

CITY OF FREMONT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & MARKETING STRATEGY



September 3, 2019



Introduction and Overview

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

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

Background

Although first settled in 1855, the City of Fremont wasn't incorporated as a city until 1911. The lumbering era encouraged many new businesses and settlers to relocate to Fremont. Additionally, the industry supported saw mills, tanneries, furniture manufacturers and the like. At the turn of the century, Fremont Canning Company was established by the Gerber family, which later evolved into Gerber Products Company in 1927; and, to date, is the largest employer and tax payer in the Fremont community. The community has diversified with other manufacturing companies, commercial entities, a hospital and public and private schools systems.

Population

Fremont's reported population from the 2010 US Census was 4081, but is estimated to have increased to 4,247 by 7/1/19 since that time, according to the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey Estimates for Newaygo County. Fremont's senior/retired population is growing, with only 54% of the population participating in the labor force; it continuously maintains a 3.5-4% unemployment rate.

Incomes, Labor Force and Unemployment

The median household income in Fremont has steadily increased with the economy, broadly benefitting the community. In 2016, Fremont's median household income had increased to an estimated \$44,155. Household income in Fremont has continued to increase annually with an overall increase of 37% since 2000, surpassing the State of Michigan's pace of 17% since 2000. Incomes have returned and surpassed pre-recession levels, resulting in a multitude of positive changes for our community regarding municipal/commercial services, programs, economic development, and capital expenditures.

Housing

There are approximately 2,075 housing units in the City of Fremont (2/3-owner occupied), of which a majority are located in the central and western areas of the municipal jurisdiction, surrounding the Central Downtown Business District.

Industry

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

Opportunities and Challenges

City Opportunities and Strengths

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

- Existing buildings that can be redeveloped and adapted for new use
- Easy access to M-82, leading east 10 miles to M-37 leading to Grand Rapids and easy access to M-120, leading 25 miles southeast to US-31 in Muskegon
- Non-motorized Town & Country Pathway that connects City parks and schools throughout town and also the western commercial district in Fremont
- Parks that include camping, beach, nature trails, ballfields, playgrounds, 24-hole disc golf course, Fremont Lake public boat launch, sledding hill and a Dog Park
- Recreation Center located Downtown with swimming pool, gymnasium, training facility and indoor/outdoor pickleball courts
- City owned and managed water and sewer services with capacity for growth
- The city owns various small parcels, seeking residential redevelopment opportunities for condos, townhouses, apartments
- There are several privately-owned large parcels, seeking commercial and residential and redevelopment opportunities for condos, townhouses, apartments
- Certified Industrial Park with 50 acres of vacant buildable land (Park is at 50% capacity)

City Challenges

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

- Lack of available housing to match available employment opportunities
- Although programs are evolving for education and training for labor related jobs, complete programs are not yet in place for area manufacturers
- Lack of quality starter housing (especially important for younger adults), and housing choices for an aging population that wishes to remain in Fremont. Very little new housing has been developed in the City in the last two decades exacerbating the issue around quality and choice of housing

Economic Strategy

For an economic development strategy following best practices put forth by the Redevelopment Ready Communities program, the individual objectives must tie back to one or more of the local goals and goals identified in the regional context. Each of the goals put forth in this strategy meets the criteria.

The Economic Development Strategy is a direct reflection of the input of residents, business owners and other stakeholders through the master planning process and general goal-setting meetings.

