



CITY OF BIG RAPIDS

MARKETING STRATEGY

Introduction

This marketing plan has been created as part of the City's efforts to obtain status as a Certified Community in the Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) program through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). The plan was completed in partnership with the City's Community Development Fellow from the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM). This marketing plan aims to guide the City's marketing efforts through 2027. Having a marketing plan is RRC Best Practice 5.3. The Mecosta County Visitors Bureau (MCVB) has been doing some great marketing and is an active partner in spreading the work. Because of this, the plan focuses primarily on coordinating existing efforts, with additions such as beginning to connect with the Michigan Main Street Program and working towards the Engaged Level. Some guidelines for the City's branding are also included.

Establishing a baseline

This section of the plan provides an overview of the City's existing partners and assets. This information will help inform the overall strategy including what new marketing efforts should be undertaken in the coming years.

Physical Assets

These assets are fixed characteristics of Big Rapids which are not anticipated to change in the coming years. Many of these are already identified in the City's other plans and include:

Asset	Description/Notes
Downtown Big Rapids	Downtown Big Rapids functions as the heart of the community and has a healthy inventory of in-line storefronts and traditional architecture that make it an attractive destination for Big Rapids residents and outside visitors.
Roben-Hood Airport	The Roben-Hood Airport is a unique asset for a rural city. Having a city owned and operated airport helps Big Rapids stand out from other communities. Most commonly known by pilots for their fresh baked cookies, the Roben-Hood Airport is the place for private planes and businesses to refuel their planes, conduct business, or to fly into town to spend time in Downtown Big Rapids. The airport recently received funding to extend their runway through the federal infrastructure bill, allowing commercial jets to fly into this airport.
Ferris State University	Ferris State University is a mid-sized four-year public university known for its quality of instruction and large selection of academic programs, ranging from associate to doctoral degrees, offered through seven degree-granting colleges. Having a university in town provides students, parents of students, and faculty small town vibes with big city conveniences.
Proximity to Urban Centers and Tourist Destinations	Big Rapids is a small, charming City in a rural setting, but still within commuting distance of jobs in urban centers such as Grand Rapids as well as tourist destinations like the Lake Michigan Lakeshore and Dragon Trail.
Community Festivals and Activities	Festival of Lights, Farmers Market, Veterans Car & Craft Show, Pocket Park Concert Series, Bandshell Concert Series, Big Rapids Freedom Fest Roben Hood Airport, Fourth of July Parade Downtown Big Rapids, Downtown Summer Fest, Tuba Bach Concert Series, Downtown Fall Festival, Home for the Holidays, Festival of the Arts, and Bands, Brews, & BBQ Festival.
Big Rapids Trails	Whether you are looking for a place to hike, bike, snowmobile or snowshoe Mecosta County/Big Rapids has the trail for you. From a leisurely stroll while taking in a scenic view or for more of a challenging adventure, we can point you in the right direction for the trail that is right for you. Local trails include: 4.5-mile Riverwalk, Clay Cliffs, 92-mile White Pine Trail. The White Pine Trail is in the Top 100 Rails to Trails nationally.
Big Rapids Parks	The City of Big Rapids maintains 7 parks, 4 of which are connected to the Riverwalk. The City parks include: Clay Cliffs, Brutus Dog Park, Fitness Park, Hemlock Park, Mitchell Creek Park, Swede Hill Park, Northend Park, and River Street Park. Northend Park also is home to a popular disc golf course.
Katke Golf Course	Located on Perry Street in Big Rapids, Katke Golf Course at FSU offers 21 holes of championship golf. In addition to superb golf, Katke is also one of the finest golf learning facilities in the Midwest that offers a Professional Golf Management Program.
Sidewalks/Bike Lanes	The City of Big Rapids prioritizes the infrastructure projects that are necessary to make Big Rapids a bikeable and walkable community. There is access to several bike lanes and sidewalks across town to support the City's long-term vision to be an outdoor recreation destination.
Bird Scooters	Visitors and residents can grab one of the many Bird Scooters located around Big Rapids. These publicly accessible scooters provide quick, environmentally-friendly transportation around town for a low cost. Bird Scooters can be found along the Riverwalk, in many of the parks and along city sidewalks.
Big Rapids Industrial Park	Big Rapids' Industrial Park is critical to the economic health of the City. It provides jobs and places for employment, opportunities for local entrepreneurs, a daytime population to patronize local shops and restaurants, and diversity which broadens the City's tax base.
Big Rapids Public Schools	Big Rapids Public Schools is a district in Mid-Michigan with approximately 2,300 students. We are comprised of a High School, Crossroads Charter School, a Virtual School, a Middle School (grades 5-8), and two Elementary Schools (grades K-4), Brookside Elementary and Riverview Elementary Schools.

