



## GRAND VALLEY METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

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CEDAR SPRINGS COOPERSVILLE • COURTLAND TOWNSHIP • EAST GRAND RAPIDS • GAINES TOWNSHIP • GEORGETOWN TOWNSHIP • GRAND RAPIDS • GRAND RAPIDS TOWNSHIP • GRANDVILLE  
GREENVILLE • HASTINGS • HUDSONVILLE • IONIA • JAMESTOWN TOWNSHIP • KENT COUNTY • KENTWOOD • LOWELL • LOWELL TOWNSHIP • MIDDLEVILLE • OTTAWA COUNTY  
PLAINFIELD TOWNSHIP • ROCKFORD • SAND LAKE • TALLMADGE TOWNSHIP • WALKER • WAYLAND • WYOMING

# GVMC Board Meeting

Thu, Dec 3, 2020 8:30 AM - 9:00 AM (EST)

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1. Welcome
2. Roll Call
3. Public Comment
4. Approval of Minutes – Attachment
5. Oath of Office – Jamestown, Village of Sparta
6. February Retirement of At-Large Member Karen McCarthy
  - Those interested in the At-Large seat should submit a letter of interest to Chair Mike DeVries
7. Approval of Proposed 2021 GVMC Board Meeting Schedule - Attached
8. Election of Officers and Executive Committee Members
  - Chair – Mike DeVries – Grand Rapids Township
  - Vice Chair – Jack Poll – City of Wyoming
  - Treasurer – Al Vanderberg – Ottawa County
  - Secretary – Brian Donovan
  - Wayman Britt – Kent County
  - Mark Washington – City of Grand Rapids
  - Steve Kepley – City of Kentwood
  - Patrick Waterman – City of Hudsonville
  - Greg Madura – Alpine Township
  - Ross Leisman – Ada Township
9. Board Additional Information
  - Kalamazoo County Email
  - EPA Advance Program
  - Media Release GVMC Safety Education and Outreach
  - WGVSU Interview w Andrea Faber
  - KCTC and KTC Core students roll up their sleeves to help reduce water runoff at Kent ISD
10. Other
11. Adjourn

# GRAND VALLEY METRO COUNCIL

## Board Meeting

September 3, 2020

8:30 a.m.

Electronic Meeting

VIA GoToMeeting

## MINUTES

### 1. Call to Order

Mike DeVries called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

#### Members Present:

Rick Baker	At-Large
Nora Balgoyen	At-Large Member
Rob Beahan	Cascade Township
Ken Bergwerff	Jamestown Township
Mandy Bolter	Kent County
Wayman Britt	Kent County
Mike Burns	City of Lowell
Tom Butcher	GVSU
Gary Carey	City of Walker
Dan Carlton	Georgetown Township
Deb Diepenhorst	Cannon Township
Mike DeVries	Grand Rapids Township
Brian Donovan	At-Large
Adam Elenbaas	Allendale Township
George Haga	Ada Township
Jerry Hale	Lowell Township
Jim Holtvluwer	Ottawa County
John Hoppough	City of Greenville
Diane Jones	Kent County
Steve Kepley	City of Kentwood
Greg Madura	Alpine Township
Karen McCarthy	At-Large
Brenda McNabb-Stange	City of Hastings
John Niemela	City of Belding
Jack Poll	City of Wyoming
Patricia Rayl	Village of Middleville
Megan Sall	City of Wyoming
Jonathan Seyferth	City of Coopersville
Julius Suchy	Village of Sparta

Jeff Thornton	Village of Caledonia
Al Vanderberg	Ottawa County
Cameron VanWyngarden	Plainfield Township
Mike Verhulst	City of Grand Rapids
Mark Washington	City of Grand Rapids
Patrick Waterman	City of Hudsonville
Lynnee Wells	City of Grand Rapids
Mike Womack	City of Cedar Springs

