

Planning Commission
Regular Meeting

November 16, 2022

6:30PM

Big Rapids City Hall
226 N Michigan Ave

1. Call to Order
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Roll Call
4. Approval of Minutes
 - a. October 19, 2022
5. Public Comment Unrelated to Items on the Agenda
6. Public Hearing
7. General Business
 - a. Study Session: Economic Development Strategy
 - b. Study Session: Manufactured Homes in Single-Family
Neighborhoods
8. Unscheduled Business
9. Adjourn

CITY OF BIG RAPIDS
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
October 19, 2022
Unapproved

Vice Chair Thompson called the October 19, 2022 regular meeting of the Planning Commission, to order at 6:30 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

PRESENT Jacob Buse, Chris Jane, Kate McLeod, Rory Ruddick, and Kasey Thompson

EXCUSED Megan Eppley and Sarah Montgomery

ABSENT None

ALSO PRESENT Paula Priebe, Community Development Director
Jessie Black, Community Economic Development Specialist

There were 33 audience members.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by McLeod, seconded by Jane, to approve the minutes of the September 21, 2022 meeting of the Planning Commission as presented, with no changes.

Motion was passed with all in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENT NOT RELATED TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

None heard

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Zoning Ordinance Map Amendment Request to Change 416 N State Street from C-3 Commercial to R-R Restricted Residential

The Public Hearing was opened at 6:33 PM.

Staff Report

Priebe summarized the Staff Report stating that City staff received an application to rezone this property by the property owner, Michelle Wise Mongar. The property at 416 N State Street is currently zoned C-3 Commercial and is a professional photography studio. The applicant is

requesting the property be rezoned R-R Restricted Residential. The R-R District is intended to provide areas of transitional use between emerging commercial uses and established residential districts. This District allows a mix of residential uses, including duplexes and multi-family housing, as well as commercial uses such as medical clinics, office space, and personal service uses.

The standards for Zoning Amendment Review were summarized. Priebe discussed whether this request should be considered as a spot zoning. It is possible to argue both sides of this question, as there are parcels zoned R-R across the street but changing just one parcel in the middle of a block appears to be spot zoning.

Michelle Wise Mongar, Applicant and owner of 416 N State Street, spoke regarding her rezoning request. The building was previously zoned C-3 and had been vacant for two years when she purchased it. While the whole block is C-3, the two parcels to the north are both in residential use. She has tried for over a year to sell, but the property as a C-3 building does not meet a need in the community. It could be a good fit for a residential home, if rezoned to allow that.

Those Who Spoke in Favor of the Request: None heard

Those Who Spoke in Opposition of the Request: None heard

Telephonic or Written Correspondence Received by Staff: None received

The Staff recommendation is that the Planning Commission recommend denial of the Zoning Ordinance Map Amendment to rezone the property from C-3 Commercial to R-R Residential as it is arguably a spot zoning. If the proposal were to rezone the entire 400 Block of N State Street, staff would be supportive of that request.

The Applicant requested that the Planning Commission table the Application until it could be brought back as a whole block.

Vice Chair Thompson closed the Public Hearing at 6:42 PM and the Commission entered Fact Finding.

- Buse asked if the whole block is brought back as a rezoning, would it be a continuation of this Application or a new one. Priebe stated that it could be a continuation of this Application, but that a new Public Hearing would need to be held due to the addition of new properties to be rezoned.

Motion

Motion was made by Jane, seconded by Buse, to table the Rezoning Application for 416 N State Street (Parcel #17-11-309-007) from C-3 Commercial to R-R Residential until the November 16, 2022 meeting of the Planning Commission, so it can be considered as an entire block and avoid the appearance of spot zoning.

Motion passed with all in favor.

Site Plan Review for a New Addition at 106 N Bronson Ave

The Public Hearing was opened at 6:43 PM.

Staff Report

Priebe summarized the Staff Report stating that City staff received an application for an addition onto the facility at 106 N Bronson Ave, which is a UPS Customer Center. The new addition will replace the existing MDC addition on site with a larger one and improve the parking lot at the rear of the site. Site plans were reviewed by Fire Marshal Hull, Engineering Technician Ruelle, and Zoning Administrator Priebe and found to satisfactorily meet City ordinances and codes by all parties, with one exception, the Plans do not include the required bicycle parking.

Mr. Kyle Blanck, Project Manager for Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc. was present on behalf of the Applicant. He explained that the purpose of the addition is to increase capacity of the facility and that the purpose of the odd design of new asphalt is to provide space for large trucks turning on the site.

Those Who Spoke in Favor of the Request: None heard

Those Who Spoke in Opposition of the Request: None heard

Telephonic or Written Correspondence Received by Staff: None received

Staff recommend approval of the Site Plan with the condition that bicycle parking be added that holds two bicycles.

Vice Chair Thompson closed the Public Hearing at 6:51 PM and the Commission entered into Fact Finding.

- Commissioners asked the Applicant if he objected to the condition of adding bicycle parking spaces. He did not but asked if there was a particular location they should be sited. It was agreed that they be near the front of the site along N Bronson and not to the rear of the site where the work will be done for this addition..

Motion

Motion was made by Jane, seconded by Buse, to approve the Site Plan Review Application for new MDC Building Addition and Pavement addition at 106 N Bronson Avenue (PIN 17-12-300-012) with conditions. The Application meets the Criteria for Review set in Section 9.6 of the Zoning Ordinance, but conditions are required to promote the use of land

in a socially and economically desirable manner. The one condition required to address this need is the addition of bicycle parking spaces on site for two bicycles.

Motion passed with all in favor.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Review of Revised Site Plans for a New Krist Oil Gas Station and Food Mart at 827 N State Street

Staff Report

Priebe summarized the Staff Report stating that tonight's review of revised plans is a continuation of the topic which was tabled at the July 20, 2022 meeting of the Planning Commission. The Applicant's team worked with City Staff as they revised the Site Plans to meet the conditions of the table motion from July:

Motion was made by Buse, seconded by McLeod, to table the final decision on the Site Plan Review for a new gas station and food mart at 827 N State Street (PIN 17-10-278-008) until a future meeting, based on several conditions that need further review. Revised plans are to be brought to a future meeting for review by the full Planning Commission at which time the issue will be taken off the table and a decision will be made.

