

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

2023 NORTHERN MICHIGAN POLICY CONFERENCE DRAWS RECORD CROWD



The 2023 Northern Michigan Policy Conference drew over 375 attendees and several notable guests, including Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist, U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters, Congressman John Moolenaar, House Speaker Joe Tate, Acting Director of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority Gary Heidel, new Acting Director of the Michigan Department of Transportation Brad Wieferich and Michigan Office of High-Speed Internet Chief Connectivity Officer Eric Frederick.

Legislators in attendance included Senators John Damoose and Michele Hoytenga, Representatives Curt VanderWall, Betsy Coffia, John Roth, Neil Friske, and Tom Kunse.

Alliance partners joined Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist following his keynote address.

EXPANSION OF THE ELLIOTT-LARSEN CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

A highly talented and diverse workforce is key to moving our state forward. Attracting and retaining a skilled workforce goes beyond competitive wages and benefits. That is why the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance worked to secure broad support in the northern Michigan business community for legislation to codify Michigan's civil rights protections to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Because of our hard work, Alliance Partners were invited to attend a private celebration at the governor's residence and a ceremonial bill signing in Lansing.



ALLIANCE MEMBERS PARTNERS



SUPPORTING PARTNER



ASSOCIATE PARTNERS



PROUD PARTNERS OF THE NORTHERN MICHIGAN CHAMBER ALLIANCE



2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

Alliance Delivers on Critical Housing Initiatives

As housing continues to be a critical issue, the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance actively engaged legislators and stakeholders to advance attainable housing priorities in 2023.

Early in the year, two Alliance Partners received gubernatorial appointments to key housing authority positions.



Governor Whitmer and Nikki Devitt

President of the Petoskey Regional Chamber, Nikki Devitt, was appointed to the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) Statewide Housing Partnership, which exists to develop a strategy to implement the 2022 Michigan Statewide Housing Plan and advise MSHDA's strategic goals. President and CEO of Traverse Connect, Warren Call, was appointed to the board of MSHDA for a term commencing February 23, 2023, and expiring March 10, 2026.

With these two appointments, the Alliance achieved key wins such as rewriting the MSHDA's Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP), a document outlining the criteria and process for allocating Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) within Michigan. LIHTC is a federal program designed to incentivize the development of affordable rental housing for low-income individuals and families.

Through the rewriting of the QAP, the Alliance successfully advocated for new rural scoring criteria that utilize a new "proximity to amenities" scoring rubric to replace the impractical "walkability score," new language with differentiated rural weightings and more tribal-specific language, and additional support and focus for smaller developers.

In the summer, the NMCA traveled to the Detroit Regional Chamber's Annual Mackinac Policy Conference to discuss economic development issues, including housing objectives, with business and government leaders.

While attending the conference, Partners engaged in productive discussions with leaders from the Michigan Manufactured Housing Association, Michigan Department of Transportation, Labor and Economic Development, and Office of Rural Prosperity.



Warren Call, Governor Whitmer, and Henry Wolf

Additionally, the Alliance observed several panel discussions, including one on "How Employers Can Help Solve Michigan's Housing Affordability Crisis." The session illustrated how businesses can be agents of change in the housing landscape, leading to positive outcomes for their companies, employees, and communities.

In the fourth quarter, Alliance members joined Housing North and its partners for the annual Northwest Michigan Housing Summit.

Every year, regional housing partners come together to exchange ideas with partners and supporters on housing solutions for communities in northern Michigan.

The summit featured several updates and presentations highlighting solutions and tools for housing being used in the region.



Mackinac Policy Conference Housing Panel

The Alliance looks forward to continuing the momentum on attainable housing priorities through these statewide initiatives and partnerships.



Caitlyn Stark, Yarrow Brown (Housing North), Tracy Davis (Housing North), Michelle Barefoot, Marc Miller, Stacie Bytwork, Nikki Devitt, Henry Wolf, and Warren Call

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

Rural Readiness Grants Awarded to Alliance Communities

The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance fought hard for continued funding for the new Rural Readiness Grant Program (RRGP) from the Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) throughout 2023. The Alliance led the way in spreading the word about the RRGP and built a coalition of nearly 100 supportive local and statewide stakeholders across Michigan.

The RRGP provides rural communities (via tax-exempt organizations) with up to \$50,000 to support collaborative planning and capacity initiatives. These competitive reimbursement grants support and invest in underserved areas and populations by providing reimbursement grant funding for capacity-building activities, development readiness initiatives, partnership and plan formation, and cross-sector collaboration.



Nikki Devitt, Rep. Curt VanderWall, Sarah Van Horn, and Henry Wolf discussed Rural Readiness Grant Program funding in June.



Christopher Germain, CEO of the Lake Superior Community Partnership, speaks to Rural Leadership Summit attendees in Cadillac.