**Members Absent:**

Thad Beard	City of Rockford
Robyn Britton	Nelson Township
Rob DeWard	Gaines Township
Kevin Green	Algoma Township
Joshua Eggleston	City of Wayland
Jason Eppler	City of Ionia
Rachel Gokey	Village of Sand Lake
Bryan Harrison	Caledonia Township
Tom Hooker	Byron Township
Doug LaFave	East Grand Rapids
Steve Maas	City of Grandville
	Tallmadge

**Others Present:**

John Weiss	Grand Valley Metro Council
Gayle McCrath	Grand Valley Metro Council
Wendy Ogilvie	Grand Valley Metro Council
Andrea Faber	Grand Valley Metro Council
Laurel Joseph	Grand Valley Metro Council
Jason Moore	Grand Valley Metro Council
Dennis Kent	MDOT
Tyler Kent	MDOT

**Voting Tally GVMC Board Meeting September 3, 2020**

Roll Call	REGIS Budget Amendment	Budget and Hearings	<b>GVMC 2018 VOTING ALLOCATION</b>
			<b>Member</b>
			Algoma - Kevin Green
X	X	X	Ada - George Haga
X	X	X	Allendale - Adam Elenbaas
X	X	X	Alpine - Greg Madura
X	X	X	Belding - John Niemela

			Byron - Tom Hooker
			Caledonia - Bryan Harrison
X	X	X	Village of Caledonia - Jeff Thornton
X	X	X	Cannon - Deb Diepenhorst
X	X	X	Cascade - Rob Beahan
X	X	X	Cedar Springs - Mike Womack
X	X	X	Coopersville - Johnathan Seyferth
X	X	X	Courtland - (open) Mat McConnon
X	X	X	East GR - Doug LaFave
			Gaines - Rob DeWard
X	X	X	Georgetown - Dan Carlton
XXX	XXX	XXX	City of Grand Rapids - Mark Washington, Lynee Wells, Mike Verhulst
X	X	X	GR Township - Mike DeVries
			Grandville - Steven Maas
X	X	X	Greenville - John Hoppough
X	X	X	Hastings - Brenda McNabb-Stange
X	X	X	Hudsonville - Patrick Waterman
			Ionia - Jason Eppler
X	X	X	Jamestown Ken Bergwerf
X	X	X	Kentwood - Steve Kepley
X	X	X	Lowell - Mike Burns
X	X	X	Lowell Township - Jerry Hale
X	X	X	Middleville - Patti Rayl
			Nelson Township Robin Britton
X	X	X	Plainfield - Cameron VanWyngarden
			Rockford - Thad Beard
			Sand Lake - Rachel Gokey
X	X	X	Village of Sparta - Julius Suchy
			Tallmadge - Open
X	X	X	Walker - Gary Carey
XX	XX	XX	Wyoming -2 Jack Poll, Megan Sall
			Wayland - Josh Eggleston
XX	XX	XX	Ottawa County - Al Vanderberg, Jim Holtvluwer
XX	XX	XX	Kent County - Wayman Britt, Mandy Bolter, Diane Jones
X	X	X	At Large - Brian Donovan
X	X	X	At Large - Rick Baker
X	X	X	At Large - Karen McCarthy
X	X	X	At Large - Nora Balgoyen

**2. Public Comment**

**None**

3. **Approval of Minutes**
  - a. **MOTION – To Approve Minutes of May 2020 GVMC Board Meeting. MOVE – Poll. SUPPORT – Seyferth. No Objections**
  
4. **Oath of Office**
  - a. The Oath of Office was administered to Patricia Rayl of the Village of Middleville. Patti stated she looked forward to working with everyone on the Council.
  
