

# Destination Diagnostic

Public Draft

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Oakland County Department of Economic Development



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This report was developed by the consultant team, Think Place Agency + BLKDOG + Tourism Economics, on behalf of the Oakland County Department of Economic Development.

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# Why should the County care about what happens with its tourism economy and place brand?

Destination promotion is a catalyst for community vitality driving what is needed for a community to become that destination where people want to visit, live, work and play.

## 1. VISIT

If you built a place where people want to visit, then you have built a place where people want to live.

## 2. LIVE

And if you built a place where people want to live, then you have built a place where people want to work.

## 4. INVEST

And if you built a place where business and residents will invest, then you have built a place where people will want to visit.

## 3. WORK

And if you built a place where people want to work, then you have built a place where business and residents will invest.





01

# Project Overview & Goals

The Approach



# Introduction



**Oakland County contributed 28% of total visitor spending to Metro Detroit’s tourism economy in 2023, which amounts to 11% state-wide.**

The Oakland County Department of Economic Development recognizes the important role that tourism and related business attraction and retention has on the local economy and promoting vibrant communities. In January 2025, the County embarked on a planning process to develop the Visit Oakland County Strategic Plan, the County’s first comprehensive Tourism & Attraction Strategic Plan that will:

- **Quantify** the value and impact of tourism in the County
- **Determine** sustainable models for tourism development and management
- **Identify** options for the County’s tourism brand messaging, positioning, and visual identity
- **Chart** actionable strategies to attract new visitors, residents,

businesses, and employees; and extend visitor stays by enhancing experiences, products, mobility and marketing.

**This Destination Diagnostic report is a milestone in the Visit Oakland planning process and is a culmination of key findings from a variety of research tasks conducted in the early phases of the project.**

# Diagnostic Approach

In order to build a baseline understanding of Oakland County, including its strengths, competitive advantages, and opportunities as a year-round community and tourism destination, the consultant team conducted:

- **Review** of existing background documents such as economic development strategies, market analysis reports, master plans/ comprehensive plans, economic data, marketing materials, etc.;
- **Inventory and benchmark** of tourism products and experiences across the County against shortlist of four competitive destinations (based on an analysis of user-generated data across sources such as Google, Tripadvisor, etc.);
- **Qualitative site visit** to major attractions/ downtowns to assess quality of visitor experiences and accessibility to various sites;
- **Impact analysis** of tourism and hospitality industry to demonstrate value of various sectors to the local economy;
- **Visitor survey** to develop visitor profiles and uncover visitor sentiments on the quality of tourism products/ experiences in the county (satisfaction levels), factors impacting travel decision-making, and general perception of the destination's brand;
- **Stakeholder engagement** with a variety of industry professionals – from visitor attraction managers/ operators to economic development and workforce development leaders, anchor institution representatives, and more.

**For more information on stakeholder engagement, please see the Appendix D for 'Engagement Summary'.**

# 02

## What Makes Oakland County A Destination

A look at the County's tourism product inventory and what's on offer for visitors today



# Tourism Products & Visitor Experiences

## Assets & Drivers

**Oakland County's top visited attractions and venues invite curiosity in culture, arts, history, and science, and most importantly, support shared fun family experiences.**

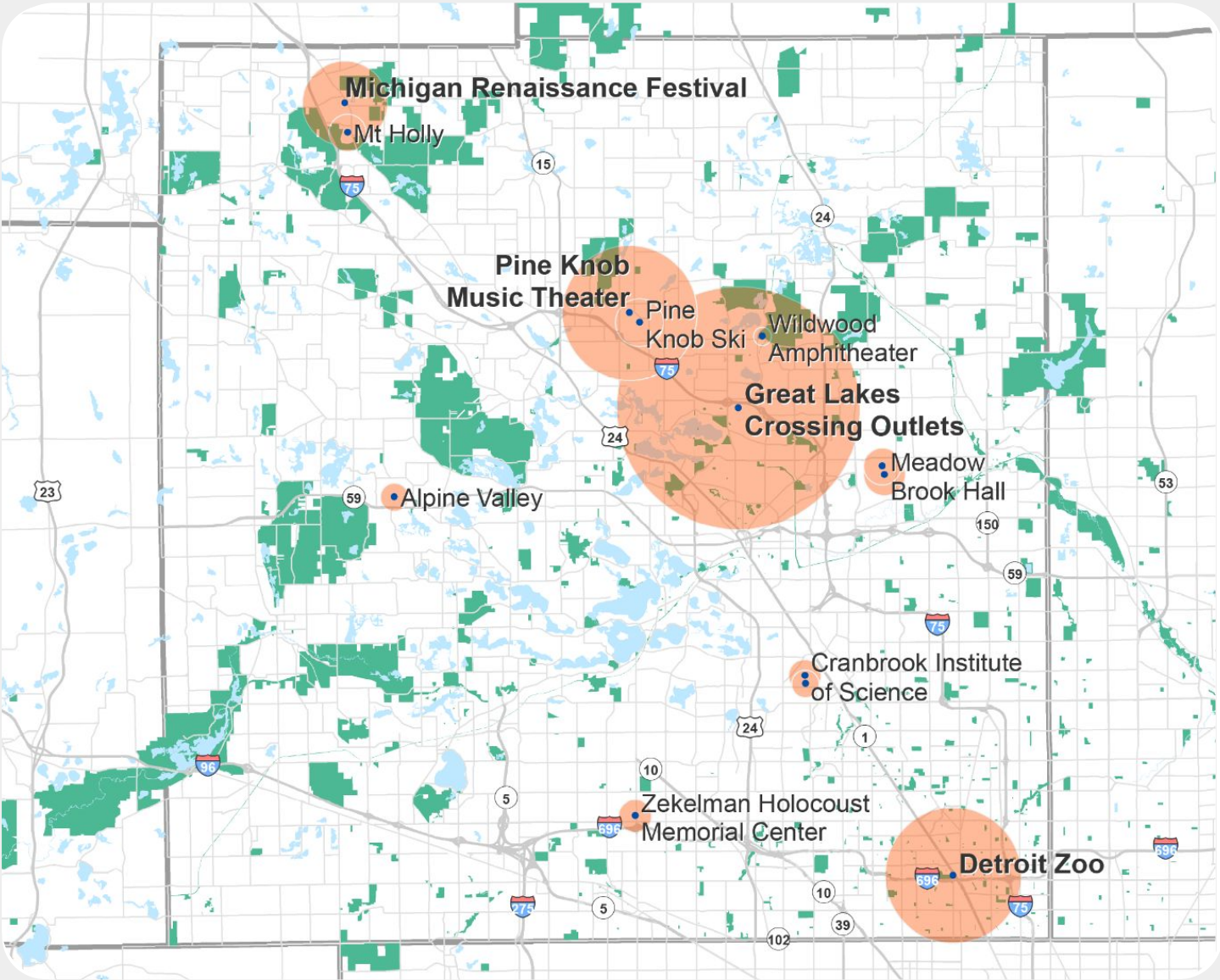
Attractions with 750,000+ annual unique visitors in the County, include the Great Lakes Crossing Outlets, which hosts the SEA Life Aquarium, LEGOLAND Discovery Center, and Peppa Pig World of Play; the Detroit Zoo, and the Pine Knob Music Theatre.

In addition, other outdoor activity-based attractions such as the Pine Knob Ski Resort and Mt Holly, and event-based attractions such as the Renaissance Festival bring upward of 50,000 visitors annually to Oakland County - particularly during off peak months of September, December and January.

Although the County's history, arts and cultural attractions attract fewer annual visitors, their proximity

to some of our County's 'tourism-ready' downtowns offer a strong opportunity to extend the dwell time of visitors seeking a combination of shopping, dining and culture offerings. In addition, the crossover of the family group audience suggests an opportunity to invite more visitors from the top-tier attractions to less-visited history, arts, and culture attractions, and to continue to build an identity as a destination for the 'curious' - whether that be in science, arts, or history.

Visitor Density by Key Assets/Attractions



Asset	2024 Total Visitors
Great Lakes Crossing Outlets	2,400,000
Detroit Zoo	750,600
Pine Knob Music Theatre	738,800
Renaissance Festival	294,300
Pine Knob Ski	94,300
Meadow Brook Hall	71,900
Mt Holly	57,800
Meadow Brook Amphitheatre	56,600
Holocaust Memorial Center	43,800
Cranbrook Institute of Science	43,100
Alpine Valley	32,000
Cranbrook Art Museum	31,300
Wildwood Amphitheater	13,400

Source: Placer.Ai (Jan 01, 2024-Dec 31, 2024)





# Tourism Products & Visitor Experiences

## Assets & Drivers

**Oakland County's downtowns are another major visitor asset as hubs of shopping, dining, entertainment, and most importantly, family-friendly events.**

During stakeholder engagement, many local representatives shared that a core part of Oakland County's identity is that it is the County that many Detroiters call home. The network of cities with walkable downtowns and areas with quality public amenities (including access to natural assets and outdoor

recreation) make Oakland County the choice place to live in the region.

An assessment of various factors across each downtown revealed a number of 'tourism ready' downtowns that could be further leveraged as part of the County's brand identity and tourism development strategies. Qualitative factors evaluated by the consultant team included **Organizational Capacity** (presence of a place-management entity, size of team, budget of

organization, etc.), **Activity/Business Mix & Anchors** (share of dining and retail tenants, presence of nearby entertainment anchors/visitor attractions, annual visitor-driving events), **Place Brand** (presence/strength of a citywide/downtown/Main Street brand), and **Lodging Facilities** (density of hotel rooms available for visitors).

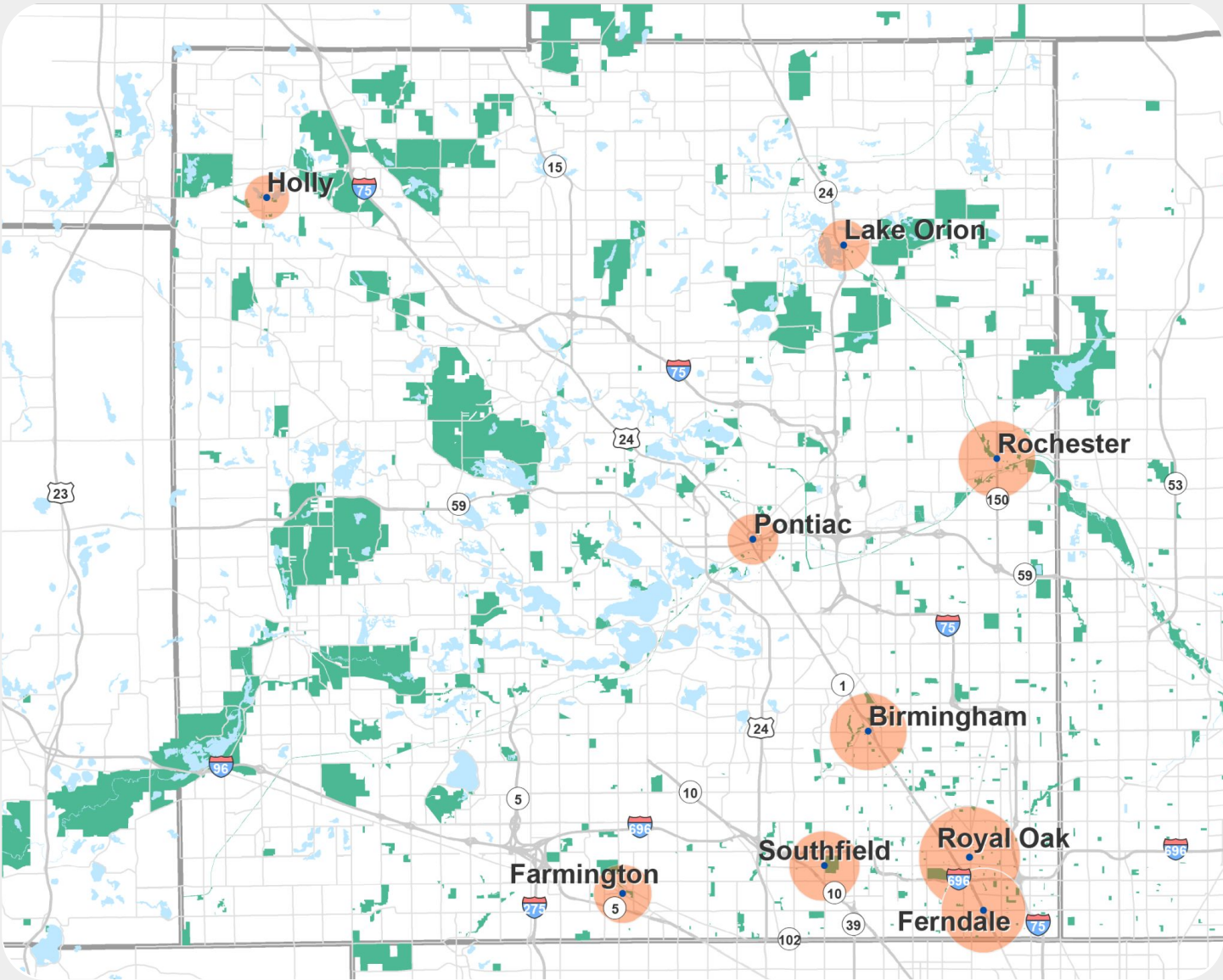


## Tourism Readiness by Community

Amongst the key factors leading to the top 10 communities ranked as being 'Tourism Ready' are **a) proximity/presence of key year-round attractions such as museums, parks/lakes/trails and other outdoor sports/recreation assets, entertainment assets** (including cinemas, live music facilities); **b) availability of hotel rooms in/within close proximity of downtown (upwards of 200 rooms), c) popular and well-attended events/festivals** (including Woodward Dream Cruise, farmers markets, Renaissance Festival, Lunar New Year celebrations, etc.); and **d) a well-organized and well-resourced place-management entity** that is able to lead and organize year-round calendar of activities and events that drive visitor traffic as well as maintain a strong image/place brand for the community.

Community	Tourism Readiness Status	Community	Tourism Readiness Status
Auburn Hills	Ready	Lyon	High Potential
Birmingham	Ready	Madison Heights	High Potential
Farmington	Ready	Oxford	High Potential
Ferndale	Ready	Pontiac	High Potential
Lake Orion	Ready	Oak Park	High Potential
Milford	Ready	Berkley	Emerging
Novi	Ready	Beverly Hills	Emerging
Rochester	Ready	Groveland	Emerging
Royal Oak	Ready	Clawson	Emerging
Southfield	Ready	Hazel Park	Emerging
Clarkston	High Potential	Lathrup Village	Emerging
Franklin	High Potential	Leonard	Emerging
Highland	High Potential	Ortonville	Emerging
Holly	High Potential	South Lyon	Emerging

Visitor Density by Key Assets/Attractions



Downtown	2024 Total Visitors
Royal Oak	1,900,000
Ferndale	1,300,000
Birmingham	1,100,000
Rochester	1,100,000
Southfield	927,300
Farmington	638,700
Lake Orion	493,300
Pontiac	490,400
Holly	374,000

Source: Placer.Ai (Jan 01, 2024-Dec 31, 2024)





# Tourism Products & Visitor Experiences

## Assets & Drivers

**Oakland County's volume and breadth of natural assets provides Metro Detroiters access to the great outdoors.**

In discussing leisure travel opportunities, stakeholders shared extensively the range of outdoor recreation and agritourism experiences in the County that appeal to both visitors and residents seeking to reconnect with nature and escape urban life. The county's western (and northern) communities, with their open land and scenic landscapes,

are especially well-suited for this audience—whether for weekend getaways or year-round living.

With a strong six-month activation window from May through October and predominantly daytime programming, there are also expanding opportunities for Friday evening and mid-week events, particularly in underutilized parks, trails, and campgrounds. Holiday-themed activations, such as tubing, holiday markets, and mulled wine gatherings, have

already proven successful in drawing seasonal visitors.

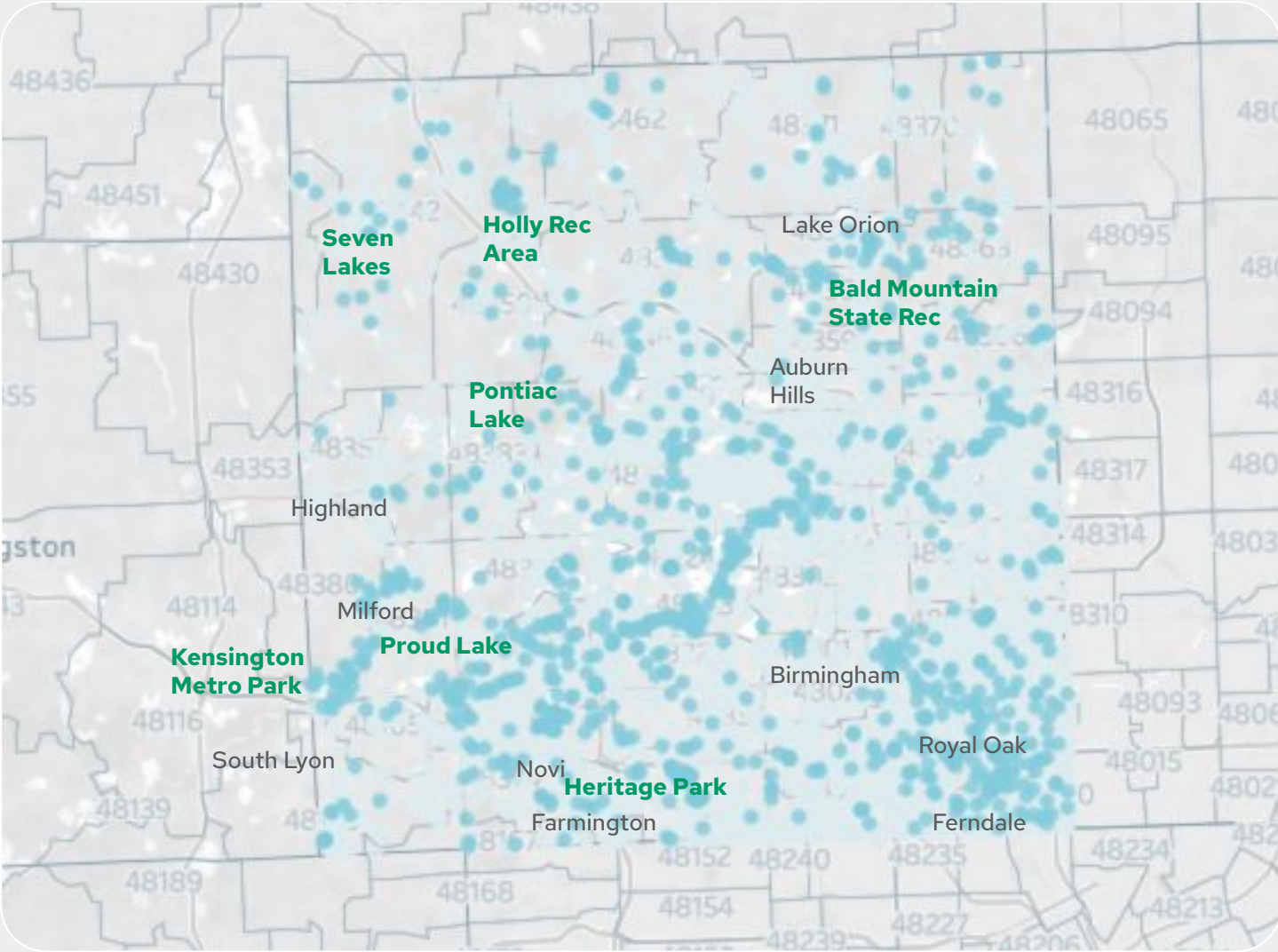
Looking ahead, there's strong potential to strategically link the great outdoors (and even agricultural attractions) with downtowns to support small businesses and drive more year-round economic activity.

**1,100+**  
points of  
interest in  
the great  
outdoors



Density of nature-related points-of-interest

(Dark Blue POIs include beaches, parks (incl. local, state, metro parks), bird watching areas, piers, nature preserves, lakes, playgrounds, etc.)



The highest-rated nature-related assets in the County each feature an average rating of at least 4.5/5.0 stars, with upwards of 1,500 reviews left by users. These traits increase their visibility to potential audiences/new visitors, and include the following:

Asset	Average Rating	Total # Reviews
Kensington Metro Park	4.7	4,162
Holly Recreation Area	4.6	2,986
Rochester Park	4.8	2,870
Pontiac Lake	4.5	2,283
Proud Lake	4.6	2,314
Seven Lakes State Park	4.7	2,177
Heritage Park	4.7	2,359
Bald Mountain State Recreation Area	4.6	1,856

Although not widely reviewed/highly rated, the Lake assets between Pontiac and Milford suggest a strong cluster of water-based recreation activity that may be leveraged as a cohesive experience for visitors interested in the great outdoors.

**Source:** Think Place Agency (2025). Based on consumer review data available through Google, the widest open consumer review platform which plays a huge role in shaping any business or attraction's reputation and attracting new visitors/consumers. Google allows consumers to leave reviews from Android and iOS devices, and seamlessly integrates this data with Google Search and Google Maps, which are some of the world's leading search engine platforms.