After receiving over 90 requests totaling more than \$4.3 million, the ORP awarded 21 grants totaling more than \$1 million to support pre-development activities to expedite housing production and infrastructure improvements and bolster rural economies. Twelve grant recipients were from northern Michigan, resulting in over \$600,000 in funding, primarily for housing development.

In response to significant demand for housing support, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) provided a grant to ORP to advance additional housing-related projects in alignment with the Statewide Housing Plan. This additional investment brought total awards to just over \$1 million.

The second round of grant funding included \$852,000 to support 19 different rural community projects, including several projects in Alliance service areas.

New Supporting Partner InvestUP



INVESTUP™

The Alliance is proud to announce our newest Supporting Partner, InvestUP!

InvestUP is a lead regional economic organization for the Upper Peninsula. Their mission is to drive prosperity across the Upper Peninsula.

The NMCA has already worked effectively with InvestUP on many fronts, including the establishment and funding of the Office of Rural Prosperity and involvement with the Jobs, Talent, and People workgroup on the Growing Michigan Together Council. We look forward to continued success through a strengthened partnership.

Funding Secured for Freshwater Research and Innovation

The Alliance helped secure \$15 million to construct the first phase of the Freshwater Research and Innovation Center. This research center will become the hub for the commercialization of freshwater and marine technology applications and the research on technologies for use on the Great Lakes and similar freshwater systems throughout the world. The research center was one of only three organizations statewide to be prioritized for a Revitalization and Placemaking Grant of up to \$5 million.



In recent memory, the \$15 million appropriation is the largest non-education direct appropriation for Leelanau County.

Northern Michigan Leaders Appointed to Growing Michigan Together Council Workgroup



Stacie Bytwork, Henry Wolf, Johnnie Turnage, Warren Call, Marty Fitante, and Hilary Doe at the Traverse City Field Hearing.

Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Stacie Bytwork and Traverse Connect Communications and Strategic Projects Coordinator Abby Baudry were appointed by Governor Whitmer to serve on the Jobs, Talent, and People workgroup chaired by Alliance Supporting Partner InvestUP CEO Marty Fitante within the Growing Michigan Together Council (GMTC).

The Council also conducted field hearings for the workgroups across the state. The Jobs, Talent, and People workgroup held the first field hearing at the Traverse City Opera House and featured experts including Creative Class Group Founder Richard Florida, Traverse Connect CEO Warren Call, Black Tech Saturdays Founder Johnnie Turnage, Michigan's Chief Growth Officer Hilary Doe, and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance's Director of Government Relations Henry Wolf.

In December, the council released a final report with recommendations to reverse Michigan's population trends in the 21st Century.

NMCA Secures Millions for Workforce Development Initiatives

Alliance Partners have already scored big wins in a supplemental budget signed into law this March. We worked closely with Sen. John Damoose to secure nearly \$10 million to help build and expand career and technical education programs at North Central Michigan College and almost \$4 million to bolster Northwestern Michigan College's aviation program. Warren Call appeared on 9&10News to promote the funding.



2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

Alliance Budget Wins

The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance celebrated several important wins this budget season, including:

- \$70 million to temporarily lower the eligibility age for Reconnect from 25 to 21, making a tuition-free associate degree or skills training available to 350,000 more Michiganders.
- Michigan Reconnect: \$10.2 million
- \$50 million additional investment for the ongoing costs of the Michigan Achievement Scholarship, lowering costs by thousands for students, bringing the FY24 investment to \$300 million.
- \$15 million for talent action teams to fast-track assistance to businesses looking to expand or locate in Michigan.
- \$50 million for the Housing and Community Development Program to alleviate affordable housing needs across the state and revitalize downtown areas in Michigan.
- \$50 million for Revitalization and Placemaking Grants to rehabilitate vacant, underused, and blighted structures and to help develop traditional downtown infrastructure
- \$10 million for Missing Middle housing programs to build on existing \$50 million within the current year budget.
- \$54.75 million for the Going PRO Talent Fund providing direct reimbursement grants to employers to assist with training, developing, and retaining current and newly hired employees
- \$3.4 million for Tri-Share, a collaborative childcare program encouraging private-public partnership with employers, employees, and the state to deliver childcare access to working parents
- \$125 million in new funding to help schools transport students
- \$1.5 billion to expand high-speed internet access to over 200,000 Michiganders in unserved and underserved areas across the state

Record-Breaking Northern Michigan Policy Fund Reception



Rep. John Roth, Sen. John Damoose, U.S. Rep. Jack Bergman and Henry Wolf at the Northern Michigan Policy Fund event in August.

The Northern Michigan Policy Fund held an August reception with Special Guests Congressman Jack Bergman, Senator John Damoose, and Representative John Roth.