5. **Acceptance of Audit FY 2018/19 – Approval of Resolution**
  - a. **MOTION – To Approve the Resolution to Accept the FY2018/19 Financial Audit. MOVE – Vanderberg. SUPPORT – Britt. No Objections**
  
6. **Budget Amendment FY 2019/20 – Approval of Resolution**
  - a. **MOTION – To Approve the Resolution to Amend the REGIS Budget for FY2019/20. MOVE – Vanderberg. SUPPORT – Madura. MOTION CARRIED (see tally)**
  
7. **GVMC Budget FY2020/21**
  - a. **Open Public Hearing – MOTION – To Open Public Hearing 8:40 a.m. MOVE – Madura. SUPPORT – Holtvluwer. No Objections**

No Comments
  - b. **Close Public Hearing – MOTION – To Close Public Hearing 8:41 a.m. MOVE – Carey. SUPPORT – Britt. No Objections.**
  - c. **Approval of Budget Resolution – MOTION – To Approve the Resolution Accepting the GVMC FY2020/21 Budget. MOVE – Beahan. SUPPORT – Britt. MOTION CARRIED (see tally).**
  
8. **Other**
  
9. **Adjourn**

## OATH OF OFFICE

STATE OF MICHIGAN     )  
                                  ) ss.  
COUNTY OF KENT        )

I do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution of this State, and that I will faithfully perform the duties of the office of a member of the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, according to the best of my ability, so help me God.

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Subscribed and sworn to before me on \_\_\_\_\_.

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Signature

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Title

**Date: November 19, 2020**

**To: Executive Committee**

**From: John Weiss**

**Re: 2021 Meetings**

Below is a list of the anticipated 2021 GVMC Board Meetings which is in compliance with the change in by-laws made February 2020.

The meetings will be held virtually until the time that social distancing guidelines are relaxed to the point where it would be safe to hold a meeting of the whole in one location.

February 4, 2021

- Review of REGIS Committee Appointments

May 6, 2021

- Approval of FY 2021 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)
- Annual Report Presentation and Acceptance of the Audit

September 2, 2021

- Approval of 2021-2022 Budget

November 4, 2021

- Election of Executive Committee and Officers
- Consideration of Public Relations Contract
- Guest Speaker

December 2021 – Date TBD

- Optional Holiday Reception

In addition to the Board of Directors listed above. Each of our departments are comprised of multiple committees and sub-committees. They will continue to meet on a regular basis:

Transportation

Transportation Technical Committee	Transportation Policy Committee
Transportation Programming Study Group	GVMC Freight Committee
Non-motorized Committee	GVMC Traffic Count Committee
West Michigan Clean Air Coalition	WM Traffic Safety Committee
Other meetings as required or requested by members, MDOT or other transportation agencies	

Environmental Department

LGROW Board of Directors	LGROW Executive Committee
Public Engagement Committee	Technical Committee
Sustainability Committee	Subwatershed Committee
Stormwater Ordinance Committee	Fund Development and Membership
Other meetings as required or requested by members, environmental groups and governmental agencies	

REGIS

REGIS Board of Directors	REGIS Executive Committee
REGIS Members Advisory Committee	REGIS Technical Committee
REGIS Specialty Users Groups for Assessors, Clerks, Planners, Assessors, DPW/Engineers	
Multiple visits as requested by members, REGIS Training, WM GIS Users Group	

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**From:** Joanna Johnson <[JJohnson@kalamazooountyroads.com](mailto:JJohnson@kalamazooountyroads.com)>

**Date:** October 27, 2020 at 1:06:13 PM EDT

**To:** John Weiss <[john.weiss@gvmc.org](mailto:john.weiss@gvmc.org)>, "White, Todd (MDOT)" <[WhiteT5@michigan.gov](mailto:WhiteT5@michigan.gov)>, "Moy, Jessica (TREASURY)" <[MoyJ1@michigan.gov](mailto:MoyJ1@michigan.gov)>

**Subject:** RE: 2020 GVMC PASER Ratings

John, thanks to you and your team. All, I just want you to know how much we appreciate our collaboration with GVMC. We have complete support from our Board and Townships and this is on a rotating 3-year schedule between our 15 townships. Especially under current circumstances thanks for the CAN DO attitude and getting this accomplished.

