



Kent County Strategic Plan

2019-2023

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Dear Kent County Residents,

In September 2018, Kent County embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process to envision a desired future for the County and translate this vision into more defined values, priorities, and goals, as well as a mission, over the next three to five years. As part of this process, we solicited input from a variety of stakeholders, including:

- County residents
- Elected officials, including all County Commissioners
- Judicial officials
- Community partners, including philanthropic and business leaders

We collected their feedback across multiple channels, including:

- An online survey of residents, available in English and Spanish
- Three community conversations at multiple locations across the County
- Interviews with elected officials and judges

- Three stakeholder roundtable interviews with area businesses and philanthropic and economic development organizations
- A survey specific to community stakeholders for additional feedback
- Two work sessions with the Board of Commissioners to refine the vision, mission, and priorities

What follows is the 2019-2023 Kent County Strategic Plan, which reflects the growing and changing demographics of our County. It also embodies our commitment to be efficient and forward-thinking with County resources. While the strategic plan is complete, the real work now begins. The County will be developing clearly defined metrics to implement the newly created priorities and goals. All this information will be shared on our website: www.accesskent.com.

For those who participated in providing feedback and ideas through this process, thank you! We hope you see your input reflected in the new vision, mission, and priorities of the County.

Sincerely,



Handwritten signature of Mandy Bolter in black ink.

Mandy Bolter
Kent County Board of Commissioners Chair



Handwritten signature of Wayman Britt in black ink.

Wayman Britt
County Administrator

COUNTY PROFILE

Kent County provides a wide and varied range of services across many areas, including public health, veterans services, social services, law enforcement, elections, vital records, tax collection, public works, parks, corrections, and the courts. Additionally, through public-private partnerships, the County plays a vital role in the Gerald R. Ford International Airport, network180 (Community Mental Health Authority for Kent County), and the John Ball Zoo. Beyond these contributions, the Road Commission and Drain Commissioner's offices also maintain hundreds of miles of critical water and road infrastructure.



1836

Organized in 1836, Kent County comprises 21 townships, five villages, and nine cities

659K

Kent County is home to a young, diverse, and educated population, totaling nearly 659,000 people

7.6%

Kent County's total population increased 7.6 percent since 2010

25.8%

More than 25 percent of Kent County's population identifies as ethnically or racially diverse

15

Kent County is home to 15 colleges and universities

89.5%

More than 89 percent of Kent County residents have a high school diploma

33.7%

More than 33 percent of Kent County residents have a bachelor's degree or higher

1st

Kent County ranked first in the state in population gains between 2017 and 2018

12th

Of 83 Michigan counties, Kent County ranks 12th in overall health outcomes

24

Kent County hosts one rural health clinic, seven hospitals, and 16 Federally Qualified Health Centers

1

ArtPrize is recognized as the most-attended public art event in the world

7,040

The Kent County Parks Department manages over 7,040 acres of public open space in 42 parks

PLAN ELEMENTS



VALUES

- Articulates what an organization stands for
- Prevails across the organization and is reflected in its vision, mission, and goals



VISION

- Serves as a single, encompassing statement about the future state of the County
- May or may not ever be achieved
- Remains true over a long period of time
- Is set by the Board of Commissioners



MISSION

- Serves as a single functional statement that defines Kent County administration's role in achieving the vision
- May be constitutionally defined in the role of county government
- Should remain constant but may evolve as the organization grows
- Is set by the Board of Commissioners and the County Administrator



PRIORITIES

- Is a set of five major accomplishments that Kent County administration seeks to fulfill in pursuit of its mission
- May or may not be directly measurable
- Is developed by the County Administrator with Board input
- Is set every three to five years



GOALS

- Serves as the pathway to fulfill the County priorities
- Is developed by the Administrator and leadership team
- May or may not be for a specific team; could cut across departments
- Is updated annually



STRATEGIES

- Is a granular activity that individual staff or groups of staff will take to reach an objective
- May or may not be used; some may be used concurrently
- Is measurable
- Is updated quarterly



PROCESS

Kent County engaged Public Sector Consultants (PSC)—a Michigan-based nonpartisan research and consulting firm—to facilitate the development of this strategic plan. The County’s primary objective was to create a plan that prominently reflected the priorities of residents. The development process included more than 20 different meetings over a ten-month period, including community conversations, county-wide surveys, internal sessions with department leaders, interviews with elected officials, and stakeholder roundtables, which culminated in two Board of Commissioners’ work sessions. In total, more than 300 individuals participated in at least one of the meetings or a survey.