Resources

Looking at Big Rapids's existing resources for marketing, the city is starting from a reasonably strong position but does have some room for expansion. Current resources include:

Resource	Description/Notes
City Website	The city maintains regularly updated website to share information on city activities, important documents, contact information
City of Big Rapids Parks and Recreation Website	The Parks & Recreation Coordinator maintains a website to bring residents and visitors a place to find all information about participating in recreation activities, exploring the parks, or following their page on Facebook.
Downtown Business Association (DBA) Website	The DBA has a website that is updated quarterly to share information on downtown events, membership news, featured members, and business directories.
MCVB Website	The MCCVB has a website that is updated regularly to share information about lodging, outdoor recreation, and all there is to do in the Big Rapids Region
Big Rapids/Mecosta County Pure MI Webpage	Through the MCVB's partnership with Pure Michigan, Big Rapids and Mecosta County have a featured webpage and customized promotional video for the region.
Local Media	The Pioneer (daily printed paper), The Torch, Sunny 97.3, Y102.3, 100.9, 107.7, 103.9, 99.1
Social Media	City of Big Rapids Facebook page, DBA Facebook page, Parks and Recreation Facebook page
City Manager Monthly Newsletter	Each month the City Manager's Newsletter includes a meet and greet with a City Staff member, news from the City Manager's desk, City Commission updates, Community Library updates, Dial-a-Ride Service numbers, and other important community news. The newsletter is sent to subscribers via email and posted on the City's Official Facebook Page.
Weekly MCVB Newsletter	Each week the MCVB sends a digital newsletter to their subscribers that include all the community events upcoming in Mecosta County. The newsletter also highlights small businesses and celebrates other local news.
Downtown Brochures	Downtown brochures are placed in the two downtown kiosks for visitors to access and learn about what there is to do in Downtown Big Rapids.
DBA 'Spotlight Videos'	The DBA regularly visits businesses in the downtown corridor and records videos of business owners sharing more about themselves, their business, and why folks should come in and shop there. These videos are shared on the DBA Facebook page and DBA website.
Downtown Dollars	The downtown dollars program is an incentive program for customers to increase their spending in downtown businesses and by doing so they can receive discounts at participating businesses.
Band of Locals	The Band of Locals organization is based on locally owned businesses Banding together to support each other. The BOL hosts a weekly <i>Focus on the Band of Locals Radio Show</i> , have a newly updated and interactive website to connect folks with local businesses, Blue Band program, and <i>On Location with the Band of Locals Member</i> Facebook videos, and new Rack Cards with QR codes.
Artworks	Artworks mission is to vitalize the community through the arts and humanities. They value community, connections, collaborations, and creativity. Artworks believes in creating a culture of warmth and belonging, individual differences and embracing our common ground, creating change through the arts and humanities, and bringing the arts to everyday life.

Partners

Big Rapids is fortunate to have numerous partners who help support the City's marketing efforts for various audiences.