PS– Road Commission of Kalamazoo County to not have us confused with KCRC 😊))))))

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**From:** John Weiss <[john.weiss@gvmc.org](mailto:john.weiss@gvmc.org)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, October 27, 2020 11:46 AM

**To:** White, Todd (MDOT) <[WhiteT5@michigan.gov](mailto:WhiteT5@michigan.gov)>; Moy, Jessica (TREASURY) <[MoyJ1@michigan.gov](mailto:MoyJ1@michigan.gov)>; Joanna Johnson <[JJohnson@kalamazooountyroads.com](mailto:JJohnson@kalamazooountyroads.com)>

**Subject:** 2020 GVMC PASER Ratings

I thought I would give you a little information about our rating program for this year. Even with Covid-19 we were able to accomplish a great deal given the significantly shortened window for ratings and other restrictions.

1. Early in the summer we outfitted our van with a plexiglass divider to allow 2 employees to be socially distanced and safe.
2. We collected 1,031 miles of federal aid roads that were collected for our members. (these are uncertified as MDOT representatives were not available)
3. We collected 708 miles of local roads for Grand Rapids, Rockford, Sparta, Lowell, Grandville, Hudsonville, Kentwood and East Grand Rapids.
4. We rated 227 miles of roads in 5 townships for Joanna and the Kalamazoo County Road Commission.

I hope this information is helpful.

John W. Weiss, Executive Director  
Grand Valley Metropolitan Council  
Suite 200  
678 Front Ave. NW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49504



# EPA Advance Program

## Description of EPA's Advance Program

The Advance Program is a voluntary program that supports states, tribes and local governments that want to take proactive steps to keep their air clean by promoting local actions to reduce ozone and/or fine particle pollution within attainment areas. These actions help continue to maintain the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).

The program provides access to EPA technical assistance, information on grants and training, opportunities for collaboration, and other support to identify actions to maintain and improve air quality. Advance plans include a range of programs addressing education and outreach, transportation and mobile sources, energy efficiency and renewable energy, innovative finance, wood smoke reduction, stationary sources, green infrastructure, and more.

By participating in the program, Advance partners can:

- provide improved air quality and continued health protection for area residents over the long term
- take actions to reduce pollutant emissions and help reduce the number of days the area exceeds the NAAQS
- engage with stakeholders in the community to identify and implement cost-effective programs and measures that make the most sense for their area
- collaborate with other participating organizations and learn about programs and initiatives that have been successful in other communities
- achieve multi-pollutant benefits (for example, through actions that may also help reduce air toxics and/or carbon emissions in addition to reducing ozone and particle pollution)

## History of EPA's Advance Program

The Advance Program began in 2012, but is new to EPA Region 5, which covers the Midwest. According to their website, more than 40 areas with a combined population of 45 million are actively participating in the Advance program. GVMC is the second organization in Region 5 to join the program – and the first MPO to be the lead organization.

## **EPA's Invitation to GVMC to Participate**

Saphique Thomas, the Advance program contact for EPA Region 5, reached out to Andrea Faber, Transportation Planner, on August 26, 2020 by email with an invitation for the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition to consider joining the EPA Advance program for ozone and/or fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>). EPA Region 5 had discovered the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition's website online and had contacted us believing that our program could fit well with the Advance program because it has longevity (it started in 1995) and already excels in community education and outreach. While we could benefit from increased EPA resources, expertise, and assistance, EPA also believed that we, as the premiere air quality program in Michigan, could be a helpful resource for other agencies across the country that are in the beginning stages of starting their own air quality programs.

This initial conversation with EPA turned into additional internal discussions with GVMC staff, as the Advance program appeared to offer numerous benefits for the Clean Air Action program AND new opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration because of its flexibility. GVMC ultimately concluded that the Advance program would benefit the work we are accomplishing through the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition and provide an opportunity for us to partner with our Environmental Department.

## **Joining the Advance Program**

GVMC sent our letter of commitment to join the Ozone and PM<sub>2.5</sub> EPA Advance program on November 17, 2020. GVMC is joining the program in partnership with the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC) and the Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW), which is housed in our Environmental Department. The boundary for the program is Kent and Ottawa Counties. For the first year of the program, GVMC plans to add a Burn Wise educational campaign to our Clean Air Action program in partnership with the WMCAC to keep the program more active during the winter and help provide resources for the community on clean burning, and our Environmental Department will work with LGROW on mitigating stormwater pollution through the use of green infrastructure, focusing on linear (roadway) projects. We plan to expand upon these activities as we grow with the program in coming years.

