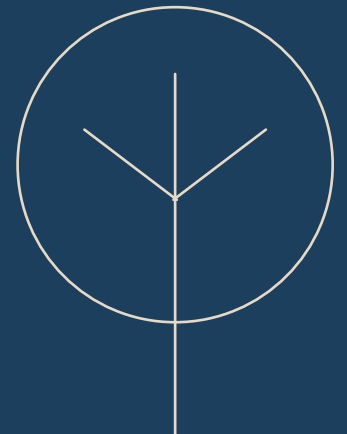


City of *Plainwell*

# *2023 MASTER PLAN*





Allegan County, Michigan  
**2023 Master Plan**  
Adopted: 2023

**Plainwell City Council**

- Brad Keeler, Mayor
- Lori Steele, Mayor Pro-Tem
- Roger Keeney
- Todd Overhuel
- Randy Wisnaski

**Planning Commission**

- Rachel Colingsworth, Chair
- Gary Sausaman, Vice Chair
- Stephen Bennett
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With assistance from



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- Appendix B. Completed Action Plan Items from Previous Plans
- Appendix C. Approval Resolutions

# 1.

## INTRODUCTION



### *Introduction*

Plainwell is located on the eastern edge of Allegan County, in Southwest Michigan. The City is completely surrounded by Gun Plain Charter Township, except for a small portion west of US-131 that borders Otsego Township. With its location close to the Kalamazoo/Portage and Grand Rapids metropolitan areas, Plainwell is well-situated within a region that has enjoyed a more stable economic atmosphere than faced by many other Michigan communities.

Plainwell is known as “The Island City” because one cannot enter downtown from any direction without first crossing a bridge. The Kalamazoo River and the Plainwell Millrace form an island around the original town plat providing a beautiful and unique setting for Plainwell and making it a special place.

### A SHORT HISTORY...

Dr. Cyrenius Thompson first settled Plainwell in 1831. He became the first postmaster in 1833. According to “A Twentieth Century History of Allegan County, Michigan” by Henry F. Thomas (1907), Plainwell was established on the Plank Road (today’s Main Street) that was built between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids in 1852. “So it happened that a Mr. Wellever bought an acre of land at the junction, in the angle between what are now Allegan and Main streets, and in the fall of 1853 began the construction of the historic Plainwell House...He did not remain long enough to see his enterprise through, but sold the land and the unfinished house to Orson D. Dunham, who late in the fall of 1853 bought forty acres surrounding the Wellever tract and shortly after became owner of the hotel site. The Plainwell House was opened to public entertainment in July, 1854.”

The Plainwell House was torn down in 1891, but Plainwell was by then established as a center for transportation and commerce. The City was platted in 1863 and incorporated as a village in 1869, with a population of approximately 200. The first railroad arrived in 1868. The community adopted a new charter and became a City in 1934.

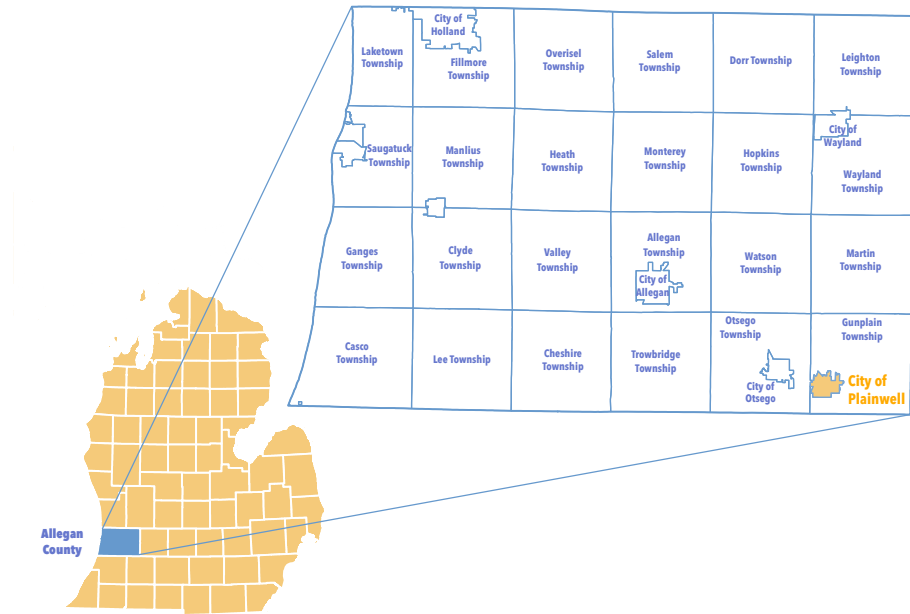
To provide power to the growing community, a millrace was constructed across the bend in the Kalamazoo River in 1856, thus surrounding the new village with water. The power afforded by the river and the millrace attracted industry, including the Michigan Paper Company, later known as the Plainwell Paper Company. The paper mill was a major area employer from its opening in 1887 until it shuttered its doors in 2000. The City purchased the shuttered mill to facilitate its redevelopment in 2006.

Plainwell has grown steadily over the years, with a population peak in 1990 of 4,057.



Although the Plainwell/Otsego area provides diverse employment and shopping opportunities, it has increasingly become a bedroom community for commuters to Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids.

Plainwell is the birthplace of syndicated cartoonist Dave Coverly, creator of the Speed Bump comic strip, character actor Ed Gale, and writer and journalist Kathleen Davis. In 2016, Plainwell native Jack Conklin was selected in the first round of the NFL draft by the Tennessee Titans.



## MASTER PLANNING

### Master Plans

The comprehensive plan is a policy document created by the City of Plainwell Planning Commission to guide the future growth and development of the City.

A sound master plan helps ensure that Plainwell remains a highly desirable place to live, work, and visit. This can be accomplished by preserving and enhancing the qualities of the City that the residents, businesses, and property owners consider important. The plan also allows the City to respond to new trends and approaches.

The comprehensive plan identifies and analyzes the City's physical elements to create a set of goals, objectives, and recommendations to direct decisions regarding future land use, neighborhood and transportation improvements, and special strategies for key areas in the City. Because the plan offers a balance between the interests and rights of private property owners with those of the entire community, it effectively assists City leaders in making substantive, thoughtful decisions for the community while considering long-term implications.

### Past Planning Efforts

Plainwell has a strong tradition of planning. The first community plan was adopted in 1979 and focused on the residential character of the City. In 1986 a new master plan was created which recommended expanding City boundaries and protecting historical areas. As a result, several properties and two historic districts were nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. Since that time, however, Gun Plain Township adopted a charter which has effectively prevented future annexations and boundary expansions.

In 1988, the City started a strategic planning process, which resulted in the Plainwell 2020 Plan. As part of the effort, task force recommendations addressed such diverse topics as Historic Preservation, Health and Human Services, Cultural/Fine Arts,



Recreational Opportunities, Riverfront Development/Community Beautification Economic Development, Public Safety, and Transportation/Municipal Services. One result of this process was the 1991 Parks and Recreation Plan, the City's first.

The Plainwell Master Plan was updated again in 2004. That plan focused on neighborhood character, redevelopment areas and infill opportunities.

### Other Plans

In 1981, the Plainwell Downtown Development Authority was formed, and in 1985 the DDA adopted the Downtown Development Plan. The plan was updated in 1991 and most recently in 2007.

The City's parks and recreation plan has been updated every five years since first being adopted in 1991. The current plan, adopted in early 2023, provides many valuable recommendations for developing parks and recreation resources within the City, as well as a non-motorized transportation plan. The 2023 - 2027 Recreation Plan was developed as a coordinated effort with the update of this Master Plan.

### Paper Mill Redevelopment Plans

When the Plainwell Paper Company ended business and closed the mill in 2000, the City began a proactive planning process for its redevelopment. It was recognized early on, for industrial purposes, the building was obsolete. In 2006, the City acquired the 36-acre site to facilitate its redevelopment.

The City has been working to craft a concept for the site, including reuse of the historic brick buildings, environmental remediation, and new commercial and residential development, including open space and access to the river. As of 2023, the paper mill site is now a mixed-use community space serving a multitude of users such as the City Hall, public safety department, an environmental engineering company, and a farmers market. The site is well-integrated with public art, community open space, and a restored bridge.



**2009 Master Plan**

The 2009 Master Plan was a collaborative effort between the City and the citizens of Plainwell. A Steering Committee composed of appointed and elected officials, business owners and citizens was formed to help guide the process. A city-wide Community Survey was utilized to determine opinions about a variety of topics including the desires for the City’s future. In addition to the Community Survey, several community stakeholders were interviewed to determine their perspective on community desires (one of the stakeholder groups was the high school student senate).

A public workshop was also held to focus on and further examine the initially identified planning issues and to begin testing the validity of community values, goals, and strategies.

**2016 Master Plan**

The 2016 Master Plan updated various components of the previous 2009 plan.

First, a technical review of the previous plan was conducted to provide initial recommendations, ensure compliance with State-required content, and evaluate the effectiveness of action items to accomplish community goals. Information about the community was then gathered in the form of updated demographics and existing land use. This information is summarized in Chapter 2, Plainwell Today.

A new city-wide Community Survey was initiated to gauge residents’ attitudes toward various aspects affecting the City’s future and to understand any changing attitudes from the previous 2009 planning effort. Survey results are summarized in the Appendix. Following the Community Survey, a public workshop was held at City Hall on January 28, 2016. The workshop was organized around topic areas such as transportation, land use development, policy, and community values. Input from the workshop was used to formulate specific actions and policies and confirm the Future Land Use Plan, found in Chapter 3, Plainwell Tomorrow.

A priority of the 2016 Master Plan was to obtain the City’s certification as a “Redevelopment Ready Community” (RRC) from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) as well as incorporate best planning practices to best position the City to facilitate redevelopment in targeted locations. As of 2023, the City is RRC Certified and working through its redevelopment projects.

**2023 Master Plan**

The 2023 Master Plan built on the implementation success of the 2016 Plan and included a coordinated public engagement effort with the Parks and Trees Commission to update the City’s Recreation Plan.

The process began with a joint kick-off meeting between the Planning Commission and Parks and Trees Commission. The two groups coordinated to hold an Open House held at City Hall that was advertised city-wide. After the Open House, the Planning Commission held three workshops to review the public input results, goals and objectives, future land use, implementation, and economic development strategies.

After review by the Planning Commission, the entire Master Plan draft was then submitted to the City Council to begin the adoption process required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. The draft plan was reviewed by the City Council and then released for review to the surrounding communities. After completing the mandated review period, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on [insert date] and the plan was adopted by the City Council on [insert date]. The resolution of adoption is copied on the inside back cover of this document, in accordance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act.



*Plainwell is an active and vibrant community*



# 2.

## PLAINWELL TODAY

### *Plainwell Today*

Plainwell is a vibrant and active community with abundant natural features, fine neighborhoods, and a viable downtown. The community has several assets not usually found in a city of its size. For instance, Ascension Borgess-Pipp Hospital provides high-quality health care to the region and Plainwell's two ice cream dairies are known throughout the area (Plainwell Ice Cream continues to be voted some of the best ice cream in South West Michigan). The Old Mill Brewpub on Bridge St. has been voted as one of the best restaurants in South West Michigan.

To envision the future of the City, it helps to remember what makes Plainwell unique today. This chapter examines the characteristics that make the City special, and lists related planning values that help focus planning strategies.

### NATURAL FEATURES

Plainwell is blessed with many miles of waterfront with the Kalamazoo River and the millrace forming "The Island City." The Kalamazoo River traverses Plainwell flowing from southeast to northwest on its way to Lake Michigan. Fortunately, the flood plain formed by these watercourses is not very wide, affecting (for the most part) only those properties adjacent to the river or to the millrace.

There are a few areas of wetlands which are identified on the National Wetland Inventory as "riverine" wetlands adjacent to the river and the millrace south of Bridge Street (See Map 1).

Topographically, the City is fairly flat and development is not hindered by steep slopes or topographic variations. There are some areas of undeveloped land with significant stands of trees. The land east of Thurl Cook Park contains many mature trees that should be preserved to the greatest degree possible.

The river and millrace, which cut off some streets and result in access issues, are still key assets to the community and should be preserved and enhanced. Otherwise, natural features do not place significant limitations on development. In fact, they help create a unique setting for Plainwell.

### *Planning Values*

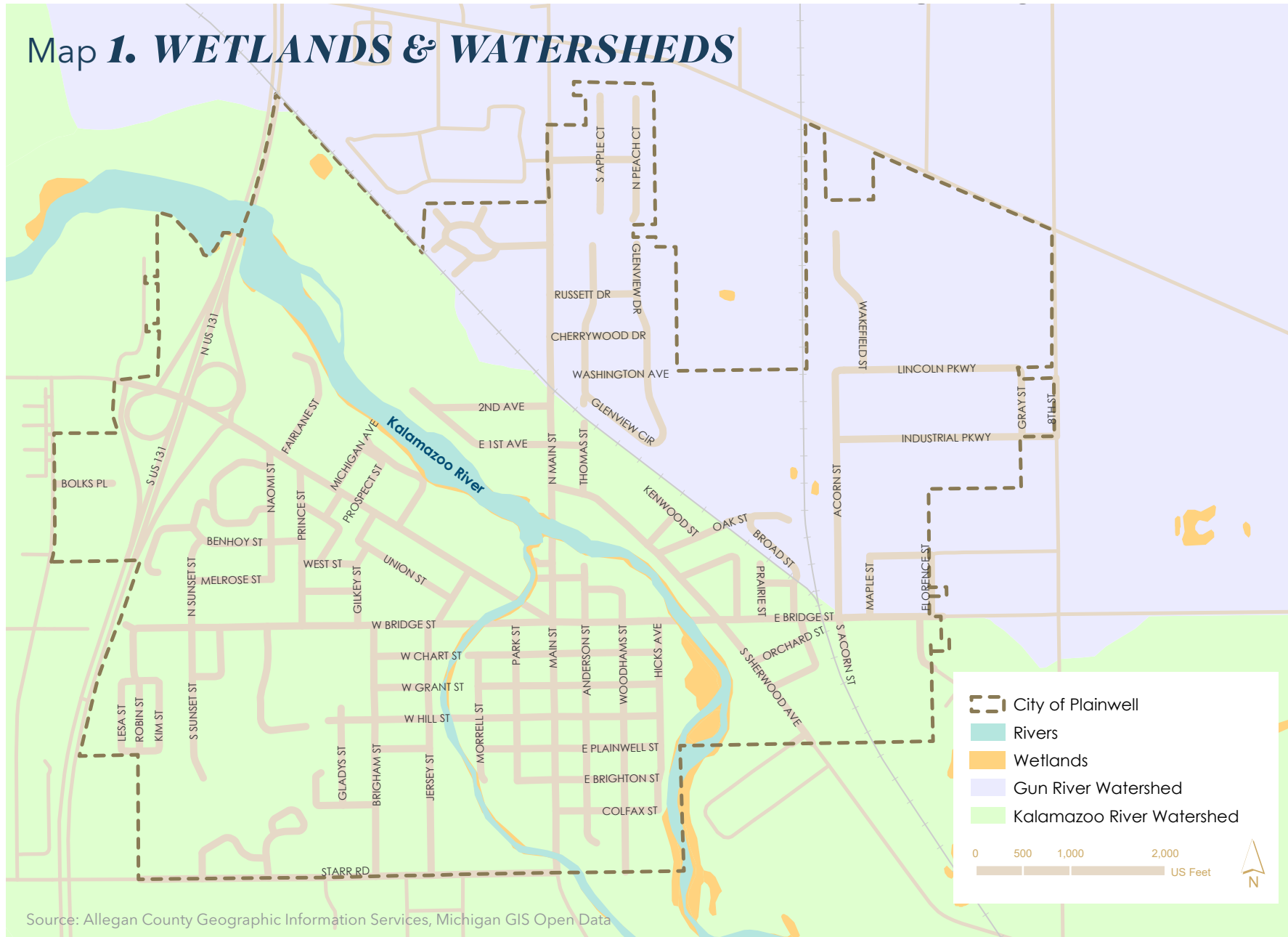
#### NATURAL FEATURES

- Respect, protect and celebrate the river and the millrace.
- Woodlands, mature tree stands, and street trees add to Plainwell's ambience and character and must be protected and enhanced.
- Being "The Island City" is unique and makes Plainwell stand out among area communities.

### TRANSPORTATION

Plainwell is well-connected to the West Michigan region with its location on M-89 and a full interchange on US-131. US-131 forms most of its western boundary, and the interchange is fully within the City limits. M-89 bisects Plainwell north and south and provides access to the many businesses to the west in Otsego Township, as well as to the cities of Otsego and Allegan. Going east, M-89 connects with Richland, the Gull Lake area and Battle Creek. US-131 provides access to nearby Kalamazoo (10 miles south) and Grand Rapids (35 miles north) and connects to Interstate 94 just 16 miles to the south. This connection affords convenient access to the Chicago and Detroit metropolitan areas.





Just to the north of Plainwell, travelers can access US-131 from 106th Street; however, this is not a full interchange. An entrance ramp allows traffic to go north on US-131 and there is an exit to 106th Street from southbound lanes. This partially configured interchange impacts traffic flow in the surrounding area and downtown Plainwell.

Major gateway entrances into Plainwell, especially from US-131, unfortunately fail to celebrate the community as a special place with an active and continually improving downtown and historic neighborhoods. For example, the small welcome sign on the south side of M-89 is lost among the several other signs and traffic control devices. Wayfinding signs are also lacking to help guide visitors to downtown or other venues.

In 2013, the City and the Michigan Department of Transportation completed its two-year reconstruction of M-89 from US-131 to the intersection of Main Street/East Bridge Street/West Allegan Street, which included reconstruction of the bridge over the Millrace and closure of West Bridge Street and a redesigned intersection of Main Street/East Bridge Street/West Allegan Street (pictured below). During that time, the closed portion of West Bridge St. replaced with a raised, brick paved pedestrian walkway.

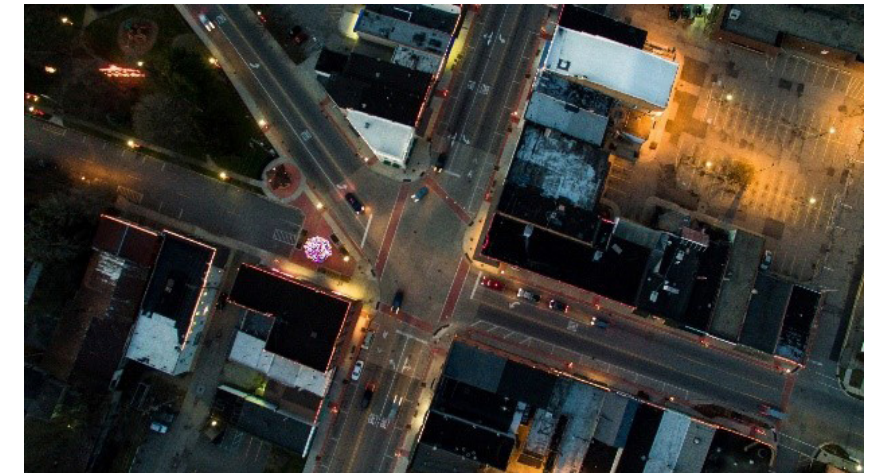
## Planning Values

### TRANSPORTATION

- Convenient and efficient transportation connections with the region and beyond are important and make living, working, and commuting easy in Plainwell.
- Gateway entrances should identify and better promote Plainwell as a special place.



**Before:** Traffic backup on Allegan Street (looking south) prior to intersection improvements



**After:** Intersection improvements on Bridge St. helped alleviate traffic congestion at the intersection



## COMPLETE STREETS

Planning the City’s transportation system involves more than just moving vehicles efficiently and safely. A transportation system needs to meet the needs of all types of users – motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and individuals with disabilities. In some cases, this is accomplished with lower vehicle speeds to be supportive of bicyclists and pedestrians, while in other places, wider vehicle lanes and higher speeds may be needed to allow for movement of vehicles and goods.

