

# Ep.3.36 - Kerry Duggan

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## SPEAKERS

Kerry Duggan, Ed Clemente, Announcer

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### A Announcer 00:01

Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity, an economic development podcast featuring candid conversations with business leaders across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts from Michigan business leaders and innovators about how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and significant workforces in the nation.

### E Ed Clemente 00:29

Hello, I'm your host, Ed Clemente. And we're very fortunate to have Kerry Duggan here. I said, Duggan, just so people understand we'll let you give a story about that later. She's the founder and CEO of SustainabiliD. Thanks again, Kerry for doing this.

### K Kerry Duggan 00:44

Happy to be here, Ed. Thanks for inviting me.

### E Ed Clemente 00:46

I think I'm more excited than you though. [I don't know, I love this state.] Well, good. Well, on this podcast, The Michigan Opportunity is sort of like a nerdy podcast in some ways. But it's actually where a lot of people really want to know what really goes on and how you make a difference - period. In the world as well as Michigan. And that's why we have people like us. So why don't you tell us a little bit about first of all, what SustainabiliD is.

### K Kerry Duggan 01:15

Sure thing. No, sincere thanks for having me on. And I love any chance I can to showcase what being a boomerang looks like here in Michigan, because it's truly a wonderful life. But by way of background, I founded SustainabilID. Back in 2017, after I had just left the White House where I was the president's climate advisor when he was vice president. And for about six and a half years, I was President Obama's deputy of his Detroit Task Force, as you know, there was a boots on the ground, federal folks on the ground, starting in 2010. So I was there from the Department of Energy at the time. And a lot of people know me from helping with the streetlight conversion to LEDs. I intervened with [Oh, I remember it, yeah.]

E

Ed Clemente 01:56

For the city of Detroit, right? That was huge.

K

Kerry Duggan 01:59

Yeah, it was the second largest LED conversion in the country. So real leadership coming out of Detroit, sort of before and during bankruptcy and came out ahead of schedule and under budget, which was not something you would have said about Detroit back then. So I'm really proud of that one.

E

Ed Clemente 02:15

I used to drive to Detroit a lot. And those lights being out, really made a big difference when they switched over.

K

Kerry Duggan 02:21

Absolutely. And so yeah, I just took what I learned in my basically decade in Washington, into this company. So I do, personally, I do high level policy. But I also really focus on deployment and removing barriers for climate tech to scale. And we serve two sets of clients, we work with large, I would call them well-established institutions. So you could think of a multinational corporation or university or National Laboratory and so on. What we do there is we help the CEO and the C suite get really smart on climate policy and help them figure out what their programs are going to be sometimes we go as far as implementing their programs. So it's basically the kind of work I used to do for the president. And then the other set of our clients Ed are the climate tech game changers, global game changers. And what we do is we help remove barriers to their ability to scale and help solve the climate crisis. And for me, the magic is when I can introduce those big institutions to these novel climate tech companies, because that's magical. The CEO looks really good for making a good choice. And the climate tech companies get to scale faster with great partnerships. And I do all of that from my office in Detroit. Very proud of that.

E

Ed Clemente 03:33

Yeah. And, by the way, we've had one of your clients, maybe other ones on, but we've had Our

Next Energy on actually. Mujeeb, he was on, he was great. And so you grew up in the Detroit area then? So you're from Southeast Michigan, [Yeah.] okay.

**K** Kerry Duggan 03:52

I'm a native. I grew up in Farmington Hills. I'm a Detroit Country Day alum. I'm a Yellow Jacket.

**E** Ed Clemente 03:58

We played them in sports once in a while but I didn't know too much about them.

**K** Kerry Duggan 04:01

Well, we won all the time. We won, I think my senior year, nine state championships. I was on two of the state champion teams soccer and women's basketball. So also very proud of that.

**E** Ed Clemente 04:09

Yeah, yeah, no, no, no, I didn't know, it's not on your resume. Yeah, well, it's a long time ago, Ed. You're in this field. I used to be very involved with it when I was in the legislature too. And at that time moves under Governor Granholm, who I'm sure you're still friends with and work with him.

**K** Kerry Duggan 04:35

I'm on her board. I'm on the secretary of energy's advisory board. So I still keep one foot in Washington. Don't be fooled.

**E** Ed Clemente 04:41

Yeah, no, no, that's a good place to have your foot because she's obviously been a leader even when I was in the legislature, most of our green tech bills, through the MEDC ones at least. And so she was always pioneer even back then to try to get us on board as the world was changing.

**K** Kerry Duggan 05:00

Yeah, she was skating to where the puck was going, Ed, with your help, right?