The well-attended event raised \$11,350, surpassing the previous annual fundraising

record set in 2018 (\$11,125) in approximately one month. The Northern Michigan Policy Fund has an all-time high of nearly \$13,000 cash on hand.

We look forward to offering more support than ever before to business-friendly legislators and candidates in northern Michigan.

Alliance Fights for Sensible Clean Energy Reforms

Legislation calling for a 100% clean energy standard in the state of Michigan was signed in November by Gov. Whitmer.

As these energy policy reforms set ambitious goals, strong concerns remain within the business community in northern Michigan and across the state. While we agree with the ultimate aim to achieve 100% clean energy, it is crucial to establish feasible goals for electric companies and cooperatives.

The Alliance joined the Coalition for Clean and Renewable Energy (CCARE) to advocate for sensible, clean energy initiatives that will protect our environment, keep our energy rates low, and maintain reliability without compromising affordability, especially for small business owners, including manufacturers.

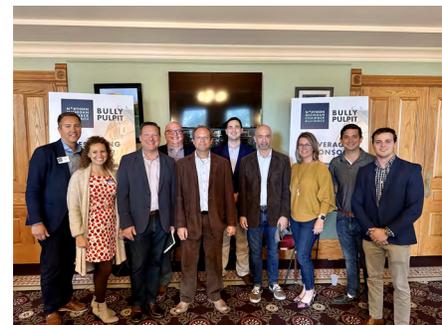
The NMCA anticipates ongoing discussions and remains committed to ensuring that the voice of the business community in northern Michigan is emphatically heard in the next phase of this process.

Bully Pulpit Draws Unprecedented Crowd

The Alliance hosted nearly 100 guests along with the “Baldly Bipartisan” duo of Adrian Hemond, CEO of public relations firm Grassroots Midwest, and John Sellek, CEO of public relations firm Harbor Strategic, for our annual Bully Pulpit panel discussion moderated by longtime state capitol reporter Kyle Melinn from MIRS News.

Adrian, John, and Kyle are three of Michigan’s top political consultants and news analysts. Their extensive experience in politics and public relations brings helpful, practical insights to our discussions and strategy as the Alliance works to grow our voice in Lansing and Washington, D.C.

Panelists discussed the state of the U.S. Presidential election and U.S. Senate race here in Michigan along with other important topics like the battle for control of the Michigan State House of Representatives and the 2026 gubernatorial election.



Warren Call, Caitlyn Stark, Chris Hackbarth (DTE), John Sellek, Kyle Melinn, Henry Wolf, Adrian Hemond, Nora Balgoyen (ITC Holdings, Corp.), Nick Abraham (ITC Holdings, Corp.), and Chris Kerber (ITC Holdings, Corp.)

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

Utilize the “Contact Your Legislator” Tool

The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance released the new Contact Your Legislator tool to give members an easy way to provide input to legislators and make their voices heard in Lansing. The new page provides background and contact information for state legislators in Michigan, along with their committee assignments and email addresses.

NORTHERN MICHIGAN CHAMBER ALLIANCE

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100th House District
Rep. Tom Kunse
R – Clare
[Email Rep. Kunse](#)

101st House District
Rep. Joseph Fox
R – Newaygo
[Email Rep. Fox](#)

102nd House District
Rep. Curt VanderWall
R – Ludington
[Email Rep. VanderWall](#)

Ethics and Oversight (Min. VC); Labor; Transportation, Mobility and Infrastructure

Families, Children and Seniors

Health Policy (Min. VC); Higher Education; Agriculture

Alliance Continues State of the State Tradition

Alliance Partners traveled to Lansing in January to host a lunch with Gov. Whitmer, Lt. Gov. Gilchrist, and Executive Office staff before the annual State of the State Address. Alliance Director of Government Relations Henry Wolf provided remarks during lunch to outline shared priorities in the new term.

Partners also hosted a Northern Caucus Legislative Kickoff Reception and met with new legislators to discuss our 2023 policy priorities.



Henry Wolf, Sen. Michelle Haitenga, Caitlyn Stark, and Paul Gunderson



Paul Gunderson, Caitlyn Stark, Rep. Jenn Hill, and Henry Wolf



Warren Call, Caitlyn Stark, Sen. Winnie Brinks, Sarah Van Horn, and Stacie Bytwork



Stacie Bytwork, Sarah Van Horn, Sen. John Damoose, Caitlyn Stark and Warren Call



Yarrow Brown, Sarah Van Horn, Stacie Bytwork, Warren Call, Rep. Betsy Coffia, and Caitlyn Stark



Paul Gunderson, Warren Call, Rep. John Roth, Sarah Van Horn, Stacie Bytwork, Nikki Devitt, Caitlyn Stark, and Henry Wolf