

For Immediate Release  
2/9/2012

**Contact:** Cyndy Fuller  
231-723-4325

*Issued as a Service for the Collaborative Master  
Plan and Implementation Strategy Leadership  
Team*

## **CONSULTANT SELECTED FOR GROUNDBREAKING MANISTEE-BENZIE INITIATIVE**

Manistee and Benzie Counties - The firm Beckett & Rader has been unanimously selected by a Leadership Team from seven Manistee and Benzie County townships to guide their "Collaborative Master Plan and Implementation Strategy" initiative. Beckett & Raeder has extensive experience in community planning and development. They were selected by the Leadership Team through a competitive process. The project will result in master plans for each of the partnering townships and a collaborative implementation strategy that will identify how the townships can work together toward shared goals involving economic well-being, quality of life and cost efficiencies. Each of the Master Plans will include an action plan that defines roles, responsibilities, a timetable and funding sources. The project Leadership team officially launched the project with Beckett & Raeder on January 30, 2012. The project is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2013. Major funding for the project will be through Michigan's new Economic Vitality Incentive Program that has approved \$157,000 to be used for master plan development and implementation.

Participating Townships and corresponding Leadership Team members (and alternates) are:

**Arcadia Township**

-Brad Hopwood, Greg Wisner

**Bear Lake Township**

-Janette May, Bill Ringel, Deanna Pattison

**Onkama Township**

-Susan Barnard, David Meister

**Pleasanton Township**

-Tony Merrill, Bob Peterson

**Blaine Township**

-Don Smeltzer, Dan Bitner, Chuck Beale, Dave Long (Alternate)

**Gilmore Township**

-Dennis Holcombe, Carolyn Feltes, Robert Delanoy

Crystal Lake Township

-Sandy Skees and Monica Schultz

The purposes of the Leadership Team are to provide guidance to Beckett & Raeder on the work plans for each Township, ensure that the project is completed on schedule, help form individual township leadership teams to guide development of their master plans, encourage and promote active participation and provide continuity for implementation.

"When a business looks at expansion and job creation or when a family looks at taking a vacation, they don't look exclusively at township lines in charting their plans and neither should we," said Brad Hopwood, Chair of the Arcadia Township Planning Commission in Manistee County. "This is what the new economy is about. The project is in alignment with where Michigan is seeking to go and it's great to be in the lead instead of following. Master Plans have gotten a bad rap because there are too many that may not be relevant or simply aren't used by a community as their blueprint action. We are intent on making this collaborative project a game changer for our communities, including business and job attraction that fits with the unique and independent character and assets of the Townships."

John Iacoangelli, team leader from Beckett & Raeder said that there's still time for additional townships or villages to be a part of the process.

"If there are other townships and villages who want to learn about the project and may want to participate, they need to let us know," Iacoangeli said. "We have a flexible schedule that will allow additional governing units to join us. We don't want neighbors with contiguous boundaries to feel left out." Iacoangeli said that information about the project is available from the Alliance for Economic Success that was asked to help coordinate the effort by the Leadership Team. They can be reached at 231-723-4325 or [orjami@allianceforeconomicsuccess.com](mailto:orjami@allianceforeconomicsuccess.com). Assisting Iacoangelli from Beckett and Raeder will be Tamara Buswinka and Shantel Sellers who have expertise in local planning and zoning and communications, respectively.

"This project is a win-win," said Dennis Holcombe, Leadership Team member from Gilmore Township. "Each of our townships will have the benefit of a new master plan that includes an implementation strategy. And we'll have the significant added benefit of working with our neighbors so that we can identify collaborative opportunities and potential cost savings."

"This project is precisely what good planning and economic development needs to be about," said David Meister, Onekama Township Supervisor. "Although we just completed a joint master plan for the Onekama Community, it behooves us to participate to identify partnership opportunities and benefits. We share the M-22 and US 31 corridors, important agricultural lands and farms, great small communities with unique character and spectacular lakes, lakeshores, dunes, marshes, rivers and wetlands. We can achieve much more by working together than we can by restricting our vision to lines in the sand."

The firm Beckett & Raeder was the primary consultant that helped Onekama Township and the Village of Onekama complete their joint master plan - the Onekama Community Master Plan - singled out for excellence by the Michigan Association of Planning.

The project will be carried out in four phases with the master plans for each township developed during the April-October 2012 period, following by the development of the collaborative implementation strategy from November 2012 through March 2013. Opportunities for community input, including township visioning sessions, will be scheduled to maximize involvement by year-round and seasonal residents. The master plans for the participating townships will encompass: local demographics, trends and economic profiles; description of community participation; existing and future land uses; public facilities and services; community sustainability; community framework and plan; and an implementation strategy and action program. A "Convention of Communities" participating will kick off the process to define and develop collaborative strategies.

"This is pioneering work for these communities and for Michigan," said Iacoangeli. "Communication and active participation by all community interests will be essential to the success of the project and the positive change it produces. It is a tribute to the leadership and vision of these communities who saw the merit in taking a partnership approach to charting their paths to the future."