The conditions are required to ensure public services and facilities affected by the proposed land use or activity will be capable of accommodating increased service and facility loads caused by land use or activities and to ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses.

The conditions are as follows:

- 1. Bollard posts in front of the propane cages.**
- 2. New fire hydrant in the Right-of-Way along N State Street near the northeast corner of the building.**
- 3. Change material behind the building, next to the privacy fence, from mulch to stone.**
- 4. Permission from MDOT to connect into MDOT's stormwater system.**
- 5. Upon review and approval of the City's engineering firm, Fleis & VandenBrink, install speed deterrents in the alley.**
- 6. Where practical, install a fence to provide a buffer between the business and adjacent residential parcels.**
- 7. Replace the proposed bike racks with "inverted U" or "post and ring" style racks, as required in Section 5.7:2(3) of the Zoning Ordinance.**

- 8. Review the relocation of the utility pole to ensure service will not be disrupted.**
- 9. Engineering review of the 45' driveway approach to examine if approach could encroach more on the Applicant's property instead of the alley right-of-way.**

Motion passed with all in favor.

Revised site plans were received and reviewed by Staff. Notice of this meeting, though not a formal Public Hearing, was sent to all property owners within 300 ft of the site. Staff review showed that the revised plans meet the local ordinances. Priebe showed on the revised site plans each of the changes requested in the Motion of the July 2022 meeting.

Mr. Joe Quandt, of the Kuhn Rogers law firm in Traverse City, was present to speak on behalf of the Applicant. They brought a court reporter to take a transcript of this portion of the meeting. He explained that the thoughtful comments from the public and the Commissioners from the July meeting have been addressed in the revised plans. This is a use-by-right in this district according to the Zoning Ordinance. They provided written statements addressing the six criteria in the Zoning Ordinance for Site Plan Approval and believe that this plans meets all criteria.

Vice Chair Thompson opened the meeting to public comments.

Kristal Wible of 830 Marion Avenue, lives adjacent from the proposed establishment. Her concern is that her property is not protected from the establishment, that their customers can access her yard, that debris will be blown on to her property, and that Planning Commissioner Jane (who is currently running for County Commissioner for the district where the facility will be located) considers his constituents in decision-making. She also wants to know how snow removal will be handled on the site.

Dave Treece of 821 Rose Avenue appreciates that Krist Oil has made changes to the plans. He recognizes that it is legally allowed but still thinks that it is a bad idea.

Pam Borstler of 819 Marion Avenue questions how gas tankers will be brought in to the site and is concerned that they may use her residential street for truck traffic.

Emily Maloy of 822 Marion Avenue is asking for clarification that the utility pole condition is met as it was not addressed earlier.

Dan Spedowski of 830 Lilac Avenue is asking how the building will face, because the Admiral Gas Station is there and thinks the back of the building will be unattractive from that view. He is concerned also that the lights will interfere with people and that the curb along the alley will not be helpful to reduce light crossing the alley.

John Cook of 820 Marion Avenue stated that he hears noise from the Admiral Gas Station currently near the site. He is concerned that the fence will do nothing to reduce the light, smell, and noise from the site to his property.

Applicant Krist Oil's Representatives responded to the Planning Commission regarding the concerns raised. Truck deliveries of fuel are scheduled by a third party and routes are determined by that company and MDOT regulations. The utility pole will stay where it is as changes to the Site Plan eliminated the need to relocate it.

Dan Spedowski of 830 Lilac Avenue asked about hours of operation.

Krist Oil's Representatives stated that none of their current facilities operate 24 hours a day and this one will not either. They also stated that they operate a food mart in addition to the gas station; the store is well stocked with everyday food needs.

Greg Denny of 323 W Pere Marquette Street wants to know which route the gas tankers will use to enter the site, where they will park to load the underground tanks, and how they will turn to get back onto the street. Krist Oil contracts with companies near their facilities to handle snow on the site; the site will be cleared and snow will be removed from the site by that company.

Krist Oil's Representatives reviewed the Site Plan and showed the truck route along N State Street. They also noted that Krist Oil staff will keep the site clean and clear of debris and reminded the Commission that the use is allowed by right.

The Planning Commissioners then made comments.

Jane spoke to the comment directed at him, stating that he serves as a volunteer as the other Commissioners do and that he listens to the positions of all and then makes decisions as best for the City and in line with the Ordinance and local regulations.

Buse asked the Applicant if they considered extending the fence into the area showing the landscaped curb. They responded that no they had not. They added fences where feasible and plan an 8 foot tall fence in that area. Buse spoke further that he explored other communities with Krist Oil facilities on Google Maps and Streetview and found them in good condition.

McLeod concurs. Any new business on that site will increase traffic but that this one shows a nice upgrade to that part of town and a better impression for people entering Big Rapids from the north.

Motion made by Buse, and seconded by McLeod, that the Site Plan Review Application for a new gas station and food mart at 827 N State Street (PIN 17-10-278-008) be approved, because it meets all of the Criteria for Review set in Section 9.6 of the Zoning Ordinance.

Motion passed with Ruddick, Jane, Buse, and McLeod voting yes and Thompson abstaining.

City of Big Rapids Economic Development Strategy Introduction

Black summarized their staff report, noting that the Economic Development Strategy will be a document that meets Best Practice 5.1 of the Redevelopment Ready Communities program. A steering committee has begun to meet to guide the process and a timeline was established to go from concept to adopting the Strategy. The Planning Commission will be the board that holds the Public Hearing at their regular meeting in January 2023 meeting and then makes a recommendation to the City Commission.

UNSCHEDULED BUSINESS

Priebe spoke about two items of unscheduled business:

- 1) It is the time of year for the annual Capital Improvement Program to be created. The Planning Commission oversees this process and they asked for two or three Planning Commissioner who may want to join the Policy Group to be more involved. Jane and Ruddick volunteered to serve on that Group.
- 2) The Planning Commission has a list of items to review in the Zoning Ordinance and these will be brought to the Commission over the next year as time allows on meeting schedules. Topics include manufactured housing, revisiting the proposed changes to the downtown and residential districts, and a review of the language of the R-P district.

