

# MASTER PLAN

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City of New Buffalo, MI

ADOPTED: November 13, 2018



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# INTRODUCTION







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The City of New Buffalo is well established as a vacation destination, drawing visitors and seasonal residents from throughout the Midwest and beyond. For decades, the sandy shores of Lake Michigan and the charming Downtown full of shops and restaurants have provided the ideal spot for summer vacationing, boating and beach activities, and family-oriented fun. This “Small Town on the Big Lake” has the foundation of amenities, appeal, and opportunity upon which this Master Plan will set a course for the future.

In recent years, New Buffalo has seen significant new development, including waterfront condominiums and townhomes, residential infill, restaurant and retail activity, and mixed-use development. However, as the waterfront, downtown, and marina areas of town have intensified, other areas of the City have experienced a slowdown of development interest and investment.

Many of the older and more rural neighborhoods are showing signs of disinvestment, as the City’s permanent population has experienced a 30% decrease in the past 15 years (from 3,200 down to 1,800). Also, some key Downtown sites are sitting vacant, as development on some projects has stalled. These vacant sites, stalled development projects, and tired/aging infrastructure and streetscape improvements have collectively created a community that is both attractive to new development, and at the same time, telegraphing neglect and past miss steps.

Momentum, however, is on the City’s side. With a renewed interest and community support, the City is prepared to make the commitment, make the changes, and make the investments necessary to make a difference. A revitalized Downtown and Lakefront that is warm, welcoming, vibrant and attractive; Neighborhoods that are stable, accommodating, desirable, and improving; and a local economy that is strong, thriving, year-round, and growing – these are the hallmarks of the future of the New Buffalo community.

As growth continues to occur, the community needs a common vision and guide to ensure local values are sustained and objectives are met. This Master Plan articulates that vision and serves as that guide. It is a foundation for decision-making related to land use and development, zoning, transportation and mobility, community facilities and services, image and identity, and more. The Comprehensive Plan is the culmination of a multi-step planning process and is based on detailed analysis of the New Buffalo community as well as extensive community outreach and engagement.



## PURPOSE OF THE MASTER PLAN

A Master Plan provides guidance for growth, development, and physical improvements within a municipality. The document is reflective of the community it serves, utilizing extensive public engagement to identify the unified vision residents have for their future. Based on foundational analysis, the Master Plan offers tangible recommendations and action items that can be undertaken to achieve the City's vision.

At its foundation, a Master Plan is a "how-to" guide that assists with land use patterns, economic development, mobility and access, community amenities and services, and management of parks and natural resources. Community outreach is a core element of the Master Plan, with opportunities throughout the planning process for residents, business owners and operators, City staff, elected and appointed officials, and community stakeholders to voice their opinion and provide feedback.

The New Buffalo Master Plan is:

- ▶ **A basis for regulatory actions:** The plan serves as a foundation and guide for the provisions of the zoning regulations, subdivision regulations, the official map, annexation and growth, and other decisions made under these regulations.
- ▶ **A basis for community programs and decision making:** The plan is a guide and resource for the recommendations contained in a capital budget and program, for a community development program, and for direction and content of other local initiatives, such as for water protection, recreation or open space land acquisition, housing, and much more.

- ▶ **A source for planning studies:** Master Plans can't address every issue in sufficient detail. Therefore, the plan will recommend further studies to develop courses of action for specific needs.

- ▶ **A standard for review at the County and State level:** Other regulatory processes identify the municipal plan as a standard for review of applications. The Master Plan is important to the development of regional plans or inter-municipal programs.

- ▶ **A source of information:** The plan is a valuable source of information for local boards, commissions, organizations, citizens, and business.

- ▶ **A long-term guide:** The plan is a long-term guide by which to measure and evaluate public and private proposals that affect the physical, social, and economic environment of the community.





## VISION & CORE STRATEGIES

The Vision for New Buffalo is to be a beautiful and welcoming community with an active and engaging Downtown; well-maintained infrastructure; safe, desirable, and accommodating neighborhoods; a thriving year-round local economy; and a community environment that prioritizes pedestrian and bicycle mobility.

Collectively, all these components will strengthen the overall quality of life in New Buffalo, for both residents and visitors. Although each aspect of the community's vision is interrelated, with each component affecting the other, the vision can best be achieved over time by prioritizing five core strategies. Throughout the Master Plan, recommendations, designations, and initiatives should all reinforce, in some way, the five Core Strategies.

## CORE STRATEGY ONE: REVITALIZE THE DOWNTOWN & LAKEFRONT

New Buffalo's Downtown and lakefront area is the heart of the community, acting as the primary activity center, a key destination for residents and tourists alike, and the core of commercial uses within the City. The Downtown and lakefront represent the symbolic heart of the City and represents a defining characteristic of the community. The City should prioritize Downtown New Buffalo as the center for investment, development, and aesthetic improvement, demonstrating a dedication to revitalization of the area as a local and regional destination.

Lake Michigan and the beautiful sandy beaches along its shores are among the most amazing and important amenities nature has to offer. As stewards of these treasures, the City must protect them, provide access to them, support and nourish enjoyment of them, and make them available to all, including maintaining the views and vistas to the Lake, shoreline, and horizon from public rights-of-way and gathering areas.

## CORE STRATEGY TWO: INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure within New Buffalo is essential to ensuring quality of life for residents and supporting local business. The City should be proactive in addressing aging infrastructure and maintaining the systems that provide basic services and amenities to the community. These efforts should be closely tied to the City's 5-year Infrastructure Plan and the Capital Improvement Plan, which already include various projects to improve local infrastructure.

In addition to improving its existing infrastructure, the City should explore opportunities to integrate emerging communication technologies within the local infrastructure network, such as high-speed internet. This investment in enhanced communication and technology infrastructure will help the City attract businesses looking for emerging and innovative technologies and make New Buffalo competitive in all areas of economic development, including emerging tech industries.



### **CORE STRATEGY THREE: STRENGTHEN NEIGHBORHOODS & HOUSING**

According to population estimates, the City of New Buffalo has lost a third of its population in the last decade. This decrease is largely attributed to the conversion of permanent residential properties into rental properties and vacation or summer homes. While this has facilitated investment within the community, many permanent residents are unable to afford the increased cost of living in New Buffalo as resort-styled vacation homes and living options increase property values. This shift in the use of residential properties has contributed to a further dip in activity during the non-summer months.

New Buffalo is home to well established residential neighborhoods offering a range of housing options. Residential uses located between the Amtrak railroad and Lake Michigan tend toward resort and vacation styled developments, including numerous vacation homes and rental properties. Over time, the location of these properties, including adjacent residential neighborhoods, has greatly increased their market value. Neighborhoods further from the Lake, like those south of Red Arrow Highway, are less impacted by seasonal home investment. A focus going forward should be to manage residential growth related to the tourism industry while developing affordable housing options to attract and retain a greater permanent, year-round population, and strengthen the residential neighborhoods in all areas of the community. This should include the development of workforce housing and market rate housing that offer residential options supporting a more stable population. The City should consider incentives to support affordable/attainable housing and other desired residential development. Property maintenance, code enforcement, infrastructure enhancements, and more are needed to further improve the quality of existing neighborhoods.

### **CORE STRATEGY FOUR: DEVELOP A YEAR-ROUND ECONOMY**

New Buffalo has historically developed as a resort community, boasting as a destination for beachfront recreation within southwest Michigan as well as the Chicago region. Although New Buffalo has benefitted from related growth, the status of vacation destination comes with a seasonal drawback. New Buffalo sees a considerable increase in population and activity during the summer months; however, activity greatly decreases during the "off-season." New Buffalo's seasonal pattern has greatly affected land use and development within the City, as well as other elements of the community. As the City continues to develop, the existing seasonal economy will continue to influence the feasibility and success of new investment. The City should take steps to capitalize on the benefits of being a resort city while aiming to create a year-round economy, which can support further employment and growth in the community.





To create a more stable business community, the City should take steps to establish a year-round economy by three means: 1) extending the tourist season by offering more off-season events, activities, and attractions, and strategically marketing the City as a year-round vacation and visitor destination; 2) development of new commercial and employment based uses that are non-seasonal in nature; and 3) increase the permanent population by providing greater housing options and affordability, as well as increased employment opportunity.

## **CORE STRATEGY FIVE: PROMOTE PEDESTRIAN & BICYCLE MOBILITY**

Whether its connecting the Downtown to the lakefront, the neighborhoods to the beach and shopping areas, students to the schools, or residents and visitors to the regional bike trail network, the City should prioritize pedestrian and bicycle mobility throughout every corner of the community. In the warmer months, walking is the preferred mode of travel for residents, visiting vacationers, and seasonal residents, especially in the Downtown, lakefront, and surrounding neighborhood areas.

Two primary goals drive the need for enhanced pedestrian connectivity: 1) providing the best possible pedestrian environment for the lakefront, Downtown, and core neighborhoods; and 2) providing safe routes and sidewalks for children walking to schools. These two community priorities should dictate the investment into enhanced and thoroughly connected sidewalk system in key areas of the City. This should be supported by efforts to ensure ADA compliance and pedestrian safety throughout the community. The City should also consider incentives to encourage owners to repair sidewalks serving their properties.

Additionally, a complete bicycle network comprised of trails, on-street lanes, and on-street routes should safely provide for bicycling as a safe means of daily transportation, as well as a recreational activity connecting the City to the greater regional bike trail network.





## PLANNING PROCESS

New Buffalo's Master Plan is the product of a multi-step, community-driven planning process designed to produce a path forward that assesses and builds on existing conditions and influences, establishes a vision, and develops policies and recommendations to serve as a guide for community decision-making. The planning process was built on a foundation of community input and outreach, and focused on both community-wide and area-specific recommendations. The planning process for the Comprehensive Plan comprised seven steps.

### STEP 1: PROJECT INITIATION

To "kick-off" the planning process, meetings were held with key City staff, the Planning Commission, and City Council. In addition, a program was developed for community outreach, including community workshops and the launch of online outreach tools, designed to promote community involvement and encourage citizen participation.

### STEP 2: EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS

This step included an assessment of the existing conditions and future potentials within the community. It was based on information provided by the City, as well as feedback from community service providers and reconnaissance, surveys, inventories, and analyses undertaken by the Consultant.

### STEP 3: COMMUNITY OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

Community outreach and citizen participation were essential components of developing the New Buffalo Master Plan. In-person outreach events were conducted to engage the community, gathering input to guide plan recommendations and policies. Web-based activities were also used to complement traditional outreach, including on-line questionnaires for residents and businesses, and input from sMap, an on-line mapped-based outreach tool.

### STEP 4: VISION, GOALS, & OBJECTIVES

An overall "vision" was established for the future of the City of New Buffalo, aimed at providing focus and direction for subsequent planning activities. The vision includes four primary focuses that serve as the "cornerstone" of the consensus building process. Based on the vision and previous steps in the process, goals and objectives were also prepared for inclusion in key sections of the plan.

### STEP 5: COMMUNITY-WIDE PLANS & POLICIES

This step included the preparation of plans for land use and development, transportation and mobility, community facilities, parks and open space, and environmental features. These plans provide the "core" for the Master Plan, reflecting community input and the City's goals and objectives.

### STEP 6: PLAN DOCUMENTS & ADOPTION

Based on the previous steps in the planning process, the draft and final versions of the Master Plan document were prepared for local review and consideration, including a Planning Commission public hearing on and adoption on 11/13/18.







# COMMUNITY PROFILE





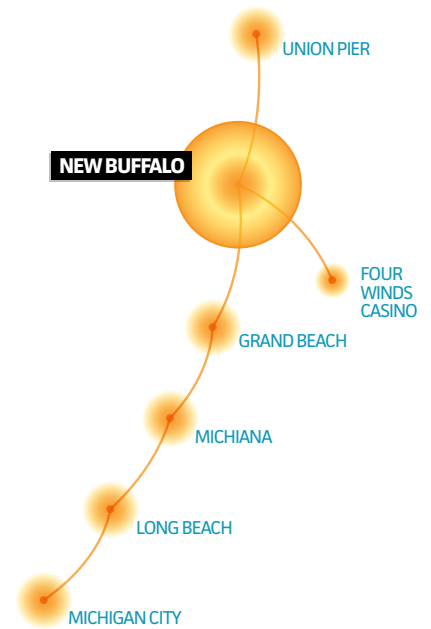


The City of New Buffalo has long been known as the “Gateway to Michigan,” situated at the southwestern tip of the state and one of the first municipalities travelers pass through upon entering Michigan from the west. New Buffalo is located less than 50 miles from Downtown Chicago, where the Galien River flows into Lake Michigan. New Buffalo has historically benefitted from its proximity to the Chicago Metropolitan Area while offering a “get-away” from the City.

## REGIONAL SETTING

New Buffalo is the largest municipality contained within New Buffalo Township, which directly borders the state of Indiana to the south. The Township is part of the greater Berrien County. The City of New Buffalo is entirely bordered by unincorporated land within the township; however, other coastal communities are located nearby, including the Villages of Grand Beach and Michiana to the south and the unincorporated community of Union Pier to the north. New Buffalo Township also includes the Four Winds Casino located on the Pokagon Indian Reservation.

The Red Arrow Highway Corridor, part of the West Michigan Pike, runs through New Buffalo connecting the Chicago region with municipalities stretching all the way to Mackinaw City. Once a high traffic roadway, the construction of Interstate 94 has decreased traffic while providing greater regional accessibility for the community. Amtrak operates a station in New Buffalo with daily service to Chicago, Detroit, and numerous other Michigan municipalities.





**887**  
Households  
in New Buffalo



**±1000**  
Boat Ships in  
New Buffalo Harbor

The Share of Vacant vs. Occupied  
Residential Units in New Buffalo is:

**51%**  
852 Vacant Units



**49%**  
1667 Residential Units

## COMMUNITY HISTORY

New Buffalo was settled in the 1800s; however, Native Americans from the Miami and Potawatomi tribes were observed in the area as early as the 1670s. In October 1834, Captain Wessel D. Whittaker's ship was ran aground during a violent storm, wrecking near present day Grand Beach. The Captain and crew sought shelter in Michigan City, Indiana, eventually hiring a rig to return to St. Joseph and report the ship's loss to its underwriters. While travelling north along the coast, Whittaker was captured by the beauty of the area, especially where the Galien River flowed into Lake Michigan. Upon settling his affairs, Whittaker laid claim to the land, returning in spring 1835 to settle the Village of New Buffalo (now City), named after his hometown of Buffalo, New York.

Early development of Whittaker's New Buffalo was mixed, initially marked by a few years of steady land speculation. The National Panic of 1837 combined with a particularly brutal winter in 1841 brought an end to further speculation. The City returned to a period of growth with the completion of the Michigan Central Railroad in 1849, which connected Detroit to New Buffalo as a route to Chicago. At the time, passengers would travel to New Buffalo and switch to other modes of transportation, largely steamships, to reach Chicago. This facilitated considerable growth and activity in the area, including new hotels, restaurants, and shops, as well as improvements to the harbor to accommodate increased traffic. In 1853, the railroad line was extended through Indiana to provide direct access to Chicago, ending a period of vitality in New Buffalo.

## COMMUNITY IDENTITY

While development was limited, the City continued to grow through the latter half of the 1800s. In the early 1900s, the City developed a new image, recognized as a resort and vacation destination. This facilitated new restaurants, shops, and hospitality accommodations geared toward tourism. Over the years, New Buffalo has retained its identity as a popular resort community, offering lakefront recreation, regionally recognized restaurants, and a variety of residential options catering to tourists.

Growing as a resort community has created a seasonal effect in New Buffalo, with tourism picking up during the summer months and business dipping during other times of the year. Many restaurants, shops, and other businesses close during the harsher winter months, decreasing activity in the City. In summer months, a larger population boosted by visitors places a higher demand on City services and amenities. In addition, popularity as a resort destination has decreased the City's permanent population as residential properties are converted to summer houses and rental properties.



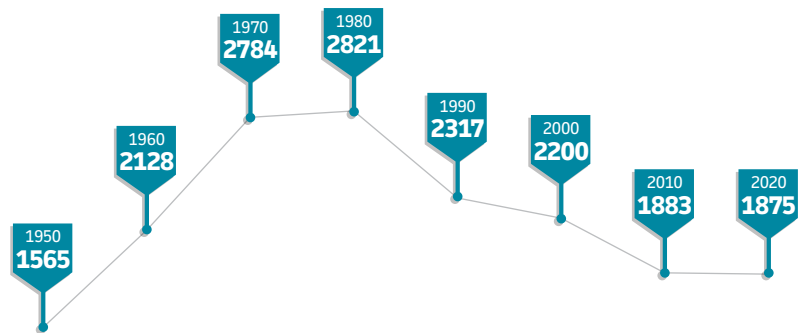
## DEMOGRAPHICS

The City of New Buffalo has a 2015 population of 1872 residents. The City's population is currently in decline from roughly 2,800 residents in 1980 to 1883 residents in 2010. Population loss has been more gradual in the past 10 years, with projections estimating a 2020 population of 1875. Losses in population are closely related to the City's tourism industry, with residents being bought out of the community by developers and individuals looking to create summer homes and rental properties.

The City sees a seasonal population spike during the summer vacation months, which has had a prolonged effect on housing in the community. While New Buffalo includes a total of 1,667 housing units, 51.1% or 852 units are listed as vacant, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. While vacant units do exist, it is likely that many of these are rental properties and temporary homes which remain vacant during most of the year.