## **Expected Benefits of Joining the Program**

**Increased Collaboration and Access to Resources.** The West Michigan Clean Air Coalition has decided to join the Ozone and PM<sub>2.5</sub> Advance program under GVMC's umbrella, which means that we will also be partnering with the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council (MACC) in Holland and the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) in Muskegon, as we all cover parts of Ottawa County. This program will allow us to have increased collaboration between our MPOs. By partnering with our Environmental Department and LGROW, the GVMC Transportation Department will have new opportunities to work alongside

them, as their work in mitigating stormwater and promoting green infrastructure will help enhance the work we are already accomplishing through our transportation planning efforts and our Clean Air Action program.

By joining the Advance program, we will also have access to a forum of other agencies across the nation with their own air quality programs and will be able to potentially enhance our own work through collaboration with them. Furthermore, this program will allow us to collaborate with the EPA and gain access to their resources and technical assistance, which will improve upon our existing efforts.

**Access to Grants and Funding Opportunities.** Joining the Advance program will help bolster our grant applications and provide us with resources and opportunities to apply for new grants.

**Improves our Air Quality in a Proactive Way.** While both Kent and Ottawa County are currently attaining air quality standards for ozone and PM<sub>2.5</sub>, participating in the Advance program allows us to protect our air quality in a proactive way and will hopefully keep us in attainment for these pollutants so that we can avoid costly emission control measures in the future (for instance, mandatory vehicle emission testing).

**Keeps Clean Air Action Program Relevant Year-Round and Gives us Resources to Protect the Community from Wood Smoke During the Pandemic.** Adding a Burn Wise educational campaign to our already successful Clean Air Action educational outreach campaign will help us keep our program more relevant during the winter and increase the public's knowledge of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and clean burning techniques. This is especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as exposure to wood smoke can increase health risks for those recovering from the virus and may make the public more susceptible to it. Please see the following link for more information:

<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/wood-smoke-and-covid-19#:~:text=According%20to%20information%20posted%20on,function%20related%20to%20COVID%2D19>.

## To Learn More

To learn more about the EPA's Advance program and to see the plans of other agencies across the country, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/advance>



## GRAND VALLEY METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

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### Media Release

Contact: Andrea Faber, Transportation Planner  
Phone: 616-776-7603  
E-mail: [andrea.faber@gvmc.org](mailto:andrea.faber@gvmc.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Monday, November 23, 2020

## Grand Valley Metropolitan Council Launches New Safety Education and Outreach Campaign

**Grand Rapids, MI** – Grand Valley Metro Council (GVMC) recently launched a safety education and outreach campaign in order to inform pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers on how they can stay safe when sharing the roadway. The education and outreach campaign includes an informational tip card for bicyclists and pedestrians that is available in English and Spanish, a webpage with videos and resources for all users of the transportation system, and a variety of FREE promotional items that help bicyclists and pedestrians stay visible, especially at night. These items include bike lights, reflective wrist bands (“slap bracelets”), and reflective safety belts that adjust to fit children and adults.

GVMC began giving out the bike lights late last summer by partnering with several of our member communities; local charitable bicycle shops that serve low-income residents, including refugees; the Kent County Sheriff’s Office; and other organizations that helped distribute them to the local community. To date, GVMC has given away over 2,600 bike lights through these partnerships. In late October, GVMC launched our new webpage, developed tip cards, and purchased the reflective wrist bands and safety belts for pedestrians. As daylight savings time has come to an end and days are continuing to get shorter, staying visible on the roadway is increasingly important to stay safe and, for bicyclists, to follow the law, which states that a bicycle operated between 1/2 hour after sunset and 1/2 hour before sunrise must have an appropriate white lamp on the front of the bike and a red reflector on the rear.

