Application Abstract: *Mid-Michigan Program for Greater Sustainability*

The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, located in Lansing, MI, presents the *Mid-Michigan Program for Greater Sustainability*. The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, (TCRPC) serves a medium-sized region (with a 2010 Census population of 464,036, located within Congressional District 8) and has been the metropolitan planning organization for over 50 years. *(Please see Exhibit 3 for a Project Area Map)* During this time TCRPC has provided innovative land use, housing, economic development, environmental and transportation planning services to county and local governments and agencies, residents and other stakeholders.

For more than fifty years, mid-Michigan enjoyed a booming industrial automotive sector that established a strong middle class. In addition, the presence of the state's capital city of Lansing and the nation's first land grant college, Michigan State University, provides an avenue for higher education and entrepreneurialism. Mid-Michigan residents have come to enjoy good housing, accessible health care, quality education for their children, and ultimately, a secure retirement.

However, mid-Michigan began a period of noticeable decline in 2000. The decline escalated significantly as the automobile industry underwent a permanent downsizing and the housing market declined. The Tri-County region has lost nearly 42,000 jobs since 2000. Michigan now has 11.2% unemployment, the third highest unemployment rate in the nation. Regionally, the rate is 9.2% and it is 13.3% in the City of Lansing. Mid-Michigan has experienced a $9,500 drop in median household income since 2000.

An era of cooperation has emerged in mid-Michigan since the mid-2000's and local leaders, businesses, and the public realize we must collaborate as a region to rebuild strong core cities and move the entire region towards economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Actions and plans already underway to revitalize Greater Lansing and the surrounding region include:

- The City of Lansing is undertaking a major master planning initiative to redefine and redevelop itself as a stronger and more vibrant core city with access to urban amenities and productive green space and was listed on *Kipplinger's* List of Top Ten Cities for Young People in 2009.

- With assistance from TCRPC, local governments throughout the region are collaborating to improve service delivery at a cost that is sustainable, and private-sector utility providers are asking to be part of this collaboration.

- TCRPC's long-range transportation plan emphasizes the need for more walk-able and bike-able communities, improved public transit, and preservation of the existing system.

- The Capital Area Transportation Authority's urban transit vision is underway to implement bus rapid transit in one of the region's high-priority corridors, the Michigan Avenue/Grand River Avenue, through the City of Lansing, East Lansing, Lansing Township, and Meridian Charter Township.

- Public, private and non-profit partners have come together to help residents and businesses take action around their increased interest in addressing climate change, energy efficiency, green infrastructure and "green" technologies.

The region must address sustainability by managing contraction in population, employment, and fiscal capacity, while simultaneously improving economic opportunity, social equity, and environmental quality.

With strong strategic planning, recent hardships in the region can lead to regional transformation that actually improves our quality of life.

This proposal builds on the momentum already underway in the Greater Lansing area and the region. Over the past several years, TCRPC, with active participation from its 15 local member governments and agencies, developed a scenario-based plan for a number of initiatives supporting sustainability: *Regional Growth: Choices for Our Future*. The individual plans and policies used to develop *Choices for our Future* involved extensive stakeholder input through mechanisms such as task forces, stakeholder work groups, and public surveys and meetings. It was adopted by TCRPC's Board of Commissioners in 2005 and 2010.

Choices for our Future includes five overarching goals: (1) Governmental issues; (2) A Healthy Economy and Healthy Environment; (3) Transportation and Other Infrastructure; (4) Open Space and Resource Protection; and (5) Growth and Redevelopment. Specific initiatives within *Choices for our Future* are at various stages in the planning process. Some are well developed, with concrete objectives and benchmarks. Some are currently being developed by various organizations in the region, including TCRPC. Still other initiatives have received little attention to date and represent gaps that need to be addressed.

Scarce public resources demand a strategic approach to pursuing the initiatives within *Choices for our Future.* To date, efforts have included incremental, short-term measures focused on cutting costs. We believe this is not fundamentally sustainable nor will it be effective in addressing the problems we face as a region. TCRPC and its partners now propose a program with a total value of $10,214,566 that includes a request of $3,000,000 of federal funding, and contributions of more $7,214,566 of local match under HUD's Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant program to accomplish the following as a Category 2 applicant:

- Fine-tune detailed execution plans for high-priority initiatives within *Choices for our Future* that are not being addressed through other programs or by other organizations in the region;
- Better integrate planning for housing, economic development, and infrastructure to guide difficult decisions on where to strategically invest, and disinvest, in the region;
- Build capacity for local sustainability planning and better coordinate efforts at the regional level through a Consortium that includes offices, agencies and stakeholders in Clinton, Ingham and Eaton Counties of mid-Michigan.
- Transform the cultural mindset of the public so they understand and embrace the changes necessary to achieve sustainability; and,
- Develop an overall set of benchmarks and sustainability metrics allowing us to measure our progress and adjust our actions as we move forward.

Through this partnership and support from the Sustainable Communities Planning Grant Program, we will make mid-Michigan and its capital city Lansing into a 21st century model of sustainability.