



Building Capacity to Drive Community-Tourism via Visitor "First Impressions" Tourism Assessments

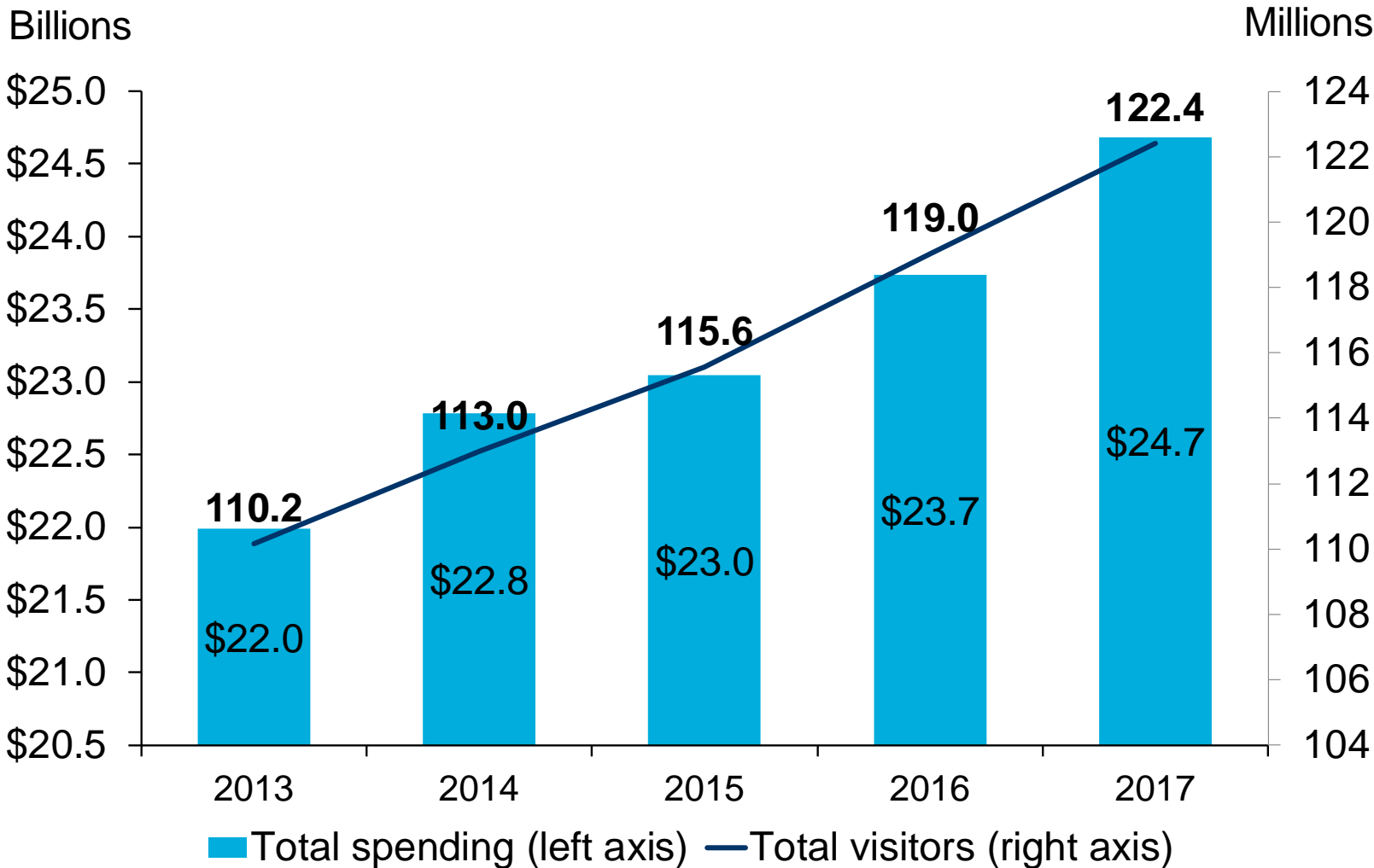
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- Background
- FIT Program Overview
- Community Case Studies
 - Actions and Outcomes
- FIT Process
- Questions and Answers

Michigan visitor volume and spending



Source: Tourism Economics

Rural communities

- Revitalization strategies for attracting visitors and new residents
- Strengthening existing local/regional tourism
- Assets are overlooked and/or neglected
- Don't realize what they have to offer or capitalize on
- Leadership and action is lacking or stagnant
- Will visitors want to return and why and to where?