GVMC’s safety education and outreach campaign was developed in response to a community need for more education about safe driving, walking, and biking to reduce crashes caused by human error. According to Michigan Traffic Crash Facts, although traffic crashes involving pedestrians and bicyclists only accounted for 1.66% of total crashes from the last five years in the GVMC area, which encompasses Kent and eastern Ottawa County, nonmotorized fatalities and serious injuries represented 19.88% of total traffic fatalities and 12.74% of total serious injuries during the same five-year period. There has been an average of 400 nonmotorized crashes per year over the last five years in the GVMC area.

New federal requirements also mandate that Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), such as GVMC, incorporate performance-based planning requirements into several areas of their transportation planning process, including safety. The current transportation bill, Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, requires MPOs to set their own targets or support the state’s for the following safety performance measures on a yearly basis:

- Number of fatalities on all public roads
- Rate of fatalities on all public roads
- Number of serious injuries on all public roads
- Rate of serious injuries on all public roads
- Number of nonmotorized fatalities and nonmotorized serious injuries on all public roads

# WGVU Interview

## GVMC: Launches Safety Education & Outreach Campaign

By JENNIFER MOSS · 21 HOURS AGO

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Listening...

1:34

*GV Metro Council launches safety education program*

# GVMC

*GVMC launches safety education campaign*

CREDIT GRAND VALLEY METRO COUNCIL

The Grand Valley Metro Council recently launched a safety education and outreach campaign. It's to help pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers.

“Our ultimate goal is to reduce traffic crashes.”

Andrea Faber is the Transportation Planner for the Grand Valley Metro Council, which recently launched a safety education and outreach campaign. It was created to help inform the community how they can stay safe when sharing the roadway. It targets pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers to aid them while on the roads.

“And one of the easiest ways to do that is to increase visibility for pedestrians. So, we're doing that by distributing reflective safety belts and slap bracelets, they're popular among kids. And we're giving away bike lights

for free.”

Faber says according to Michigan Traffic Crash Facts, although traffic crashes involving pedestrians and bicyclists only accounted for 1.66% of total crashes from the last five years in the GVMC area, which encompasses Kent and Eastern Ottawa County, nonmotorized fatalities and serious injuries represented more than 19 percent of total traffic fatalities and over 12 percent of total serious injuries during the same five-year period.

“So, while these non-motorized crashes are very small segment in the overall pie of traffic crashes in the area, they’re much more likely to result in a fatality or a serious injury.”

Faber says they continue to build partnerships with local communities, businesses and more to help them with distribution of their free safety items. For more information on how to stay safe or help the program, you can go to [GVMC.org/safety](http://GVMC.org/safety).

**TAGS:**

GVMC has historically opted to support MDOT's safety targets and will do the same for 2021. GVMC's safety education and outreach program is expected to enhance MDOT's efforts to achieve their safety targets and further assist with their Toward Zero Deaths initiative by reducing crashes in our MPO area through community education and the distribution of lights and reflective gear to non-motorized users of the transportation system.

GVMC is continuing to build partnerships with local communities, businesses, and other organizations to help us distribute our free safety items to the public. If you are interested in offering your office or business as a pickup location for these items, or if you have any upcoming events where the items could be distributed in a safe, socially distant way, please fill out a form at [www.gvmc.org/safety-outreach](http://www.gvmc.org/safety-outreach) or contact Andrea Faber by phone at (616) 776-7603 or email [andrea.faber@gvmc.org](mailto:andrea.faber@gvmc.org). Any additional questions about GVMC's safety education and outreach program can also be directed to Andrea Faber.

###

*The Grand Valley Metro Council (GVMC) is a council of governments dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of the people of our metropolitan area through collaboration among regional partners. For more information on GVMC, please visit [www.gvmc.org](http://www.gvmc.org).*

## KCTC and KTC Core students roll up their sleeves to help reduce water runoff at Kent ISD

By Joanne Bailey-Boorsma November 11, 2020



*East Kentwood senior Onna Austin and Grandville senior Morgan Smith work on planting*

Kent ISD — Spiderwort. Boneset. Ironweed. Mountain Mint. Swamp Hibiscus. Like names out of a book for magical plants, in a way these Michigan native plants do have magical powers: students at the Kent Career Tech Center will tell you these plants help filter ground water.