In every session, participants were asked to reflect on:

- Things going well in Kent County, both broadly throughout the County and more specifically within its government
- Potential improvements
- The most important item the new strategic plan should address
- What should be retained from the County’s previous strategic plan—Vision for 2020—and what is no longer necessary

Through the survey, community members were also asked to rate Kent County’s performance on meeting the Vision for 2020 Strategic Plan objectives. Survey results were similar to other feedback, ranking the County as exceling in fiscal responsibility but falling short under resident engagement.

SURVEY RESULTS

Category	1-2 (Poor)	3 (Neutral)	4-5 (Good to Excellent)
Quality of Life	25	44	61
Proactive and Innovative	38	49	41
Stable Revenue	9	44	76
Efficient with Resources	25	53	50
Safe Community	20	38	72
Citizen Participation	61	29	39



PERSPECTIVES

Philanthropic and business leaders expressed satisfaction with the County's commitment to fiscal responsibility as well as its delivery of mandated services. These leaders, however, want the County to be more forward-looking, serve as a regional leader in addressing growth challenges (transportation, congestion, affordable housing, etc.), and tackle diversity, equity, and inclusion issues.

Department leaders identified challenges to address over the next five years to position Kent County for future success. Internal points of focus included strategic resource alignment, workforce development, retention and recruitment improvements, innovative use of technology, and sensible regulations. External items included increasing engagement with residents, planning for growth, removing barriers to opportunities, enhancing the health of the community, and ensuring services continue to grow alongside the population.

Elected officials, including commissioners and judges, praised the County's sound fiscal practices, its value of public-private partnerships, its delivery of basic services, and the efficiency of its government. They, however, identified areas of improvement the County should focus on, including diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; County leadership on a regional scale; the strategic growth of County services; and more robust resident engagement and communication efforts.

Community members noted a strong and growing economy in the County as well as a high quality of life. They also highlighted the County's fiscal responsibility and some departments go above and beyond to provide exceptional services. Nonetheless, these members expressed concern about numerous issues, including population growth, limited resident engagement, land-use planning, challenges with diversity and inclusion, lack of communication from the County, and limited funding for basic services.



Participants were also critical of the County's previous mission statement, which was lengthy because it encompassed the County's mission, vision, and priorities.

The Board of Commissioners and Administrator's Office staff participated in five work sessions in which they developed statements around their commitments as County leaders, created individual visions for the County, and articulated the role of the County in delivering on the strategic plan priorities and goals. PSC asked Commissioners to create their own vision for Kent County for future generations when thinking about the vision statement for the County. Multiple vision and mission statements were developed and shared with the public for additional feedback before agreeing on the final versions.

PSC compiled the feedback from the meetings and aggregated this information into 40 potential areas on which Kent County could focus its efforts over the next three to five years. County leadership was asked to review the potential areas and answer the following questions:

1. Does achieving Kent County's mission require focusing on this area?
2. If you answered yes, is it the responsibility of the County or someone else?
3. Will achieving this have low or high impact?
4. Does this item have low or high feasibility?

The resulting information was then used to prioritize responses and determine where the County's efforts would be most impactful and achievable over a five-year period. The following priorities are a direct reflection of this exercise, stemming from the input received from the public and stakeholders.

County leaders, departments, and staff are committed to the ongoing responsibility of implementing this plan. Department directors will prioritize implementation while carefully reviewing the viability and financial impact of each objective. The internal Performance Management Review Team will track goal performance and make any necessary course corrections.