### Population Change (1950-2020)

*New Buffalo*



*Source: ESRI BusinessAnalyst & CMAP 2040 Projections*

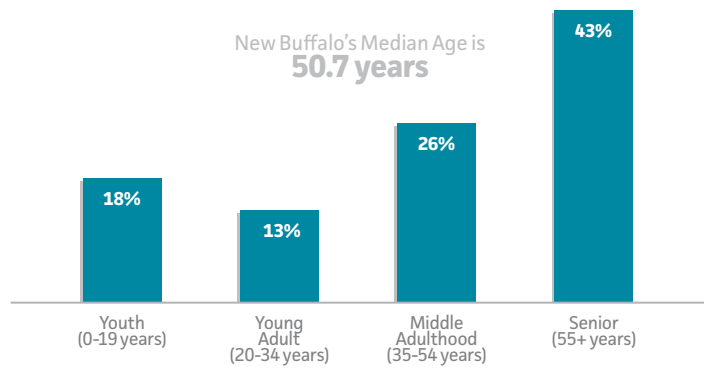
**- 317**

estimated population loss  
between 2000 and 2010

The population of New Buffalo is aging, with the City's median age increasing from 48.4 years old in 2010 to 50.7 years old in 2015. The median age is projected to further increase to 52 years old by 2020. Individuals over 55 years of age account for most New Buffalo's population at 43%, while youth under 19 years of age account for 18% and young adults between the ages of 20 and 34 account for only 13%. These trends can be linked to the City's seasonal pattern and status as a "resort" community. The increasing costs of property in New Buffalo and lack of year-round employers makes living in New Buffalo difficult for young adults and new families.

## Age Distribution (2015)

*New Buffalo*



Source: ESRI Business Analyst



## PAST PLANS, STUDIES & REPORTS

A review of past plans, studies, and reports was conducted to align the Master Plan with previous planning efforts and initiatives. This understanding helps guide the New Buffalo Master Plan and unite existing planning efforts and documents. Both local and regional planning efforts which may have an impact on New Buffalo have been reviewed.

### LOCAL PLANS

#### New Buffalo Master Plan 2000-2010 (2003)

New Buffalo's previous master planning effort was completed in 2003, reviewing the key elements of the City and establishing a set of goals and objectives to guide growth and development. Many of the issues discussed within the plan are still relevant today, including a focus on the Downtown, improving access to the Lakefront, and development of a year-round community. Where appropriate, recommendations of the 2003 Master Plan have been updated and expanded to better address issues which have persisted in the community.

#### 2014-2024 Master Plan (2014)

The City of New Buffalo 2014-2024 Master Plan is an un-adopted master planning effort completed with assistance from the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission. The Plan provides an important review of the community including demographics, natural resources, parks and recreation, education and community facilities, and transportation. The Master Plan functions more effectively as an existing conditions document, stopping short of specific recommendations and implementation strategies. Given the recent completion of this effort; however, the 2014-2024 Master Plan has been used as a resource throughout the planning process.

#### Downtown New Buffalo Study (2009)

The Downtown New Buffalo Study was conducted by the Business Improvement District Board of Directors. The study was based upon results of a downtown survey distributed throughout the community. The study demonstrated a clear lack of identity to the Downtown, with respondents noting the area as having no theme or unified image. In addition, the basic amenities and infrastructure of the Downtown were often rated as being in fair or poor condition. The findings of the study were used to create the Downtown Streetscape Plan.

#### Downtown Streetscape Plan (2010)

Utilizing the Downtown New Buffalo Study, the Downtown Streetscape Plan provided a detailed inventory of the Downtown area, looking to address issues emphasized by the community. The Plan includes detailed design guidelines for streets within the Downtown study area, aimed at providing a cohesive character while improving pedestrian and bicycle safety. While recommendations of the Streetscape Plan were never fully implemented, in 2015 the City initiated a process to develop a new Streetscape Plan.

#### Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, & Greenway Plan (2014-2019)

The Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan inventories and reviews all parks, recreation, and open spaces within City limits, providing an action plan for specific improvements and upgrades. The Plan was used to solicit public input, guide future investment, and identify potential funding sources for expansion of existing facilities. In addition, the Plan establishes goals to maintain and improve existing facilities, develop new recreational opportunities, and enhance local partnerships.

## REGIONAL PLANS

### Berrien County Master Plan (2015)

The Berrien County Master Plan acts as a guiding document for the entirety of Berrien County, Michigan, establishing direction for green infrastructure, economic development, agriculture, housing, transportation, and infrastructure. As a county-wide document, the Plan provides overarching policies for Berrien County, aiming to protect natural resources and open spaces while facilitating healthy growth of existing communities. New Buffalo resides within an economic landscape defined as water/recreation, highlighting the community's reliance on tourism for economic development.

### Harbor Country Hike & Bike Plan (2010)

The Harbor Country Hike & Bike Plan provides an analysis of existing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, including recommendations for new extensions, in Harbor Country. This area is defined by the Townships of New Buffalo, Chikaming, and Three Oaks including the municipalities of New Buffalo, Three Oaks, Grand Beach, and Michiana. The Plan proposes three non-motorized pathways moving through the City north to south, providing connections to Grand Beach, Michiana, Union Pier, and Three Oaks. Routes would run within the right-of-way along Clay Street, Red Arrow Highway Corridor, and through the Downtown via Whittaker Street to Marquette Drive. An off-road route was also proposed with a trailhead at the New Buffalo City Beach. The Plan also recommends various bike lanes and sidewalk improvements to roadways in the City.

### Galien Watershed Plan (2003)

The Galien Watershed Plan was developed to address flooding and pollution concerns for the Galien River. While only a small portion of the watershed is contained within the City, this includes the river's mouth, thus conveying all water in the system through New Buffalo. The Plan provides specific recommendations regarding water quality, wetland preservation and restoration, land use policies, and hydrology.



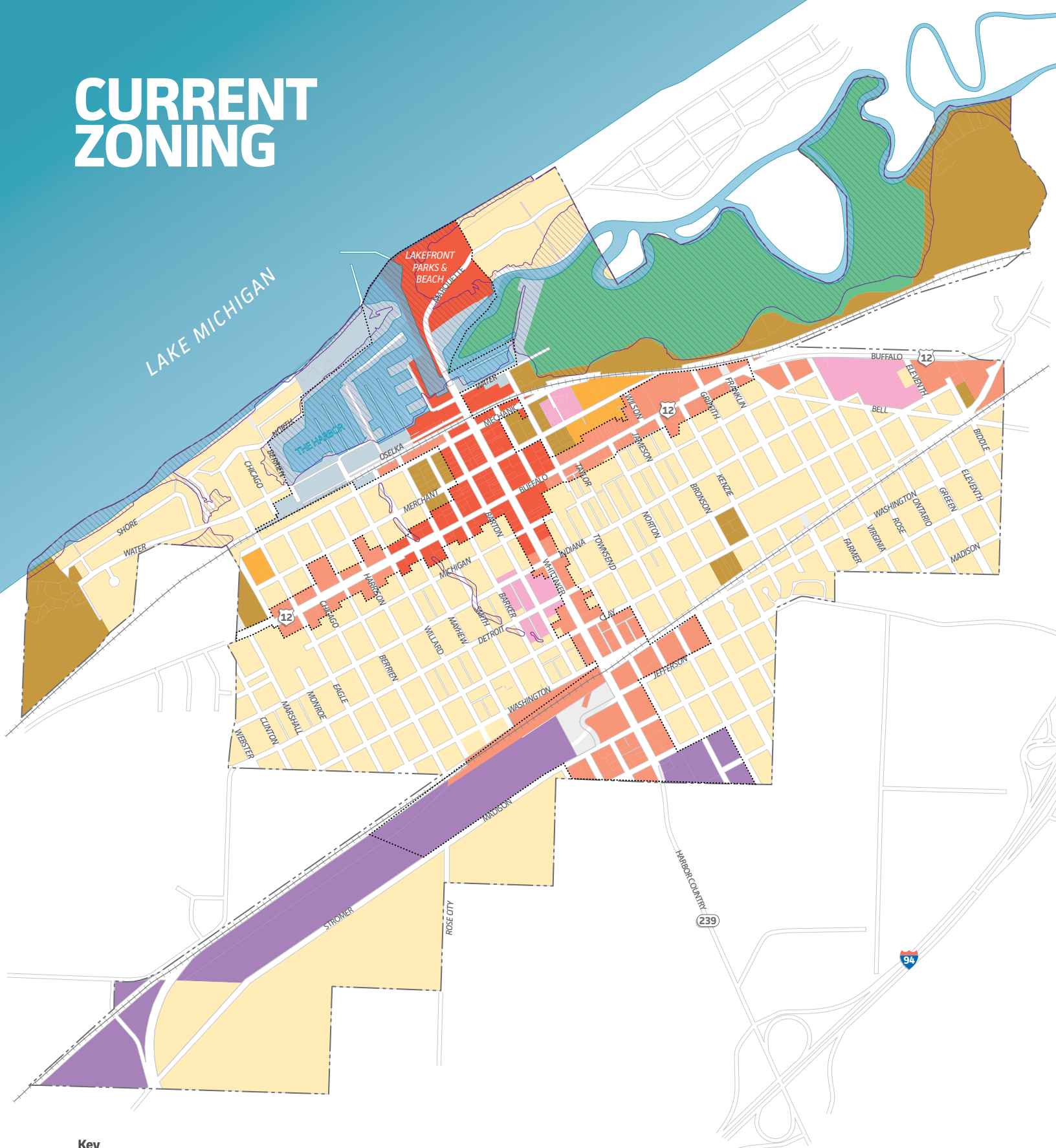
# EXISTING LAND USE



## Key

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #fff9c4; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Single-Family Detached | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #e67e22; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Commercial Services | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Public / Semi-Public  |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #f1c40f; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Single-Family Attached | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #c0392b; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Hotel               | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #3498db; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Religious   |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #8e44ad; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Multi-Family           | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #9b59b6; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Office              | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #a9d0d9; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Open Space  |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #2ecc71; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Mixed Use              | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #231815; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Industrial          | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #27ae60; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Park  |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #e74c3c; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Commercial General     | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #9b59b6; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Light Industrial    | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #f1c40f; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Railroad / Utilities  |
|  |   | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #bdc3c7; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Vacant Land   |
|  |   | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; border: 1px solid black; position: relative;"><div style="position: absolute; top: 50%; left: 50%; transform: translate(-50%, -50%); font-size: 8px;">•</div></span> Vacant Building |

# CURRENT ZONING



**Key**

- R-1 Single Family Residential
- R-2 Medium Density Residential
- R-3 High Density Residential
- PUD Planned Unit Development
- I-1 General Industrial District
- GCD General Commercial District
- CBD Central Business District
- DDA Boundary
- WM Waterfront Marina District
- NCD Nature Conservation District
- FP-1 Floodplain District\*

\*FP-1 Floodplain District is a special flood hazard area having a one percent chance of flooding in a given year.





# COMMUNITY OUTREACH







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Community outreach is an essential element of the planning process for the New Buffalo Master Plan. Public engagement provides valuable input from the individuals who form the community, helping to create a baseline understanding for planning efforts. The issues, concerns, opportunities, and assets identified by community stakeholders helped shape the recommendations and strategies of the Master Plan, ensuring a document that is relevant and reflective of the community it serves

The following is a summary of community outreach completed as part of the planning process. Both in-person and online outreach efforts have been used to engage the community, including:

- ▶ City Council and Planning Commission Workshop (25+ in attendance)
- ▶ Resident Workshops (30+ in attendance and 40+ in attendance)
- ▶ Business Workshop (20+ in attendance)
- ▶ Online Resident Questionnaire (167 responses)
- ▶ Online Business Questionnaire (19 responses)
- ▶ sMap-online interactive mapping tool (11 maps, 71 points of interest)
- ▶ Post Card Questionnaire (several hundred distributed; 60+ returned)
- ▶ Targeted outreach to second homeowners (feedback from 20+)

THIS SECTION CONTAINS A SUMMARY OF THE THOUGHTS, COMMENTS, AND OPINIONS RECEIVED THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROCESS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE **ITEMS IDENTIFIED IN THIS SUMMARY ARE NOT RECOMMENDATIONS OR OBSERVATIONS OF THE CONSULTANT**, BUT RATHER FEEDBACK AND COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE WORKSHOPS AND ON-LINE OUTREACH ACTIVITIES.

## MAJOR ISSUES

The following is a summary of the major issues identified throughout all public outreach, including both in-person and online opportunities. These issues were discussed, in various ways, across all outreach events and tools, highlighting their importance for the New Buffalo community. Some of the more detailed summaries of individual outreach efforts are also included following this section.

### DOWNTOWN NEW BUFFALO

The Downtown area located along Whitaker Street was a central focus throughout community outreach. Residents and business owners felt the area lacks investment, vitality, and excitement. Major vacant properties make the area feel empty, particularly the unfinished development between Merchant Street and Mechanic Street. While seen as the heart of New Buffalo, community members want to see new investment and vitality to make the Downtown a regional draw and competitor.



## LAKE MICHIGAN & BEACHFRONT

Like the Downtown, Lake Michigan and the beachfront were highlighted as a central reason visitors and residents come to New Buffalo. Participants argued, however, that the beach has become dated and less appealing than other beaches in communities along the Lake Michigan coast. Many noted that plans have been developed for the lakefront, but never implemented. Throughout outreach participants called for redevelopment and revitalization of the beachfront to not only improve its entertainment value but also better integrate it with the Downtown and community.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Community members demonstrated a strong desire for new businesses and development. Residents hope to see new commercial uses, including restaurants, retailers, and entertainment businesses, especially in Downtown. While the City's unique small businesses were seen as an asset, many felt that a lack of investment is hurting the community and decreasing its prominence within the region. In some cases, this was linked with a need for a steadier/year-round employment base.

## YEAR-ROUND ECONOMY

Closely linked to economic development was the need for a year-round economy. Business owners and residents alike noted that New Buffalo has a seasonal economy that caters to summer tourism. In other seasons of the year, however, companies struggle to bring in patrons on a regular basis. Many noted that this has led to seasonal retailers who close for the off season, creating a perception that the community is not active during those months. Business owners and operators called for new ways to support local business operation and tourism to bring in patrons throughout the year.

## LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The poor condition of local infrastructure was a consistent discussion in community outreach. While comments were not limited to any particular area, many older residential neighborhoods were highlighted as having poor maintenance. In addition, Whittaker Street and the Red Arrow Highway Corridor were often noted as having a poor appearance which creates a negative image of New Buffalo given their prominence as the City's two busiest roadways. Sidewalks were most consistently noted as being poorly maintained and dangerous for pedestrians.

## GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITY

Many comments from public engagement noted a lack of effort and urgency from the local government and community. Stakeholders often felt that the local government was not effectively addressing significant issues within the community, particularly the unfinished property in Downtown New Buffalo which has remained vacant for many years. Also discussed was a lack of empathy or interest from residents who are unconcerned about the future of the City. This was closely tied to the community's seasonal tourism, given that many homeowners don't live in New Buffalo fulltime. Participants felt that new energy and focus was necessary from all stakeholders to bring about change for the better.



## IN-PERSON OUTREACH

In-person events are the core of community outreach, providing an opportunity for stakeholders to publicly discuss issues facing the City of New Buffalo. These events enable face-to-face discussion and pointed questions that are vital to building an understanding of the community. Further, in-person outreach helps to gather not just the important issues and concepts, but the emotions behind them which are central to establish a vision for the City. In addition to an initial kick-off workshop with the City Council and Planning Commission, three in-person outreach events were held in support of the New Buffalo Master Plan: a two Community Workshops and a Business Workshop.

## WORKSHOP FORMAT

All three workshops followed a similar format designed to facilitate discussion and gather a range of input from participants. The workshops began with a brief overview of the planning process and concluded with a questionnaire exercise, from which participants shared their written comments with the overall group. The exercise included questions relating to top issues and concerns, important projects and actions, and community strengths and assets.

## COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

On Monday, July 20, 2015 at City Hall, and Monday, November 7, 2016 at the New Buffalo Senior High School, workshops were held for residents and community stakeholders. Collectively, more than 70 individuals attended and participated at the two events.

### Top Issues & Concerns

#### *Appearance of the Downtown*

Workshop participants showed concern for the appearance of New Buffalo's "downtown" or the Whittaker Street corridor between Buffalo Street and the railroad. Many comments regarded vacancies within the downtown, particularly the unfinished development on the northeast side of Whittaker between Merchant Street and Mechanic Street. Dubbed "the hole," the site was noted as an eyesore, with the vacant, unfinished, and dilapidated structure detracting from the visual appearance of the area. Commenting that the site has sat unfinished and poorly maintained for close to a decade, residents expressed a strong desire for redevelopment.

Additionally, residents called for downtown streetscaping, façade upgrades, new awnings, fresh paint, more parking, improved walkability, year-round businesses and recreational retail, and other destination-type establishments including a movie theatre, food vendors, tourism, a boardwalk and green space. Participants hope to see life and excitement within the downtown area.

### *Outdated Infrastructure*

In coordination with enhancements to the appearance of downtown, many of the participants at the community workshop indicated a need for citywide infrastructure repair and enhancements. Residents cited infrastructure repairs needed along the lakefront, as well as the city street network. Although the lakefront was noted as the city's best asset, it was generally agreed that infrastructure updates are necessary to enhance the lakefront to make it even better. Aside from the desired lakefront infrastructure enhancements, many participants voiced a need for sidewalk and street repairs; specifically, to widen the sidewalks and fill in pot holes in the street network. Additionally, there was a call for more public restrooms in the downtown and lakefront areas.

### *Appearance of Beachfront and Lion's Park*

Another top issue discussed was the need for improvements to the appearance of the lakefront and Lion's park. Several workshop participants suggested bringing in sand to refill the eroded beaches. Participants described the beachfront as overall lacking in activity and excitement, with some commenting that visitors were choosing beaches in other cities over New Buffalo. Other argued that, while the beach was an important attribute, it remains isolated from other destinations within the city. Given its location between the downtown, beach, and City boat launch, Lion's Park was discussed as being poorly maintained, uninteresting, and lacking in overall features.

