



“Clean Energy in Michigan” Series, Number 3

# Collaborative Planning for Renewable Energy: Gratiot County, Michigan

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## Q: How can community engagement lead to better outcomes for future energy development?

### History of Collaborative Planning

Gratiot County has used collaborative planning between residents, businesses, and municipalities since the 1970s. In 2008, Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. (GGDI), a public/private partnership devoted to economic growth, worked with local leaders to apply for and receive funding from the Partnership for Change to support the formation of a countywide master plan. In 2011, the Gratiot Regional Excellence and Transformation (GREAT) plan was the first of its kind in Michigan to establish collective goals across municipal boundaries.

### Exploration of Wind

Wind developers began approaching Gratiot County during the creation of the GREAT plan because they saw the logistics associated with jurisdictions’ universal ambitions as an opportunity.

Wind Resource, LLC, one of these wind developers, found that the county had suitable wind as well as grid availability arising from industries that left in the 1970s. As a result, the developer prompted the county to consider wind energy.

Don Schurr, former President of GGDI and Chairperson of the GREAT plan meetings, recognized that wind farms could be a prospect for economic development in Gratiot County. Both Schurr and Rich VanderVeen, Founder and President of Wind Resource, LLC, understood that the pursuit of this renewable technology could not happen without community support.

Information was shared with the community as the idea of wind energy began to be explored. VanderVeen was instrumental in offering technical assistance, knowledge, and even guided wind farm tours for those who wanted to experience wind in action. Michigan State University Extension experts also hosted an education session open to the public. People expressed little to no opposition towards wind energy which encouraged authorities to move forward in turning this concept into reality.

Gratiot County Wind Turbine. Photo courtesy of Greater Gratiot Development.



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The Clean Energy in Michigan series provides case studies and fact sheets answering common questions about clean energy projects in Michigan.

Find this document and more about the project online at [graham.umich.edu/climate-energy/energy-futures](http://graham.umich.edu/climate-energy/energy-futures).



Map source: [Wikipedia](#)

## Public Engagement

The same collaborative framework used to form the GREAT plan was followed simultaneously to establish a countywide wind ordinance. The creation of this ordinance was fully transparent. In an attempt to disclose and address any concerns about wind energy.

The county put out widespread notices for the ordinance meetings through newspapers, radio, and social media. Anyone could participate in crafting the wind ordinance if they desired. As many as 300 people attended any of the given 20+ meetings. It took two years to articulate and formulate Gratiot County's final wind ordinance. The county ordinance was the template for other municipalities to use, which 14 of the 16 townships adopted.

Gratiot County Wind was the first project to go online, just a year after the GREAT plan and wind ordinance were completed. Invenergy became the developer of the project while Wind Resource, LLC, stayed on as a consultant. Over

250 families signed on to be part of the project area. A "pooling easement" was used to grant each of these families a lease payment—even if they did not host a turbine on their property. Negotiations for land leases occurred at the same time as the wind ordinance public meetings.

After this first wind project was built, residents in the country regrouped to initiate an increase in the ordinance's setback distance from 500 feet to 1000 feet from a building. No major changes have been made to the document since, and additional wind projects have been approved under this revised ordinance. Gratiot County currently has 217 wind turbines and two more wind projects are under development.

## Future of Gratiot County

An update to the GREAT plan occurred in 2017. The main modifications resulted in a new section that explores strategies to encourage solar development. Planners saw solar as a natural next step due to the community's wide reception of wind. This update motivated the assembly of a solar energy ordinance adopted by Gratiot County on behalf of five townships. To date, several solar developers have expressed interest in generating commercial solar, and there is also interest among residents for residential (rooftop or ground-mount) solar.

- 1 GREAT Plan: [https://www.gogrowgratiot.org/uploads/9/5/3/0/9530559/gratiot\\_master\\_plan\\_draft\\_7.21.17\\_final\\_draft.pdf](https://www.gogrowgratiot.org/uploads/9/5/3/0/9530559/gratiot_master_plan_draft_7.21.17_final_draft.pdf)
- 2 Wind Ordinance: [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dleg/Adopted\\_Gratiot\\_County\\_-windordinance\\_350514\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dleg/Adopted_Gratiot_County_-windordinance_350514_7.pdf)
- 3 Solar Ordinance: <https://www.gratiotmi.com/DocumentCenter/View/3278/Gratiot-County-Zoning-Ordinance-for-Solar-Energy-Systems-and-Solar-Farms-PDF>
- 4 Greater Gratiot Development: <https://ggdi.gratiot.org/>
- 5 Mackinaw Power: <http://mackinawpower.com/>