Partner	Audience(s)	Activity(ies)
Mecosta County Convention and Visitors Bureau (MCVB)	Visitors	West MI Trails Magazine, West MI Tourist Assoc., WMTA Member & Link/Social Media partnership (plus quarterly e-blast), WMTA Trade Shows (5)-brochure distribution, Outdoor News, social media boosts ie; Facebook, Bandshell Summer Series, Festival of the Arts, Tuba Bach Sponsorship, Fishing and Trails Partnership with DNR & MACVB, Welcome Center Promotions (FSU bags, boo bags, fireworks glasses), Band, Brews, & BBQ w/ BR Lions Club (includes venue and other related expenses as well as marketing billboard/radio/social media/print for event), annual visitors guide, Michigan Linear DNR State Park Guide, Meet Michigan Magazine Guide & Article, BR Beginnings/Summer Fest (collaboration with BRDBA & FSU Dawg Days), Annual Destinations publication with Pioneer Newspaper ¼ page ad, MI Festivals and Events membership, Car Fest Car Show, Billboard Advertising, Pure MI Partnership, promo items, weekly e-newsletter, social media posts, Community Calendar on website, running tv ads in local hotel lobbies
Mecosta County Development Corporation (MCDC)	Business owners, developers, corporations	A collaborative effort between The Right Place, Inc, Mecosta County, the City of Big Rapids, FSU, Big Rapids Township, Mecosta Township and other local private sector partners, the MCDC's mission is to facilitate and initiate economic development that expands and diversifies the Mecosta County economy, thereby creating job opportunities for area residents.
Downtown Development Association (DDA)	Potential downtown businesses, residents, and visitors	Allocate Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds to DBA for marketing initiatives. Uses additional TIF funds for placemaking/design projects.
Downtown Business Association (DBA)	Existing downtown businesses, residents, and visitors	Promotes downtown businesses through Facebook posts, boosting posts ie; Facebook, downtown brochures, downtown dollars, radio ads, collaboration with MCVB and FSU for Dawg Days, organizes and promotes annual downtown events.
Ferris State University (FSU)	First Time In College (FTIC), transfer students, parents, broader society	Digital advertising (display, video streaming, gaming streaming), social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitch, direct mail, email, billboards, broadcast TV, Hulu, select significant prints, MI High School Sports Network, local/regional sponsorships, press releases, hosting events.
Dragon Trail Committee	Outdoor recreation enthusiasts	MCVB Big Rapids Region logo is on the official Trail Map.
The Band of Locals	Locally owned businesses, residents, nearby municipalities	The BOL hosts a weekly <i>Focus on the Band of Locals Radio Show</i> , have a newly updated and interactive website to connect folks with local businesses, Blue Band program, and <i>On Location with the Band of Locals Member</i> Facebook videos, and new Rack Cards with QR codes.
Spectrum Health	Talent recruitment and retention	Look to Spectrum Health Big Rapids Hospital for exceptional care from health professionals who are proud to be a part of the community.
Michigan Works! West Central	Talent recruitment and retention	The Michigan Works! West Central Association provides services and support to Michigan's workforce development system. Through the Association, members can access timely, relevant professional development opportunities and ensure high-quality programs for all customers.
Service Clubs/Organizations	Residents	Community service organizations like The Elks, The Lions Club, Rotary Club, The Jaycees, etc. promote fellowship among its members and are devoted to the principle of volunteer community service.

The City of Big Rapids Brand

The City of Big Rapids is coordinates its branding efforts with the Mecosta County Visitors Bureau. It will be included in this plan to go through an official re-branding process in this 5-year plan.

Colors

Mecosta County Visitors Bureau



PANTONE 368 Green
C = 54 M = 0 Y = 100 K = 0
R = 120 G = 190 B = 33
#78BE21



PANTONE 3005 Blue
C = 100 M = 35 Y = 0 K = 2
R = 0 G = 119 B = 200
#0077C8

City of Big Rapids

Font

Mecosta County Visitors Bureau

Gotham Ultra is font, script is Born Ready

City of Big Rapids

Current font on the website is Lato, Size 12 pt font. A city website updates committee is currently underway and once a new font is selected it will be reflected in this plan.

Tagline/Motto

You'll Love It Here!

Logo



TRAILTOWN
of PURE MICHIGAN®

Mecosta County Visitors Bureau

Explore the
BIG RAPIDS
REGION
MECOSTA COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU

Photos

The City of Big Rapids has a collection of photos that are used for the website however, it is a priority in the execution of this marketing to increase the stock of professional photos, videos, and drone shots available to be used for promotional materials. The current photo stock can be found in the Shared Drive, under Community Development, in the Images folder. The photos include community events, downtown, local park amenities, and public art that has been installed across the city.

Marketing Goals & Actions

The heart of any plan is its goals and actions. Given the solid baseline the city has for marketing at this time, this plan recommends staying the course in most instances with some areas for enhancements on existing resources. Key audiences break down these actions to reflect the difference in messaging and delivery methods.