As a final note, the priorities and goals are not meant to be exhaustive of the efforts that Kent County will engage in over the next five years. Instead, these are the priorities among dozens of others the County is and will be focused on in the months and years to come. The specific items are included in the strategic plan because they are most directly tied to how the County will address public sentiment, remain competitive, and ensure it is a place where individuals and families want to live, work, and play.

VALUES

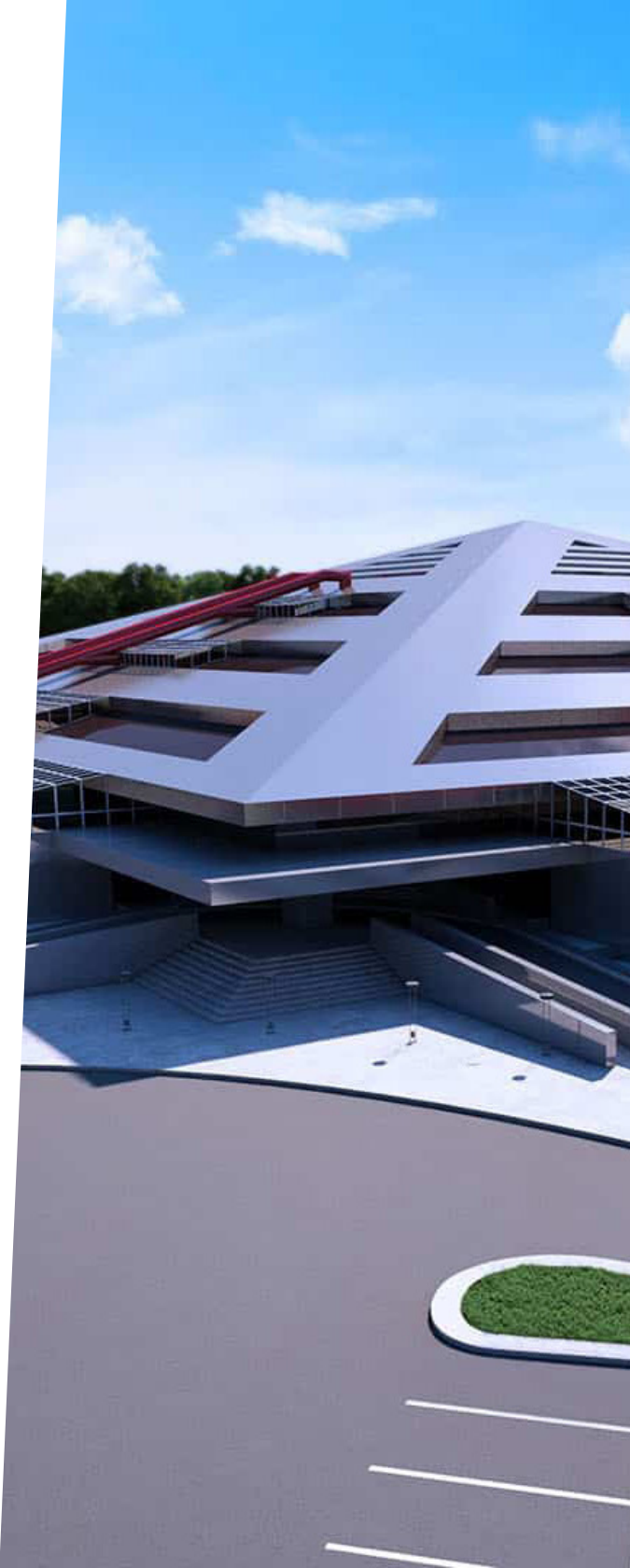
- Act with integrity
- Serve as responsible stewards of County resources
- Provide high-quality service to internal and external customers
- Work collaboratively
- Embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion

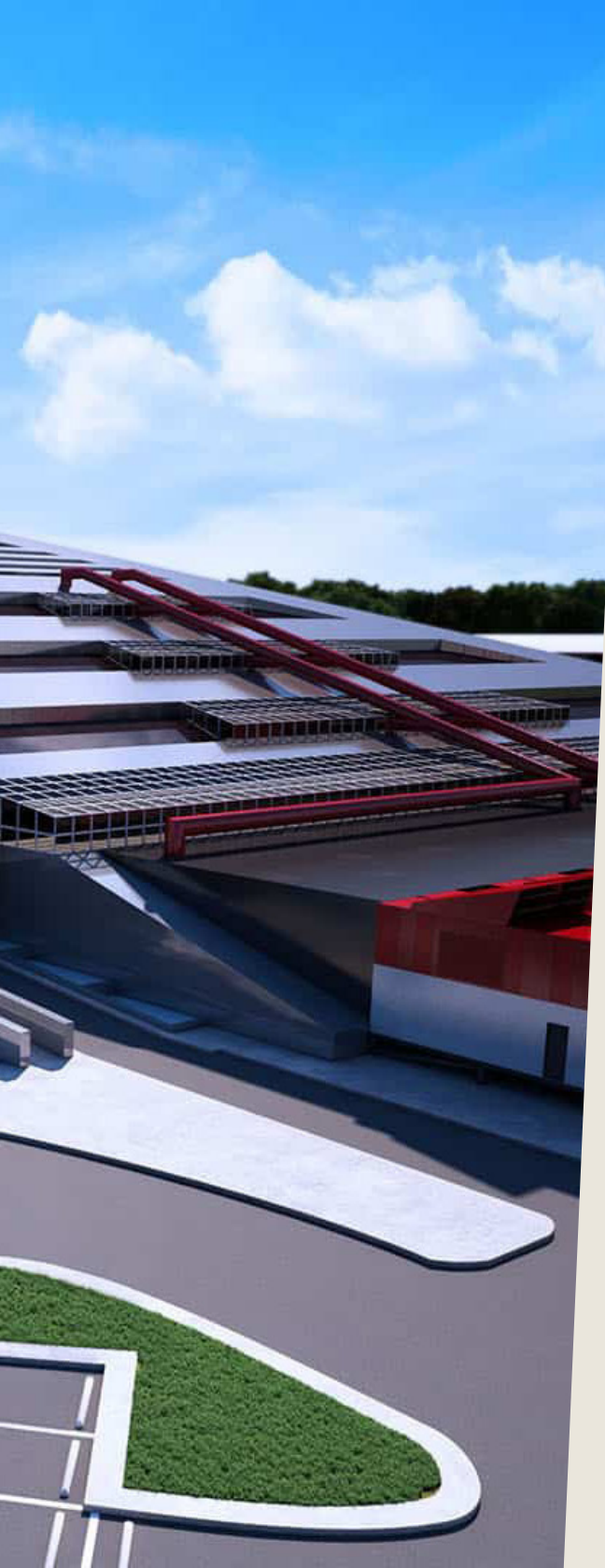
VISION

Kent County is where individuals and families choose to live, work, and play because we are a forward-looking, intentional, and inclusive community that serves as the economic engine of West Michigan.





MISSION

Through responsible budgeting and thoughtful planning, Kent County government is committed to providing resources and services that promote a high quality of life for the entire community.





PRIORITIES

-  **1** ECONOMIC PROSPERITY
-  **2** HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE
-  **3** EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE DELIVERY
-  **4** INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION
-  **5** EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS



Economic Prosperity

Kent County's demographics are rapidly evolving. Since 2010, the population has grown nearly eight percent. Today, the County's nearly 659,000 residents are younger, more diverse, and increasingly better educated than previous generations. Of these individuals, 50 percent are younger than 35; 26 percent identify as racial or ethnic minorities; and college education rates are higher than state and national averages.

As one of the fastest-growing economies in the United States, Kent County is an excellent place to conduct business. For 21 consecutive years, the County has received the highest possible credit rating (AAA) from Standard and Poor's (S&P) Global and Moody's Investors Service,

placing it among only a few counties in the United States to achieve these ratings. Like high personal credit scores, the County's AAA bond rating significantly reduces the cost of capital needed to improve County infrastructure and services.