# Tourism Products & Visitor Experiences

**There are strategic opportunities to be leveraged in the great outdoors through enhanced convenience, connectivity and access.**

At this time, positive consumer sentiments/reviews shared of major nature-related assets are related to 'family-friendliness' and 'cleanliness/maintenance'. However, limited positive sentiments are shared around convenience/access and public transportation.

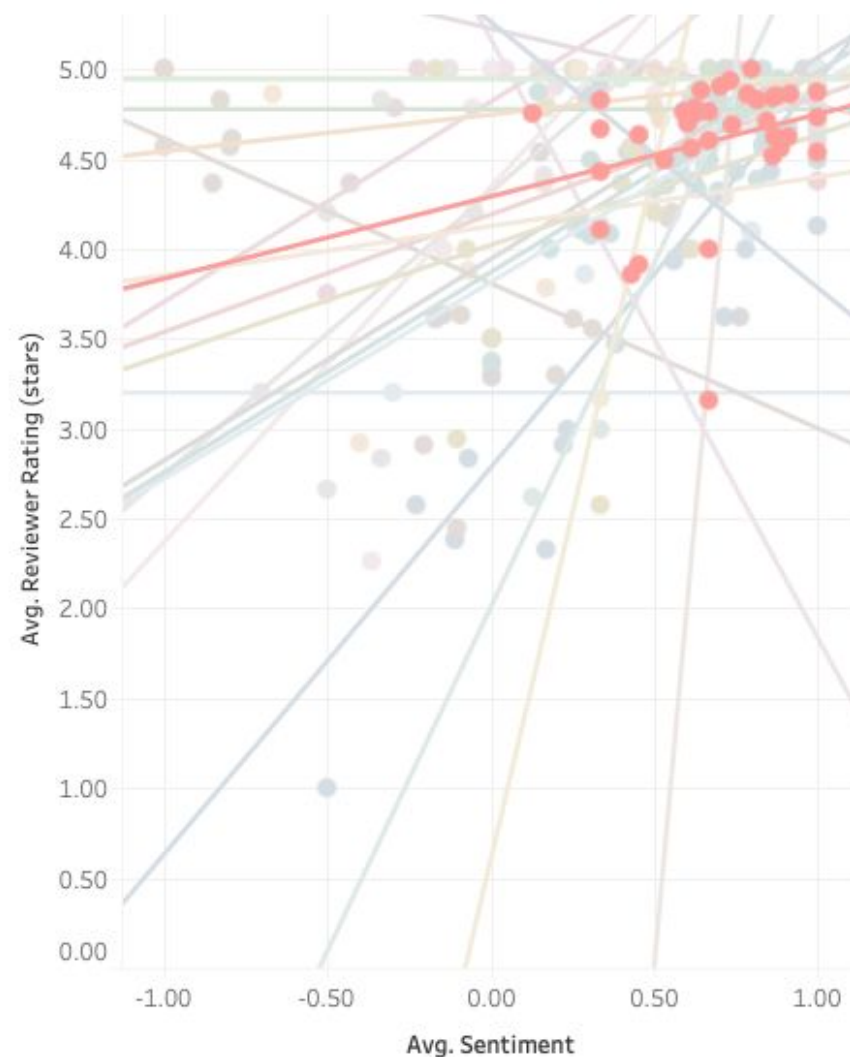
The Great Outdoors experiences are also reportedly disjointed across the County. In order to get more people to go to and from outdoor recreation to agriculture assets (and downtowns), stakeholders at industry focus groups shared the need to

further encourage leisure visitor use of the extensive trail networks (Rail to Trail networks) and to build more bike amenities and multilingual bike trail signage at points-of-interest. In particular, better signage between downtowns/ business nodes and trail heads may help encourage 'park and bike' practice amongst visitors.

Stakeholders also shared that another key challenge to easy access of nature-related assets is the lack of effective communications. Currently, information about parks is siloed by the management authority (i.e. County, local municipality, metro, state, etc.). As such, the diverse park systems and recreation passes on offer across the County can reportedly result in confusion amongst park users who are simply looking to access the outdoors.

## Correlation of 'Maintenance and Cleanliness' sentiments to average ratings

Correlations by topic



Source: Think Place Agency (2025) (based on consumer review data available through Google).

# Oakland County's Landscape of Messaging

## What The County Says

**The County has had and still has a range of sub-brands in which it uses to promote its varying programs, services and amenities.**

For the business audience, **Advantage Oakland** is a single, quick and identifiable platform that houses all resources relating to business site selection, entrepreneurship, and growth/expansion.

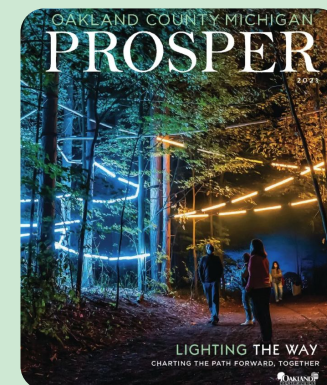
It is a robust brand platform that has also steadily gained a wide engagement across social media such as LinkedIn with targeted professional industry groups (e.g. #OCTechCollaboration).

Its central unifying message of "Michigan's Premier County" also positions Oakland County strongly nationally. However, while appropriately 'elite' for the corporate business community, its exclusivity may hinder its appeal to smaller, emerging, minority groups and communities.

### ALL AUDIENCES



### B2C/CONSUMER AUDIENCE (LOCALS, VISITORS)



### B2B/BUSINESS AUDIENCE



# Oakland County's Landscape of Messaging

## What The County Says

**Unlike Advantage Oakland, the consumer-facing brands of the County are far more disparate.** From Parks to Main Streets to the County blog (and former Prosper Magazine), there are various avenues through which the consumer (whether local or out-of-towner) must navigate to build a comprehensive understanding of the County as a place to be.

Some of the key messaging across these platforms include:

The Great Outdoors:

- "...abundance of unique landforms and exceptional natural features..."

The Downtowns:

- "...local experiences, festive events, and many

areas to create timeliness memories..."

- "...year-round recreation, entertainment, shopping, and more!"

While the breadth of content and information is readily available across the various platforms, stakeholders shared the need to centralize the information for the consumer. Some key challenges cited include:

- "information about parks is siloed by the management authority (i.e. County, local municipality, metro, state, etc.)"
- "the region boasts a full calendar of events. We need a centralized, user-friendly events calendar and communications toolkit to improve visibility for both residents and visitors."



## County's Messaging

### Visit Detroit (B2C)

Visit Detroit's international reach and fast-growing social media engagement (Visit Detroit's social media growth averages 10,000 new Instagram followers monthly) will be critical for Oakland County to leverage to raise its brand and product awareness.

Given that Visit Detroit has indicated its position to focus on niche marketing over broad messaging, Oakland will need to build and message unique experiences that contrast the urban offerings of the City of Detroit – including its Great Outdoors.

## Partners' Messaging

### Michigan Economic Development Corporation (B2B)

MEDC positions Oakland as being part of the 'Detroit Region'. The core messaging of the region as having "Unending Innovation" positions Oakland County strongly against national competitors for talent and business.

### Pure Michigan (B2C)

Pure Michigan's international reach is a critical platform the County should be leveraging for its tourism assets. Pure Michigan has a comprehensive inventory of assets by City/Town, and strong coverage of Oakland County's 'Great Outdoors' assets (e.g. off road vehicle parks) and 'Grown/Built in Oakland' assets (e.g. orchards, cider mills, automotive-related museums). However, given that Oakland County sits within much larger and more prominent regions – Detroit and Southeast MI, it is unlikely for a visitor to quickly and easily find the assets in Oakland County on Pure Michigan's platform given the competitive hierarchy of information.

"Cocktails are craft, beers are brewed on-site, and the menus and atmospheres are often eclectic."

"Pick from the finest Christmas tree selection"

"quaint, charming with All The Feels town"

"...part of the greater canvas of Metro Detroit..."

"...the economic center for the state of Michigan."

# 03

## How Does Oakland County Stack Up

How does the County's brand and visitor products/experiences fare against similar destinations across the nation



# The Competitive Set

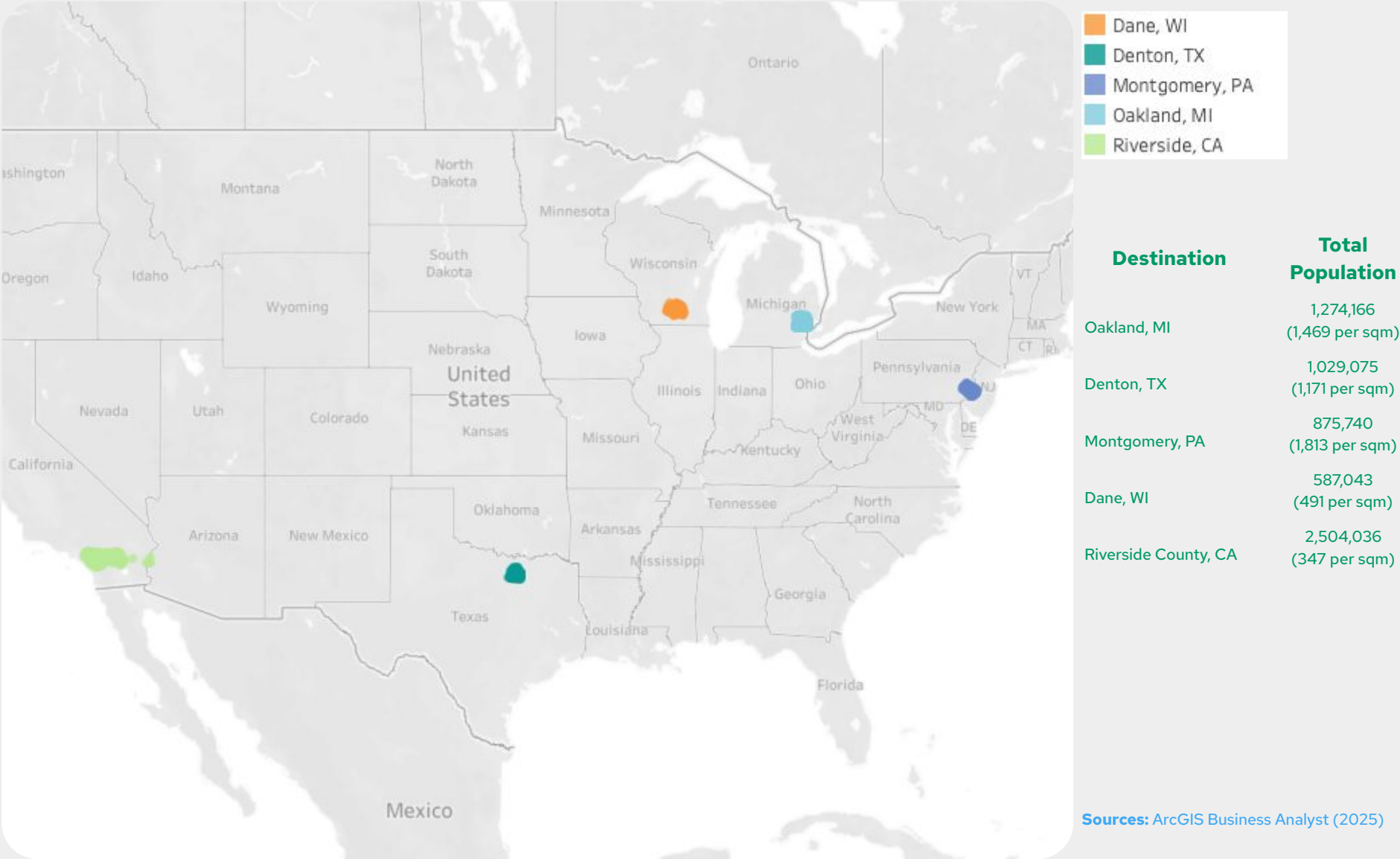
County	Tourism Entity	Airport - Annual Passengers (Millions)	Average Drive Time to Next Major City (minutes)	Total Hotel Rooms	Annual Visitor Spending (\$ - Millions)
Oakland MI	Visit Detroit	32,972	35 (Detroit)	17,350+	3,300
Denton TX	Discover Denton	87,818	45 (Dallas)	9,370+	1,246
Montgomery PA	Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board	28,132	40 (Philadelphia)	9,510+	1,402
Dane WI	Visit Madison	6,316	75 (Milwaukee)	11,390+	1,200
Riverside CA	Visit Greater Palm Springs	3,237	75 (San Bernardino)	33,640+	9,207

Based on known competitive destinations and other destinations catering to a similar clientele with a comparative set of tourism product offerings, the team selected a competitive set of domestic destinations with county-level tourism governance entities.

Sources: Bureau of Transportation Statistics; CoStar; Tourism Economics (based on data from last available year).

The Competitive Set

This map shows density of offerings within each County.



# Product Benchmark

In order to benchmark the County’s tourism product inventory against that of competitive destinations, the team analyzed the quantity and quality of experiences across several categories such as ‘Education, Arts & Culture’, ‘Shopping’, ‘Culinary’, ‘The Great Outdoors’, etc. in each competitive destination. Below are key highlights from the product benchmarking.

### Strengths & Opportunities

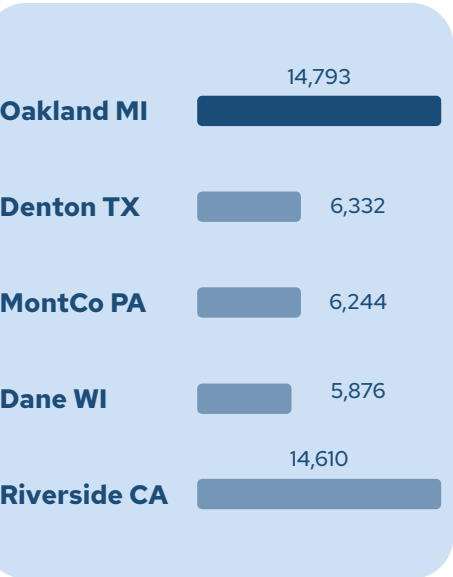
By virtue of its size, Oakland MI offers visitors **the largest supply of tourism products and experiences**.

The County has over 14,700+ points-of-interest across all assessed categories. As such, by scale of offering, it **aligns most closely with Riverside CA** and has the opportunity to support longer

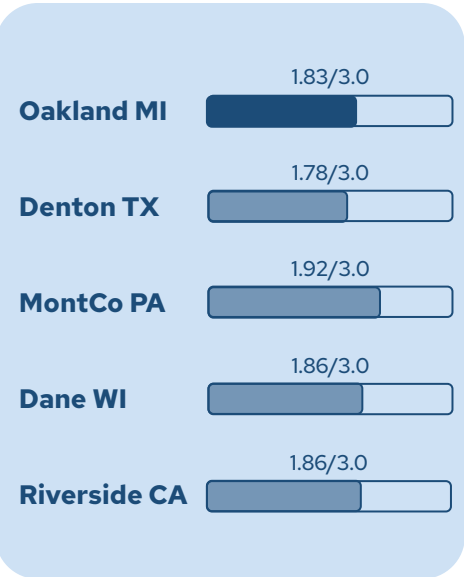
dwel time of visitors in the region.

Furthermore, compared to its national competitors, Oakland’s tourism products and experiences are among the most affordable making it a **price-competitive destination for travelers seeking lower cost experiences** in a tighter economy - particularly for those traveling in larger groups like families.

Total # Products/Experiences



Average Price Level of Products/Experiences



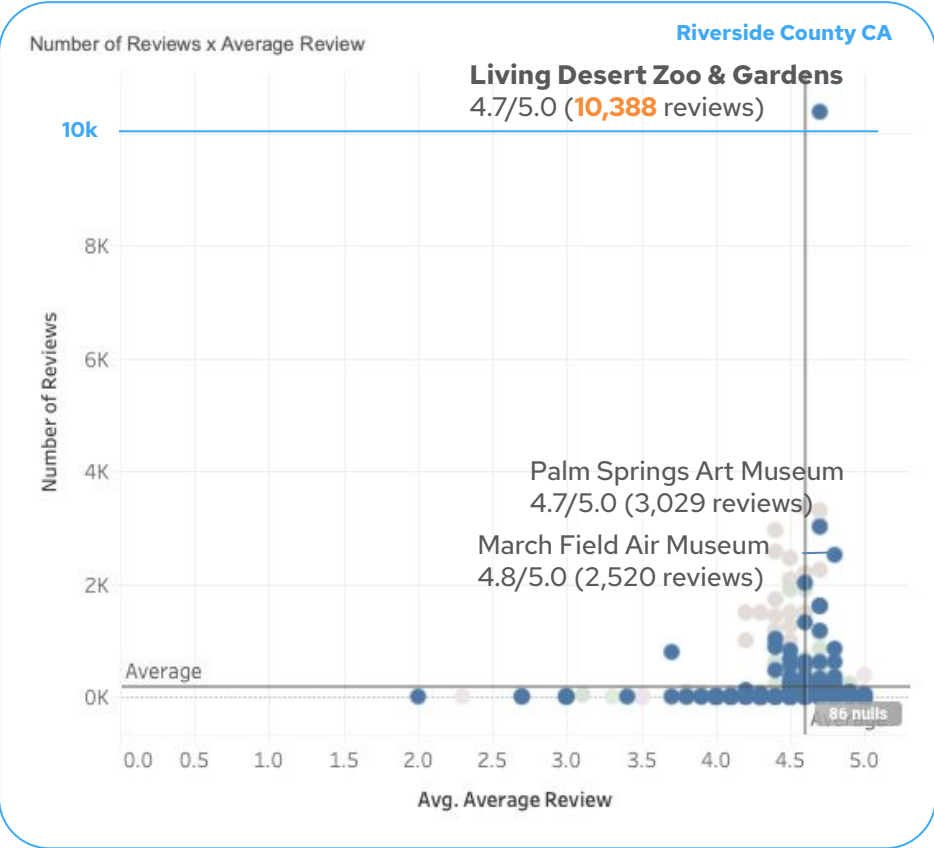
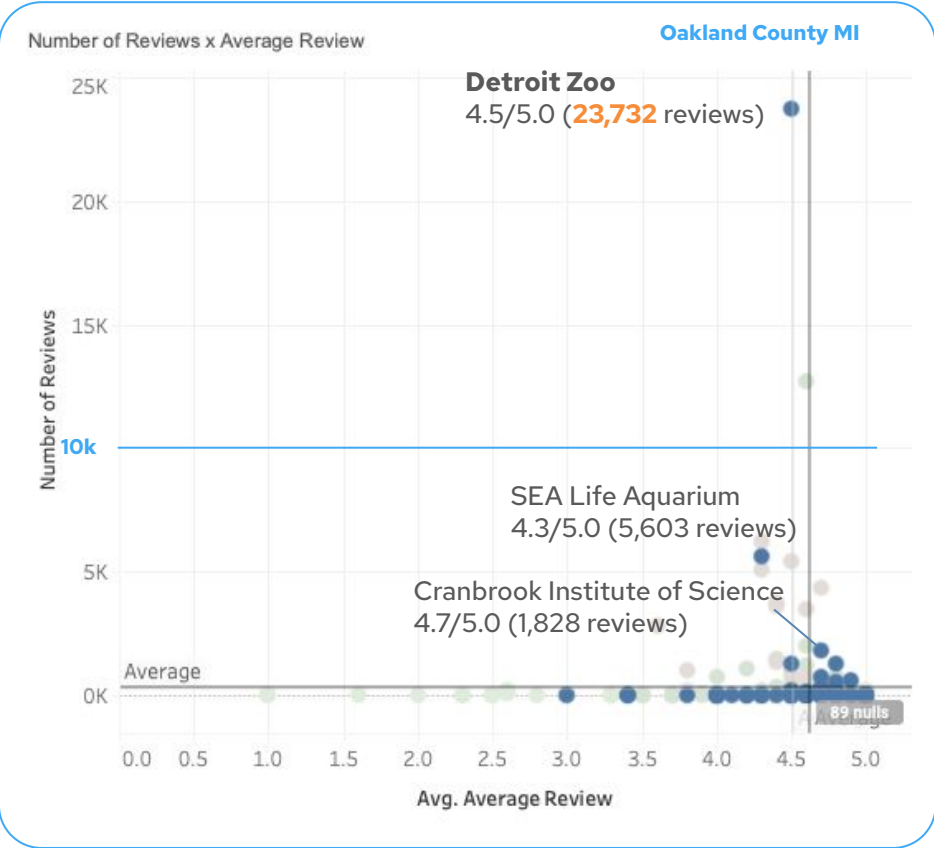
Source: Think Place Agency (2025) (based on consumer review data available through Google).

# Product Benchmark

The benchmarking assessment reiterates **the power of two critical visitor assets in the County - the Detroit Zoo and Pine Knob Music Theatre**. Both assets punch far above its weight on visibility/recognizability as well as quality of experiences as reported by visitors.

To grow as a destination, the County will need to leverage the popularity and visibility/recognizability of both cultural assets, as well as build on visibility to other assets with reportedly quality offerings such as Cranbrook Institute.