### *Reprogram Lakefront*

Closely related to the appearance of the beach front, workshop participants expressed a desire for improved programming along the lakefront to increase the number of uses the beach and lakefront can offer. For example, residents envision a boardwalk, non-motorized boat rentals, food vendors, a farmers' market, and a playground becoming part of the landscape. Respondents hoped to see Lion's park repositioned to better connect the beach to the downtown area and provide a space for community gathers and activities. The development of new lakefront programming and activities was linked to the loss of important tourism dollars.

### *Need for a Sustainable Economy*

Given New Buffalo's position as a tourist destination along the coast of Lake Michigan, residents explained the City's struggle with year-round economic activity. While much of the city includes part-time residents, those living in the City full-time residents face limited opportunities and choices during the off-season months as retail businesses and other destinations within the city shut down temporarily. Additionally, some participants expressed the need for integration between permanent and seasonal residents, noting that there is a lack of heritage development within the City caused by the lack of social cohesion between part-time and full-time residents. Furthermore, participants highlighted a lack of full-time employment opportunities due to the seasonal economy.

### *Lack of a Sense of Urgency*

For many community stakeholders, a key issue was the lack of a sense of urgency within the local culture. Many felt that major concerns need to be addressed with immediate action; however, local apathy or disinterest has reduced the City's ability to affectively mitigate these issues. This was partially linked to New Buffalo's status as a "vacation town," which means a large amount of the population is not fully invested in the community's future. The large vacant development within the downtown, which has stood empty for over a decade, was cited as a clear example. Respondents hope to see greater action and more urgent responses to local issues moving forward.

### *Need to Implement the Master Plan*

Several participants identified the need to create, adopt, and implement the Master Plan as a top priority. The general sentiment was that past planning efforts resulted in plans that were not followed by the City and were not used to inform decisions or guide actions. The importance was in actually implementing the Master Plan and using it to guide City actions regarding land use, development, community character. For many community stakeholders, a key issue was the lack of a sense of urgency within the local culture.





## BUSINESS WORKSHOP

On Monday, July 20th, 2015 a workshop was held with over 20 members of the New Buffalo business community. This workshop provided business owners and operators an opportunity to publicly discuss issues facing The City of New Buffalo from a business perspective.

### Top Issues & Concerns

#### *Parking and Public Restrooms*

Many business owners explained that there is a lack of parking and public restrooms in New Buffalo. Many participants expressed frustration with the longstanding, unfinished development, dubbed “the hole” on Whittaker. Workshop participants stressed the need for more parking and public bathrooms, identifying the vacant site at the intersection of Whittaker and the Red Arrow Highway Corridor as a potential site. Additionally, several participants desired a more walkable environment in New Buffalo, which could also influence parking.

#### *Fix Whittaker Street Development*

A large majority of the participants highlighted the need to redevelop the vacant, unfinished development on Whittaker. The nearly decade-long stalled development is left unmaintained causing blight in the downtown district, which participants do not appreciate nor find good for business. Other workshop comments included Streetscaping and offering incentives to develop vacant lots near the Whittaker street development.

#### *Implement Lakefront Plans*

Another issue identified by the Business Owners workshop includes timely implementation of existing plans. Many participants feel a lack of urgency from the city when it comes to implementation of plans, particularly those relating to the lakefront and marina. Many hope to see better use of the area and implementation of greater placemaking that will help elevate the character of New Buffalo.

#### *Year-Round Economic Opportunities*

Workshop participants identified year-round economic opportunities as an issue in New Buffalo. For instance, one participant noted the lack of reasonable rent to keep business open all year. In a tourism-based economy, business revenues significantly drop in the off season, and a solution is needed to accommodate this bi-annual fluctuation for year-round businesses through appropriate leases. Additionally, business owners described how off-season vacancies and temporary shutdowns negatively affect year-round businesses. One suggested recommendation was to ask seasonal business owners to install nicely decorated storefronts to be displayed throughout the offseason rather than leaving a dark, naked building to sit for months. Also, some business owners noted a lack of communication between the City and business.



## ONLINE OUTREACH

As a compliment to in-person outreach events, online tools were developed to offer residents additional opportunities to provide input. Online outreach helps to capture feedback from those unable to attend outreach events as well as those unlikely to attend, responding to a fundamental shift in the way individuals interact with their community. Online tools included questionnaires for community members and the business community, as well as sMap, an interactive mapping application. Appendix A and B of this document include the full, unprocessed data for each online questionnaire.

## COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRE

A total of 166 individuals completed the community questionnaire. Most respondents have lived in the area for over 10 years (57%); however, a quarter of respondents have lived in the area for 1 to 5 years. This speaks to an existing core of long term residents with a more recent wave of shorter term residents. Most respondents were between the age of 45 and 64 (57%).

When asked about influences to living in New Buffalo, the City's location, schools, and residential neighborhoods were listed as important advantages. Local library service, electric service, water quality, police protection, and fire protection were all identified as community strengths. In reverse, the quality of sidewalks, job opportunities, and local government were noted as disadvantages to living in New Buffalo. Overall, infrastructure was discussed as a significant disadvantage, noted in the poor quality of sidewalks, roads, and general municipal infrastructure.

Most participants felt the City's housing stock is in good or fair condition, with 42% believing it is staying the same and 30% of respondents believing it is improving in quality. Almost 75% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of life in New Buffalo; however, 36% believe it is staying the same and 39% argued it is getting worse. Participants supported the development of new single-family homes and senior citizen housing; however, condominiums, apartments, and townhomes were not desired.

The largest threats to quality of life in the City were identified as poorly maintained and vacant properties, lack of employment opportunities, and development regulations and policies. Despite a belief that the City's quality of life is decreasing, 43% of participants do feel New Buffalo will be a better place in the next 5 years.



## Questionnaires



### Community Questionnaire

If you are a resident of New Buffalo or a surrounding community and would like to provide additional input for the Master Plan, you can click the button below to take a short questionnaire.

[Take the Community Questionnaire](#)

### Business Questionnaire

If you own or operate a commercial business or property in New Buffalo or a surrounding community, and would like to provide additional input for the Master Plan, you can click the button below to take a short questionnaire.

[Take the Business Questionnaire](#)

## BUSINESS QUESTIONNAIRE

A total of 19 business owners and operators completed the business questionnaire. While the business questionnaire did receive fewer responses, input was generally consistent with that of other outreach opportunities. Most individuals represented businesses which have been in the community for 10 or more years.

Participants identified the greatest advantages to operating a business in New Buffalo as the proximity to their home, visibility and access to customers, and their current building or property. The greatest disadvantages were the local employment base, local regulations, and character of the community or business district.

Asked to rate various services and facilities in the community, respondents listed water quality, electric service, fire protection, trash service, and police protection as in good condition. Sidewalks, trees and landscaping, and regional arterials and state roads were identified as being in poor condition.

Respondents had mixed feeling regarding parking availability, it being identified as both a top advantage and disadvantage to operating a business in New Buffalo. Similarly, when asked if their business needs more parking spaces, 47% responded yes and 53% responded no.

Most of the survey participants felt that the community has declined in the past ten years. Similar to the community survey, respondents argued the local government has not effectively deal with business related issues and concerns. Participants identified visibility and access to customers as New Buffalo's greatest strength regarding business, with the character of commercial areas as the largest weakness.



## SMAP

sMap is an online mapping tool that residents used to create their own custom maps of New Buffalo and shared their priority issues, concerns, and suggested improvements. This input is geographically tagged to specific locations on that map, providing a spatial understanding of the community.

A total of 11 maps have been created on the New Buffalo sMap, generating 71 points across the community. The following is a summary of common trends noticed consistently throughout the maps created:

- ▶ **Assets.** Community Asset points focused around three areas: natural resources such as Lake Michigan or the beach; various stores and shops within the Downtown area; and, historic and cultural assets such as churches or historical structures.
- ▶ **Development Sites.** Participants focused largely on two locations they would like to see developed: the vacant, incomplete development in Downtown along Whittaker Street, and the beachfront.
- ▶ **Roadways.** Whittaker Street and the Red Arrow Highway Corridor were consistently noted as problematic, with unsafe intersections, poorly maintained sidewalks, and various congestion issues.
- ▶ **Appearance of Whittaker Corridor.** All points regarding poor appearance were placed along the Whittaker Street corridor, extending from outside the community to the beachfront.
- ▶ **Public Safety.** Participants identified several public safety concerns, largely relating to infrastructure. This included a need for new lights in neighborhoods, widening of dangerous sidewalks, and pedestrian related concerns along Whittaker Street.





# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT

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The Land Use and Development chapter identifies appropriate uses for all properties in the City of New Buffalo, providing for orderly and efficient growth, development, investment, and change over time. This chapter includes an overall Future Land Use Map as well as a Development Framework that provides more detailed discussion regarding the scale and intensity of desired development and overall character of New Buffalo's neighborhoods and commercial districts.

## FUTURE LAND USE

All parcels within the City have been designated one of 12 land use categories. These land use categories should serve as the basis for development review as well as revisions and amendments to the City's Zoning Regulations.

The Future Land Use Map identifies the following primary land uses:

- ▶ Single-Family Detached
- ▶ Single-Family Attached
- ▶ Multi-family
- ▶ Mixed-Use
- ▶ General Commercial
- ▶ Harbor/Marina
- ▶ Industrial/Employment-Focus
- ▶ Public/Semi-Public
- ▶ Parks/Preserves & Natural Areas
- ▶ Lakefront Parks & Beach
- ▶ Railroad/Utilities
- ▶ Conservation Development

## SINGLE-FAMILY DETACHED

Found throughout all areas of the community, detached single-family homes should continue to be the most predominant land use in the City of New Buffalo. Detached single-family homes in New Buffalo include a wide variety of housing styles, sizes, and price points, and should be largely owner-occupied. Single-family detached neighborhoods should be well-served by parks, schools, and City infrastructure and services.





## **SINGLE-FAMILY ATTACHED**

Attached single-family homes consist of structures containing multiple single-family dwellings, each sharing a common wall with at least one adjacent dwelling, and with each unit having direct access to outside. Within New Buffalo, row homes are the most common type of single-family attached housing. Residential developments within and surrounding the marina area also primarily comprise of single-family attached housing. The intensity and character of single-family attached units should be compatible with surrounding single-family neighborhoods. More intense single-family attached development is appropriate within and in areas adjacent the downtown, or strategically located to serve as a buffer between single family neighborhoods and areas of more intense development including the Red Arrow Highway Corridor and Whittaker Street corridors.

## **MULTI-FAMILY**

The multi-family land use consists of structures with multiple housing units that utilize common entrances, hallways, and shared building amenities. Examples of multi-family residential developments include apartments, condominiums, and senior housing. Multi-family development is currently limited to properties along the marina and is typically three- to four-stories in height. Moving forward, additional multi-family development should be encouraged in and around Downtown New Buffalo.

## **MIXED-USE**

Mixed-use development, most typically found in Downtown, is generally characterized by two- to three-story buildings with restaurant, retail, and service uses on the ground floor, and office or residential uses on the upper floors. Mixed-use buildings should be located at or near the sidewalk with parking located at the rear of the building. Mixed-use development should be encouraged within the Downtown but can also be incorporated within New Buffalo's other general commercial areas where appropriate.

## **GENERAL COMMERCIAL**

Commercial uses provide for the day-to-day retail and service needs of New Buffalo's residents as well as the needs of visitors and those passing through the community. General commercial uses include a range of uses such as restaurants, retail shops, entertainment venues, offices, grocery stores, service uses, and more. The Red Arrow Highway Corridor and Whittaker South Street corridors should continue to anchor New Buffalo's general commercial development, accommodating auto-oriented, yet pedestrian-friendly development that provides a wide range of goods and services.



## HARBOR/MARINA

This category features uses related to the function and operation of the New Buffalo Harbor and marina. This includes private marinas, boat slips and docks, and yacht clubs, as well as the City Transient Marina. Development and reinvestment in this area should strive to leverage the waterfront area as a community amenity by improving public access to the waterfront, maintaining views of the water and horizon, and encouraging development that “pulls” the lakefront and water areas inland, rather than walling off the waterfront from other parts of the community. The City should update ordinances for the harbor/marina area to ensure compatibility of uses, as the area has developed with a mix of residential and commercial uses.

## INDUSTRIAL/ EMPLOYMENT-FOCUS

Though limited in scale currently, future industrial and other employment-focused development are desirable to broaden and better establish more year-round economic activity in New Buffalo. This category can include a range of uses that provide year-round employment such as research and development, light manufacturing and assembly, commercial service and contracting, office, and more. To minimize conflicts with established residential neighborhoods and commercial areas, future industrial/employment-focus land uses should be located south of the railroad corridor. Buffering and screening regulations should also be in place to appropriately mitigate potential negative impacts.

## LAKEFRONT PARKS & BEACH

This category includes components that collectively make up the public lakefront/beach-oriented areas of the City, including City Beach, City Boat Launch, Lions Park, and Riverfront Park. This area represents the heart of the City’s lakefront/beach experience and is intended to open to the public and enjoyed by all. As development occurs in the areas surrounding Lakefront Parks & Beach, priority should be given to ensuring the success, attractiveness, and overall character of this important area. The City should also ensure that this area maintain an attractive, safe, comfortable, and easily accessible pedestrian environment that provides connectivity throughout the lakefront and surrounding areas.

## CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT

This large area is primarily wooded and undeveloped, including mesic flatwoods (wetland), the crest of the Inner Lake Border Moraine, and two separate watersheds. While featuring important environmental assets, the area also represents a significant opportunity for new development. Given the right development and use, the area could provide a great opportunity for a sizable employment use or attractive business park campus setting. Maintaining the wooded character of the area is essential and natural features located on the site must be incorporated into any new development. This conservation development approach will accommodate new development and investment in New Buffalo, while protecting the highly values environmental features of the area.

## PUBLIC/SEMI-PUBLIC

The public/semi-public land use comprises institutions and community facilities that contribute to New Buffalo’s overall quality of life and local culture. This use category includes both public facilities, such as the library, schools, and the City Hall, as well as private facilities such as religious institutions. Public/semi-public uses can be found throughout the community, but they are generally located proximate to residential areas. Public/Semi-public land uses and related policies are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6: Community Facilities.

## PARKS, PRESERVES & NATURAL AREAS

The parks, preserves and natural areas land use category includes parks, open spaces, natural areas, and important natural features such as the Lake and lakefront area, wooded areas, wetlands, streams, preserves, and rivers. These areas can be either public or private. The components of the parks and open space category and other relevant information are further explained and detailed in Chapter 7: Parks, Recreation, and Environmental Features Plan.

## RAILROAD/UTILITIES

Utilities and railroad rights-of-way and facilities, passenger station, parking areas, maintenance facilities and grounds, and more, collectively provide critical infrastructure throughout the community for the transporting of freight and passengers. Utilities and rail are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5: Transportation Plan and Chapter 6: Community Facilities.

# FUTURE LAND USE



## Key

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #fff9c4; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Single-Family Detached | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #ff9966; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Commercial General            | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #90ee90; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Parks, Preserves & Natural Areas               | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #ffb6c1; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Railroad / Utilities |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #ffcc99; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Single-Family Attached | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #008080; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Harbor / Marina               | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #d2b48c; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Lakefront Parks & Beach                        |  |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #d2b48c; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Multi-Family           | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #c0c0ff; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Industrial / Employment-Focus | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #90ee90; border: 1px solid black; border-style: dashed;"></span> Conservation Development |  |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #800000; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Mixed-Use              | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #66b3ff; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Public / Semi-Public          |  |  |

## DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The New Buffalo community prides itself on the quality of its neighborhoods, the charm of its Downtown, and its reputation as a desirable waterfront destination for sun, fun, and family. The Development Framework provides guidance on key issues impacting New Buffalo's residential and commercial areas. The primary goal of the Development Framework is to preserve and enhance the established and desirable character of New Buffalo's neighborhoods while diversifying housing options, expanding the Downtown and lakefront, and strengthening the year-round economy.

The Development Framework divides the community into ten areas:

- ▶ Inland Neighborhood (pg 36)
- ▶ Core Neighborhood (pg 38)
- ▶ Preserve/Open Space (pg 39)
- ▶ Downtown New Buffalo (pg 40)
- ▶ Harbor/Marina (pg 44)
- ▶ Lakefront Parks & Beach (pg 45)
- ▶ Red Arrow Highway Corridor (pg 46)
- ▶ South Whittaker Corridor (pg 48)
- ▶ South Whittaker Business Park (pg 50)
- ▶ Conservation Development (pg 51)



# DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



**Key**

- Core Neighborhood
- Inland Neighborhood
- Preserve / Open Space
- Downtown New Buffalo
- Red Arrow Highway Corridor
- Harbor / Marina
- Lakefront Parks & Beach
- S. Whittaker Corridor
- S. Whittaker Business Park
- Conservation Development

## INLAND NEIGHBORHOOD

The Inland Neighborhood area consists of the residential neighborhoods south of The Red Arrow Highway Corridor. This area is available to residents at various stages of life from young professionals and families to empty-nesters and seniors. This area also provides a wider range of neighborhood character than other areas of the City, ranging from lower density areas with larger lots and somewhat rural character, to more traditional neighborhood development and even some single-family attached and medium-density residential areas. This area of the City is also home to the community's public school campus (elementary, middle, and high school) and various parks sites.

This area of the City is crucial in meeting the housing needs for current and future resident populations. The area provides a stable single-family residential character, yet provides opportunity for a variety of new infill development including additional single-family detached, attached, and multi-family residential, including senior housing.

In addition, because this residential area is slightly further away from the Downtown and lakefront areas, it is less impacted by the demand for vacation property conversions, thus helping to keep the area more affordable. Proximity to public schools also increased the desirability of the neighborhood for families with school-aged children.