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

UConn COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

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UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT EXTENSION

West Virginia University EXTENSION SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

EXTENSION



First Impressions

A Program for Community Development

Brattleboro, VT

Summary Report

November 12, 2015



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

Assessing your community for tourism (FIT)



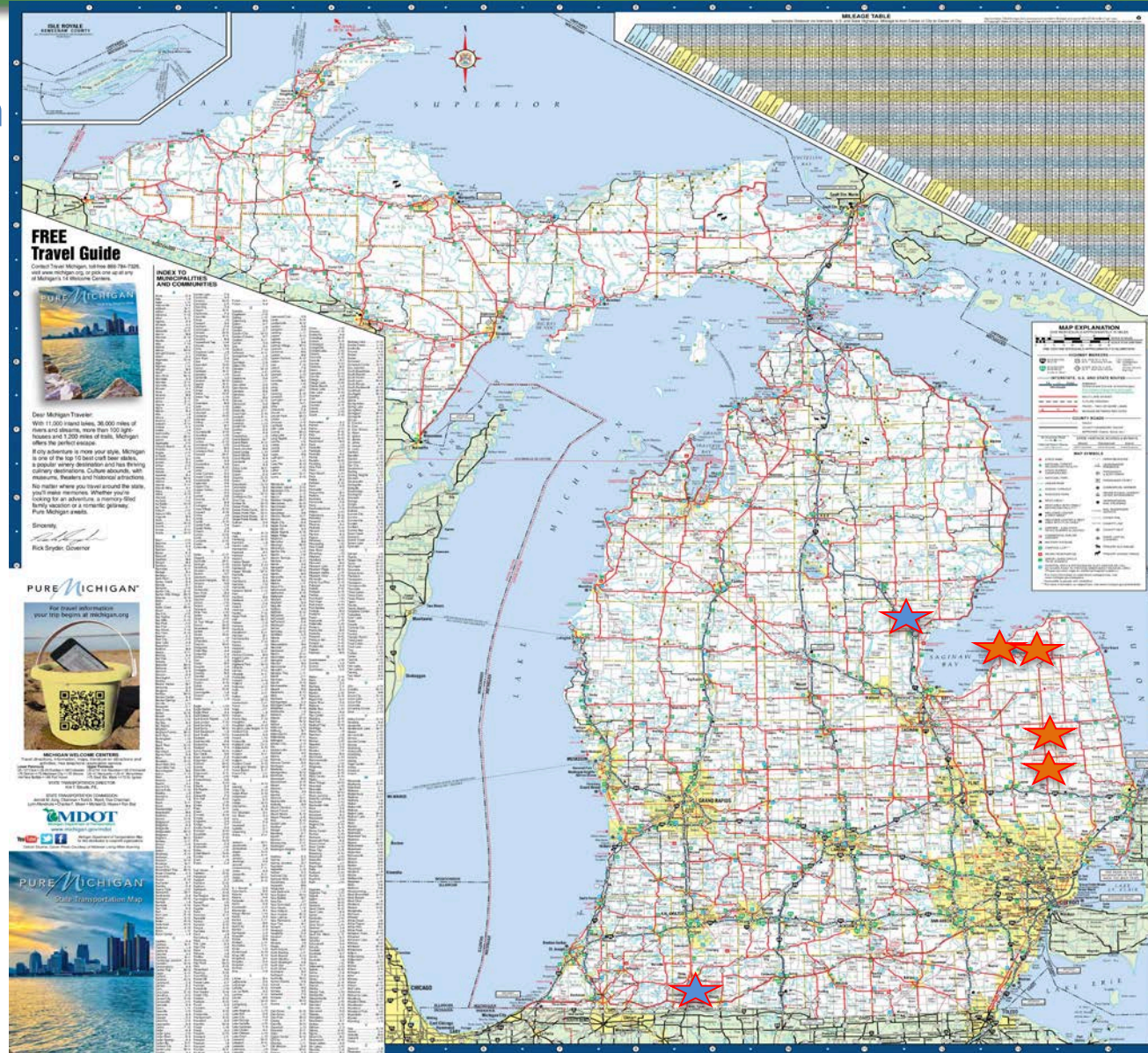
msue.anr.msu.edu

FIT communities will:

- Learn about their assets and opportunities from first-time visitors.
- Strengthen an existing cohort of leaders and residents by providing them an opportunity to organize on the basis of valuable feedback about their community.
- Develop a list of action items for community improvement.
- Integrate action items into community plans.
- Take action on community improvements and strengthen their image.
- Improve community well-being and quality of life for residents and visitors.

FIT 2016 (Pilots)

- Sturgis and Standish



FREE Travel Guide



Dear Michigan Traveler:
With 11,000 island lakes, 36,000 miles of rivers and streams, more than 100 golf courses and 3,200 miles of trails, Michigan offers the perfect vacation.

Michigan's diverse scenery, historic architecture, and vibrant cultural scene make it a popular vacation destination. From scenic views and historic architecture, to vibrant cultural scene, whether you're looking for an adventure, a relaxing getaway, a family vacation or a romantic getaway. Pure Michigan awaits.

