strategic Planning Committee reviewed a myriad of external trends including social / demographic, economic, pandemic, workforce of the future, policy / political, technological, and justice system.

<https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/17thcc/pdfs/17CC-External-Trends-6.6.24.pdf>

Case filings, time to disposition, program statistics, fiscal, and human resource trends were among the internal trends reviewed as part of the planning process.

<https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/17thcc/pdfs/17CC-Internal-Trends-6.6.24.pdf>

Below is a summary of possible long-term implications of trends on the Court. Also included at the end of this section are two future scenarios. The first is a challenging or undesirable narrative where the Court is ill-prepared for the future. The other is a positive or desirable narrative where the Court is proactive, prepared, responsive, and adaptable to the changing times.

Long-Term Implications of Trends

1. Access and Services. Kent County's population is increasing, and demographics are changing. The Court's future caseloads/ workloads will likely increase accordingly. And the Court will need to adapt, enhance, and expand services (online, personal, and virtual) to meet the changing demographics and needs of the public. Enhancing access and services for self-represented litigants, the elderly and low income, non-English or limited English persons, persons who are disabled, and other marginalized groups will be necessary in the future. The Court also will need to explore new and innovative ways for enhancing access and services such as expanding virtual access, expanding services to growth areas around the County, creating new partnerships, and using new and evolving technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence, chat bot, etc.), to name a few.
2. Court and Community-Based Programs and Services. There are a growing number of justice-involved individuals, youth, and families with behavioral health and other needs including mental health, substance use / abuse, transitional and permanent housing, employment, education, and the like. Enhanced and expanded court and community-based programs (e.g., diversion, deflection, specialty courts, restorative, and rehabilitative) will be needed to collectively address the needs and ultimately help individuals, youth, and families succeed. Using innovative and evidence-based tools and programs will help the court and other providers/partners achieve effective outcomes.
3. Safety and Security. Gun violence, including mass shootings, is on the rise. Threats and violence against public officials, including judges also are becoming commonplace. Many people do not feel safe or express concerns about personal safety. The Court, in collaboration with local and state law enforcement partners, must continually monitor and avert threats, strengthen security, and maintain a safe and secure environment for all who use and work at the Court.

-
4. Technological Innovations. Technological innovations including generative artificial intelligence (AI) (e.g., ChatGPT) are rapidly advancing. The wireless revolution, electronic and virtual “everything” (e.g., court hearings, virtual appointments), data systems, data analytics, and data sharing, and use of mobile devices are examples of the technological advances occurring. The Court must stay abreast of developments and continue to explore and use available and emerging technologies to improve access, services, and operational efficiency. It also must continually assess and prevent cyber threats and attacks, protect confidential data and personal information, and keep the Court’s computer / IT systems secure.
 5. Workforce / Workplace Practices. The world of work is forever changed. The pandemic along with other factors (e.g., low unemployment rates, difficulties recruiting / filling positions, changing workforce expectations) have transformed the new future of work. Employers (the Court) and management are having to modernize workplace practices to meet the changing expectations of employees that include hybrid or flexible work arrangements, a more relaxed yet engaging and satisfying work culture, a desire to do meaningful work, expectations for professional development and advancement opportunities, to name a few. The Court will need to adapt workplace and leadership and management practices in the future to be able to attract and retain a competent and committed workforce.
 6. Agility and Embrace Change. Organizations must remain agile and resilient to succeed in the future. And, because change is necessary and pervasive, the Court must strive to be nimble and responsive to changing times and build a culture that drives and embraces change.
 7. Public / External Relations. Maintaining positive public relations with city and county leaders (e.g., commissioners, city council, administration/executives) and other justice system and community leaders is essential for the future. Collaborating with these leaders and entities will help ensure the Court has adequate funding and all are working together to improve the Kent County justice system.
 8. Divisiveness and Civility. We are living in a time when society is divided – polarized – on many social, economic, and political issues. Confrontations and conflicts are frequent and seemingly have been normalized. Civility in society and in the courtroom has declined. The Court must continue to build trust and confidence, be neutral and unbiased, uphold the highest standards / integrity / etiquette, and promote civil discourse and just resolutions of disputes and legal matters.
 9. Public Trust. Trust and confidence in public institutions are continuing to decline. Judges (the courts) generally are not always perceived as fair, unbiased, neutral, and transparent. Many people do not understand the third and independent judicial branch of government and its role and function in society. The Court must be proactive in educating the public about the judicial branch of government and take actions that regain and inspire trust.

Future Scenario 1 – Challenging / Undesirable Narrative

The Court is struggling to adapt to the changing landscape and fails to make needed improvements. The Court is struggling to fulfill its mission, work toward its vision, and live its core values. One challenging and / or undesirable future narrative is as follows.

1. Crime is increasing across the County. Litigation generally is on the rise.
2. Delays in processing filings and paperwork and scheduling matters are pervasive.
3. Many cases are pending. Litigants, families, and others are adversely affected. Backlogs are increasing. Cases (of all types) are not being resolved in a timely manner; cases are not being resolved within the recommended time guidelines.
4. The Court has not refined or perfected remote / hybrid hearings. Many attorneys and litigants struggle to understand hybrid / remote procedures. Procedures vary depending on the courtroom / judge. The effectiveness of remote hearings is being questioned.
5. The Court's services have been cut. The quality and timeliness of services are declining. Litigants and families are not receiving assistance and/or services to help them navigate court processes, understand what they need to do to proceed with their cases. Customer service has declined; the Court is not easy to access, it is not understandable, and service from staff is slow. Court users are frustrated.
6. Staff turnover remains high, and staff are burning out. The Court has not adapted to the changing expectations of court employees. Hybrid work privileges have been lost. Training is inadequate. Employee morale has declined; it has hit an all-time low.
7. The Court lags other courts in Michigan in its use of technology, creating a positive work culture, and providing training, professional development, and career advancement / promotional opportunities to staff.
8. Facilities have been neglected. They do not promote trust and confidence in the court system. Space and facilities are inadequate as is.
9. Relationships with justice system and community partners have not been established or maintained.
10. The Court is reactive. Its reputation has declined. The public and businesses have lost trust in the court system.

