

2014 Review

Master Plan Update Progress Report

City of Three Rivers, MI

Five years since the City of Three Rivers' 2009 Master Plan Update, the initiatives, goals, and ideas described in the document still ring true. This progress report serves to note what the City has accomplished thus far, and what still needs to be done.

Master Plan Update Summary:

Key Ideas

The 2009 Master Plan is an update to the 2000 plan that better reflects the demographics, goals, and strategies of the City of Three Rivers. In the assessment of the current conditions in Three Rivers, it was noted that the city has an aging housing stock with less than 14% of homes constructed after 1980. The housing status is indicative of a growing need for active code enforcement followed by building inspections to ensure the safety and vitality of neighborhoods. Housing remains affordable, however, with a resilient market in the face of the mid-2000 housing crisis. Additionally, there is a renewed interest across the state of Michigan and within Three Rivers towards downtown loft-style living. This type of housing requires an increase in mixed-use development which permits a combination of residential, office, and commercial uses. The result is an aesthetically pleasing, controlled, logical development that maximizes the use of existing structures.

Another new idea discussed in the 2009 Master Plan is that of smart growth, which is intended to concentrate a city's center to avoid urban sprawl, increase walkability, and promote more mixed-use development. This planning concept is all about sustainability and developing a sense of community, while including the potential for an urban growth boundary that would demonstrate logistical growth for city limits over the next 20 years.

Discussions with members of the Planning Commission and local stakeholders resulted in the creation of a series of goals and objectives that have been grouped into the following six categories:

- Aesthetics
- Recreation
- Rental Housing
- Second District Development and Redevelopment
- Economic Development
- Downtown

Goals and Objectives

Category 1: Aesthetics There were five main areas of focus in the aesthetics category. **First**, the plan addresses the need to maintain the current level of code enforcement. This is due to the high percentage of aging homes that can easily become unsafe and rundown affecting neighboring property values. The **second** aesthetic concentration is the city's gateways and entry points. Adding signifying features to these areas would work to foster community pride as well as providing a cohesive appearance. A **third** concept is the addition of aesthetic controls in

the zoning ordinance that adds to the **fourth** objective of beautifying the commercial corridor. **Finally**, the plan demonstrates the need for beautifying parks and amenities.

Category 2: Recreation Eight concepts were outlined within the recreation category. The plan seeks to improve recreation by:

- increasing the number of trails thus increasing connectivity throughout the city
- increasing recreation opportunities for teens
- utilizing the river for recreation
- exploring the possibility of a new sports complex
- marketing Three Rivers for recreation
- improving trail connections to surrounding lake communities
- upgrading equipment and facilities in existing parks
- adding more parks in the second district

Category 3: Rental Housing The intention of the rental housing category is to promote high-quality affordable housing and increase homeownership as discussed in the first category. The plan seeks to find a balance within its housing stock that encourages renting through multi-family developments, while leaving single-family homes available for homeownership. The intention is to discourage the transition of single-family into multi-family homes, and reducing the number of low income units available.

Category 4: Second District Development and Redevelopment This plan outlines the objectives of redeveloping the Essex Wire site, improving aesthetic controls in the zoning ordinance, instituting more clean-up days, as well as increasing the number of parks.

Category 5: Economic Development Approaching the topic of economic development the plan offers eight goals:

- Work closely with surrounding townships on growth and progress
- Redevelop the former hospital site
- Relocate industry to industrial parks
- Utilize the river for more prime development
- Seek higher education extension programs and classes
- Market Three Rivers for recreation, business, and living
- Maximize lake visitors' experience in Three Rivers
- Recruit service industry and/or white collar jobs

Category 6: Downtown The final category includes the following objectives:

- Activity center for teens and kids
- Pedestrian friendly streetscape
- Increase marketing
- Expand downtown business hours
- Retain Business Route-131 through downtown
- Increase unique shopping venues

- Increase shopping opportunities
- Promote downtown “loft” living
- Conduct a needs analysis of the downtown district

Master Plan To-Do List:

- Develop a “City Beautiful” campaign
- Create home ownership incentives
- Create rental management incentives
- Strengthen support for neighborhood associations
- Create gateway signage
- Update zoning ordinance to maintain aesthetic controls
 - Look into overlay districts
- Add new aesthetic elements in the commercial core
- Develop a “City Beautiful” plan for each corridor
- Develop a parks and recreation 5-year Master Plan
- Add parks in the 2nd District
- Increase the number of clean-up days and trash pickups
- Conduct a needs study for teen recreational opportunities
- Utilize the river for recreation with annual events
- Market Three Rivers for recreation
 - Create a City wide logo
- Create an event council/committee of the chamber
 - Inventory community events
 - Identify open seasonal dates for future events
 - Create events that capitalize on recreational opportunities
 - Initiate a slogan competition
 - Engage the St. Joseph County Economic Development Council
- Create a Trails Master Plan
- Renovate housing stock
 - Create incentives for renters to transition into single-family, owner-occupied units
 - Amend the zoning ordinance to restrict conversion of single-family units into multi-family units
 - Strengthen zoning standards to slow the conversion of existing housing stock into rental units

- Amend the existing rental registration program for stronger safety standards
 - Develop an owner-occupied residential incentive program
- Develop a plan for the former hospital site (redevelopment that offers wide public benefit)
- Incentivize relocation of industrial uses to industrial parks
- Complete a technology inventory (for business infrastructure)
- Develop a section on the city's website geared towards attracting businesses
- Conduct a needs analysis of the downtown district

5 Year Progress on Master Plan To-Do List:

- Develop a "City Beautiful" campaign
 - The City has implemented an annual spring clean-up event and has given residents one dump pass per year for additional disposal.*
- Create home ownership incentives
- Create rental management incentives
- Strengthen support for neighborhood associations
- Create gateway signage
 - Two City entrance signs were ordered this summer that will welcome people into the City.*
- Update zoning ordinance to maintain aesthetic controls
 - Look into overlay districts
- Add new aesthetic elements in the commercial core
- Develop a "City Beautiful" plan for each corridor
 - Downtown received a \$750,000 grant for new lights, concrete pavers, and the mural wall.*
- Develop a parks and recreation 5-year Master Plan
 - Done! Additionally, the skate park is currently undergoing a renovation to make it more useable.*
- Add parks in the 2nd District
 - The Fourth Street Park was expanded and additional items were added: 2 basketball courts, picnic table, benches, water fountain, and a bike rack. Land for the parking lot was purchased.*
- Increase the number of clean-up days and trash pickups
 - Done!*
- Conduct a needs study for teen recreational opportunities
- Utilize the river for recreation with annual events

TR Peddle Paddle Tour celebrated its second year as an event in Three Rivers this summer.

- Market Three Rivers for recreation
 - Create a City wide logo
Done!
- Create an event council/committee of the chamber
Initiate the DDA Main Street Program which will focus on downtown development and historic preservation. State assistance will improve organization, aesthetics, promotions/events, and business development.
 - Inventory community events
 - Identify open seasonal dates for future events
 - Create events that capitalize on recreation opportunities
 - Initiate a slogan competition
 - Engage the St. Joseph County Economic Development Council
- Create a Trails Master Plan
Done! Also created the recreation authority with the City and Fabius Township
- Renovate housing stock
 - Amend the zoning ordinance to restrict conversion of single-family units into multi-family units.
The City amended its zoning ordinance to restrict single family homes from being converted into 3 unit apartment buildings.
 - Strengthen zoning standards to slow the conversion of existing housing stock into rental units
 - Amend the existing rental registration program for stronger safety standards
 - Develop an owner occupied residential incentive program
- Develop a plan for the former hospital site (redevelopment that offers wide public benefit)
A current developer is looking at building apartments for the older portion, demolishing the newer portion, while keeping the hill and outdoor area for recreation
- Incentivize relocation of industrial uses to industrial parks
- Complete a technology inventory (for business infrastructure)
- Develop a section on the city's website geared towards attracting businesses
The City is participating with the St. Joseph County Economic Development and Southwest Michigan First to provide business attraction and retention services. The city website is undergoing changes with multiple sites to give us a greater presence on the web. The City also completed a new business application form to better guide those interested in opening a business in Three Rivers.
- Conduct a needs analysis of the downtown district

The City has completed an application to receive state assistance for a needs analysis study to be completed. This is a service offered through the Michigan Main Street Program.

Recent Community Feedback

In order to determine if these 2009 Master Plan initiatives still resonate with the community's desires, they were compared against feedback from a survey and the DDA's recent visioning sessions.