| Key Focus Areas and Strategies | | | | |
|--|--|----------------------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Action | Responsibility | Timing | Priority | Complete |
| 1. Review zoning ordinance to see if it inhibits Joint Master Plan implementation; make necessary changes. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council | Within 1 year | 1 | On going |
| 2. Adopt new zoning requirements identified in zoning ordinance review. (Examples: new mixed use and form-based districts, flexible regulations for residential/commercial districts to accommodate anticipated growth, and appropriate density changes that reflect desired community character. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council | 1-2 years | 1 | In process |
| 3. Prepare economic development plan that: - Identifies potential employers for Industrial Park (i.e., food processing/manufacturers) - Done in conjunction with public schools and regional education district, establishes programs to provide necessary education and training for youth to secure jobs -Promotes development and creates a business climate to attract positive economic development and maintains competitiveness in the West Michigan economy | Staff, Planning Commission, School Board, City Council | As needed | 2 | In process |
| 4. Review and revise Joint Master Plan in response to changing needs and priorities. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council | Annually and as needed | 2 | Master Plan update 2021 |
| 5. Update Capital Improvements Plan to prioritize plan elements, projects and identify funding options. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council | Within 1 year and annually | 1 | On going |
| 6. Develop and implement a rental housing inspection program. | Staff, City Council, Planning Commission | Within 1 year | 2 | Review started |
| 7. Continue to aggressively enforce building and property maintenance codes. | Staff | Now | 1 | On going |
| 8. Complete, fund, and implement a streetscape program for downtown and gateways - including a streetscape master plan to “green” community entrances, especially at south and west entrances along M-82. | Staff, City Council, Community | 1-3 years | 2 | In process |
| 9. Review current way-finding signage plan, and identify, fund and implement necessary changes and additions. | Staff, City Council, DDA | 1-2 years | 3 | |

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| Action | Responsibility | Timing | Priority | Complete |
| 10. Continue development and implementation of additional sections of non-motorized pathway system that coordinates connection to partnering township facilities and destinations. | Staff, City Council, community members | 1-5 years | 3 | On going |
| 11. Continue implementation of DDA & LDFA Plans: streetscape improvements, façade grant enhancement program that incentivizes building and site improvements, develop concepts for specific development sites, and perform more detailed market assessment and make recommendations | Staff, DDA, LDFA, Chamber of Commerce, City Council | 1-2 years | 2 | On Going |
| 12. Implement policies to encourage community clean-up efforts and provide incentives to clean up and improve neighborhoods. | Staff, Fremont Schools, City Council | Within 1 year | 1 | On going |
| 13. Aggressively market Fremont's restaurants and businesses as a unique destination north of Grand Rapids. (ie.. Publications, Social Media etc.) | Staff, DDA, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Businesses | Now | 1 | On going |
| 14. Improve maintenance practices and procedures for all public facilities, parks, and utility systems. Determine a comprehensive strategy for identifying water quality issues and a plan for implementing water quality improvements in both public and privately connected systems. | Staff, City Council, State Agencies | 1-5 years | 2 | |
| 15. Develop and implement policies that serve to protect existing trees, woodlots and street trees in Fremont. | Staff, DDA, City Council, Community Members | 1-3 years | 2 | |
| 16. Require new development to inter-connect with existing streetscapes and zoning code. | Staff, Planning Commission (via Site Plan Review), City Council | 1-2 years | 1 | On going |
| 17. Continue and build on programs that encourage building renovation and improvements. | Staff, City Council, DDA | Now | 1 | On going |
| 18. Continue with implementation of access management measures that control the number, location and design of access points along all major road corridors. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, State Agencies | 1-5 years | 2 | On going |

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| Action | Responsibility | Timing | Priority | Complete |
| 19. Continue supporting other forms of transportation by interconnecting sidewalks, streets, bike lanes and non-motorized pathways, in cooperation and partnership with surrounding jurisdictions. | Staff, Planning Commission, City Council, Neighboring Communities, State and County Agencies | 1-5 years | 3 | On going |
| 20. Continue to market Fremont Industrial Park's vacant parcels (50 acres) and remain cognizant of expansion opportunities. | City Council, Planning Commission, LDFA | 1 | 1 | In progress |
| 21. Continue to support the conversion of the previous Valspar site, owned by Sherwin Williams, to potential residential housing site. | Staff, City Council, State Agencies | Within 1 year | 1 | In progress |