There being no further business, Vice Chair Thompson adjourned the meeting at 7:29 PM with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Paula Priebe
Community Development Director

STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Jessie Black, Community Development Fellow
SUBJECT: City of Big Rapids Economic Development Strategy
DATE: October 10, 2022

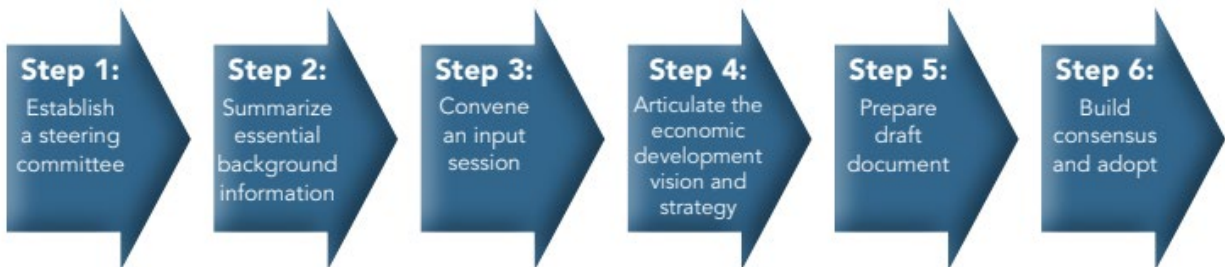
Introduction

Most communities have a general idea of how they intend to encourage economic development. High performing Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRCs) distinguish themselves from others by having a clear strategy that describes how they intend to attract investment, build tax base, and create jobs. Their strategies are rooted in relevant community planning documents, and they execute deliberate initiatives that encourage investment while eliminating development and redevelopment obstacles. A community’s economic development strategy is among the most important elements of the RRC process as it focuses squarely on retaining and attracting jobs and investment—primary goals of the RRC program.

Discussion Thus Far

Jessie Black has organized a steering committee comprised of the following members: City Manager Mark Gifford, Community Development Director Paula Priebe, MCDC Executive Director Kelly Wawczyk, DBA Director Josh Pyles, Toppings/The Backroom Owner Shawna Conley. The steering committee met for its kickoff meeting on October 5, 2022. At the meeting Jessie laid out the proposed timeline along with the Redevelopment Ready Communities Economic Development Strategy Guide that will guide the framework and timeline of this initiative.

Timeline



City of Big Rapids
Economic Development Strategy Draft 1

Table of Contents

Part One: Overview	3
Summary of Key Information.....	3-4
Part Two: Economic Development Process	5
Summary or Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT), & Suggestions.....	5
Part Three: Local, County, & Regional Economic Development Goals	6
Local & County Goals.....	6
Regional Goals.....	7
Part Four: Economic Development Strategy	8
Strategic Objectives.....	8-9
Part Five: Implementation Matrix	10
Appendix	11
Appendix A: SWOT Analysis & Suggestions from Community Input.....	12
Appendix B: Implementation Partners.....	17
Appendix C: Other Sources.....	18

I. Overview

Summary of key information

The City of Big Rapids is the county seat of Mecosta County and the only city within the county's boundaries. Though located within Big Rapids Township, it is politically independent. Originally called Leonard, the town grew and prospered, profiting from the vast forest of pine which was chopped and floated down the Muskegon River to the metropolises where the wood was used. At first people avoided the name of Leonard saying, "I'll meet you by the big rapids," and thus the town took on the name of Big Rapids when it got its first post office. The area was already a major logging center at the time but the industry, however, soon began to wane. So, residents turned to making equipment related to logging, such as saws, blades, and sharpening tools. Several of those firms remain today. Since 1884, Big Rapids has been home to a four-year, public, Division II athletics, Division I hockey university, the Ferris State Bulldogs.

Present day, Big Rapids is located along the 131 Interstate and is in close proximity to bigger cities like Grand Rapids and Traverse City while still being able to enjoy living in a rural setting. Recreation in Big Rapids offers a variety of year-round opportunities for all outdoor enthusiasts. Here in Mother Nature's playground there are endless trails across the region for hiking, biking, snowmobiling, or snowshoeing. In the city there are nine public parks, two city-operated trails, and falls at the midpoint of the linear 91-mile Fred Meijer White Pine Trail. The White Pine Trail is located along the old Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad that dates back over 150 years. In the 1990's, the railroad line was converted to a "Rail-to-Trail," with the 13 miles from Big Rapids to Reed City being the first section paved. According to the National Rails to Trails Conservancy, the White Pine Trail is designated as one of the Top 100 Rails to Trails in the nation.

Population

The City of Big Rapids has a population size of 8,976 and a median age of 22. By having a medium-sized public university like Ferris State right in the center of the city, the population of full-time residents somewhat fluctuates due to the movement of college students. The large presence of college-aged people skews the median age to the younger side.

Household Income

The City of Big Rapids has a poverty rate at 37.7% with a median household income of \$28,628 (datausa.io, 2020).

Labor Force

The economy in Big Rapids employs 5.3k people. The largest industries are education, retail trade, and health care & social assistance. Though those are the largest industries present in the community the most common job groups are sales & related occupations, office & administrative support occupations, and food preparation & serving related occupations. Compared to other places, Big Rapids has an unusually high number of residents working as health technologists & technicians, food preparation & serving related occupations, and personal care & service occupations. The highest paid jobs held by residents in the community are health technologists & technicians, healthcare practitioners & technical operations, and health diagnosing & treating practitioners & other technical occupations (usadata.io, 2020). Some of the largest employers in the area include Ferris State University, Spectrum Health, Original Footwear, Big Rapids Products, Federal Screw Works, and Haworth.

Housing

Big Rapids is a community where more residents rent their home than own their home. There are a total of 3,357 households reported to the US Census from 2016-2020. Between 2019 and 2020 the median property value increased from \$93,900 to \$100,100, a 6.6% increase. The home ownership rate in Big Rapids is 40.6%, which is lower than the national average of 64.4%. People living in the city have an average commute of 14.1 minutes, and they report driving to work alone. Car ownership in Big Rapids is an average of 2 cars per household, same as the national average.