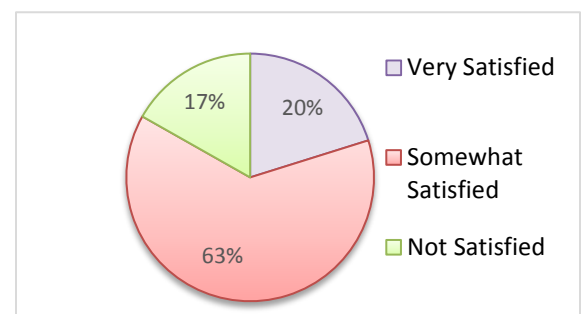
DDA Visioning: Within the last year, Three Rivers has been preparing to establish themselves with the Michigan Main Street Program, which aims to promote traditional downtown areas. One benefit of being a Main Street Community is having access to perks such as the Baseline Assessment Visit that happened this spring. During this visit, statewide experts helped to analyze the current downtown environment and conduct a community visioning session to provide direction for the future. The key components of what people would like to see in downtown Three Rivers were:

- Stronger social position of downtown within the community
- Stronger business environment
- Maximize value and connection to the river and natural resources

These key points closely mirror some of the recreation and downtown goals that are outlined in the 2009 Master Plan, validating that they still hold true five years later.

Community Survey: During the summer of 2014, the summer planning intern conducted a city survey. Residents were provided three opportunities for input: an online survey accessed via the city's website or through the QR codes on flyers left at downtown businesses, a full-size hard copy survey that was available at city hall, public library, commission on aging, and farmers market, and a half sheet hard copy survey that was available at LA Café, Up In Smoke BBQ, and Lowry's Bookstore. The local newspaper also ran a story regarding the survey. In total, there were 133 responses. The Planning Commission was given a hard copy of all of the surveys. A simple summary of the results is provided below.

The first substantial question asked "How satisfied are you with the quality of life in TR?" paired with the options of "very satisfied", "somewhat

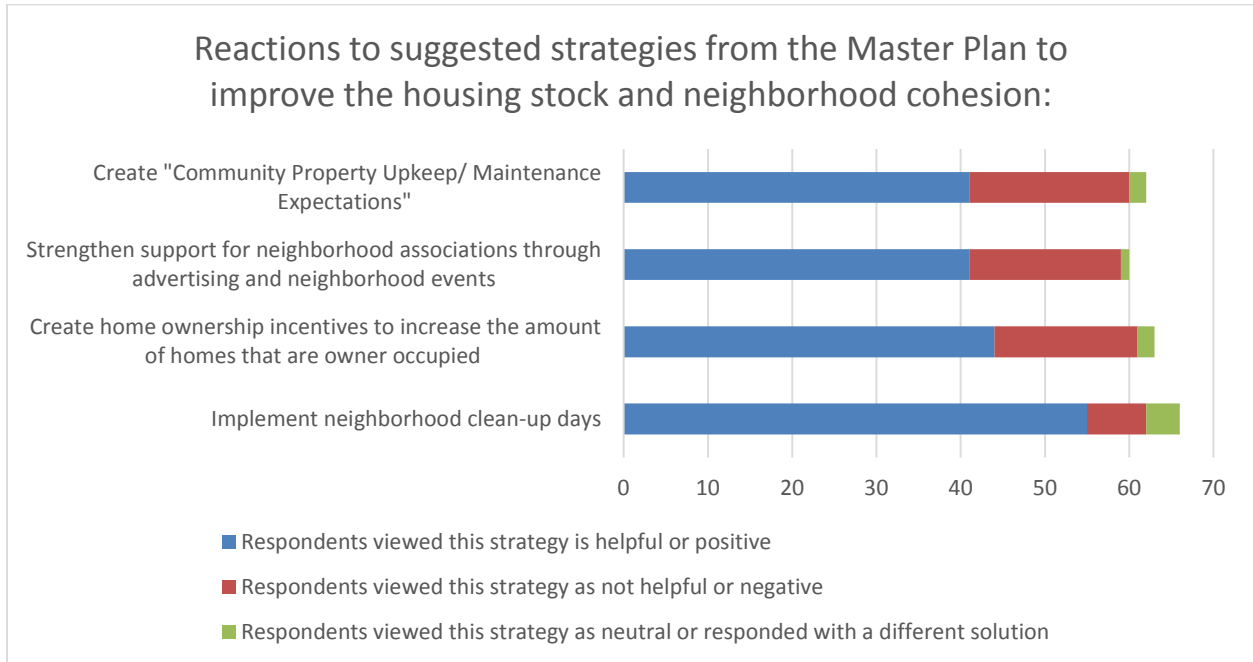


satisfied”, and “not satisfied.” Responses across all survey formats are listed in the chart.