Businesses	
<i>Main Goal(s)</i>	Support existing businesses; Attract new businesses; Increase awareness of downtown vacancies for businesses looking to relocate/expand
<i>Main Message</i>	Big Rapids is open for business and willing to work directly with those looking to start up or expand their business.
<i>Partners</i>	MEDC, MCDC, Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce, DDA, DBA, Band of Locals
Actions	
2022-2023 Redevelopment Ready Communities Certification	Once the City achieves RRC Certified status, work with the Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce and Mecosta County Development Corporation to spread the word via the website, social media, traditional media and by displaying Certified material in city offices and the downtown district.
2023 City Website Updates	As the City achieves RRC Certified status, work with the City's IT Director to create an Economic Development Webpage on cityofbr.org. This webpage can serve as a landing page for all things RRC related, explicitly marketing the Redevelopment Ready Sites. We will have to prepare Property Information Packets as part of Best Practice 6.
2022-2023 DBA Website Updates	DBA's website could use more regular updates, so information and events are up to date.
2022 (& ongoing) Coordinate Events Calendars	A system will be created to streamline the process for everyone to submit/view one another's events. The event organizer's responsibility will be to update their event details for the group to ensure everyone is telling the same story. CVB Community Calendar will house events
2022 (& ongoing) Social Media Content	City staff can explore options to bring on a part-time/full-time marketing intern that would be responsible for carrying out the social media strategy in the marketing plan. Hiring a student intern can fill the gap in the short-term until the city is able to hire a full-time marketing professional. The marketing strategy for businesses would be focused on awareness and engagement for residents around downtown businesses. From there the strategy can be expanded.
2023-2025 Update the Master Plan as well as implement the Economic Development Strategy	The city's master plan is set to be reevaluated in January 2023. As part of the RRC Certification process, the City of Big Rapids will need to review its Master Plan to remain in alignment with Certified Expectations. The Community Development Fellow is working with community stakeholders to create an Economic Development Strategy (EDS) that will support the foundations of this process. The EDS will serve to support the marketing efforts and document the desired direction of the future for the community.
2022-2026(& ongoing) Engage with Michigan Main St Program	City staff will work with DBA, DDA, and Band of Locals to coordinate their efforts and consider connecting with the Michigan Main Street Program to pursue the Engaged Level by 2026. A community will officially be recognized as an Engaged Level Main Street Community once they have participated in the Main Street Training Series and have developed their communications and fund development plans. There are two additional levels of MI Main St's Program, Select Level, and Master Level, that can be pursued once requirements for the Engaged Level are met and reevaluated in future marketing plans.

Residents	
<i>Main Goal(s)</i>	Attract new residents to the city with a focus on younger families and professionals; Encourage existing residents to be active in their community; Increase communication between the city and residents on essential updates, community events, etc.
<i>Main Message</i>	Big Rapids is a small, charming city in a rural setting, offering residents a cost of living that is dramatically lower than other parts of the state or country. As a university town it offers small town vibes with big city conveniences.
<i>Partners</i>	FSU, Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce, MEDC, Big Rapids Housing Commission, DDA, DBA
Actions	
<i>Ongoing</i>	Continue to hold and advertise community events. Ensure information on these events are posted on social media as well as the city website, newsletter, local media, and spread throughout FSU's campus. Work with organizations to ensure the events are accurately posted on community calendars at least 30 days before the event.
Community Festivals & Events	
<i>Ongoing</i>	Continue disbursement of monthly newsletter.
City Manager's Monthly Newsletter	
<i>2022 (& ongoing)</i>	Collaborate with community stakeholders to develop a shot-list of what kinds of photos/videos the city would like to have on hand. Consider if drone shots are desired as well. Hire freelance photographer at community events to start the stockpile of this content that can be used across websites, social media, ads, etc.
Professional Photos/Videos	
<i>2022 (& ongoing)</i>	Create strategy to increase awareness of community events. Feedback from the survey has told the story that residents feel they don't know/found out last minute about community events. It would be in everyone's best interest to have a marketing strategy that focuses on awareness and engagement of residents to not only create transparency between the two but improve the trust and rapport between the city, its residents, and the college population.
Social Media	
<i>2022 (& ongoing)</i>	Continue to share important community news through the disbursement of monthly utility bills.
Utility Bills	

Visitors	
<i>Main Goal(s)</i>	Attract new visitors to the city with a focus on outdoor recreation enthusiasts and University constituents.
<i>Main Message</i>	Come play in Mother Nature's Playground. Explore our numerous year-round trails plus abundant land and lakes for hunting and fishing. Create your own adventure right here in Big Rapids. Regardless of if you are an outdoor enthusiast or looking to grab a bite to eat in our Historic Downtown, there's something for everyone. Whether you're escaping to Big Rapids for an afternoon excursion, weekend get-a-way or if you are looking to relocate to the area, we're confident 'You'll Love It Here!'
<i>Partners</i>	MCVB, West MI Tourist Association, Pure Michigan, DDA, DBA, Band of Locals, local media, Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce
Actions	
2022 (& ongoing) City Website Updates	Implement 1-2 action items into the website update strategy—what do we want visitors to do when they visit cityofbr.org? Use strategy to redo website to be more functional, user friendly, and easier to navigate. Have pages linked (to CVB) that highlight shops, restaurants, and parks with days/hours of operation
2022 (& ongoing) Coordinate Events Calendar	Work with the city, CVB, DBA, Band of Locals, and other community organizations to have streamlined process for posting/sharing events. The DBA has a calendar specifically for their member's events while the CVB has a more encompassing Community Calendar. Both calendars have a great purpose but to increase turnout at events, telling the same story for events and having the information available for people in multiple places promptly before the event can maximize the potential for a good turnout.
2022 (& ongoing) Pure Michigan Trail Town Designation	As a newly designated Pure Michigan Trail Town, work with MDNR, Friends of the White Pine, Paul Griffith, Kelly Wawsczyk, Heather Bowman, and others to promote this designation, create a plan for installing Pure Michigan signage around the city and on US 131 north and southbound.

