

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF UNION
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Prepared by

Middle Michigan Development Corporation

Summary

A summary of findings from the analysis of two town hall meetings and the Master Plan of 2011 MMDC concludes the following:

- There is an interest in industrial, commercial, and retail development.
- Tourism is of great interest and should be part of the economic development plan.
- There is adequate infrastructure for the growth and development of industrial, commercial, and retail businesses.
- The quality of life that exists in the Township and in the City of Mt. Pleasant would be of great value to the growth and attraction of businesses.
- The Township has the benefit of being in close proximity to excellent educational opportunities.
- There are strong organizations such as Middle Michigan Development Corporation, Central Michigan University, Mid Michigan Community College, the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, the City of Mt. Pleasant and others who will be great partners in the plan to grow the economy of Union Township.

Recommendations

1. Commission a market study and gap analysis to determine the placement, nature, assets, and ability of the township to attract retail businesses to its major corridors. Particular emphasis should be given to the Blue Grass and Pickard business areas. MMDC recommends a national retail market expert such as Buxton, Plunkett, Infosurv, or similar organization.
2. Initiate a coordinated regional “way finding” campaign with the City of Mt. Pleasant and Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe that would clearly direct people to principal shopping districts, commercial and industrial sites ,tourism points of interest, parks, recreational facilities, non-motorized pathways, educational facilities, medical facilities, government buildings, and other points of interest. A “brand” for the area should be identified so that the signage is consistent and sends a message that the two entities are related and work together as one to promote the area. The nature of the wayfinding program should be to coordinate regionally while allowing for distinction and branding of the specific communities. MMDC recommends working with a group such as Corbin Design who specializes in these types of efforts.
3. Engage regional partners by entering into symbiotic relationships with County and City of Mt. Pleasant initiatives and services. This is a recommendation left intentionally vague and could begin simply with enhanced communication or board placements. MMDC is identified as a potential vehicle for such an effort if the motivation is to enhance collaboration between large scale community efforts while also reducing opportunities for competition between communities.
4. To the extent allowable by law, create a specific set of incentives directed to addressing identified needs within the two principle Downtown Development Authorities of the Charter Township of Union. Some suggestions for these incentives: land assembly, non-

conforming structure demolition, façade assistance, signage assistance, and public infrastructure. The Township, through its contractual relationship with MMDC, should aggressively market these incentives as a means of reducing retail and commercial vacancy.

5. Set specific deliverables for the contract economic development partner, Middle Michigan Development Corporation, such that the priorities identified by the Township and Economic Development Authority boards can be met.

INTRODUCTION

The Charter Township of Union is a unique six by six square mile township surrounding the City of Mt. Pleasant in Isabella County in the State of Michigan. This township encompasses everything from rural agricultural land to the more urban concept of strip development and big box retail. It is truly an eclectic community. The township also has the uniqueness of having the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal land within its boundaries and Central Michigan University and all it has to offer as its core. Because of this diverse network of amenities, there are governments, development opportunities, and multiple visions pulling at the community and its development possibilities. And, one cannot dismiss the neighboring influences when considering the design of an economic development plan for the Township. Indeed, the amenities that surround Union Township are of great importance to its growth and development.

On page 3 of the Township's Master Plan, adopted in June of 2011, it states: "Union Township has used the principals of smart growth to inform their study and direction. Each goal can be tied to one of these principals, recognizing that good planning involves looking beyond our borders, our life span and our perceptions."

Since the Township encourages the concept of change, this economic development plan will follow that premise. In order to move forward with conscious managed growth and development the community must embrace change.

In the process of creating this plan MMDC carefully considered the demographics of the Charter Township of Union, its assets and capacities, the goals set forth by the Master Plan of 2011 and the vision and desires of the community.

The approach that was taken to identify the assets, resources, vision, and desires of the community was to host two community town hall meetings, one for the Union Township Economic Development Authority, and one for the general public to receive input for the plan. In each meeting the assets and capacities of the Township and its neighbors were identified. Then the vision and desires of the community were recorded and categorized into areas industrial, commercial, retail, tourism, infrastructure, education, and other amenities that did not fit into any particular category but were considered important to the members of each group. The data gathered from those meetings is included in this plan.

In addition to the town hall meetings, Middle Michigan Development Corporation carefully scrutinized the Charter Township of Union Master plan adopted in June of 2011. The goals in the Master Plan for development of the township were matched with the assets, resources, vision, and desires of the participants from the town hall meetings.

Land use was considered as well. Since land use in the Township is so diverse we found it was imperative to emphasize the importance of preserving that property for its intended use. This plan will focus on the development of commercial, retail, tourism, and industrial/technology businesses. Although housing and agriculture are important in an overall community plan, it is not part of the focus of this plan.

Finally, after aligning the goals from the Master Plan and the assets and capacities identified by the residents attending the town hall meetings, Middle Michigan Development Corporation came up with several recommendations to move the economy of Union Township forward.

Town Hall Meeting Results

Middle Michigan Development Corporation facilitated two town hall meetings to gather input from Union Township officials and citizens on the economic development plan for the community. At each meeting the attendants were asked to identify the assets of the community, its resources, and their wishes and dreams for the development of Union Township. MMDC catalogued the results of these meetings into the following categories: Industrial/Technology, Education, Infrastructure, Commercial, Retail, Tourism, and an “other” category as there were some assets, resources, and wishes and dreams that did not fit into any particular category. The following shows the information gathered from the two round table events.

Industrial/Technology

Assets: Delfield, MMI, Industrial Plants, Green Energy projects

Resources: Developable land, farmers, Middle Michigan Development Corporation, Central Michigan University Research Corporation.