“When it rains, the water from the parking lot runs off into the lower area,” said Victor Evans, a senior at Godwin Heights, who is raking wood chips in a drainage area near the Kent ISD entrance off of Leffingwell Avenue. Victor is a student in the KCTC sustainable agricultural program. “The area is just grass, so it floods. The plants will help to absorb some of the water.”

The water from the Kent ISD area feeds into the Lamberton Creek watershed. The plants will aid in reducing the amount added to the creek.

On the other side of KCTC, where the Kent Innovation High is housed, Ethan Keuning, a sophomore from Forest Hills Public Schools who



*Eileen Boekestein from LGROW talks to students about how to handle the plants*



attends both KIH and KCTC, works with students from the KCTC design lab to put native Michigan plants in a berm area.

“This does not directly go into the watershed, but it does help to plant here,” Ethan said. “The roots help filter the bad stuff out of the water such as gas and oil from the cars in the parking lot.”

### **Tackling Runoff**

One of the largest contributors to watershed issues are school grounds, said Eileen Boekestein, an environmental education coordinator

for Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, which oversees the [Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds \(LGROW\)](#).

Boekestein noted that most of Kent County is in the Grand River watershed. “Turf grasses, parking lots, roofs... they all contribute to runoff,” she said. “It can lead to high erosion with volumes of water soaking into the ground. Plants reduce some of the problem by helping to slow down the water.”

LGROW started the Grand River [Green Schools](#) with the goal to plant trees and native plants on school properties in the watershed. The program is funded by a \$125,427 Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant from the U.S. Forest Service. It also has received \$45,336 in local cash and in-kind matches, with the total project at \$170,763.

Along with the Kent ISD campus, schools in Rockford, Grandville, Forest Hills and Allendale have signed up to be part of the project, and

Boekestein hopes to connect with other Kent County school districts. The Kent ISD campus is one of the biggest projects in the grant, she

said. Students from KCTC and KTC [CORE programs](#) took two days during the week of Oct. 19 to plant 20 trees and about 4,300 square feet of native plants.

### **Hands-On**

“This is a great opportunity for the students,” said Kent Conservation District Manager Jessie Schulte.

“For the last eight years, the students in the KCTC agriculture program have been helping us to prepare the native plants for our annual sale. This is the first time that they get to see how these plants are planted and get hands-on experience.”

The hands-on experience is definitely what Sparta junior Jose Zavala was most excited about.

“My family owns a greenhouse and this is the first year we had it open, selling hanging plants and vegetables,” Jose said. “I have plans to make it bigger, so there is a real benefit to me to see how to make the holes, plant and see how to help these plants grow.”

Another key aspect to the event was that students could explore agriculture careers.

“For our students, it really gives them the opportunity to explore what types of jobs there are, helps them build teamwork and gives them the opportunity to work with other students from different programs,” said KTC Core instructor Megan McNaughton.

For those who were planting near KIH, it was an opportunity to see a resolution to a problem they had been watching.

Design Lab instructor Joe Phillips said they are required to create their own experiment, and for the past six years several have

monitored the Lamberton Creek watershed. The planting project, Phillips said, helps students see how experiments can lead to results.

"It's great to be able to get outside and do something," said East Grand Rapids sophomore Iain McKay, design lab student.

"I like the experience," Victor said. "I like doing this because you can get your hands right into it."

### **Joanne Bailey-Boorsma**

Joanne Bailey-Boorsma covers Kent ISD and Godwin Heights. She was born in the Detroit area but grew up in Brighton where she attended Hartland Public Schools. The salutatorian for the Class of 1985, she changed her colors from blue and maize to green and white by attending Michigan State University, where she majored in journalism and minored in photography and German. She expanded her color palette to include orange and black as both her daughters graduated from Byron Center Public Schools; maroon and white for Aquinas College where her daughter studies nursing and also brought back blue and maize for Grand Rapids Community College where her youngest