



2019

Economic Development Strategy



*Liz Agne
Photography*

City of Plainwell

1/1/2019

Introduction and Overview

Introduction and Overview

The City of Plainwell strives for the overall increase in quality of life and prosperity of its residents and business owners. Through improvements to its physical infrastructure, image and commitment to support local businesses, the goal of Plainwell economic development strategy is to support and embrace policies and practices to improve the overall economic welfare of the city. This document outlines the economic development strategies embraced by the city.

This strategy was developed collaboratively between the City Council and the Planning Commission. Further, this strategy is based on the 2016 City of Plainwell Master Plan update and builds upon the information, goals and principles of that effort. This strategy is a refinement of the economic development and redevelopment framework established in the Master Plan.

Background

The City of Plainwell was incorporated as a village in 1869 and as a city in 1934. The Mill Race was dug in 1856 in a natural depression of land along the Kalamazoo River. The race encouraged many new businesses and settlers to relocate to Plainwell. These new businesses included a grist mill built by Mr. Henry J. Cushman in 1858. The first saw mill was built by Mr. Brigham then G.B. Force and O.D. Dunham established a rake factory. In 1860, they also opened a factory. Soon thereafter, three steel bridges were erected to cross the Mill Race at Allegan (M-89), Bridge and Main Street. In 1886, a group of local businessmen met and soon thereafter, in 1890, the Michigan Paper Company opened on the site of the Lyons and Page Mill which was built in 1872 as a manufacturer of newsprint. In 2006, the City of Plainwell purchased the former paper mill and by 2014 City Hall relocated to a portion of the now historic mill.

Population

Plainwell's reported population from the 2010 US Census was 3,804, but was estimated to have decreased marginally (0.1%) to 3,798 in 2014 according to the US Census Bureau's Five-Year American Community Survey Estimates.

Incomes, Labor Force and Unemployment

The median household income in Plainwell has not kept pace with the economy, affecting the community broadly. In 1999, Plainwell's median household income was \$45,625; by 2014 it had decreased to an estimated \$41,417. In other words, real household incomes in Plainwell have not only failed to grow, but have actually declined (far below that which is necessary to keep pace with inflationary factors affecting the overall economy). This is especially troubling as the economy in the state of Michigan has begun to rebound, incomes have not returned to pre-recession levels. A decline in median family income is a harbinger of tough decisions to come for the community regarding municipal services and programs, economic development, and capital expenditures.

Housing

There are approximately 1,593 housing units in the City of Plainwell. The majority of households are located in the immediate area surrounding the Central Business District.

Industry

The sectors of manufacturing, education, and healthcare employ the largest number of workers in City of Plainwell.

Opportunities and Challenges

City Opportunities and Strengths

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

- Existing buildings that can be redeveloped and adapted for new use
- Plainwell sits along the Kalamazoo River and the Mill Race, surrounding our downtown to form the “Island City.”
- Easy access to US-131 and sits 15 miles north of Kalamazoo and 35 miles south of Grand Rapids
- Non-motorized Riverwalk that connects four of the seven parks in Plainwell
- 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
- The city owns the former Plainwell Paper Mill, 36 acres along the Kalamazoo River and seeking redevelopment of the mill site for condos, townhouse and service/retail businesses
- Plainwell Paper Mill is on the National Historic Registry list
- Certified Industrial Park housing 34 businesses

City Challenges

The city will need to address the following local and regional changes:

- Lack of land for any type of expansion or new housing developments
- Education and training for labor related jobs
- 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 exacerbating the issue around quality and choice of housing
- Owning a superfund site and the slow pace of progression for redevelopment

Economic Strategy

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 goals identified in the regional context. Each of the goals put forth in this strategy meets the criteria.