The design of the transportation system also needs to reflect the context of adjacent land uses. Nationally, this approach is often referred to as “complete streets,” harmonizing streets with their surroundings while interlacing transportation networks to meet the mobility needs of all users. The City should implement context-sensitive street design solutions to accommodate all users and ability levels by installing ADA-compliant curbs and ramps, pedestrian-friendly crosswalks, sidewalks of appropriate width and distance from roadway, and on-street bicycle facilities (where feasible and appropriate).

### Non-Motorized Transportation

The Plainwell Riverwalk begins in Sherwood Park, crosses the river on an old railroad trestle, passes behind the bandshell and follows the Kalamazoo River, passing under the Main Street bridge and over to the Millrace. The trail then follows the Millrace through Fannie Pell Park, passes under the Allegan Street bridge, and ends at Hicks Park, where it connects to the sidewalks on Bridge Street.

On-street bike facilities were added to North and South Main Street following the reconstruction of M-89 in 2013. From Starr Road to Grant Street and Bannister Street to First Avenue, the roadway contains standard, four-foot wide bike lanes. First Avenue to Wedgewood Drive contains buffered bike lanes, and Grant Street to Bannister Street contains shared lane markings (“sharrows”). As part of the redevelopment of the former paper mill, a multi-use pathway is planned for the south side of the riverbank.

### *Planning Values*

## COMPLETE STREETS

- Non-motorized connections between neighborhoods, schools, parks and shopping areas must add to the quality of life in Plainwell.
- Support a “complete streets” approach; transportation for all types of travelers of all ages and abilities.



## EXISTING LAND USE

Plainwell is almost entirely developed, with a central downtown, well-kept historic neighborhoods, and newer development in more outlying areas. Commercial activity is focused downtown and on arterial streets that lead to the downtown; employment uses are concentrated in the northeast.

### Waterfront

Although Plainwell is split by the Kalamazoo River and millrace and inter-connected by bridges, there is generally not a sense that neighborhoods are isolated or unduly divided. The Kalamazoo River and millrace currently present a prime opportunity for additional waterfront development. With the on-going redevelopment of the former paper mill, a park and trail have been constructed along the Kalamazoo riverfront east of the Millrace to capitalize on its unique location on one of the City’s natural assets.

### Public/Quasi-Public

Plainwell’s schools, including athletic and recreation facilities, are concentrated at the Plainwell School Complex in the southwest corner of the City; parks and community facilities are located throughout. While the City’s compact layout makes it easy to reach Plainwell’s parks and schools from surrounding neighborhoods and the downtown, implementing the non-motorized transportation recommendations would enhance those connections.

### Commercial

Downtown, while facing some vacancies, remains relatively stable, and buildings are continuously being rehabilitated or restored. With the former Harding’s Supermarket being converted to an Ace Hardware, the Mill is the only sizeable vacant building in the heart of downtown. With retail and consumer buying preferences ever changing, creative approaches to enhance the viability of retail and potential alternate uses will need to be routinely explored and evaluated.



The approaches into Plainwell from the north, east, and west are all characterized by commercial development. Commercial activity on North Main Street outside of the downtown is generally auto-oriented, such as service stations and auto supply/repair shops. On M-89, approaching from the east, there is a unique collection of buildings concentrated at the rail crossing. These old grain mills and railroad buildings have been redeveloped into unique shops, offices, and a microbrewery and are located nearby Plainwell's famous ice cream parlors.

The approach on M-89 from the US-131 interchange is oriented toward highway traffic with gas stations, convenience stores, and a hotel. The Ascension Borgess-Pipp Hospital is also located here, but its entrance and approaches are not well defined. Further east, Harding's has taken over the old Big Top Market and has renovated the building and relocated the historic neon Harding's Market sign once located along North Main Street to in front of its new location on M-89. However, there are several vacant lots along the corridor and the transition between this commercial area and the residential neighborhoods leading into downtown is not particularly successful.

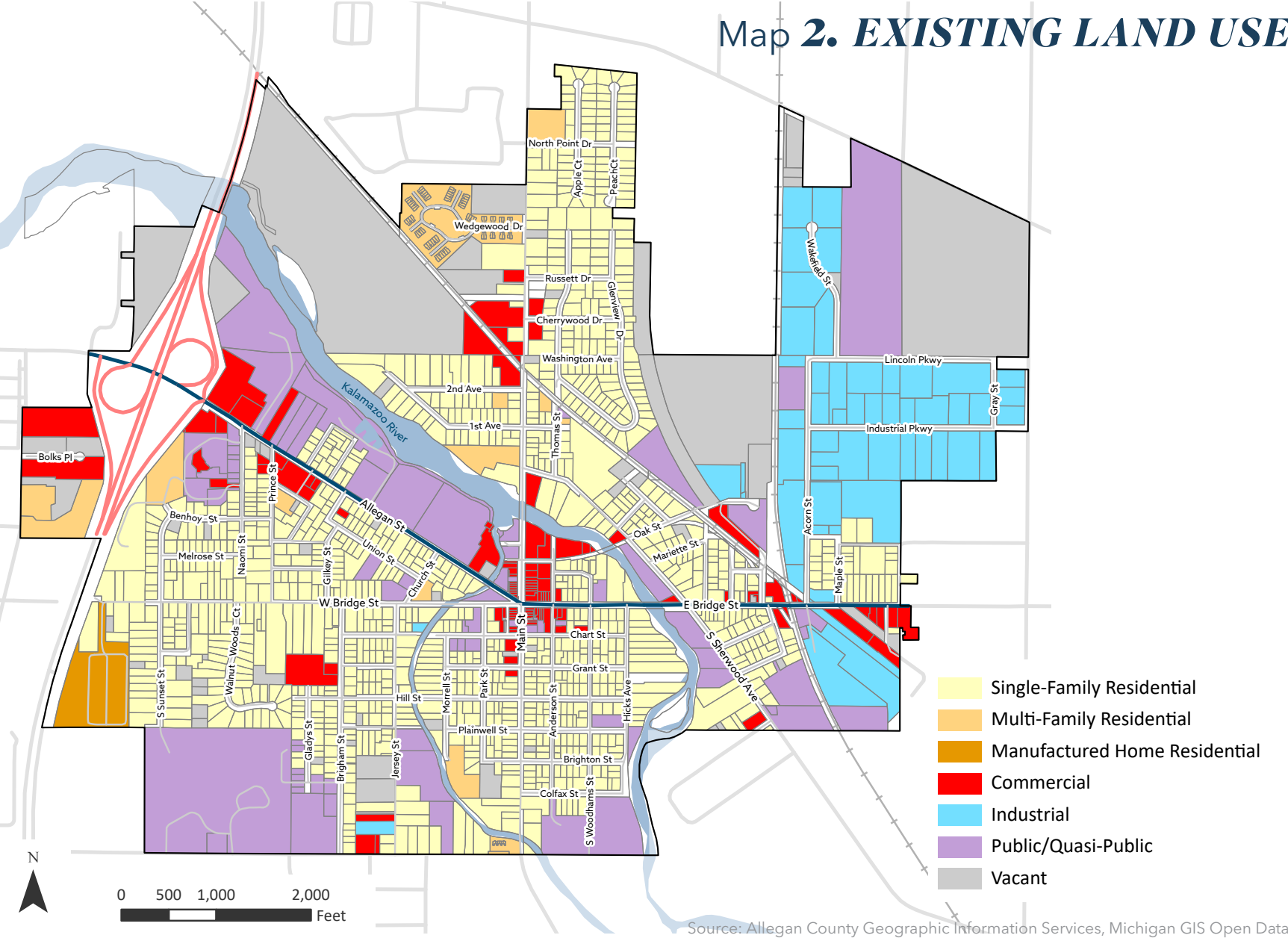
Map 2 shows existing land uses. Significant vacant parcels in the City include a large wooded parcel north of Oak Street and a large parcel along the north side of the Kalamazoo River west of North Main Street. The downtown central business district is located in the heart of the City at the intersections of Bridge, Main, and Allegan streets. US-131 forms the western boundary of the City with single-family residential neighborhoods outlying the existing commercial areas along M-89 and around downtown. The northeast portion of the City contains a mix of industrial and more intensive commercial uses contained within the City's industrial park. Additional residential development exists north of the river primarily on larger lots and contains some of the City's newer residential development. City-owned lands comprise a large portion of existing land use and includes parks, trails, public parking lots, and redevelopment sites such as the former paper mill.

*Planning Values*

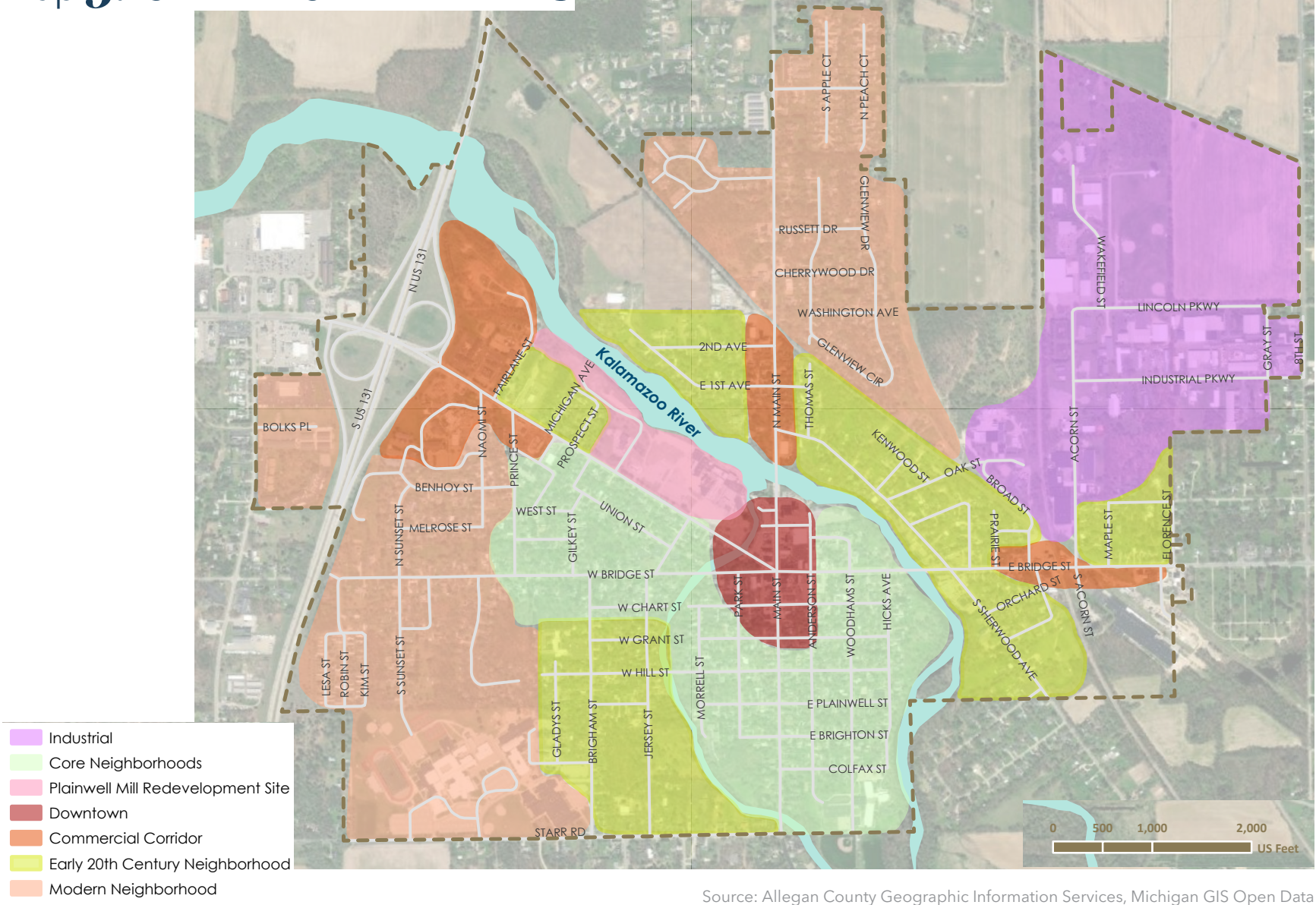
EXISTING LAND USE

- Plainwell's pattern of development must support strong neighborhoods and viable shopping and employment areas.
- The development of vacant land must respect the natural environment and setting and result in enhancing the City as a whole.
- Community gateways should celebrate Plainwell as a unique place and guide travelers to downtown and other attractions.
- Establish sensitive and compatible transitions from commercial to residential uses.
- Capitalize on waterfront development opportunities while continuing to protect natural resources.

Map 2. *EXISTING LAND USE*



Map 3. *CHARACTER AREAS*



LAND USE AND CHARACTER

Residential Character

Plainwell can be classified by three different residential neighborhood types. Map 3 identifies where certain types of neighborhoods, each with a particular character, are located. Residential neighborhoods are described as follows:

- **Core Neighborhoods**  
Core Neighborhoods are those that were developed as part of the original settlement of the City mostly prior to 1900. This area includes the original street grid on the island and the Bridge Street Historic District. The average density in Core Neighborhoods is 3 to 4 units per acre.  
Homes are characterized by popular architectural and vernacular styles of the Victorian period, such as Gothic Revival, Italianate and Queen Anne. Even many of the more modest homes contain certain aspects of these style elements.
- **Early 20th Century Neighborhoods**  
These areas developed in the first half of the 1900s. The residential areas on the north side of the river and south of the Otsego railroad spur, the neighborhood just west of the millrace, and the small neighborhood north of East Bridge Street and west of the railroad tracks, all fall into this category.  
In this area, streets are arranged in a grid pattern and small front porches, less ornamentation and (usually) detached garages, characterize homes. Styles include Cape Cod and Prairie. Lot sizes are slightly larger and the average density is approximately 2.5 to 3 units per acre.

- **Modern Neighborhoods**  
Modern Neighborhoods are areas that developed after World War II, including the new subdivisions east of North Main Street and north of the river, and the neighborhoods in the western part of the City, north of the Starr School Campus. This area also includes the City's only manufactured housing park.  
These neighborhoods are arranged on curvilinear streets, often terminating in a cul-de-sac. The homes generally do not have front porches, as outdoor living is more focused on private back yards. Garages are attached to the home and are often a dominant part of the front façade. Some newer homes have stylistic architectural elements, but most are fairly homogeneous tract homes that have been individualized by their owners. Similar to the Early 20th Century Neighborhoods, the average density is 2.5 to 3 units per acre.

*Planning Values*

EXISTING LAND USE

- The fact that residents take pride in their neighborhoods should be celebrated and supported.
- Plainwell's neighborhoods must continue to be strong, distinct from one another, and a core unit of social life.
- Each neighborhood type has a distinct character that should be preserved and enhanced.
- Maintenance of homes and neighborhoods is important and both homeowners and rental property owners should be held to a high standard.



**Non-Residential Character**

There are three distinct non-residential character areas:

- Downtown

Plainwell's downtown falls within a National Register Historic District and is characterized by classic one-, two- and three-story commercial buildings. Some building owners have restored façades to their original appearance. Others, however, suffer from well-intentioned but architecturally inappropriate improvements that have occurred over time and have dramatically affected the overall appearance and character of downtown. Downtown is a mix of offices, retail stores, and restaurants and, for the most part, the transition from downtown to surrounding neighborhoods is orderly. The north end, however, is affected by auto-oriented uses that are not consistent with the character of downtown and turn their back to the Kalamazoo River.

- Commercial Corridors

Major commercial corridors are located on Allegan Street and North Main Street, as well as the commercial and industrial uses on East Bridge Street. While these areas typically contain auto-oriented uses, the old grain mill and freight house on East Bridge Street, as well as the regionally-known ice cream dairy, may encourage a more unique and pedestrian-friendly environment.

- Industrial Park

The industrial uses and the Plainwell Industrial Park are located in the northeast corner of the City. Most of the sites in the park have been developed with fairly stable businesses and vacancies are infrequent.

*Planning Values*

EXISTING LAND USE

- Downtown should remain the City's business center and its historic and cultural core.
- Corridors containing businesses that are geared to the traveling public should project a positive impression of Plainwell and encourage visitors to explore the rest of the community.
- Capitalize on and promote unique regional draws, such as the ice cream dairies and popular, well-known restaurants that should be maintained and promoted.
- Redevelopment of the paper mill is a community priority.

HOME TYPES WITHIN RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER AREAS:



Core Neighborhoods



Early 20th Century Neighborhoods



Modern Neighborhoods

NON-RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER AREAS:



Downtown



East Bridge Street



Allegan Street

PEOPLE

Population Trends

Plainwell’s reported population from the 2020 US Census was 3,788. The population of the City has decreased marginally by 0.4% over the past decade. Plainwell’s population peaked to 4,057 residents in 1990 but it has been on a slow decline over the last two decades. As shown in the table below, the population for the City of Plainwell and Gun Plain Township are projected to increase based on the Constant Proportion Method and Allegan County population trends calculated by the State of Michigan¹.

Table 1: Comparative Population Projections

	2020	2025	2030
Allegan County	119,788	125,866	132,040
City of Plainwell	3,788	3,980	4,175
Gun Plain Township	6,153	6,465	6,782

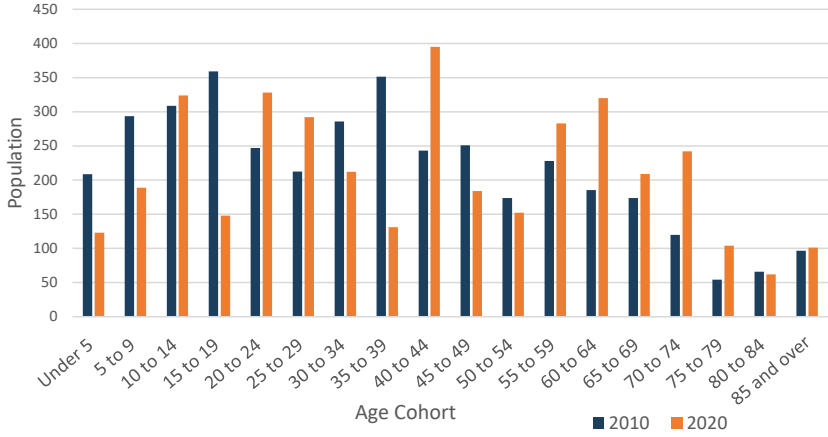
	2035	2040	2045
Allegan County	137,392	142,005	145,603
City of Plainwell	4,345	4,491	4,604
Gun Plain Township	7,057	7,294	7,479

Age

Chart 1 shows how the population, by age group, has changed since 2010. Like many communities, Plainwell is aging as the baby boomer generation enters retirement as seen by the age cohorts of 70 to 74 increasing from 2010 to 2020. In addition, there has also been a significant increase in residents in age bracket 75 to 79. This has implications for the kinds of housing that may be desired by residents wishing to remain in the community for their entire cycle of life, community services, transportation, retailing, recreation and

overall development patterns. There has also been a significant decline in the younger population. Specifically, a decline of more than 100% can be seen in the 15 to 19 and 35 to 39 age cohorts over the past decade. This would indicate the importance of job opportunities (local and regional), and affordable housing for families that find Plainwell’s school system particularly attractive.