Museums, Historical Sites & Similar Institutions

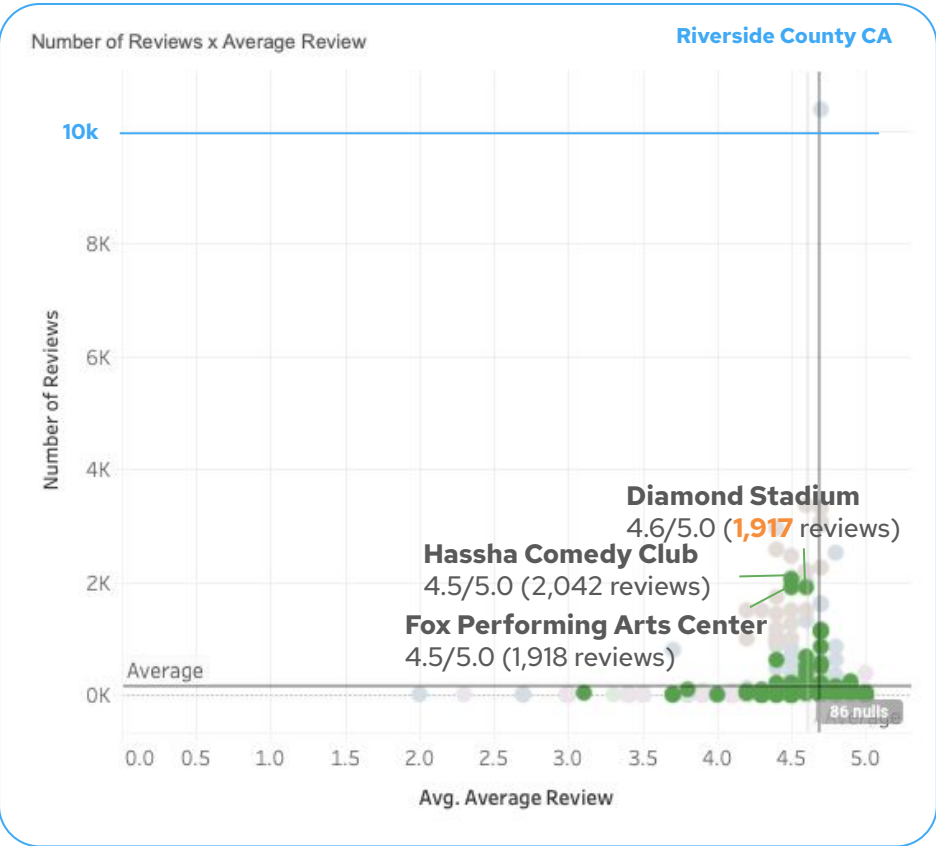
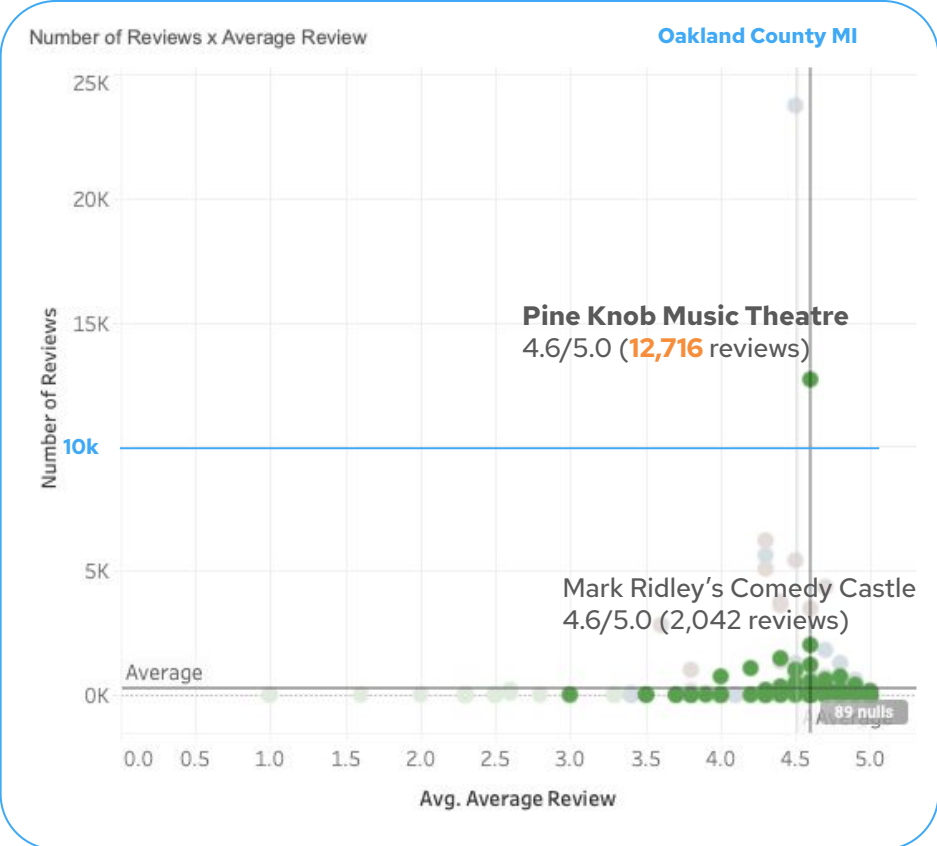


'Education, History & Culture' Products/Experiences in Oakland County MI and Riverside County CA.  
Source: Think Place Agency (2025) (based on consumer review data available through Google).

# Product Benchmark

In particular, **Pine Knob’s rating outperforms similar assets in Greater Palm Springs**, a destination widely known for its cultural identity as home to the globally-recognized Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival and various International Film Festivals.

■ Performing Arts & Related Industries



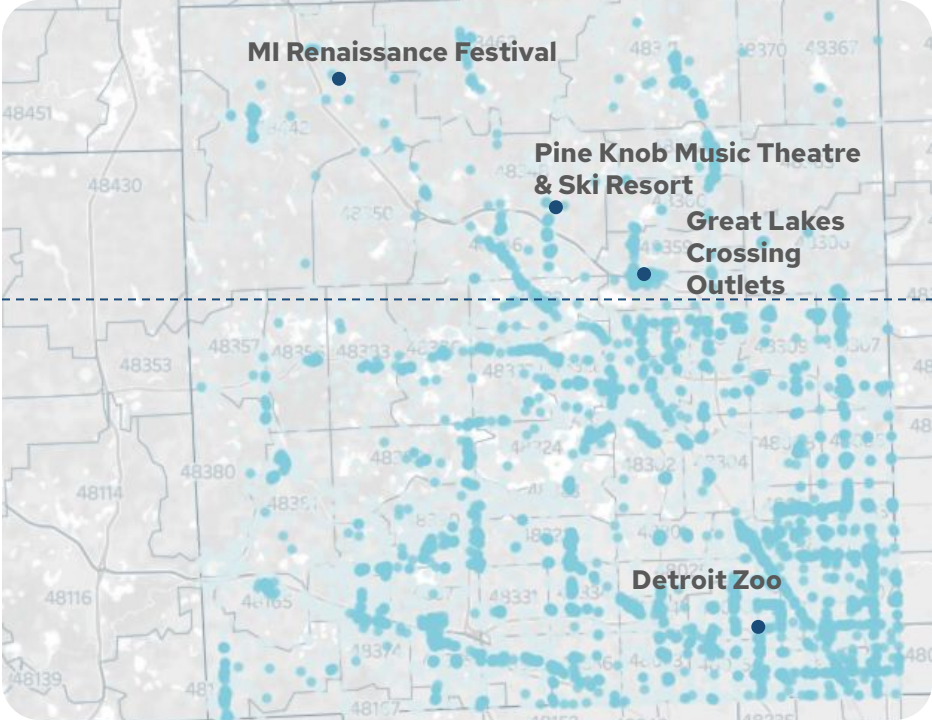
'Education, History & Culture' Products/Experiences in Oakland County MI and Riverside County CA.  
Source: Think Place Agency (2025)(based on consumer review data available through Google).



# Product Benchmark

## Challenges

With the exception of the Detroit Zoo, **the County’s top visited attractions are located farther north, where Culinary offerings in ‘Tourism-ready’ downtown/Main Streets are less densely available** and therefore less convenient to visitors who may be interested in extending dwell times with enjoyable culinary experiences before/after the main attraction planned for the visit. Improving connectivity and the perception of distance between the tourism products and experiences farther north vs south will be critical to building cross-visitation in the County and extending overall visitor dwell times.



Culinary Products/Experiences in Oakland County MI.  
Source: Think Place Agency (2025) (based on consumer review data available through Google).

### Total # Culinary Products/Experiences

Oakland MI	3,591
Denton TX	2,509
MontCo PA	2,203
Dane WI	1,615
Riverside CA	5,474

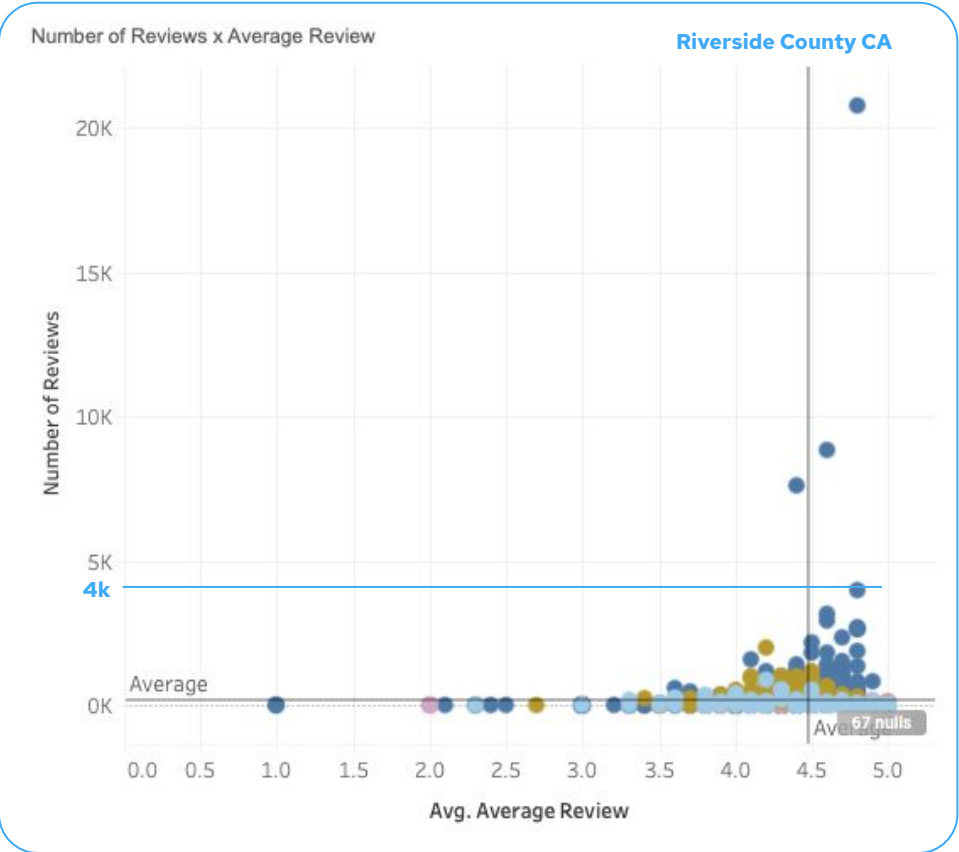
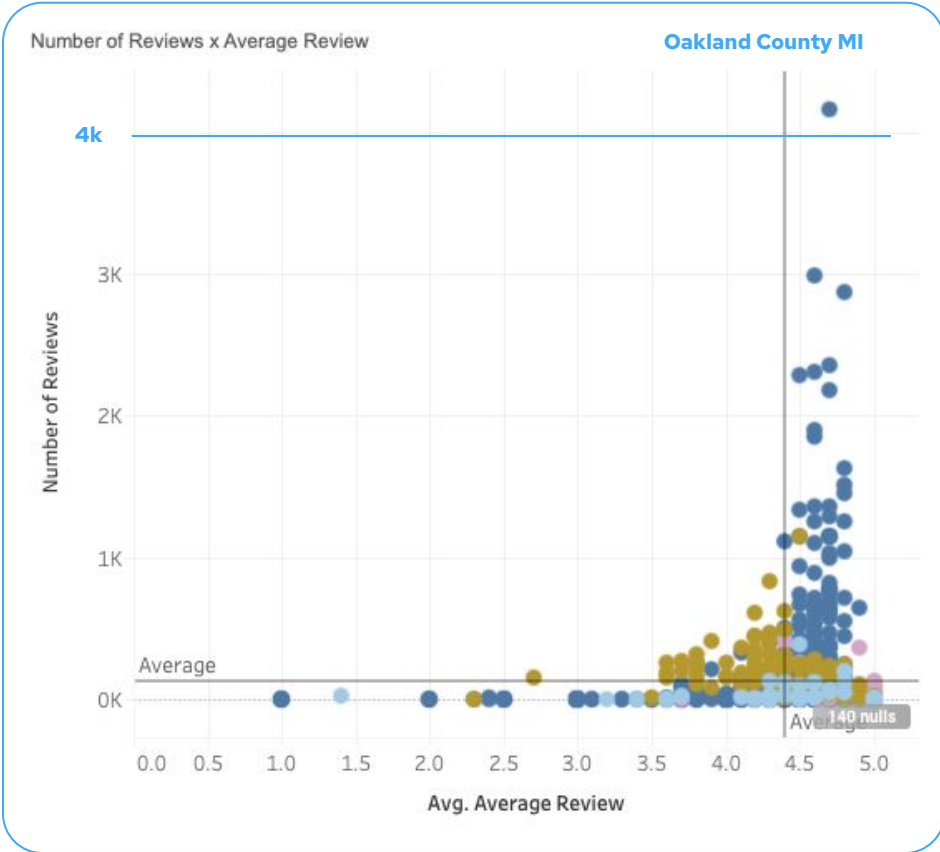
### Total # Craft Beverage Products & Experiences

Oakland MI	186
Denton TX	97
MontCo PA	182
Dane WI	176
Riverside CA	275

# Product Benchmark

- Nature parks/scenic viewpoints
- Recreation facilities/golf courses
- Camps/campgrounds
- Recreation training/school/instruction

When compared with Riverside County CA, a destination brand widely associated with its natural assets (deserts, canyons, mountains) and outdoor recreation facilities (primarily golf courses and campgrounds), **Oakland’s nature parks/scenic viewpoints and outdoor recreation facilities are significantly less reviewed, impacting its potential draw as the ‘urban escape’ to the great outdoors.**



## Brand Benchmark

In order to benchmark the County's brand against that of competitive destinations, the team observed all existing digital and print marketing materials to extract key taglines, campaigns, visual assets and qualitatively evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each. The team primarily focused on Destination Marketing Organization's assets and materials.

### Dane County, WI

The Destination Madison brand centers Madison's distinctive appeal as state capital and college town – cosmopolitan yet true to local character.

#### "Unmistakably Madison"

They utilize bright, inclusive photography and user-generated content. The brand language utilizes "inspire" call-to-action.

#### "With Love, Madison"

It celebrates the inclusive attitudes of the region, with something for every visitor or local to enjoy, no matter their interests.

**Dane County Guide** business directory offers some additional county-wide support.

### Weakness

While the capital city is a major strategic advantage, the destination's branding relies heavily on this. Promotion of other communities in the county feels like an afterthought.

destination  
**madison**



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# Brand Benchmark

## Denton County, TX

### "Original. Independent"

Discover Denton, TX emphasizes the city as an indie, charming alternative to Dallas-Fort Worth and smaller, quirky counterpart to Austin.

They utilize rugged yet playful design elements: Bold fonts, vintage graphics, and high-contrast photography are inspired by bustling music and arts scene.

Events and attractions define Denton's tourism as a mix of Texas heritage, collegiate arts/culture, and outdoor leisure.

### Far Out Vibes, Down Home Feel

Discover Denton actively markets to meeting and sports event planners as lower-cost alternative with same great amenities as Dallas-Ft Worth.

## Weakness

The brand's efforts are focused on city of Denton, relying heavily on a niche of music and the arts.

Additionally, there's a lack of a nationally known "must-see" attraction to bring in families outside of sports tourism, or older adults without an existing connection to the colleges or city.



**DISCOVER  
DENTON TX**





## Brand Benchmark



### Montgomery County, PA

Philadelphia's historic countryside utilizes "**Let Freedom Reign,**" which carries the brand from colonial-era historic sites to outdoor adventure and nightlife.

This active, inspiring language is matched with bright, bold colors and balanced by patriotic hues for historical tie-ins. They often use modern fonts for Montco, while Valley Forge is stylized in colonial script to differentiate the focus.

A rich mix of attractions supports the "freedom to choose your adventure" branding.

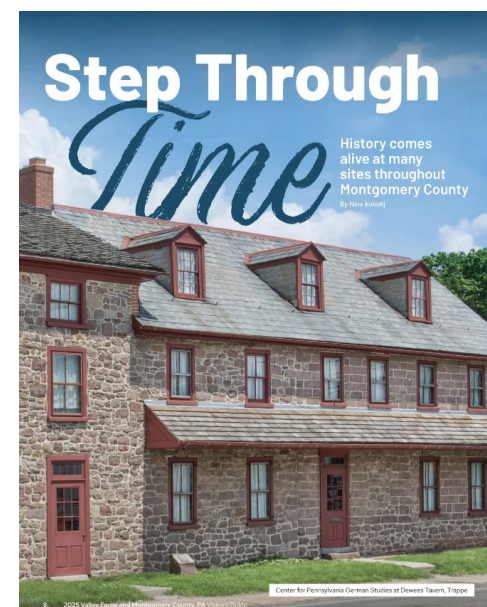
Use of **#MakeitMontco** for local pride has propelled the use in branding and marketing initiatives:

- Crave Montco
- Arts Montco
- Shop Montco

### Weakness

The county and its attractions are sprawling, which dilutes the sense of place. This is compounded by the use of two brands: Valley Forge and Montco.

There's ongoing education required for visitors to understand that Montgomery County = Valley Forge area plus much **more**.



# Brand Benchmark

## Riverside County, CA

Due to its shape and geographic variation, tourism branding for Riverside County is regional, not county-specific:

Greater Palm Springs (Central) uses **"Find Your Oasis,"** 10Lake Valley (SW) is **"Discover the SoCal Wildlands"** which includes Temecula Valley's **"Live Glass Full,"** and the City of Riverside (NW) uses **"The Heart Of Southern California."**

Each key tourism asset has a brand that aligns with visitor expectations, and reflects the region's variation.

Across all brands, imagery is polished and aspirational, with a focus on rejuvenation and escapism.

The use of earth tones and aqua blues, combined with modern fonts convey a laid-back yet upscale vibe. Riverside and 10Lake use bolder colors, the former with a vintage vibe and the later more outdoor-centric.

For Greater Palm Springs, the design style also incorporates watercolor elements and geometric patterns reminiscent of 1950s and 1960s architectural breeze blocks found in the area.

## Weakness

The visitor economy is heavily influenced by marquee events such as Coachella Music Festival.

Additionally, the separate tourism asset brands could create confusion for county visitors depending on how they do or do not work together.

The eastern side of the county includes Joshua Tree National Park, and a series of ghost towns until the Arizona border.



# Organizational Capacity Benchmark

There are various types of destination organizations (DMOs) that lead the tourism and hospitality industry towards a collective vision for the destination.

## Destination Marketing

**Organizations** are primarily focused on attracting visitors by promoting its unique attractions and experiences, rather than focusing on individual products or services. Its key functions also include ensuring the creation and maintenance of a positive image of the destination.

## Destination Management

**Organizations** emphasize connecting various components of a destination to create a cohesive and quality experience, and creating a coalition of organizations/ interests working towards the competitiveness and sustainability of the destination.

## Destination Stewardship

**Organizations** are in a continuous pursuit of a net positive tourism ecosystem that balances a positive tourism experience for visitors with that of the needs of local communities (including meeting the economic, environmental, and social/cultural needs of a destination). According to the World Travel & Tourism Organization, to succeed, destination stewardship requires full public-private-community collaboration.

The destination stewardship approach has emerged in recent years as a concept “embodying sustainable and responsible destination management” and that is “based on the responsible use of shared or ‘common pool’ resources”.

–WTTC “Towards Destination Stewardship”

# Organizational Capacity Benchmark

In order to benchmark the County's tourism management structure, the team analyzed the type of entity, funding structure, staff size and composition, and program areas of destination marketing organizations in each of the competitive destinations.