**E** Ed Clemente 05:05

Yes, yeah. Gretzky, she's following the Gretzky axiom. Where do you see what you do, because I know it's hard to move too fast in the green space. But I know there's obviously a lot of

opportunities that are gradual. Do you see it more like building a master's thesis when you do green tech? Or do you think it's stuff that can be leapfrogging more?

K

Kerry Duggan 05:35

Yeah, it's interesting. So first of all, you know, I used to work for the president. So two presidents. And I always like to say, I love all the states equally, but I choose to live here, Ed, and I think, in terms of this audience, what they need to hear is that this is the right place and the right time to be in Michigan, particularly with my horse blinders on around energy, environment, climate, we have competitive advantages with deep compassion for other states that are really suffering from the impacts of climate, we have some realistic advantages. So my message to everyone around the world is come to Michigan and manufacture and then sell your products around the world. So the other thing, gosh, since your time in the legislature, a lot has changed in the world. But I will tell you this once-in-a-generation investment, the series of bills between the bipartisan infrastructure law, CHIPS-plus and the IRA, we probably won't see that kind of massive movement on the federal side. And it is my sincere hope. And I do spend quite a bit of time trying to make sure that Michigan companies, municipalities and the state understand how to access those federal dollars, and then partner with other folks in terms of deploying the stuff that we know how to make in Michigan. And that's what excites me companies, like ONE, who you mentioned, great example of a company that's moving very fast. And, you know, real commitment to planet-saving, humanity-saving work. There's other companies and you know, you can always look at my website SustainabiliD it's a D instead of a TY at the end. You know, we we work with global companies that can have global impact. But certainly, I like to stay very aware of the companies and Michigan. Luxwell is another great one to take a look at. They've got a vacuum-insulated glass technology, and I know how sexy everyone thinks energy efficiency is. But if you can save the energy from being used in the first place, that's probably the smartest answer.

E

Ed Clemente 07:34

Why don't you break that down a teeny bit? Because I know I've heard of them. Are they based on the west side of the state?

K

Kerry Duggan 07:39

No, no. They're headquartered in Ypsilanti. Not far at all.

E

Ed Clemente 07:42

Oh, wow. Okay. Yeah. Why don't you say exactly kind of what you, I know, it's hard to describe, but for people who want to know what you mean by saving energy versus having to create it.

K

Kerry Duggan 07:52

Sure, yeah I wasn't going to try to explain vacuum-insulated glass, but I'll leave that to them. But let me just point a picture for you. So you may know this fellow named Bill Gates. He and a

But let me just paint a picture for you. So you may know this fellow named Bill Gates. He and a bunch of his, let's see, relative colleagues in that category of wealth, are investing in, I want to say about 130 portfolio companies through a group called Breakthrough Energy. Luxwell and Our Next Energy are two of those portfolio companies that are headquartered here in Michigan. Our Next Energy is focused on an EV battery, but also grid storage battery to stabilize the grid. You and I have lived through enough brownouts to know that that is something we desperately need. And they have a wonderful partnership with DTE, which is super important. But on the Luxwell side it's about energy efficiency. So I'll give you a great example. I have the privilege and the benefit of living in a beautiful, historic home in Indian Village. I have no thermal barrier in my home. Every bit of fireplace and heating and cooling that I put into my home goes right out the windows because they're not efficient. According to my friends at Luxwell, if I retrofitted my home with their technology, I could probably save 60% on my bill. 60% on my bill in a community that is mostly single pane windows. I mean, that's money in people's wallets. That's what that's about. So that's why I'm big on energy efficiency. And you'll see a number of the partners that I have in our company that are in that space.

A

Announcer 09:28

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E

Ed Clemente 09:45

And you probably have heard of this. I know it's a newer organization but the Center for Advanced Manufacturing, Cynthia Hutchinson, have you met her yet? You probably have not.

K

Kerry Duggan 09:55

I don't think I've had a chance to meet her.

E

Ed Clemente 09:57

It's pretty interesting. We just, in fact, we've interviewed her on the podcast, you can find her if you want to look at the categories, but what they're doing is something not the same as what you're doing. But they're sort of creating like this, she spent some time with the World Economic Forum, and that's exactly what they're trying to do is say, like, not only does Michigan manufacture these things. But nationally, we should be thinking about this. As we're moving into, like the new industries, the advancement. In fact, a lot of these are all advanced manufacturing industries you're talking about.