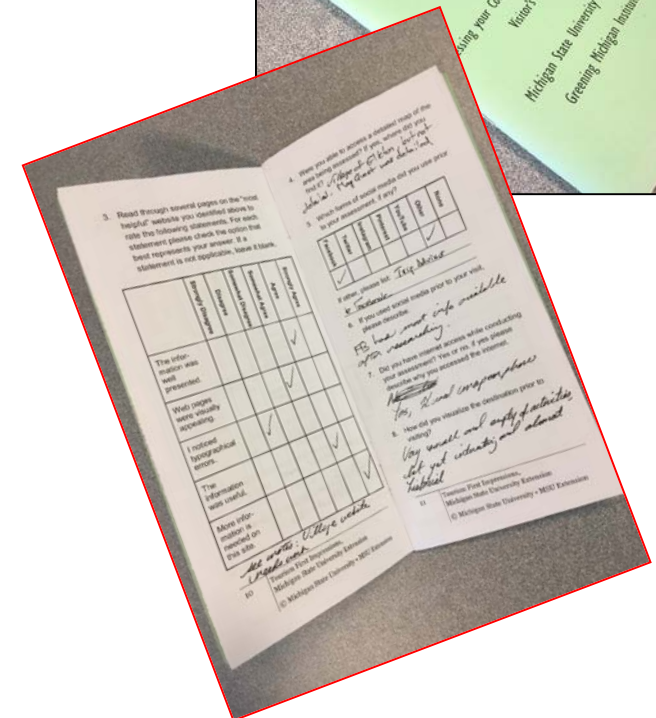
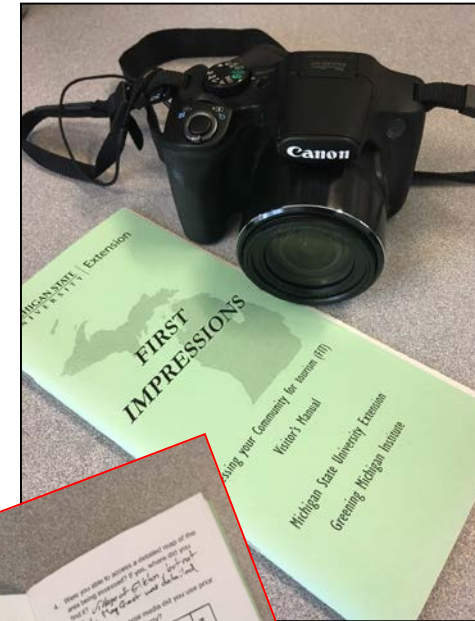
Sincerely,
Rick Snyder, Governor



MICHIGAN WELCOME CENTER
1000 West Shoreline Drive
Saginaw, MI 48607
800.452.3333
www.michigan.gov/welcome



1. Prior to the Visit
2. Initial Impression
3. Community Information
4. Visitor Motives
5. Destination Evaluation
6. Residential Areas
7. Tourism Assets Visited
8. Main Downtown Business Area
9. Using Senses and Safety
10. Lasting Impressions
11. Trip Reflections



Which social media did you use?



Answer	Count
Facebook	5
Twitter	0
Instagram	1
Pinterest	0
Youtube	2
None	0
Trip Advisor Other	1
Total	9

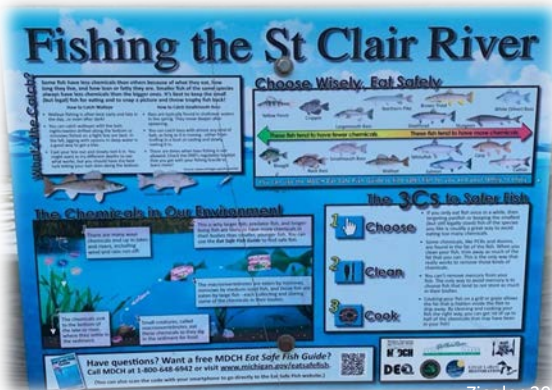
Why was it used?



Top 3 reasons you think visitors come to the destination?



Ziegler 2019



Ziegler 2019

Relax	5
Be in nature	3
In transit to somewhere else	1
Engage in sports activities -Boating/Fishing	1
Other	1
Get away from people	1
Shop	1
Visit friends and family	1
Enjoy the weather	1
Visit historical sites	0
Experience the nightlife	0
Get entertained/for entertainment	0
Engage in business activities	0
Seek adventure	0
Engage in religious activities	0
Experience a unique culture	0

8. Downtown Business Area

• The grounds have been landscaped with flowers, trees, shrubs, and bushes	15
• There are areas of green space	15
• Parking charges are reasonable	15
• Parking is centrally located	14
• Parking is secure	14
• The downtown business area is handicapped accessible	14
• This is a welcoming place	14
• People are smiling	14
• Walking sidewalks are well maintained	13
• Additional walking paths are available	13
• There is pedestrian traffic (foot and bike)	13
• Customers are greeted warmly when they walk through the door	13
• There is a mix of ages	12
• Hanging baskets are displayed on the exterior of businesses	11
• Vehicle traffic is managed to encourage pedestrian movement, via foot or bike	11
• The main downtown business area is a major tourist draw for the area	11
• The main downtown business area feels distinct or special	10
• Flags/banners are displayed on the exterior of businesses	9
• There is a gateway point to enter/leave town (piece of art, mural, sign, etc.)	9
• There are walker/biker friendly signs	8
• Bike lanes exist on roadways	7
• There is a mix of ethnic groups	2

Destinations strengths?

- Strong rural character, agricultural lands
- Hospital community
- Building stock,
- Municipal park
- Downtown village facades
- Cass River, (disc) golf course(s)
- Eclectic businesses
 - (Red Market, Snowmobile Farm, Pharmacy)
- Petroglyphs, Octagon Barn
- Wide open spaces
- Good School(s)
- Mix of dwellings



Challenges facing the destination?