## MOST SIMILAR TO VISIT DETROIT

### Dane WI - Destination Madison

**Structure:** 501(c)(6) Visitors, Convention Bureau

**Budget:** \$7.2 million, primarily through room tax revenues (10% rate)

**FTE Staff:** 36

**Mission:** Create economic impact through tourism

**Functions:** Promotion/Marketing  
Sales/Sports/Conventions  
Events Management  
Industry Research

**Type of DMO:** Stewardship

### Denton TX - Discover Denton

**Structure:** Formerly function of a chamber, in transition to Tourism Public Improvement District

**Budget:** \$1.6 million, combination of city funds, membership dues, hotel occupancy tax revenues, and program/event fees

**FTE Staff:** 6

**Mission:** Market and promote Denton in order to generate demand for the destination

**Functions:** Promotion/Marketing  
Sales/Sports/Conventions

**Type of DMO:** Marketing

### Montgomery PA - Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board

**Structure:** 501(c)(6) Visitors, Convention Bureau

**Budget:** \$10.2 million, combination of grants, membership dues, and hotel tax

**FTE Staff:** 22

**Mission:** Engage and interact with businesses representing the tourism and hospitality industry, and to promote convention and leisure visitation

**Functions:** Promotion/Marketing  
Sales/Sports/Conventions  
Industry Support & Research

**Type of DMO:**  
Marketing/Management

### Riverside CA - Visit Greater Palm Springs

**Structure:** Tourism Business Improvement District

**Budget:** \$20.7 million, primarily through room tax revenue (3% rate)

**FTE Staff:** 12

**Mission:** To promote the destination and advance regional collaboration to improve quality of life

**Functions:** Promotion/Marketing  
Sales/Sports/Conventions  
Events Management  
Industry Research  
Workforce Development

**Type of DMO:** Stewardship



# Organizational Capacity Benchmark

## Building Partnerships

With a strong, existing destination marketing entity overseeing regional marketing, Oakland County needs to do a better job of putting itself on the map and stewarding the county as a destination too.

In particular, stakeholders shared the need for Oakland County to move away from being the “best kept secret” in metro Detroit and that the greatest barrier is the lack of a unifying destination messaging

for the county and the absence of a single go-to resource for promoting the County’s 62 communities that would become a critical way for Visit Detroit to better showcase and market assets in Oakland County.

### Oakland MI - Visit Detroit

**Structure:** 501(c)(6) Visitors, Convention Bureau

**Budget:** \$21.6 million, combination of grants, membership dues, and lodging assessment revenues (2% rate)

**FTE Staff:** 20+

**Mission:** To promote the metro Detroit as a convention, business meeting and tourism destination

**Functions:** Promotion/Marketing Sales/Sports/Conventions

**Type of DMO:** Marketing/Management

# 04

## Who's Visiting & What Are Their Perceptions

A look at the visitors and how they  
perceive the County



# Visit Oakland County Survey 2025

The County's very first  
visitor perception  
survey

**1,811** total responses  
**1,439** completed the  
survey (79%)  
**6.5** minutes spent on  
survey  
**33** total questions  
(mostly multiple choice  
questions)

## Purpose of the Survey

The County's first visitor survey was aimed at uncovering visitor sentiments on the quality of tourism products/experiences in the county, preferred methods of getting to/around the destination (and any challenges), factors impacting travel decision-making, perception of the destination's brand, and general demographics of travelers/size of travel groups (origins, spending habits, travel days/seasons).

Respondents targeted include past

visitors from across metro Detroit, southeast MI, and midwest drive markets. and/or visitors that have been interested in visiting Oakland County

## Survey Distribution

The survey was live from March 05-April 18 2025 (6.5 weeks) and distributed widely across the County's marketing channels (including County Executive's newsletter, Advantage Oakland, etc.), as well as that of partners such as Birmingham PSD, Downtown Ortonville, and other local media (Oakland County Times).

As an incentive to drive response rates, Oakland County, by and through Oakland County Department of Economic Development (“ED”), offered sponsored prizes. Prizes were provided to the County at no cost.

**For a full list of prizes, please see Appendix C for ‘Survey Questionnaire & Prize List’.**

### Respondent Demographics

91% of total respondents live in the metro Detroit area, of which they include the following:

- Oakland ZIP codes - 95%
- Wayne ZIP codes - 2%
- Macomb ZIP codes - 1%
- Livingston ZIP codes - 1%

9% of total respondents live outside metro Detroit, of which they include the following:

- MI ZIP codes - 74%

- Other States - 26% (predominantly OH, IN, IL ZIP codes)

It is also important to acknowledge limitations of the survey. The survey received an overwhelming response from respondents that identify their race/ethnicity as ‘White’ and with median age of 55.

- 84% of respondents identified their race/ethnicity as ‘White’
- 6% of respondents identified their race/ethnicity as ‘Black or African American’

- 2% of respondents identified their race/ethnicity as ‘Hispanic or Latino’
- 8% of respondents identified their race/ethnicity as ‘Other’



2025 Visit Oakland County Survey. Source: Think Place Agency (2025)

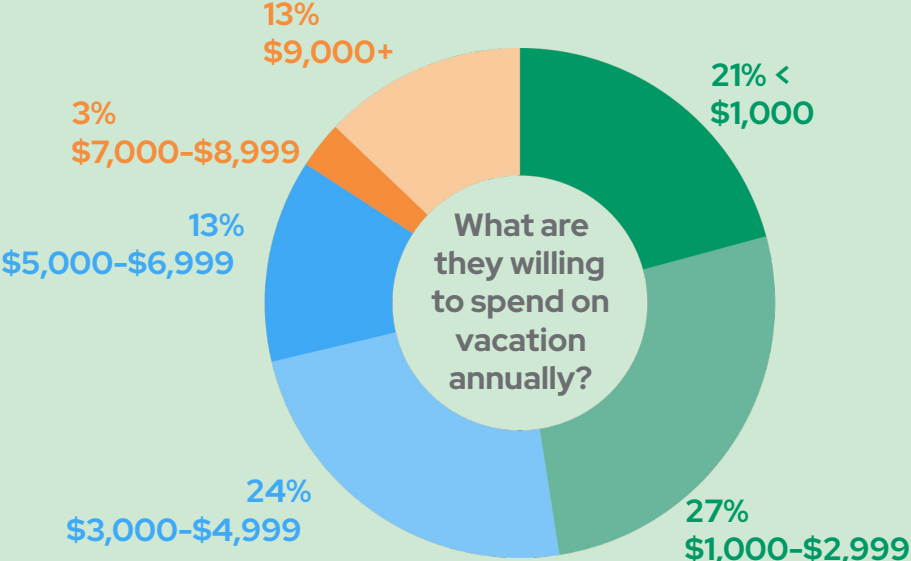
# The Out-of-Towner

## Budget savvy SE Michigander and Midwestern explorer

This visitor from within 2-2.5 hour drive of the County (largely SE Michigan, OH, IN) offers the greatest opportunity for the County to grow its reach and market. The out-of-towners that have been to Oakland County have formed favorable impressions and are likely to visit again, with many citing strong family ties as being a key reason for wanting to return. However, they are likely looking for more affordable experiences.

At least 1 in 4 respondents recognize Oakland County as either a 'safe', 'welcoming', and/or 'diverse' destination.

100% would visit Oakland County again (if they've been to Oakland County before.)



## On a scale of 1-10...

What is your overall impression of Oakland County as a destination?

6.2

(0- Extremely negative, 10 - Extremely positive)

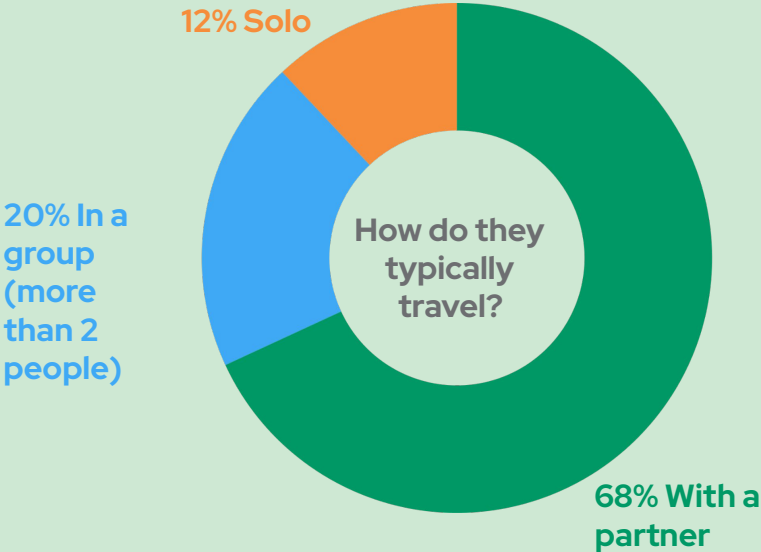
How likely are you to recommend Oakland County as a place to visit to friends/family?

6.3

(0- Extremely Unlikely, 10 - Extremely Likely)

2025 Visit Oakland County Survey. Source: Think Place Agency (2025)

9 in 10  
would  
visit  
Oakland  
County  
again



On a scale of 1-10...

What is your overall  
impression of Oakland  
County as a  
destination?

6.4

(0- Extremely negative, 10 - Extremely positive)

How likely are you to  
recommend Oakland  
County as a place to  
visit to  
friends/family?

6.3

(0- Extremely Unlikely, 10 - Extremely Likely)

The Metro  
Detroitters

Loyal regional  
visitors &  
destination  
ambassadors

This visitor has likely visited Oakland County in the last year, is most familiar with its offerings, and has formed a more positive impression of the County as a destination, and therefore more likely to recommend Oakland County to friends and family.

Interestingly, unlike the 'Out-of-Towners', the Metro Detroit visitor strongly identifies Oakland County with the outdoors. More than 1 in 4 have identified Oakland County as being 'outdoorsy' while only 10% of Out-of-Towners do.

# Growth Opportunities

The beautiful, great outdoors are currently only serving those ‘in the know’.

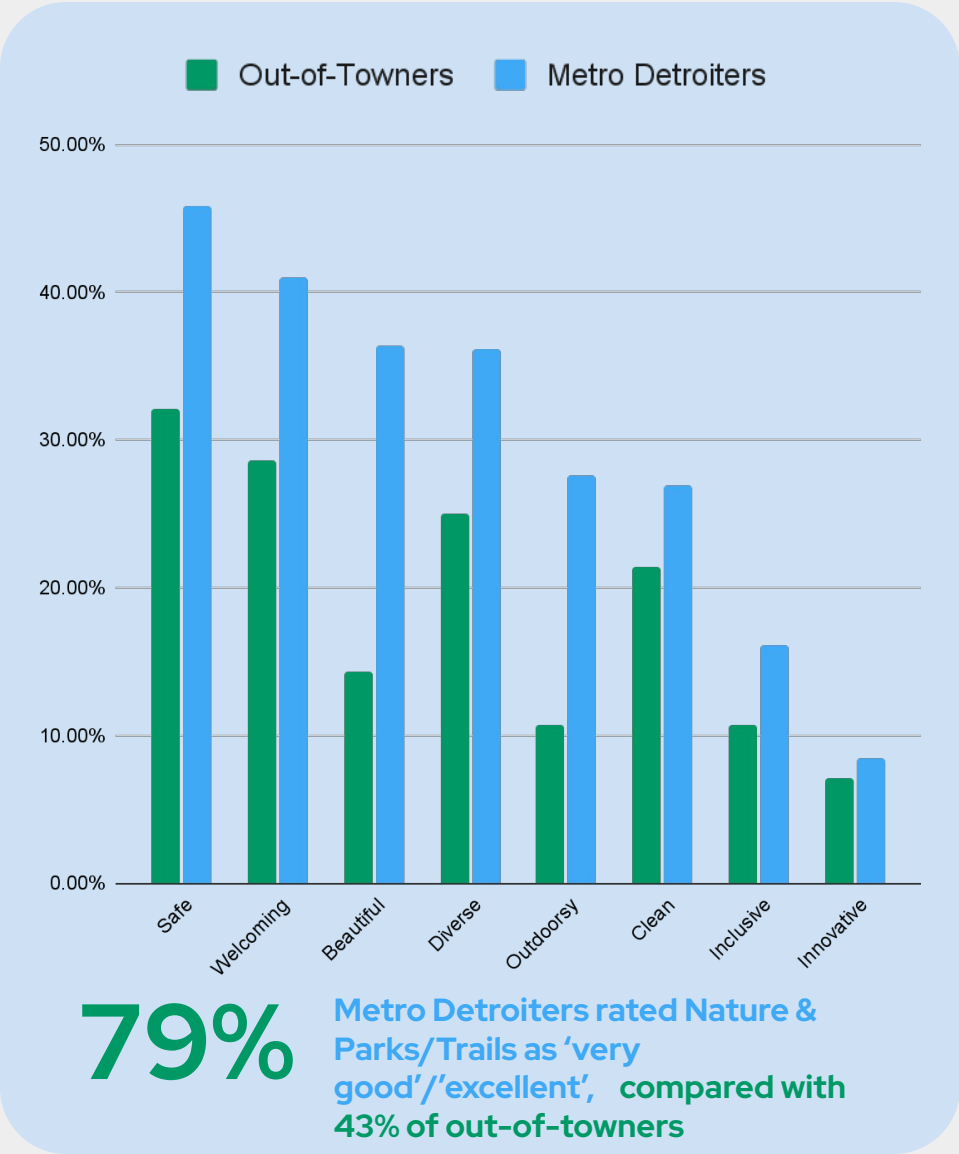
Despite the County’s wealth of facilities/assets for more niche outdoor recreation activities such as horseback riding, mountain biking, kayaking/boating, and its countless scenic lakes, only the Metro Detroiters who are ‘in the know’ are leveraging these experiences.

Oakland County’s legacy of innovation is a hidden and untapped asset.

Although the County is and has been home to innovators working on cutting-edge technological advancements across industries, and especially in automotive, neither Metro Detroiters nor out-of-towners identified this piece of the County’s identity as being significant.

Oakland County is a ..... Destination. (Fill in the blank)

2025 Visit Oakland County Survey. Source: Think Place Agency (2025)



# Growth Opportunities

**Beyond dining/shopping and the great outdoors, Oakland County stands out with its events and festivals.**

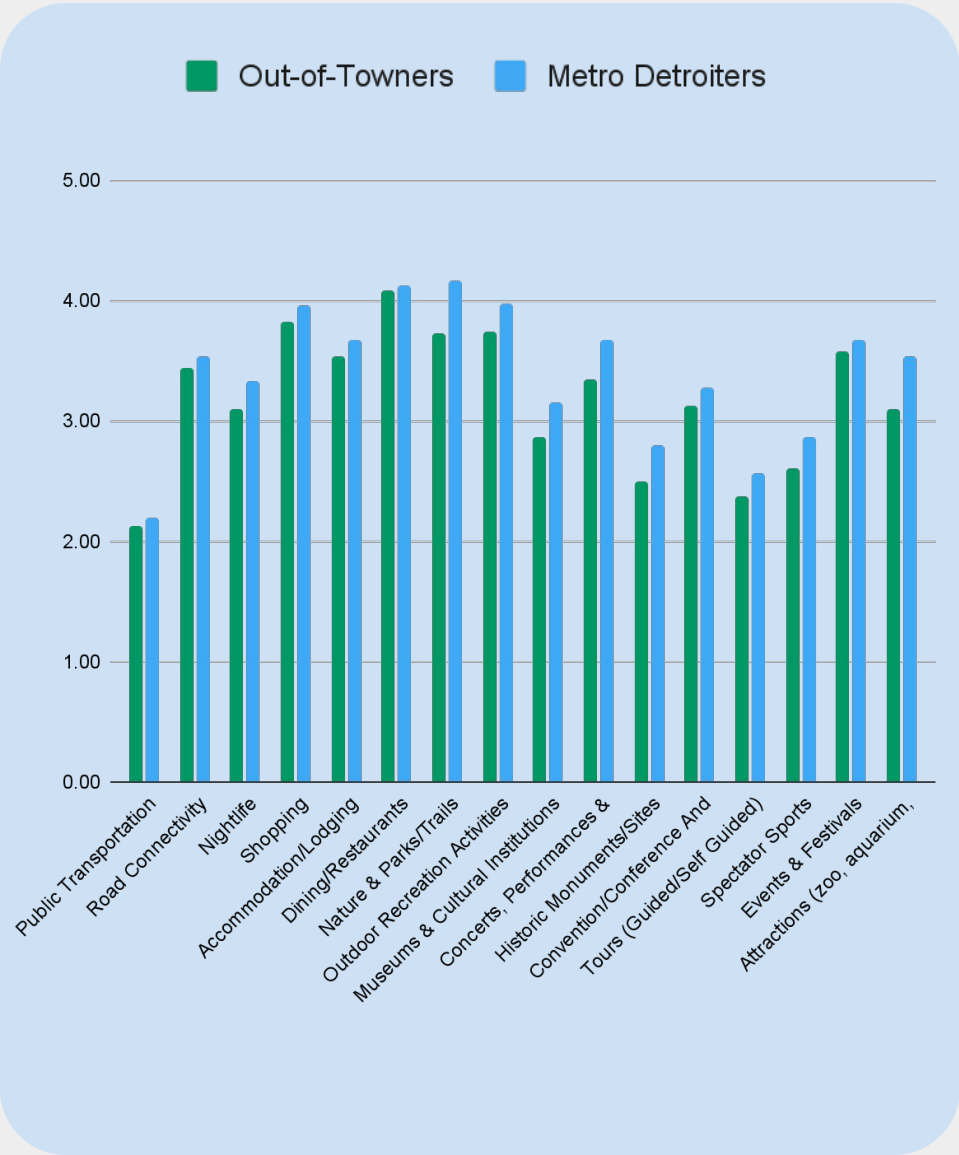
Unlike many other destinations, 36% of out-of-towners and 58% of Metro Detroiters rated the events and festivals in the County as being very good/excellent. This is likely due to the County’s track record of hosting homegrown Michigan events around the clock, and should really be leveraged moving forward to celebrate more diverse cultures and invite more international communities to share in the cultural offerings.

**The lack of alternative mobility options between tourism products and experiences poses risks to the County’s visitor economy.**

Amongst several issues shared by stakeholders and visitors (via the survey), relating to countywide infrastructure challenges, the most frequently cited was that of public transit access and overall mobility in Oakland County. Public transit is an amenity that is sought after not only by visitors but locals alike.

**How would you rate the overall quality of each of the following factors in Oakland County?**

2025 Visit Oakland County Survey. Source: Think Place Agency (2025)



# 05

## Valuing The Tourism Industry

To understand the breadth of impact of the tourism industry

This economic impact study was developed by Tourism Economics. For questions on the economic impact study, please reach out to the team at [admin@tourismeconomics.com](mailto:admin@tourismeconomics.com).



# Understanding the Status Quo

At present, the travel sector is already an integral part of Oakland County's economy. Visitors generate significant economic benefits to households, businesses, and government, and represent a critical driver of the county's future.

**In 2024, the visitor economy generated \$4.9 billion in total business sales and supported nearly 4.0% of all jobs in Oakland County.**

By monitoring the visitor economy, policymakers can inform decisions

regarding the funding and prioritization of the sector's development. They can also carefully monitor its successes and future needs. This is especially true as Oakland County's visitor economy has fully recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic and is now expanding into new growth territory.

To quantify the significance of the visitor economy in Oakland County,

Tourism Economics developed a comprehensive model detailing the far-reaching impacts arising from visitor spending. The results of this study show the scope of the visitor economy in terms of direct visitor spending, along with total economic impacts, jobs, and fiscal (tax) impacts in the broader economy.

An IMPLAN input-output model was constructed for Oakland County. The model traces the flow of visitor-related expenditures through the county's economy and their effects on employment, wages, and taxes.

IMPLAN also quantifies the indirect (supplier) and induced (income) impacts of tourism. Tourism Economics then cross-checked these findings with employment and wage data by sector to ensure reasonableness of the estimates.

For the purposes of this economic impact assessment only, a visitor is defined as someone who stayed overnight or traveled more than 50 miles to the destination, and deviates from the normal routine. The primary source of the employment and wage data is the

Regional Economic Information System (REIS), developed and maintained by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. This is more comprehensive than Bureau of Labor Statistics (ES202/QCEW) and includes sole-proprietors and independent workers.