### *Key objectives:*

- ▶ Establish property maintenance support programs
- ▶ Provide opportunities for affordable housing
- ▶ Provide a mix of dwelling unit types
- ▶ Encourage new development and investment
- ▶ Prioritize code enforcement
- ▶ Repair sidewalks and complete connected network
- ▶ Repair streets and install curb and gutter

## Focus on Infill

There are several residential blocks within the Inland Neighborhood that have numerous vacant lots and opportunities for new investment with minimal barriers. Infill development and the redevelopment of vacant residential parcels should be prioritized. While amendments to development regulations and the marketing of residential development opportunities may foster increased development within less occupied areas of the community, measures should be taken to facilitate new development that is of high quality and reflective of the character of nearby homes that have already been built.

## Opportunity for Variety

With its larger parcels, number of vacant lots, and greater affordability relative to areas closer to the lake, the Inland Neighborhood provides increased opportunities for a greater variety of housing and development types. While the area should remain a predominantly single-family detached neighborhood, The City should work with local developers and builders to explore and realize opportunities for new single-family attached and multi-family residential development. Any non-single family detached residential development should ideally be located near the edge corridors of the Red Arrow Highway Corridor, Whittaker Street, and the CSX railroad corridor, providing a transitional use between areas of more intense commercial activity and the established single-family residential areas. Any new development should be sensitive to and compatible with the single-family character of the neighborhood.

## Property Maintenance

While New Buffalo's neighborhoods remain healthy and stable overall, the Village has not been immune to the issues of foreclosures and poor property maintenance that were exacerbated by the recent (2008) recession. These issues are symptomatic of regional and national housing market trends, and by no means unique to New Buffalo, but the City can play a role in improving housing conditions within its neighborhoods.

The City should work with the community, including Berrien County and local financial institutions, to identify funds and establish maintenance assistance programs designed to aid homeowners and landlords in improving the condition of their properties. The intent of such a program would not be to subsidize routine maintenance but provide assistance with improvements that support community-wide goals.

## Code Enforcement

The enforcement of the City building code and property maintenance related ordinances is crucial in maintaining a quality environment for residents and businesses throughout New Buffalo. The City should continue to budget for and support staff in undertaking consistent and effective code enforcement throughout the community. The City should also establish a process through which concerned residents and neighborhood groups can assist with monitoring their own neighborhoods and limit the impacts of poor property maintenance. Such a process should include code enforcement education to familiarize residents with City ordinances.



## CORE NEIGHBORHOOD

The Core Neighborhood area consists primarily of the residential neighborhoods north of the Red Arrow Highway Corridor and south of the Amtrak railroad line, and the residential neighborhood west of the harbor between the Amtrak line and Lake Michigan. This area is primarily single-family detached residential, but also contains some single-family attached and multi-family development. The area is also a mix of permanent/year-round residences and summer/seasonally occupied units. The neighborhood consists of several blocks of fairly uniform lot sizes and patterns, with greater lot size and pattern variety nearer the lake. The neighborhood is also home to some public facilities (water plant, churches, school) and limited open space.

Proximity of this neighborhood to the Downtown and lakefront make it a primary location for seasonal residences, with increased activity, pedestrian traffic, and residential occupancy during the summer months. As important as the character of Downtown New Buffalo, the upkeep, appearance, investment, and pedestrian-friendliness of this neighborhood is an essential component of strengthening the City's reputation and sense of place for both full-time and part-time residents, and visitors. This neighborhood area is unique in that it has direct significance on both the commercial and residential offerings of the City.

### *Key Objectives:*

- ▶ Complete the sidewalk network
- ▶ Maintain single-family detached character
- ▶ Prioritize code enforcement
- ▶ Repair streets and install curb and gutter
- ▶ Buffer non-residential uses
- ▶ Encourage new development and reinvestment

## Connectivity

To the extent possible, the Core Neighborhood should be physically and visually connected to Downtown and the lakefront. Pedestrian and bicycle mobility and environment are a priority, with a complete network of well-maintained and connected sidewalks on all sides of all blocks. Bicycle lanes and facilities should be installed and designated to the extent appropriate and practical.

## Non Single-Family Infill Development

Although some opportunity exists for non-single-family infill development within the neighborhood, such as townhomes, condominiums, and apartments, such development should only be approved on a very limited basis, if at all. The areas surrounding the neighborhood along the marina and within and near downtown, offer a wide range of higher density multi-family and single-family attached product, with opportunity for even more. The established single-family detached character of the Core Neighborhood should be protected and enhanced, not eroded. If new non-single-family residential development is considered, it should be of the type intended to provide permanent/year-round housing for City residents, possibly including senior housing.

## Character

The character of the residential neighborhoods surrounding a downtown is one of the most significantly contributing components to the character and perception of the downtown. Understanding this fact underscores the importance of maintaining an attractive, charming, and desirable residential environment throughout the neighborhood. Any successful Downtown requires a residential component along with the mix of commercial and recreational offerings, and this neighborhood is part of the downtown's residential make-up. Property maintenance and code enforcement are essential, as are development regulations and guidelines to ensure desirable high quality residential development.

There is a rhythm to neighborhoods such as this and new development, whether small or large, traditional or contemporary, should reinforce the establish charm and character of the neighborhood. Where nonresidential uses do encroach into the neighborhood, such as the boat storage facility at the corner of Willard and Mechanic, special attention should be given to screening such uses and mitigating any negative impacts on the neighborhood.

## PRESERVE/OPEN SPACE

This designation represents a unique condition found in the area between the Amtrak railroad tracks and Lake Michigan, northeast of the City Beach and Harbor. This area is home to single-family detached residences adjacent to large natural open spaces such as Lake Michigan, the City Beach, the Galien River and Preserve. These homes are considered "up on the dunes", "back on the river", or "set in the woods". The area is largely characterized by the stunning natural environment and features that contribute so much the City's beauty and sense of place.

There is very little development opportunity remaining in this area (with the exception of some sites along Preserve Way) and the priority moving forward should be on maintaining the beauty and health of the natural ecosystems and resources for the entire community, and not just for the benefit of those who live adjacent or in close proximity. These natural areas and features represent one-of-a-kind beauty, essential natural systems and resources, recreational amenities, and enhanced tourism and revenue opportunities for the City. The priority going forward should be preserving these natural areas and not accommodating additional private development.

### *Key objectives:*

- ▶ Prioritize natural features and ecosystems
- ▶ Limit future development to minimize impact
- ▶ Provide access for recreation ("soft impact")

## DOWNTOWN NEW BUFFALO

The historic North Whittaker Street corridor forms the heart of Downtown New Buffalo and the community as a whole. As identified in the Future Land Use Map, the City should continue to support new development and reinvestment that provides for a mix of uses and maintains or establishes a streetwall along North Whittaker Street and the Red Arrow Highway Corridor. Mixed use developments should include a combination of retail, restaurant, entertainment, and service uses, with office and residential uses located on the upper floors of buildings.

New development in the Downtown should encourage walkability and promote a pedestrian-friendly environment. Where possible, off-street parking should be provided at the rear of buildings or in shared lots on the edge of the district. Additional multi-family and single-family attached development should also be encouraged on blocks surrounding the downtown to foster pedestrian activity throughout the day.

The Downtown has been studied extensively over the years and a variety of plans have been developed, from master plans to streetscape concepts and design. There is now a sense of urgency to downtown improvement as signs of stalled development, deferred maintenance, lack of investment, and an eroding pedestrian environment are becoming more significant.

### *Key objectives:*

- ▶ Prioritize the pedestrian
- ▶ Maintain views to the Lake
- ▶ Provide additional off-street public parking
- ▶ Enhance the streetscape and appearance
- ▶ Provide additional gathering places/plazas
- ▶ Encourage new high-quality development
- ▶ Improve connectivity between the Downtown and lakefront/beach areas
- ▶ Construct a bridge over the river for non-motorized traffic
















# DOWNTOWN & LAKEFRONT FRAMEWORK

LAKE MICHIGAN



## Key

-  Downtown Gateway & Entry
-  Downtown Streetscape
-  Key Intersection
-  Key Pedestrian Intersection & Crosswalk
-  Redesigned Lakefront / Beach Campus
-  Downtown Approach Enhancements
-  Pedestrian Bridge
-  Boardwalk
-  Redevelopment Site
-  Potential Public Parking
-  Potential Public Plaza
-  Surface Parking Lot Improvements
-  Maintain Lakefront View

## Pedestrian is Priority

Throughout the Downtown, accommodating the pedestrian and creating a safe, attractive, easily navigable, and engaging pedestrian environment is a top priority. Mid-block curb cuts should be eliminated where possible. From Red Arrow to the lakefront, the sidewalk should be as continuous as possible, and automobile conflicts minimized. The sidewalk should be as wide as possible, given parking needs and vehicular circulation requirements, to create opportunities for outdoor dining, sidewalk displays, gathering areas, and the accommodation of large volumes of pedestrians.

The creation of a new plaza or pedestrian gathering areas should also be explored in the downtown, potentially at the intersection of Whittaker and Mechanic or Whittaker and Merchant. All pedestrian crossings at every Whittaker Street intersection should be improved and enhanced to reinforce the pedestrian environment. For every land use and development decision in the Downtown, the City must first ask the question "Will this proposed development or project improve the pedestrian environment of the Downtown and will it improve the pedestrian experience?" If the answer is no, the proposed development or project should not be undertaken.

## Parking is Essential

While parking is essential for the Downtown, it should not be a dominant land use in the core Downtown area. In terms of Land use and development, surface parking lots should be located at the rear of buildings or at off site locations away from Whittaker Street. Ideally, surface parking lots should not exist along Whittaker Street. On street parking should be maximized throughout Downtown and new public lots should be created. Construction of a new public parking lot should be considered between Mechanic Street and the Amtrak railroad tracks, east of Thompson Street. This location is ideally situated to accommodate parking for both Downtown and City Beach/lakefront visitors. Any new parking lot should be located to minimize impact on the surrounding residential neighborhoods.



## Lake/Downtown Connectivity

The connection between the Downtown and the beach/lakefront should be as strong as possible – visually, physically, and functionally. A new bridge for non-motorized traffic should be installed just south of the existing Whittaker Street bridge to seamlessly tie together the Downtown and lakefront. In addition, line-of-site from all public rights-of-way (primarily Whitaker Street) and gathering areas in the Downtown to the lake, horizon, dunes, and marina should be maximized. Lake Michigan is an important amenity for the entire Downtown and the entire community, and it should not be screened from view. Maintaining this lake line-of-site is essential. To further this end, overgrowth of plants, trees, and shrubs should be removed wherever possible to increase views to the lakefront.

## New Development

New development in the Downtown is necessary to fill the gaps created by vacant and underutilized properties and stalled development. New development, however, must reinforce the charm, desired character, and unique appeal and sense of place that New Buffalo provides. New development along Whittaker Street should be located at or near the sidewalk, provide high quality material and design, pedestrian focus and detail, first floor facades that are inviting, attractive, and at least 50% clear windows. The City should utilize professional development review services to ensure all proposed development is appropriate and of the necessary design and quality.



## HARBOR/MARINA

The Harbor/Lakefront area consists primarily of the marina, immediately adjacent marina-oriented residential, lodging/hotels, marina related services and storage facilities. This area represents the heart of much of the summertime boating/recreational activity and is the engine that drives much of the nearby Downtown and residential activity and investment. The area is nearly 100% built-out, with the exception of a handful of infill residential parcels. Past development decisions have virtually eliminated views to the water, marina, and beach from areas other than those immediately adjacent to the water's edge. As a result, the only view corridor allowing the water to penetrate into the visual fabric of the Downtown and community, is a view straight down the Whittaker Street corridor.

### *Key objectives:*

- ▶ Prioritize the pedestrian
- ▶ Maintain views to the Lake
- ▶ Improve connectivity between the Downtown and lakefront/beach areas
- ▶ Construct a bridge over the river for non-motorized traffic

## Maintain the View

Lake Michigan is one of the most amazing natural features in the world. It is beautiful, unique, and New Buffalo's greatest asset. And yet, views to the water, horizon, and beachfront are all but screened from view by development that has occurred over the years. The City seems to have failed to prioritize protecting views to the water from points inland, with the exception of a relatively narrow view corridor straight down Whittaker Street. Going forward, protecting and creating views to the water must be a priority, and a key determinant when evaluating any investment in the Harbor/Marina and Downtown areas.

## Pedestrian Mobility

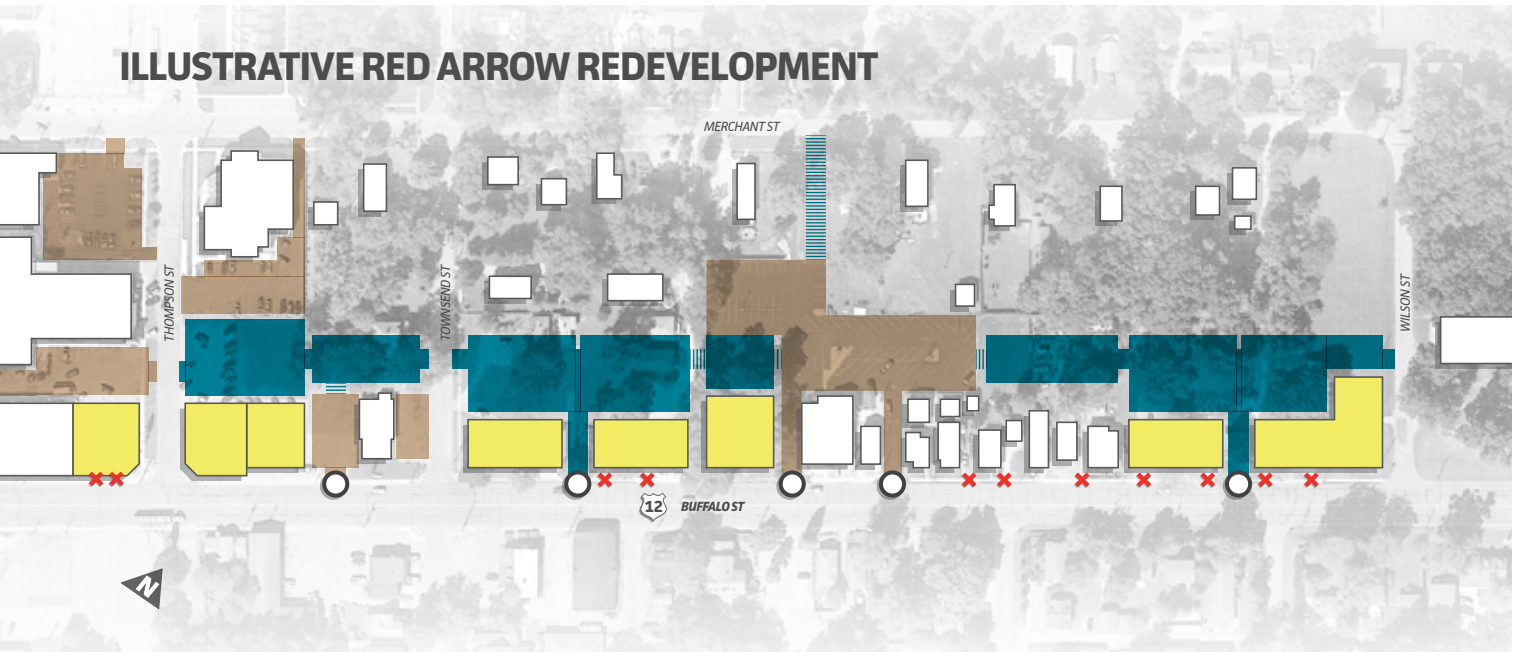
Like in the Downtown, accommodating the pedestrian and creating a safe, attractive, easily navigable, and engaging pedestrian environment is a top priority. As the activity hub for the area, and with parking at a premium and auto traffic often congested, walking and biking are the preferred modes of transportation. Both public and private improvement should focus on improving and supporting pedestrian mobility and creating a welcoming and accommodating pedestrian environment. To this end, a new pedestrian bridge over the channel, connecting the Downtown to the City Beach area, should be a top priority.

## LAKEFRONT PARKS & BEACH

The area adjacent to Marquette Drive, including the City Beach, parking lot, public boat launch, Lions Pavilion Park, and Riverfront Park, presents an opportunity for a completely reconfigured and designed Lakefront Parks and Beach area. Such a redesign could/should include a new pedestrian bridge over the Galien River, outdoor entertainment venue, relocated parking for beach and boat launch, a realignment of Marquette Drive, a boardwalk type feature along the channel, and much more. This area represents the edge of the City, but it is front and center in terms of priority, activity, and importance.

Over the years there have been several development/improvement/concept plans for a reconfigured beachfront area. Currently, the area appears “tired” and needs improvement. The idea of redesigning this area and creating a new Lakefront Park and Beach is a great idea. Although such an undertaking would require its own study and design initiative, components to be considered include: reconfiguring the Marquette Drive alignment to push Marquette further south thereby creating a larger contiguous Lakefront Park and Beach area, for instance “flipping” the location of the beach parking with Lions Pavilion Park allowing the park to be immediately adjacent to the beach; reducing the area devoted only to boat launch parking, enabling potential use of boat launch parking for general beach parking during periods of low activity at the boat launch; creating continuous sidewalk/boardwalk connecting the lakefront to Downtown, running along the channel, over the new pedestrian bridge, and aligning with the sidewalk on the west side of Whittaker Street; replace the dated beach facility building; create a new outdoor concert/entertainment venue space; and much more.

# ILLUSTRATIVE RED ARROW REDEVELOPMENT



## RED ARROW HIGHWAY CORRIDOR

The Red Arrow Highway Corridor serves as a primary gateway to New Buffalo from neighboring communities to the north and south along the Lake Michigan coastline. A wide range of corridor/neighborhood scale commercial development should be encouraged along Red Arrow to provide local access to goods and services, and strengthen the local tax base and employment opportunities. Available sites for development along the corridor are well established due to existing block and parcel layout. Establish design guidelines for future Red Arrow Highway Corridor development.