- Lack of investment and abandonment
- Disconnect between hospital and downtown
- No brand connection, no motto/slogan
- Zoning codes/mixed-use?
- Overabundance of parking
- Building vacancies
- Entering/exiting downtown
- Signage to parks/natural resources (lack of)
- Matching the community to the website
- Lacking multiculturalism
- Distance markers to attractions



FIT 2016 (Pilots)

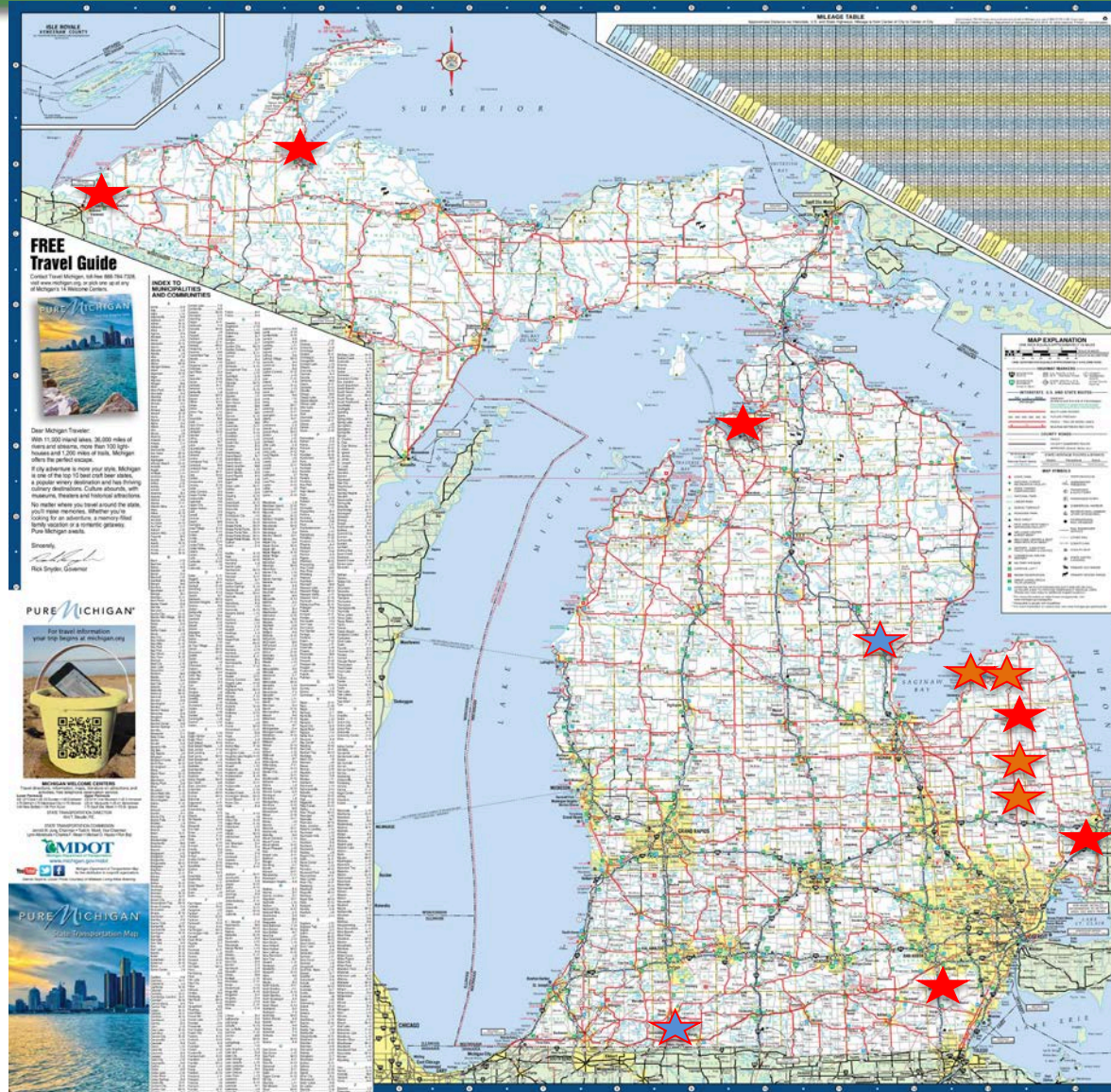
- Sturgis and Standish

FIT 2017

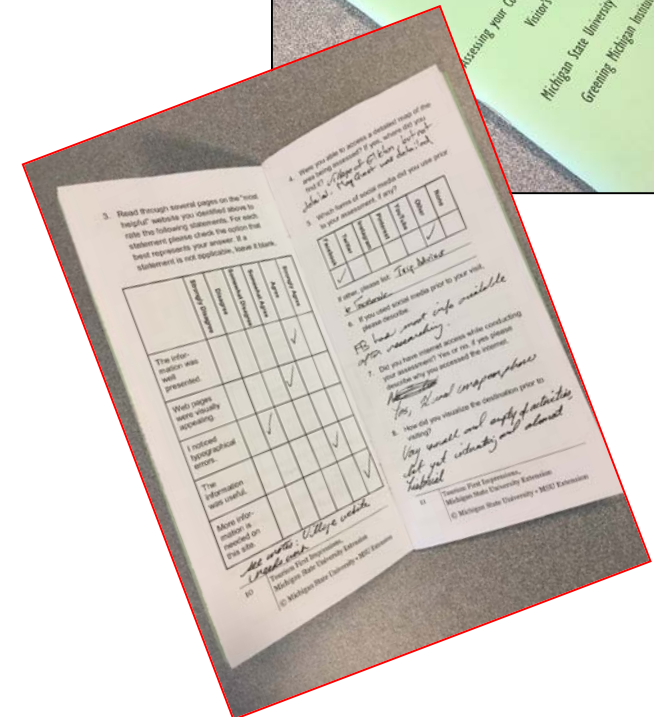
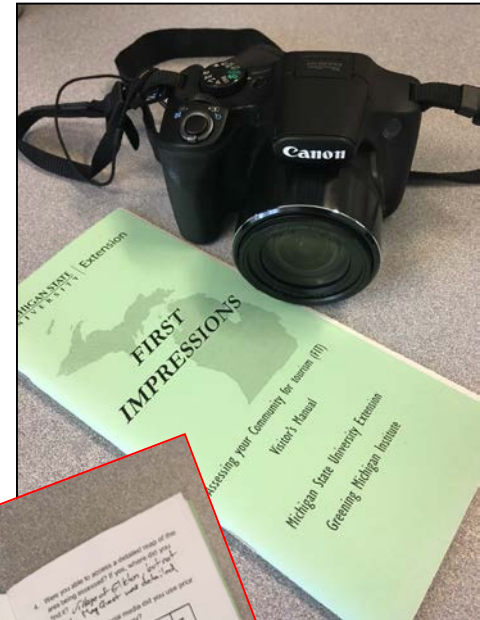
- Village of Elkton
- Imlay City
- City of Marlette
- Village of Sebewaing

FIT 2018

- East Jordan
- Village of Dundee
- Bessemer
- Houghton
- Cass City
- Marine City



1. Prior to the Visit
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9. Waterfront Community (Added in 2018)
10. Using Senses and Safety
11. Lasting Impressions
12. Trip Reflections



9. Waterfront Assessment

- Riverside Walking and/or Biking Trails
- Marina
- Boat Launch
- Kayak Launch
- Shore-based Restaurant(s)
- Shore-based Retail
- Fishing Dock
- Shore-based Fishing
- Kayak Trail(s)
- Waterfront Playground(s)
- Coastal Wayfinding Signage
- Lakeside Walking and/or Biking Trails
- Water-trail Signage
- Swimming Beach(es)

15
13
12
12
12
10
9
9
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4
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3
0



9. Waterfront Assessment

What is one area that could be improved?

- Re-open ferry to Canada...the marina needs to be inviting and/or upgraded
- The parking area in front of the catholic school needs to be improved and added to the waterfront amenities along the downtown riverfront.
- A longer walking trail along the river would be very nice, if possible.
- A wider promenade with benches and vendors would create a vibe to the area.
- Around the beach area, it would be nice if there were slow down signs for kids, etc. Also, having some signs for kayakers, canoers to launch would be nice.



FIT 2016 (Pilots)