The analysis draws on the following data sources:

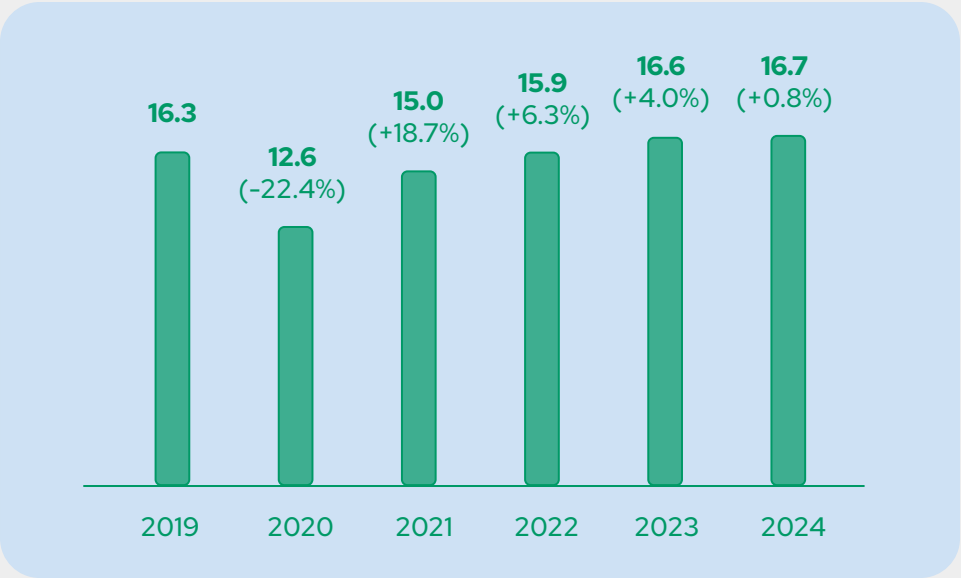
- Bureau of Economic Analysis and Bureau of Labor Statistics: Employment and wage data, by industry

STR data: Lodging metrics, including room demand and supply, room rates, occupancy, and room revenue

- Michigan Department of Revenue: State level sales tax data by industry category
- U.S. Census Bureau: Economic Census data, as well as data on population, households, second homes
- U.S. Energy Information Administration: regional gasoline prices

Oakland County Visitor Volume (millions)

Source: Tourism Economics



# Tourism’s total economic impact in Oakland County reached \$4.9 billion in 2024.

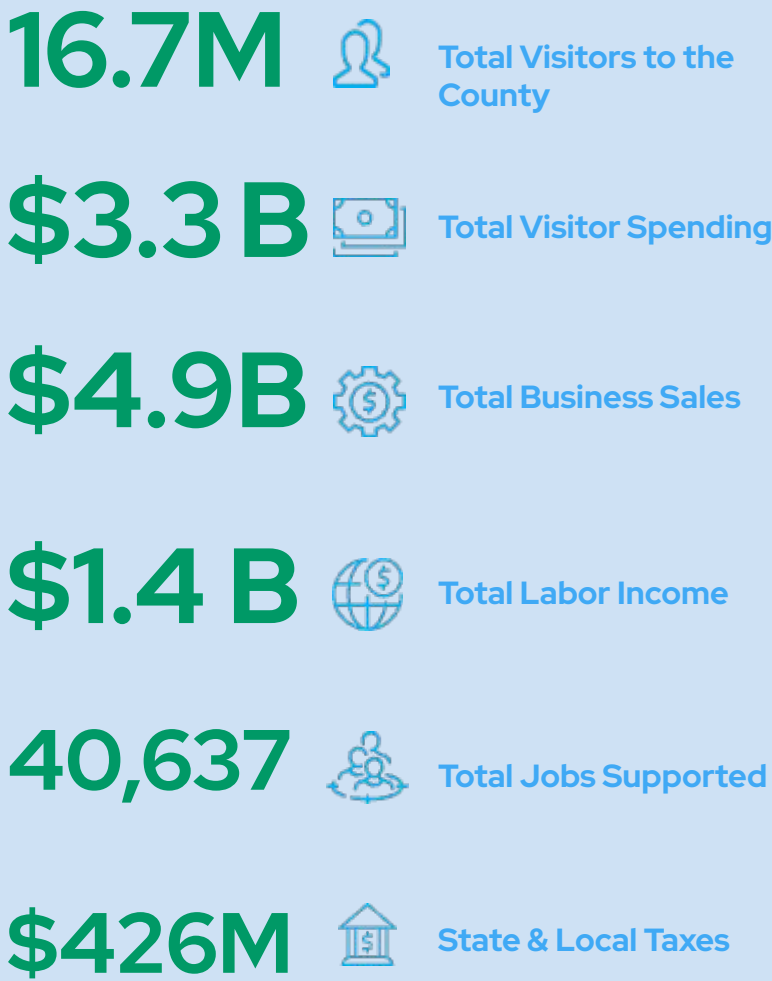
## The Visitor Economy Drives Economic Impact

In 2024, 16.7 million visitors spent \$3.3 billion across Oakland County. Total visitor volume and spending to Oakland County expanded 0.8% and 1.3% respectively, from 2023 levels. For comparison, visitor volume is 1.6 times the population of the State of Michigan (10.1 million)

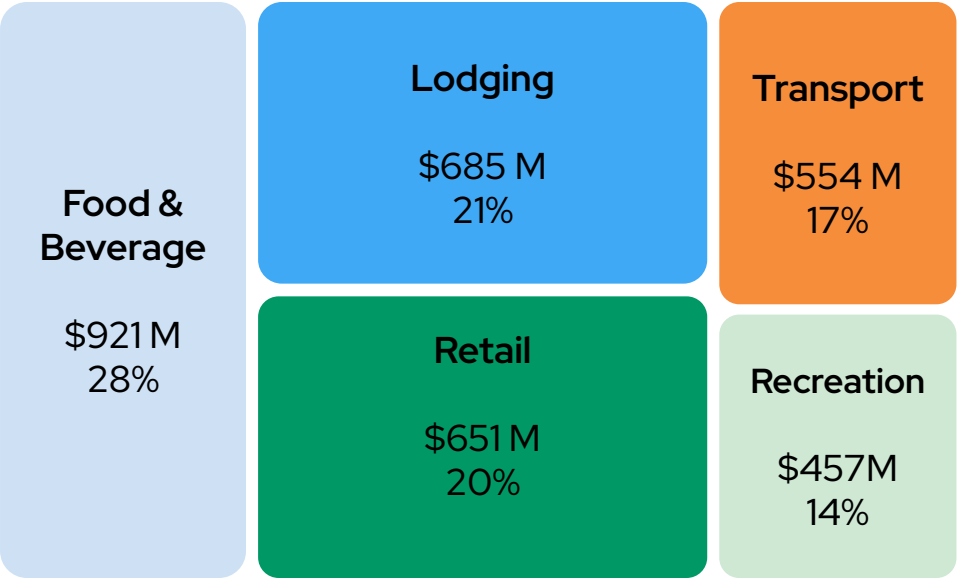
## Total Economic Impacts of Visitors in Oakland County

Direct visitor spending in the local economy generated a total impact of \$4.9 billion in Oakland County in 2024, including indirect and induced impacts. This total economic impact sustained nearly 41,000 jobs, \$1.4 billion in income, and generated \$426 million in state and local tax revenues.

### Key 2024 Findings from Oakland County



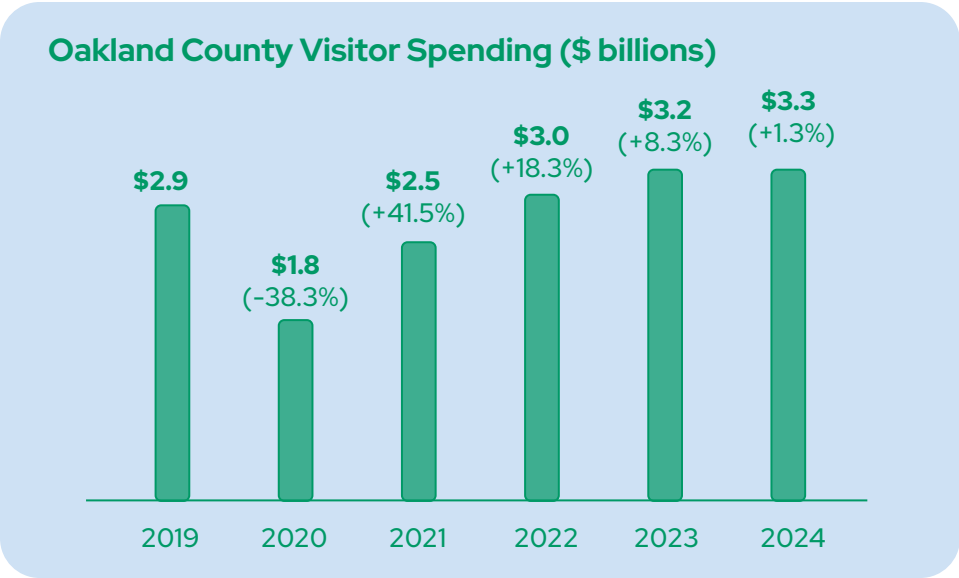
# Visitors to Oakland County spent \$3.3 billion across various sectors in 2024.



Spending on food and beverages accounted for \$0.9 billion or 28% of total visitor spending.

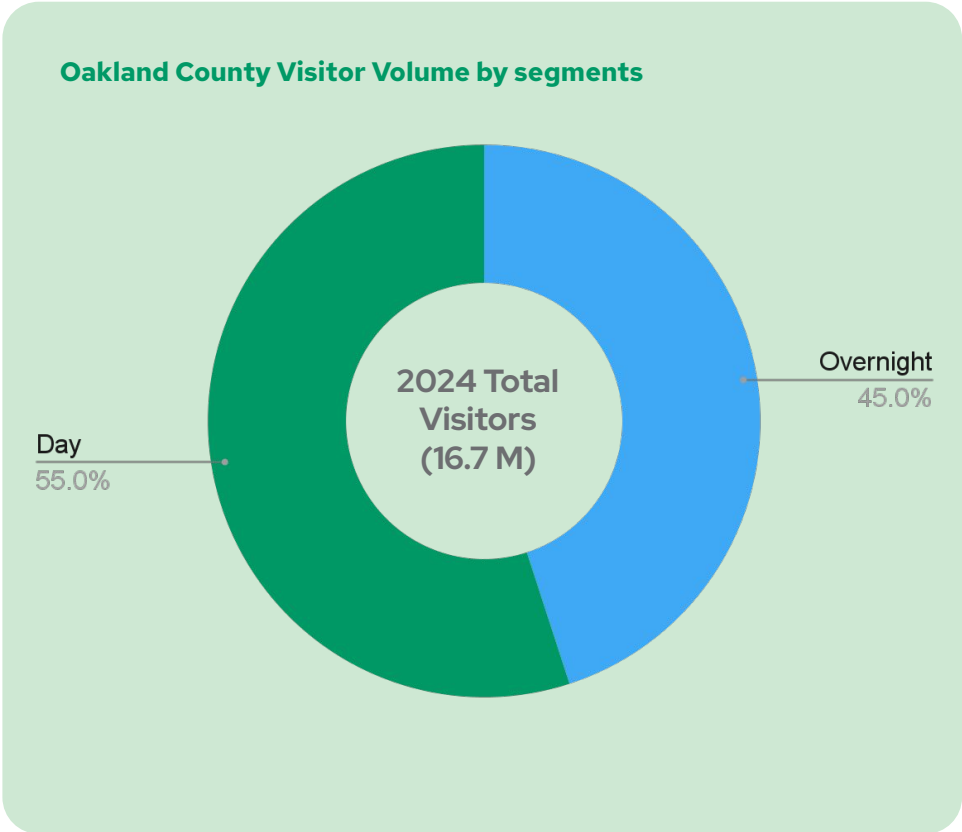
Lodging spending reached \$0.7 billion, or 21% of total visitor spending, and spending on retail tallied \$0.7 billion.

Transportation and recreation spending contributed 17% and 14%, respectively, to total visitor spending.



Source: Tourism Economics

# Spending Trends & Visitor Volume



**Visitor spending in Oakland County grew 1.3% in 2024, driven by moderate increases in both prices and real demand.**

Food and beverage spending led increases in 2024 with an 3.9% expansion, driven in part by 2.9% growth in prices. Visitor spending on recreation and lodging also expanded 2.5% and 1.4%, respectively. Spending on retail and local transportation was slightly down in both categories, driven by lower gas prices and changing spending priorities.

**Overnight visitor volume growth was relatively flat at 0.4%, trailing day visitor volume at 1.0%.**

Spending growth in both categories was modest at 0.8% and 1.4%, respectively, reflecting relatively little change from 2023. Most visitors to Oakland County (55%) came for the day and overnight visitors accounted for 74% of spending.

Source: Tourism Economics





Oakland County Visitor Spending (\$millions)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024 growth
Total Visitor Spending	\$2,887	\$1,780	\$2,518	\$2,979	\$3,225	\$3,268	1.3%
Lodging*	\$591	\$393	\$550	\$629	\$676	\$685	1.4%
Food & Beverage	\$736	\$470	\$670	\$789	\$886	\$921	3.9%
Retail	\$604	\$388	\$550	\$618	\$660	\$651	-1.3%
Recreation	\$592	\$300	\$414	\$507	\$541	\$554	2.5%
Transportation	\$363	\$229	\$334	\$435	\$463	\$457	-1.2%

Source: Tourism Economics (\*Lodging spending is calculated as an industry)

Oakland County Visitor Volumes and Spending, by segment ( \$ millions, millions of visitors)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024 growth
Total Visitors	16.3	12.6	15.0	15.9	16.6	16.7	0.8%
Day*	8.7	7.6	8.3	8.7	9.0	9.0	1.0%
Overnight*	7.3	5.0	6.7	7.1	7.4	7.4	0.4%
International	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.2	6.9%
Total Visitor Spending	\$2,887	\$1,780	\$2,518	\$2,979	\$3,225	\$3,268	1.3%
Day*	\$520	\$401	\$486	\$558	\$590	\$597	1.4%
Overnight*	\$2,126	\$1,323	\$1,989	\$2,279	\$2,409	\$2,429	0.8%
International	\$241	\$57	\$43	\$141	\$226	\$242	6.8%
Per Visitor Spending	\$177	\$141	\$168	\$187	\$194	\$196	0.5%
Day*	\$60	\$53	\$59	\$64	\$66	\$66	0.4%
Overnight*	\$289	\$264	\$297	\$323	\$326	\$327	0.4%
International	\$974	\$961	\$974	\$985	\$968	\$967	-0.1%

Source: Tourism Economics (\*Lodging spending is calculated as an industry)

# The Economic Impact Methodology

Our analysis of the Oakland County visitor economy begins with direct visitor spending and analyzes the downstream effects of this spending on the broader economy. To determine total economic impact, we input direct spending into a model of the Oakland County economy, constructed using an IMPLAN input-output (I-O) model.

IMPLAN remains a nationally recognized and widely used modeling tool, the leading provider of economic impact data and analytics software.

The model traces the full extent of industry impacts as dollars flow through the local economy.

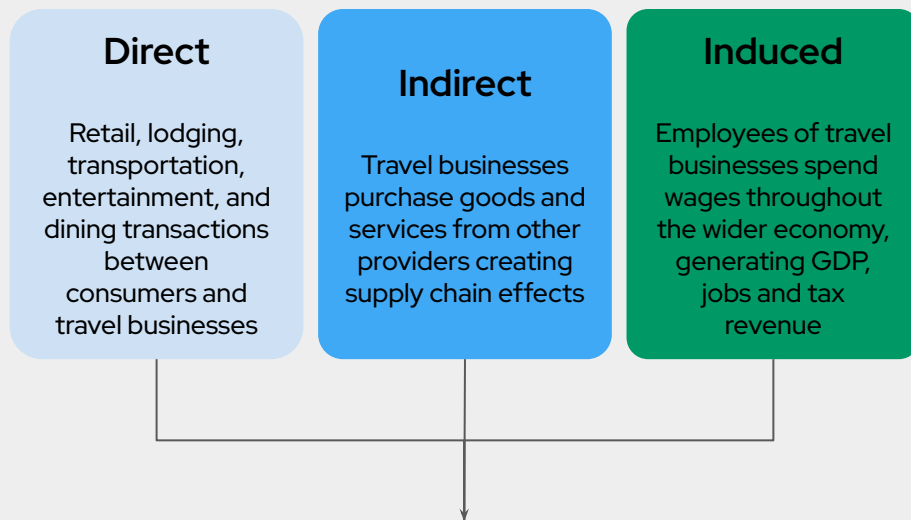
I-O models represent a profile of an economy by measuring the relationships among industries and consumers, quantifying three levels of impact:

- **Direct impacts:** Visitor spending creates direct economic value within a discrete group of sectors (such as recreation and transportation). This supports a relative proportion of spending, jobs, wages, and taxes within each sector.
- **Indirect impacts:** Each directly affected sector also purchases goods and services as inputs (e.g. food wholesalers, utilities) into production. These impacts are called indirect impacts or supply-chain effects.
- **Induced impacts:** Lastly, the induced impact is generated when employees whose wages are generated either directly or indirectly by visitor spending spend those wages in the local economy. This is called the induced impact or income effect.

The Tourism Economics model calculates these three levels of impact—direct, indirect and induced—for a broad set of indicators, including:

- Spending
- Wages
- Employment
- Federal Taxes
- State Taxes
- Local Taxes

# Economic Impact Framework



## Total Economic Impact

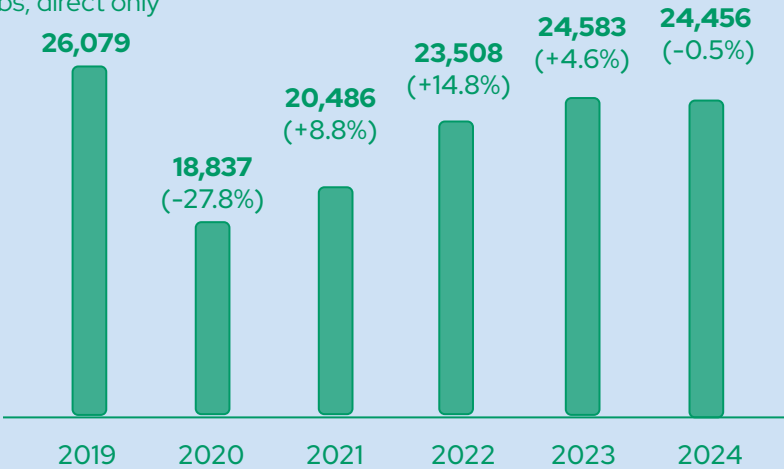


Source: Birmingham PSD

# The tourism industry in Oakland County directly supported 24,456 local jobs.

## Visitor Supported Employment in Oakland County

Jobs, direct only



## DIRECT EMPLOYMENT

Visitor-supported employment declined slightly in 2024, dropping to 24,456 jobs. Visitor activity supported a significant portion of direct employment in several key industries in Oakland County. Visitors sustained nearly all employment in the lodging sector, 19% of recreation employment, and 14% of food services employment. Overall, direct visitor-supported employment accounted for 2.3% of all jobs in Oakland County in 2024.

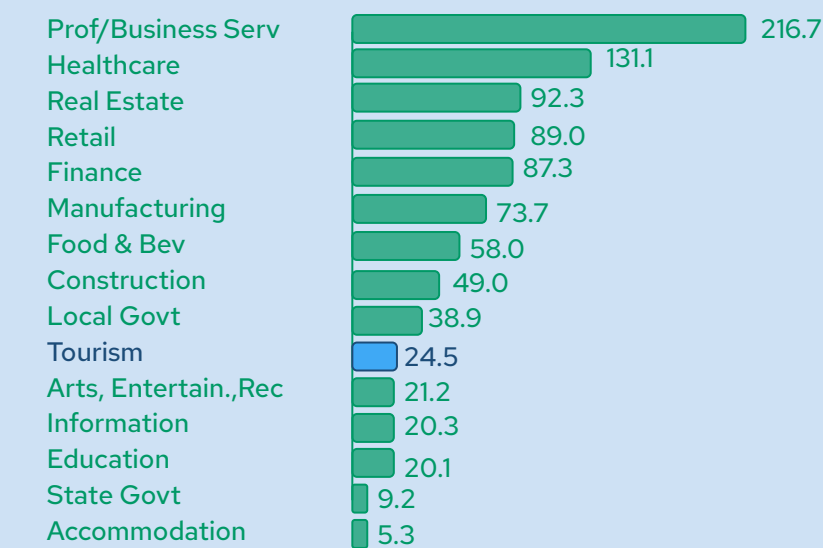
When considering total jobs (including indirect and induced), this share was 3.8% of the total. For comparison, total tourism-supported jobs in benchmark destinations Dane County, WI, and Montgomery County, PA, were 4.0% and 1.8%, respectively in 2023.



# Taken together as an industry, the 24,456 direct tourism jobs rank 10th in Oakland County.

## Visitor Supported Employment in Oakland County

Jobs in thousands



Comparing employment levels can help understand the relative size and importance of an industry to the regional economy. As visitor spending cuts across several industries - accommodations, food and beverage, retail, recreation, and transportation - a direct comparison requires us to include all jobs driven by direct visitor spending.

**When taken together as an industry, the 24,456 direct tourism jobs ranks 10th in Oakland County, higher than Information, Education, and State government employment.**

The total economic impact of \$4.9 billion accrued to industries across the economy.

BUSINESS SALES IMPACT

The visitor economy contributed a direct impact of \$3.3 billion in 2024. This direct impact generated \$1.6 billion in indirect and induced impacts, resulting in a total economic impact of \$4.9 billion in Oakland County’s economy. The total economic impact shows the benefits to the broader economy across industries at the indirect and induced levels.

Business Sales Impacts by Industry (\$millions)

	Direct Business Sales	Indirect Business Sales	Induced Business Sales	Total
Total, ALL INDUSTRIES	\$3,275	\$973	\$619	\$4,867
Retail Trade	\$817	\$12	\$59	\$887
Food & Beverage	\$756	\$35	\$38	\$828
Lodging	\$665	\$0	\$0	\$665
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	\$96	\$303	\$201	\$599
Recreation & Entertainment	\$450	\$31	\$8	\$489
Business Services	\$0	\$282	\$63	\$345
Gasoline	\$228	\$1	\$2	\$231
Other Transport	\$160	\$25	\$8	\$193
Personal Services	\$104	\$31	\$19	\$154
Communications		\$109	\$37	\$146
Education & Healthcare		\$4	\$117	\$121
Wholesale Trade		\$52	\$33	\$85
Construction & Utilities		\$63	\$15	\$78
Government		\$11	\$13	\$25
Manufacturing		\$13	\$4	\$17
Air Transport		\$1	\$1	\$2
Agri, Fishing, Mining		\$2	\$1	\$2

Source: Tourism Economics

Visitor spending supports 1-in-25 of all jobs in Oakland County, including nearly 9,600 jobs in the food and beverage industry.