Developers	
<i>Main Goal(s)</i>	Attract new development to downtown Big Rapids with a focusing on retail, dining, and activity-based businesses; Encourage additional investment from existing businesses
<i>Main Message</i>	There are bountiful opportunities to develop in the City of Big Rapids. In the Historic Downtown District there are several options to redevelop or expand existing properties that stand vacant. Through the city's investment in becoming Redevelopment Ready Certified through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, developing in Big Rapids is streamlined, personalized, and easy.
<i>Partners</i>	Mecosta County Development Corporation, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, West MI Regional Planning Association, DDA, Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce
Actions	
<i>2022 (& ongoing)</i> Redevelopment Ready Communities	Once the City achieves RRC Certified status, work with the Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce and Mecosta County Development Corporation to spread the word via the website, social media, traditional media and by displaying Certified material in city offices and the downtown district.
<i>2022 (& ongoing)</i> City Website Updates	As the City achieves RRC Certified status, work with the City's IT Director to create an Economic Development Webpage on cityofbr.org. This webpage can serve as a landing page for all things RRC related, specifically marketing the Redevelopment Ready Sites that we will have to prepare Property Information Packets as part of Best Practice 6.
<i>2022-2023</i> Local Incentives	Review local incentive options and better advertise their availability on the city website.
<i>2023 (& ongoing)</i> Market Priority Sites	Market priority redevelopment sites via the Mecosta County Development Corporation and MEDC, including the new www.miplace.org/sites page for Big Rapids which is a benefit of RRC Certification. RRC will connect us with those benefits once certified.
<i>2023 (& ongoing)</i> Design-Build Packages	Develop design-build packets with MEDC's Redevelopment Services Team. This is a benefit of being RRC Certified.



APPENDIX

Big Rapids Downtown Why 'You Love It Here' Survey Report

March 14, 2022 – May 10, 2022

The Big Rapids Community Development Fellow worked with City Staff to gather anonymous input and feedback related to resident's patronage in Downtown Big Rapids. This survey took 5 minutes or less to complete and guided participants through a series of questions regarding one's favorite aspects of Downtown, current spending habits in Downtown shops, and recommendations for improvement in the area. The information collected from this survey will provide insight into the community's thoughts as well as support the shaping of the Marketing Plan and Economic Development Strategy for the City.



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Background

The following report will unpack the survey results collected through the virtual Big Rapids Downtown Why 'You Love It Here' Survey. The survey was conducted as part of the City's efforts to obtain status as a Certified community in the Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) program through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Certified Redevelopment Ready Communities® attract and retain businesses, offer superior customer service, and have a streamlined development approval process making pertinent information available around-the-clock for anyone to view (MEDC, 2022). The purpose of these survey results is to inform a marketing plan and economic development strategy that is being created to guide the City's prioritization of future projects. Having a marketing plan is RRC Best Practice 5.3 in addition to an economic development strategy as RRC Best Practice 5.1.

Survey Method

The survey was conducted March 14, 2022, through May 10, 2022. The CEDAM Community Development Fellow collaborated with City Staff to create and administer the survey. Participants were able to identify themselves as a City Resident, Non-City Resident, and Downtown Business Owner. Once they identified with one of those groups, participants took the survey virtually through a Google Form. The target audience for this survey was City Residents, non-city residents that frequent Big Rapids often, and Downtown Business Owners. Participants were not specifically recruited to take the survey, but the survey was made available to anyone interested in completing it. The survey took participants through a series of questions regarding their favorite aspects of Downtown, current spending habits in Downtown shops, and recommendations for improvement in the area. The information collected from the survey provides insight into the community's thoughts as well as supporting the shaping of the Marketing Plan and Economic Development Strategy for the City.

