

MSU Study Finds Potential for New, Sustainable Economic Sector in Michigan

MSU Center for Community and Economic Development delivers in-depth analysis of new markets potential in the state

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April 3, 2017

For Immediate Release

LANSING, Mich. – There may be potential for establishing a “deconstruction economy” in West Michigan that collects and repurposes waste generated by more than 250,000 abandoned structures in the Great Lakes region.

According to a study conducted by the MSU Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED), in partnership with the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC), structural abandonment and blight plagues many Midwest communities, placing economic hardships on already distressed areas and subjecting residents to potentially significant health and safety hazards. More than 9 million tons of construction and demolition waste went to Michigan landfills in 2016, of which an estimated 90 percent is generated by demolition activities. The demolition of these abandoned structures is funded primarily by federal, state, and local taxpayers.

“Vacant, deserted property presents communities with a clear health and safety hazard. Repurposing the materials salvaged from these properties can reduce the negative effects of abandonment and create jobs in the local community. By adopting policies that encourage reuse and facilitate deconstruction over demolition, public policy leaders can put an end to the practice of private property abandonment that has burdened communities for decades,” said Rex LaMore, MSU CCED director.

Among the study’s key findings:

- Local ordinances can be effectively used by local governments to increase the use of recycled construction and demolition materials, and to practice deconstruction practices over demolition. Mandatory reuse and recycling rates in new construction assist in diverting materials from landfills.
- The process of deconstruction requires more labor than demolition, therefore a deconstruction-based economy would create more jobs than current demolition work. (–continued–)



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- Truck transportation of structural debris and repurposed materials was found to be the most feasible for a variety of reasons, including cost and logistics. Container shipping on the Great Lakes was also explored, but was found to be a method requiring further development in order to become feasible.

“The study is a critical step towards exploring innovative solutions that lead to a sustainable future. For the Muskegon community, the concept of deconstruction is a theoretical solution that addresses economic, social, and environmental priorities. Increased utilization of the Port of Muskegon, job growth, blight elimination, and reduced landfill contributions—the potential benefits are tremendous,” said Erin Kuhn, WMSRDC executive director, and MSU CCED community partner.

The study was funded in part by a technical assistance award from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA).

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The CCED’s mission is to advance MSU's land-grant mission by creating, applying, and disseminating valued knowledge through responsive engagement, strategic partnerships, and collaborative learning. CCED is dedicated to the empowerment of communities in creating sustainable prosperity and an equitable global knowledge economy.

Established in downtown Lansing, Michigan in 1969, CCED, in partnership with public and private organizations, has developed and conducted numerous innovative programs to address local issues while building the capacity of students, scholars, and communities to address future challenges. The CCED focuses its resources on the unique challenges of distressed communities throughout the state of Michigan.

Michigan State University has been advancing knowledge and transforming lives through innovative teaching, research and outreach for more than 150 years. MSU is known internationally as a major public university with global reach and extraordinary impact. Its 17 degree-granting colleges attract scholars worldwide who are interested in combining education with practical problem solving.