While the City is not a developer and does not build housing, the City does have several roles to play in ensuring that residents of Big Rapids have the safe and attainable housing they wish to have. In 2020, the City commissioned a study of the local housing market. The final Report includes a narrative summary of the findings, two market potential analyses based on an aggressive and a conservative approach, a breakdown of the lifestyle clusters of Big Rapids residents, profiles of the target market for Big Rapids homeowners and renters, movership rates, a real estate analysis, market parameters, residential building typology information, and a summary of Missing Middle Housing in Michigan. The findings of this report are being used by City staff, the Planning Commission, and the City Commission to analyze and amend City Ordinance and policies around housing, with the goal that Big Rapids has housing to meet the needs of current and future residents.

Education

The high school graduation rate is high in persons 25 years of age or older at 91.2%. Those 25 years of age or older that hold a Bachelor's degree or higher reflects 29.5% of the population.

II. Economic Development Process

As part of the planning process for this strategy, City Staff hosted two community input sessions and attended the City's annual Chili Cook Off event to engage with a variety of stakeholders and residents and gather their visions for future development. The input sessions were structured to complete a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The SWOT analysis was followed up by a breakout for participants to place their commercial development wishes on maps of the four commercial districts present. In addition, an Economic Development Strategy Committee was established to ensure stakeholders were invited into the planning process.

Below is a summary of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and suggestions that were provided by residents. A detailed compilation of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and suggestions provided by residents can be found in Appendix A.

Strengths

The strengths that residents identified highlighted many of the great amenities Big Rapids has to offer such as sidewalks/bike lands, Katke Golf Course, the local parks/trails system, and annual local events. Many observed strengths based on the geographic location of Big Rapids and its proximity to Interstate 131 and M-2; in addition to having a municipal owned airport and the economic opportunities that provides. Services such as Corewell Heath and strong local public schools were also identified as strengths for the community.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses that residents identified showcased what they feel that Big Rapids is lacking in. Residents expressed that they are frustrated with the minimal diverse dining options, evening and weekend hours of local businesses, and availability of open businesses on Mondays. Increased access to childcare services and missing middle residential housing was a common theme to support the retention and growth of the community. Across the board there was an outcry for improved communications, rapport, and trust between residents and the City.

Opportunities

The opportunities that residents identified showcased the pride and hope they have for the community to continue to be a great place to live, work, learn, and play. Some examples include Scooter's Coffee coming to town, activating being the tubing capitol of Michigan again, Depot Park Development, and the airport runway extension.

Threats

The threats that residents identified highlighted the complexities of businesses and people migrating outward of the city because the opportunities to expand, cost of doing business, and big box store dilemma are crippling their opportunities. As a college town, a threat that was identified was the students not feeling welcome, which impacts the competitiveness of recruiting for the University.

Suggestions

The suggestions include residents' creative feedback for what commercial businesses or models they wish would come to Big Rapids. This was a fun and creative way for residents to provide City Staff their commercial development wish list that can be taken into consideration for individuals looking to invest in businesses ventures in Big Rapids.

III. Local, County, & Regional Economic Development Goals

The Economic Development Strategy follows the recommendations and best practices of the Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program best practices by connecting individual objectives to local, county, and regional economic goals. This section outlines the local, county, and regional economic goals.

Local Economic Goals

The City of Big Rapids aims to achieve the following goals for its local economic development efforts:

1. The City of Big Rapids is an attractive, livable community.
2. The City of Big Rapids is a top choice for area professionals and others to live, having a variety of housing types and strong neighborhoods.
3. The City of Big Rapids maintains and expands vital infrastructure with detailed plans and sustainable funding sources.
4. The City of Big Rapids continues to improve local government services through coordination with other governments and organizations in addition to opportunities for professional development.

County Area Economic Goals

Mecosta County aims to achieve the following goals for its local economic development efforts:

- ***Meeting with MCDC Director on 11/21 for lunch to go over this and infuse the goals here***

Regional Economic Goals

The City of Big Rapids is in the west central lower peninsula of Michigan within West Michigan region 4. The Right Place, Inc. (RPI) is the primary economic development partner in West Michigan. Since its founding in 1985, RPI has developed and implemented plans to guide the organization and drive long-term economic growth in the Greater Grand Rapids Region. According to their 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, RPI is steering the boat to achieve the following economic development goals:

1. Strengthen our position as the leading resource for growing companies in the Greater Grand Rapids Region.
2. Increase our focus on inclusive growth initiatives to provide economic opportunities for all in the Greater Grand Rapids Region.
3. Ensure long-term economic growth by supporting the region's foundational economic assets, such as infrastructure and quality of life.
4. Provide comprehensive strategies for economic prosperity in the region by engaging business and community leaders.
5. Drive economic growth throughout the Greater Grand Rapids Region with strategic partnerships and collaboration.
6. Educate and inform the region on strategic emerging and long-term business trends impacting the Greater Grand Rapids Region's economy.
7. Engage in regional talent development, retention, and attraction efforts to address the Greater Grand Rapids Region's most challenging economic growth issue.

These goals are tailored to address the following strategic growth areas:

1. Advanced manufacturing
2. Information technology
3. Health sciences
4. Food processing & agribusiness

IV. Economic Development Strategy

The Economic Development Strategy is outlined from feedback received during the community input sessions and Economic Development Strategy committee meetings. In addition, on January 24, 2022, the Mayor, City Commissioners, City Manager, City Clerk, City Attorney, and Department Heads met to review the Vision for 2024 that was developed in 2019 and the four goals established in that previous process. The team identified key objectives for each goal area and one-year tasks to be accomplished in 2022-2023. Through this process, the goals and tasks laid out within the 2022-2023 Strategic Plan have informed the overall goals and vision of this Economic Development Strategy.

Strategic Objectives

Branding & Marketing-

This objective aims to enhance the public relations, communications, and marketing efforts towards residents, visitors, businesses, and investors. As the new Communications Officer transitions into their role, they should implement the goals and actions outlined in the Big Rapids Marketing Strategy. The plan should be evaluated and updated on an annual basis.