The survey was shared to the public through the City's official Facebook page, the Ask Big Rapids Facebook group, Ferris State University's Student Government Association Instagram, and through word of mouth. Several downtown businesses promoted the survey by displaying promotional flyers with QR codes that were linked to the survey's landing page. One local apartment complex displayed the survey flyers with QR codes in their leasing office. These promotional flyers were also displayed in the downtown kiosks as well as the bulletin boards outside City Hall.



Survey Results

The survey collected 193 responses: 118 from City Residents, 68 from Non-City Residents, and five Downtown Business Owners. Overwhelmingly in each category, survey participants expressed the need for additional businesses in the downtown area that are welcoming to children and families. In addition, activity-based entertainment options were highlighted as an opportunity to meet the needs of children, families, and the college-aged population. Survey participants identified expanding nighttime and weekend business hours as an opportunity to grow the downtown since the current hours of many businesses prevent first-shift, working class individuals from patronizing the downtown businesses. The farmer's market hours were specifically highlighted as a barrier to participate for first shift, working class individuals.

City Residents

In the City Residents category, over 70% of participants were between the ages of 18-45. In addition, the average household income for City Residents was split relatively evenly between the categories. The most prevalent household income for participants was \$0-\$24,999 (24.6%), followed by \$25,000-\$49,999 (20.3%), \$50,000-\$74,999 (20.3%), \$75,000-\$99,999 (15.3%), and \$100,000+ (19.5%). City-Residents responded that the types of businesses they visit most frequently include restaurants, retail good stores, and hair salon/barbershops. City-Residents identified what is keeping them from participating in downtown activities is the unawareness of such activities or finding out at the last minute. When City-Residents were asked how they learn about things happening in the community, they responded they learn through social media or word of mouth and prefer to be reached through social media, email, and text messages in that order.

Non-City Residents

In the Non-City Residents category, 18 different municipalities were represented in the survey with 20 participants from Big Rapids Township, 10 from Green Charter Township, and 38 among the other 18 municipalities. When participants identified as non-city residents, they were asked if they could share which municipality they currently reside in. Please see appendix A for the list of municipalities represented in this survey. In addition, 39.7% of non-city residents that participated were between the ages of 36-45, 20.6% between 56-65 years old, 19.1% between 46-55 years old, 10.3% between 26-35 years old, 8.8% between 18-25, and 1.5% 65+ years old. The most prevalent household income participants reported was \$100,000 (44.1%), followed by \$75,000-\$99,999 (19.1%), \$50,000-\$74,999 (19.1%), \$25,000-\$49,999 (8.8%), and \$0-\$24,999 (8.8%). Non-city residents responded that the types of businesses they visit most frequently include restaurants, retail good stores, and services like doctors, insurance, banking, etc. Non-city residents identified lack of options, specifically family friendly opportunities, and timing as the most common barriers to participating in the downtown activities. Non-city residents identified redevelopment of the former JC Penney building, development of other vacant parcels, and expanding restaurant options in the downtown as the most bountiful opportunities to improve the area. When non-city residents were asked how they learn about things happening in the



Survey Results Cont.

community, they responded that they learn through social media, word of mouth, and radio. When asked how they prefer to be contacted, participants responded their preferences are through social media, text message, and email in that order.

Downtown Business Owners

Five downtown business owners participated in the feedback survey. Of those participants, three of the businesses have been in the community longer than 10 years, and the other two have existed for between 5-10 years. Four out of the five participating business owners identified as City Residents with two business owners between the ages of 36-45, two 56-65 years old, and one 65+. When asked what challenges are facing their business, supply chain issues were identified as the number one challenge, followed by marketing and promotion, declining customer base, and the number of FSU students missing from the community as of late. Four out of the five participating businesses operate with 6-10 employees and one operates with 10-15 employees. Business owners were asked to choose between four categories of what can be done to help their business and identified priorities in the following order: increased awareness/marketing, funding assistance, business development mentorship, and lower costs of doing business in the city. When asked which downtown projects are of most importance to them as a business owner, they responded in the following ranking: marketing and promotional projects (community events, enhancing web presence), economic restructuring projects (marketing and development of vacant parcels), downtown focused community events (seasonal festival, business networking, beer festival), and design projects (beautification, streetscape/landscape improvements). When business owners were asked what they identify as current challenges to the downtown, they responded that a lack of retail options was the most pressing challenge. There was additional space left for business owners to share their own thoughts beyond the options listed, and they shared the following insights:

- Bringing people downtown and off Perry Street
- General entertainment options
- Declining FSU student population. We need to join FSU and help recruit students!
- Customer parking/improved parking lots

When asked how they learn about things happening in the community, all business owners responded through social media, followed by radio and word of mouth, and finally through the local newspaper. As for their preferred method of communication, it was an even split between text message and social media with email being the least preferred method.