- Sturgis and Standish

FIT 2017

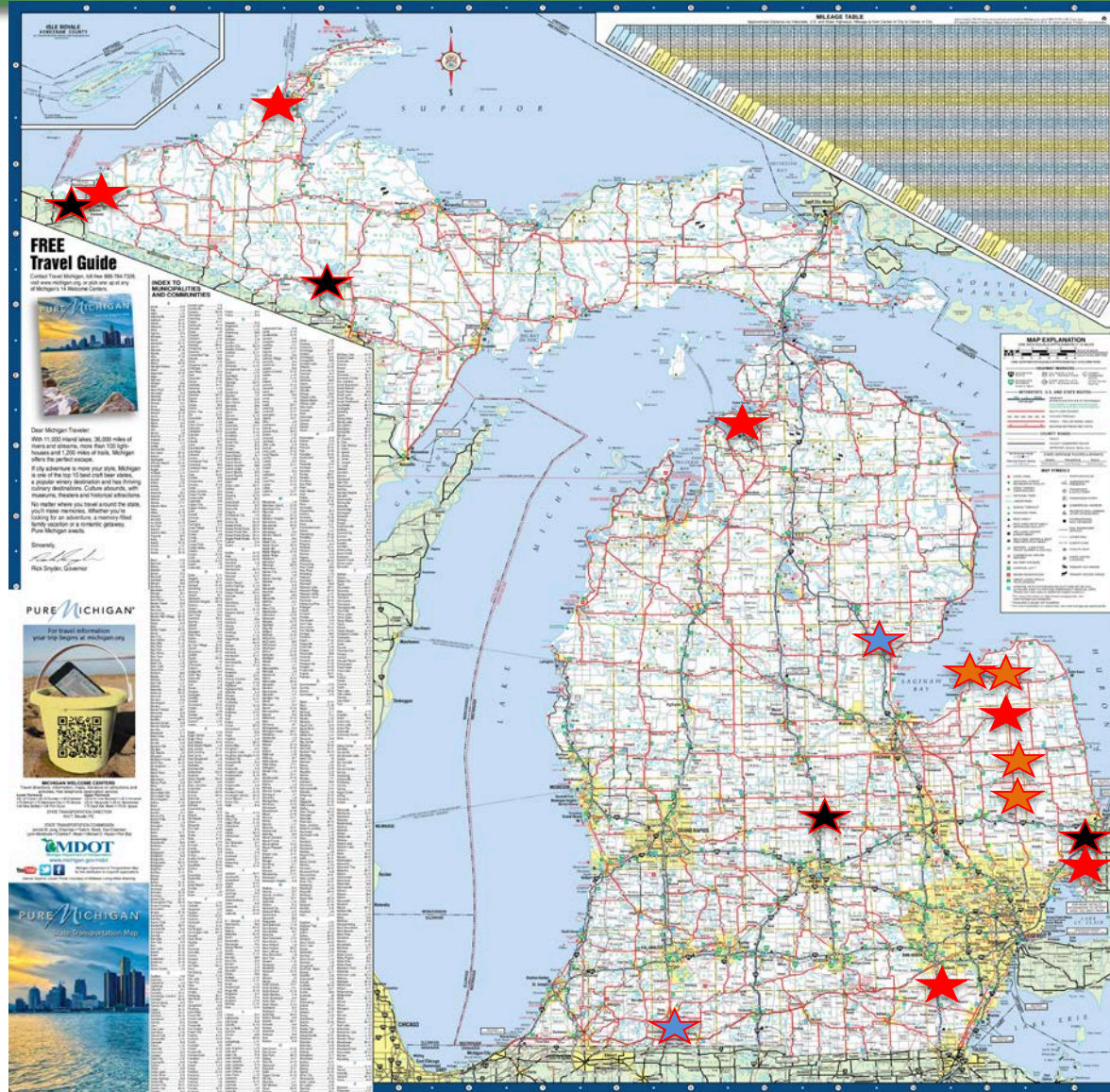
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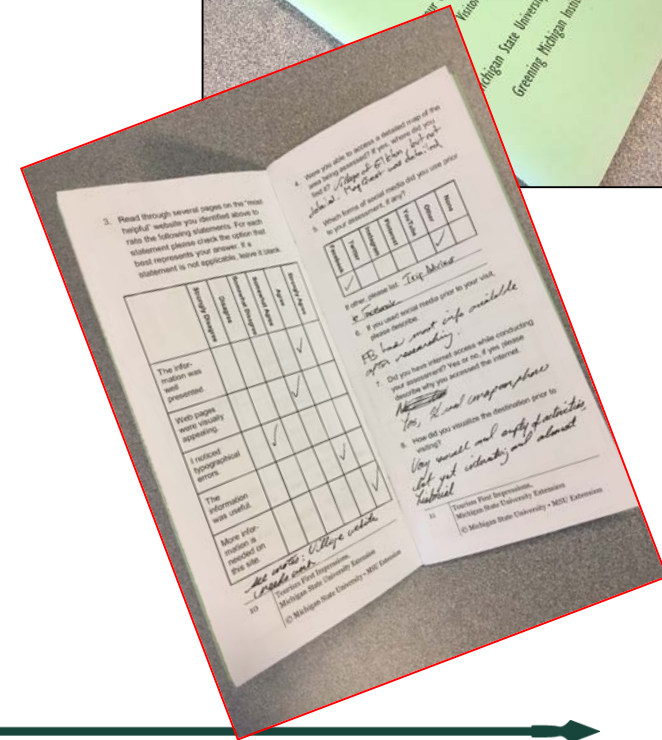
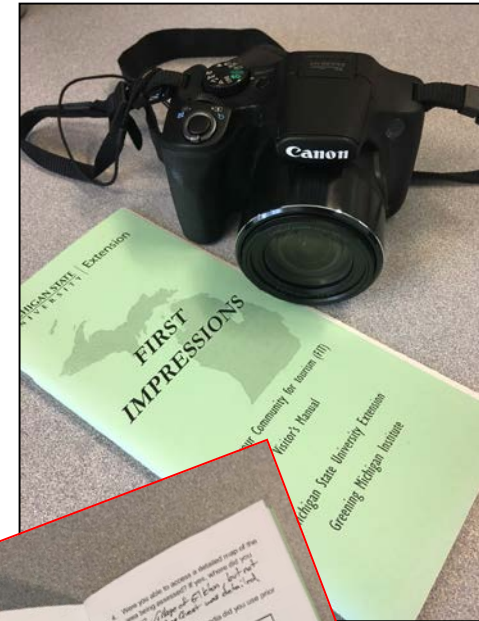
- East Jordan
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- Bessemer
- Houghton
- Cass City
- Marine City

FIT 2019

- Laingsburg
- St. Clair
- Ironwood
- Crystal Falls and Area



1. Prior to the Visit
2. Initial "5 minute" Impression
3. Community Information
4. Visitor Motives
5. Destination Evaluation
6. Residential Areas
7. Tourism Assets Visited
8. Main Downtown Business Area
9. Waterfront Community (2018)
10. Using Senses and Safety
11. Art and Culture (Added in 2019)
12. Lasting Impressions
13. Trip Reflections



Arts and Culture opportunities you think could be improved or expanded on?