EMPLOYMENT IMPACTS

Visitor activity sustained 24,456 direct jobs in 2024, with an additional 16,181 jobs supported from the indirect and induced impacts of visitor activity. The total jobs impact was to 40,637 in 2024, one of every 25 jobs in the county (3.9%).

Employment Impacts by Industry (jobs)

	Direct Jobs	Indirect Jobs	Induced Jobs	Total
Total, ALL INDUSTRIES	24,456	9,423	6,758	40,637
Food & Beverage	7,879	862	835	9,576
Recreation & Entertainment	3,991	434	171	4,596
Lodging	4,517	1	8	4,526
Retail Trade	2,819	193	977	3,989
Business Services		3,253	716	3,969
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	200	2,228	941	3,369
Personal Services	2,368	525	441	3,334
Other Transport	2,373	606	175	3,154
Education & Healthcare		101	1,795	1,896
Communications		406	158	564
Government		190	259	449
Wholesale Trade		281	152	433
Gasoline	309	9	35	353
Construction & Utilities		245	66	311
Manufacturing		72	17	89
Agri, Fishing, Mining		12	7	19
Air Transport		5	5	10

Visitor spending drives income across industries, including six industries with \$120 million or more in total income.

LABOR INCOME IMPACTS

Visitor activity generated \$0.7 billion in direct labor income and a total of \$1.4 billion including indirect and induced impacts. There are six industries in which visitor activity supports more than \$100 million in total labor income.

When taken on a per job basis, the average wage for direct tourism jobs was \$27,700 per year while the average for indirect and induced jobs was \$45,000. Overall including all jobs, the average wage for tourism-supported jobs was \$34,600 annually in 2024.

Labor Income Impacts by Industry (\$millions)

	Direct Jobs	Indirect Jobs	Induced Jobs	Total
Total, ALL INDUSTRIES	\$677	\$449	\$278	\$1,404
Food & Beverage	\$237	\$20	\$18	\$274
Business Services	\$0	\$205	\$44	\$250
Lodging	\$168	\$0	\$0	\$168
Retail Trade	\$106	\$4	\$21	\$131
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	\$12	\$77	\$39	\$128
Recreation & Entertainment	\$112	\$6	\$3	\$122
Other Transport		\$17	\$5	\$22
Education & Healthcare	\$0	\$3	\$89	\$92
Personal Services	\$42	\$18	\$10	\$71
Communications		\$35	\$13	\$48
Wholesale Trade	\$0	\$26	\$14	\$41
Government		\$14	\$14	\$28
Construction & Utilities		\$18	\$5	\$23
Gasoline		\$0	\$1	\$1
Manufacturing	\$0	\$4	\$1	\$5
Air Transport		\$1	\$1	\$1
Agri, Fishing, Mining		\$0	\$0	\$0

Source: Tourism Economics

Each household in Oakland County would need to be taxed an additional \$805 to replace visitor-generated taxes.

LABOR INCOME IMPACTS

Visitor spending, visitor supported jobs, and business sales generated nearly \$760 million in government revenues in 2024.

State and local taxes alone tallied \$426 million.

Each household in Oakland County would need to be taxed an additional \$805 to replace the visitor-generated taxes received by state and local government in 2024.

Tax Impacts (\$millions)

State Taxes	277.6
Sales	152.5
Bed	32.5
Personal Income	45.2
Corporate	6.6
Social Insurance	0.0
Excise & Fees	16.1
Property	24.6
Local Taxes	148.4
Bed	10.8
Personal Income	15.1
Excise & Fees	5.9
Property	116.6
Federal Taxes	333.9
Personal Income	120.5
Corporate	32.5
Indirect Business	12.1
Social Insurance	168.7
Total Tax Revenues	759.8



# Economic Impact In Context

**\$3.3B**

## Total Visitor Spending

The \$3.3 billion in visitor spending means that **\$9.0 million was spent every day** by visitors in Oakland County, on average.

**\$1.4B**

## Labor Income

The \$1.4 billion in total income generated by tourism is the equivalent of over **\$2,600 per household** in Oakland County.

**40.6 k**

## Jobs

If every visitor supported employee were in one place it would be enough to nearly fill Comerica Park (41,000 capacity).

**\$426M**

## State & Local Tax Income

The \$426 million taxes received by the state and local governments in 2024 is **enough to fund the average salaries of 6,600 public school teachers** in the County.

# 06

## Next Steps

Areas of opportunity to grow and develop our place brand and visitor experiences



# Oakland County's Tourism Opportunities

## Products & Experiences

**Oakland County must build on its niche opportunity to offer the great outdoors from May through October to Metro Detroiters/visitors to the City of Detroit.**

With over 1,100+ points of interest in the great outdoors, across a breadth of recreation activities and sporting assets/facilities, Oakland offers open landscapes and is a perfect getaway for the urbanite - whether for weekend getaways or year-round living.

## Products & Experiences

**Oakland County must leverage its identity as a destination that invites residents and visitors to make the ordinary extraordinary.**

At the root of the County's identity and history is the fundamental truth that Oakland County has always been a destination for 'the curious' - from cutting edge industries and innovations in medicine and EV, to venues and institutions for science, arts, and culture that punch above their weight.

## Products & Experiences

**We should build on the success of our downtowns and calendar of events.**

Our downtowns and communities are a core part of Oakland County's identity. The network of cities with walkable neighborhoods and downtowns and quality public amenities (many with proximity/access to natural assets and outdoor recreation) make Oakland County the choice place to live in the region - especially amongst the international community.

## THE BIG CHALLENGE:

The County will need to overcome the real and perceived challenge of distance and disjointedness between our tourism products & experiences through strategic itinerary marketing, coordinated events and programming, and non-motorized transportation enhancements.

# Oakland County's Tourism Opportunities

## Audience

**Oakland County is the region's hometown, bringing generations of families together year-round.**

The County's top-visited attractions support shared fun family experiences, whether through concerts, comedy, and entertainment, or play and learning. In addition, the County's longtime residents are the biggest ambassadors for the destination, greatly influencing organic one-time visitation by hosting friends and family for the holidays.

## Audience

**Oakland County is an escape for Metro Detroiters and urbanites from across SE Michigan.**

In addition to the Great Outdoors assets in the County, Oakland's marquee events and festivals such as the Renaissance Festival and Woodward Dream Cruise single handedly draw millions of visitors to the County from across the region and beyond. They are iconic

multi-day experiences that allow urban dwellers to immerse themselves in culture outdoors unlike anywhere else in metro Detroit.

## THE BIG CHALLENGE:

The Great Outdoors have not been widely marketed for Oakland County to-date and, as a result, remain largely leveraged only by the Metro Detroiters who are 'in the know'. The County will need to build on information accessibility (including multi-lingual) and ensure integration of parks information to grow interest in and use of the great outdoors.

# Oakland County's Tourism Opportunities

## Organizational Capacity

### **Oakland County will need to leverage the strong marketing platforms and capabilities of Visit Detroit.**

In 2024, Visit Detroit successfully advocated to increase the convention and tourism tax on hotel rooms in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties from 2% to 3%, giving the organization an even greater pool of resources to funnel toward destination marketing for

the region. Rather than compete on marketing functions, the County should build on its key niches that can best feed into Visit Detroit's marketing approach.

At this time, Visit Detroit's social media growth averages 10,000 new Instagram followers monthly and will be a critical platform for Oakland County to leverage to raise brand and product awareness.

## Organizational Capacity

### **Oakland County should support Visit Detroit in destination management and stewardship.**

As Visit Detroit focuses on regional marketing, Oakland County will need to work on doing a better job of putting itself on the map and stewarding the county as a destination through product development and management, and ensuring that the visitor experience is seamless, positive, and most

importantly, memorable for its most loyal regional visitors who might serve as ambassadors for the County.

# 07

# Appendix

A deeper dive into the data and stakeholder engagement





APPENDIX A

Tourism Readiness: Downtown/Main Street/Commercial District

≤24: Emerging, 25-35: High Potential/Needs Support, 36-45 : Tourism Ready

Downtown/Main Street/Community	Visitor Driver Attractions/Events (max: 15 points)	Retail & Lodging Density (max: 10 points)	Organization Capacity (max: 15 points)	Brand/Identity (max: 5 points)	Total Points (max: 45 points)	Tourism Readiness Status
Auburn Hills	14	10	12	3	39	Ready
Birmingham	10	8	14	5	37	Ready
Farmington	10	8	14	4	36	Ready
Ferndale	12	8	12	5	37	Ready
Lake Orion	12	8	12	4	36	Ready
Milford	12	8	13	4	37	Ready
Novi	14	10	10	2	36	Ready
Rochester	12	8	15	4	39	Ready
Royal Oak	13	8	13	4	38	Ready
Southfield	13	7	12	4	36	Ready

Scores allocated based on data from multiple sources: Oakland County Main Street; Placer.Ai; CoStar; AirBNB/VRBO

APPENDIX A

Tourism Readiness: Downtown/Main Street/Commercial District

≤24: Emerging, 25-35: High Potential/Needs Support, 36-45 : Tourism Ready

Downtown/Main Street/Community	Visitor Driver Attractions/Events (max: 15 points)	Retail & Lodging Density (max: 10 points)	Organization Capacity (max: 15 points)	Brand/Identity (max: 5 points)	Total Points (max: 45 points)	Tourism Readiness Status
Clarkston	13	5	6	3	27	High Potential
Franklin	12	4	6	3	25	High Potential
Highland	13	4	6	3	26	High Potential
Holly	13	6	6	3	28	High Potential
Lyon	13	4	7	2	26	High Potential
Madison Heights	10	9	5	2	26	High Potential
Oak Park	13	7	5	3	28	High Potential
Oxford	13	7	6	3	29	High Potential
Pontiac	13	6	5	4	28	High Potential

Scores allocated based on data from multiple sources: Oakland County Main Street; Placer.Ai; CoStar; AirBNB/VRBO

APPENDIX A

Tourism Readiness: Downtown/Main Street/Commercial District

≤24: Emerging, 25-35: High Potential/Needs Support, 36-45 : Tourism Ready

Downtown/Main Street/Community	Visitor Driver Attractions/Events (max: 15 points)	Retail & Lodging Density (max: 10 points)	Organization Capacity (max: 15 points)	Brand/Identity (max: 5 points)	Total Points (max: 45 points)	Tourism Readiness Status
Berkley	5	5	10	4	24	Emerging
Beverly Hills	6	1	2	3	12	Emerging
Clawson	9	6	6	2	23	Emerging
Groveland	13	0	0	0	13	Emerging
Hazel Park	0	3	5	2	10	Emerging
Lathrup Village	5	5	7	4	21	Emerging
Leonard	6	0	0	1	7	Emerging
Ortonville	11	2	5	1	19	Emerging
South Lyon	10	4	6	3	23	Emerging

Scores allocated based on data from multiple sources: Oakland County Main Street; Placer.Ai; CoStar; AirBNB/VRBO

APPENDIX B

# Glossary – Spending Definitions

Term	Description
Lodging	Includes visitor spending in the accommodation sub-sector. This includes food and other services provided by hotels, rentals and similar establishments.
Food and beverage	Includes all visitor spending on food & beverages, including at restaurants, bars, grocery stores and other food providers.
Recreation	Includes visitors spending within the arts, entertainment and recreation sub-sector.
Shopping	Includes visitor spending in all retail sub-sectors within the local economy.
Local transport	Ride share, taxis, limos, trains, rental cars, buses, and gasoline purchases.
Air transport	Where applicable, the local share of air transportation spending.
Second homes	Where applicable, spending associated with the upkeep of seasonal second homes for recreational use as defined by the Census Bureau.

Source: Tourism Economics

APPENDIX B

# Glossary – Economic Impact Definitions

Term	Description
Direct Impact	Impacts (business sales, jobs, income, and taxes) created directly from spending by visitors to a destination within a discreet group of tourism-related sectors (e.g. recreation, transportation, lodging).
Indirect Impact	Impacts created from purchase of goods and services used as inputs (e.g. food wholesalers, utilities, business services) into production by the directly affected tourism-related sectors (i.e. economic effects stemming from business-to-business purchases in the supply chain).
Induced Impact	Impacts created from spending in the local economy by employees whose wages are generated either directly or indirectly by visitor spending.
Employment	Employment is measured by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) definition, and captures full-time and part-time jobs, which includes salary and wage employees and proprietors.
Labor income	Income (wages, salaries, proprietor income and benefits) supported by visitor spending.
Value Added (GDP)	The economic enhancement a company gives its products or services before offering them to customers.

Source: Tourism Economics

APPENDIX B

# Glossary – Economic Impact Definitions

Term	Description
Local Taxes	City and County taxes generated by visitor spending. This includes any local sales, income, bed, usage fees, licenses and other revenues streams of local governmental authorities – from transportation to sanitation to general government.
State Taxes	State tax revenues generated by visitor spending. This will include sales, income, corporate, usage fees and other assessments of state governments.

Source: Tourism Economics



## APPENDIX C

# Visit Oakland County Strategic Plan – Visitor Survey Questionnaire

## Section 1: Welcome

The Oakland County Department of Economic Development is spearheading a tourism and attraction strategic planning effort. As a county resident, traveler and/or past visitor to the county, we value your impressions and perspectives of the area. The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. By completing this survey, you may enter to win an Oakland County Prize Pack. Thank you for participating in the survey and stay tuned for more information, which will be posted on the Visit Oakland County Strategic Plan website!

**FOR FULL TERMS & CONDITIONS FOR THE PRIZE DRAW, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SURVEY.**

The questions in the survey will mostly apply to Oakland County, Michigan. See the map below of Oakland County (outlined in red).

## Section 2: How Well Do You Know Oakland County?

1. Do you live or work in Oakland County (MI)?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. When did you last visit Oakland County (MI)?
  - a. Never
  - b. Before 2020
  - c. 2020–2023
  - d. Less than or about a year ago

## APPENDIX C

3. On your last trip to Oakland County (MI), how many people were in your travel party?
  - a. [Open Ended - Numeric Value only, Decimals, percentages, and non-numeric characters are not accepted.]
4. On your last trip to Oakland County (MI), approximately how much did you spend in each of the following categories during your trip? (in US dollars, Decimals, percentages, and non-numeric characters are not accepted.)
5. On your last trip to Oakland County (MI), how long did you stay in the County?
  - a. Day Trip only
  - b. 1-2 nights
  - c. 3-4 nights
  - d. More than 5 nights
6. On your last trip to Oakland County (MI), what was your choice of accommodation? (Select all that apply)
  - a. Hotel
  - b. Motel/Bed & Breakfast
  - c. Vacation Rental (AirBnb, VRBO, etc.)
  - d. Campground
  - e. With family or friends
7. Would you be interested in visiting Oakland County (MI)?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Not Sure
8. Are there places, events, or activities you would like to see or do in Oakland County (MI)? Share with us.
  - a. [Open Ended - Comment Box]

## Section 3: Trip Planning

9. On average, how frequently do you travel (farther than 50 miles) for business and/or leisure in a year?
  - a. <1 trip per year
  - b. 1-2 trips per year
  - c. 3-4 trips per year
  - d. More than 5 trips per year
10. What types of trips are you planning in the next 12 months? (Select all that apply)
  - a. No trips planned
  - b. Business/Client meetings
  - c. Business events/conferences
  - d. Leisure vacation
  - e. Hybrid trip (business + leisure)
11. What are you looking forward to doing on your trip(s)? (Select all that apply)
  - a. Visit Friends and Family
  - b. Visiting arts and cultural attractions
  - c. Visiting historic monuments/sites
  - d. Spending time at family-friendly attractions
  - e. Attending a local festival/event
  - f. Attending concerts/shows
  - g. Enjoying the local food scene and nightlife
  - h. Participating in outdoor sports and recreation
  - i. Engaging with nature
  - j. Participating in a 'once-in-a-lifetime' activity
  - k. Health and wellness activities
  - l. Attending spectator sports
  - m. Participating in athletic competitions
  - n. Other (please specify): [Open Ended]

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12. Which of the following factors have an impact on your travel decisions? (1 - no impact, 5 - high impact)
- Personal financial situation
  - Personal safety
  - Transportation costs (i.e. flights, trains, cruises)
  - Lodging costs (i.e. short term rentals, hotels/motels, B&Bs)
  - Climate/weather
  - Convenient access to the destination (i.e. travel time, flight connectivity, etc.)
  - Ease of travel upon arrival at destination (i.e. availability of taxi, public transportation, parking, etc.)
13. What are common tools you use to research a potential travel destination? Select all that apply
- Travel websites/blogs/vlogs (Lonely Planet, Conde Nast Traveler, etc.)
  - Online Forums (Reddit, Facebook Groups, etc.)
  - Social media (Instagram, Pinterest, TikTok, etc.)
  - Travel apps (Skyscanner, AirBnB, Expedia, etc.)
  - Travel magazines
  - Official tourism websites
  - Other. Share with us: [Open Ended]

## Section 4: Destination Sentiment

14. On the whole, what is your overall impression of Oakland County as a destination? (1- Extremely negative, 5 - Extremely positive)
- [Scale range]
15. How would you rate the overall quality of each of the following factors in Oakland County? Rate each aspect based on your experience. (1 - Extremely Poor, 5 - Extremely Good, N/A)
- Public Transportation
  - Road Connectivity
  - Nightlife
  - Shopping
  - Accommodation/Lodging
  - Dining/Restaurants
  - Nature & Parks/Trails
  - Outdoor Recreation Activities
  - Museums & Cultural Institutions
  - Concerts, Performances & Shows
  - Historic Monuments/Sites
  - Convention/Conference And Meeting Venues
  - Tours (Guided/Self Guided)
  - Spectator Sports
  - Events & Festivals
  - Attractions (zoo, aquarium, theme parks)

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16. Are there any particular activities/businesses/attractions you would recommend to another visitor?
    - a. [Open Ended]
  17. Fill in the blank "Oakland County is a \_\_\_\_ destination." Select all that apply.
    - a. Historic
    - b. Beautiful
    - c. Welcoming
    - d. Fun
    - e. Authentic
    - f. Creative
    - g. Diverse
    - h. Peaceful
    - i. Inclusive
    - j. Innovative
    - k. Vibrant
    - l. Safe
    - m. Outdoorsy
    - n. Progressive
    - o. Small
    - p. Gritty
    - q. Clean
    - r. Sustainable
    - s. Sophisticated
    - t. Conservative
    - u. Congested
    - v. Boring
    - w. None of the Above
    - x. Other. Please specify: [Open Ended]
  18. Would you visit Oakland County again?
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
    - c. Maybe
  19. If you're willing to share, please tell us why.
    - a. [Open Ended]
  20. How likely are you to recommend Oakland County as a place to visit when talking to friends and family members? (0-Extremely Unlikely, 10 - Extremely Likely)
    - a. [Scale range]
  21. What do you think would most improve the quality of the visitor experience in Oakland County?
    - a. [Open Ended]
- Section 5: Tell Us About Yourself**
22. What is your home mailing zip code (US 5-digit) or postal code?
    - a. [Open Ended]
  23. What is your gender?
    - a. Male
    - b. Female
    - c. Non-Binary
    - d. Prefer not to say
    - e. Prefer to self describe: [Open ended]
  24. What is your age?
    - a. [Open Ended - numeric value only]

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25. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
- a. White
  - b. Black/African American
  - c. American Indian/Alaska Native
  - d. Asian
  - e. Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
  - f. Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin
  - g. Some Other Race. Identify: [Open Ended]
26. On average, do you travel ...
- a. Solo
  - b. With a friend/partner/family member
  - c. In a group (more than 2 people)
27. On average, how much do you/your household typically spend on travel annually (including flights, transportation, lodging, etc.)?
- a. Less than \$1,000
  - b. \$1,000-\$2,999
  - c. \$3,000-\$4,999
  - d. \$5,000-\$6,999
  - e. \$7,000-\$8,999
  - f. \$9,000 or more
28. If you would like to leave us additional thoughts about Oakland County as a tourism destination that have not been covered in the questions above, please do so here.
- a. [Open ended]

**Section 6: Sweepstakes Entry**

29. Please enter your email to enter a chance to win a “Taste of Oakland” prize package and receive future communications about the Oakland County Tourism & Attraction Strategic Plan.
- a. First Name [Open ended]
  - b. Last Name [Open ended]
  - c. E-mail [Open ended]

**Thank you for completing the visitor survey. Press ‘Submit’ to complete the survey.**

## APPENDIX C

# Visit Oakland County Strategic Plan – Prize List

We would like to extend our sincerest thanks to the following partners that sponsored prizes for the survey sweepstakes.

The following is a list of the donated items from each sponsor.

