

Thank You for Your Input!

Community Engagement Focus Group #1



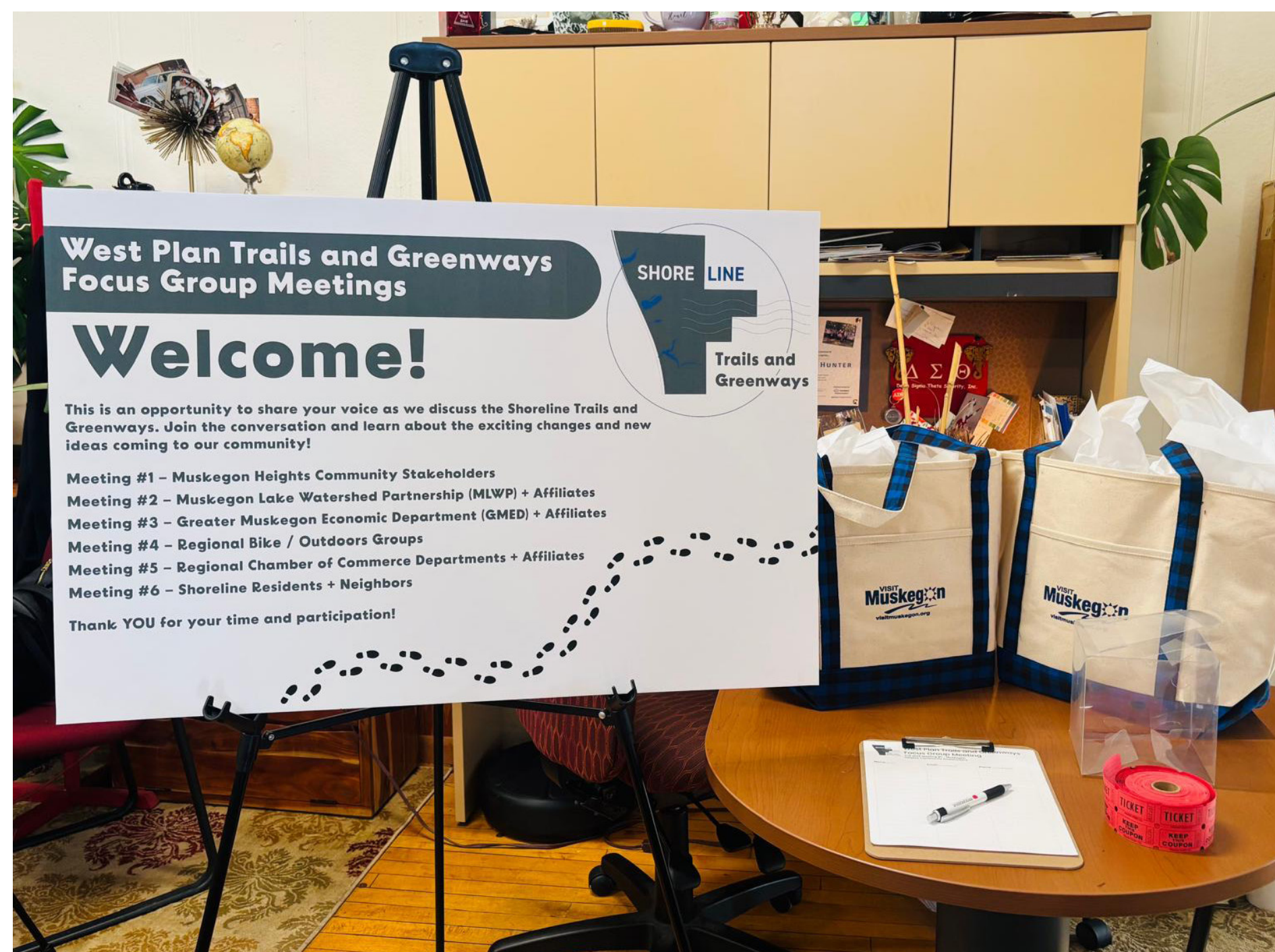
When & Where: On Thursday, March 13, 2025, Shoreline Trails and Greenways (STAG) hosted the first focus group meeting for the Muskegon Shoreline's, Trails, and Greenways project at The Us Café in Muskegon Heights. The community space was warm and inviting, with plenty of seating that made it feel like a welcoming gathering space. The US Café provided delicious food and refreshments, adding to the comfortable atmosphere. This event marked the beginning of the public engagement process for the Muskegon STAG project, bringing together a diverse group of attendees—including seniors, business owners, community stakeholders, and longtime residents—to share their ideas and concerns about the future of trail and waterway connections in the area.

Why: This focus group meeting was designed to gather community input on the current state of the shoreline and trail system, identify opportunities and challenges, and capture a shared vision for the future. The goal was to meet people where they are, creating a space where participants felt empowered to engage in meaningful conversations and provide feedback that will directly inform the project's design. By hearing directly from the community about what's working and what's not, we aimed to gather ideas for improving connections, safety, and overall experience while addressing key challenges. The emphasis was on inclusive and authentic dialogue, ensuring that the needs and experiences of all stakeholders were represented.

What We Did: To make the event engaging and interactive, we set up a variety of stations where participants could share their ideas:

- **Survey Station:** Provided attendees an opportunity to provide feedback online using a QR code or fill out a paper version on site.
- **Vision Drawing Station:** We invited neighbors to draw what they would like the shoreline and trails to look like in five years, highlighting key features, amenities and connections they wanted to see.
- **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) Activity:** Encouraged attendees to document and discuss what works, what doesn't, and what they want to see in the future for activation and connectedness.
- **Board Game Activity:** A fun, hands-on way for community members to show us what's most important to them on the trails and greenways.

To show our appreciation, two lucky participants won a Muskegon STAG SWAG BAG filled with goodies!



#1

Thank You for Your Input!

Community Engagement Focus Group #1



What We Learned: Community feedback provided valuable insights on the current state of the trails and shoreline, highlighting several key points:

What's Working Well:

- More people are using the trails for biking and walking, improving their quality of life.
- The trails connect people to work, essential services, and recreation.
- There's a great opportunity to educate kids and adults about safe biking practices, regulations, and trail use.

What Needs Improvement:

- Trails aren't fully connected, limiting access.
- A lack of infrastructure, such as electric scooters and bikes, restricts broader use of the trail system.
- Existing structures are outdated and require maintenance and upgrades.

Opportunities for the Future:

- Connecting trails to other networks, particularly along Sherman Boulevard, which touches multiple municipalities.
- Promoting safer streets and increase transportation options to minimize wear and tear on roads.
- Capacity building within the community to ensure that improvements are made by the people, for the people.

Challenges to Consider:

- Poor road conditions may distract from trail investments and generate public concern about resource allocation.
- Trail maintenance costs can present a long-term challenge.
- Access to outdoor spaces can feel like a privilege, making it harder for some community members to prioritize engagement with these projects.

What is Next:

The success of this first meeting sets the stage for five more focus group sessions with key stakeholders.

Additionally, community members identified future pop-up engagement opportunities where project updates and additional feedback can be gathered. These upcoming sessions will continue to refine the project vision and ensure that future trail and shoreline improvements align with the community's needs and desires.