- Include more public art, especially in the parks and along the river. And include more of the heritage info into art by including youth art perspectives too.
- Better promotion, signs out the day of or sign where it is happening.
- Tell more of the Native American history of the area
- Direct your QR codes on the walking trail to actual historical info of each vessel/ship. Don't route us to another website and force visitors to “dig” even further for it.
- More murals would be a nice addition





- Art
- Recreation
- Business
- Community





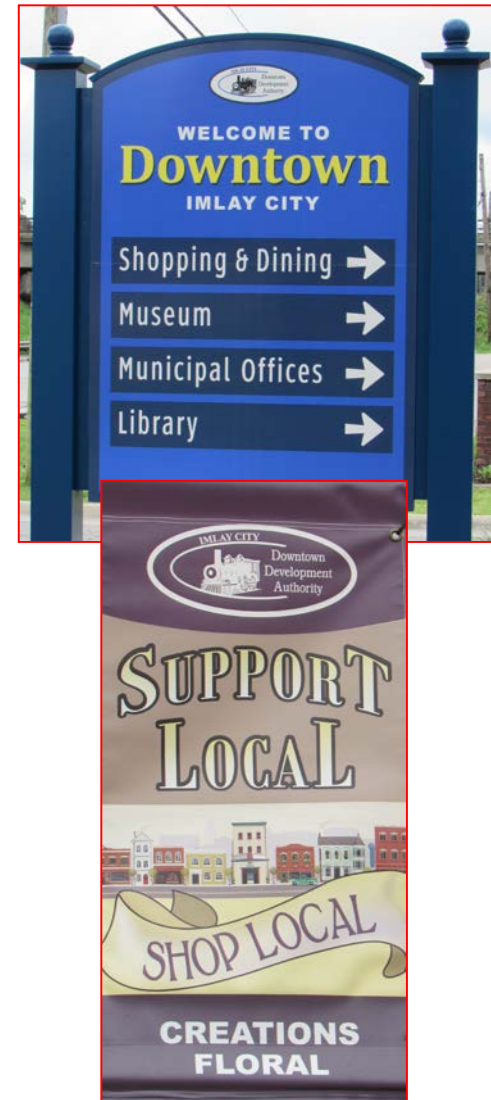
- Not how to become a tourist town, but what do tourists think of your town...
- Every community gets visitors...
- Do they want to return or will they and why or why not?
- Information, not criticism, to drive action...

Community Leadership Team (CLT)

- CLT is determined by community
 - *Recommendations are given*
- Public and Private Sector partnership is recommended
- Strongest CLTs include:
 - City or Village Managers
 - Downtown Development Authorities
 - Chambers of Commerce
 - Local Business Owners, Entrepreneurs, and/or Industry
 - School Officials
 - Residents



- Volunteers beautification committee created (awarding beauty vs. penalizing blight)
- Historical walking trails
- Cycling and kayak trail signage
- Public/Private agritourism partnership
- Hispanic community representation in public sector
- \$3,000 grant dollars secured for future projects



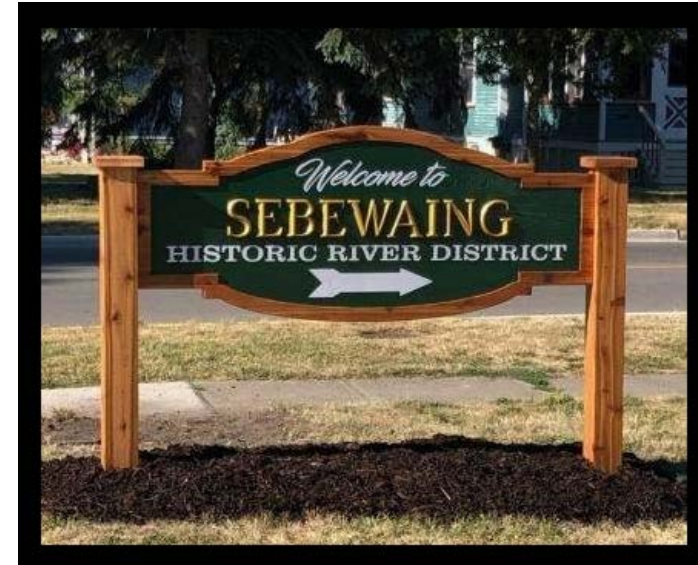
- Downtown Development Authority re-engaged with new projects after 9 years with all new members.
- Launched their first farmers market
- Businesses engaged for better service
- \$3,000 grant dollars secured for future projects



- Downtown Development Authority re-engaged and launching projects after 4 years.
- Local artists engaged for mural paintings
- Websites redesigned and promotional material created
- Businesses engaged for better service
- Youth/business entrepreneurship program



- Established “Historic River District”
- Launched new farmers market
- Recreation plan updated after 5 years
- Kayak trail signage
- Grant dollars secured for future projects
- Active “Community Leadership Team”



