

Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce



Overview

Founded in 1887, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce’s mission is to create business opportunities by focusing on four core initiatives: services/goods, community building, advocacy for member businesses and networking. The Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce’s (GRACC) membership includes more than 3,000 businesses from Western Michigan, ranging in size from large Fortune 500 companies to small business owners. However, more than 80 percent of its members have 50 employees or less.

Regional Priorities

The GRACC has by and large been involved in numerous strategies to strengthen the region’s economy. Most recently, however, GRACC’s focus has been three-fold: improving the air quality of the region, maintaining an economically competitive downtown district and reducing healthcare costs for employers.

For example, in the past, Kent County has been listed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a “nonattainment” area because the region’s air pollution levels exceeded the national ambient air quality standards. Nonattainment classifications may be used to specify which air pollution reduction measures an area must adopt and when the area must reach attainment, which often times requires businesses to invest in pollution controls. GRACC contends that the vast majority of air pollution in the region travels across Lake Michigan from Chicago and Milwaukee. As a result, GRACC is working with the Governor and Attorney General’s Office to discuss air quality standards and issues. The GRACC has also partnered with the state Chamber of Commerce and a manufacturing association to make sure that there is some exemption for the Grand Rapids region if they become classified as a nonattainment area.

In addition to its battle to reduce air pollution in the region, GRACC has been committed to protecting its downtown entertainment district. A proposal has been on the table for the construction of a tribal casino thirty miles south of Grand Rapids in Allegan County’s Wayland Township. GRACC is adamantly opposed to the development of a casino in Western Michigan because, as the Director of Policy and Government Affairs at the Chamber stated, “an untaxed, unregulated business will drain money out of downtown Grand Rapids — the city’s entertainment district.” The GRACC has led the charge against the construction of a new casino with a coalition of businesses that has organized into the Community Partnership for Economic Growth. The group commissioned a study by the Anderson Economic Group that concluded the tribal casino could potentially divert up to \$92 million dollars from other businesses in the region. However, GRACC appears to be alone in this fight since nearly every other economic group near the casino has come out in support of it, including the chambers of commerce from Kalamazoo, Wayland, Plainwell, along with the Allegan County Chamber of Commerce.