In many areas however, the lots fronting Red Arrow are relatively small with a shallow depth, limiting the potential for new development. There are however, several vacant and underutilized sites along the corridor that present current development opportunity. Development along the corridor must safely accommodate the automobile, pedestrian, and cyclist, especially in those blocks closest to Downtown, but ideally for the full length of the corridor (from St. Mary of the Lake to Redamak's).

### Key objectives:

- ▶ Provide contiguous sidewalks along both sides of Red Arrow (may require easements)
- ▶ Establish and enforce development standards for on-site landscaping
- ▶ Enhance corridor streetscape and appearance of key intersections
- ▶ Implement wayfinding improvements
- ▶ Minimize and eliminate unnecessary curb cuts
- ▶ Improve internal cross access of adjacent sites
- ▶ Support new development on key sites along the corridor
- ▶ Explore removing truck route designation

- Existing Building (To Remain)
- Existing Parking (To Remain)
- Potential Infill Development
- Potential Shared Parking
- Potential Consolidated Access Drives
- Potential Curb Cut Removal



## Access Management

Access management is an important issue along all major roadways. To the extent possible, the City should seek to minimize the number of direct curb cuts/driveways along Red Arrow. The City should encourage internal cross access of adjacent properties and encourage property access from intersecting side streets to reduce the number of needed curb cuts wherever possible along the roadway. By reducing the number of curb cuts, safety and traffic flow are improved, as is the potential for more attractive sites and enhanced corridor appearance by creating less pavement and more areas for landscaping.

Over time, as more properties are assembled and/or developed, like possibly the area between Townsend and Ramona, these properties could have a single ingress/egress that would provide joint access to a shared parking area at the rear of the buildings. Even if the smaller residential structures remain for commercial uses, a shared parking area with unified access could improve the business viability by collectively providing more parking than any individual site could provide on its own. In several areas, single-family homes have been converted to commercial uses. While the City should continue to allow for the commercial use of these sites, access management must be improved to minimize or eliminate access points along heavily traveled Red Arrow Highway Corridor.

## Corridor Appearance, Screening & Buffering

Currently, few sites along Red Arrow are attractively landscaped. The corridor itself is lacking any right-of-way streetscape enhancement along its length and most parking lots have no perimeter or internal landscaping. In general, sites are poorly landscaped and the corridor has an overall unattractive appearance. The City should develop landscaping and design standards for all new development along the corridor to ensure future development is of a higher quality appearance that contributes to a more attractive corridor that helps to establish a better character and image of New Buffalo.

These standards should include parking lot perimeter and internal landscaping, as well as foundation planting and other site enhancements. Red Arrow serves as an approach route into the community and it is important that it be attractive and reflective of the City's desired character. Additionally, new standards should be explored for screening and buffering commercial activity and uses from adjacent residential properties. A key component of the Plan is to strengthen the overall character of the residential neighborhoods, and an important part of such a strategy is to mitigate the extent possible the impacts of abutting commercial development.

## Accommodating Cars & People

Unlike the Downtown, the Red Arrow Highway Corridor has to have a greater design emphasis on accommodating the automobile. However, the pedestrian must still be accommodated safely on each site and along both sides of the corridor. In the summer months, large groups of pedestrians stream from the downtown area to destinations such as Oinks and Redamak's. Sidewalks should exist on both sides of the Red Arrow Highway Corridor, be at least 5' wide, and maintained in good condition. At a minimum, sidewalks should be provided along the corridor between Kenzie Street to the east and Monroe Street to the west. All sites, especially any new development, must ensure the site is designed in a manner that accommodates getting pedestrians safely from the public sidewalk and parking areas to the primary entrances of the building and the other gathering areas on the site.

## SOUTH WHITTAKER CORRIDOR

The South Whittaker Street Corridor serves as the regional gateway into New Buffalo from I-94 and is a primary approach route into the Downtown and Lakefront area. Although the South Whittaker Corridor lacks the development intensity of The Red Arrow Highway Corridor, it provides a wide range of commercial, residential, and industrial uses. Although similar development patterns exist along much of its length, the corridor varies a bit in character as it transitions south away from The Red Arrow Highway Corridor. The Red Arrow corners, developed with a bank and the development potential of a prominent vacant lot, anchor the South Whittaker Corridor, but are functionally part of the Downtown.

The Corridor provides small unique functional areas that are subtly different and require varying approaches to accommodating improvement over time. In general, the corridor will remain a primarily commercial corridor that will likely intensify in the future, including the redevelopment and assembly of smaller parcels into new larger commercial properties. However, residential conversions to business uses, and some remaining residential uses, will continue to be a part of the South Whittaker Street Corridor. At the southern end of the corridor is the potential to build upon the existing light industrial uses to create a larger light industrial/commercial-service employment area. It is also important to coordinate the south entry into the South Whittaker Corridor area, to the extent possible, with the Township's CIA Exit 1 improvement efforts.

### *Key objectives:*

- ▶ Install curb and gutter
- ▶ Prioritize redevelopment of key sites
- ▶ Focus on development and enhancement of key "nodes"
- ▶ Provide contiguous sidewalks and curb-separated bike lanes (cycle tracks)
- ▶ Install gateway/entry features
- ▶ Install streetscape enhancements and wayfinding signage
- ▶ Maximize development and adaptive reuse potential of Madison & Whittaker site
- ▶ Maintain appearance of transition areas

## Transition Areas Between Nodes

The areas along the corridor between the nodes should continue to support the conversion and adaptive reuse of residential and institutional structures. In addition, existing commercial uses and new commercial development will locate along the corridor as market accommodates and development opportunities and sites become available. This is the nature of much of the corridor and it helps to establish its character and relatively low intensity of uses. Any new development or intensification of existing sites and building must be respectful of and sensitive to the immediately adjacent residential areas.

## Nodal Approach

Sometimes it is difficult to undertake corridor-wide development initiatives when lack of resources and market momentum dilute effectiveness. For South Whittaker, a nodal approach may be a better approach to development and land use strategies. For example, moving southward to Clay Street from Red Arrow, the corridor is comprised primarily of residential and institutional structures converted and adapted for commercial use, with some exceptions. However, when you get to the area between Clay and the railroad tracks, the character changes and the area consists of commercial uses in commercial buildings on both sides of the street. This small, one-block node can be improved with better signage, streetscaping, sidewalk on the east side, pedestrian amenities, and more to begin to establish a quaint small commercial shopping and service node.

At this location the 90° parking along the street adds to the pedestrian environment and mix of storefronts, adding to the unique character of this block. The City should focus on improving this node. By focusing on these nodes 1) The Red Arrow Highway Corridor/Whittaker node, 2) the Clay Street node, and 3) the Madison Street node, the corridor will begin to develop identifiable and relatable nodes that will ultimately work together to create the character of South Whittaker, with smaller scaled and typically less intense development between nodes. This could be accomplished through the development of specific design guidelines, particularly along the Red Arrow Highway Corridor.

## Madison & Whittaker Opportunity Site

The large property at the corner of Madison Street and S. Whittaker Street (530 S. Whittaker Street) represents a tremendous opportunity for new development and adaptive reuse. A commercial site of this size is a scarce commodity in New Buffalo and could accommodate a wide range of commercial, retail, entertainment, restaurant, recreation, multi-family residential and/or mixed-use development. The existing building is unique, and while adaptive reuse may be challenging, it could result in a true one-of-a-kind destination within the community and region. A combination of adaptive reuse of the existing structure and new development on the balance of the site would likely be the most market viable solution for the property. Rather than adhering strictly to a commercial only scenario, the City should remain flexible in its approach to the site and consider a range of uses, ensuring however that any development is compatible with surrounding uses and helps to establish the desired character of the community along this important gateway.

## Sidewalk Continuity & Bikability

As along other major corridors in the City, there should be continuous sidewalks along both sides of South Whittaker Street, from Red Arrow Highway out to the southern limits of the City and beyond. Some of the corridor has sidewalks in good shape, some existing sidewalks are in poor condition, and some areas of the corridor at the southern end are lacking sidewalks all together, along the frontage on the east side of the road and on both sides of the road south of the tracks. The biggest hurdle to sidewalk continuity is adjacent to pull-in parking areas in front of commercial buildings, although this is easily rectified. Additionally, sidewalks should be extended to the areas south of the railroad tracks as new development or uses are brought on line. Also, on-street bike lanes should be striped if possible, or at a minimum, signage should be installed identifying the corridor as an on-street bike route. Further, if there is adequate right-of-way, bike lanes should be physically separated from vehicular traffic. This type of bicycle facility is known as a curb-separated bike lane or cycle track. Coordination with the Township's CIA plan is encouraged.



## **SOUTH WHITTAKER BUSINESS PARK**

To the south of the existing residential on the corner of Whittaker Street and Madison Street is an existing industrial/business area that should be further developed, improved, and expanded. If expanded, it would improve employment opportunities and broaden the tax base with minimal impacts to existing development or established residential neighborhoods.

The area has great proximity to I-94 access and is located strategically for businesses needing a convenient access to the regional interstate network. The area can accommodate a mix of light industrial, commercial services, and retail uses and currently includes uses such as auto towing and service, a concrete plant, self-storage, retail, and restaurant uses. The area can also accommodate uses and include outdoor storage and service areas for material, equipment, or vehicles, with sufficient property size and minimal impact of adjacent properties.

### **Key objectives:**

- ▶ Buffer non-residential uses from adjacent neighborhoods
- ▶ Develop and enforce screening standards for outdoor storage
- ▶ Develop and enforce new development standards for on-site landscaping and signage
- ▶ Improve the overall appearance of the area as a gateway
- ▶ Explore opportunities to expand the industrial use area

## **Serving as an Attractive Gateway**

Although the current mix of uses and the planned future land use for the area isn't necessarily the most attractive in terms of development type, the area must still be improved and developed over time as an attractive gateway into the community. Commercial retail and service uses should front Whittaker Street, with more intense industrial uses and activities set back a distance and screened from public rights of way. Attractive signage, manicured and landscaped front yards, and outdoor storage that is screened, should all be characteristics of this area moving forward.

## **Buffered from Residential**

Although the area is designated as an industrial/business area, it is important that any development, use, or activity be effectively screened and buffered from the adjacent residential areas. Outdoor storage should not be visible from adjacent residential properties and performance standards should be put into place to safeguard against inappropriate hours of operation, noise, vibration, air pollution, and other nuisances often associated with such activities.

## **Annexation and Growth**

As needed to accommodate new business development for the area, annexation of the City should be considered to allow the industrial/business/employment area to grow. In addition to regional transportation access and conducive zoning, such districts need the room to grow as such uses typically desire to locate next to like uses. The area south of what is currently developed is vacant and could potentially accommodate significant growth and development, possibly including very large employment uses.

## CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT

The portion of the City located west of Whittaker Street and south of the CSX railroad tracks is currently home to extensive woodlands and two isolated light industrial uses. With significant opportunity for infill development and reinvestment within the core of the community to the north, this area should be protected from premature development.

However, if infill sites are unable to accommodate a highly desirable development and an opportunity is presented to the City for such a development in this area, then such a development should be considered. Such a development could range from business park and employment uses to a specialized residential development such as senior housing or continuing care facility. If the area is developed, great care should be undertaken to maximize tree preservation and incorporate conservation design best practices.

### *Key objectives:*

- ▶ Insist on conservation design best practices for new development
- ▶ Stay open to a range of potential uses/development (from residential for business park)





# TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY







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A balanced, efficient, and well-connected transportation system provides access to goods, services and community resources, and supports land use development through a variety of modes. The transportation system in the City of New Buffalo consists of an integrated network of roadways, waterways, and an established and developing network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

The Transportation and Mobility chapter focuses on strategic improvements to the transportation system that capitalize on the City's existing infrastructure, reduce system inefficiencies, provide missing linkages in the transportation network, increase downtown parking opportunities, and expand the bicycle and pedestrian system to reach all the City's important community and recreational facilities.

## FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION & THOROUGHFARE TYPE

Roadways have two basic functions: to provide mobility and to provide land access. For planning and design purposes, roadways are classified in a hierarchical structure by function to define their role in the transportation system and their eligibility for certain types of federal transportation funds. Four general functional classifications are used, including freeways, arterials, collectors and local roads. Arterials are commonly subdivided into major (principal) and minor designations based on location, service function and design features (i.e., right-of-way, road capacity, continuity within system, speed limits, parking controls, traffic signal spacing, etc.). Each roadway classification serves as a collecting/distributing facility for the next higher classification in the system.



The following summarizes the roadway functional classification system serving the City of New Buffalo and further describes these thoroughfares based on their context and design features. The City should maintain the classifications of its roadway system and work with MDOT and Berrien County to improve the operation and multi-modal function that these roadways should provide.

## **FREEWAYS**

Freeways provide the highest degree of mobility, with access limited to grade-separated interchanges to preserve capacity for high volumes of traffic and high travel speeds. The nearest freeway to the New Buffalo is interstate I-94, which is accessed from Whittaker Street just south of the city limits. I-94 at this location is under MDOT jurisdiction.

## **ARTERIALS**

Arterials provide a high degree of mobility and function as the primary travel routes through urban areas. These roadways are continuous and serve the broader region, connecting the freeway system with the local system of collector roads, as well as the major activity centers within a community. Arterials are higher capacity facilities that carry high volumes of traffic and require more stringent access controls and traffic signal spacing. In New Buffalo, arterial roadways include US 12/Red Arrow Highway and S. Whittaker Street/Harbor Country Drive.

## **COLLECTORS**

The collector system is designed to support the arterial network. Collector roads consist of medium-capacity, medium volume roads that have limited continuity and serve to distribute traffic between the higher-level arterials and the lower level local roads. Collectors provide some direct land access but to a more limited degree than local roads. In New Buffalo, the collectors are maintained by the City and are two-lane roadways, with right-of-way widths generally ranging from 66-80 feet. Collector roadways in New Buffalo include N. Whittaker Street, Clay Street, and portions of Detroit Street. Collector Streets are under the jurisdiction of the City.

## **LOCAL ROADS**

Local roads provide direct access to private property and are accessed from arterial and collector roads. Trip lengths on local roads are typically short and volumes and speeds are typically low. All remaining roadways not designated above are classified as local roads and are generally two-lane roadways with a right-of-way width of 66 feet. The local roads are also maintained by the City.



## PUBLIC TRANSIT

Public transit in New Buffalo is made available through two service providers. Amtrak provides transportation on a regional scale, connecting New Buffalo to adjacent communities and major cities, including Chicago and Detroit. The station generates daily activity, including 21,751 passengers in the 2014 fiscal year, or an average of almost 60 passengers a day. On a more local scale, the County operates the Berrien Bus, a pay-per-trip bus system that serves residents across the region. Though the County does operate a few fixed routes, none are located within New Buffalo. The Berrien Bus operates on a call service, with users booking travel 24 hours in advanced and paying a fee based on the distance they travel.

While transit in the New Buffalo area is limited, the County has planned for further development of public transportation systems. In 2009, the County completed Moving Forward-A Plan for Public Transit In Berrien County, which includes the following five coordinated planning strategies:

- ▶ Establish a structure to build and sustain coordination efforts
- ▶ Expand outreach to customers, human service agency staff, employers, and others and provide simplified access to information regarding existing transportation options.
- ▶ Expand fixed route public transportation services
- ▶ Use current demand-response services more efficiently to expand capacity of current services offered to individuals who need human service and specialization transportation.
- ▶ Improve integration between county-wide rural service, small dial-a-ride services, and fixed routes.

## PEDESTRIAN MOBILITY

As stated throughout this Master Plan, the City should prioritize pedestrian mobility. Important in every community and often identified as a key component of quality of life, walkability is even more important in beachfront communities, tourist destinations, and active downtowns. In fact, walkability and a safe and attractive pedestrian environment is essential. For this Plan, two primary goals drive the need for enhanced pedestrian connectivity: 1) providing the best possible pedestrian environment for the lakefront, Downtown, and core neighborhoods; and 2) providing sidewalks and safer routes to school for students. These two community priorities should dictate the investment into enhanced and thoroughly connected sidewalk system in key areas of the City.

**Downtown/Lakefront/Core Neighborhoods** – These areas are the heart and soul of the New Buffalo Community. This core area is a key tourist destination, the primary driver of the local economy, and a defining component of the community's overall identity and character.

In these areas the sidewalk network should include a fully connected sidewalk network of 5' wide sidewalks minimum on both sides of all streets. In some locations where right-of-way widths are insufficient, the City should consider access easements on adjacent properties as necessary to install the sidewalk system.

Sidewalks on N. Whittaker Street should be widened to the extent possible and a new pedestrian bridge should be installed just west of the existing vehicular bridge, seamlessly connecting the Downtown and lakefront areas.

**Safe Routes to School** – For the neighborhoods south of Red Arrow Highway where a complete sidewalk system may not be possible or desirable, the priority should be establishing a sidewalk system that prioritizes Safe Routes to Schools. By identifying these routes, designating them for sidewalks, and constructing the sidewalk network, the City will be providing the safety and convenience necessary to appropriately service its residents.

**Intersection Improvements/Pedestrian Crosswalks** – Throughout the community, key intersections should be significantly improved to provide safer pedestrian crossing and to improve the appearance of the corridors and community as a whole. For prominent pedestrian crossing in an established pedestrian environment, such as those along N. Whittaker Street, intersections should be improved with bump outs, pedestrian holding areas, bollard lighting, brick paver treatments, pedestrian furniture, signage, and more. It should be very clear at these locations that pedestrians are the priority and automobile must yield to those who are walking. Even in areas that are not established pedestrian environments, like along Red Arrow Highway and S. Whittaker Street, improved pedestrian crosswalks are essential and should be installed, especially at intersections on Safe Routes to School designated streets. The City should undertake any action that can improve pedestrian safety and strengthen the pedestrian environment.