Chart 1: Population by Age (2010 and 2020)



Source: 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

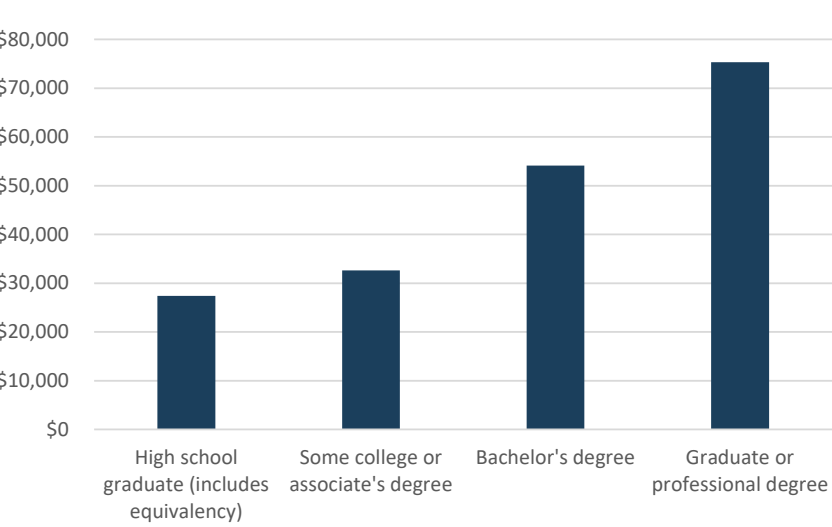
Educational Attainment & Income

Plainwell is a well-educated community; nearly 94.8% of the population have graduated from high school and another 18.6% have a bachelor’s degree or higher, according to the 2020 ACS 5-year estimates. 88.2% of children over 3 years or older are enrolled in public schools and an estimate of 11.8% are enrolled in private schools. As shown in the Chart 2, there is an established correlation between education and income levels; the greater the level of educational attainment, the higher the income. However, surrounding communities (Gun Plain Charter Township, Alamo Township and Cooper Township) all have a higher percentage of graduates and their income levels outpace those in Plainwell.

Plainwell’s schools enjoy a reputation for educational quality, which combined with other factors helps attract families with children to the community. Family households with children below age 18 make up 33.4% of those households in Plainwell. This is high than for the entire state (25.8%) and consequently Plainwell is viewed as a quality place to raise a family.

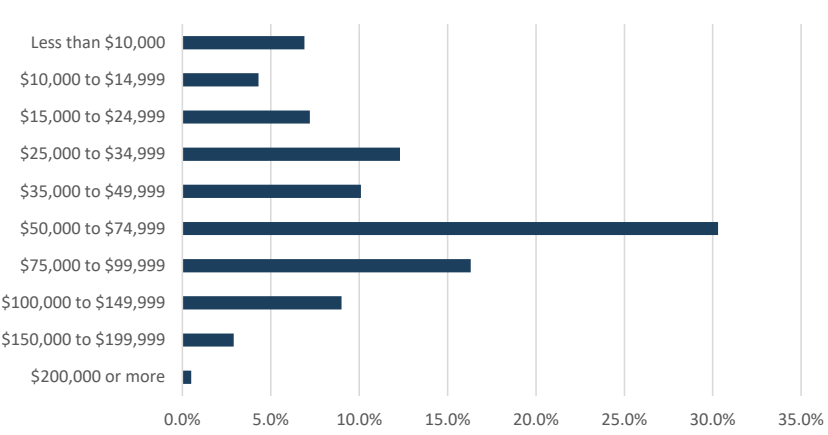
According to the 2020 ACS 5-year estimates, Plainwell’s median household income was \$58,776 that increased almost 30% since 2010 and is similar to that of the state average (\$59,234). As shown in Chart 3, 30.3% of the households falls under the \$50,000 to \$74,999 income category and about 18.4% of the households make less than \$25,000 annually. Approximately, 10.1% of city’s population is below the poverty level that is 3.6% less than the state average.

Chart 2: Income by Education Level 2020



Source: 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Chart 3: Household Income 2020



Source: 2020 American Community

*Planning Values*

PEOPLE

- Plainwell is a “hometown” where residents hope to grow up, raise families, and retire.
- Plainwell is a well-educated, stable and family-oriented community.



THE ECONOMY

Although detailed economic assessments of the broader community and downtown were not undertaken, certain indicators can help provide direction as to what opportunities may be. These, however, must be viewed within the context of critical trends that impact commercial and residential activity:

Commercial

- Commercial development, retail in particular, is going through a major transition and will continue to do so at a rapid pace in the foreseeable future. Continued supply chain and labor market issues will likely continue to impact retailers and other service industries for some time.
- Technology has opened up new ways of marketing and making purchases, particularly in communities composed of families with school age children; one of Plainwell’s characteristics. Over the past few years, internet shopping has continued to see double digit growth, while traditional “bricks and mortar” shopping, where a patron physically goes to the store, has seen either stable sales and revenue volumes, or declines. Internet purchases can now be made from operations situated anywhere in the world, including Plainwell.
- Inflation, due to demand related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other market forces, have resulted in a reduction in disposable income and increased interest rates. Increases in things like energy and utility costs, food items, insurance, and vehicle operations, will funnel more and more family income dollars toward basic necessities. Unless these increases are offset by equivalent rises in household incomes families will have less money available for discretionary purchases.
- Current volatility in the stock market may continue to cause stress to investment and retirement accounts.

- Some new “brick and mortar” opportunities are emerging. Operations like Apple, that formerly sold their products via third parties, the internet or catalogues, are now moving to sell via their own stores. Major “big boxes” (Wal-Mart, Target, Walgreens and others) are reaching for new markets and are locating in smaller communities using vastly reduced store plans. Some of these are seeking space in Michigan and more will in the future.

Housing

- Plainwell is a City of neighborhoods that include a broad range of residences, from historic mansions, to 1950s ranch homes, to modern tract houses. Generally, residential and commercial/ industrial neighborhoods have been well integrated and have coexisted peacefully.
- There are a total of 1,659 housing units in the City of Plainwell according to the 2020 Decennial Census. The City has a high occupancy rate of 96.1% and a vacancy rate of 3.9% which is comparatively lower than State and County figures (each just around 12%). According to the 2020 ACS 5-year estimates, renter-occupied housing units make up about 30% percent of all occupied housing units, which is similar to the statewide percentage (29%), yet higher than Allegan County (17%).
- Typically, mortgage underwriters and housing specialists consider housing affordable if rent payments or principal and interest payments fall below 25% to 28% of gross income. In 2020, the median household income for the City of Plainwell was \$58,776. Using the 25% standard, \$14,694 (avg.) would be needed annually for housing costs in an affordable market. The ACS estimates reported that the median mortgage amount in the city is \$1,088 (\$13,056 annually) and the median rent is \$702 for a two-bedroom apartment (\$8,424 annually). This indicates that the housing market is comparatively affordable in the City of Plainwell.



- Other concerns were over the lack of quality starter housing (especially important for younger adults), the lack of quality higher density residential (that may be especially appealing to that age group), and housing choices for an aging population that wishes to remain in Plainwell. Very little new housing has been developed in the city in the last two decades (Table 3).

Table 2: Type of Housing

Type	Percent
1-unit detached	76.0%
1-unit attached	3.4%
2 units	3.6%
3 to 4 units	6.7%
5 to 9 units	5.8%
10 or more units	3.7%
Mobile home or other housing	0.8%

Source: 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Table 3: Age of Housing

Built	Percent
1939 or earlier	33.6%
1940 to 1959	21.2%
1960 to 1979	27.8%
1980 to 1999	13.7%
2000 to 2009	3.2%
2010 to 2013	0.0%
2014 or later	0.6%

Source: 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Employment

According to 2020 ACS 5-year estimates, Plainwell’s leading employment sectors with 27.2% of the City’s population work in educational services, health care, and social assistance and about 24.5% work in manufacturing and saw a 11% and 1 % increase respectively over the past decade (Table 4). As shown in the chart 4, the largest amount of growth can be seen in the other services, except public services and transportation and warehousing, and utilities sectors. A decline of 100% can be seen in the information sector and agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining sectors. It should be noted that these are estimates, and ACS data tends to have larger margins of error for breakdown data in smaller communities. For comparison to the ACS data, Table 5 includes a list of the top employers in Plainwell by the number of employees.

Chart 4: Change in % by Occupation 2010-2020

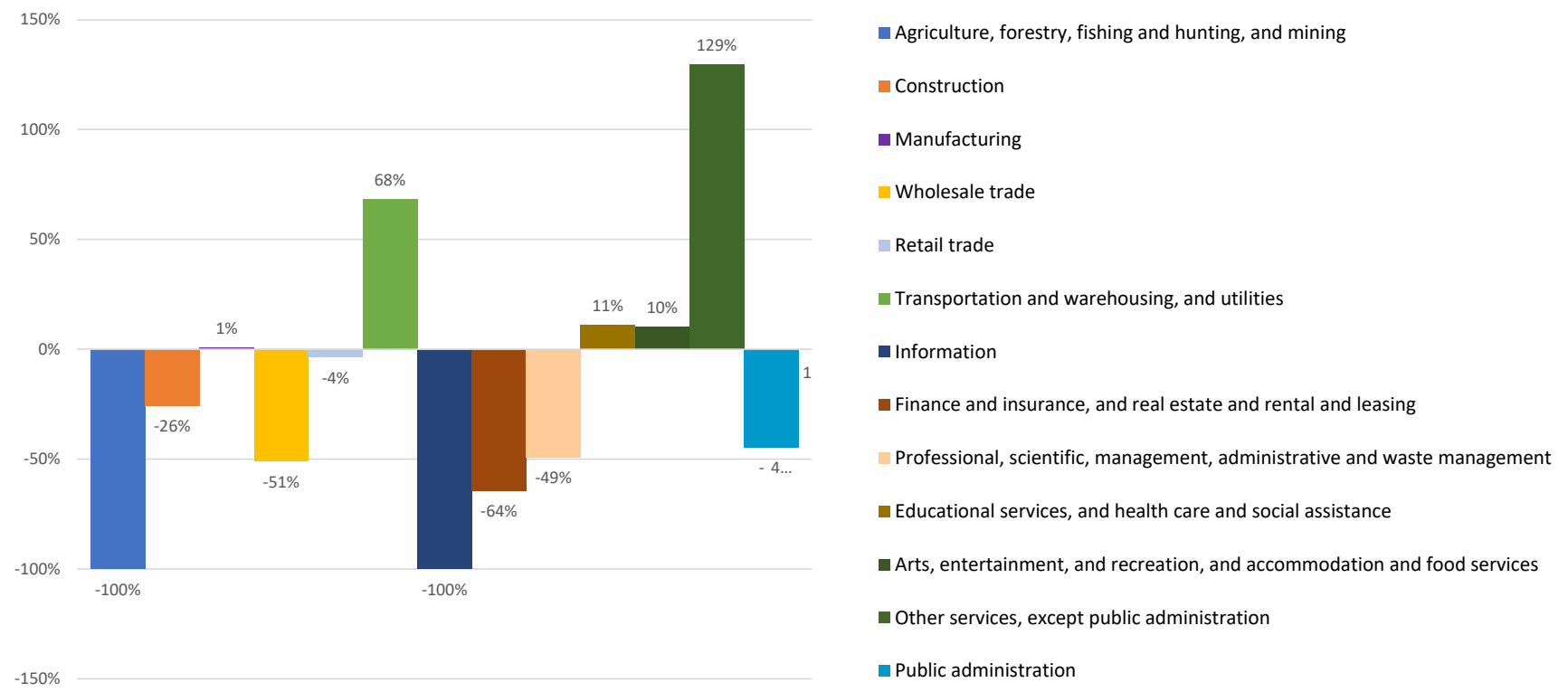


Table 4: Leading Employment Sectors

Sector	Percent
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	27.2%
Manufacturing	24.5%
Retail trade	14.3%
Other services, except public administration	9.3%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	9.0%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	3.8%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	3.4%
Construction	3.1%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	2.1%
Public administration	1.8%
Wholesale trade	1.4%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	0.0%
Information	0.0%

Table 5: Top Employers in Plainwell

Company	Product	Employees
Plainwell Public Schools	Education	385
Ascension Borgess-Pipp Hospital	Medical	151
Life Care Center	Nursing Home	114
HyTech Spring & Machine	Manufacturing	125
Visiting Angels	Health Care	105
TMD Machining	Manufacturing	104
Modernistic	Cleaning	100
Rizzo Packaging	Manufacturing	90
Preferred Plastics	Manufacturing	60
Drug & Laboratory Disposal	Waste Disposal	52
GHD	Engineering	35
Midway Chevrolet	Auto Sales	33
Motan, Inc	Manufacturing	25
City of Plainwell	Government	28
Harding’s Market	Retail Grocery	26
Tustin’s Asphalt	Asphalt Service	23
West Michigan Industries	Manufacturing	20
Nobis	Animal Health	19
Comfort Inn	Hospitality	17





While the business/industrial park has been reasonably stable and successful, business activity nevertheless will continue to be in transition. Some operations may not continue into the future while others will grow and prosper. To create sustainable economic development a recruitment strategy for new businesses should focus on the following:

- The area's natural or economic resources.
- Synergy with existing production and inputs, in terms of either equipment or materials.
- Existing operators in the county and nearby areas who are now involved with R&D or other branches of the same parent company that are involved with R&D.
- Research or the development of a product that would not negatively impact the environment.
- R&D activity related to emerging sectors or markets throughout the country and/or world.
- Either or both a reasonable likelihood of interest in funding or current funding.

Based on these guidelines, the Ascension Borgess-Pipp Hospital represents a potential catalyst, as well as a linkage to general Kalamazoo regional activity, including pharmaceutical R&D. In addition, the community's abundant water resources, that help define its character, are also critical to potential economic activity, particularly R&D. Most research today revolves around natural resources that are being looked at for a host of purposes. These include climate change, human and animal bio-medical opportunities, relationships between birds and animals and human cognitive skills, invasive species, and alternative energy. Since the Plainwell Mill site consumes quite a bit of the waterfront, its redevelopment for a mix of uses and activities in existing or new structures could include this type of research and be linked to major national and international corporate interests in the region.

#### Opportunities

Plainwell may be in a position to take advantage of certain trends. Beyond boundary adjustments there is not much opportunity for substantial new development within City limits, yet there is opportunity, particularly in downtown, for reinvestment and appropriate character redevelopment. It is noted that:

- With households at both ends of the spectrum (those having children, as well as a growing number of seniors) retail and related activities trend toward educational and recreational opportunities that may be appropriate niche markets for downtown Plainwell. This could also include more national downtown retail operations with new model plans that are smaller than conventional suburban stores.
- Affordable food service establishments that are family and senior oriented should be viable in the downtown at present and in the future.
- There are likely to be substantially changing and growing needs for certain types of commercial activities even based on current population demographics. Other area studies indicate that there are likely gaps in the vicinity for the certain types of office and related services. These could be located either in the downtown or elsewhere, but would benefit varied age groups and downtown vitality if located there.
- The success of retail and related service activities, whether located in the downtown, or in Plainwell's other commercial areas, is strongly influenced by dollars that flow from residents in surrounding communities and visitors. In all probability, this has always been the case. Given Plainwell's location in the southeastern corner of Allegan County, it is most likely these additional sales have come and will continue to come from neighboring communities that include parts of Allegan, Barry and Kalamazoo Counties. Preserving a strong sense of place that attracts visitors, particularly downtown, will help to keep retail and service related maintain business.

### *Planning Values*

#### THE ECONOMY

- A strong, attractive, and vital downtown is essential to maintain Plainwell's small town atmosphere.
- Job opportunities are important for long term community health.
- Good schools and strong neighborhoods are important ingredients to maintain and attract residents and businesses.
- Redevelopment of the Plainwell Mill is a critical part of Plainwell's renaissance.
- Transportation enhancements must relieve congestion yet be responsive to community character.
- Maintaining Plainwell as a community with deep roots, quality neighborhoods, good schools and parks, a vital downtown and attractive community entrances is economic development.



COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Parks and Trails

The City of Plainwell has seven public parks ranging in size from a small roadside pull-offs of less than an acre to over 30 acres. Overall, park space encompasses 85 acres of land and 7.3% of the City’s land use.



Hicks Park is the oldest park in the City and contains several large, mature deciduous trees as well as the historic Soule Fountain. Hicks Park connects to Fannie Pell Park by way of a Riverwalk trail, which passes underneath M-89. Fannie Pell Park is located adjacent to the former mill site at the confluence of the Millrace and Kalamazoo River.

The Riverwalk continues to Sherwood Park located on the eastern bank of the Kalamazoo River. The adjacent land uses are very compatible with this community park. These land uses include an ice cream shop to the north, the public library to the south of Bridge Street and a neighborhood to the east. The park seems to be a favorite of many City residents due to its advantageous location.

Thurl Cook Park and Darrow Park are two additional community facilities providing a scenic view and access to the river. Thurl Cook has a dog park and ample open space. Kenyon Park is the largest of the City’s parks (over 30 acres) located near the City’s industrial park. The park contains several amenities such as baseball, softball, and soccer fields.



While not owned by the City, a long, linear Consumers Energy right-of-way runs through the City adjacent to Thurl Cook Park. The right-of-way has been identified as a potential route for a multi-use, non-motorized trail. This Interurban Trail would connect the cities of Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo. A planning effort helped to determine a most viable trail route and engineering specifications. Implementation of this planning effort is ongoing.

Water

Plainwell’s water system currently serves over 1,500 residential, commercial, and industrial customers located within the City’s corporate boundaries as well as adjacent neighborhoods located in Gun Plain Township adjacent to the border with the City. The City has a standing agreement with Gun Plain Charter Township to service those homes along the border indefinitely. The system consists of a 750,000-gallon storage tower, three wells, and approximately 25 miles of water mains.

Sewer

The City’s sanitary sewer system has over 15 miles of sewer lines and services five municipalities under a ‘Wastewater Treatment Service Agreement’: Gun Plain Township, Prairieville Township (which has a 425 agreement with Gun Plain Twp.), Martin Township, the Village of Martin (which has a 425 agreement with Martin Township), and Otsego Township. In Gun Plain Township, the City provides service to several businesses including Meijer near the M-89/US-131 interchange, various residential developments adjacent to the City’s boundary, and the golf course residential development at Lake Doster. Representatives from the six communities meet quarterly in a joint sewer meeting. The agreement (while not an authority), guarantees capacity to the listed communities and outlines surcharges to users based on volume.

In 2013, the City was awarded a \$1 million grant from the State of Michigan’s revolving loan fund that went toward a total \$4 million upgrade to the sanitary sewer system. The system now operates using moving bed biofilm reactor (MBBR) technology. MBBR processes improve reliability, simplify operation, and require less space than traditional wastewater treatment systems.



CONCLUSION

Plainwell is a strong community with many positive assets and a clear home town atmosphere. Redevelopment of the mill site will be yet another reason to attract people to visit and live in the City. Plans for the future of the community must preserve these positive elements and draw upon them where change is needed. The planning values that are expressed in this plan, both explicit and implicit, provide a strong foundation for future land use decisions.



# 3.

## PUBLIC INPUT & VISIONING

### *Public Input & Visioning*

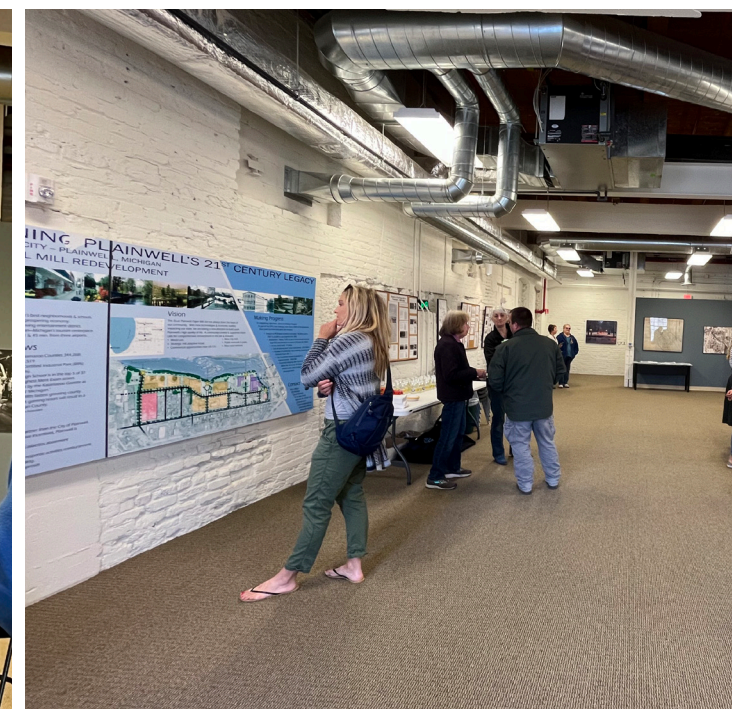
Based on stakeholder interviews, public surveys and public workshop events, key community issues and opportunities were identified and then translated into planning values. These values, which are described in Chapter Two, are focused on a series of topics that were discussed with the broader public during a community forum.