Conclusions/Recommendations

The Big Rapids Downtown Why 'You Love It Here' feedback survey was conducted with the intent to gain insight into resident's and non-city resident's perspectives on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the downtown district. The feedback received in the survey will be used to inform a long-term vision for the city's marketing and economic development efforts. The survey participants spanned across a variety of age groups and income ranges that allowed the results to be more generalizable and attuned to the needs of all members in the community.

Survey participants provided recommendations for potential downtown events that can be planned to increase turnout and overall foot traffic in the Downtown area. Some of these events included an all-day event that has kid-oriented activities during the day that phase into more adult-oriented entertainment in the evening hours. Additional ideas included a beer festival, wider range of arts activities, outdoor movie nights, adopting Bay City's Feet on The Street model, and closing off a portion of Michigan Ave to allow foot track between businesses and the expansion of outdoor dining options. Another recommendation was to revive parades for game days at both BRHS and FSU. These are great examples of some ways in which the city can leverage placemaking and effective marketing to ignite community connections and community pride. This will simultaneously create a sense of place for residents and visitors to highlight how great Big Rapids is to live, work, play, learn, and grow. Please see Appendix B and C to gain insight into what survey participants had to say when asked "is there anything else you would like us to know?"

Gathering feedback from city and non-city residents who frequent Big Rapids provides an opportunity to turn these insights into actionable items that will continue growing the community for future generations. As the city is getting ready to engage in the process to update the Master Plan, it is recommended that this feedback be incorporated into the long-term vision for marketing all the great things the city has to offer. The city collaborates with the Mecosta County Visitors Bureau to increase marketing efforts however, it is recommended that the city create a plan to hire a full-time marketing or DDA Director to ensure that marketing strategies and event planning geared towards residents, businesses, visitors, and developers can be carried out efficiently and effectively. The Big Rapids Downtown Development Authority has an established TIF Plan that has recently started to grow due to thriving marijuana business in downtown. The new TIF funds could help create and support a full-time position to do this work and help the community become eligible to pursue Essentials status in the Michigan Main Street Program. If the city chooses to pursue Michigan Main Street Essentials Status, this will open doors for downtown development grants, programs, and other best practices to positively impact the community from a holistic approach.



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Appendix A

20 participants were from BR Township, 10 from Green Charter Township, 38 other

Number of participants from other Townships, Cities, Villages that participated:

Austin Township (1)	Horsehead Lake (1)
Canadian Lakes (2)	Howard City (1)
Cedar Springs (1)	Jenison (1)
Chippewa Lake (Rodney) (3)	Mecosta Township (4)
Chippewa Township (1)	Morton Township (2)
Colfax (5)	Newaygo County (2)
Grand Rapids (2)	Reed City (2)
Grant Township (1)	Stanwood (5)
Hersey (2)	Sherdian (2)



Appendix B

When residents were asked if there is anything else they would like us to know...

A movie theater would be perfect!

Appreciate all that they do.

I feel like Downtown Big Rapids has a LOT of potential, for college students, families, and professional adults alike. There are great food options, some retail options, but minimal activity options. While it is impossible to make everyone happy, all that matters is that you try your best and take into account what people have in common.

It would be nice to have the farmers market in the park instead of in a parking lot!

A movie theatre in this area whether downtown or on Perry would be beneficial to this area!

I think a pavilion downtown would be nice. I love way downtown Cadillac has utilized and incorporated the lake and downtown. I wish planning would have been the same in this town. The trail along the lake is amazing. I wish something similar would have been done here to tie the two together. Love the parks along our river. Just wish downtown could somehow incorporate that.

M20 traffic tends to split the downtown into north and south sections. A safer way to cross M20 near Hemlock should be looked into, especially with the wonderful amenities coming to the park. Getting pedestrians to the park safely, from all directions, should be a priority.

It would be nice to have a safe crossing spot on Maple Street to access the Riverwalk entrance located just west of the Maple Street bridge. Its a very dangerous spot to cross.

Too many offices in the downtown area.

Stop focusing on all the Ferris focus on families, do more for families as activities, places to go to and have fun.

There are way to many dispensaries and not enough activities/ events for families

I've lived here in BR for 21 years. Over the years I've participated in different events, both in attending or helping. I feel that there are certain businesses or groups of businesses that really continue to sponsor events, which is great, but they also limit the types of events we have due to social, political and religious beliefs. There are a wide range of people in BR - we're a melting pot. Opening up events and businesses that aren't necessarily something that those majority of people would support might make others feel more accepted and welcome.