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.

| Key Focus Areas and Strategies | | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Action | Responsibility | Timing | Priority | Complete |
| 1. Review zoning ordinance 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 to implement plan, including new mixed use and form-based districts, flexible regulations for industrial park, revised commercial design standards and appropriate density changes that reflect desired community character. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council | Within 1 year | 1 | In process |
| 3. Prepare economic development plan that: -Identifies potential employers and lists requirements for each category. -Is done in conjunction with public schools, establishing a program to provide necessary public infrastructure and public services (such as education and training) secure jobs. -Promotes development and creates a business climate to attract positive economic development and maintains competitiveness. | Staff, Planning Commission, School Board, City Council | As needed | 2 | |
| 4. Review and revise master plan in response to changing needs and priorities. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council | Annually and as needed | 2 | Master Plan update 2021 |
| 5. Update Capital Improvements Plan to prioritize plan elements, projects and identify funding options. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council | Within 1 year and annually | 1 | On going |
| 6. Develop and implement a rental housing inspection program. | Staff, City Council | Within 1 year | 2 | |
| 7. Continue to vigorously enforce building and maintenance codes. | Staff | Now | 1 | On going |

| Key Focus Areas and Strategies | | | | |
|--|--|---------------|----------|------------|
| Action | Responsibility | Timing | Priority | Complete |
| 8. 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, City Council, Community | 1 – 3 years | 2 | In process |
| 9. Complete, fund and implement a sign plan for way-finding. | Staff, City Council, DDA | 1 – 5 years | 3 | |
| 10. Develop and implement a plan to expand trails, enhance access and create a public gathering space along the Kalamazoo River. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, Mill Developer | 1 – 5 years | 1 | In process |
| 11. Update DDA plan - prepare a more detailed plan for the downtown based on plan recommendations, including: design and configuration of downtown streets, streetscape improvements, façade enhancements, concepts for specific development sites, more detailed market assessment and recommendations, incentives to encourage building and site improvements. | Staff, DDA, Chamber of Commerce, City Council | 1 – 2 years | 2 | |
| 12. 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 | |
| 13. Work with the Plainwell School District and area youth organizations to create a “youth cabinet,” who will advise Plainwell on policies affecting area youth. | Staff, City Council, Plainwell Schools, Area Youth Organizations | 1-2 years | 3 | |
| 14. Aggressively market Plainwell’s restaurants, businesses, and water-front as a unique destination between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids. Publications, Social Media etc. | Staff, DDA, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Businesses | Now | 1 | On going |
| 15. Implement policies for ecologically sensitive design and maintenance practices for all public facilities, parks, and utility systems. Determine a comprehensive strategy for monitoring water quality and a plan for implementing water quality improvements. | Staff, City Council, Planning Commission, Parks & Trees Committee, County and State Agencies | 1 – 5 years | 2 | |
| 16. 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 | |

| Key Focus Areas and Strategies | | | | |
|--|--|-------------|----------|-------------|
| Action | Responsibility | Timing | Priority | Complete |
| 17. Develop and implement policies that serve to protect existing trees, woodlots and street trees in Plainwell. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, Parks & Trees | 1 – 3 years | 2 | |
| 18. Require new development to inter-connect with existing streets, side-walks, and other infrastructure. | Staff, Planning Commission via Site Plan Standards and Review, City Council | 1 – 2 years | 1 | |
| 19. Continue and build on programs that encourage building renovation and improvements. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, DDA | Now | 1 | On going |
| 20. 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 | |
| 21. Work with MDOT, Allegan County Road Commission and West Michigan Regional Planning Commission to resolve congestion and safety issues on M-89; include developing a fully directional interchange at US-131/106th Avenue. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, State and County Agencies | 1-2 years | 2 | |
| 22. Undertake a study that explores another road connection from the industrial park north to Miller Road. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, State and County Agencies | 1-3 years | 3 | |
| 23. Support other forms of transportation by interconnecting sidewalks, streets, bike lanes, and trails. In cooperation with surrounding jurisdictions prepare and implement a plan for an inter-connected, non-motorized trail/bike path system. Explore using the former inter-urban 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 | 1-5 years | 3 | In progress |
| 24. 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. | Staff, Planning Commission | 1-2 years | 1 | |

| Key Focus Areas and Strategies | | | | |
|--|---|----------------|----------|-------------|
| Action | Responsibility | Timing | Priority | Complete |
| 25. Evaluate current travel patterns, volumes and street widths relative to their land use context. Develop a new street classification policy that employs traffic calming measures and also considers “road diets” to reduce street widths, while maintaining safe and acceptable traffic volumes. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, State and County Agencies | 1-3 years | 1 | |
| 26. Continue to market and expand Plainwell’s current industrial park. | City Council, Planning Commission | When available | 3 | |
| 27. 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 |