In turn, specific policies and actions were developed or affirmed from public input that reflect these values and help provide structure for the Master Plan. These policies and actions can also guide the community when making decisions about Plainwell's future. Community policies and actions are dynamic and subject to change; therefore, regular review by the Planning Commission ensures that they remain current and valid, reflecting existing trends and circumstances.

### PAST AND PRESENT PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A key master plan process goal is to engage the public; permitting as many voices as possible to be heard. A series of techniques have been employed during updates to the Plan so this could be realized including community stakeholder interviews, a community survey, and a community forum or open house.

In 2009, community stakeholders were interviewed using a consistent set of questions about Plainwell, which triggered responses about community concerns, opportunities for change and individual visions for Plainwell's future. The responses were then used to help craft questions for a community survey that was available both electronically and by mail. A public forum followed the survey to allow residents the opportunity to provide additional input. The forum was educational and informative with key findings, trends and land use concepts described for specific areas. These included community gateways, neighborhoods, trails and open space, downtown, and employment areas.





## 2015 PUBLIC SURVEY

In late 2015, the public involvement process included a public survey to glean attitudes and insights from residents in the community. The survey used for this Master Plan update was largely developed from the previous 2009 public input survey with a few alterations to reflect changing conditions in the City over time. The survey was made available online and via submitted hardcopies. The City advertised the survey on its website and Facebook page to encourage a wide audience to participate. Complete results of the two surveys may be found in previous versions of the Plan. Plainwell residents largely felt that Plainwell affords a high quality of life and is a great place to raise a family. Residents expressed they were very satisfied with City services, primarily public safety, snow control, leaf/limb removal, the parks and recreation system, and the library system; residents stated they were least satisfied with road maintenance. The survey showed Plainwell residents are generally satisfied with the US-131/M-89 interchange; however, its appearance, landscaping and character could be improved beyond its existing state. Downtown Plainwell remains a point of pride for the City as a strong majority of residents are satisfied with the downtown's appearance, quality and variety of businesses, availability of parking, and community event space. If new businesses were to come into downtown, residents suggested they wish to see more specialty businesses such as furniture or clothing stores, coffee shops, or health and fitness facilities.

Top priorities for the future according to Plainwell residents were to expand the Riverwalk, develop a location for a Farmers' Market, extend bike and non-motorized facilities, expand housing opportunities for senior citizens and elderly populations and redevelop the former paper mill site. Plainwell residents still feel a rental inspection ordinance should be enacted and have observed positive changes since the improvement of code enforcement throughout the City. Results of the survey input were made available on the City's website.

## 2016 PUBLIC WORKSHOP

A publicly advertised and well-attended workshop followed the dissemination of the public survey in 2015. The workshop was organized around four major topic areas: policies, community values, transportation, and land use and development. Each of these topic areas included an interactive station which included maps with various land use exercises, comment card prompts, and informal conversations between public officials and community members. While more quantitative data was received from the community survey, the workshop was used primarily to solicit qualitative data during this process and afforded residents the opportunity to weigh in and voice their opinions and recommendations. Approximately 27 community members participated in the workshop and results were made available to the public via the City's website. Below is a summary of the feedback received from the workshop:

- Most residents believe Plainwell affords a high quality of life and is a great place to raise children.
- Most important policies from the previous master plan include: supporting downtown and existing commercial areas, expanding the riverwalks, and preserving and enhancing a strong and diversified retail base.
- Things which make Plainwell great: downtown; public safety; riverwalks, trails, and parks; the redeveloped mill; and job opportunities in the industrial park.
- Some concerns and opportunities for the City: improving and eliminating gaps in the sidewalk network, improving regional trail connections, lack of bike lanes, and traffic and congestion at the M-89/US 131 interchange.

Feedback from the public workshop and the tabulated survey results were used to help craft specific policies and actions.

## 2022 OPEN HOUSE

A public open house for both the master plan and recreation plan updates was held in April of 2022 at the Plainwell City Hall to solicit feedback from the community through discussion and engagement activities. Attendees were given the opportunity to engage in any of the activities and discuss items of personal importance with city officials and planning consultants. The master plan portion of the open house was organized around five stations, including: 1) Community Values, 2) Future Land Use, 3) Mobility, 4) General comments and discussion, and 5) Growth Opportunity. Generally, the public that attended reaffirmed much of the previous input and provided feedback that helped the Planning Commission in reviewing the existing goals and policies of the Plan. Below is a summary of feedback received at the open house:

- Parks, shops, restaurants, and the riverwalk were identified as defining features of Plainwell. Encouraging the use of these features and creating more green spaces like parks, trails, etc. with proper amenities can be of great importance to residents and should be considered throughout the Master Plan update.
- Participants displayed a strong concern regarding the conditions of roads and sidewalks in and around the City.
- In the land-use activity, participants expressed an overall interest in seeing apartment/senior housing and attached housing (duplexes and townhomes) more than single-family homes.

A complete engagement report can be found in the Appendix.





# 4.

## PLAINWELL TOMORROW

### ***Plainwell Tomorrow***

Plainwell's future will in large part depend on its ability to build on the character of its downtown and unique and charming neighborhoods, its setting as the Island City, and its attractive waterfront. To be successful, it will be important for Plainwell to maximize its assets and distinguish itself from many other communities in the Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids metropolitan region.

#### FUTURE LAND USE AND CHARACTER

Map 4 shows how land uses in Plainwell should develop and evolve and highlights specific elements and subareas that are detailed in this chapter. It is important to note that while density will continue to play a role in land use designations the character of uses and their ability to fit the context of their surroundings will be almost equally, if not more important. Therefore, the future land use designations reflect a nexus between various character areas of the City and planned land use. Any new development and redevelopment should refer to both the desired uses in each district as well as the character of the area into which it is going.

These character areas are also the foundation for future zoning and development regulations that could be implemented for specific areas in Plainwell. These could include older residential neighborhoods, mixed use areas, and the downtown. Development regulations, such as form-based codes, that are based on the character or form of a particular neighborhood can direct and control future land uses so they are much more responsive, the results more predictable, and the fit with the context actually works.

#### **Residential**

There are three categories of residential land uses:

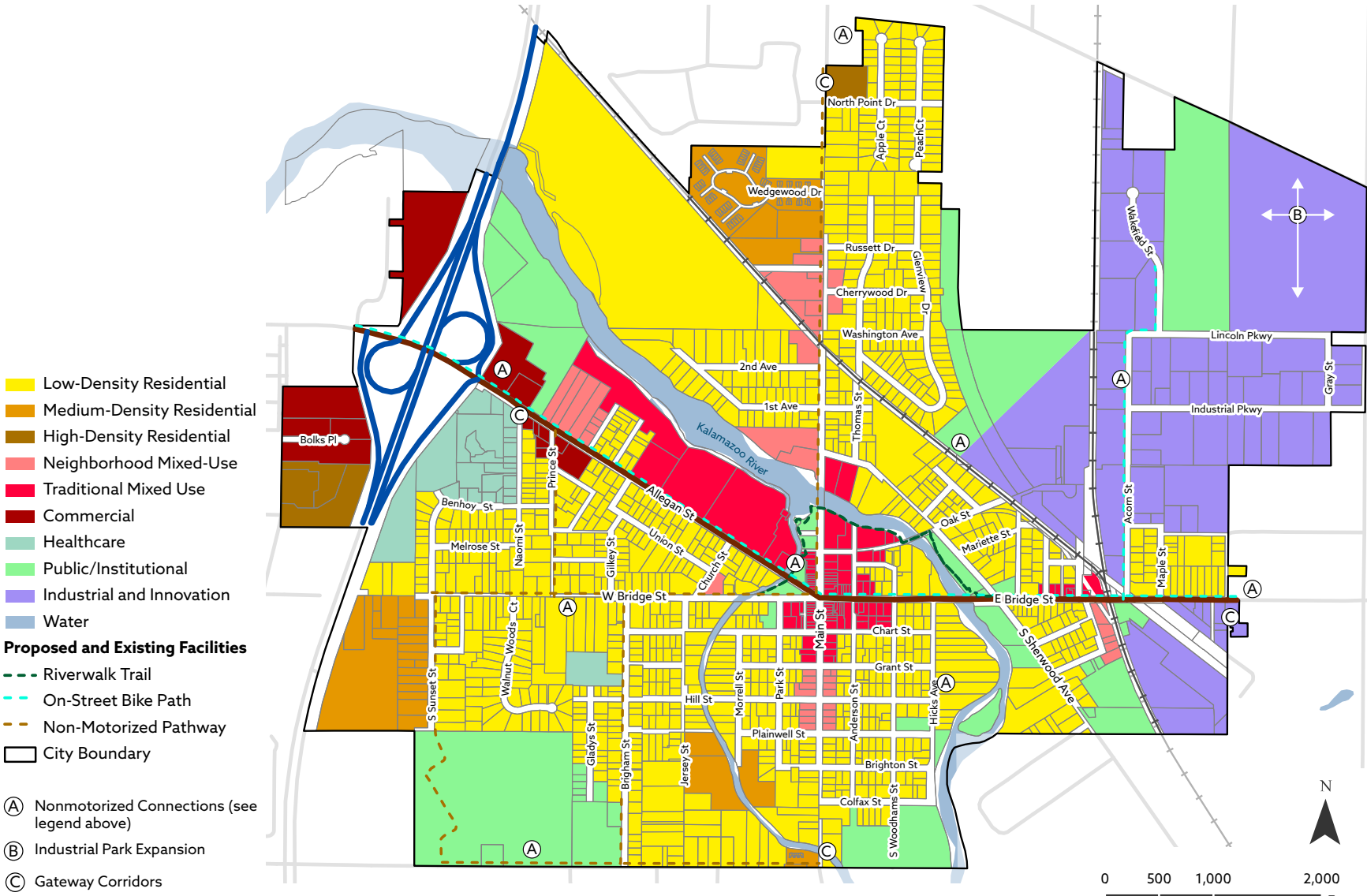
- Low-Density Residential, with single-family homes on moderately sized lots;
- Medium-Density Residential, that may include a mix of single-family, two-family and limited scale multiple-family units on smaller lots; and
- High Density Residential, characterized by multiple-family residential uses (apartments, senior facilities, etc.) on modestly sized lots.

#### **Low-Density Residential**

Low-Density Residential areas primarily reflect existing residential neighborhood patterns with the exception of a large parcel north of Second Avenue between the Kalamazoo River and the Norfolk-Southern railway corridor. While currently undeveloped, the property provides future opportunities for a low-density, traditionally designed neighborhood with small blocks defined by interconnected streets and sidewalks, garages that do not dominate the streetscape and a focus on creating a quality environment that encourages walking and includes small parks and linked open spaces. Densities in this category range from 2.5 to 4 units per acre and new development should consider the densities of neighboring properties and the average density of the character area in which the development is located, which could be higher or lower depending on the neighborhood.



Map 4. FUTURE LAND USE



Source: Allegan County Geographic Information Services, Michigan GIS Open Data

Medium-Density Residential

Medium-Density Residential is planned in two locations; 1) the Pinecrest Mobile Village near Pinecrest Drive and neighboring properties, and 2) the Wedgewood Condominium development on the west side of North Main Street and adjacent properties. Medium-Density Residential development provides another housing option for seniors and young families and more affordable housing for middle-income families. The Future Land Use map identifies expansion areas for this use beyond existing Medium-Density Residential areas.

Future development, at densities of 4 to 6 units per acre, should be appropriate to the style and existing development patterns within each respective Residential Character Area. Uses include small lot single-family development, single-family detached and attached homes, and two family dwellings. Multiple-family developments should incorporate innovative site planning techniques such as clustering, interconnected open space, and pedestrian linkages. Development design and pattern should closely resemble that of Plainwell's single-family neighborhoods. Consistent front setbacks, rear or side yard garages, building orientation to the street, and a grid street pattern are elements that should be reflected in future development. Development that is consistent and aligns with the previously described Character Areas will help maintain the City's sense of community, quality of life, and strong neighborhoods.



Medium-Density Residential examples

High-Density Residential

Areas west of US-131, near 12th Street, are planned for High-Density Residential and currently contain several multiple-family apartment buildings. The proximity of this area to shopping, employment, and transportation is an important consideration and, therefore, suggests future development at a density of 6 to 12 units per acre.

Uses could include multiple-family apartments or condominiums, two-family attached housing, or townhouses. Similar to Medium-Density Residential, the pattern of High-Density Residential development and design should align with the Character Areas described previously and compliment Plainwell's single-family neighborhoods in regards to site design and architectural character.

Commercial and Mixed Use

Development within each of the following categories should reflect not only the planned land use in each category but the character of the area (described previously) in which the development is located.



Neighborhood Mixed-Use example

Neighborhood Mixed-Use

Neighborhood Mixed-Use is planned for four areas; 1) North Main Street between Second Avenue and Russet Drive, 2) along the North and South Main Street and East and West Bridge Street corridors adjacent to downtown, 3) along M-89 between Fairlane and Michigan Avenue, and 4) between Roberts Street and the railroad tracks south of M-89.

Neighborhood Mixed-Use accommodates a range of compatible residential and business uses in support of strong pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods. Examples of appropriate non-residential uses include personal services, small convenience or grocery stores, small take-out restaurants or diners, and small-scale offices with less than five



employees. To preserve the integrity of Plainwell’s character the focus should be on reusing and redeveloping existing structures whenever possible. Any new development should be compatible with the surrounding character and scale, and be in harmony and integrate with surrounding properties. The Neighborhood Mixed-Use designation differs from other mixed-use areas in that the intent is to provide small-scale commercial uses that support healthy neighborhoods. Neighborhood Mixed-Use areas are small pockets within existing residential areas and the character and feel of any commercial or retail development should complement these neighborhoods. This designation allows a comprehensive approach to development and encourages mixed land uses, shared vehicular access and parking, and pedestrian amenities such as enhanced streetscapes and other public spaces. Architecture should reflect traditional forms and character focus on making public spaces memorable, and should orient to the street, much like in the downtown.

**Traditional Mixed-Use**

Downtown Plainwell and the former Plainwell Paper Mill site are included in the Traditional Mixed-Use area. Because Downtown, including Main and Bridge Streets and the surrounding business area, are so different from other commercial districts in the City they require special consideration. Subarea Plans for both the Mill Site and Downtown are discussed later.

Traditional Mixed-Use is also planned for a small area north of M-89 between Prairie Street and the railroad tracks on the east side of the Plainwell. Over time, this area has developed as a small niche mixed-use area including retail, residential, and office uses. Mixed-use is encouraged given the area’s unique character, its location on a major thoroughfare, and the special land uses. However, it is planned for smaller-scale commercial establishments that would not compete with, but compliment downtown Plainwell.

While Neighborhood Mixed-Use (described previously) is focused on integrating small-scale commercial establishments with existing high quality residential neighborhoods, Traditional Mixed-Use areas are focused on mixing residential uses in traditionally commercially-oriented areas. Examples of residential uses include loft style apartments or condominiums above downtown businesses and townhouses. Residential development should integrate with the more urban development pattern found in downtown Plainwell. A wide range of commercial uses are planned for areas designated as Traditional Mixed-Use. Examples of uses include retail, restaurants, personal and professional services, offices, and government and civic uses, among others. Emphasis should be on active ground floor uses that create an lively and interactive street environment, especially Downtown.

**Commercial**

The businesses currently located on both sides of the M-89/US-131 interchange are designed to serve highway travelers. They include restaurants, a hotel, gas stations, car dealerships, and convenience stores along with other highway-oriented commercial establishments. Unfortunately, the resulting image is the opposite of what Plainwell is and can be in the future.

Because downtown should remain as the community’s business, commercial, and retail heart, areas planned for future commercial or continued highway-oriented commercial should be limited in scope. Any potential expansion should be carefully analyzed based on a more than adequate area-wide supply of commercial land and weighed against potential economic impacts.

Because the interchange area is such an important “gateway” and community entrance, the visitor’s realm should be a welcoming place that clearly expresses Plainwell’s positive values and pulls people into the community. Unfortunately, its current character fails to do that.

Therefore, Plainwell should adopt site and building design standards as part of the zoning ordinance to help ensure future development and redevelopment in this quadrant reflects a positive community image. Residents and visitors should feel that they have entered a special place, rather than a typical highway interchange. By embellishing the gateway with high quality design features, such as enhanced landscaping, public art, a well-designed highway bridge that fits its context, and “welcome” and wayfinding signs, Plainwell’s image can be substantially upgraded. A subarea plan for the M-89 corridor between US-131 and Downtown is discussed later in more detail.



Commercial example

**Healthcare**

The area currently anchored by the Ascension Borgess-Pipp Hospital is envisioned as a healthcare cluster that includes multiple medical, health, and related housing land uses. Development opportunities should be explored for medical office, research and testing, expanded hospital facilities and services, medical education, and supporting land uses that include residential and retirement housing. Due to the interrelated nature of these uses safe and connected sidewalks and paths, and clearly defined streets, drives and landscaped parking lots should be part of any plans for redevelopment.

**Public/Institutional**

Included are institutional uses such as public schools, government buildings, and public parks. Because of their nature, these areas are not expected to change over time. Public and institutional uses should be identified and the site planning and design of surrounding development or redevelopment should consider these areas.

**Gateway Corridors**

Plainwell has four key gateways; 1) M-89 at US-131, 2) M-89 at Florence Street, 3) North Main Street at North Point Drive, and 4) South Main Street at the Mill Race. These gateways and associated street corridors should reflect Plainwell’s unique character. They should have a common theme that provides a unified look and feel and that visitors and residents can positively associate with Plainwell. Improvements should support the community as a special place and include enhanced and uniform signs that are free of clutter and that are at an appropriate scale based on location and traffic speeds, quality night-lighting, directional and way-finding signs, and street trees, and landscaping with a splash of color. Because some gateways are constrained due to limited space, easements or land acquisition may be necessary and should be explored.





### Industrial and Innovation

The businesses in Plainwell’s thriving industrial park, located on the City’s east side, provide many employment opportunities for local and area residents. While the industrial park is near capacity, future expansion includes growth to the northeast of the existing park and redeveloping the area south of M-89 between the railroad tracks and City limits to the east.

Because of the changing nature of employment-based land uses, future growth should accommodate a wide variety of potential activities such as office, research and development, laboratories, light industrial and manufacturing, and service commercial to offer well-paying jobs.

The key will be to retain current businesses and to expand opportunities to attract new users. A growing trend in business park design is to better integrate employment areas with the rest of the community. To do that, certain enhancements should be explored, such as making sure property maintenance is addressed in a timely way; providing inter-connecting sidewalks and trails that link nearby places to eat and businesses; improving streetscapes; inter-connecting key roads; and exploring changes to development regulations to provide a certain degree of flexibility for such things as lot sizes and uses. Finally, supporting green efforts such as allowing for on-site alternative energy generation, coordinated recycling,

innovative stormwater management practices, and incentives for LEED building certification and construction practices could attract new users to the industrial park.

Currently, exit 50, the US-131/106th Avenue interchange, is incomplete and does not permit southbound access to and northbound access from US-131. A full interchange would provide a better link with US-131 and may reduce some of the industrial traffic pressure on M-89.

### Non-Motorized Connections

A non-motorized plan was prepared in 2005 that identified existing and proposed bicycle routes, extensions to the Riverwalk Trail, and non-motorized pathways. Existing connections include an on-street bicycle lane along Prince Street between M-89 and West Bridge Street, and the Riverwalk Trail following the Mill Race north from West Bridge Street to the south bank of the Kalamazoo River and then across the river to North Sherman Avenue. Bike lanes were added to North and South Main Street following the reconstruction of M-89 in 2013. From Starr Road to Grant Street and Bannister Street to First Avenue, the roadway contains standard, four-foot wide bike lanes. First Avenue to Wedgewood Drive contains buffered bike lanes, and Grant Street to Bannister Street contains sharrows.