As a County, we are committed to maintaining our strong financial footing through sustained and conservative fiscal management. We will also work with residents and businesses to position them for success, recognizing that—as Kent County thrives—so does the surrounding region.



We will focus on sound fiscal management and policies to support the economic prosperity of the County as well as the West Michigan region.

Goal: Maintain the financial stability of Kent County

Goal: Improve the fiscal position of the County through increased state and federal advocacy

Goal: Position the County for multigenerational economic and population growth



High Quality of Life

Kent County's 25 departments, offices, and agencies provide services across numerous focus areas, including public health and wellness; water quality; support for veterans, children, and vulnerable adults; public safety and courts; waste, recycling, and conservation; parks; elections; and vital records. Whether providing 80,000 clinic visits, creating innovative programming like Girls Court, repairing roads, or managing one of the nation's largest urban parks and beaches for 100,000 visitors a year, the County plays a critical role in improving the quality of life for residents.

This strategic plan builds off existing efforts that are focused on improving the quality of life for our residents and communities. Kent County wants to be at the forefront of supporting the growth of our 864 square miles, ensuring that as communities grow, the availability of resources and services does too.



We will foster a high quality of life that promotes safe and healthy communities, strategic growth, and world-class outdoor resources.

Goal: Ensure an appropriate public safety response to preserve safe communities

Goal: Address existing and emerging public health and environmental concerns

Goal: Support community efforts that improve the social determinants of health

Goal: Sustain and optimize alternatives to incarceration as well as inmate programming and services

Goal: Develop and enhance park and trail facilities to improve access for recreation and leisure opportunities



RECYCLING & EDUCATION CENTER



Excellence in Service Delivery

Kent County's shifting demographics present a growing need to change how it will continue delivering high-quality services. Though the County is committed to attracting and retaining top talent and providing world-class customer service from its 1,700 employees, the pace of technological change can present

difficulties for employees and customers alike. Therefore, we will continue to identify opportunities to optimize operations and strengthen the use of technology and data. We will also review our hiring and retention practices as we are keenly aware that investing in our people is one of the best ways to maintain a culture of excellence.



We will adopt innovative ways to deliver services that maximize efficiency and provide an exceptional experience to those we serve.

- Goal:** Ensure responsive services to areas with growing and/or changing demographics
- Goal:** Create an organizational culture that emphasizes excellence in customer service
- Goal:** Ensure that Kent County is an employer that attracts and retains diverse and top talent
- Goal:** Embrace innovation and continuous improvement to optimize County operations
- Goal:** Strengthen the use of technology to foster efficient use of resources



Inclusive Participation

Over the last decade, Kent County's population has grown at a record-breaking pace. The County has not just grown in number, but it has also become more diverse. Nearly 26 percent of residents identify as racially or ethnically diverse, and this number is likely to increase in the years ahead. As a result, Kent County is

committed to undertaking efforts and strategies to address the needs of its evolving population so that all its departments, offices, and agencies provide culturally competent customer service to all residents. Additionally, we will continue to recruit and retain a workforce that reflects our diverse community.



We will provide innovative and inclusive ways to engage residents and involve them in County government.

Goal: Provide our residents with equitable access to efficient, effective, and culturally responsive services

Goal: Intentionally incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in our service delivery

Goal: Recruit and retain a qualified, diverse workforce that reflects our continually changing community



Effective Communications

Kent County seeks to increase its dialogue with residents on how it can be a partner in improving lives and communities. With nearly 659,000 residents across 21 townships, five villages, and nine cities, this is no small feat. Therefore, the County has made developing and implementing a strategic communication plan a top priority. We want to create two-way interactions with residents and government/

leadership, including with the Board of Commissioners, and will be seeking ways to create opportunities to gather input and participation from residents. Through a new strategic communication plan, changes to the County's website, and more engagement tools for County leaders, we are working to deliver more timely and engaging information to those we serve.



We will be transparent and clear in the communications and decisions of the County.

Goal: Develop a new strategic communication plan for the County

Goal: Ensure visible County leadership and staff participation in community initiatives

Goal: Elevate the County's significant initiatives through regular, ongoing communication



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