- **Oakland County Parks** donated – One Family Fun Passbook (\$350 value) consisting of the following passes:
  - One ORV Admission – 2
  - One Night of Camping – 2
  - One Bike Rental at Campground – 1
  - One Boat Rental at Campground – 1
  - One 9-Hole Round of Golf with Cart – 3
  - One Large Bucket of Balls at Lyon Oaks Driving Range – 1
  - One Nature Center Program – 2
- **Auburn Hills DDA** donated (x2) rounds 18 holes at Fieldstone Golf Course, 2 umbrellas, 2 journals, 2 t-shirts
- **Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm** donated free admission ticket for family of 4 (upto x4) – Friday/Saturday from 12-3 pm
- **Oak Park DDA** supported in donating the following
  - \$25 gift cards (x2) to local restaurant, Sahara
  - Unexpected Craft Brewing Company \$40 gift card
  - Mother Handsome bag of whole coffee beans and gift card valued at \$25
  - Pie Sci Pizza gift card valued at \$50
  - Hansons Hall t-shirt and \$25 gift card



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- **Berkley DDA** donated mural-branded Downtown Berkley bags (x3)
- **Lyon Township DDA** donated DDA picnic blankets (x2); DDA small backpacks (x3)
- **Wixom DDA donated DDA** hats (x2) and t-shirts (x2) and supported in the donation of the following:
  - El Camino Real Mexican Restaurant - \$20 Gift Certificate
  - Volare Ristorante - \$50 gift card
  - Dough by Rumi's Passion - \$25 gift card
  - Wixom Station Food & Drink - \$30
  - Drafting Table Brewing Company - \$25 gift card
  - Spray Chic - Airbrush Tanning - \$40 gift card
  - Little Caesars Pizza - \$25 gift card
  - Wixom Liquor - \$25 gift certificate

## APPENDIX D

# 1-on-1 Stakeholder Engagement Summary

A series of 'closed door' interviews were conducted in-person during a site visit and virtually via Zoom with key industry leaders and decision makers in Oakland County from February-March 2025. These meetings were intended to introduce key individuals to the Visit Oakland Plan project and to offer these individuals a safe space to share any vital information that may impact plan strategies and final implementation. Stakeholders selected for 1-on-1 engagement in the initial phase of this project include policymakers, program partners, and managers/owners of major tourism attractions, events, and festivals - each with varying abilities to lead and/or support the implementation of the final strategic plan and destination brand.

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Name of Stakeholder	Title	Organization
Katja Thomakos	Senior Director of Development	Cranbrook Institute of Science
Molly Mcgrath	Event & Customer Service Manager	Cranbrook Institute of Science
Nancy Swords	Deputy Director	Cranbrook Institute of Science
Randi Hamilton	Chief Experience Officer	Detroit Zoo
Gary Neumann	General Manager	Great Lakes Crossing (Mall)
Kristen Old	Marketing & Tourism Manager	Great Lakes Crossing (Mall)
Garth Wooten	Oakland County Veterans Services (Manager)	Great Lakes National Cemetery
Connor Newton	Visitor Services Manager	Meadowbrook Hall
Madiha Tariq	Deputy County Executive - Health and Human Services	Oakland County
Sean Carlson	Deputy County Executive - Economic Development and Information Technology	Oakland County
Justin Willcock	Oakland County Economic Development	Oakland County

Name of Stakeholder	Title	Organization
Harry Weaver	Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer	Oakland County - Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
Ron Campbell	Principal Planner / Preservation Architect	Oakland County Economic Development
Jennifer Llewellyn	Manager	Oakland County - Workforce Development
Cheryl Bush	Airport Manager	Oakland County International Airport
Ben Stupka	Executive Director	Regional Transit Authority (RTA)
Amy O’Leary	Executive Director at SEMCOG President of Metropolitan Affairs Coalition	SEMCOG
Tyler Klifman	Planner III	SEMCOG
Naheed Huq	Director of Economic Development	SEMCOG
Linda McIntosh	Director of Marketing & Communications	Somerset Collection (Mall)
Blair Bowman	Owner, Suburban Collection Showplace	Suburban Collection Showplace

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Name of Stakeholder	Title	Organization
Harmony Lloyd	VP of Planning & Innovation	Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART)
Claude Molinari	President/CEO	Visit Detroit
Erica Coulston	Owner	Walk The Line Recovery Therapy
Michael Lary	WDC Board President	Woodward Dream Cruise
Gabi Burman	Director Of Communications, Marketing & Events	Zekelman Holocaust Center

The following section is a high-level summary of sentiments and views shared by these key stakeholders during the 1-on-1 engagements.

## APPENDIX D

# Oakland County's Identity & What Makes It A Destination

## Oakland County is Metro Detroit community.

Stakeholders interviewed shared unanimously that Oakland County should be positioned as a community of the Metro Detroit region. Many shared that the 'Detroit' brand remains the most recognizable brand nationally and internationally - locals from across the region, including from Oakland County, identify as being from Detroit when identifying themselves to national and international leaders. As such, it is critical that the County builds on the strengths of the 'Detroit' brand. In addition, County staff shared the importance of aligning the County's positioning with Detroit given that the County Executive is 'big' on supporting the region as a whole to ensure net positive migration.

Most importantly, stakeholders shared that the City of Detroit will likely remain the premier sporting and entertainment center for the

region given recent significant investments on sporting, arts & cultural, and convention facilities in downtown Detroit.

As such, stakeholders agreed that positioning Oakland County in relation to Detroit as the center of gravity will be critical to ensuring success of the destination, whether through emphasis on proximity of the County to downtown Detroit (less than 30 minute drive) or by complementing products with charming small town experiences and outdoor recreation.



Nobody says they're  
from Oakland  
County, they say  
they're from Detroit.



## APPENDIX D

**Oakland County is the region's hometown.**

In a variety of ways, stakeholders shared that a core part of Oakland County's identity is that it is the County that many Detroiters call home. The network of cities with walkable neighborhoods and downtowns and the areas quality public amenities (including access to natural assets and outdoor recreation) make Oakland County the choice place to live in the region. It makes Oakland County the home to Detroit's "hardworking and resilient people".

Like many Michigan hometowns, the County's longtime residents are the biggest ambassadors for the destination. They have greatly influenced organic one-time visitation and/or year-round net migration, whether by hosting friends and family for the holidays or by attracting family to move back permanently for personal and professional reasons/job opportunities.

Recent families that have moved back to the County also shared sentiments that Oakland is among some of the best places to build families and homes in the country given the overall quality of life and access to quality education and the outdoors. As a result, stakeholders also shared the opportunity that the County has to highlight the diversity of its large international community that it has welcomed. The diverse cultures and ethnicities of families in Oakland County continues to grow (13% foreign-born population) and will likely continue to influence culinary experiences in the destination and should be supported and showcased moving forward to differentiate the County from Detroit.



**Oakland's parks are  
some of the most  
accessible assets in  
the State.**





**APPENDIX D****Make the ordinary extraordinary.**

At the root of all conversations surrounding economic development, as well as the history of the County, is the fundamental acknowledgement that Oakland County has always been a destination for 'the curious'. Its history is deeply rooted in cutting edge innovations and industries and today that includes specialty clinic hubs and international patient centers.

Stakeholders shared that one of the County's biggest assets in attracting innovative companies and start-ups is its skilled and educated talent pool that boasts some of the highest rates of post-secondary educational attainment in the Midwest, supported greatly by a mix of its K-12 public/private/parochial school systems. The County's history is deeply rooted in cutting edge innovations and industries.

Today, Oakland County is the premier address for doing business in Metro Detroit with access to the 'Big 3 companies', the County's Triple A bond rating, and access to a forward-thinking County airport for corporate executives. Even for leisure tourism, its attractions (e.g. Detroit Zoo, Cranbrook, historical museums) place great emphasis on telling the stories of innovators and designing educational programs for the next generation.

**Oakland County is a big Spring-Summer destination.**

Managers and operators of major tourism attractions, including cultural and educational institutions, shared that Oakland County is ripe for Spring-Summer itineraries for visitors of all ages. This is largely due to the timing of the County's biggest drivers of visitation, its marquee events and festivals - Renaissance Festival and Woodward Dream Cruise. These two major events singlehandedly draw millions of visitors to the County from across the region and beyond.

In addition, with the breadth of natural assets in the County, Oakland is also a popular summer camp destination for families and youth, indicating the strongest audience potential with inter-generational families for Spring-Summer experiences.

**Oakland County is a destination for Midwesterners.**

In discussing potential origin markets for destination marketing, managers and operators of major tourism attractions shared that the biggest potential remains with visitors from Southeast MI (in particular, Ann Arbor and its educated consumer base seeking complementary fine art and cultural experiences via day trips/weekend stays). Given the limited drive-time trade area of Southeast MI, however, it is likely that these visitors are spending limited amounts of time in the County - 60-90 minutes per visit to an attraction.

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Beyond the 50-mile radius of the County, stakeholders shared the opportunity to consider other major origin markets including other parts of the State of MI, northern major cities of OH (Toledo, Sandusky, Cleveland) and IN (Fort Wayne), given that summer camps in Oakland County are already attracting families and youth from out-of-state.

While the Canadian market remains top-of-mind, stakeholders shared caution around messaging the destination in order to combat negative perceptions and decreasing interest in travel to the US as a result of ongoing federal trade war activity.



**We haven't returned to our 2019 highs of paid attendance and participation in the arts and culture.**



## The Challenges & Limitations

### **Oakland County needs to further leverage creative placemaking.**

At this time, stakeholders shared that there are limited planned and heavily-resourced creative placemaking activations throughout the county that “create buzz and excitement” and have the ability to generate meaningful visitor traffic.

The opportunity to grow creative placemaking in the County lies particularly in developing new and complementary marquee events and building more year-round public art (beyond murals) and wayfinding on major travel arteries and highways where “there is clearly a need to break up the visual experience” (for example, along Woodward Avenue).

### **Oakland County faces resource- and demand- constraints in the tourism and hospitality industry..**

Stakeholders across the County shared challenges on both the supply- and demand-side of the tourism and hospitality market. Given that a large share of restaurants and drinking places (micro-breweries, bars, pubs, etc.) in the County are small, local

## APPENDIX D

owner-operator businesses, many remain constrained by time and resources to continuously enhance operations and train staff on the job - leading to limited workforce opportunities in these sectors.

On the demand side, cultural institutions shared collectively that overall visitation has declined and that attendance rates have not returned to 2019 levels (pre-COVID). This is indicative of the industry writ large nationally and will need to be mitigated particularly as public funding for arts and culture is unlikely to grow in the coming years.

**Oakland County has significant infrastructure and built environment challenges to overcome.**

Amongst several issues shared by stakeholders around countywide infrastructure challenges, the most frequently cited was that of public transit access and overall mobility in Oakland County - for residents, employees, and visitors.

In particular, the large size/geographic spread of the County and the limited use of the highway systems for transit present significant challenges with operating public transit systems efficiently. Regional transit representatives shared that running long bus routes across the County has also resulted in inefficient service delivery, however, this issue is currently being addressed by SMART.

In addition, east-west connectivity via public transit that has the potential to connect several points-of-interest across the County is limited.

Other frequently cited issues include downtown universal accessibility (largely owing to older streetscape and real estate) and the lack of signage and wayfinding for key attractions and tourism assets. Given that visitors currently have to navigate the

County via private vehicle, there is a strong need for tourism attractions to be more visible and prominent from major travel arteries, with truly accessible and welcoming signage.

On talent attraction and retention, stakeholders shared that a key challenge for the County remains in its ability to provide mixed-income housing for younger talent in entry positions and employees with growing families seeking first-time home ownership opportunities.



**We don't welcome visitors  
who don't have their own  
private vehicle.**



## APPENDIX D

**Oakland County needs to grow and stay competitive as a tourism destination in the Metro Detroit area.**

In addition to the news of a potential new convention facility in Macomb County, stakeholders shared the need to grow lodging inventory in Oakland to be able to keep overnight stays locally and attract bigger meetings and events/conventions.

In particular, event organizers and meeting venue operators in the southern sections of the County shared the need for upscale and boutique brands to meet preferences of both business event and social/leisure event attendees.

Finally, Woodward Dream Cruise shared that their biggest challenge in being able to grow sponsorships and therefore the size/scale of the event is in its lack of real estate ownership along the event route. While the public nature of the event and it being hosted along public roadways is what enables it to attract over a million visitors to Oakland County annually, organizers shared that the lack of ownership of any real estate along the route limits its abilities to host large sponsor events and brand activations. For the event to grow in a meaningful way, the Woodward Dream Cruise would need to own and manage a site substantial enough to serve as the event's 'hub'.

**Oakland County needs to build on its regional partnerships.**

In 2024, Visit Detroit successfully advocated to increase the convention and tourism tax on hotel rooms in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties from 2% to 3%, giving the organization an even greater pool of resources to funnel toward destination marketing for the region. In conversation with Visit Detroit, the organization has indicated its position to focus on niche marketing over broad messaging. As such, it will continue to dedicate marketing resources and leverage its base of social media influencers to generate niche content for each county. At this time, Visit Detroit's social media growth averages 10,000 new Instagram followers monthly and will be a critical platform for Oakland County to leverage to raise brand and product awareness.

Tourism industry stakeholders across the County shared that there remains significant opportunity to improve relationships and communication with Visit Detroit. In particular, industry stakeholders would like to see a more consistent/regular communication and feedback loop with the destination marketing organization, as well as a more strategic approach to generating business leads and group tour activity for assets in Oakland County.

## APPENDIX D

**Oakland County needs to overcome the perception of 'exclusivity' in Oakland County.**

Due to a number of historic factors, Oakland County has built a reputation regionally as being exclusive. As such, stakeholders have shared that it is important that as we develop a brand positioning for the County that we highlight the new era of openness for the County – from County leadership all the way down to individual communities – and the real diversity of the people in the County.

The reality is that despite the overall high performance of the County in economic and workforce development, there remain some communities that continue to struggle with quality of life issues, low incomes/wages and remain challenged by high rates of inflation. It is critical that the County acknowledges those segments of the population and bring awareness to efforts being made to support them. By doing so, it has the ability to build on the changing national perception of Detroit as the city that has made progress and where “vibes are up”.

## Destination Marketing & Development Opportunities

**Oakland County has the opportunity to leverage homecoming activity in the Fall-Winter season.**

In addition to Spring Break, cultural institutions in the County experience its peak museum days over the Thanksgiving and Christmas break with high rates of friends and family visiting for the holidays in Oakland. As such, it is important to continue to promote these ‘indoor cultural experiences’ collectively and build on partnerships between cultural institutions in the County and with others in the region, to support cross-visitation during the colder months.

At this time, Cranbrook has leveraged partnerships with Culture Source – a great regional organization promoting arts and cultural anchors, and the Cranbrook Art Museum has increased its presence in Detroit through cross-promotional events, art installations, and concert series partnerships with other cultural institutions in downtown Detroit.

## APPENDIX D

### **Oakland County needs to support its biggest tourism generators and grow traffic to high-potential assets.**

The three big tourism generators for the County with potential to yield higher rates of visitation, as shared by stakeholders include:

- **Suburban Collection Showplace - for business travel (groups/meetings/conventions).**
  - Ongoing plans include City West Development and addition of on-site hotel rooms to be able to host larger events/conventions and keep visitors along the soon-to-be commercial corridor.
  - The Suburban Collection Showplace is interested in revisiting a long-term sustainable funding and operations model.
- **Woodward Dream Cruise and other emerging cultural events - for leisure travel**
  - The County should build on the successes of its pop-up events and 'once-in-a-lifetime' events/festivals/experiences because they are the biggest drivers for visitation to the assets and attractions.
  - After-dark events post-COVID have proven to be successful traffic drivers
  - The County should leverage its international communities to grow diverse celebrations, events and festivals throughout the year.

- **Cranbrook and Meadowbrook Hall - for business and leisure travel**
  - Venues at both assets can accommodate corporate meetings, receptions, holiday parties, client events and have a unique selling point - both have built-in entertainment with museum exhibits and specialized museum tours
  - Both venues serve clients with higher budgets seeking unique event experiences beyond traditional banquet halls/meeting rooms

### **Oakland County needs to address countywide mobility.**

Stakeholders unanimously shared that improving countywide mobility will be critical to getting visitors to where tourism assets are. In addition, the county has also shared a willingness to further invest in improving connectivity between key clusters of tourism activity, if backed by proven data and metrics.

An early win that may be leveraged is an increased but targeted use of SMART's event-specific shuttle services that have proven to be successful for special events such as the Woodward Dream Cruise (week-long service), Ferndale Pride, Rochester Festival of Lights, and Arts, Beats & Eats.

## APPENDIX D

**Oakland County needs to ensure the brand and marketing reaches young talent and diverse audiences.**

Stakeholders across various sectors shared that they have seen the power in social media, organic sharing, word-of-mouth referrals, and highly recommend that the County consider these strategies as part of its marketing efforts moving forward.

Other suggestions made by stakeholders included a) ensuring that all information used in marketing is accessible as it is key to retaining awareness and attention from various audiences, and b) ensuring the visual identity and brand position builds on the County's image as an international community and its key niches (especially as Visit Detroit seeks to highlight the County's differentiators as part of its niche marketing approach).

With regards to talent attraction, workforce development representatives (many of whom have seen past talent attraction marketing attempts fail at the local/regional/state levels) shared the importance of ensuring the destination marketing for talent is accompanied by an incentive package that can "really push the needle on attraction efforts".



Bring back a  
'Prosper Magazine' in  
web-form, or at least  
its content.





## APPENDIX D

# Focus Group Stakeholder Engagement Summary

A series of thematic/topic-based focus groups were facilitated virtually via Zoom with key industry stakeholders and local representatives in Oakland County from April 01-07, 2025. Over 500 individuals from the following areas of expertise were invited to attend one or more of the focus group sessions, and 102 were in attendance during the week of the session.

- Agriculture, Markets & Food Production
- Nature, Parks & Trails
- Outdoor Sports
- Culinary, Retail
- Hotel & Lodging
- Economic Development & Workforce
- Health Systems & Higher Education
- Transportation & Mobility
- Craft Beverage
- History, Arts & Culture
- Small Business Development
- Entertainment
- Local Elected & Appointed Officials

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**APPENDIX D**

These meetings were intended to introduce key individuals to the Visit Oakland Plan project, offer attendees an organized forum to meet other representatives with similar areas of expertise/interest, and to share any vital information that may impact plan strategies and final implementation with the County and Consultant team. Stakeholders selected for focus group engagement in the initial phase of this project include policymakers, program partners, and managers/owners of major tourism attractions, events, and festivals - each with varying abilities to lead and/or support the implementation of the final strategic plan and destination brand.

The following section is a high-level summary of sentiments and views shared by these key stakeholders during the 1-on-1 engagements.

## APPENDIX D

# Destination Identity

**Oakland County has always welcomed the world's leading innovators.**

Stakeholders across a variety of sectors shared that Oakland County's prime location within an hour's drive of Detroit, Ann Arbor, and a major international airport has always enabled it to attract entrepreneurs and businesses seeking accessibility and strategic positioning. With unparalleled access to major highways and international transport hubs, it has become a magnet for global commerce, enabling businesses to easily reach markets like Ann Arbor, Lansing, Detroit, Flint, and Canada.

The region is home to a robust cluster of headquarters, including the Big Three automakers and Tier 1 suppliers, making it particularly attractive to companies in the automotive and advanced manufacturing sectors.

Stakeholders also shared that Oakland is a model county for investment, given the government's fiscally conservative nature and AAA bond rating, offering businesses stability and confidence. The strong network of chambers that the County has and their active participation in international trade shows demonstrate a collaborative, growth-focused ecosystem. The region offers access to top-tier talent through its leading school systems and local universities, including Oakland University and Lawrence Tech. With

dedicated workforce initiatives—such as short-term training programs, pre-apprenticeships in robotics, and industry-specific events—companies benefit from a tailored talent pipeline. Add to that a welcoming, business-friendly environment with streamlined permitting processes, and stakeholders agreed that it's no surprise top international companies, particularly from Asia and Europe, have chosen to land in Oakland County.



**On average, we see a couple of businesses opening each quarter.**



## APPENDIX D

**Oakland County is a longstanding destination for established immigrant families.**

Across discussions with small business development professionals in the County as well as other non-profit organizations supporting immigrant communities, stakeholders agreed that Oakland County has long been a destination where immigrant families come to build successful, fulfilling lives. The County's recognition for its high-quality education systems, reliable public services, overall public safety, and proximity to abundant job and business opportunities offer the promise of opportunity for immigrant individuals and families seeking to build prosperous livelihoods.

According to stakeholders, these families often share their stories of success with communities abroad, fueling a steady, word-of-mouth stream of new residents and helping to promote Michigan's livability. Today, there's a growing opportunity to actively reshape perceptions—particularly in European markets—about Southeastern Michigan by highlighting Oakland County's balanced, hardworking lifestyle, which often resonates more with European sensibilities than more fast-paced U.S. regions on the coasts (e.g., San Francisco, New York).

Stakeholders unanimously agreed that Oakland County's diversity is also reflected in its vibrant immigrant communities. South, Southeast, and East Asian populations thrive in cities like Farmington Hills, Novi, and Madison Heights—home to cultural hubs like the Asian Cultural Center, 168 Market (one of the Midwest's largest locations),

and the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce. Novi hosts a strong Japanese expatriate presence, supported by institutions like the Japanese School of Detroit and the Japan Business Society of Detroit.