## BICYCLE MOBILITY & TRAILS

With relatively narrow rights-of-way (typically 66" for most streets) throughout the City, there is often insufficient room to accommodate on-street bike lanes. However, through appropriate signage, bike route designation, on street markings, wayfinding, and a good distribution of well-placed bicycle racks and facilities, New Buffalo can improve its standing as a bicycle friendly community. To keep bicycles off the sidewalks, where they don't belong, cyclists need to have a safe riding environment in the street. And once the cyclists reach their destinations, bicycle racks should be available to accommodate their parking needs without requiring the rider lock the bike to a sign, light pole, or tree along the sidewalk. The City should prioritize installing bike racks at key destinations, such as City Hall, within Downtown, or at community parks.

## LOCAL & REGIONAL TRAILS & ROUTES

Fortunately, the City is well positioned to benefit from and support regional efforts to introduce pedestrian and bicycle trails and routes. The Harbor Country Hike and Bike Plan, prepared by the Friends of Harbor Country Trails, demonstrates a regional dedication to non-motorized mobility, with the goal of providing routes that connect municipalities from Indiana to Warren Dunes. New Buffalo City Beach, New Buffalo Elementary, and Oselka Park/New Buffalo High School and Middle School are prioritized destinations along these routes, placing New Buffalo at the center of the regional systems southern extent.

Four regional bicycle routes currently run through New Buffalo:

- ▶ A route connecting New Buffalo, Union Pier, and Three Oaks with segments along Maudlin Road, Jefferson Road, Whittaker Street, and Marquette Drive
- ▶ A route connecting New Buffalo, Union Pier, Lakeside, Herbert, and Three Oaks with segments along Maudlin Road, Jefferson Road, Whittaker Street, and Marquette Drive

- ▶ A loop route that runs through New Buffalo with an extension connecting to Three Oaks, with segments along Maudlin Road, Jefferson Road, Madison Street, and Stromer Road
- ▶ US Bike Route 35, which acts as a recommended best route for cyclists riding along the Lake Michigan Coast, with segments along Lubke Road, Detroit Street, Eagle Street, Clay Street, and Red Arrow Highway

These routes feature on-street, shared roadway configurations with signage indicating the specified route. While they support bicycle mobility, Whittaker Street southeast of Red Arrow Highway is the only segment within New Buffalo with dedicated on-street bicycle lanes, and Maudlin Road and Jefferson Road feature five-foot shoulders. The City should work with the County to introduce dedicated bicycle lanes or off-street pathways along existing bicycle routes to improve safety and encourage bicycle mobility.

## PLANNED TRAILS

Though only a limited number of dedicated routes exist, the Hike and Bike Plan identifies several additional bicycle and pedestrian routes which could benefit the City and Region. New Buffalo is an important cross-road within this system, connecting northern areas of Harbor County with Three Oaks and Indiana. Improvements within City limits largely consist of dedicated bike lanes and sidewalks along important routes, with a mixture of bike lanes, shared use paths, and shared use roads connecting to the regional system. Roadways which are identified for future routes and trails have been included on the accompanying pedestrian and bicycle mobility map.

The City should work with the County and State as appropriate to make the specified improvements along these routes, including bike lanes, sidewalks, and shared uses paths with proper signage. In addition, the City should make improvements to major intersections that will support bicycle and pedestrian safety, such as roadway bump-outs, medians, signage, and pedestrian signals.

Roadways which will see new sidewalk additions include:

- ▶ Bronson Street
- ▶ Indiana Street
- ▶ Detroit Street
- ▶ Clinton Street
- ▶ Marshall Street
- ▶ Monroe Street
- ▶ Eagle Street
- ▶ Chicago Street
- ▶ Berrien Street
- ▶ Willard Street
- ▶ Mechanic Street

In addition to other planned improvements, the Friends of Harbor Country are currently working with the City to develop a 2-mile dedicated pathway which would connect New Buffalo High School and Middle School to the new Sari Asher Memorial Park (Dog Park).



# PEDESTRIAN & BICYCLE MOBILITY



## Key

- Bike Lanes & Sidewalks
- Sidewalk Prioritization
- Bike Lanes & Shared Use Path
- Proposed Sidewalk (SRTS Grant)
- Proposed Loop Trail
- Bike Lanes
- Shared Use Road
- USBR 35

- Existing Schools
- Trail Head
- Priority Pedestrian Crossing
- Water Course

## Existing Schools

- 1 St. Mary of the Lake School (private)
- 2 New Buffalo Senior High School
- 3 New Buffalo Elementary School

## DOWNTOWN/ LAKEFRONT PARKING

Parking in the Downtown/lakefront area continues to be an issue during peak vacation season. Although the Downtown has on-street parking along Whittaker Street and the lakefront has parking at City Beach, there continues to be a need for additional peak season parking. Consideration should be given to developing a new public parking lot between E. Mechanic Street and the railroad tracks.

As new development comes on line, additional development considerations could be given to developers to provide additional parking for public use, over and above the parking required by code. Such an approach could add to the parking inventory of Downtown at no or little cost to the City.

The Boat Launch parking area should also be examined for better utilization during non-peak boat launch times that coincide with peak beach activity demand. The grant funding used to develop the boat launch restricts parking utilization, so additional study is required to determine the best course of action for activating this underutilized area for shared parking purposes.

## GATEWAYS & WAYFINDING

Gateways and wayfinding signage should be installed at key locations throughout the City. Gateways/entry features should announce arrival into the City and a different set of unique gateways should announce entry into the Downtown. City gateway features should be located along Red Arrow Highway at either end of the community and on S. Whittaker Street near Madison Street. The City should develop design guidelines for gateways that include attractive signage and could include elements of native landscaping, lighting, public art, and more.

Unique Downtown gateways should be installed along Red Arrow Highway near Smith Street and Townsend Street, and the intersection of Red Arrow Highway and Whittaker Street should be improved as a key intersection feature, tying in Downtown streetscape elements and on all four corners of the intersection, including visually strong pedestrian crossings running parallel to Red Arrow Highway on intersecting cross streets, including Whittaker.

Additionally, uniquely designed and attractive wayfinding signage should be installed at key locations throughout the City providing direction to key destinations. Wayfinding signage could offer directional information for City Beach, marina, Boat Launch, Downtown, public parking, Library, schools, parks, City Hall, bike trails, and more. Such signage should be strategically placed to inform visitors who are traveling by car, on foot, or by bike. In addition, a pocket visitor map/pamphlet could be produced to coincide and complement the wayfinding signage program.

## STREETSCAPE ENHANCEMENTS

The City should implement a streetscape enhancement program for key areas of the City. Streetscape improvements could include decorative pavers or pavement, lighting, signage, banners, landscaping, pedestrian amenities, wider sidewalks, pedestrian holding areas, street furniture, public art and more.

Three levels of streetscape improvement are recommended for the City: 1) Primary – the most detailed, pedestrian-oriented, and attractive streetscape treatment should be implemented along Whittaker Street from Red Arrow Highway to City Beach; 2) Secondary – this streetscape improvement should be designed for Red Arrow Highway and include pedestrian scaled amenities appropriate for a busy auto-oriented corridor; and 3) Tertiary – This enhancement level should be implemented along S. Whittaker Street and include components of the Primary and Secondary design vernacular, but at much less intense and programmed manner. All three levels of streetscape treatment should utilize similar design elements to ensure a recognizable image and identity that ties all areas of the New Buffalo community together.

# STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENT PLAN



- Key**
-  Primary Intersection
  -  Primary Streetscape
  -  City Gateways
  -  Secondary Intersection
  -  Secondary Streetscape
  -  Downtown Gateways
  -  Tertiary Intersection
  -  Tertiary Streetscape
  -  Pedestrian Link
  -  Pedestrian Bridge





# COMMUNITY FACILITIES





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The City of New Buffalo is a home rule community, governed by a city council and city manager system. The City has a 5-member City Council elected at-large, with a mayor and mayor pro tem elected annually from among the City Council members. The City Manager is appointed by the City Council and carries out the policies and actions of the City Council including effective and efficient provision of City services and programs.

## CITY OF NEW BUFFALO

The City government also includes the following:

- ▶ City Assessor
- ▶ City Building Inspector
- ▶ City Clerk
- ▶ City Treasurer
- ▶ Fire Department
- ▶ Police Department
- ▶ Recreational Facilities Department (Further discussed in the Parks, Recreation, and Environmental Features Chapter)
- ▶ Street Department
- ▶ Water Department

## City Hall

New Buffalo City Hall is the primary facility for the government of New Buffalo, including the City Council Chambers, primary offices of City staff, Police Department, and Recreational Facilities Department. Located just west of Downtown, City Hall is an important landmark within New Buffalo and serves as a community gathering space.

Currently, the City Hall adequately accommodates the administrative and police functions of the City. However, if a larger facility is necessary in the future, consideration should be given to converting the existing City Hall into a public safety facility (possibly combining efforts with neighboring law enforcement providers), with the administration/City Hall operations relocated to a new or adaptive re-use facility elsewhere in the City.





## Fire Department

The New Buffalo Fire Department is a “paid per call” fire rescue department, providing fire suppression, fire prevention-education, hazardous material response, and vehicle extrication/accidents response, amongst other resources. The department includes both full time and volunteer firefighters. The City should regularly review facilities, equipment, and services of the Fire Department to ensure fire and emergency response needs are adequately met, particularly during summer months when the City contains a larger population.

## Police Department

The New Buffalo Police Department is located in City Hall and comprised of 7 full-time officers supported by part-time, reserve, and seasonal officers. The Department provides safety and emergency response services within the community, including coastline response/marine patrol. The City should regularly review facilities, equipment, and services of the Police Department to ensure emergency response needs are adequately met, particularly during summer months when the City contains a larger population.

## Street Department

The Street Department is primarily responsible for maintenance of public streets using complete streets protocol, stormwater management, and sanitary sewer collection. The department facilities collect and convey wastewater within the City to a wastewater treatment plant operated by the Galien River Sanitary District (GRSD) Sewer Authority. The department is also responsible for vehicle fleet and equipment maintenance, street department facilities maintenance, and the City’s urban forestry and decorative street lighting programs.

The City should coordinate with the Street Department to ensure continued quality of the sanitary sewer collection and stormwater management systems. This is particularly important for stormwater management as runoff waters generated by development can have a significant impact on the City’s most important environmental features such as the Galien River and Lake Michigan. The City should also work with the department to conduct a full analysis of complete street infrastructure and identify necessary street and sidewalk improvements, particularly around Downtown New Buffalo.

The Street Department also operates the City Maintenance garage, stockyard, and salt storage dome located along Jefferson Street. Currently, these facilities are poorly marked and unscreened, despite operations similar in nature of light industrial uses. Given the potential for new residential in this area, as well as the nearby existing single-family homes, the City should consider on-site improvements. This provides an opportunity to better organize these operations, screen high-intensity uses, and establish a more cohesive appearance for City facilities.



## Water Department

The Water Department functions as a public utility that provides clean, safe water to residents in the community. The Department operates a water filtration plant, located at the western end of Water Street, and water distribution facilities throughout the community, with Lake Michigan being the local water source. The Department has recently received a Water Fluoridation Quality Award in 2014 and was the 2013 regional winner of a water taste-off held by the Michigan Section of the American Water Works Association.

The system currently has a capacity of 2.5 million gallons per day, with an average daily use in 2014 of 585,000 gallons. The City should conduct regular analysis of the system to ensure future demands can be met; however, the capacity of the system should be sufficient to address extended demand on the system that may result for a larger year-round population and residential growth.

## Downtown Development Authority

The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) was established by the City Council in 2014 with the aim of revitalizing and supporting business and development in Downtown New Buffalo. The DDA is able to conduct studies and make improvements within Downtown utilizing tax increment financing and other funding sources. Given the importance of Downtown within the community, the City should coordinate with the DDA to manage projects in the area, including redevelopment and repurposing of the lakefront area and projects along Whitaker Street. The DDA will play an important role in both the short- and long-term success of improvements within the area.

## NEW BUFFALO TOWNSHIP

The City of New Buffalo is contained within the New Buffalo Township, which has jurisdiction over all unincorporated land within the township. The Township also includes the villages of Grand Beach and Michiana, and the unincorporated community of Union Pier. The City and Township are entirely autonomous; however, the proximity of both results in sharing of some services between City and Township residents. For example, New Buffalo Township Public Library is located within the City of New Buffalo and provides services to residents in both the City and Township.

The City should continue to coordinate with New Buffalo Township to identify means by which community facilities and services can be shared and strengthened within the area. This could include cooperation on year-round events and festivals that capitalize on the unique resources of each jurisdiction. For example, the more rural character of the Township could help support fall and spring events and activities.





## EDUCATION

Public education in New Buffalo is provided by the New Buffalo Area Schools District. The District includes New Buffalo High School and New Buffalo Middle School, which share a campus along Clay Street, and New Buffalo Elementary School, which is located directly outside the City along Lubke Road.

The district serves children from the City of New Buffalo, New Buffalo Township, Grand Beach, and Michiana. Understanding that schools are often a primary component of attracting new families to a community, the City should coordinate closely with the school district to maintain high quality educational programs and facilities. In addition to New Buffalo Area Schools, education is also provided by St. Mary of the Lake Catholic Church, which offers pre-kindergarten through 8th grade education.

## LIBRARY

Library services in New Buffalo are provided by New Buffalo Township Public Library, which serves both New Buffalo and Chikaming Townships. Between 2012 and 2014 the Library teamed with the City to construct a new and improved library building. The new facility is located in Downtown New Buffalo along Thompson Street, opening in August of 2014.

As New Buffalo aims to grow its permanent, year-round economy and population, the City should coordinate with the Public Library to identify potential service needs and improvements that will be necessary to handle greater demand on library services. While the building is appealing, the library's parking lot is entirely void of any landscaping and presents a fairly unattractive appearance along Red Arrow Highway and N. Thompson Street. The library's site should be enhanced with both internal and perimeter landscaping, and consideration should also be given to reconfiguring the parking lot layout.

## HEALTHCARE

Healthcare services in Southwest Michigan are provided by Lakeland Healthcare; however, no facilities are operated within New Buffalo. Lakeland Healthcare operates hospitals within St. Joseph, Niles, and Watervliet. The closest hospital facility for New Buffalo is Franciscan Health - Michigan City and LaPorte Hospital. Medic One is 911 response. Given the size of New Buffalo, additional healthcare options are unlikely to be necessary within the City.





## OTHER COMMUNITY FACILITIES & AMENITIES

The following are additional facilities and amenities within New Buffalo which help to strengthen the quality of life in the community. Many of these facilities are further discussed in other chapters of the Master Plan and are included in this section given their contribution as a community amenity.

### Beachfront Area

New Buffalo's beachfront area provides an important destination and space for community gathering and interaction. This includes the City Beach, City Boat Launch, Riverfront Park, and Lions Park and Pavilion. The beachfront is a major source of tourism within New Buffalo and helps to draw residents and visitors to the community. While some concerns were voiced during the community outreach process, the majority of residents identified the beachfront area and its recreational spaces as a critical asset in the community.

Improvements to the beach and related public spaces will help to encourage further investment in New Buffalo, attract new residents and visitors, and better position New Buffalo to compete with adjacent lakeside communities.

### New Buffalo Harbor

The New Buffalo Harbor is an important community amenity in the City, supporting boating, fishing, and other water recreation. The high volume of boating, recreation, and hospitality uses generates frequent activity and supports tourism within New Buffalo. In addition, the harbor creates an interesting "neighborhood" of boat slips and docks, with clubs and organizations that support social interaction and create unique resident networks.

### Amtrak Station

The New Buffalo Amtrak Station provides transportation to and from the City, connecting New Buffalo to adjacent communities and major cities, including Chicago and Detroit. The station generates daily activity, including 21,751 passengers in the 2014 fiscal year, or an average of almost 60 passengers a day.



## New Buffalo Railroad Museum

The New Buffalo Railroad Museum is a unique entertainment use within the community with cultural and historic value. Founded in 1989, the museum documents the City's heritage as a railroad hub for both the Pere Marquette and Chesapeake & Ohio railways. The Museum features historical exhibits and artifacts, a model train layout, and historic train cars which visitors can tour, including a Chessie Box Car and Troop Pullman Sleeper Car.

The museum is located near the intersection of Whittaker Street and Jefferson Street, adjacent to the still-operating freight railroad line and a vacated fitness facility, a potential redevelopment site within the City. The site provides an optimal location for the museum; however, the City should work with the museum to explore potential improvements or repositioning of the museum that would better support both the museum and future development on the site.

## Religious Institutions

Churches and religious institutions also contribute to the local quality of life and in many cases offer programs, activities, and assistance for residents. For example, St. Mary of the Lake also operates a private Catholic school within the City. Religious institutions also create spaces for community gathering and encourage social interaction.

## Regionally Recognized Eateries

The City contains a number of regionally recognized eateries that helps attract visitors to the community and elevate the prominence of New Buffalo, including Redamak's Tavern, The Stray Dog Bar & Grill, Brewster's Italian Café, and Oink's Dutch Treat Ice Cream & Yogurt, and local favorites like Nancy's, Rosie's, Casey's Bar & Grill, just to name a few. The popularity and reputation of these businesses, and many others, makes them important assets for the community which should be preserved and strengthened within New Buffalo.

## Four Winds Casino

Though not contained within the City, Four Winds Casino is an important asset for the community, further supporting tourism in the area. The Casino draws visitors from across the region and provides an additional entertainment option unique to New Buffalo. The City should coordinate with both Four Winds Casino and the Township to identify opportunities for cooperation which could strengthen tourism and entertainment within Southwest Michigan.