There are too many marijuana dispensaries here

I think this town has so much potential and can continue to grow on what is already here and offered!

put in a public starbucks.

Maybe more events like the cornhole event. The beer tent and music. Kids events during the day adults are night. Would be nice if they could overlap a little.

Big Rapids lacks, and has always lacked, a place for elementary and middle- aged children to go and socialize, as well as the same for our teens.

I'm fairly new to BR, and the pandemic has really limited what I feel comfortable doing. Things are changing, but it's tricky to meet like-minded people.



Appendix B Cont.

Yes where does all my tax money go

Snow and ice free sidewalks

We love this city....It appears to be stagnant . Don't we have a DBA that can assist?

Downtown needs to remain full of unique shops; not same old/same old.

It would be nice to have something like a Dave and busters that can be family oriented while still serving college kids

We would love an open gym for our kids and more kid related activity!

I would love to have a new movie theater in town.

The prices of empty buildings exceed the available revenue. Punish these developers with double tax for vacancies! Increase available housing by allowing duplex but keep out student housing by limiting to sfh and duplex. This town is ridiculous with all the ordinances it doesn't offer enough to be so picky. It screams white privileged

We need more activity-based options in the downtown!

Winter is so dead out here. Outdoor heating of some sort may bring life to downtown during the winter months.

We need more child friendly activities besides the parks and youth sports

We are considering moving as we don't like that the town has turned into a pot destination. Any no, the renovation of empty buildings does not justify turning a wholesome little town into what we have now. Look at the data from states that are ahead of us in this and the cost in crime and deterioration outweighs all perceived advantages.

Closing off one block of downtown to be pedestrian only would be so cool. Blocking cars on Michigan from Maple St to the raven would be awesome. I don't think parking would be an issue because there are several large parking lots surrounding that block. When they do that sort of thing for events it feels so much more like a community, because everyone can walk around and mingle. There could be outdoor seating in the road, so it's not all packed onto the sidewalk. And Schuberg's would have so much more room if they could seat outside!

The farmers market is unfair to the permanent businesses in that lot. I'm frequently annoyed by the space it takes up. I'd rather the road was closed than deal with the parking lot mess.

The farmers market hours do not accommodate working people. I think we lack things that could draw college students to downtown. It is not friendly to single households. I don't think people have access to knowledge of events. Draw people from in and outside the city limits. Close the street down once in a while in summer and have a like sidewalk sale where people can actually explore downtown and see what there is with samples and coupons being handed out. Get some other options. I feel like it's so stuffy and geared toward older people who have money.

lack of activities in the town is driving away the young people



Appendix C

When non-city residents were asked if there's anything else they would like us to know...

Bike lanes are a must
There needs to be more for non-college entertainment. We need something fun for kids. Something like a YMCA or a bounce station. No more banks!!!
Convert the 100 blocks to entertainment zones and close to traffic
This community would do well to update your public transportation services. Along w/adding to your "downtown" area the services offered out of the downtown area that take a person 2-3 hours "just" in riding above mentioned public transportation. ie: actual "grocery" option's.
Please stop opening more marijuana stores...: what kind examples/role model are you trying to set?
Focus on year-round residents and families, not just college students
I would like to see more indoor places to take kids in the winter like jump stations or a museum.
Completely disappointed in the overabundance of pot shops! Certainly changed the image of Big Rapids to the negative! Your tax base can be achieved by much better means!
I love all the community access points like the trails, parks, and tennis courts. I definitely wish there was some sort of a community band, I would love to join
Grow the farmers market. More options/vendors/food trucks/art/music
We need restaurants that cater to LOW CARB NO CARB DINING
Use the river walk trail more effectively in the winter. Groom cross country trails on one side and let people walk on the other. We have so much potential for good trails and people travel for good trails then they stay to eat.
We need a family activity center for Littles that doesn't rely on nice weather.
Stop the increase of permits for marijuana stores and growth facilities! It's sickening!
Seems like the city takes four steps backward with every step fwd. Lots of shortsighted and political decision-making is not good for the COMMUNITY
No more pot shops.
Focus on bringing students downtown. There is an enormous untapped market because historically, the city hasn't marketed or welcomed the student population.
Would appreciate a community newsletter that is mailed and indicates upcoming events, community sports offerings, etc so that don't have to always look on the website/social media.
More childrens activities. More food options. More activities and events for the community
Outdoor dining would be cool