Madison Heights is increasingly recognized as the region's "Chinatown." To reinforce this welcoming spirit, Oakland County is pursuing certification through the Welcoming America network, reaffirming its commitment to inclusion and the long-term success of its immigrant residents.



**Oakland offers  
immigrant families the  
opportunity to create a  
prosperous life.**



## APPENDIX D

**Oakland County is the choice location for a small business looking for another metro Detroit address.**

Small business development professionals discussed the traits that make Oakland County an ideal choice for small businesses looking to expand beyond their first location. According to these stakeholders, they've seen a general trend of entrepreneurs increasingly being drawn to communities where they can both live and work—and Oakland offers just that. With high quality of life, diverse neighborhoods, and affordable commercial space, particularly in the northern and western parts of the County, business owners gain access to a large and diverse customer base across metro Detroit without the high costs often associated with central urban areas. Unlike cities that focus solely on proximity to downtown Detroit, Oakland County provides a complete package of livability, opportunity, and support.

A growing trend has seen many Detroit-based businesses opening second locations throughout Oakland County, from Rochester Hills to Bloomfield Hills. Cities like Southfield, recognized as one of the best places for Black women entrepreneurs, highlight the county's inclusive and supportive business environment as another critical trait to leverage in attracting small businesses.

Entrepreneurs also benefit from a robust ecosystem of small business resources throughout the County—including Main Street Oakland County, Oakland Thrive, local Chambers, and Principal Shopping Districts. Oakland Thrive, in particular, leads with language accessibility and with a technical support staff that reflects the county's diversity, ensuring that all entrepreneurs can access the tools they need to thrive.

However, stakeholders also shared a word of caution on the increasing competitiveness of the City of Detroit as a hotbed for entrepreneurship, given the City's recent initiatives and programs directed at seeding and supporting small businesses in commercial corridors (Motor City Match).

**Oakland County is seeing a migration of the creative class and families returning to their roots.**

In addition to business leaders and immigrant families, stakeholders noted that Oakland County is increasingly attracting members of the creative class—artists, designers, and remote professionals—seeking a blend of inspiration, affordability, and lifestyle balance.

With proximity to both urban culture and outdoor escapes, the County offers creative and entrepreneurial energy. This audience is drawn to walkable downtowns, maker spaces, live/work housing, and easy access to events, galleries, and trails.

Stakeholders also emphasized Oakland's appeal to multigenerational households. Many residents who grew up in the area are now returning with families of their own, or relocating aging parents nearby to foster closeness across generations. With safe neighborhoods, top-tier healthcare, and a variety of housing options, Oakland County provides an ideal setting for families to put down lasting roots.

## APPENDIX D

# Find A Place That Fits You

## **Oakland County communities offer quality opportunities to lead any kind of lifestyle.**

Despite the range of municipalities represented in the focus group discussions, stakeholders agreed that Oakland County is a uniquely diverse destination where individuals and families can find communities that match their lifestyle, career stage, and personal preferences. From urban centers with vibrant, walkable downtowns to quieter, rural areas offering a peaceful escape (for example, Highland and other north and western communities in the County want to continue to leverage their identities as the quiet escape from the big city bustle), each part of the county brings something distinct to the table.

Stakeholders shared that cities such as Royal Oak, Ferndale, and Birmingham have grown to attract younger professionals with their blend of dining, entertainment, parks, and mixed housing options, while more established professionals and corporate executives often gravitate toward communities like West Bloomfield, Rochester, and Franklin, which offer larger homes and upscale amenities. Even as communities differ in pace and character, stakeholders were united

by a shared foundation of the County's public safety, access to nationally recognized healthcare systems (Henry Ford, Corewell, UMich, McLaren Health, Detroit Medical Center), and consistently high quality of life.

This geographic and lifestyle diversity not only makes Oakland County an attractive place to live, but also supports sustainable population growth and regional competitiveness. Fast-growing areas like Lyon Township, which has doubled its population in less than 20 years, demonstrate the county's ability to meet evolving residential demand while maintaining strong infrastructure and services. With top-rated public, private, and parochial schools and a broad array of housing options that support residents at every life stage, Oakland County is well-positioned to continue serving as a welcoming, dynamic home for current and future generations.



**We're honoring yesterday  
and building for  
tomorrow.**



## APPENDIX D

# The Great Outdoors

## Oakland County offers the great outdoors to Metro Detroiters.

In discussing leisure travel opportunities, stakeholders shared extensively the range of outdoor recreation and agritourism experiences in the County that appeal to both visitors and residents seeking to reconnect with nature and escape urban life. The county's northern and western communities, with their open land and scenic landscapes, are especially well-suited for this audience—whether for weekend getaways or year-round living.

With a strong six-month activation window from May through October and predominantly daytime programming, there are also expanding opportunities for Friday evening and mid-week events, particularly in underutilized parks, trails, and campgrounds. Holiday-themed activations, such as tubing, holiday markets, and mulled wine gatherings, have already proven successful in drawing seasonal visitors. Looking ahead, there's strong potential to strategically link outdoor and agricultural attractions with local downtowns to support small businesses and drive more year-round economic activity.

## Outdoors in Oakland - Parks, Lakes, Trails & Sports

Stakeholders shared that the County has an opportunity to bring back competitive sports through hosting minor/feeder leagues and tournaments/events that still have the ability to draw visitors from across the Southeast MI region (particularly for golf, soccer, cricket).

As for popular outdoor recreation activities, the County offers facilities for walking, biking, and more niche activities such as horseback riding and mountain biking. Ultimately, stakeholders shared that the biggest untapped opportunities lie in water trails and state recreation areas - for example, horseback riding, equestrian history/culture, and cottages in Highland and campgrounds in Ortonville that are currently only used by people who are 'in the know'.

To invite the use of our outdoor recreation assets by a more diverse audience, there needs to be greater accessibility in communications about outdoor assets to ensure diverse ethnicities of users, family users, and other new users from outside the local communities.

In addition, there should be a more coordinated communications effort to link different park systems and recreation passes that currently cause confusion amongst park users who are just looking to access the outdoors. Currently, information about parks is siloed by the management authority (i.e. County, local municipality, metro, state, etc.)



## APPENDIX D

- SEMCOG park finder is the only existing resource that is comprehensive in its inventory of parks and recreation facilities

Currently, the Great Outdoors experiences also appear disjointed across the County. In order to get more people to go to and from outdoor recreation to agriculture assets, the County should encourage the use of its extensive trail networks (Rail to Trail networks) and build more bike amenities.

- Existing efforts being led by Michigan Airline Trail, Huron Valley trails, Southeast MI Active Transportation Committee, Detroit Greenways Coalition
- There is a need for clearer and more multilingual signage for assets and need for more bike infrastructure near agri-events and assets to support cross-visitation
  - In particular, better signage between downtowns/business nodes and trail heads to encourage 'park and bike' practice
- Pontiac is using RAISE grants to create separated and shared-use paths for bikes to connect to Clinton River Trail, and potential for MOGO bike share expansion into Pontiac

### Grown in Oakland - Agriculture and food/beverage production

One of the primary strengths of our agriculture and food production assets in the County are their ability to bring in various audiences to learn about where food comes from and environmental stewardship - less than an hour from the bustle of downtown Detroit.

From families with young children to older couples and corporate groups, our agricultural settings (farms, farmers markets, cider mills, etc.) invite visitors to experience our outdoors while enjoying fresh, quality produce and invite an appreciation for our rural outdoors. Some of the key assets that continue to grow their calendar of events and ability to host group meetings/events include:

- Bauer School Farm
- Van Hoosen Farm
- Cider mills
- Cooks Dairy Farm
- Toll Gate Farms
- Mayberry Farms
- Upland Hills Farm

In the last few years alone, many of these assets have noted seeing a growing share of corporate events seeking farm-setting/ non-traditional outdoor venues, particularly for corporate family/off-site events, retreats.

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**A piece of the outdoors in the North and West of Oakland County.**

For year-round residents, stakeholders from communities in the North and West of the County were proudest to share the opportunities for families to find land and homes that enable them to disconnect from city life. Residents that continue to call the North and West of the County home are engaged in equestrian culture and agriculture, even if just as hobby farmers—a really unique lifestyle to have less than an hour from Downtown Detroit.

# America's Automotive & Automation Hub

**Oakland County is proud of its Motor City identity.**

Whether in conversations about tourism opportunities or economic development, stakeholders unanimously shared that a big piece of the County's identity remains in the automotive industry/history, given that the biggest tourism assets and businesses include the following:

- Big 3 Automakers
- Woodward Dream Cruise
- M1 Concourse
- Pontiac Auto Museum
- Meadowbrook Hall

As such, in telling the story of the destination, it is critical that Oakland County celebrate its storied past with the industry and the various companies that have made Oakland County famous along the way.

## APPENDIX D

**Oakland County's next frontier is in robotics and automation, electric vehicle and battery technology.**

In speaking about the history, stakeholders also shared the importance of highlighting the potential of a future that aligns closely with the legacy of innovation. Present day, the County has innovators working on multi-modal improvements and technological advancements in automotive, in particular EV and AV/Battery technologies. In Troy, for example, LG Energy is leading the charge with other smaller companies in modular technologies and with locally-based engineering support teams.

Other cities are also seeing growing demand in adjacent industries such as robotics and automation due to manufacturing reshoring and nationwide labor shortages. In Rochester Hills, for example, there are major industry players in robotics such as FANUC and Yaskawa that now call Oakland County home. In addition, Oakland Community College has quickly responded to the growth of the industry by offering several training programs in the field to build a local talent pipeline.

## Groups/Meetings, Events & Conventions

**Oakland County continues to host homegrown Michigan events around the clock.**

While Oakland County continues to host many traditional corporate and industry meetings, events, and conventions that at the Suburban Collection Showplace in Novi, including the Michigan State Fair and the Michigan Golf Show, the County is also big on leisure events and festivals, particularly in the summer.

Throughout the summer, there is a busy calendar of events across all the towns and cities in the County - from farmers markets, town-specific summer festivals like Milford Memories, Lite the Night, Art on the Grand, and concert series to other 4th of July lake fireworks, block parties, etc. In addition, Woodward Dream Cruise remains the biggest week of the summer inviting all communities across the route to be a part of the festivities (e.g., outdoor dining on Saginaw, related and unrelated events along the route). This and other iconic hometown events in the Fall and Winter ensures the County is activated year-round.

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**Oakland County is big on creating access to national and global arts and culture that amaze.**

The County's biggest performance venues host hundreds of shows throughout the year - from Pine Knob's 15,000 seater and over half a million attendees annually to more boutique venues like Meadowbrook (7,000 seater), Paint Creek Center for the Arts, The Strand, and Crowfoot bringing in a mix of world-renowned acts and artists like Lainey Wilson, Jason Aldean, Wiz Khalifa, Sarah McLachlan, and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

In addition, the international communities complement cultural events and performances in these venues with celebrations of global cultures - from Lunar New Year celebrations and Asian Lantern Festival in May to summer concert series in local parks and amphitheaters. The American Chamber Association puts on year-round programming focused on Chinese Arts and culture (Art/Photo exhibitions and contests by Asian artists, film screenings, etc.), and the Lunar New Year celebration in Oakland County has even outgrown its space and was held in Detroit Eastern Market, drawing over 3,000 participants in 2025.

**Oakland County is a growing sporting events destination.**

While golf has always been a big sport for the County given its breadth of public and private golf courses, and the Michigan Golf Show held in Novi, there has been recent growth in other sports including:

- Total Sports facility hosts national/international sporting events (soccer, baseball)
- Mountain bike events draw thousands of riders
- White Lake is a growing hub for extreme sports (motorcycle racing on frozen lakes)
- Anticipated new cricket fields that may host regional tournaments, widely attended by the international community of Southeast Michigan.

## APPENDIX D

# The Challenges in Intra-County Accessibility

## **Oakland County faces gaps in mobility and connectivity across its communities.**

Stakeholders acknowledged that public transit services such as SMART have grown in recent years, in addition to other regional demand-response systems such as NOTA, WOTA, People's Express, etc. Among notable achievements, stakeholders shared the following:

- The 2022 millage has enabled expansion of service and teams, improvements in transit communications/ticketing software, etc.
- Individual communities are also collaborating to provide trolleys to shuttle visitor traffic between downtowns during warm season/holiday rides

However, there still remains an overall lack of adoption of mass transit and a need to continue educating and marketing to residents and visitors on SMART in order to encourage ridership. In particular, transportation on major event days can present logistical challenges in getting crowds to and from venues without high rates of mass

transit ridership. Others shared that the deployment of event shuttles has helped relieve traffic congestion for some larger events.

## **Oakland County faces universal accessibility challenges in its most rural sections.**

While communities like Royal Oak and Birmingham have been investing in accessibility, and efforts by MDOT to prioritize accessibility enhancements as part of major reconstruction projects, the gravel roads and hilly areas of northern Oakland County continue to present accessibility challenges. As such, visitor expectations on road conditions need to be managed when they're venturing into some of the more rural sections of the County through education and messaging.

## APPENDIX D

# Avoiding a Return to Exclusivity

While nationally affordable, stakeholders shared that the County is experiencing increasing cost of living relative to neighboring counties due to several factors such as new taxes, housing costs, etc. For example, renters face steep housing costs of \$800-\$1,000 for 1-bedroom apartments, especially impacting the younger workforce and talent.

Despite this housing challenge, there has been varying appetites for mixed housing development across communities. Development experts that participated in the focus groups also noted that redevelopment projects in older communities of the County have been more difficult to finance than new development.

## **Oakland County must diversify its modes of communication to reach diverse audiences.**

Stakeholders widely acknowledged that language accessibility and cultural understanding are critical for event promotion.

Representatives from various immigrant and international communities shared that when their communities receive messages from familiar media outlets and communication platforms, then engagement is likely to increase. At this time, there are a variety of ways that immigrant groups communicate with one another and by which businesses promote themselves. For example, Chinese Americans primarily use WeChat and QR Codes for small business openings, and Chinese-speaking businesses might prefer Red Note over TikTok.

While the region boasts a full calendar of events, stakeholders noted a gap in coordination and promotion across platforms. There is a strong need for a centralized, user-friendly events calendar and communications toolkit to improve visibility for both residents and visitors.

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## APPENDIX D

# Destination Marketing & Development Opportunities

**Oakland County has the opportunity to build on its regional partnerships and leverage the successes of Detroit and vice versa.**

Stakeholders reported that the communities across the County have drastically shifted their mentality from being in competition with Detroit to being in collaboration with Detroit over the past decade – “Detroit’s success benefits Oakland County”.

As such, complementing Detroit while highlighting the unique offerings of Oakland County (Renaissance Festival, Pine Knob, the ski hills, outdoor recreation, small towns/ quaint main streets, etc.) will be critical to our success as a destination.

Major sports teams' events in Detroit and the city's ability to attract larger conferences/meetings/events in reality help create opportunities for Oakland to leverage regional travel/cross-county visitation.

In addition, the County should work closely with Detroit Greenways Coalition and other advocacy groups/hobby groups that understand the bike culture and can serve as ambassadors/champions of the trail networks in the region to further encourage cross-visitation sustainably.



**We need to cheerlead  
for them [Detroit] but  
also advocate for  
ourselves.**





## APPENDIX D

**Oakland County needs to put itself on the map, too.**

Stakeholders shared the sentiment that the County needed to put itself on the map in order to strengthen its relationships with Wayne County and Detroit.

While domestic messaging should emphasize Oakland County's bold leadership, programs, and initiatives in order to move away from being known as the "best kept secret" in metro Detroit, stakeholders shared the need ensure that international messaging lean toward a respectful tone, given current political sensitivities.

At this time, stakeholders shared that there is no current single go-to resource for promoting the County's 62 communities and therefore there is a critical need to unify messaging. In addition, a single comprehensive and easily accessible inventory of year-round activities across communities, and a calendar/guide of signature events in different cities is also much needed.

**Oakland County has critical partners across industries ready to mobilize but they need onboarding and resources.**

The County can leverage the existing collaboration between Main Street organizations, chambers, municipalities, and economic development teams at local level to use its brand platform and aggressively reach international audiences. In fact, many economic development expert stakeholders shared the desire to bring back out-of-market activations in Germany, France, Japan that were more frequently held pre-COVID.

Others suggested using existing companies to host delegations and have them invite their international networks to explore Oakland County opportunities. To encourage this, it may be helpful for the County to carry out extensive internal education with companies that have already chosen Oakland County so that they are better able to spread the word about the County to other businesses that may be looking to expand in US or in the midwest market.

Given the presence of consulates and large international communities in Oakland County, there is also a potential to build strong relationships and to work with diplomatic corps and other international business groups (International Chambers of Commerce - Detroit chapters, Counsel Generals from Japan, South Korea, Germany, UK, Italy, Canada, etc.) to leverage their audiences and raise awareness of the County's brand and offerings.

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Ultimately, the strongest partners for the brand implementation will include local leaders of municipalities with hotels, meeting space/venue managers, and other tourism asset operators/business owners who shared excitement at being included in the tourism planning initiative and open to cross-collaboration with various attractions, whether in or outside the County(Henry Ford, Detroit Zoo, etc.)

In particular, municipalities and local leaders shared that they would welcome grant support for tourism development and are hopeful that in such case there will be equitable distribution of resources across the County. In particular, representatives from smaller municipalities expressed a desire for support in “telling their own story”.



**We are a prime landing  
spot in Michigan... for  
anyone and any  
company.**



## APPENDIX D

# Near-Term Market Growth Opportunities

## **LEISURE: Oakland County helps urbanites get away from the big city bustle.**

Detroit residents looking for respite and looking to explore their own backyard – whether through agritourism or outdoor recreation are a prime audience for Oakland County leisure visits. In particular, outdoor enthusiasts (hikers, bikers, equestrians) and water sports/aquatic recreation enthusiasts are likely to be drawn to various lakes in the County that each have distinct personalities – “there are party lakes, exclusive lakes, family lakes, etc.”

However, to build on this near market opportunity, the County will need to work closely with the local commercial real estate sectors to develop waterfront restaurants and work with lake associations to build on water-based events and create more floating stages, water recreation competitions (e.g. dragon boat festivals), and fireworks shows that drive the summer weekend traffic.

## **LEISURE: Oakland County has the opportunity to celebrate its diverse cultures and invite more international communities to share in cultural offerings.**

The wide range of family-friendly events that the County hosts throughout the year has strong appeal to the immigrant family audiences who look forward to doing things together as multi-generational households.

In particular, immigrant families have expressed increasing interest in accessing the great outdoors and learning about the agriculture history and opportunities in the County. However, many lack awareness of the parks, lakes and other natural resource assets in the County and will need targeted campaigns and marketing efforts.

## APPENDIX D

**BUSINESS: Oakland County should also be a first-choice location for entrepreneurs.**

Stakeholders shared that there's a strong opportunity for Oakland County to better position itself to those looking to start their own spin-off businesses following an established career in the industries of Oakland County. This insight was supported by anecdotal trends of an increase in corporate employees starting side businesses or transitioning to entrepreneurship in the same sectors as their corporate employment.

In particular, for the metro Detroit area, Oakland County should be the first choice location for a business offering higher price point products and luxury lifestyle services given the existing customer base here with higher average incomes and spending powers.

## Long-Term Market Growth Opportunities

**BUSINESS: Oakland County is a competitive, climate-resilient business location.**

As industries and larger businesses continue to make long-term growth decisions and factor in climate challenges for coastal locations such as New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, metro Detroit and Oakland County appear to be prime for investment given their climate-protected status.

However, stakeholders acknowledged that there is still a lot of work to be done in changing the perceptions of business decision makers who are not from Michigan, particularly around preconceived notions about traffic congestion in the region.

## APPENDIX D

**BUSINESS: Oakland County has the potential to put the region on the map as a medical tourism destination.**

The health care systems operating in the county offer a variety of nationally-recognized specialties (among other treatments) including:

- Cardiology/heart center (open heart program is ranked nationally with a recent addition of a nationally-known cardiac surgeon that has boosted the program)
- Urology (out-of-state patients, women's urology specialists)
- Oncology (Henry Ford attracts patients for high-end specialty care (e.g., cancer treatment) from around the world)
- Orthopedics (spine surgeons attracting out-of-market patients)
- Plastic surgery (microsurgery, unique procedures, international patients in the cleft lip surgeries/treatment program)
- Breast reconstruction

In fact, US News & World Report rankings rates the Royal Oak campus #1 in Michigan and Corewell Health is increasing private room availability owing to increasing demands for treatments.

Currently, marketing experts from various medical institutions shared that the most effective method for getting the word out on medical advancements being made in Oakland County is through physicians' attendance at nationwide industry conferences/events.

As such, the County should work closely with these institutions to ensure County messaging also lands with targeted industry associations such as Michigan Hospital Association and the American Hospital Association. In fact, many shared that an untapped opportunity lies in Oakland County being host to healthcare-related conferences.

Health systems shared that in order to be able to treat a greater base of patients seeking longer-term treatment, the County will need to increase and diversify lodging options near healthcare campuses to house friends and families supporting patients during treatments.

To learn more, visit:

[VisitOaklandCounty.com/Strategic-Plan](https://VisitOaklandCounty.com/Strategic-Plan)

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# Public Draft

May 21, 2025

Oakland County Department of Economic Development