Several non-motorized links are also proposed that expand current trail connections to parks and recreational areas, schools, downtown Plainwell, and the M-89 corridor. To help encourage residents and visitors alike to venture into and explore Plainwell and beyond, additional inter-connected bicycle lanes, trails, and pathways throughout the broader community should be explored. Plainwell should continue to work with surrounding municipalities to interconnect regional non-motorized trails, such as the River to River Trail, that provide opportunities for a wide variety of recreational and transportation options.

Special attention should be paid to pedestrian access and links to the Plainwell Community Schools complex. The City should work with Gunplain Township to provide a more pedestrian friendly environment and safer crossings near the intersection of 12th Street and 102nd Avenue providing students with safer routes to and from schools.

Additionally, the City should consider preferred routing and alternative connections to the planned River to River Trail along the historic interurban rail route between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids. Connecting businesses, neighborhoods, downtown, and other destinations to the trail will encourage community-wide biking and leverage the planned route as an economic development tool.



*Example of enhanced pedestrian crossings.*



ZONING PLAN

The land use categories described and on Map 4: Future Land Use relate closely to Plainwell’s zoning districts. The following table describes the relationship between future land use and zoning districts.

Future Land Use Plan Designation	Corresponding Zoning Districts
Low-Density Residential	R-1A and R-1B Single Family Residence District and R-1C Single and Two Family Residence District, with minimum lot areas of 12,000 sq. ft., 9,800 sq. ft., and 7,200 sq. ft. respectively. The intent of these districts is to encourage the construction of and the continued use of land for single-family dwellings and to prohibit other uses that would substantially interfere with the development or continuation of single family dwellings, and in the R-1C District, of two-family dwellings. However, Plainwell should consider implementing new regulations for certain neighborhoods that can better protect and enhance existing and desired neighborhood character; defining such things as architectural form, building and garage placement and maximum home, lot and block sizes.
Medium-Density Residential	R-1A and R-1B Single Family Residence District, R-1C Single and Two Family Residence District, and RMH Residential Mobile Home District. The latter is designed for those who prefer mobile home living. This is a future land use density designation that corresponds to existing land uses in these districts.
High-Density Residential	R-2 Multiple-Family Residence District is designed primarily for duplexes, multiple-family dwellings including two or three-story apartments, townhouses, row houses, and dwelling groups. This designation applies to existing high density residential development to the west of US-131.
Neighborhood Mixed Use	While there is no directly corresponding district this land use designation does encompass portions of the SB Service Business and the CS Community Service Districts. Both of these are envisioned as transitional districts that have little potential negative impacts on surrounding neighborhoods. A new form-based district may best implement this designation.
Commercial	The C-2 General Commercial District best corresponds to this category and is intended to provide businesses and services usually found in major shopping centers and business areas at the juncture of major streets. Because of their prominent locations, more detailed design standards should be developed for these areas that include both building and site design requirements. A new form-based district may best implement this designation.

Healthcare	There is no category that directly corresponds to this designation. Rather it is envisioned as an expansion of CS Community Service District which allows most, if not all of the uses envisioned for this land use designation.
Public Institutional	There is no category that corresponds to this designation.
Industrial & Innovation	I, Industrial District best corresponds to this category and is intended to provide a location for industry and employment centers that, due to their more intense nature, make them incompatible with traditional business or residential areas.

M-89 CORRIDOR PLAN

Map 5 highlights specific recommendations for the M-89 corridor between US-131 and downtown Plainwell.

Non-Motorized

Pedestrian walkways support alternate ways of getting around Plainwell as well as providing recreational opportunities and public access to the City’s natural resources. They also contribute to the community’s quality of life.

In particular, the Kalamazoo River and Mill Race add to Plainwell’s unique character, and while a river walk is already established along the Kalamazoo River near downtown, it should be expanded and continued along both banks, especially toward the west.

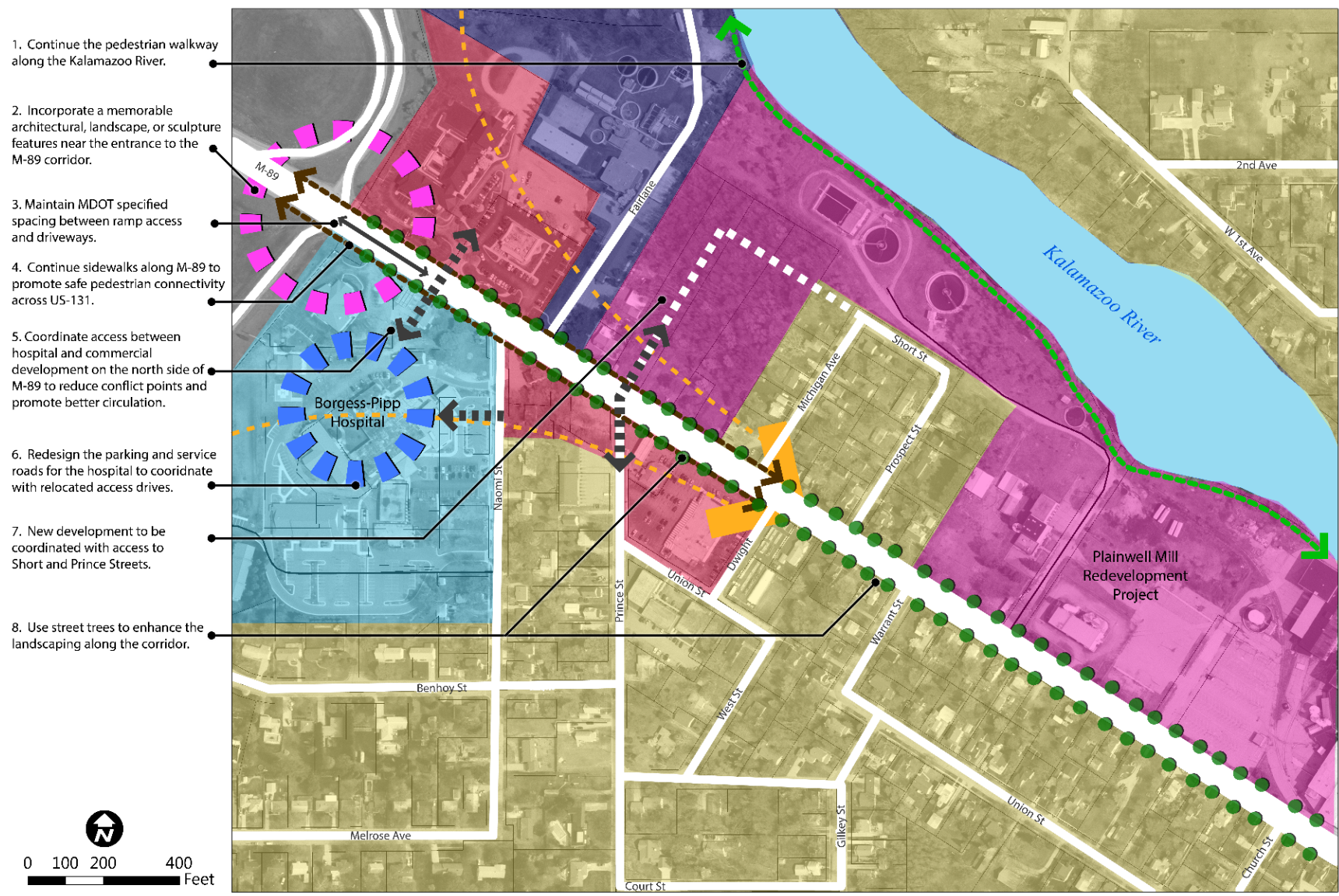
Sidewalks along M-89 stretching from downtown to the US-131 interchange were included in the road reconstruction of M-89 in 2014. The recent inclusion of these pedestrian facilities helps provide increased accessibility to the former mill site slated for mixed-use redevelopment (discussed in further detail later in this chapter).

Providing comfortable, safe connections to and from the former Paper Mill redevelopment site will enhance quality of life for future residents living within the development as well as residents living within close proximity. Planned commercial and residential uses located on the former Paper Mill site fronting M-89 would benefit the greatest from non-motorized connections allowing enhanced accessibility to these future destinations.

The installation of sidewalks along M-89 helps to complete a major gap in Plainwell’s sidewalk and non-motorized transportation system. This more complete network now allows accessibility to business and residences along M-89 and ultimately downtown Plainwell help further facilitate redevelopment of key sites in the downtown.



Map 5. *M-89 CORRIDOR SUBAREA PLAN*



US-131/M-89 GATEWAY

Currently, the entrance into Plainwell from US-131 is not a welcoming experience for visitors or residents. This gateway should announce an arrival that reflects the City's unique character.

The aim should be to develop distinctive and memorable architecture, landscapes, and public art. In addition, a unified streetscape and development pattern along the corridor will help tie things together. While more detailed design is required, guidelines should be prepared that describe the desired development pattern - addressing site and building layout and design, site access, architectural character, building facades, materials, as well as a unified landscape theme. Streetscape elements include consistent light fixtures and poles, signs (such as street, way-finding and banners), landscape treatments at intersections, street furniture in appropriate locations, and street trees. In order to continue the sense of entry the entire length of the M-89 corridor should be made greener. Expanding tree planting within the existing parkway along the corridor will be particularly important, providing a more pedestrian friendly environment while giving visitors a sense of entry into a special place. Consistency coupled with high quality, high value development will enhance not only the gateway into Plainwell but the broader community as well.



Community gateway examples



**Access Management**

Control of the location and spacing of driveways or access points along M-89 will improve safety and help preserve the roadway’s ability to carry traffic. Access management guidelines have two functions: to protect the public investment in the roadway by minimizing congestion and crash potential, and to allow property owners reasonable access to their properties. The goal of access management is to facilitate traffic operations and improve public safety along major roads. Access management looks at the following factors:

- Number of Access Points: Because the number of driveways allowed along major roads will affect traffic flow, ease of driving and crash potential, the number of driveways should be limited. Alternative access should be provided from side streets or driveway connections wherever possible.
- Sight Distance: Proper sight distance needs to be maintained at driveways and intersections to ensure vehicles can safely enter or exit the traffic stream.
- Driveway Spacing: Driveways need to be adequately spaced from intersections and other driveways to help reduce conflicting turning movements.
- Interconnection: Whenever possible, drives between adjacent uses should be interconnected so that travel from one site to an adjacent or nearby site does not require re-entering the main traffic stream.

Access management concerns on M-89 include:

- Spacing between the US-131 ramp access and driveways on M-89; and
- Cross-street access between Ascension Borgess-Pipp Hospital and commercial development on the north side of M-89.
- Curb cut spacing on M-89 east of Naomi.

*Examples of poor access management:*



*driveway spacing*



*parking up to pavement*



*poor driveway definition*

**DOWNTOWN PLAINWELL PLAN**

Like so many other towns, downtown is Plainwell’s heart and soul and maintaining it as a thriving and vibrant place is a critical part of maintaining a healthy community.

**Use and Development**

Downtown should continue as one of Plainwell’s two major commercial nodes (the other being near the M-89/US-131 interchange) and the focus of economic development and business attraction efforts should be to retain and enhance downtown and its businesses. Rather than expanding its geography, attention should instead focus on continued infill development, redevelopment, and revitalization projects, streetscape and landscaping enhancements, and continued support for building façade improvements.

Downtown activities should include a mix of retail, residential, public, and entertainment land uses. In key downtown settings, such as a main shopping street, priority should be given to retail sales and services on the ground floor because they generate foot traffic and turnover; a key aspect of maintaining a healthy retail environment. This is especially important near the juncture of Bridge/Main and Allegan Streets where the goal should be a critical mass of retail businesses that make downtown Plainwell an even more vibrant destination.

While offices and residential uses should be located on the upper floors of downtown multi-story buildings, much will depend on the market and the ability for Plainwell to absorb expanded retailing opportunities. Nevertheless, first floor office uses should be avoided on Main Street, Bridge Street and Allegan Street, whenever possible. Due consideration should also be given to second story and loft apartments that can help accommodate a higher residential population in and adjacent to the downtown. While Plainwell has significant residential neighborhoods within walking distance of the downtown, more can be done to encourage new housing options.

Because parking will undoubtedly remain located behind many downtown buildings, rear store entrances will have to be handled carefully. Many will require enhancements to allow pleasing, safe, and efficient access to and from parked cars. However, they must not be allowed to overwhelm or dominate the true front door, which must orient to and remain located along the street and public sidewalks.

*Downtown development character:*



*mixed-use  
residential and retail*



*pedestrian friendly  
streetscape*

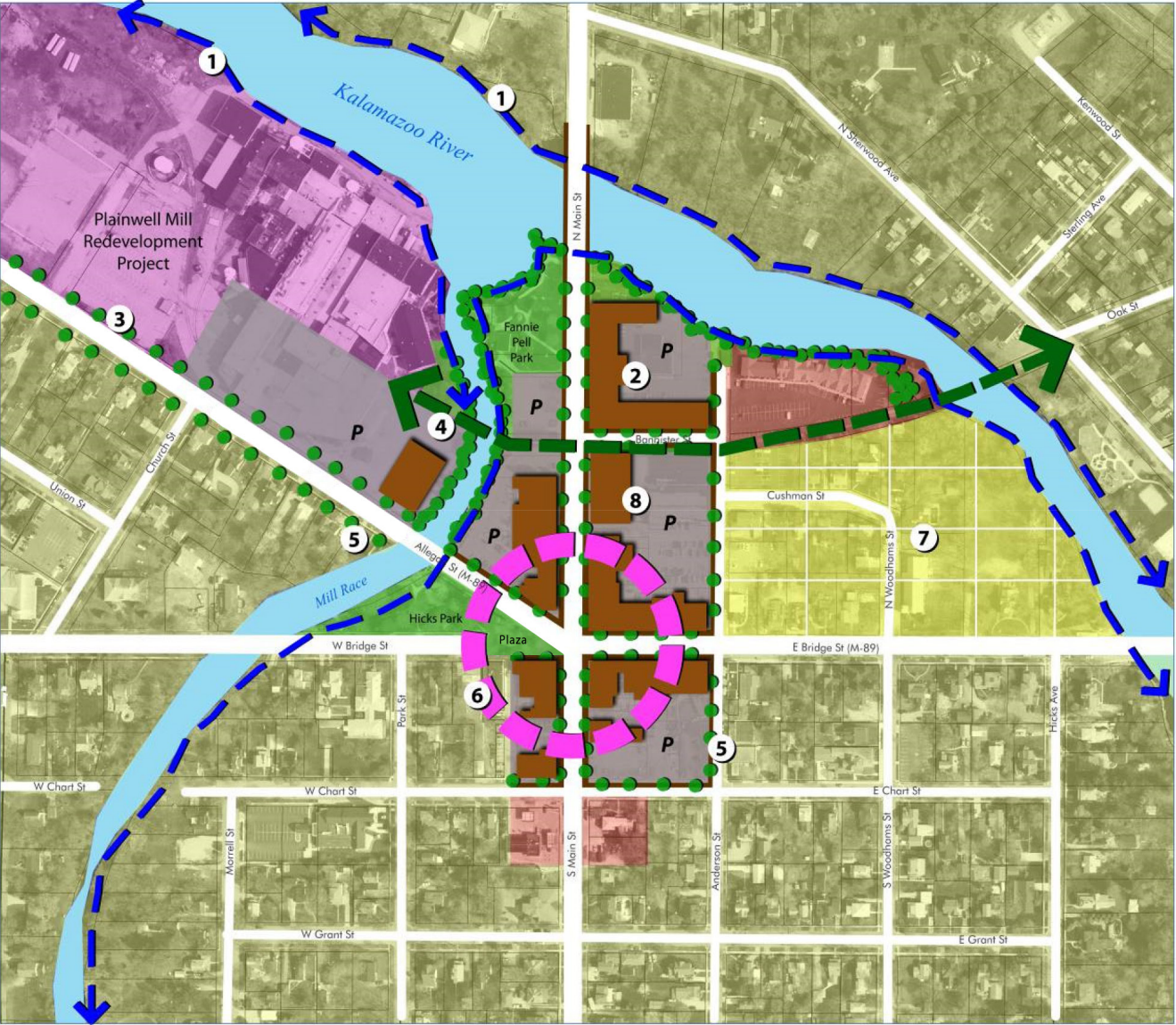
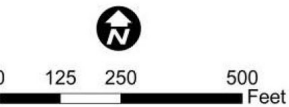


*infill development*



Map **6. DOWNTOWN SUBAREA PLAN**

- 1. Continue the pedestrian walkway along the Kalamazoo River and Mill Race.
- 2. Continue the pattern of traditional downtown development north to the Kalamazoo River
- 3. Create a sense of entry to the downtown by enhancing the streetscape along M-89 to the Mill Race
- 4. Reinforce the pedestrian walkway through downtown linking the Mill Project with the east side of the Kalamazoo River.
- 5. Utilize street trees to enhance the landscaping of downtown and through streets.
- 6. Maintain and activate the plaza and the intersection of M-89 and Bridge Street.
- 7. Reinforce the single-family residential neighborhood between downtown and the Kalamazoo River.
- 8. Commercial/retail infill/redevelopment potential incorporating enhanced access to Main Street utilizing streetscaping and open space design principles.



Government and civic land uses, such as City hall and a post office can also help support downtown, since they attract people running errands and carrying out personal business. Currently, among the key downtown civic destinations are Plainwell’s three parks: Hicks Park, Fannie Pell Park, and Riverwalk Park. Therefore, the recommendations and improvements in the Community Recreation Plan should be implemented to strengthen these parks and the recreational opportunities they provide in and around the downtown for City residents and visitors alike.



View of east side of N. Main Street looking south

**Development Character**

When new development, infill development, or redevelopment occurs, it should complement existing development patterns. Building façades should be located near the sidewalk at the front of a lot to maintain a consistent urban edge. Buildings on corner lots are among the most important in a downtown because they help define the intersection of two streets and, therefore, must attractively define both edges. Parking lots should be located to the side or rear of a building, behind a line that extends across the façade, and not interfere with the natural flow of pedestrian traffic. When new buildings are to be wider than existing ones, generally 50 feet or more, façades should be divided into smaller bays to maintain a rhythm and scale of storefront patterns. Buildings should also have a consistent height, generally two to three stories. However, single

story buildings must also be tall enough to help enclose the public realm that contains streets and sidewalks. This can be accomplished by establishing minimum floor to ceiling heights (fourteen to sixteen feet) at the ground level and requiring a rooftop parapet for buildings with flat roofs to enclose mechanical equipment and to add height. Generally, single story buildings should be at least eighteen to twenty-four feet tall. In all cases, the goal for new construction must be to maintain downtown’s traditional main street feel.

The area just east of downtown, between East Bridge Street and the Kalamazoo River and east of North Anderson Street (including Cushman Street and North Woodhams Street), has evolved over the years into a mix of residential, commercial, and office uses but without a clearly defined direction for the future. Given the potential for infill along Main Street and the redevelopment of the former paper mill, the continued encroachment of commercial uses into residential neighborhoods should be avoided. This accomplishes nothing but to dilute downtown, weakens attempts to redevelop buildings and sites and limits opportunities for planned infill. In addition, it has the potential to harm the very residential neighborhoods that are viewed important to Plainwell’s long-term health. Therefore, this neighborhood should transition back to residential uses, similar to the neighborhoods currently surrounding downtown. Traditional residential development in this area will help strengthen existing, established neighborhoods and will afford an opportunity to increase near-downtown residents. Such a change will also help concentrate commercial and retail development to the downtown and prevent scattered commercial along M-89.

**Walkability and Connectivity**

While the majority of downtown buildings are structurally sound and their arrangement promotes good downtown walking patterns, more can be done to improve the environment. Opportunities for community development projects include enhancements to public parking and signage, downtown streetscapes and landscaping, and expanding the system of riverfront walkways and open space.