Expanding Broadband Access-

Technology is fundamental in today's world and access must be ensured to allow for growth and success. Bringing high speed data and multiple provider options to the city is a top priority for the city in addition to expanding the access to fiber optic. In partnership with the Mecosta County Development Corporation, it is imperative to dive into the future and search out potential grants and partnerships for making these priorities a reality. Exploring the Michigan Open Optical Network (Project MOON-Light) through Michigan State University would be a great starting point.

Retainment in the Big Rapids Industrial Park-

With Big Rapids Township surrounding the boundaries of the City of Big Rapids, the industrial park in the City does not have much, if any room, to expand. The primary objective for the Big Rapids Industrial Park is to work with the existing companies within to retain their business. In collaboration with the City, Mecosta County Development Corporation, Ferris State University, and other economic stakeholders, it will be an objective to work together to provide a reliable and skilled workforce.

Housing Options-

The final Housing Study demonstrated a need for additional housing in Big Rapids and can be utilized to direct actions and new policies. Big Rapids must address the need for higher density options, single family residential rentals, and the missing middle. Providing an adequate stock of housing allows for a robust workforce and bountiful local economy.

Increase in Dining & Retail-

There are gaps in the available dining and retail options across the four commercial districts within the City. In addition, there also appears to be a gap in the number of regional dining and retail establishments in the area. Attracting and retaining the interests of regional brands as well as expanded support for small business opportunities will create a vast variety of options for the community.

Infrastructure Maintenance & Improvements-

Infrastructure maintenance and improvement is a foundational piece to all economic development. Having adequate and reliable infrastructure in place allows the wheels to move on other development, redevelopment, and improving the overall quality of life for residents. New housing developments can be jumpstarted by the City through the development of infrastructure, such as streets and water utilities, to support residential development.

Sidewalk and Bike Lane Expansion-

As a Pure Michigan Trail Town and rural community with limited resources for mass public transportation, having adequate sidewalks and bike lane access is imperative to a healthy economy. Big Rapids strives to be as walkable and bikeable as possible and has one of the highest walk scores in the state of Michigan according to walkscore.com. The municipality has been funding projects that connect key destinations to sidewalks and create bike loops that offer cycling enthusiasts a plethora of options for routes that are all interconnected to the major local trails.

Outdoor Recreation Tourism-

The City is working towards the goal of becoming an outdoor recreation destination for Michiganders and beyond. They have made great strides towards this goal as the City of Big Rapids was designated as a Pure Michigan Trail Town in April 2022. The newly named, and now City-owned, Depot Park remains largely undeveloped. Through grant opportunities the city is hoping to develop this park as its official White Pine Trail Trailhead in the next few years. In addition, the city is working to develop a skatepark on separate, but nearby, parkland to expand recreation opportunities for all. Finally, the city and other private-public partnerships are investing millions of dollars to improve Hemlock Park and add/update features such as tennis courts, basketball courts, pickle ball courts, a splash pad, a universally accessible playscape, and a universally accessible kayak launch.

Real Estate Development-

Economic vitality for Big Rapids is reliant on not only new development opportunities but also potential redevelopments. Redevelopments create the space for underutilized properties to be rejuvenated and can transform unused land into bright, purposeful spaces. There are multiple redevelopments the City is working on or plans for in the near future, key highlights from this list are shown below.

Mechanic Street Area Development: The infrastructure project will include the extension of Loudon Street, Mechanic Street and DeKraft Avenue, and the addition of two parallel streets between DeKraft Avenue and Bjoranson Street, along with installation of water and sewer lines to service the entire future housing development in this neighborhood.

Rust Avenue Extension: Rust Avenue will be extended beyond Escott Street to a small cul-de-sac, at which there will be three lots for purchase to develop housing that borders the Clay Cliffs nature area.

[*Hanchett Property*](#)

[*AMC Theater*](#)

[*JC Penney Building*](#)

V. Implementation Matrix

The implementation Matrix below details the status, timeline, and partners involved with the previously discussed strategic objectives. The matrix will assist the City of Big Rapids with keeping track of economic development priorities. Seen as a working document, the matrix outlines anticipated goals and timelines which may change as opportunities arise. *Many Partners Involved are displayed with their acronym of the organization, for the full list of Implementation Partners and their contact information, please see Appendix B*

Strategic Objective/Project	Status	Project Timeline	Partners Involved	Description
Branding & marketing	Ongoing		DBA, Band of Locals, MCVB, FSU, MCDC/RPI, Chamber of Commerce	In connection to the City of Big Rapids Marketing Strategy, increased PR/communications/marketing and overall branding is a priority.
Expanding broadband	Not Started		MCDC/RPI, FSU	Expanding broadband access and options for access is critical infrastructure that is needed for Big Rapids to be competitive with other college towns and larger urban areas like Grand Rapids
Retention in the Big Rapids Industrial Park	Not Started		MCDC/RPI, Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Mecosta, MI Works! West Central	Supporting existing businesses in the Industrial Park through partnerships with the MCDC and FSU to provide a reliable and skilled workforce
Housing options	Ongoing		MCDC/RPI, Housing Commission	Need to create diverse housing stock to support a growing community.
Increase in dining & retail	Not Started		MCDC/RPI, DBA, DDA Chamber of Commerce	Attracting and retaining the interests of regional brands as well as expanded support for small business opportunities
Infrastructure maintenance & improvements	Ongoing		MCDC/RPI, MDOT, Consumers Energy	City will continue to invest in projects that create adequate and reliable infrastructure so development, redevelopment, and quality of life can improve.
Sidewalk/bike lane expansion	Ongoing		MCDC/RPI, MDOT	City will continue to invest in bike lane and sidewalk extension projects that support the vision of being a walkable and bikeable community
Park development & improvements	Ongoing		MCDC/RPI, MDNR, Muskegon River Watershed Association, Friends of the White Pine, MCVB	To support the City's designation as a Pure Michigan Trail Town and vision to become an outdoor recreation destination; continue investing in park development/improvement projects
Real Estate Redevelopment	Ongoing		MCDC/RPI, MEDC, Housing Commission, DDA (for those within downtown district)	Redevelopment is vital to infill the City and repurpose property, which is being underutilized.

IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS:

- In partnership, City of Big Rapids and MCDC will create baseline metrics and evaluation timeline for the implementation matrix
- Implement Big Rapids Marketing Strategy as new Communications Officer position is filled
- MCDC to explore opportunities for partnerships with Project MOON-Light through Michigan State University

APPENDIX

Appendix A: SWOT Analysis & Suggestions from Community Input

Strengths

- Ferris State University
- Municipal owned airport
- Pure Michigan Trail Town
- Katke Golf Course
- Proximity to urban centers and tourist destinations
- Community festivals and activities
- Big Rapids Trails and Parks
- Sidewalks/bike lanes
- Overall walkability and bike access
- Big Rapids industrial park
- Big Rapids Public Schools and Crossroads Charter Academy
- Corewell Health (rebranded Spectrum Health)
- Farmer's Market
- Pure Michigan Trail Town designation
- Muskegon River
- City Staff
- MCDC/The Right Place, Inc.
- White Pine Trail
- Hanchett property
- Located along 131 Interstate and M-20
- Band of Locals + their weekly radio show
- Currie's sign outside their business
- Virtual accessibility of city meetings
- Huntey's Clubhouse Childcare
- Marihuana tax revenue
- Local people and new folks to the area rehabbing rundown rental properties
- Investors rehabbing and/or building new structures
- Kindness
- Parades
- Marihuana shops and their tax revenue
- Pocket Park Concerts
- Kind vendors/merchants
- Artworks
- Festival of the Arts
- BR Pride Event
- Downtown landscaping efforts

Weaknesses

- Municipality has a lack of control over development opportunities.
- Downtown Urban Renewal initiatives have, in a way, handicapped the character of buildings in that commercial district.
- Lack of “destination feel” in the downtown district.
- Manufacturing companies having challenges with skilled employee hiring/retention
- Missing middle for residential housing
- Surrounded by townships (creates challenges for development)
- Capacity of the DDA
- ‘Services’ heavy in the downtown district.
- Encouraging new models of coordination/collaboration
- Availability of diverse commercial dining businesses (vegan, vegetarian, world cuisine, etc.)
- A formal downtown square doesn’t exist currently
- Rapport between FSU institution, students, faculty, ‘The City’
- Closed attitude of new ideas, people, and businesses
- Communication and rapport between city and residents
- Quality of local paper
- Businesses not open 5-6 days a week, most closed on Mondays
- Many businesses don’t have extended and/or nighttime/weekend hours
- Options and availability of childcare
- Rhetoric is “it’s easy to do marihuana business here” → how do we create a culture to make it easy for all business types
- Maintenance of rentals within city limits, particularly rentals on State St.
- Outdated manufactured homes
- FSU adjunct and overall faculty living locally
- Strength/productivity of Town & Gown
- Big Rapids is an island community in the sense that it’s isolated on its own island with no room to build out and not much else around it.
- Not enough for families to do in town.
- Not enough activities for college students
- No central location for information about local events

Opportunities

- Creating and nurturing an economic environment for multiple options of the same business to thrive (ex: coffee shops).
- Being more strategic about economic development/marketing and the ways in which we pull people of the highway and main roads, out of their car, and into shops.
- Having a food co-op established
- Battery plant coming into the township
- Scooter's Coffee
- Restaurant/retail expansion in downtown district
- Social district
- Developing a downtown farmers market pavilion
- Conducting an analysis of what businesses come into downtown, when/if they leave, and learning more about what factors play into making those decisions.
- Activate being tubing capitol of Michigan again
- Depot restoration and Depot Park development
- The Dragon (our proximity to the trail bolsters economic opportunities)
- Big Rapids becoming a destination city
- Improvements in the main entrances of town to enhance the overall aesthetic
- Mini golf course development
- Movie theater restoration
- A department store (like JC Penney's) coming into town
- Investing in an incubator space for upcoming entrepreneurs
- Airport runway extension
- Putting information in the water bill to improve city/resident communications
- Enhanced awareness of the Band of Locals Radio Show
- Availability in water/sewer system to offer to entrepreneurs looking to invest/build
- Having more community events to bring people together
- 'Electrification' to prepare for electric vehicle car influx
- The White Pine Trail development on the southbound portion of the trail

Threats

- Retail/medical/commercial businesses moving outside city limits
- Need for more skilled trade professionals
- Need diversified types of housing to anticipate the needs of the future influx in residents. Without it, the city is majorly threatened by outside municipalities absorbing the housing development opportunities and residency growth.
- High rent for retail spaces makes investment difficult for upcoming entrepreneurs
- Big box store dilemma/dark storefronts
- Competitiveness of farmers market vs. other municipalities
- Students not feeling welcome impacts our present and future competitiveness as a college town
- COVID-19
- Inflation/overall economy on local and national scale
- Shipping delays/supply chain issues
- FSU faculty using their student commuter coach bus to commute from Grand Rapids
- Hospital moving out to the township
- Public schools moving outside the city
- People having no choice but to drive 1+ hours to access amenities
- Closed mindedness about new businesses

Suggestions

South Third Avenue District

- Eating establishment to service the White Pine Trail users
- Mini golf
- Playground near the hiking trail
- Any fast food on the East Side
- Glass museum/shop
- Five Guys Burgers & Fries
- Craig's Cruisers Family Fun Center
- Taco restaurant
- Sonic Drive Thru
- Music center (noted it could be anywhere although posted on this board)
- Chick Fil-A
- Glass blowing school
- Chuck E. Cheese

Perry Avenue District

- Olive Garden
- Gellyball
- Veterinary office
- Beauty supply store for African Americans
- Costco/Sam's Club
- Indoor swimming pool

North State Street District

- Improve facades of buildings in this district
- Toy store
- Drive-in movie theater
- A fishing shop (like Cabela's)
- An indoor activity place for kids—bounce house, something similar to the model of Catch Air in Grand Rapids
- Taco stands
- Rest area closer to factories
- YMCA
- Tube/kayak rental