Dreams and Wishes: Green Energy, bio-fuels development, quality niche manufacturers, high tech companies

Education

Assets: CMU, MMCC, CMCH, K-12 schools, SBTDC, Mt. Pleasant Technical Center

Resources: Public Schools, Higher Education, Tribal College, Rollie Denison Leadership Institute, libraries, CMU Faculty, staff and students.

Dreams and Wishes: music production studio.

Infrastructure

Assets: Regional Airport, Highway Construction Firms, Isabella County Road Commission, MDOT Transportation office, Union Township water and sewer plants, US 127, Railroad, Broadband, Air/Water quality, cemeteries, expressway accessibility, Recycling Center, Mt. Pleasant Smart Zone.

Resources: Infrastructure (water, sewer, electrical, police, fire etc.) US 127, Airport, Conference Centers

Dreams and Wishes: Expanded Water/Sewer, Non-motorized trails, sidewalks and bike paths

Commercial

Assets: Available land, vacant buildings, conference centers,

Resources: Employment opportunities, Middle Michigan Development Corporation, Migizi Development Corporation, MSU Extension, SBTDC, CMU Entrepreneurs

Wishes and Dreams: Professional Office space

Retail

Assets: Shopping Centers, downtown shopping

Resources: Developable Land, available store fronts, CMU Entrepreneurs

Dreams and Wishes: Outlet mall, bar/grill at Morey Courts, low cost health and wellness centers, more diverse restaurants, more diverse retail.

Tourism/Festivals/Recreation/Events

Assets: Soaring Eagle Resort and Casino, McDonald Park, Jameson Park, Island Park River Walk/Trail, Zibiwing Center, Broadway Theater, Water Park, Public Transportation, Restaurants and Nightclubs, Chippewa River, Downtown events, Golf Courses, Top 10 in Retirement Communities, Local School Sports, quality of life/college town

Resources: Lodging facilities, brewery, casino, race tracks, ice rink

Dreams and Wishes: River access for tourists, wine tasting festival, Mt. Pleasant's own arts "Eats and Beats" festival, winery, indoor golf center, Rent-a-Bike network, outdoor amp theater, community swimming pool, arts community

Other

Assets: Urban/Rural Living, Safe Community, Low cost of living, Good Hospital, Amish Presence, MAC TV network, Multi Community Collaboration, Churches, Good Township Board, Tribal Community, Vision 20/20, Low cost housing,

Resources: Human Services, Community Organizations, governmental agencies, multiple police agencies.

Dreams and Wishes: Town Center, place branding

Union Township Master Plan Goals, Objectives and Tasks

When considering an economic development plan for a community one must be mindful of the amenities within its boundaries and the assets it has adjacent to its boundaries. Union Township has a land pattern of higher intensity uses such as commercial and industrial near the borders of the City of Mt. Pleasant while residential and agricultural uses are in the outlying areas of the Township. Recreation and tourist attractions are scattered throughout the township and its adjacent neighborhoods. Most industrial property is in the eastern part of the township which allows for easy access to the expressway.

Commercial typically runs in strips near the highway, near a highway interchange, or on major streets such as Pickard, Remus, Bluegrass and Mission. Public and civic amenities such as township parks are mostly adjacent to the City or natural features.

Tourism opportunities in the Township tend to center around its parks, the Chippewa River, the amenities surrounding the Chippewa Indian Tribe, Central Michigan University, and events in and around the City of Mt. Pleasant. The Township and its neighbors have much to offer to attract tourists. This would include the Soaring Eagle Resort and Casino, the Soaring

Eagle Water Park, The Zibiwing Center, the Chippewa River, the proposed non-motorized bike paths, Central Michigan University Division I athletics, the proposed Children's Discovery Museum, and excellent golf courses to name just a few.

Union Township's Master Plan does not mention tourism to any great extent but it does state that the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, in stakeholder interviews, said that they would like to partner with the region to promote tourism.

Industrial and Technology business attraction and growth was of interest to both the participants of the town hall meetings and the respondents to the surveys for the Master Plan. Those who participated in the town hall meetings listed Middle Michigan Development Corporation as a resource for the attraction and development of new business in the fields of industry and technology. Those participants indicated an interest in green energy, bio fuel, niche manufacturing, and high tech companies. The Master Plan states that approximately 77% of respondents indicated that they support industrial growth. To support this mission, Union Township has developable land available for both commercial and industrial development. According to a spokesperson from Middle Michigan Development Corporation, the Township needs more industrial land but it may not be appropriate for the Township to own its own industrial park.

Commercial development was addressed in both the town hall meetings and the Master Plan. Participants in the town hall meetings named available land, vacant buildings and conference centers as assets for the growth and development of commercial properties in the Township. Their wish was to have an inventory of professional office space for commercial use. Approximately 67% of the respondents to the Master Plan survey support commercial development.

Respondents to the Master Plan survey were asked what they thought was the most pressing issue affecting the quality of life in Union Township and the overwhelming response was well paying jobs. This was consistent with the respondent's support of industrial and commercial development.

Finally, retail development was addressed in the town hall meetings. This category received more attention than commercial and industrial. The participants in the town hall meetings listed shopping centers and downtown shopping as assets but indicated that they would like to have an outlet mall, more diverse restaurants, and more diverse stores for shopping. Retail development was not specifically mentioned in the Master Plan. It is assumed that retail development is included in the plan for commercial development.

The participants in the town hall meetings also put a focus on education, infrastructure, and quality of life. There was a strong interest in "branding" the community so that it stands out as a great community in which to live, work, and play. Although these are not categories for job growth and development they are resources that are important when marketing an area for development.