The focus of these should be on place-making, or the creation of attractive, exciting and memorable public spaces. These should be designed to encourage public gatherings, events and celebrations without overlooking individual comforts such as well-maintained walking surfaces, benches that do not interfere with foot traffic and facilitate people sitting and enjoying their stay in the downtown, lighting that enhances safety yet does not overpower the setting and event spaces that interconnect visually and physically with the rest of the community. Encouraging social interaction in public places can be not only a tool for building social capital but also enhances the main street feel of the downtown.

### Form Based Code

A form-based code is a land development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code and could best implement the recommendations of this plan. A form-based district could be created in the downtown that allows for an appropriate mix of uses (business, office and residential), defines the desired character to create a cohesive and unified image, determines the desired location and boundaries, and incorporates a variety of incentives to entice developers to contribute to the realization of that vision.

A new form-based zoning district could help to ensure future development within these areas is more traditional in design to meet the intent of the master plan. The existing “preferred” character of commercial buildings and dwellings can be incorporated into the code or new building typologies can be developed. Zoning requirements could include:

- Drawing commercial buildings to right-of-way (ROW).
- Requiring buildings to have a minimum frontage width along the front building line.
- Prohibiting parking in front of principal buildings.
- Requiring a minimum percentage of windows and doors on facades to require traditional “storefronts.”
- Requiring minimum and maximum building heights (two to three stories).
- Providing a vertical mix of uses with ground-floor retail, or service uses and upper-floor service, or residential uses.

### Redevelopment

#### Former Plainwell Paper Mill Site

In 2006, the City acquired the 36-acres that was formerly home to the Plainwell Paper Mill and has held several town meetings to develop a community vision and plan for the site. Map 7 shows the concept plan for the site that includes the following.

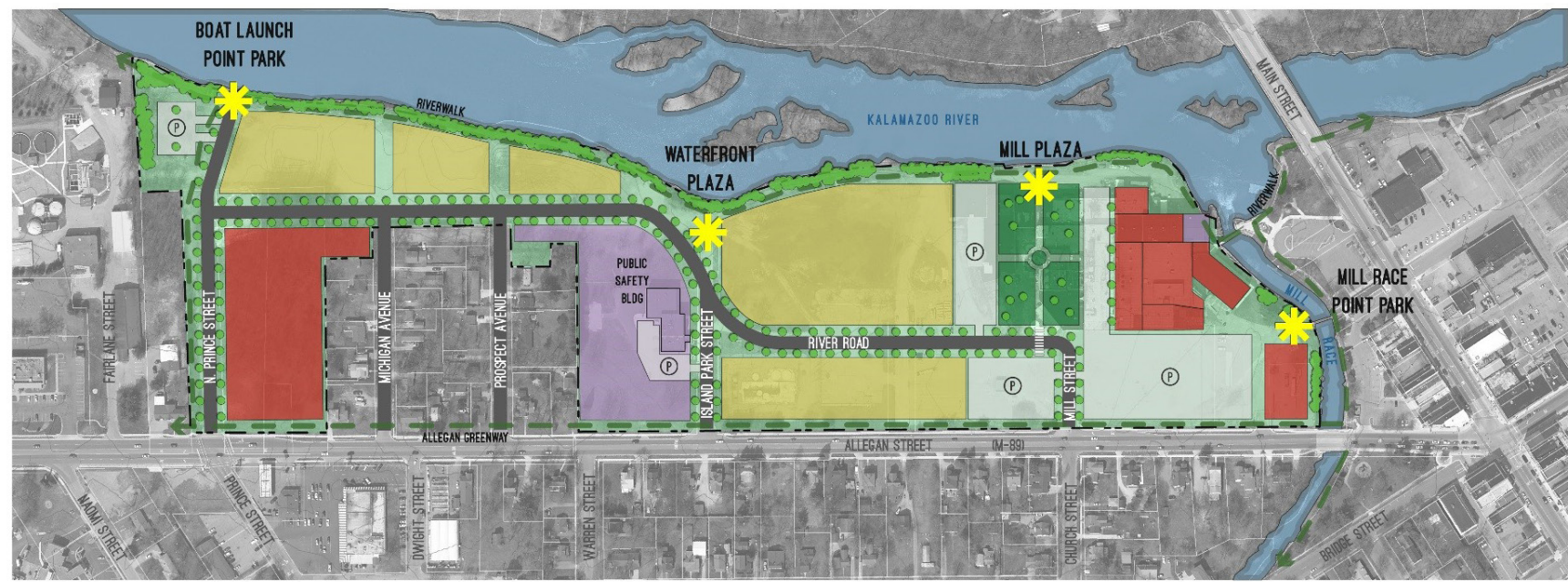
- The plan preserves and adaptively reuses the historically significant original mill buildings. These structures have been deemed important to the cultural heritage and unique character of the community. A mixed-use approach including residential, commercial, office, and special event space, as well as City hall is planned for these structures
- The Riverwalk Trail is proposed to continue along the portions of the site bordering the Kalamazoo River and Mill Race.
- Public access to the Kalamazoo River is enhanced by developing four new parks/facilities:
  - » Boat Launch Point Park (at the terminus of an extended North Prince Street);
  - » Waterfront Plaza (located near the middle of the development);
  - » Central Park (located among the reused historic buildings on the east end of the development); and
  - » Mill Race Point Park (located adjacent to the former railroad bridge crossing the Mill Race from the Mill Site to Downtown).
- New residential includes attached, owner-occupied housing that enhances and supports Plainwell’s current pattern of strong neighborhoods.

- Retail and commercial that serves adjacent neighborhoods, the community and visitors and is complementary to and supports more intense commercial development in the downtown and near the US-131 interchange.
- Street trees, street furniture, pedestrian-scale lighting, and other amenities along all newly constructed streets, as well as those bordering the site, in order to create a pedestrian-friendly environment and sense of place.



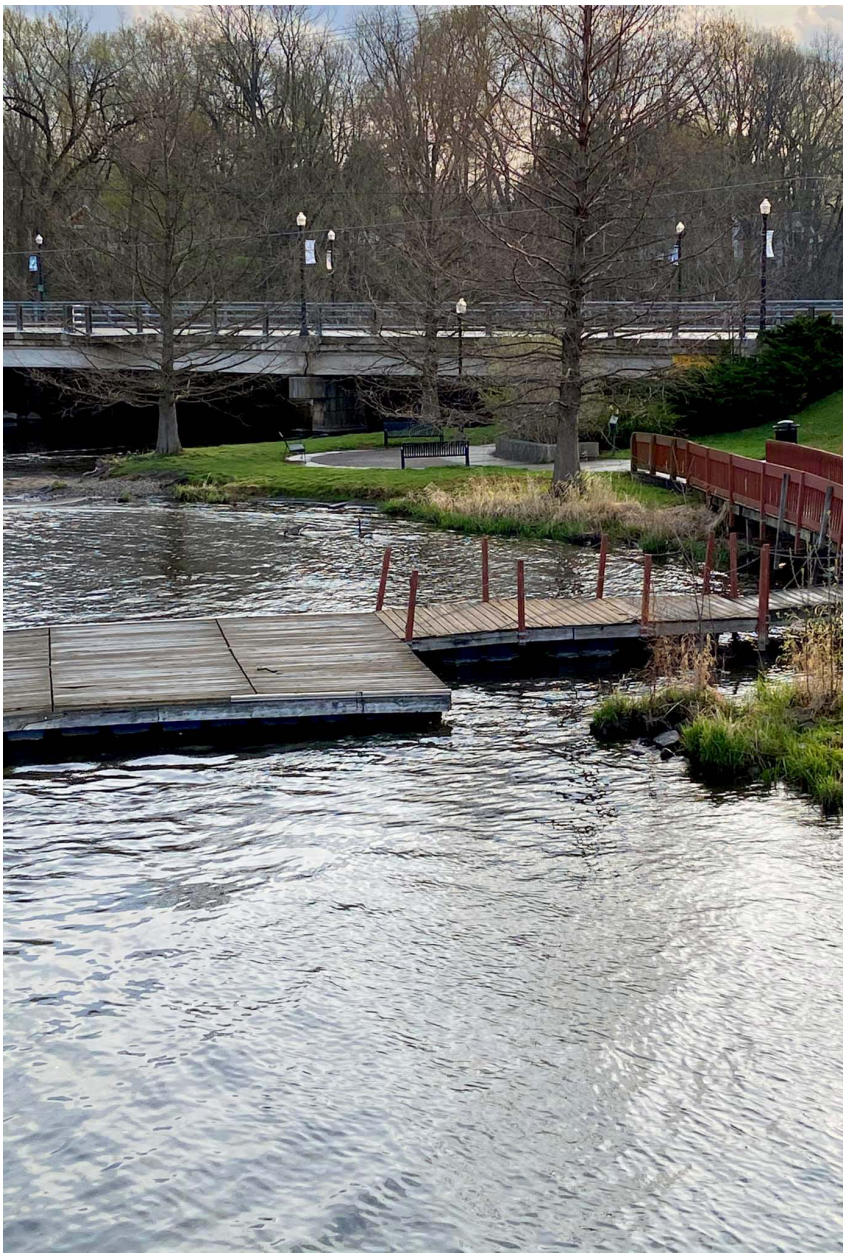


Map **7. FORMER PLAINWELL PAPER MILL REDEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN**



**LEGEND**

- COMMERCIAL
- RESIDENTIAL
- GOVERNMENT/INSTITUTIONAL
- OPEN SPACE
- PARKING



**RIVERFRONT PLANNING, ACCESS, AND ECOTOURISM**

One of Plainwell's greatest assets is its linear waterfrontage along the millrace and Kalamazoo River. These riverfronts provide scenic views, recreational opportunities and improve property values. The City should explore increasing access to the river and millrace through boat and kayak launches, parks and passive recreational space such as platforms for fishing. Moreover, there is an opportunity for the City to improve its protection from potential floods by creating natural flood protection through green infrastructure such as terraced flood walls and vegetated berms which integrate recreation facilities, enhance flood protection and improve ecology. Plainwell may also maximize upon its riverfront assets by further integrating its successful Riverwalk and outdoor event space with retail development.

**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS**

City officials and departments must embrace the plan, applying its recommendations to help shape annual budgets and the design of capital improvements. For example, the City's department of public works can support implementation through infrastructure improvements, streets, and storm systems designed consistent with plan policies and recommendations, or the planning and building department through site plan review. The capital improvement plan (CIP) must interrelate and generally be consistent with the goals and objectives of the master plan. The list of planned projects in the capital improvement plan should be compared against the general project discussion and goals of the existing master plan.





## HOUSING

Like many other communities, Plainwell is growing older and its demography is transforming due in part to changing family size and makeup. Nuclear families are no longer the norm; therefore, housing options must accommodate a variety of family types, income levels and lifestyles.

The housing needs of special groups, like the elderly, must also be an important part of Plainwell's commitment to provide appropriate housing choices for all of its residents. Viable senior housing options that include remaining at home as long as possible, to special facilities, such as senior independent living, are especially important to residents who want to stay in the neighborhoods they are most familiar with and be near family and friends. Plainwell also affords a high-quality, walkable environment ideal for those who can no longer drive or simply no longer wish to do so.

Rental housing for lower income residents or supportive housing must be integrated with support services, and its design and construction should consider both long-term durability and security. Options for the younger sector of the population are just as important. Smaller families and couples may desire alternatives to single-family detached, owner-occupied housing, such as townhomes, flats, and apartments above storefronts.

This concept of providing housing for a variety of family types, income levels, ages, ability levels, and lifestyles is colloquially referred to as "missing middle housing." The 'missing middle' in this instance are housing types which fall between the low density of detached single-family residential homes and higher-density, mid-rise apartment complexes. Duplexes, courtyard apartments, bungalow courts, townhomes, and multi-plex structures provide a more rich housing choice for people of all backgrounds and future residents of Plainwell.

## LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT

LID is considered by many to be an effective tool that can be incorporated into local zoning and development regulations that may minimize the impact of stormwater runoff. According to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, LID is:

[T]he cornerstone of stormwater management with the goal of mimicking a site's pre-settlement hydrology by using design techniques that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, and detain runoff close to its source.

Stormwater runoff is a major source of pollution and results in the degradation to water resources, increase in the magnitude and frequency of floods, reductions in fish and other aquatic species diversity, increased in streambank erosion, and decreases in infiltration into the groundwater. The review of the zoning ordinance indicates that there are no stormwater regulations or standards for design. In the absence of a stormwater ordinance, a "greening" the zoning ordinance with Low Impact Development ("LID") practices is recommended. Solutions to ameliorate deleterious effects of unmanaged stormwater should be explored.

In an effort to strive toward LID, consideration of a number of "non-structural" best management practices (BMPs) which require developers to make reasonable efforts to design with sensitivity to the environment is recommended. Nonstructural BMPs are "stormwater runoff treatment techniques that use natural measures to reduce pollution levels that do not involve the construction or installation of devices (e.g., management actions)." They are less technical in nature and can be reviewed by the Planning Commission and staff, as opposed to structural design for storage and treatment of stormwater runoff.

## REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT AND TRAINING

To ensure the greater predictability of new development accomplishing the goals and recommendations of the Master Plan, a thorough technical review of the City's zoning codes should be conducted to determine if the current development regulations in place today match those goals and recommendations. Additionally, an ongoing training program for city and planning commissions. Ongoing training is essential due to turnover on boards and commissions, as well as new elected officials. There should be a budget, tracking system, internal and external opportunity notices and community involvement.



# 5.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### Implementation

A master plan is only useful as long as it is implemented and consulted when making land use decisions. This chapter outlines policies and actions for implementing the master plan. A policy is a clear statement of how the City intends to conduct its services, actions or business and provides a set of guiding principles to help with decision-making. An action is the specific method in which policies are carried out.

#### POLICIES

##### 1. Natural Features

To preserve and protect the community's unique riverfront setting, its waterways and woodlots, Plainwell seeks to:

- 1.1 Expand the Riverwalk to increase accessibility and draw users to Plainwell's unique riverfront assets.
- 1.2 Enhance water quality and improve the ecological health of environmentally sensitive areas.
- 1.3 Protect and preserve trees in parks, along riverfronts, and adjacent to public streets and roadways.

##### 2. Transportation

To enhance transportation options and to provide safe and efficient routes into and from the community, Plainwell seeks to:

- 2.1 Alleviate traffic congestion, particularly along M-89 between Downtown and US-131, wherever possible, to help facilitate safe and efficient travel.
- 2.2 Implore sound access management techniques particularly on major roadways which may benefit most from fewer and more properly spaced driveways and intersections.

- 2.3 Enhance area-wide access through regional non-motorized trail connections (such as the River to River Trail), sidewalk connections and improved highway interchange design.

- 2.4 Enhance gateways and corridors to improve the "front door" image of the City.

- 2.5 Employ a Complete Streets approach to planning for roadway design to accommodate all users and ability levels through interconnected sidewalks, streets, bike lanes, and trails. Make ADA improvements when and where feasible.

##### 3. Land Use

To preserve and protect the unique character of its downtown and neighborhoods, Plainwell seeks to:

- 3.1 Support downtown and existing commercial areas and discourage additional commercial development outside of established commercial areas of the City.
- 3.2 Limit commercial zoning in the City to avoid over-saturating the market, negatively affecting the competitiveness of existing commercial areas, and attracting undesirable businesses into the City.
- 3.3 Enhance access to the river and provide greater opportunities for boating, kayaking, and community events.
- 3.4 Keep and concentrate civic uses and government functions downtown.
- 3.5 Respect community character by imploring context sensitive street design solutions and encouraging preservation and rehabilitation of older, historic structures.
- 3.6 Provide more diverse housing options to make Plainwell a desirable place for all age groups, lifestyles, and income levels.



4. People

To promote itself as a vital community and a place in which people can comfortably live, raise families and grow old, Plainwell seeks to:

- 4.1 Enhance the quality of life of Plainwell residents.
- 4.2 Use the following Smart Growth Principles to evaluate future development:
  - a. create a range of housing opportunities and choices;
  - b. create walkable neighborhoods;
  - c. encourage community and stakeholder collaboration;
  - d. foster a distinctive, attractive community with a strong sense of place;
  - e. make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective;
  - f. mix land uses;
  - g. preserve open space, natural beauty and critical environmental areas;
  - h. provide a variety of transportation choices;
  - i. strengthen the community by directing growth to already developed areas;
  - j. take advantage of compact building and neighborhood design; and
  - k. provide opportunities for more year round recreation.

5. The Economy

To help raise median household incomes and provide job opportunities for its residents, Plainwell seeks to:

- 5.1 Support employment areas by diligently enforcing development codes and maintenance standards.
- 5.2 Preserve and enhance a strong and diversified retail base by:
  - a. focusing Plainwell’s retail mix on meeting the needs of residents while also attracting patrons from surrounding communities;
  - b. continuing to support economic development initiatives associated with the mill redevelopment;
  - c. strengthening and enhancing locally-owned downtown businesses;
  - d. focusing more suburban style, auto-oriented commerce near US-131;
  - e. adopting policies that serve to attract “new economy” workers, such as flexible and affordable housing choices, promoting home occupations, extending wireless and broadband service and improving cell phone service throughout the community; and
  - f. maintaining Plainwell’s unique character and appeal by promoting the programs and amenities already in place that make it a charming and special place.

6. Residential Neighborhoods

To preserve, protect and enhance its residential neighborhoods, Plainwell seeks to:

- 6.1 Support the quality and character of its neighborhoods by continuing to vigorously enforce residential building and maintenance codes.
- 6.2 Support opportunities for “lifecycle” housing, including independent living units, assisted living, and continual care.

7. Non-residential Areas

To enhance the character of its unique downtown, commercial corridors and waterfront, and to provide future opportunities for employment, Plainwell will:

- 7.1 Support the quality and character of its commercial and employment areas by continuing to vigorously enforce building and maintenance codes and building on programs that encourage building renovation and improvements.
- 7.2 Work to maintain certification as a Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) by utilizing best practices and maintaining a list of redevelopment ready sites.
- 7.3 Collaborate with the Plainwell Downtown Development Authority to improve and enhance the Downtown.

PROJECT PRIORITIES

The actions are listed with a “priority number” as follows:

Priority 1 projects are those that should be given immediate and concentrated effort. These are the first projects that should be commenced after this Master Plan Update has been adopted. Any preliminary steps that must be taken to implement the action (such as seeking funding, changes in local ordinances, etc.) should be commenced immediately. Those Priority 1 projects that have a longer time horizon should be revisited on an as-needed basis, and should be incorporated into other applicable long-term planning programs, such as a capital improvements plan.

Priority 2 projects are those that are necessary to implement the plan, but either depend upon commencement or completion of Priority 1 projects, or do not have the same immediacy of Priority 1 projects. Once commenced, however, these projects should be considered important and should be pursued until completion.

Priority 3 projects are those that implement elements of this plan, but are not urgent and can be delayed for a longer period of time. These projects are more susceptible to budgetary constraints.

Some projects within the matrix do not have a specified timing period because they are based on less predictable factors such as funding sources, etc. The timing for these projects is explained within the matrix. Further, the Economic Development Strategy found later in this chapter outlines the implementation of key focus areas and strategies specifically relating to economic development and prosperity in the City.



IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Ordinances, Guidelines, Plans, and Policies

Action	Responsibility	Timing	Priority	Status
1. Review zoning ordinance processes and procedures to see if it inhibits master plan implementation; make necessary changes.	Staff, Planning Commission, City Council	Within 1 year	1	On-going
2. Adopt new zoning requirements that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Implements the plan, including establishes new mixed-use and form-based districts for the downtown and surrounding commercial areas.</li><li>Create revised commercial design standards and appropriate density changes that reflect desired community character.</li><li>Protects those features in residential neighborhoods that make them special places and requires new development to follow suit.</li><li>Support varied housing options that are compatible with neighborhood character.</li></ul>	Staff, Planning Commission, City Council	Within 1 year	1	On-going (as need arises)
3. Review and revise master plan in response to changing needs and priorities. Ensure consistency with Master Plan.	Staff, Planning Commission, City Council	Annually and as needed	2	In progress (Update process underway; changing needs and priorities to be addressed)
4. Update Capital Improvements Plan to prioritize plan elements, projects and identify funding options. Review the annual capital improvement plan against the goals and objectives of the Master Plan to ensure compatibility.	Staff, City Council	Within 1 year & annually	1	Ongoing

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX CONT'D

Ordinances, Guidelines, Plans, and Policies

Action	Responsibility	Timing	Priority	Status
5. Develop and implement a rental housing inspection program.	Staff, City Council	Within 1 year	3	In progress
6. Complete, fund, and implement a streetscape program for gateways.	Staff, City Council, DDA	1 – 3 years	2	In progress
7. Complete, fund and implement a sign plan for wayfinding	Staff, City Council, DDA	1 – 5 years	2	Incomplete; funding unavailable at this time
8. Develop and implement a plan to expand trails, the Riverwalk, enhance access and create a public gathering space along the Kalamazoo River.	Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, Mill Developer, Local Citizens Bicycle Group	1 – 5 years	1	Attending meetings as part of the West Michigan Trailways.  Added bike lanes on N & S Main St.
9. Update DDA plan - prepare a more detailed plan for the downtown based on plan recommendations, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>design and configuration of downtown streets,</li><li>streetscape improvements,</li><li>façade enhancements,</li><li>concepts for specific development sites,</li><li>more detailed market assessment and recommendations,</li><li>incentives to encourage building and site improvements.</li></ul>	Staff, DDA, Chamber of Commerce, City Council	1 – 2 years	2	In progress



IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX CONT'D

Ordinances, Guidelines, Plans, and Policies

Action	Responsibility	Timing	Priority	Status
10. Implement low-impact design and green infrastructure development practices by conducting the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create LID requirements for site plan review.</li><li>• Undertake a campaign to educate the community about current water quality issues and environmentally friendly practices.</li><li>• Determine a comprehensive strategy for monitoring water quality and a plan for implementing water quality improvements.</li><li>• Provide incentives for waterfront property owners to create vegetative buffers, rain gardens, and other low-impact solutions to address the quality of stormwater runoff.</li><li>• Implement policies for ecologically sensitive design and maintenance practices for all public facilities, parks, and utility systems.</li></ul>	Staff, City Council, Planning Commission, County and State Agencies	1 – 5 years	2	On-going; implemented well-head protection ordinance
11. Assess and update zoning ordinance to allow “missing middle” housing types and allow affordable housing choices at either end of the market; for the young and for empty nesters.	Staff, City Council, Planning Commission, Area Senior Advocacy Agencies	1-5 years	2	On-going
12. Update zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations to require new development to inter-connect with existing streets, sidewalks, and other infrastructure.	Staff, Planning Commission via Site Plan Standards and Review, City Council	1-2 years	1	On-going (as need arises)

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX CONT'D

Ordinances, Guidelines, Plans, and Policies

Action	Responsibility	Timing	Priority	Status
13. Update zoning code to prepare and implement access management measures that control the number, location, and design of access points along all major road corridors.	Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, State and County Agencies	1-5 years	2	In progress (Update process underway; changing needs and priorities to be addressed)
14. In cooperation with surrounding jurisdictions prepare and implement a plan for an inter-connected, non-motorized trail/ bike path system. Plan, design, and implement a regional trail from Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids traversing through Plainwell using the former interurban line and consider connections across US-131, to schools and parks, and to other key destinations like downtown and the industrial park.	Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, Neighboring Communities, State and County Agencies, Local Citizens Bicycle Group	1-5 years	3	Ongoing
15. Conduct annual review of the master plan to determine progress of completing actions.	Staff, City Council	Within 1 year	3	In progress
16. Adopt site and building design standards as part of the zoning ordinance to help ensure future development and redevelopment near the M-89/US-131 interchange reflects a positive community image.	Staff, City Council, DDA	1 – 3 years	2	In progress



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Introduction & Background

The City of Plainwell strives for the overall increase in quality of life and prosperity of its residents and business owners. Through improvements in its physical infrastructure, image, and commitment to support local businesses, the goal of the Plainwell economic development strategy is to support and embrace policies and practices to improve the overall economic welfare of the City. This strategy was originally developed collaboratively in 2019 between the Plainwell City Council and the Planning Commission and was reviewed and modified as part of the 2023 Master Plan Update. It builds on the previous economic development and redevelopment efforts of the 2016 Master Plan.

In order to attract new investors, businesses, and residents, the City of Plainwell is certified as a Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) and intends to maintain that certification through the effective timeline of this Plan. RRC certification is obtained through a voluntary, no-cost program that is designed to promote effective redevelopment strategies through the implementation of RRC best practices. Through certification as an RRC, the City is committing to a rigorous assessment of current conditions in the community and working to implement best practices. Through this process, the community is recognized as being proactive and business-friendly.

This Plan provides comprehensive social, economic, and existing conditions information in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. This strategy considers the facts and findings found in those chapters. For the sake of brevity, they are summarized but not extensively repeated. Please refer to those chapters for specific data and information. Plainwell’s population has stagnated in recent decades. This is likely due to the inability to expand and annex new land, the presence of empty nesters, and the lack of new housing in the City. The City’s income has increased in recent years; however, neighboring townships have seen income levels outpace the City’s. Similarly, Plainwell is

an educated community; however, neighboring townships have a higher percentage of college graduates. Generally, employment in Plainwell is dominated by manufacturing, education, and healthcare. The top five largest employers in the City are Plainwell Public Schools, Ascension Borgess-Pipp Hospital, Life Care Center, HyTech Spring & Machine, and Visiting Angels.

Opportunities and Challenges

The 2019 Strategy developed a list of opportunities and challenges for economic development and prosperity in the City. This list was evaluated, modified, and reaffirmed during the 2023 Master Plan update:

City Opportunities and Strengths

Plainwell is well positioned for growth and development as a result of the following:

- Plainwell has existing buildings that can be redeveloped and adapted for new use.
- Plainwell sits along the Kalamazoo River and the Mill Race, surrounding the downtown to form the “Island City.”
- Plainwell has easy access to US-131 and located 15 miles north of Kalamazoo and 35 miles south of Grand Rapids.
- Plainwell is home to a non-motorized Riverwalk that connects four of the seven parks in the City.
- Plainwell is home to two year-round parks that include an ice-skating rink, sledding hill, and dog park.
- City owned and managed water and sewer services with capacity for growth.
- City ownership of the former Plainwell Paper Mill, including 36 acres along the Kalamazoo River and seeking redevelopment

of the mill site for condos, townhouse, and service/retail businesses.

- Plainwell Paper Mill is no the National Historic Registry list.

- Plainwell has a certified Industrial Park housing at least 34 businesses.

- Plainwell is home to a municipal airport.

- Plainwell is home to a new district library.

- Plainwell is home to a highly rated and desired school system and has a “5th year agreement” with local colleges.

- Plainwell has nearby access to education and training, including community colleges, universities and the Michigan Statewide Carpenters and Millwrights Skilled Training Center in Wayland.

- Plainwell is home to award winning businesses such as restaurants, ice cream parlors, and personal service establishments.

- Plainwell has 52 vacant acres ready for new development.

- Plainwell has extensive recreation opportunities in the City such as access to the Kalamazoo River and a comprehensive park system.

- Plainwell is home to several large employers such as the Ascension Borgess-Pipp Hospital.

City Challenges

Plainwell will need to address the following local and regional challenges:

- Plainwell has minimal land for any type of expansion or new housing developments.

- Lack of quality start housing (especially important for younger adults), the lack of quality higher density residential (that may be especially appealing to that age group), and housing choices for an aging population that wishes to remain in Plainwell. Very little new housing has been developed in the City in the last two decades exacerbating the issue around quality and choice of housing.

- Plainwell owns the mill site and the pace of progression of redevelopment has been slow.

- A truck route runs down north and south Main Street through Downtown Plainwell.

- Parking opportunities downtown are not evenly distributed.

- Plainwell has underutilized brownfield property.

- Plainwell has seen minimal population growth in recent decades.

Focus Areas and Strategies

For an economic development strategy to follow best practices put forth by the Redevelopment Ready Communities program the individual objectives must tie back to one or more of the local goals and objectives. The Economic Development Strategy is a direct reflection of the input of residents, business owners, and other stakeholders through the master planning process and general goal-setting meetings. These are established in addition to the general master plan strategies found in the Implementation Matrix.



Key Focus Areas and Strategies

Action	Responsibility	Timing	Priority	Status
1. Routinely review and update economic development strategy and report progress to the City Council.	Staff, Planning Commission, City Council	Annually; minimum 5 years	1	Ongoing
2. Continue to support the conversion of the former paper mill and site to mixed development that includes employment-based land uses.	Staff, City Council	Within 1 year	1	In progress
3. Continue to vigorously enforce building and maintenance codes.	Staff	Now	1	Ongoing
4. Complete, fund, and implement a streetscape program for downtown and gateways – including a streetscape master plan to “green” community entrances, especially M-89 between US-131 and downtown.	Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, Community	1-3 years	2	In process
5. Implement policies to encourage community cleanup efforts and provide incentives to clean up and improve property.	Staff, Plainwell Schools, Chamber of Commerce, City Council	Within 1 year	1	TBD
6. Aggressively market Plainwell’s restaurants, businesses, and water-front as a unique destination between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids. Publications, social media, etc.	Staff, Downtown Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown businesses	Now	1	Ongoing
7. Promote opportunities for “lifecycle” housing, including independent living units, assisted living and continual care.	Staff, City Council, Planning Commission, Area senior Advocacy Agencies	1-5 years	2	TBD

Key Focus Areas and Strategies Cont'd

Action	Responsibility	Timing	Priority	Status
8. Work with business owners to cross promote businesses and attractions in the community (e.g., provide coupons for other businesses, promotional materials for attractions, etc.)	Staff, DDA	1-5 years	1	In progress
9. Develop a location for a Farmers Market and Community Garden	Staff	1-3 years	2	In progress
10. Continue to market and expand Plainwell’s current industrial park	City Council, Planning Commission	1-3 years	1	Ongoing
11. Continue to build on programs that encourage building renovation and improvements.	Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, DDA	Now	1	Ongoing
12. Prepare and implement a plan that addresses congestion and truck traffic yet is sensitive to the context of the M-89 corridor and at the M-89/Main/Bridge intersection.	Staff, Planning Commission	1-2 years	1	TBD
13. Encourage active ground floor uses in the Downtown.	Staff, Planning Commission, Downtown Development Authority	1-2 years	1	TBD



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

In addition to the above specific strategies and focus areas, the City also supports general implementation strategies that support economic development goals and actions. Those include placemaking, streamlining processes, and marketing.

Placemaking

By creating quality places where people want to live, work, place, and learn, communities are better prepared to address challenges. When people are invested in their communities, they are more willing to actively participate in its development and maintenance. This helps generate sustainability and community growth. Placemaking must meet the specific needs of a community; therefore, community input is essential. The City will continue to work with the property owners, businesses, and community partners in the improvement of Downtown Plainwell to ensure it continues to be a unique and inviting place.

Streamlining and Processes

The City will continue to assess and improve its development processes, including manuals, outlines, and forms available to guide the public and developers. This includes review of the Zoning Ordinance, application forms, and checklists, to ensure that they are accurate, effective, and easy to understand.

Marketing & Regional Alignment

The City will continue to work with the Lakeshore Advantage and other entities in marketing the City to new business and residents. The City understands that leveraging and advertising its assets, both locally and regionally, will help to elevate prosperity and encourage investment.

DESCRIPTION OF FUNDING SOURCES

A. Revitalization and Placemaking Program (RAP)

Issued by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), this program may be available to Plainwell and provides funding for downtown public infrastructure, façade improvements, and signature building projects. The Revitalization and Placemaking program provides access to gap financing for place-based infrastructure development, real estate rehabilitation and development, and public space improvements. Eligible applicants are individuals or entities working to rehabilitate vacant, underutilized, blighted and historic structures and the development of permanent place-based infrastructure associated with traditional downtowns, social-zones, outdoor dining and placed-based public spaces.. This program routinely evolves and should be explored with the MEDC. All questions regarding the program should be directed to:

Michigan Economic Development Corporation  
300 North Washington Square  
Lansing, Michigan 48913

B. Façade Improvement Project

Grants are available for communities that seek to target areas of traditional downtowns for improvements that will have a significant positive impact. The Downtown Façade Program is structured to provide commercial/mixed-use building façade improvements to sustain and minimize deterioration of downtowns. This program is based on the premise that the exterior improvements will stimulate additional private investment in the buildings and the surrounding area, attract, and increase the number of customers, thereby resulting in additional downtown economic opportunities. This program should be explored with the MEDC.

C. Signature Building Project

Grants are available for communities seeking to acquire vacant, partially vacant, or substantially underused buildings located in downtowns for rehabilitation into a commercial/mixed use building that will hopefully result in job creation. This program enables a community to secure a building that is a focal point within the downtown for commercial rehabilitation purposes that will make a significant contribution to the overall downtown area. This program should be explored with the MEDC.

D. Downtown Infrastructure

Grants are available to provide public infrastructure improvements that directly support private redevelopment projects in traditional downtowns. Public infrastructure includes items such as parking facilities, streetscape, public water or sanitary sewer lines and related facilities, streets, roads, bridges, and public utilities. This program should be explored with the MEDC.

E. Transportation Alternatives Program

The Michigan Department of Transportation’s program funds non-traditional road projects (outside the traditional curb and gutter) such as streetscapes, non-motorized paths, and historical restoration of transportation facilities. These investments support place-based economic development by offering transportation choices, promoting walkability, and improving quality of life. The program uses federal transportation funds designated by Congress for these types of activities.

Further information about the program is available at [www.michigan.gov/tap](http://www.michigan.gov/tap) for the online application and instructions, or by calling (517) 335-1069.

F. Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA)

MSHDA offers a variety of loan products for low to moderate income homebuyers.

Further information about these programs is available at [www.michigan.gov/mshda](http://www.michigan.gov/mshda).

G. Individual Development Accounts

Recognizing the need to support families in their exit from poverty, this program encourages the accumulation of wealth and assets. IDAs are matched savings accounts designed to help low-income and low-wealth families accumulate a few thousand dollars for high return investments, including homeownership. Individuals must meet IDA program acceptance criteria. H. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The HOME Program provides formula grants to states and localities that communities use, often in partnership with local nonprofit groups to fund a wide range of activities that build, buy, and/ or rehabilitate affordable housing for rent or homeownership for low-income people. The incomes of households receiving HUD assistance must not exceed 80 percent of the area median. Eligible activities include site acquisition or improvement.

H. Commercial Rehabilitation Act

Public Act 210 of 2005 encourages the rehabilitation of commercial property by abating the taxes on new investment. Commercial property is defined as a qualified facility primarily used in the operation of a commercial business.

Further information about this program is available at [www.michigan.gov/taxes/property/exemptions/commercial-rehab/commercial-rehabilitation-act](http://www.michigan.gov/taxes/property/exemptions/commercial-rehab/commercial-rehabilitation-act).



I. Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Land and Water Conservation Fund

May be available for certain park, recreation and open space enhancement projects; specific criteria include:

Program Objectives: The objective is to provide grants to local units of government and to the state to develop land for outdoor recreation.

Criteria: Applications are evaluated using established criteria and alignment with Michigan's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Detailed information on the scoring criteria and application requirements can be found in the Recreation Grants Application Guidelines booklet. Applicant Eligibility: Any unit of government, including Native American tribes, school districts, or any combination of units in which authority is legally constituted to provide recreation. Local units of government, school districts, and local authorities must have a DNR-approved community five-year recreation plan to be eligible.

J. United States Department of Agriculture Rural  
Development Housing & Community Facilities  
Programs

Designed to develop essential community facilities for public use in rural areas Community Facility Programs can make and guarantee loans for essential community facilities in rural areas and towns. Loans and guarantees are available to public entities such as municipalities, counties, and special-purpose districts, as well as non-profit corporations and tribal governments. Facilities include schools, libraries, childcare, hospitals, medical clinics, assisted living facilities, fire and rescue stations, police stations, community centers, public buildings and transportation. Community Programs utilizes three flexible financial tools to achieve this goal: the Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program, the Community Facilities Direct Loan Program, and the Community Facilities Grant Program.

K. Grants from private foundations

CONCLUSION

Although this plan is a comprehensive guide for land use planning over the next 20 years, there is no way to predict what changes may occur that are not contemplated. Therefore, decisions related to development should be considered carefully in light of the recommendations of the Master Plan.

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (Act 110 of the Michigan Public Acts of 2006) requires Plainwell’s Zoning Ordinance to be “based on a plan to promote the public health, safety and welfare, to encourage the use of lands in accordance with their character and adaptability, to limit the improper use of land, to conserve natural resources and energy, to meet the needs of the state’s residents for food, fiber and other natural resources, places of residence...and other uses of land.” Since the zoning map is a part of the Zoning Ordinance, changes to zoning boundaries should be in conformance with the Master Plan.

Change is constant and usually unpredictable, however, and there may be circumstances that warrant changes to the zoning boundaries that are not consistent with the Master Plan. If and when this occurs, the Master Plan should be updated to conform to the changed circumstances. Because of the time and process required for amending the Plan, such changes should be considered carefully.

The following table contains a series of evaluation factors that may be used to determine if a proposed development warrants a change to the land use designation on the Future Land Use Plan map.

If future development decisions take these factors into account, and if the Plan is reviewed on a regular basis and updated when necessary, then Plainwell can be assured that development will reflect the desires of its citizens, reflected through the adopted Master Plan.

Future Land Use Evaluation Factors

- Does the proposed new classification meet the qualifications noted in the appropriate section of the Master Plan?
- Are the zoning districts and their uses that may apply to the new classification compatible with and appropriate in the vicinity of the property under consideration?
- Have any conditions changed in the area since the Master Plan was adopted that justify this change?
- Will there be any community impacts that should be considered, such as increased traffic, or others that might create a need for additional services or improvements?
- Are there any environmental considerations that may be contrary to the intent of the existing or proposed classification of that land use?
- Was the property improperly classified when the plan was adopted or amended? Are the qualities of the property (or area) different than those that are described in the plan?
- Will there be any adverse effects on adjacent properties as a result of the proposed land use change?
- What impacts will result on the public health, safety, and welfare?



# *Appendix A*

2022 OPEN HOUSE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT REPORT



## Master Plan Engagement Report

CITY OF PLAINWELL PLANNING COMMISSION

WILLIAMS & WORKS

Introduction

The existing City of Plainwell Master Plan was adopted in 2016 and was written to guide the future growth and development of the City. In 2022, the City of Plainwell Planning Commission began the process of updating the existing Master Plan to ensure that the Plan was still accurate and relevant. As part of the update, the City of Plainwell utilized an open house to engage with community members and gain input regarding land use and infrastructure concerns. The open house was utilized for both the Master Plan and the Parks and Recreation Plan update. This report presents the findings of this outreach effort. It includes a summary of findings and a discussion of the methods used to solicit feedback.

Public Open House

The public open house was held on Thursday, April 14, 2022, at the Plainwell City Hall from 6 pm to 8 pm. The open house featured several interactive stations designed to solicit input from the community through engaging activities. The general purpose of each activity was to prompt the public with questions relevant to the Master Plan. The public was tasked with providing feedback regarding characteristics of the City that are important to them and ideas they may have to address issues or concerns. Attendees were given the opportunity to engage in any of the activities as they pleased and further discuss specific items of personal importance with city officials and planning consultants.

The open house received around 30-40 attendees. The event was publicized through online methods such as emails and social media announcements. Other forms of advertising were also used. Results from each of the activities are presented on the following pages, along with conclusions and next steps.

Welcome Board

An informative welcome board was present at the planning event that provided context about the Plan and encouraged participants to take part in the available activities. The board included educational text regarding three questions: (1) What is a Master Plan? (2) Why is long-range planning important? and (3) Why are we here today?

