



groundwork
CENTER FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

SUMMER 2016

Laying the Groundwork

Last year, in an effort to expand support for our work, we made the big move of changing our name to the Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities. As you can imagine, after more than 20 years as the Michigan Land Use Institute, I was a bit nervous. Now, just over a year later, I am thrilled to report that "Groundwork" is working. I've received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback on the new name, and we are indeed achieving our goal of recruiting more members and increasing awareness about our work to build resilient communities.



drops and becomes competitive with other electric generation options, our clean energy team officially launched Groundwork Shines, an innovative residential solar campaign in northwest Michigan.

On the local food and agriculture front, we are proud to report that Taste the Local Difference™, our local food marketing campaign, has proven its value in the marketplace as a social enterprise under Groundwork's umbrella. And the state Legislature just passed a measure that will dramatically increase locally grown fruits and vegetables in school cafeterias, an initiative modeled after our farm to school work in northwest Michigan with the support of many committed partners.

So far, 2016 has been an exceptional year of accomplishment—and all of us on the staff, Board, and Advisory Council extend our sincere appreciation to each and every one of you who make this good work possible.

As always, we'd love to hear your ideas and feedback, so don't hesitate to get in touch. Our outreach efforts are in high gear, so if you see a Groundwork table at special events, be sure to say hello!

Thank you to all of you who stuck with us during this transition. It showed me that no matter what, our supporters are dedicated to our pro-environment, pro-economy mission and believe in our capacity to produce meaningful outcomes.

With this newsletter, I want to send our collective best wishes and update you on some of our most recent outcomes:

After nearly two years of organizing and outreach to build support for revitalizing passenger rail service from Ann Arbor to Traverse City and Petoskey, state leaders officially announced a major study to explore the next steps in making this vision a reality.

As the cost of producing energy from the sun

HANS

Groundwork Executive Director



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A Legislative Victory for School Kids and Farms

Groundwork's longstanding focus on farm to school has resulted in a major legislative victory for the health of Michigan's school kids and the bottom line for Michigan farms. In June the Michigan Legislature approved funding for a pilot project in two Michigan regions—west Michigan and northwest Michigan—that will dedicate up to “10 Cents a Meal” of match funding for locally grown fruits and vegetables on school menus.

This funding follows a successful three-year pilot project led by Groundwork in seven Grand Traverse-area school districts that caught the attention of Senator Darwin Booher (R-Evart). Sen. Booher worked with Groundwork's Diane Conners to craft legislative language that offers competitive grants totaling approximately \$250,000 in the Michigan Department of Education budget to help school food service directors purchase

more fruits and vegetables from local Michigan farms.

In our original locally funded pilot, Groundwork demonstrated a 142 percent average annual increase in spending in the first two years on locally grown fruits and vegetables as a result of the additional funds, and documented 25 different fruits and vegetables from 36 different farms purchased by the schools.

Diane says one of the key advantages of the “10 Cents a Meal” program is that it provides stable funding for schools to try new products, and also allows farms to plan for stable markets. Both farmers and school kids enjoy the connections between their breakfast and lunch menus and their nearby farm neighbor.

Groundwork is working closely—and quickly—with Michigan Department of Education officials and partners at Michigan State University's Center for Regional Food



Systems to prepare grant application criteria, online forms, and information materials for food service directors in the two regions. As many as 166 school districts across 23 counties are eligible for this initial state pilot, and priority will be given to schools that can demonstrate the capacity to utilize the funds effectively and immediately. Schools also will rank higher if they demonstrate a

commitment to farm to school meals, school gardens or related nutrition education.

This legislative success is a perfect example of Groundwork's commitment to working locally to develop models of resilience that can be applied and replicated as policy change elsewhere. We are extremely proud of the good work of Diane and the Groundwork food and farming team on this success!

Other News from Groundwork

Train Keeps a Movin'

Last year, Groundwork said it's possible to restore passenger train service to northern Michigan from Ann Arbor within 10 years. We are pleased to report that progress is tracking right on schedule.



On July 29, state transportation officials announced that they will launch the northern Michigan passenger rail feasibility study this fall. That study will explore issues and options for reinstating passenger train service to the Traverse City and Petoskey areas.

A key issue will be clarifying track conditions and the associated costs of repair, which will determine allowable train

speeds. This in turn effects the total travel time by train between Traverse City and Ann Arbor. The study will also look at issues such as operational management structure; passenger interest; cost of tickets; frequency and seasonality of service; passenger stops; and depot amenities at towns along the tracks.

Groundwork's Jim Bruckbauer secured local, state, and federal funding to pay for the feasibility study in a partnership with the Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA), and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). Jim will keep you up-to-date on ways you can participate in the study this fall.

Healthy, Local Food for ALL

Groundwork's focus on food and farming has always strived to be inclusive of all members of our community—not just those that can afford a CSA farm share or the food co-op. Groundwork's Meghan McDermott is now leading a regional task force of the Northwest Michigan Food & Farming Network to create partnerships and programs to ensure that our low-income families can access healthy, local food.

Thanks to a *Building Healthy Communities* grant with the Health Department of Northwest Michigan, Meghan is assisting four food pantries and four area schools with new approaches to making healthy, local food an easy choice.

By providing mini-grants and technical

assistance, Groundwork helped the Father Fred food pantry in Traverse City create a new raised-bed garden; Boyne Falls Public School purchase a commercial smoothie blender; and Leelanau Christian Neighbors in Suttons Bay purchase a new refrigerator for storing produce. These relatively inexpensive additions all help make healthy, locally grown food more accessible to all.

Groundwork Shines

Solar energy production is taking off in many parts of the nation – and world – as the price of solar panels has plummeted in the past several years. However, rooftop solar installations in northwest Michigan have been increasing slowly.

Groundwork's Clean Energy Policy Specialist Dan Worth is working to change that and bring the “solar contagion” to our region. Dan is partnering with our local solar installation businesses to provide marketing assistance, as well as “solar scouting” to determine if a house is a good candidate for solar panels. Sunny, south-facing roofs are essential, but we are also working to streamline the permitting headaches and provide access to necessary financing for homeowners.

Our Shines program is soliciting homeowners in the Grand Traverse region through our website, and matching viable projects with local installers. As the program expands we will also help increase the capacity of the installers to take on even more projects.