Downtown District

- Clothing store
- Movie theater
- Children's museum
- Sushi restaurant
- The Wellness Witch (tarot, massage, tea)
- EverPlay Café
- Vegan food options
- Year-round farmer's market/enclosed pavilion
- Acting club
- Kayak course on the Muskegon River (behind the middle school)

Appendix B: Implementation Partners

Kelly Wawsczyk

Executive Director
Mecosta County Development Corporation
(231) 923-8884
wawsczykk@rightplace.org

Mark Gifford

City Manager
City of Big Rapids
(231) 592- 4058
mgifford@cityofbr.org

Josh Pyles

Executive Director
Downtown Business Association
(231) 592- 4038
jpyles@cityofbr.org

Carlleen Rose

President
Band of Locals
(231) 796-2502
carlleenrose55@gmail.com

Connie Koepke

Executive Director
Mecosta County Visitors Bureau
(231) 796-7640
director@bigrapids.org

Michele Albright

Chamber President
Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce
(231) 679-9694
director@mecostacounty.com

Del Kirkby

Cadillac Transportation Service Center Manager
Michigan Department of Transportation
(231) 775-3487
kirkbyd@michigan.gov

Patrick Tiedt

Community Affairs Manager (Lake, Mecosta,
Missaukee, Osceola, Wexford Counties)
Consumers Energy
(231) 383-3840
Patrick.Tiedt@cmsenergy.com

Paul Griffith

Vice President
Friends of the White Pine Trail
(231) 250-1173
psaagriffith@gmail.com

Big Rapids Housing Commission

(231) 796- 8689
admin@bigrapidshousing.org

Ferris State University **Jessie is having coffee with Dr. Pink on December 6, 2022, and going to talk with him about the best point of contact*

Leadership Mecosta

(231) 250-9975
bargersr@gmail.com

Big Rapids Downtown Development Authority

Contact Mark Gifford, Big Rapids City Manager
**Contact information provided in the left column*

Appendix C: Other Sources

Data USA. (2020). *Big Rapids, MI*. Data USA. Retrieved November 10, 2022, from <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/big-rapids-mi>

Ferris State University. (n.d.). *The Birth of a City*. Ferris State University. Retrieved November 10, 2022, from <https://www.ferris.edu/alumni/Historical/COO/birth.htm>

Person. (2022, June 27). *MSU, Merit Network awarded \$10.5m for statewide broadband infrastructure*. MSUToday. Retrieved November 10, 2022, from <https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2022/federal-grant-awarded-to-msu-merit-network-broadband-infrastructure>

STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Emily Szymanski, Planning & Zoning Technician
SUBJECT: Manufactured Homes in Single-family Neighborhoods – Discussion
DATE: November 16, 2022

Introduction

The topic of manufactured housing has been a reoccurring topic of discussion during recent Planning Commission meetings. Both community members and Planning Commissioners have asked for clarification on several items pertaining to this topic and have expressed interest in having a larger discussion overall. To help guide discussion, this Staff Report was created with the intent to:

1. Provide information on manufactured homes and modular homes.
2. Provide Commissioners with the current Big Rapids Ordinance language pertaining to single-family dwelling standards.
3. Discuss Michigan’s Mobile Home Commission Act, Act 96 of 1987 in relation to what local municipalities *can* regulate.
4. Relate the discussion back to affordable housing and exclusionary zoning practices.

Manufactured and Modular Homes

The following information has been sourced from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

What is a manufactured home?

Formally known as a mobile home, manufactured homes are built in the controlled environment of a manufacturing plant and are transported in one or more sections on a permanent chassis.

What is a modular home?

A prefabricated home that consists of repeated sections called modules. The sections are constructed away from the building site, then delivered and installed on site.

What is the difference between manufactured and modular homes?

Manufactured homes are constructed according to a code administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD Code). The HUD Code, unlike conventional building codes, requires manufactured homes to be constructed on a permanent chassis. Modular homes are constructed to the same state, local or regional building codes as site-built homes. Other types of systems-built homes include panelized wall systems, log homes, structural insulated panels, and insulating concrete forms.

**What are my options for financing the purchase of a manufactured home?*

There are many alternatives for financing your home, including a growing number of lending institutions that are providing conventional and government-insured financing plans for prospective owners. The most common method of financing a manufactured home is through a retail

installment contract, available through your retailer. Some lending institutions that offer conventional, long-term real estate mortgages may require the homes to be placed on approved foundations. Manufactured homes are eligible for government-insured loans offered by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), the Veterans Administration (VA), and the Rural Housing Services (RHS) under the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

*The Federal Government has been discussing ways to close the housing supply gap and increase affordable housing units over the next five years. The May 16, 2022 White House Briefing Room Statement identified several ways to address the lack of overall housing stock, especially affordable housing. One of the ways to meet the need of affordable housing is by supporting production and availability of manufactured housing. The Press Briefing stated:

“The majority of people buying new manufactured homes rely on personal property financing (chattel lending) rather than conventional mortgages. This type of financing typically costs more than traditional mortgage financing due to higher interest rates and shorter loan terms. Freddie Mac has announced that it will complete a feasibility assessment for the requirements and processes necessary to support loan purchases of personal property manufactured housing loans. If FHFA approval is obtained, Freddie Mac will purchase these kinds of loans to assist with product design and support future loan purchase capabilities. Beyond personal property financing, both Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac (the Enterprises), in their Duty to Serve Plans, also released revised purchase targets for manufactured housing loans, which will have the effect of fostering greater liquidity for manufactured housing and increasing delivery of manufactured homes. Finally, recognizing the cost and development time savings provided by manufactured housing, HUD is making it easier to finance new units and helping manufacturers update their designs to meet changing consumer demands. This includes working to increase the usability of FHA’s Title I loan program for Manufactured Housing, supporting greater securitization of Title I loans through Ginnie Mae’s platform, updating the HUD Code to allow manufacturers to modernize and expand their production lines, and helping manufacturers respond to supply chain issues.”