K

Kerry Duggan 10:32

Yeah, actually, I think I did meet her now that I'm thinking about it. One of the cool things about being a Detroiters is that if you stay here long enough, they all come to you, because we are still a really important place. The United Nations Global Compact actually came through Detroit,

with one of the UN ambassadors, the US Ambassador to the UN, and we did a supply chain round table with him over at the Detroit Athletic Club. And two things out of that. One, Cynthia I think was there. Two, the ambassador's reaction to seeing Detroit from the Detroit Athletic Club was really fun for me. I always enjoy bringing people here and kind of showing them around town. And it's just not what they have imagined, right? And he left that meeting saying, I'm gonna come back, I want to do more work here. So you're exactly right, we still are the epicenter for the opportunity space in energy storage, not just for batteries, but as I said, for the grid. And I think if we focus, and we don't see that opportunity, there's lots we can do. And I will also mention, one of our clients is Argonne National Laboratory out of Chicago. We have been investigating the Midwest with them on energy storage and right now our thesis is that Michigan is in the clear lead. So the the real focus is what are the gaps? And how do we keep this lead moving forward? So very exciting time. Lots of neat partnerships I've never seen before coming out, which is super fun.

E

Ed Clemente 11:55

The Argonne National Lab was of particular interest when I was in the legislature, but more Oak Ridge Labs, because they were doing a lot with advanced energy with the Granholm administration back then. You probably know Ray Bowman. [Of course.]

K

Kerry Duggan 12:09

The secretary poached him, I think from Oak Ridge up to Michigan.

E

Ed Clemente 12:13

Yeah, yeah. Back in the day, because he was with Oak Ridge. And him and Doug Parks were working on a lot of these things. [Great guy.] Yeah. Is there any other partners like you want to mention, I know you've mentioned quite a few at this point. I'm sure you're sort of more like a convener of some of these things. And some you're actually obviously involved with, but anyone else you want to mention?

K

Kerry Duggan 12:42

Yeah, I mean, the stuff that I'm working on, that's happening in real time as we're talking where we have a partnership with the Aspen Institute, which I'm sure you've heard of their energy environment programs, really thoughtful, really important. Myself and a number of Detroiters have been out to their energy convenings. And we told them that they need to, you know, Aspen's nice, but you should come to Detroit. And you know what, Ed? They bit. They came up here. My team convened a bunch of small salon style tables, so they can get to know the energy community in Detroit. And they're coming back, and they're going to have a commitment that will be announced shortly. So I'll make sure that you and your team have that. I can't give it away now. But maybe we'll do an exclusive with you. And then the other partnership I have is with Milken Institute, who's got a global reach, I was just at their la global conference, and leaving that, they've got an initiative called 10,000 Communities where they're really, like me, focused on trying to get those federal dollars spent, obviously, to stand up Made

in the USA manufacturing, and so on, but also really focused on communities that have been left out. And so I'm partnering with them. And I'm holding a convening in October, to really showcase the opportunity space that Michigan offers. So I'm excited about those two partnerships in particular. But as you can see, from our website, we have a very big team, we have our hands on a lot of different projects. I still have my various political appointments, two with the governor and one with the secretary. So try to keep my pencil sharp. And as I said, I've been able to do that from Detroit. And so that's really my message to anyone who's hesitating about coming back here or coming here for the first time. This is a fun place to live. We have four seasons, they're gorgeous, and I just was in DC for two days where it was not particularly wonderful in terms of the weather. So I miss my friends in DC, of course, I miss interfacing with my former boss on a daily basis, but I'm really happy to be here. And I feel like this is a place where if you are fresh out of school or you're just coming back, you can still have an outsized impact, where you can't necessarily do that in other places. So come back, everybody.

E

Ed Clemente 14:59

Yeah. You know, it's funny, I just talked to somebody about that recently, where I feel like Detroit, good or bad, the way the size it is now, population-wise, but also opportunities, it is a place that is sort of a smaller community but still has big city status globally. I work a lot with international groups and we can talk about this offline sometime. But with Global Ties Detroit, we bring in these international delegations, and all of them know Detroit even before they know Michigan sometimes, right? They just know it. So it's got the brand. So when people come here, they do see a lot of opportunities.

K

Kerry Duggan 15:41

Yeah, that's right. I had a gentleman named Frank Loyd, you can Google him. He's sort of an icon in the environmental community. I've known him for a long time. He and his buddies go on an annual trip to look at architecture. And he phoned me. He said, I know you're back in Detroit. Can my friends come here? We want to go see all the Albert Kahn buildings, and I just love him. Yeah, just come over to my house. It's an Albert Kahn designed house. He goes, You're kidding me? I said, No, that's what you can, it's the cost, what do I want to say, the quality of life and the cost of living compared to Washington DC, forget about it. I remember, we went to Supino Pizza our first Friday here. And the bill came and I looked at it, I said, well, where's the rest of the bill? It's been great for my family. And to your point about having impact, and unlike other places, like it's not about just me, but I brought with me a husband and two kids, and a tax base, and my husband was on like five different boards in town and ended up running the Parks and Rec Department. So it is a place, he was unknown. He's from Spanish Harlem. He's not from here, but was able to come here and have a really big impact.