Future Scenario 2 – Positive / Optimistic Narrative

The Court is adapting and responding proactively and effectively to the changing landscape. The Court is continuously making needed improvements. The Court is fulfilling its mission, making strides toward its vision of the future, and living its core values. One positive or optimistic future narrative is as follows.

1. The County's population continues to increase and is more diverse.
2. The Court is easily accessible and user friendly (online, in-person, and remotely via community centers, libraries, etc.). Resources and services are available to assist court users (online videos/tutorials, multilingual fillable and printable forms, etc.). The Court is more understandable; there is less confusion among court users. Customer service is excellent, according to court users.
3. Case processing has been streamlined. Scheduling is timely and uniform. Court data is consistent and reliable.
4. The Court has developed consistent virtual hearing procedures and practices. Attorneys, litigants, and staff know what to expect. Appearance rates are high, and litigants are able to meaningfully participate in hearings and access services.
5. Backlogs are low. Cases are being resolved in a timely manner. The Court is leading the state in resolving all cases per the time standards. Case age rates are at the lowest point ever.
6. The Court is leading in the use of technology to enhance access, convenience, and operational efficiency. Staff and judges alike are trained in the uses of technology; they are highly competent to handle virtual hearings and provide virtual services.
7. The Court has adapted to changing conditions and expectations. It has built a modern workplace and is prepared for the workforce of the future.
8. The Court is fully staffed (including the detention center). It has a healthy turnover rate. The Court has developed effective hybrid work arrangements. Staff feel welcome and connected to their coworkers and feel they are doing meaningful work. Staff also feel valued and are empowered and collaborative. They are trained adequately and have professional development and career advancement opportunities. Staff are highly engaged and satisfied. Morale is high.
9. The Court has expanded programs to assist court users (e.g., specialty programs, mediation, referral services to housing, education, employment, etc.).
10. The Court has expanded partnerships in the community to meet the growing needs of court users (e.g., housing, education, employment, behavioral health services, etc.). Youth and families are connected to community services. The services to court customers are helping litigants, youth, and families succeed.
11. The Court has an excellent reputation in the community and with County leadership. It is viewed as a neutral place that resolves disputes fairly and timely. The public trusts and has confidence in their court system.

Appendix B: Organizational Assessment

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quality of services – we care, customers are satisfied, staff are helpful and provide information in a timely manner 2. Use of virtual proceedings – virtual proceedings are in demand; Zoom hearings improve access to court hearings 3. Improving technology – using Zoom for virtual court proceedings; going paperless – making system / process improvements 4. Satisfied and professional employees – the Court has talented staff; staff have the resources they need to do their work; staff feel comfortable seeking assistance; staff know what is expected of them 5. Fairness of the Court / judicial decisions – litigants feel heard; are treated with respect 6. Alignment between partners and judges / staff – partners, judges, and staff are largely in agreement on future priorities / needed improvements 7. Good relationships with external partners 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ease of access – physical, online, and virtual access, personal assistance; parking 2. Timely resolution / processing time – reduce wait times; start matters on time; improve scheduling; resolve matters in a timely manner; consistency in virtual proceedings; help litigants understand what they need to do after their hearing 3. Programs and services – more court and community-based programs and services are needed to meet need 4. Build / maintain public trust – educate the public about the Court; public outreach 5. Employee wellbeing and equity – recognize staff accomplishments; provide regular feedback; focus on improving work / life balance; flexibility; equitable practices; diversity in leadership; staff feeling safe/ secure; provide growth / advancement opportunities 6. Communication – internal and external (staff and partners); celebrate accomplishments / share positive survey results 7. Implement / learn new technologies – e-filing; new systems; AI 8. Common court culture – build unity across the Court – mutual understanding of the Court / educate about court services and role of areas; teambuilding

Future Opportunities:

1. Access: collaborate with community partners to improve access (e.g., kiosks in libraries)
2. Case processing / timeline resolution: improve coordination between divisions on parallel cases (e.g., family and criminal); create more efficient and effective ways to provide notice and opportunities to participate in court hearings / services; improve consistency across courtrooms (e.g., virtual proceedings, procedures, etc.); need more docket time for PPO cases; improve case management practices – e.g., triage cases, implement differentiated case management; do a deeper dive into factors that contribute to the time it takes to resolve certain case types; streamline case processing
3. Resource allocation: analyze case trends to predict future resource needs; reallocate resources based on volume of cases / workloads.
4. Improve practices / expand programs and services: grow / strengthen specialty courts; do not detain youth for technical / probation violations; provide more local placements for girls / youth - e.g., open new Girls Residential program in detention; measure outcomes of diverted DL cases; expand juvenile diversion program; expand juvenile placement facilities/options.
5. Workplace / workforce: add more flexibility for staff, where possible; improve hiring practices; focus on employee retention; build a workforce / workplace for the future; engage in succession planning; build a culture that embraces change; provide more opportunities for career advancement
6. Technology: implement “operation paperless,” which will improve processes (be more efficient and timelier); explore other uses of technology to enhance access, services, and operational efficiency
7. Communication: showcase / share the Court’s high-performance numbers – survey results
8. Public Trust – build credibility and trust with the community