# PARKS, RECREATION & ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES







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For the City of New Buffalo, recreation and environmental features have had a significant impact on how the community has developed and continues to prosper as a tourist destination. Parks, recreational facilities, and environmental features like the Lakefront Park and Beach, Lake Michigan, Galien River, and Great Lakes Marsh provide important recreational amenities which draw visitors from across the Midwest and beyond. Supporting these facilities further contributes to quality of life in the community, enabling residents to stay active and living a healthier lifestyle. Recreational opportunities and unique natural resources will have a key role as the community works to leverage its image as a resort town, improve the major attractions which draw visitors, and create a more complete year-round economy.

In 2014, the City updated its **Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan**, which was developed in collaboration with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission. The 2014 document provides recommendations and strategies regarding parks, recreation, and environmental features on a more detailed level of analysis than does this Master Plan. The City should work to implement the various recommendations and improvements discussed within the 2014 plan and update as needed. This should include a review of recommendations to identify action items which align with goals and objectives of the new Master Plan.

## CITY PARKS & RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Parks and recreational facilities in New Buffalo are maintained by the Recreational Facilities Department, with assistance provided by the Parks and Recreation Board, the Harbor Commission, and the Planning Commission. The City of New Buffalo owns and operates 9 parks and facilities covering approximately 45 acres of land. These valuable amenities provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, including both locations for day-to-day recreation and major components of New Buffalo's tourism industry. Given the importance of these resources, the City should consistently review the status of parks and recreational facilities to proactively identify necessary improvements and projects. This should include regular community outreach efforts to determine needs and issues emphasized by residents.



## LAKEFRONT PARK AND BEACH

The Lakefront Park and Beach is one of the most important destinations in New Buffalo, giving the City its primary tourist attraction and establishing New Buffalo as a resort community. The 15-acre Lakefront Park and Beach site includes 800 feet of Lake Michigan beachfront, 6 acres of dunes, and 213 parking spaces as well as a variety of recreational opportunities. As the City looks to better position the Lakefront Park and Beach and connect it to Downtown New Buffalo, improvements should focus on improving the pedestrian experience, connectivity with adjacent areas, and providing new facilities for recreation, civic gatherings, and events. In addition, concerns regarding the amount of on-site parking and the need for overflow parking should be addressed.

## CITY BOAT LAUNCH

The City Boat Launch includes 8 launch ramps and over 140 parking spots large enough to accommodate a vehicle pulling a boat trailer. The launch provides access to the Galien River from which boats can access Lake Michigan through the New Buffalo Harbor. As the City looks to improve the lakefront campus and better connect the City Beach to Downtown New Buffalo, the City Boat Launch and its dedicated parking area could be an important component of the overall improvement and enhancement scenario.

## LIONS PARK & PAVILION

Lions Park is a 2-acre mini-park which includes a sheltered pavilion with picnic tables, grills, and outdoor fireplaces. Given its location, Lions Park is well positioned to function as a community gathering space for events and festivals. This use is limited; however, by the size of the park and poor accessibility for pedestrians. Repurposing and repositioning of the park has been the focus of numerous studies and projects. As the City looks to provide a better lakefront campus and better connect the City Beach with Downtown New Buffalo, Lions Park will play a key role in linking the two areas. Improvements should aim to better leverage Lions Park and the Pavilion as community assets through greater pedestrian access and a more easily programmed recreational space. A realigned Marquette Drive is one concept the City should consider, providing the opportunity for adjacency for City Beach and Lions Park & Pavilion into a more pedestrian friendly-lakefront campus.



## RIVERFRONT PARK

Riverfront Park is a linear mini-park of less than 1 acre positioned between Whittaker Street and the Federal Navigation Channel of the Galien River. The Park includes 2 fishing decks and a path commonly used by those travelling to the City Beach from other areas of New Buffalo. Riverfront Park has been central to numerous studies and projects regarding the beachfront area and will be an important element of designing a better lakefront. Riverfront Park is also instrumental in better connecting the Lakefront Park and Beach to Downtown New Buffalo, serving as the landing pad and gateway/welcome zone for pedestrian crossing over from the Downtown to the beach. Improvements should greatly focus on the pedestrian experience, providing a safe, efficient, and enjoyable pathway between the two areas. The area's continued use as an active recreational area is important and will depend largely on the City's vision and redesign for the area. In addition, the City should address riverbank protection to avoid long-term erosion of the area.

## TRANSIENT MARINA

The Transient Marina includes 33 boat slips intended for shorter stay boat docking and a small open space area just east of the intersection of Whittaker Street and Water Street. The Transient Marina's location between Downtown New Buffalo and the City Beach make it a prominent site. Improvements to better connect Downtown and the beach should leverage the Transient Marina as a community destination and recreational facility, bringing boaters directly in to the shops, restaurants, and activities of the Downtown.

## OSELKA PARK

Oselka Park is a 17.5-acre community park located directly adjacent to the New Buffalo Area School's campus. The park includes sports fields, picnic areas, a children's playground, a sledding hill, a seasonal ice rink, and walking paths, providing recreational amenities for both the schools and surrounding residential areas. New sidewalks and designated bike routes within the surrounding neighborhood will help improve accessibility to the park for residents throughout the community.

## TURTLE POND NATURAL AREA

Turtle Pond Natural Area is a 2-acre protected forested wetland area with a boardwalk for wildlife observation. The natural area includes three unpaved parking spots and a nature trail. The site could benefit from ADA compliant boardwalks to improve pedestrian accessibility from the surrounding neighborhood as well as new signage and improvements to better mark the location and amenities of the area.

## SKATE PARK

The Skate Park is a programmed area for skateboarding and similar recreation directly adjacent to New Buffalo Area School's campus. This area is the only recreational space in new Buffalo directly aimed at youth and teenager activity. Where appropriate, the City should create additional spaces for youth activities to support educational facilities and attract new families to the area.

## SARI ASHER MEMORIAL PARK

Sari Asher Memorial Park is a recently completed 1.8-acre dog park. This park provides a unique recreation spaced which was specifically desired by members of the community. The City should continue to develop unique and interesting recreational spaces to diversify outdoor activities in New Buffalo. In addition, the City should regularly conduct community outreach to determine recreational needs and desires of New Buffalo residents.

## NEW COMMUNITY POOL

One amenity missing from the community is a public pool. While some residential developments near the lakefront provide private pools for owners and guests of the development, the City lacks a public indoor or outdoor swimming pool. Such a facility would be a tremendous asset for the City's residents and could provide both recreation and fitness/health benefits. While an outdoor seasonal facility is more cost effective to construct, maintain, and operate, an indoor facility would provide year-round recreation and fitness for New Buffalo's permanent residents.

## ADDITIONAL PARKS & RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

In addition to City facilities, several additional parks and recreational facilities exist which are owned and operated privately or by quasi-public organizations. These facilities provide additional recreational opportunities for residents and visitors to New Buffalo, further supporting a high quality of life in the community. Many of these facilities support private organizations and are closed to the public or are commercial businesses operated to offer recreational amenities.

Additional parks and recreational facilities in New Buffalo and the surrounding area include:

- ▶ New Buffalo Yacht Club
- ▶ Lake Michigan Yacht Club
- ▶ Oselka Marina
- ▶ Pleasure Isle
- ▶ St. Mary's School (Private school with recreational facilities)
- ▶ The Nature Conservancy-Robinson Preserve
- ▶ The Nature Conservancy-Grand Beach Preserve
- ▶ Bible Baptist Church (Religious institutions with recreational facilities)
- ▶ Journey Lutheran Church (Religious institution with recreational facilities)
- ▶ Chikaming Preserve
- ▶ Adrenaline Fitness (Private membership gym)
- ▶ Third Coast (Surf shop and sports organization headquarters)
- ▶ Outpost Sports (Kayak and canoe sales and rental)
- ▶ Camp Sokol (seasonal camp for tourist hospitality)
- ▶ New Buffalo Rod and Gun Club (Sports organization)
- ▶ Oak Hill Springs (Privately owned open space)
- ▶ Schultz Park (Park operated by Sunset Shores Homeowners Association)
- ▶ Whittaker Woods Golf Course
- ▶ Dunes Club Limited Gold Club
- ▶ Village of Michiana (village activity area)
- ▶ Village of Grand Beach (village activity area)
- ▶ Village of Grand Beach Golf Course
- ▶ Galien River County Park (Located in New Buffalo Township)
- ▶ New Buffalo Township Memorial Park
- ▶ New Buffalo Township Maudlin-Beckett Cemetery
- ▶ New Buffalo Township Glassman Park
- ▶ New Buffalo Township & Chikaming Township / Townline Road Beach Access
- ▶ River Valley Senior Center (located in Chikaming Township)
- ▶ Chikaming Township Park and Preserve
- ▶ Red Arrow Landing - MDNR Access
- ▶ Michigan Welcome Center
- ▶ Warren Dunes State Park
- ▶ Warren Woods State Park
- ▶ Grand Mere State Park
- ▶ Louis J. Sima Great Lakes Marsh

# TRAILS

The City is well positioned to benefit from and support regional efforts to introduce pedestrian and bicycle trails and routes. The Harbor Country Hike and Bike Plan, prepared by the Friends of Harbor Country Trails, demonstrates a regional dedication to non-motorized mobility, with the goal of providing routes that connect municipalities from Indiana to Warren Dunes. New Buffalo Lakefront Park and Beach, New Buffalo Elementary, and Oselka Park/New Buffalo High School and Middle School are prioritized destinations along these routes, placing New Buffalo at the center of the regional systems southern extent.

Four regional bicycle routes currently run through New Buffalo:

- ▶ A route connecting New Buffalo, Union Pier, and Three Oaks with segments along Maudlin Road, Jefferson Road, Whittaker Street, and Marquette Drive
- ▶ A route connecting New Buffalo, Union Pier, Lakeside, Herbert, and Three Oaks with segments along Maudlin Road, Jefferson Road, Whittaker Street, and Marquette Drive
- ▶ A loop route that runs through New Buffalo with an extension connecting to Three Oaks, with segments along Maudlin Road, Jefferson Road, Madison Street, and Stromer Road
- ▶ US Bike Route 35, which acts as a recommended best route for cyclists riding along the Lake Michigan Coast, with segments along Lubke Road, Detroit Street, Eagle Street, Clay Street, and the Red Arrow Highway Corridor

These routes feature on-street, shared roadway configurations with signage indicating the specified route. While they support bicycle mobility, Whittaker Street southeast of The Red Arrow Highway Corridor is the only segment within New Buffalo with dedicated on-street bicycle lanes, and Maudlin Road and Jefferson Road feature five-foot shoulders. The City should work with the County to introduce dedicated bicycle lanes or off-street pathways along existing bicycle routes to improve safety and encourage bicycle mobility.

# PLANNED TRAILS

Though only a limited number of dedicated routes exist, the Hike and Bike Plan identifies several additional bicycle and pedestrian routes which could benefit the City and Region. New Buffalo is an important cross-road within this system, connecting northern areas of Harbor County with Three Oaks and Indiana. Improvements within City limits largely consist of dedicated bike lanes and sidewalks along important routes, with a mixture of bike lanes, shared use paths, and shared use roads connecting to the regional system. Roadways which are identified for future routes and trails have been included on the Pedestrian and Bicycle Mobility Map on page 59.

The City should work with the County and State as appropriate to make the specified improvements along these routes, including bike lanes, sidewalks, and shared uses paths with proper signage. In addition, the City should make improvements to major intersections that will support bicycle and pedestrian safety, such as roadway bump-outs, medians, signage, and pedestrian signals.

In addition to other prioritized routes, the Friends of Harbor Country are currently working with the City to develop a 2-mile dedicated pathway which would connect New Buffalo High School and Middle School to the new Sari Asher Memorial Park (Dog Park).



## ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

The landscape of New Buffalo inhabits a unique place in the regional environment. As one moves through the community forested areas give way to marshes and wetlands, dunes and beaches, and finally Lake Michigan. The environmental features of New Buffalo are a defining element of the community which have shaped the history of the City and continue to impact development, industry, and recreation. These resources include New Buffalo's primary tourist attractions which have helped build the community's identity as a resort destination. As the City looks to better leverage these assets, protection and preservation of environmental features will be pivotal to the community's continued prosperity. Further, the City should explore the potential to further capitalize on these and other natural resources outside of the summer vacation months, supporting a year-round economy.

## LAKE MICHIGAN

Lake Michigan is the most prominent environmental feature for the City of New Buffalo. The Lake has had a significant impact on New Buffalo as far back as the City's founding and continues to support tourism, business, and growth in the community. New Buffalo's prominence as a resort community has developed because of the beaches, dunes, swimming, fishing, and recreation opportunities offered by the Lake. As a significant element of New Buffalo, the City should continue to be proactive in protection of Lake Michigan and the related beachfront and dunes. Development along the coast should require strict adherence to Low Impact Design (LID) and Best Management Practices (BMPs) to limit erosion and other impacts on the Lake. Similarly, the City should regularly evaluate the beach, dunes, and other high risk natural areas along the coast to identify projects and studies that will be necessary to maintain the Lake as a cherished environmental feature and recreational opportunity.

## GALIEN RIVER

The Galien River is New Buffalo's primary waterway, which flows from the north-east through New Buffalo Township into Lake Michigan. The Mouth of the Galien River connects New Buffalo Harbor to the Lake, support boating, fishing, and other water based recreation. Directly north-east of the Harbor the river runs through the Louis J. Sima Great Lakes Marsh and includes boat slips for adjacent houses in both the City and Township. The Galien River Watershed Management Plan was prepared by the County following concerns about water quality, and impacts of the river on adjacent municipalities. The City should take an active role in implementation of the Watershed Management Plan, aiming to reduce pollution and other effects on the waterway. A primary concern is continued growth within the watershed which produces increased runoff. While the City contains only a small portion of the river, efforts to limit runoff and other factors will be important given that the river head is within New Buffalo.



## LIGHTHOUSE CREEK

Lighthouse Creek is an additional waterway in the City, which empties into Lake Michigan southwest of the mouth of the Galien River. The creek's watershed is largely outside the City in New Buffalo Township and partially in Indiana; however, the head of the waterway runs through residential areas bordering the lake. The City has been actively researching options to resolve flood and erosion concerns, especially flooding related to the Water Filtration Plant's backway lagoon. While evaluation of the watershed is ongoing, low impact development standards should help with reduction of flooding and stormwater runoff. The City should establish zoning requirements for new development in the area to ensure low impact design is utilized.

## WATER TRAILS

New Buffalo is part of two water trails that provide recreational opportunities and connections to communities along the Lake Michigan coast. The Galien River Marsh Water Trail is a three-mile designated route between a federal boat launch along U.S. Route 12 and the City Boat Launch. The route travels through the Louis J. Sima Great Lakes Marsh offering views of natural areas and wildlife.

The Lake Michigan Water Trail is an ongoing project to connect 1,200 miles of lakeshore in Lake Michigan. When completed, the trail will be the longest continuous-loop water trail in the world. Thus far, 75 miles have been designated linking New Buffalo to Chicago and ongoing efforts should help further connect New Buffalo to other communities of Southwest Michigan and the greater Lake Michigan coastline.

## WOODED AREA AT SOUTH OF TOWN

Large heavily wooded areas exist at the southern edge of the City, south of the railroad tracks, Madison Street, Stormer Road, and east of Whittaker Street. These heavily wooded areas, some of which are smaller, city-owned parcels, could accommodate a wide variety appropriate types of development and uses in the future. When and if development occurs, the City should require strict adherence to Low Impact Design (LID) and Best Management Practices (BMPs) to limit removal of mature tree stands and minimize the environmental impact on the area. The extensive stands of trees offer a unique setting that should be designed into any development as an amenity. Additionally, trails for walking and biking should be incorporated into the area as development occurs, ensuring the natural areas remain accessible to the public to the extent possible.

# PARKS, RECREATION & ENVIRONMENT



## Key

- Parks, Preserves & Natural Areas
- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Lake Michigan, Rivers & Streams
- Trails
- Water Trails
- Coastal Management Boundary
- New Buffalo Railroad Museum & Historic Area

## Parks, Preserves & Natural Areas

- 1 Transient Marina
- 2 Riverfront Park
- 3 Lions Park
- 4 City Boat Launch
- 5 City Beach
- 6 Louis J. Sima Great Lakes Marsh
- 7 Sari Asher Memorial Dog Park
- 8 Oselka Park
- 9 Skate Park
- 10 Turtle Pond Nature Preserve
- 11 Merganser Point Preserve
- 12 Shultz Park (Quasi Public)
- 13 Holbrook Creek Natural Area
- 14 Morainic Ridge Natural Area
- 15 Stormal Woods Natural Areas
- 16 NBAS Athletic Fields
- 17 NBAS Nature Study Trails (West)
- 18 Turtle Creek Preserve
- 19 Galien River County Park
- 20 Nokmes Creek Natural Area
- 21 Pere Marquette Railside Trail (10k)
- 22 NBAS Nature Study Trails (East)





# IMPLEMENTATION







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The New Buffalo Master Plan provides policies and recommendations for actions the City should undertake in the next 10-15 years. For the vision of New Buffalo to be realized, the City must be proactive and have the support and participation of local leaders, other public agencies, various neighborhood groups and organizations, the local business community, property owners, developers, and residents. The City should be the leader in promoting cooperation and collaboration with these partners to implement the Plan. This chapter presents an implementation framework that the City can use to initiate and undertake key recommendations included in the Master Plan. The actions and strategies identified in this section establish the “next steps” to be taken in continuing the process of community planning and investment.

## USE PLAN ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS

The Master Plan should become the City’s official policy guide for land use, development, and community improvement. It is essential that the Plan be adopted and then used on a regular basis by City staff, boards, and commissions to review and evaluate all proposals for improvement and development. The City Manager should meet with key City staff to explain the purpose and benefits of the Master Plan.