E

Ed Clemente 16:49

Yeah, it happened fast. And that's the other thing. People come to America to sort of, you know, international people migrate here because you can make it here quicker than, not just Detroit, but I mean, the United States. But then when you come to a city like Detroit, there's tons of

opportunities and it's growing more and more with all, we should let you tell your funny story. You're not related, so when people look at your name, they're gonna think it's related to the mayor, but he pronounces it Duggan. You're Duggan. So why don't you tell your story?

K

Kerry Duggan 17:22

I'll tell my funny story. But I'm gonna go back to your other point. Probably the funniest moment for me it was when I was prepping the then vice president for one of the trips in town. We were coming here to talk about the buses. And you know, he's very fond of the mayor. But on the plane, he kept saying Duggan, Mayor Duggan, and I looked around, and none of my colleagues were willing to correct him. And I said, Sir, I'm Duggan, he's Duggan. He's like, Oh, yeah, you're right. So we get to Detroit. And, you know, so great to be back in Detroit, he says, with Mayor Duggan, and I was like, Oh, they probably knew I shouldn't have corrected him, he would have gotten it right if I didn't say anything. It was cute. My mother was in the audience. And she texted me she like, Did you just get a promotion? [But it's spelled the same way, right?] The same way, and we have an ongoing argument for years and years. And the funniest thing is a story he tells apparently, I don't remember this, but he remembers seeing me play basketball. And I was decent, all state and so on. He used to take credit for me, because people would be like, your daughter's really good. So yeah, but to your point about Detroit, the one thing I want to just acknowledge, like this place is not perfect. But that's where the work is. And there's a lot of really beautiful work around equity here happening. Even with things like Detroit Means Business and the reaction to COVID. The leadership I have seen here, and the receptivity to making sure that we're really trying to get the information and the tools and the resources in the hands of people who aren't energy literate or in my space, but maybe don't have the internet or a data plan on their phone. There's a lot of deep thinking here, about how when we recover, and we are certainly on a road to recovery here, that everyone has a place and a space to thrive. And so that's really a fun, but important thing to say to mention, you know, don't have rose colored glasses here. You're going to come here and you're going to do good work. [Oh, yeah.]

E

Ed Clemente 19:24

Yeah, no, no, no, I was a trustee for Wayne County Community College. [You know.] Yeah, we've worked with a lot of underserved populations. And you know, it's just a challenge, always. So we're near the end here. Just last couple of questions. Because you've had such a interesting and exciting career. Is there anything you tell yourself at 17 to do differently?

K

Kerry Duggan 19:48

Oh, sheesh. I think the biggest thing I've learned just in these last few years is to trust my gut. I think you and I've talked about it but living in Washington I obviously was successful enough to be well placed and do big things. But a lot of that had to do with keeping my head down and just doing the work and not trying to be a peacock. So that's not advice I would give, I think I have that sensibility just because of where I came from and I knew how to work hard. In fact, my big job interview for the president, I was brought into his office, you know, sir, this is Carrie Duggan. She's from the Department of Energy. And he didn't look up. He was looking down at his desk in the West Wing and then the counselor says, she's from Detroit, and she played



basketball. And he looked up and gave me the winning Joe Biden smile and said, What position? And I didn't skip a beat, Ed, I said, sharpshooter, sir. And he's like, all right, you may brief me. [Wow, that's wonderful. I know he's pretty tall himself, isn't he?] He is, yeah. It was a blessing to work for him. When I left that role, I felt like I'm never going to work for such a duo of people that I had great respect for. And, both President Obama and President Biden really are focused on community community engagement. And whenever we traveled the, the then-VP would always ask what's really going on on the ground, he was really interested in what was going on in communities so that he wasn't ignorant or anything like that, and that our programs were actually addressing real community needs. In fact, when I was put out on the Detroit project under President Obama, that so informed my work as a federal public servant. That's actually how I got the job. You know, the president, I always have to say which one I'm talking about, the former vice president, [President, yeah.] pulled me onto his team because he knew about the work I did on the street lighting. So Detroit makes everyone better. Let me just say that.

E

Ed Clemente 21:57

Yeah, it's a story I think a lot of people just take for granted how nice the lighting is. Yeah, but it was really a challenge prior. So anyway, I know there's a bunch more things I'd love to talk to you about. But we keep the podcast kind of tight, so people will get it all in. And with that, I want to thank again, our guests, Kerry Duggan. She's the founder and CEO of SustainabiliD, "D" at the end, and we look forward maybe to having on with some of your future guests, maybe some of the people you work with, and we can circle back on that someday.

K

Kerry Duggan 22:30

Yeah, I look great on the radio. So let's do it, Ed, thanks for having me.

E

Ed Clemente 22:34

Thanks, Kerry. [Alright, bye bye.] Join us next week where our guests will be Jon Kramer. He's the president and CEO of OHM Advisors.

A

Announcer 22:44

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