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(See two renderings with captions below the release.)

Muskegon Heights DDA Approves Downtown Vision Plan

Muskegon Heights, MI – Greater Muskegon Economic Development (GMED) in partnership with the City of Muskegon Heights is pleased to announce that the City’s downtown development authority (DDA) has approved the “Reaching New Muskegon Heights” vision plan for downtown Muskegon Heights. The plan is part of a larger New Muskegon Heights initiative and is the culmination of an 18-month process that included public surveys, focus groups and in-person tours with stakeholders. GMED managed the project and helped secure funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and the Community Foundation for Muskegon County to hire Ann Arbor consultant SmithGroup to develop the plan document.

One of the key elements of the plan is the renovation of the Strand Theater, the largest commercial property in downtown Muskegon Heights. “Although there have been limited investments in the Strand Theater in the past, this is the first time we have laid out a comprehensive, long-term vision for this property,” said Muskegon Heights City Manager Troy Bell. “If done correctly, the revitalization of the Strand property has the potential to reignite interest and spur new development throughout our downtown.” Preliminary plans call for a new theater/performing arts center and restaurant on the ground floor, second floor office space, and three floors of residences above.

The Reaching New Muskegon Heights plan outlines a vision for the redesign and complete makeover of Rowan Park and surrounding properties as well. “Our goal is to redesign Rowan Park to make it more interactive,” Bell said. “We envision adding a kids splash pad and replacing the existing street with a walking promenade to allow us to host more festivals and events in our city’s core.” The park design also includes the installation of the City’s first bronze statue titled “Band Together,” which honors the rich tradition of the Muskegon Heights High School marching band, particularly its drum majors who have historically held a special place of honor in the community. Additional plan elements include “Park Place

on Broadway,” a new residential/retail development with terraces overlooking Rowan Park, and new pavement and streetscaping along Broadway Avenue.

GMED Community Development Strategist Cathy Brubaker-Clarke said that embarking on a planning project of this magnitude during the Covid pandemic created additional challenges. “We had to be creative about how to gather the input we needed to develop a solid, viable plan,” she said. “However, the successful completion of the plan demonstrates Muskegon Heights’ commitment to making this vision a reality for their community and we are extremely proud to be a partner in this process.”

The City will now work to seek grants to support repaving and streetscaping on Broadway and will apply for permits and MEDC funds for the Strand Theater renovation. They are also working with Metro Consulting Associates on preliminary designs and a project timeline. The MuskegonCity Arts Initiative, led by former Muskegon Museum of Art Executive Director Judy Hayner, is raising funds to support the Band Together statue, and The Muskegon Heights High School Alumni Association is designing and developing commemorative plaques that are also part of the public art installation.

“This plan honors the great citizens and community of Muskegon Heights by creating a vision for the downtown that our community deserves,” added Bell. “Every successful community has at its core a thriving downtown, and we intend to capitalize on the assets we already have to create a downtown that we can all be proud of for generations to come.”

Visit <https://www.reachingnewmuskegonheights.org/> to see the complete Reaching New Muskegon Heights plan.

About Greater Muskegon Economic Development

Greater Muskegon Economic Development (GMED) was founded in 1999 and is the countywide economic development agency dedicated to supporting local business. GMED’s focus is to leverage public and private investment to accelerate business growth and the creation of high-quality employment opportunities in Muskegon County. Appreciating the importance of the local business community, GMED serves as a clearinghouse of information on programs and incentives available to your business. Learn more at <https://www.developmuskegon.org/>.



Rendering #1: View of Broadway Avenue in Muskegon Heights after the renovation of the Strand Theater property and Rowan Park.



Rendering #2: View of Center Street near Muskegon Heights City Hall as a shared pedestrian area designed to host festivals and events in the City's core downtown.

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