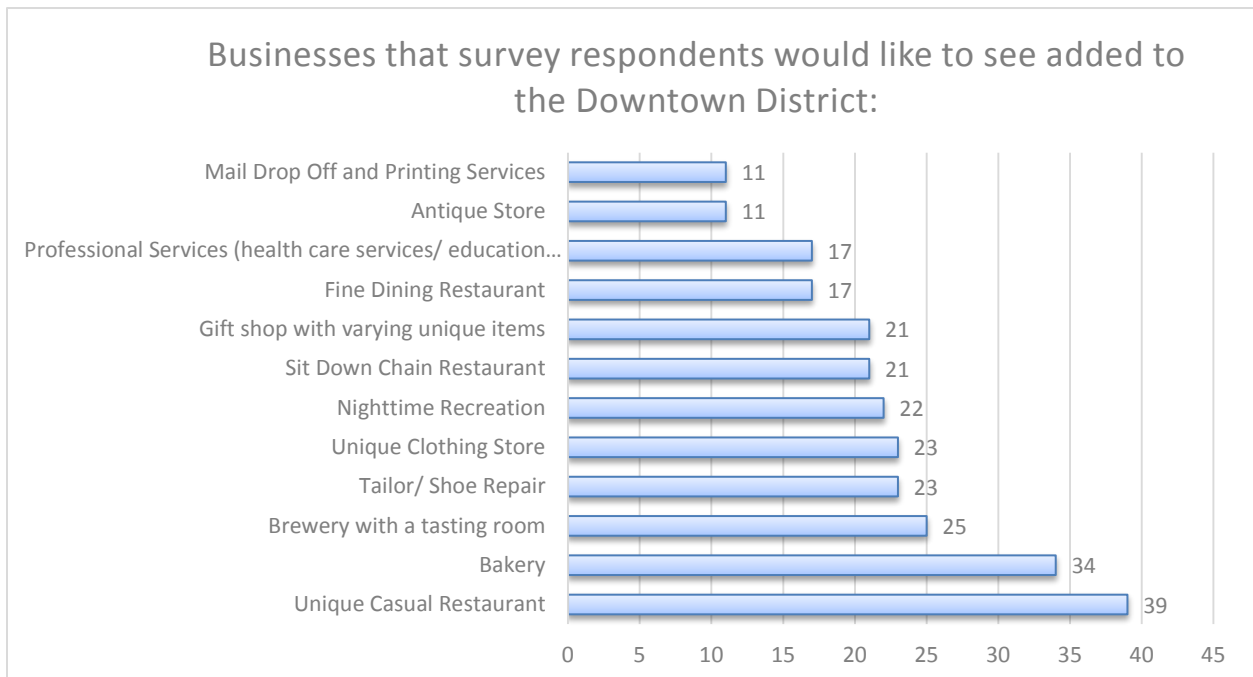
The second substantial question asked respondents to rank a list of priorities found in the Master Plan. Unfortunately, this question was flawed in two ways. First it asked respondents to rank 1-7 when there were 8 items listed, and second some respondents used each number once while some respondents used numbers more than once. For example, multiple respondents ranked each option as either 1 (most important) or 7 (least important). However, the results across all platforms were computed by awarding one point for each listed priority for every time it was ranked as “least important”, eight points for each listed priority every time it was ranked “most important”, and points in between corresponding with their numerical position from “most important” to “least important”. The result gives the most points to the priority that received the most support and the least points to the priority that received the least support.



The next substantial question asked was in the form of a chart where residents were asked to choose “helpful” or “not helpful” regarding a list of four potential strategies listed within the Master Plan to address the improvement of housing stock and neighborhood cohesion.



Next, respondents were asked to place check marks next to the listed businesses that they would like to see added to the downtown. There was also an “other” category where some respondents listed other businesses such as a soda fountain and ice cream shop and some respondents expressed reluctance regarding the viability of downtown as a business center.



The last quantitative question respondents were asked was to evaluate whether they agree, disagree, or are neutral regarding the Master Plan’s priorities for the Downtown District.

Evaluation of Downtown District Master Plan Priorities

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral

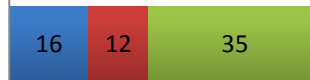
Adding pedestrian streetscape elements such as safe pedestrian crossings, sidewalk benches, and lighting at pedestrian, (not auto) scale is important



Encouraging the development of loft style apartments on the upper floors of downtown buildings is important



Adding gateway signage or entry nodes to welcome visitors to the City is important



Adding attractive wayfinding signs is important