To further educate the community about the Plan, the City should:

- ▶ Make copies of the Plan available online for free, provide hard copies at City Hall for purchase, and have a copy on file at the public library for reference;
- ▶ Provide assistance to the public in explaining the Plan and its relationship to private and public development projects and other proposals, as appropriate;
- ▶ Assist the City Council and Planning Commission in the day-to-day administration, interpretation, and application of the Plan;
- ▶ Provide a Master Plan orientation for new elected or appointed officials;
- ▶ Maintain a list of current possible amendments, issues, or needs which may be a subject of change, addition, or deletion from the Master Plan.





## AMENDING DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

While the Master Plan articulates a vision for the New Buffalo community, the City's development regulations are the primary tool that can be used to implement the Plan. Following adoption of the Master Plan, the City should update the current zoning ordinance and other regulation, codes, and ordinances, to ensure that regulations reflect current City policy and the desires of the New Buffalo community.

Amendments to development regulations and design standards should consider complementary programs and incentives that can be used to achieve the community's vision for economic development, neighborhood character, downtown revitalization, corridor enhancement, connectivity, and other aspects of the Plan.

Specific recommendations of the Master Plan that development regulations can address include:

- ▶ Managed growth on the periphery of the community;
- ▶ The appropriate scale, design character, and configuration of development in the Downtown and along Whittaker Street and Red Arrow Highway;
- ▶ Enhancements to landscaping and screening as redevelopment and reinvestment occurs in commercial areas;

- ▶ Encouraging mixed-use and multi-family development in and near the Downtown;
- ▶ Facilitating the development of parks and open space to best meet the recreation needs of New Buffalo residents;
- ▶ Improving New Buffalo's image as a development-friendly community through a simplified development review and permitting process;
- ▶ Protect and enhance environmentally sensitive areas and natural features; and
- ▶ Protect and enhance the character and value of the lakefront area as an amenity for the entire community.

## ANNEXATION & GROWTH MANAGEMENT

The New Buffalo planning jurisdiction includes several hundred acres of undeveloped and unincorporated land. It is critical that the City take steps necessary to ensure long-term control over these areas. This will provide several benefits, including regulatory control over the type of development that can occur, and benefits related to tax revenue. In the short term, the City should pursue annexation agreements with property owners to provide some predictability of the community's ultimate footprint. Incrementally over time, the City should formally annex portions of the planning area as development potential is realized. This can be done in conjunction with strategic infrastructure investment to manage growth in a sustainable and responsible way. As incremental development occurs, special consideration should be given to community-wide infrastructure systems and services, such as stormwater management, multi-modal transportation networks, public safety, education, and others.

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM

Some recommendations of the Master Plan may require City capital investment. To support implementation of these recommendations, the City should establish a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The CIP establishes schedules, priorities and estimated costs for all public improvement projects over a five-year period. Through this process, all projects are reviewed, priorities are assigned, cost estimates are prepared, and potential funding sources are identified.

The CIP typically schedules the implementation of a range of specific projects related to the Master Plan, particularly the restoration and upgrading of existing utilities and infrastructure. The CIP should also consider investments related to open space, community facilities, flood mitigation and stormwater management, and public streetscaping.

Some of the recommendations of the Master Plan that can be included through capital improvement planning include:

- ▶ Strategic infrastructure development to serve key development opportunities;
- ▶ Regular maintenance of streets, sidewalks, trails, and other transportation systems;
- ▶ Investments in streetscaping and gateways on key corridors, such as Whittaker Street and Red Arrow Highway, that would enhance the image of the community;
- ▶ Installation of green infrastructure components along rights-of-way and City-owned properties;
- ▶ Construction of new public parking facilities;
- ▶ Realignment and Intersection improvements that would enhance vehicular flow as well as pedestrian and bike safety and mobility;
- ▶ Construction of a new on-site maintenance facility at or near City Beach; and,
- ▶ Reconfiguration of the New Buffalo Amtrak Station area to better accommodate commuter traffic and pedestrian mobility in the Downtown.

## JURISDICTIONAL & ORGANIZATION COOPERATION

For the Master Plan to be successful, there must be strong leadership from the City of New Buffalo and firm partnerships between other public agencies, community groups and organizations, the local business community, and the private sector. The City should assume a leadership role to cooperate and coordinate with the Downtown Development Authority, local school districts, New Buffalo Township Public Library, nearby townships and municipalities, Berrien County, Michigan Department of Transportation, and Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, among others. In addition, the City should actively work with and encourage developers and the business community to undertake improvements that conform to the Master Plan and improve the quality and character of New Buffalo.

The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) was established by the City Council in 2014 with the aim of revitalizing and supporting business and development in Downtown New Buffalo. The DDA can conduct studies and make improvements within Downtown utilizing tax increment financing and other funding sources. Given the importance of Downtown within the community, the City should coordinate with the DDA to manage projects in the area, including redevelopment and repurposing of the lakefront area and projects along Whittaker Street. The DDA will play an important role in both the short- and long-term success of improvements within the area.

## IMPLEMENTATION ACTION MATRIX

The Master Plan provides several policy and program recommendations. Following the recommendations of the Plan, the City should develop an Implementation Action Matrix included at the end of this section provides City staff and community stakeholders with an organized table demonstrating the numerous recommendations of the Master Plan. In conjunction with the annual updates to the Capital Improvement Plan, the City should utilize, and update regularly, the Implementation Action Matrix to reflect the most up-to-date implementation actions and priorities. The Implementation Action Matrix should consist of:

- ▶ A detailed description of the projects and activities to be undertaken;
- ▶ The priority of each project or activity;
- ▶ An indication of the public and private sector responsibilities for initiating and participating in each activity; and
- ▶ Potential funding sources and assistance programs that might be available for implementing each project or activity.

## IMPLEMENTATION ACTION COMMITTEE

Without actual physical and regulatory changes as recommended, a Master plan becomes a paper document, rather than the living, community guide it is intended to be. To ensure the implementation of recommendations the City should form an Implementation Action Committee.

The Action Committee would consist largely of volunteers who meet at specific times throughout the year to identify opportunities for implementation of the Master Plan recommendations. Working in an advisory role, the committee would be able to provide City staff with prioritized actions that adhere to the Plan's goals and objectives. Committee members should meet annually throughout the life of the plan, allowing recommended actions to be tailored to City finances, economic development, and implementation progress.



## REGULAR UPDATES

It is important to emphasize that the Master Plan is not a static document. If community attitudes change or new issues arise which are beyond the scope of the current Plan, the Plan should be revised and updated accordingly.

Although a proposal to amend the Plan can be brought forth by petition at any time, the City should regularly undertake a systematic review of the Plan. The City should initiate review of the Plan at least every three to five years. Ideally, this review should coincide with the preparation of the City's budget and Capital Improvement Plan and the preparation of an annual action agenda.

In this manner, recommendations or changes relating to capital improvements or other programs can be considered as part of the commitments for the upcoming fiscal year. Routine examination of the Plan will help ensure that the planning program remains relevant to community needs and aspirations.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

The following is a list of possible funding sources that the City could pursue to fund the implementation of the Master Plan.

It should be noted that while the information regarding these funding sources was deemed accurate at the time this Plan was written, the long-term availability of funds for these resources cannot be guaranteed. The City should revise, update, and expand this list of potential funding sources as a component of any future Master Plan update.

City participation may be in the form of infrastructure improvements, tax abatement, land acquisition, permit waivers and other assistance. The City's involvement may likely be necessary, at least with initial projects, to serve as catalysts for future investment and development.

There are many programs and tools available including local, county, state and federal sources. The following includes some of those tools and resources that may be applicable to the City of New Buffalo Master Plan.

## TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF)

TIF funds can typically be used for infrastructure, public improvements, land assemblage, and in offsetting the cost of development – including, but not limited to engineering, stormwater, and other site related issues. TIF utilizes future property tax revenues generated within a designated area or district to pay for improvements and incentivize further reinvestment. As the Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) of properties within a TIF District increases, the incremental growth in property tax over the base year that the TIF was established is reinvested in the area. Local officials may then issue bonds or undertake other financial obligations based on the growth in new tax revenue within the district. Over the life of a TIF district, the taxing bodies present within the district, receive the same amount of tax revenue that was generated in the base year in which the TIF was established. There are provisions that allow for schools to receive additional revenue.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS

Many communities use Tax Increment Financing (as appropriate) to fund the startup and/or operation of a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to oversee a range of redevelopment activities for a specific geographic area, particularly commercial areas and central business districts. A CDC is typically an independently chartered organization, often with not-for-profit status, that is governed by a board of directors. The directors typically bring expertise in real estate or business development along with a demonstrated commitment to the community. CDCs are often funded through public-private partnerships with financial commitments from local financial institutions or businesses and a public funding source (TIF, etc.) to provide for both operating expenses and programs, as appropriate. CDCs may undertake traditional chamber of commerce-like activities such as marketing, promotion, workforce development, information management, and technical assistance to small businesses, but may also administer loan programs or acquire and redevelop property in the community.

Many communities create CDCs under the umbrella structure of an established chamber of commerce in the community so that missions are complementary and do not overlap. An example of a distinctive CDC activity is the facilitation or administration of a revolving loan fund or a community lending pool capitalized by commitments from local financial institutions to provide low-interest/low-cost loans. Such funds typically target both new and expanding businesses for such redevelopment activities as interior improvements, façade and exterior improvements, building additions, site improvements, etc. Some state and federal small business assistance programs are structured to work in combination with CDC administered loan programs. Another distinctive activity of a CDC is property acquisition and redevelopment, which is most successful when the organization is mature in both expertise and capacity (particularly if the CDC intends to manage property after redevelopment).

## PAYMENT IN LIEU OF TAXES (PILOT)

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) is a tool similar to tax abatement. The City can use PILOT to reduce the property tax burden of a desired business for a predetermined period. In this instance, a local taxing body and a property owner will agree to the annual payment of a set fee in place of the property taxes. Payments are typically made in the form of a fixed sum, but they may also be paid as a percentage of the income generated by a property.

In addition, PILOT can also be a means of reducing the fiscal impact on the City of a nonprofit, institutional use, or other non-taxpaying entity locating to a key site. While such uses can be desirable as activity generators, they can also negatively impact municipal services. Provisions can be made to offset that negative impact by allowing the City to be compensated for at least a portion of the revenue that would otherwise be collected in the form of property tax.

## STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDS & SOURCES

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANTS

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), originating from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, are administered by the Michigan Strategic Fund through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). They are used by municipalities to help private, for-profit businesses locate or expand in their community. Examples of funded projects include extending utility lines to an expanding company that will create new local jobs. They can also be used for critical infrastructure needs in low- and moderate-income communities.

CDBG require matching funds by either the benefiting business or the municipality. Each year, Michigan receives approximately \$30 million in federal CDBG funds, funding projects throughout the state via several grant programs.

### BLIGHT ELIMINATION GRANTS

The Blight Elimination Program provides communities with financial assistance to remove and improve areas that are designated a slum or blighted. Eligible under this activity would be property acquisition, clearance/demolition, historic preservation, and building rehabilitation necessary to eliminate public health and safety hazards.

### FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

The Façade Improvement Program provides funding for commercial and mixed-use building façade rehabilitation and reconstruction. The goal of the program is to reduce the deterioration of traditional downtowns, assuming that exterior improvements will stimulate additional investment in the area and attract additional customers.

### DOWNTOWN INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS

The Downtown Infrastructure Program is available to improve infrastructure quality and reduce costs to make projects feasible. Only improvements related to new commercial or mixed-use developments are eligible. Activities may include the demolition necessary make other improvements, but all projects must be publicly-owned and maintained, unless the utility is privately-owned.

### SIGNATURE BUILDING ACQUISITION GRANTS

The Signature Building Acquisition Program funds the acquisition and rehabilitation of vacant and underutilized buildings in downtown districts. Municipalities may also contribute funding to acquisition, allowing developers to lower overall project costs. It is expected that the developer will spend at least the amount of the acquisition cost to improve the building's interior.



## TAX EXEMPTIONS

There are several exemptions allowed by the Michigan Department of the Treasury to assist businesses in the state wishing to improve their physical assets. The following are several programs as described by the Treasury that could be applied to projects supporting the goals and objectives of the Corridors Master Plan.

### INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES EXEMPTION

The Plant Rehabilitation and Industrial Development Districts Act, known as the Industrial Facilities Exemption, provides a tax incentive to manufacturers to enable renovation and expansion of aging facilities, assist in the building of new facilities, and to promote the establishment of high tech facilities. An Industrial Development District (IDD) or a Plant Rehabilitation District (PRD) must be created prior to initiating a project.

### NEW PERSONAL PROPERTY EXEMPTION

The New Personal Property Exemption affords a 100% property tax exemption for specific businesses located within eligible distressed communities. This exemption is for all new personal property placed in a district that has been established by the local unit of government. The local unit of government determines the number of years granted and may grant any number of years for the exemption.

### NEIGHBORHOOD ENTERPRISE ZONE ACT EXEMPTION

The Neighborhood Enterprise Zone Act provides for the development and rehabilitation of residential housing located within eligible distressed communities.

### TAX INCENTIVES FOR PRESERVING HISTORIC PROPERTIES

The National Park Service and Internal Revenue Service, in cooperation with State Historic Preservation Offices, offer Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives to encourage private sector investment in the rehabilitation and re-use of historic buildings. Since the program's founding in 1976, over \$62 billion in private investment has preserved 38,000 historic properties.

### BROWNFIELD TAX INCENTIVE

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offers the Brownfields Tax Incentive to help clean up former industrial or commercial areas that were abandoned due to concerns about environmental contamination. To satisfy the contamination requirement, the taxpayer must demonstrate that there has been a release, threat of release, or disposal of a hazardous substance at the property. Under the incentive, environmental cleanup costs are fully deductible in the year incurred, rather than capitalized and spread over time. Improvements in 2006 expanded the tax incentive to include petroleum cleanup.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING GRANTS

Under the Planning and Local Technical Assistance program, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) assists states, counties, municipalities, and educational institutions in drafting economic development plans. The plans should be regional in scope, targeted to guide the economic development efforts of a community or region. The EDA also supports Partnership Planning investments that fund the development, implementation, revision, or replacement of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDs). CEDs describe and prioritize regional strategic economic goals.

## FOUNDATION & SPECIALIZED GRANTS

The successful implementation of the Plan requires realization of projects that range in scale and scope. One type of funding source that becomes increasingly significant when issue-specific projects or programs (tourism, performing arts, historic preservation, small business assistance, etc.) are considered is the foundation grant. The City should continue to dedicate resources to monitoring and exploring foundation grants as a funding tool.

## FEDERAL SBA 504 LOAN PROGRAM

The Small Business Association's (SBA) 504 Loan Program provides small businesses with long-term, fixed-rate financing for acquiring assets for expansion or modernization. 504 loans, administered through CDCs, are typically structured with SBA providing 40% of the total project costs, a lender covering up to 50% of the costs, and the borrower contributing 10% of the costs. Under certain circumstances, a borrower may be required to contribute up to 20% of the total project costs.

## COASTAL ZONES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Administered by the Department of Environmental Quality, the Coastal Zones Management Program promotes wise management of cultural and natural resources along Michigan's Great Lakes coast. The program provides technical and grant assistance to municipalities and other local and regional groups to support environmental stewardship, innovate to address unique coastal challenges, and serve as cooperative partners in economic development.

## TRANSPORTATION FUNDING SOURCES

### MAP-21

On July 6, 2012, President Obama signed into law Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), a two-year transportation reauthorization bill. MAP-21 replaces the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), which expired in September 2009 and was extended nine different times. The goal of MAP-21 is to modernize and reform the current transportation system to help create jobs, accelerate economic recovery, and build the foundation for long-term prosperity.

MAP-21 continues funding for numerous programs previously funded through SAFETEA-LU. Given the recent passage of MAP-21, it is still uncertain how changes in Federal policy will ultimately impact existing funding programs. The City should continue to keep informed as to the status of these programs and any new funding sources that may be introduced in the near future as a result of MAP-21.

The following discussion summarizes grant programs covered under MAP-21 that could be utilized by the City to make enhancements to local transportation infrastructure, including roadways, bridges, sidewalks, and trail.

## SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

The SRTS program has provided funding for various infrastructure related projects including the planning, design, and construction of infrastructure-related projects that will substantially improve the ability of students to walk and bicycle to school, including:

- ▶ Sidewalk improvements;
- ▶ Traffic calming and speed reduction improvements;
- ▶ Pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements;
- ▶ On-street bicycle facilities;
- ▶ Off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities;
- ▶ Secure bicycle parking facilities; and,
- ▶ Traffic diversion improvements near schools.

## CONGESTION MITIGATION & AIR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CMAQ)

The CMAQ program focuses on projects that provide solutions to regional congestion and air quality problems. Eligible project types have included transit improvements, commuter parking lots, traffic flow improvements, bicycle/pedestrian projects and projects that result in emissions reductions. In the past, these projects have been federally funded at 80 percent of project costs.

## SURFACE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM (STP)

In the past, these funds have been allocated to coordinating regional councils to be used for all roadway and roadway related items. Projects in this funding category have required a local sponsor and have been selected based on, among other factors, a ranking scale that considers the regional benefits provided by the project among other factors.

## MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION CATEGORY A

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), under the mission of maintaining the state's transportation network, administers the Economic Development Fund – Category A, designed to promote increased economic potential and improve the quality of life through support of job creation and retention in Michigan. County road commissions and municipal street agencies can receive up to 80% of costs for transportation projects that will lead to private sector job creation. The project must be related to agriculture or food processing, tourism, forestry, high technology research, manufacturing, mining, or office centers of 50,000 sq. ft. or more.