- Active “Community Leadership Team”
- Actions:
 - Adventure sports marketing
 - Visitor Social Media
 - Business improvement programs
 - Residential improvements programs
 - Pedestrian friendly connections
 - Developing Historical/Cultural Tourism
 - Signage
 - Wayfinding
 - Water & nature trail signage





- Communities are using FIT to -
 - Build capacity
 - Strengthen their image, assets, and tourism opportunities
 - Update Master and/or Recreation Plans
 - Spawn new ideas and leadership
 - Community Foundation grants
 - Getting organized for state agency programs for additional support
 - Redevelopment Ready and Main Street Programs





- **Who?**
 - 5 person assessment teams
 - Generational diversity
 - Mixed sex, race...
- **When?**
 - Typically Summer months
 - Weekdays and weekends
 - Overnight stays
 - Day visits
- **With who:**
 - Family members (3+ people)
 - Alone
 - Spouse or partners





1. A Community Leadership Team (CLT) is formed.
2. CLT applies for FIT.
3. MSU Extension conducts a FIT orientation and outlines next steps with the CLT.
4. A team of FIT visitors visit the community unannounced
5. Internal meetings, results summarized.
6. CLT organizes a Community Report Forum (CRF) and summary of results are shared in open forum.
7. A written report is provided to the CLT.
8. CLT takes the lead with community and decides to act.
9. MSU Extension conducts follow-up with CLT to gauge impacts and offer further assistance.



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TRAVEL

Astoria transformed into a stylish weekend destination

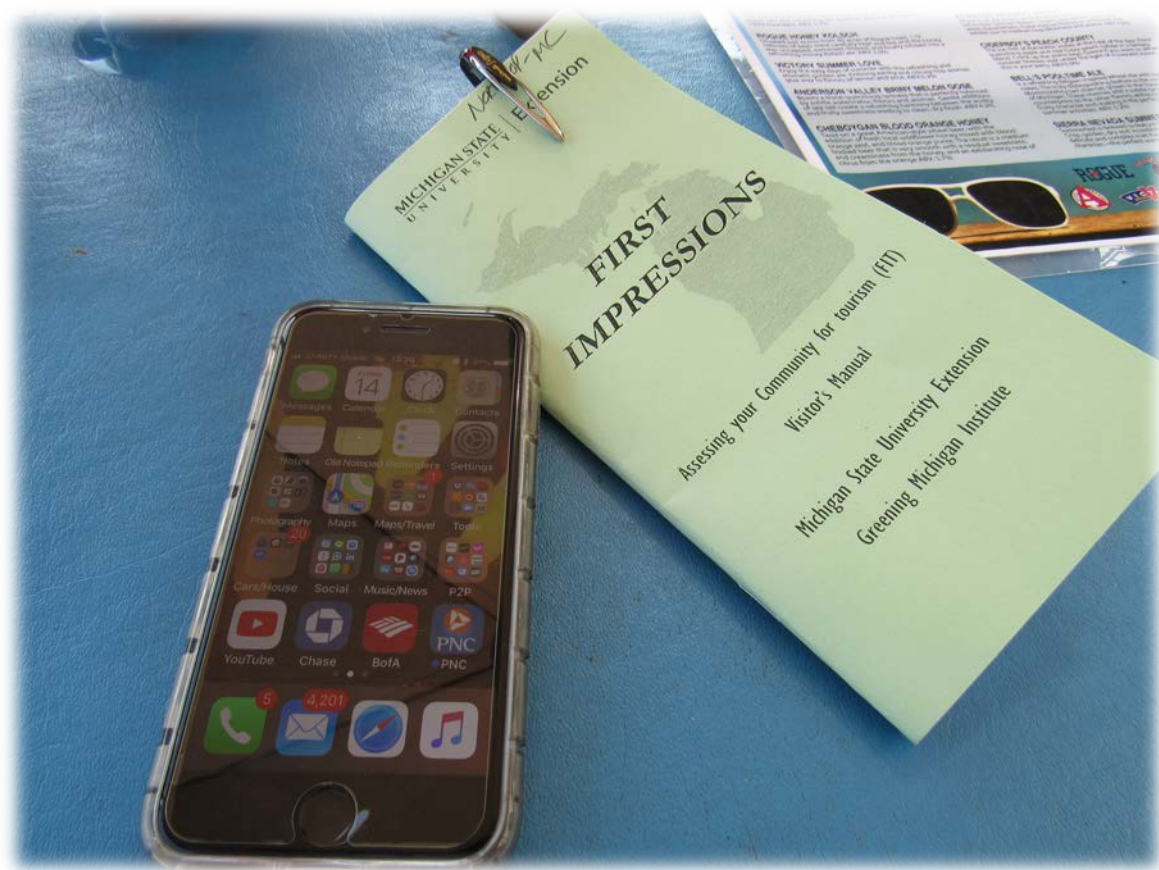


save the Astoria Ferry



<https://tinyurl.com/FITNET19>





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Resources:

- Michigan Economic Development Corporation - <http://www.michiganbusiness.org/tourism-reports/>
- Michigan State University Extension:
 - Tourism-<http://msue.anr.msu.edu/topic/info/tourism>
- Outdoor Industry Association –
 - Michigan Report -<https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/michigan-outdoor-recreation-economy-report/>

