

MUSKEGON HEIGHTS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Economic development is the development of economic wealth of countries, regions or communities for the well-being of their inhabitants. From a policy perspective, economic development can be defined as efforts that seek to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for a community by creating and/or retaining jobs and supporting or growing incomes and the tax base. The City of Muskegon Heights understands the importance of having strong economic development policies and procedures in place in an effort to improve and expand the local economy. This strategy was developed to guide economic development procedures within the City.

Economic Development Steering Committee:

The Muskegon Heights Economic Steering Committee is made up of staff members from the City Manager's Office, the Planning Department and the Clerk's Office. The committee is responsible for guiding economic development in the City and for the creation of this strategy.

Economic Development Vision:

The City of Muskegon Heights, Michigan strives to be a place of economic opportunity and prosperity. Through business creation, expansion and retention, Muskegon Heights will foster a business-friendly climate that will create career opportunities to its citizens and attract new residents with business opportunities.

Goals:

The following list of economic development goals were developed by the steering committee and influenced by the City Council and the Watching New Muskegon Heights input sessions and plan.

1. Support a strong, diverse and attractive housing stock that is in good condition and holds value. This includes the support for new construction and ongoing maintenance, preservation and updating of homes.
2. Attract new economy industries and business start ups to invest in the community, while supporting and retaining current businesses.
3. Create a retail and entertainment district downtown with a distinct vibe or feel.
4. Enhance downtowns public spaces.

Challenges:

There are numerous commercial and industrial buildings located in the city that are falling into disrepair and the number of demolitions is exceeding the number of rehab projects. Without reinvestment into these properties, the city may lose a number of its existing commercial and industrial buildings to attract new industry.

Opportunities:

The City owns dozens of vacant commercial and residential lots. An aggressive lot sale / redevelopment plan could provide developers with an extra incentive to invest in Muskegon Heights.

Coordination with Regional Economic Development Efforts:

Required by federal enabling legislation to maintain the region's eligibility for federal development assistance, the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) prepares the annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is a fact book and blueprint for the economic development of the West Michigan Region. The CEDS also lists and prioritizes major regionally significant economic development projects in the region. The City of Muskegon Heights will be represented on the CEDS Strategy Committee by the City Manager.

Steps to Achieve Goals:

The following is a list of the steps that the City will utilize to achieve the goals of the strategy:

1. The City will partner with local businesses and industries to offer job training programs and internships to foster the professional growth of young people within Muskegon Heights. Regional partners such as the Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce, Greater Muskegon Economic Development and the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission will be able to help facilitate training programs.

Goal(s) Addressed: Attract new economy industries and business startups to invest in the community, while supporting and retaining current businesses.

Timeline: Set training program meeting with GMED by 10/1/22.

Responsible Department: Managers Office

2. The City desires a safe and convenient multi-modal transportation system that provides travel choices and balances the needs of all users. The City will work with the Muskegon County Biking Coalition to be included in their regional greenways plan that focuses on turning former railroad right-of-way into bike paths.

Goal(s) Addressed: Enhance downtowns public spaces.

Timeline: Set meeting by 10/1/22.

Responsible Department: Planning Department

3. The City will package and market priority redevelopment sites. This will include the Strand Theater and vacant DDA-owned retail spaces. The City will create marketing pieces on these sites and distribute requests for proposals from developers.

Goal(s) Addressed: Attract new economy industries and business startups to invest in the community, while supporting and retaining current businesses. Create a retail and entertainment district downtown with a distinct vibe or feel.

Timeline: RFP's developed by 10/1/22.

Responsible Department: Planning Department

4. The City will partner with the Downtown Development Authority to prioritize investments. Public investments can spur private owners to reinvest in their properties. The City will utilize tax increment financing to pay for public improvements. The City will host a DDA meeting to prioritize public investment projects and discuss funding options.

Goal(s) Addressed: Enhance downtowns public spaces.

Timeline: Set meeting with DDA by 10/1/22.

Responsible Department: Managers Office

5. The City will conduct a feasibility study on relocating the farmers market to Rowan Park.

Goal(s) Addressed: Create a retail and entertainment district downtown with a distinct vibe or feel. Enhance downtowns public spaces.

Timeline: Hire a consultant by 12/1/22

Responsible Department: Managers Office

6. The City will encourage the development of infill housing units on vacant lots downtown. The focus will be on Baker St from Columbia to Manahan and Broadway Ave between Sanford St and 6th St. The City will identify funding mechanisms to incentivize the development of housing units.

Goal(s) Addressed: Support a strong, diverse and attractive housing stock that is in good condition and holds value. This includes the support for new construction and ongoing maintenance, preservation and updating of homes.

Timeline: Identify funding mechanisms by 12/1/22

Responsible Department: Managers Office

7. The City will look to enhance the community gathering spaces downtown by redesigning Center St as a festival street. Muskegon Heights is known for some of its summer festivals and a new space for these gatherings could grow these events to become regional destinations. The City will construct an estimate of the street enhancements, identify funding mechanisms and present it to the City Council.

Goal(s) Addressed: Enhance downtowns public spaces.

Timeline: Presentation to the City Council by 12/1/22

Responsible Department: Managers Office

Annual Reporting & Goal Setting:

The Economic Development Steering Committee will develop an annual report and present it to the City Council every January. The goals and action steps will be updated during the February City Council work session every year.