Station 1. Community Values

What Makes Plainwell so Great?

Participants were asked to write down reasons why they think the City of Plainwell is great on a sticky note and place their responses on the designated board. This activity was important because it highlights what is working in the community and what could be built upon in the future.

Figure 1 a word cloud of common terminology used in the responses to this question. The larger the word, the more commonly it was used in the responses. The word cloud generator used removes numbers, special characters, and stop words (e.g., the, is, are, etc.) from the transcribed comments.

Topics commonly expressed include parks and the riverwalk, appreciation of community events, and the enjoyment of local shops and eateries. A full list of comments can be found in Appendix A.

What is Detracting or a Threat to Plainwell?

Participants were also asked to write down what they perceive as a threat against the City of Plainwell on a sticky note and place their responses on the designated board. This activity was important because it outlines problems or what isn’t working in the community. Figure 2 is a word cloud of common terminology used in the responses to this question

Figure 3 lists the major topics that were provided by the public and the number of times these topics were mentioned on the sticky notes.

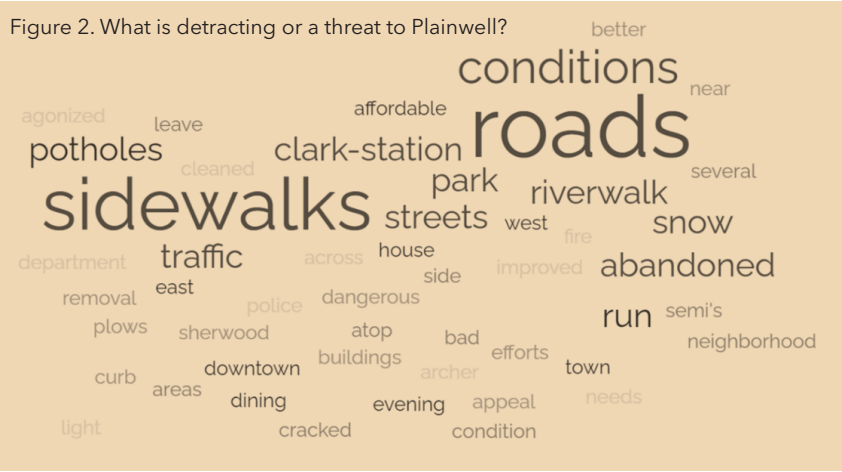


Figure 3. Community Values

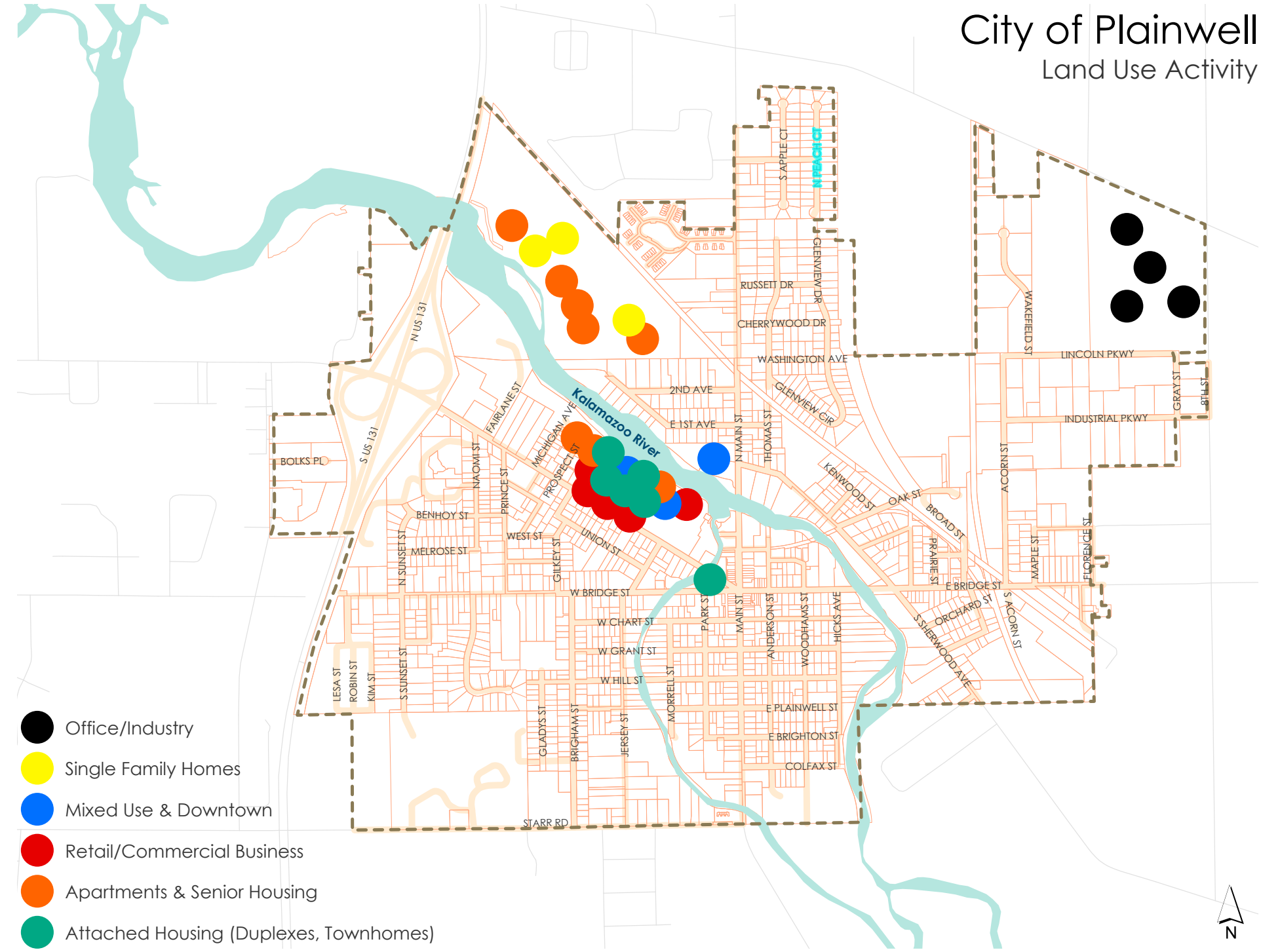
What makes Plainwell so great?		What is detracting or a threat to Plainwell?	
Shops and Restaurants .....	7	Sidewalks/Road Conditions ...	10
Parks .....	5	River Pollution.....	3
Riverwalk .....	4	Abandoned Clark Station .....	2
People .....	3	Donnie's Auto.....	1
Community Events.....	1	Sidewalk Snow Removal .....	1
City Workers .....	1	East/west traffic .....	1
Safe .....	1		





### Station 2. Future Land Use Activity

To glean insights into the future land use and development, participants were asked to use the different color stickers to mark where the differing uses of land should be encouraged. The respondent's feedback was transcribed onto a map and is illustrated on the land use activity map on the following page. Single-family homes were denoted by yellow stickers and were largely placed in the existing agricultural properties west of the railroad and north of the Kalamazoo River. Apartments and Senior Housing are denoted in orange and can also be seen in the same area and along the riverfront properties north of Allegan Road near City Hall. Stickers in green represent attached housing (duplexes, townhomes) and commercial use (in red) were also placed along the river and north of Allegan Road. Suggestions for office and industry uses were concentrated in the northeastern portion of the City.



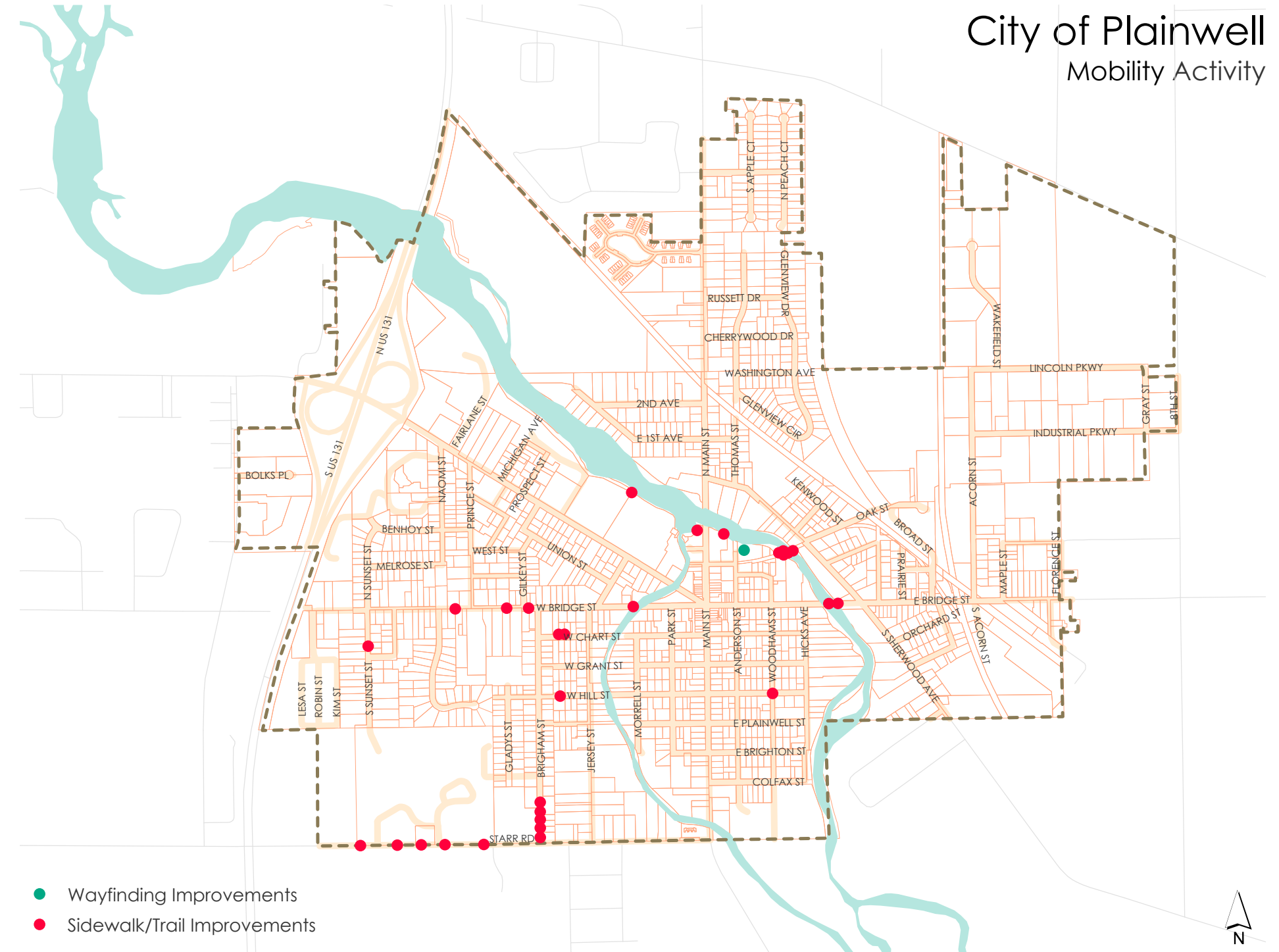
### Station 3. Mobility Activity

Participants were asked to place pins on the map that corresponded to various transportation and mobility improvement categories. Blue pins denoted improvements regarding crosswalks, sidewalk/trail improvements were indicated in red, and wayfinding improvements were represented by green pins. A majority of the pins placed on the maps were red, regarding sidewalk and trail improvements, and only one green pin was placed indicating wayfinding improvements. No blue pins were placed on the mobility activity map. The category pins and their relative locations are represented on the map on the next page.

As shown on the map, pins for sidewalk improvements were seen in clusters south of the Kalamazoo River. Streets on which the pins were placed were:

- Starr Rd. (west of Brigham St.)
- Brigham St. (near Plainwell Middle School)
- Plainwell Riverwalk (including the bridge)
- W Chart St.
- W Bridge St.
- E Bridge St. (near Sherwood Park)
- S Woodhams St. & E Hill St.
- W Hill St.
- S Sunset St

Additionally, participants repeatedly expressed the need for improved pedestrian connections to the school, an improved deck surface on the pedestrian bridge, and city-wide sidewalk maintenance.





## Station 4. Comment Cards

Comment cards were available during the event to gather open-ended feedback from the participants. The cards asked for the participant's additional thoughts or ideas regarding the City of Plainwell's Master Plan update. Additionally, Station 4 shared copies of a recently completed Redevelopment Ready Site Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for the Paper Mill Site located at 200 W Allegan Street. Therefore, many of the comments were related to the overall site design vision illustrated in this RFQ. A total of seven comment cards were completed and their content has been transcribed below.

- Lots of good ideas however, if we can't maintain what we already have, we can't expand. Neighborhood roads are horrible especially bad in the orchards, patching is long past being effective.
- Use existing buildings, no big city look. Current buildings mixed-use areas- develop into upstairs lofts and retail on the main level. Develop 1-story condos for those who want to stay in the town to retire, but don't want to keep their bigger 2-story homes. 1200-1800 sq ft type of housing. Small office spaces for rent- 100-200 sq ft. More green and family-use areas, splash pad, skate parks, farm markets own space, all close in town!
- Really like the paper mill properties site map. As an individual thinking of living downtown in the future, is there/will there be an opportunity to get on a housing waiting list and/or invest ahead of time toward a home?
- The mill redevelopment plan is great! Looking forward to townhomes and multipurpose uses
- Enjoyed seeing how Plainwell is becoming more attractive, especially with the old mill development

- Don't like the road next to the riverwalk- keep it open for walking, biking. Etc. Don't like the single-family homes on the north side of Allegan St. Maybe parking for commercial space.
- The amount of apartment housing vs the amount of green space in the current plan is very disappointing. It does not become a destination for residents to visit or non-residents to make a point to travel to. The mill area is already the most traffic-congested area in Plainwell, the housing structure would only compound this. As the population of Plainwell continues to increase and young families buy homes, we are all looking for centrally located kids-focused playground parks, a splash pad, and a peaceful space along the river. This model of stacked housing devalues the downtown district for its current residents. Please use this opportunity to make downtown Plainwell a destination for residents and non-residents to make a point to visit, not just a source of income at the cost of a cultural improvement opportunity- particularly at a site that has been a cultural stalwart in the City for a long time. To put it simply, this plan bums me the hell out.

## Growth Opportunity Board

This board provided information from the Paper Mill Properties Redevelopment Ready Site RFQ. The City of Plainwell has been collaboratively developing a vision for future development on the Paper Mill site since 2006. A concept map was included that displayed the future of this site. The goals of the concept included creating new residential options through attached housing formats, providing a central gathering place internal to the site with waterfront views, ensuring accessibility to the Kalamazoo River, etc. The participants also provided feedback regarding this redevelopment concept which can be seen in the comment card section transcribed on the previous page.

## Conclusions

Based on the results of the Public Open House, the City of Plainwell Planning Commission may wish to consider the following as it updates the goals, objectives, and action items contained in the Master Plan:

### Recommendations

- Parks, shops, restaurants, and the riverwalk were identified as defining features of Plainwell. Encouraging the use of these features and creating more green spaces like parks, trails, etc. with proper amenities can be of great importance to residents and should be considered throughout the Master Plan update.
- Participants displayed a strong concern regarding the conditions of roads and sidewalks in and around the City. Improving these issues should be highlighted when reviewing the Master Plan goals and objectives. The mobility activity section can be utilized to prioritize areas in the City that need sidewalk and road improvements.
- In the land-use activity, participants expressed an overall interest in seeing apartment/senior housing and attached housing (duplexes and townhomes) more than single-family homes. The Planning Commission may consider this interest while developing future land use.

## Next Steps

The City of Plainwell Planning Commission should review and discuss the open house results contained in this report at their next meeting and future meetings, if necessary.

Appendix A

What makes Plainwell so Great?
The flowers and flags
Location on the river, some nice shops/stores; hart's dean's Plainwell ice cream, kayak co.
Shops and restaurants
Parks
People
Riverwalk awesome
Riverwalk
The parks and community events
The people
The businesses that have invested in our downtown area (Perfect Image, Passiflora, Dog and the Bank etc.) are truly appreciated. More of this please!
Safe
Commitment from those working for the City
Parks and people
Plainwell ice cream
City events and festivals
Food
Local dining establishments
Shops and restaurants
City workers do an awesome job
Family; friendly parks and play areas
Donnie’s auto
Pedestrian friendly spaces

What is detracting or a threat to Plainwell?
Donnie’s auto
What is getting dumped into the river upstream from us?
East/west traffic through town
Affordable evening dining downtown
House on M-89 across from the police/fire department needs to be cleaned up
Streets and sidewalks
Agonized archer at the traffic light. Improved "curb appeal" to some buildings.
The abandoned Clark station :
Abandoned Clark station
I would like to see better snow removal efforts near riverwalk park and Sherwood Park. It is very dangerous as plows leave snow atop the sidewalks in several areas
Sidewalks
Sidewalks and road conditions semis on side streets
Potholes and cracked sidewalks
Condition of neighborhood roads
Bad roads, difficult to run/walk
Sidewalk conditions and road potholes
Run down riverwalk
Bridge street historic district road conditions and all adjoining roads. Walnut woods especially.
What is getting dumped in the river?

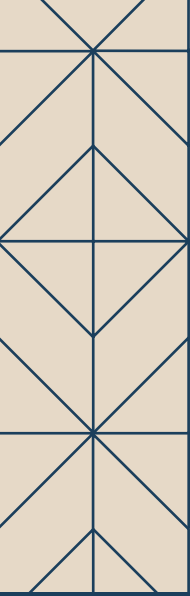


# Appendix B

## COMPLETED ACTION PLAN ITEMS FROM PREVIOUS PLANS

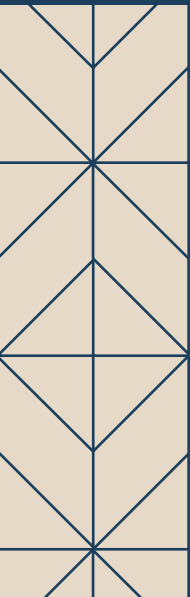
### Ordinances, Guidelines, Plans, and Policies: Completed Items since 2011

Action	Status
1. Complete, fund, and implement a streetscape program for downtown.	Downtown streetscape completed with N & S Main Street Project 2011.
2. Implement policies to encourage community cleanup efforts and provide incentives to clean up and improve property.	Façade grants and revolving loan funding for businesses and an Allegan County 0% interest loans for residential properties.
3. Work with the Plainwell School District and area youth organizations to create a “youth cabinet,” to advise Plainwell on policies affecting area youth.	Create a seat on our committees for a youth, start with Parks & trees; promotion committee; Look at a youth council.
4. Aggressively market Plainwell’s restaurants, businesses, and waterfront as a unique destination between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids	Created the Otsego Plainwell Area Chamber of Commerce whose purpose is to market area businesses.
5. Develop and implement policies that serve to protect existing trees, woodlots and street trees in Plainwell.	Have a Street Tree Ordinance # 201
6. Continue and build on programs that encourage building renovation and improvements.	Façade grants and revolving loan funding for businesses and an Allegan County 0% interest loans for residential properties
7. Prepare and implement a plan that addresses congestion and yet is sensitive to the context of the M-89 corridor and at the M-89/Main/Bridge intersection.	Complete. Notes: Major intersection project called out in 2009 plan completed.
8. Continue to market and expand Plainwell’s current industrial park.	Industrial Park is currently full
9. Prepare an economic development plan that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identifies potential employers and lists requirements for each category.</li><li>• Is done in conjunction with public schools, establishing a program to provide necessary public infrastructure and public services (such as education and training) to secure jobs.</li><li>• Promotes development and creates a business climate to attract positive economic development and maintains competitiveness.</li></ul>	Completed and updated in 2023



# *Appendix C*

APPROVAL RESOLUTIONS





City of ***Plainwell***  
***2023 Master Plan***