Current Language in the Big Rapids Zoning Ordinance for Single Family Dwellings

4.1:25 Single Family Dwellings:

Single Family dwellings in the City of Big Rapids not located in a mobile home park shall comply with the following standards:

1. It complies with the minimum square footage requirements of this Ordinance for the zone in which it is located.
2. **It has a minimum width across any section of twenty-four (24) feet** and complies in all respects with the City Building Code, including minimum heights for habitable rooms. Where a dwelling is required by law to comply with any federal or state standards or regulations for construction which are less stringent than those imposed by the City Building Code, then the less stringent federal or state standard or regulation shall apply.
3. **It is firmly attached to a permanent foundation**, constructed on the site in accordance with the City Building Code and coextensive with the perimeter of the building, which

attachment shall also meet all applicable building codes and other state and federal regulations.

4. **It does not have exposed wheels, towing mechanism, under-carriage or chassis.**
5. The dwelling is connected to a public sewer and water supply or to such private facilities approved by the local Health Department.
6. The dwelling contains storage area either in the basement under the dwelling, in an attic area, in closet areas or a separate structure being standard construction similar to or of better quality than the principal dwelling. Such storage shall be in addition to the space for the storage of automobiles and shall be equal to not less than fifteen (15) percent of the minimum square footage requirement of this Ordinance for the zone in which the dwelling is located. In no case, however, shall more than two hundred (200) sq. ft. of storage area be required by this provision.
7. The dwelling is aesthetically compatible in design and appearance with other residences in the vicinity, with either **a roof overhang of not less than six (6) inches on all sides, or alternatively with window sills and roof drainage systems concentrating roof drainage along the sides of the dwelling; with not less than two (2) exterior doors with one being in the front of the dwelling and the other being either the rear or side of the dwelling; contains permanently attached steps connected to said exterior areas or to porches connected to said door areas where a difference in elevation requires the same.** The compatibility of design and appearance shall be determined in the first instance by the City Zoning Administrator upon review of the plans submitted for a particular dwelling subject to appeal by an aggrieved party to the Zoning Board of Appeals within a period of fifteen (15) days from the receipt of notice of said Zoning Administrator's decision. Any determination of compatibility shall be based upon the standards set forth in the within definition of "dwelling" as well as the character of residential development outside of mobile home parks within three hundred (300) feet of the subject dwelling where such area is developed with dwellings to the extent of not less than twenty (20) percent of said area; where said area is not so developed, by the character of residential development outside of mobile home parks throughout the City. The foregoing shall not be construed to prohibit innovative design concepts involving such matters as solar energy, view, unique land contour, or relief from the common or standard designed home. (8) The dwelling contains no additions or rooms or other areas which are not constructed with similar materials and which are similar in Article 4 General Provisions 4-15 appearance and which have similar quality of workmanship as the original structure, including the above-described foundation and permanent attachment to the principal structure. (9) The dwelling complies with all pertinent building and fire codes including, in the case of mobile homes, the standards for mobile home construction as contained in the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations entitled Mobile Home Construction and Safety Standards, effective June 15, 1976 as amended. (10) The foregoing standards shall not apply to a mobile home located in a licensed mobile home park except to the extent required by a state or federal law or otherwise specifically required in the Ordinance of the City pertaining to such parks.

Michigan’s Mobile Home Commission Act, Act 96 of 1987

This Act was created to ...”prescribe its powers and duties and those of local governments; to provide for a mobile home code and the licensure, regulation, construction, operation, and management of mobile homes...”

Included below is language from a relevant Section (Section 125.2307) of this Act. The full version is attached to this packet for reference. For the purpose of this discussion, Section 125.2307 of the MHC Act identifies what cannot be included within a local municipalities zoning ordinance. Section 125.2307 states:

125.2307 Higher standard proposed by local government; filing; rules; implementation; review; approval; adoption by ordinance; relation of ordinance to specific section of code; standard not subject to filing requirement; design of ordinance; standard for setup or installation of mobile homes; prohibited standards; aesthetic standards; inspections; "inspection for safety" defined.

Sec. 7:

1. Except as provided in subsection (7), a local government that proposes a standard related to mobile home parks or seasonal mobile home parks, or related to mobile homes located within a mobile home park or a seasonal mobile home park, that is higher than the standard provided in this act or the code, or that proposes a standard related to the business, sales, and service practices of mobile home dealers, or the business of mobile home installers and repairers, that is higher than the standard provided in this act or the code, shall file the proposed standard with the commission. Except as provided in subsection (7), the commission may promulgate rules to establish the criteria and procedure for implementation of higher standards by a local government. The commission shall review and approve the proposed standard unless the standard is unreasonable, arbitrary, or not in the public interest. If the commission does not approve or disapprove the proposed standard within 60 days after it is filed with the commission, the standard shall be considered approved unless the local government grants the commission additional time to consider the standard. After the proposed standard is approved, the local government may adopt the standard by ordinance. The ordinance shall relate to a specific section of the code.
2. A local government standard related to mobile homes not located within a mobile home park or seasonal mobile home park need not be filed with the mobile home commission, unless the standard relates to the business, sales, and service practices of mobile home dealers, or the business of mobile home installers and repairers.
3. **A local government ordinance shall not be designed as exclusionary to mobile homes generally whether the mobile homes are located inside or outside of mobile home parks or seasonal mobile home parks.**
4. A local government ordinance shall not contain a standard for the setup or installation of mobile homes that is incompatible with, or is more stringent than, either of the following:
(a) The manufacturer's recommended setup and installation specifications. (b) The mobile home setup and installation standards promulgated by the federal department of

housing and urban development pursuant to the national manufactured housing construction and safety standards act of 1974, 42 USC 5401 to 5426.

5. In the absence of any setup or installation specifications or standards for foundations as set forth in subsection (4)(a) or (b), the local government standards for site-built housing shall apply.
6. **A local government ordinance shall not contain roof configuration standards or special use zoning requirements that apply only to, or excludes, mobile homes.** A local government ordinance shall not contain a manufacturing or construction standard that is incompatible with, or is more stringent than, a standard promulgated by the federal department of housing and urban development pursuant to the national manufactured housing construction and safety standards act of 1974, 42 USC 5401 to 5426. **A local government ordinance may include reasonable standards relating to mobile homes located outside of mobile home parks or seasonal mobile home parks which ensure that mobile homes compare aesthetically to site-built housing located or allowed in the same residential zone.**

Food for Thought: Exclusionary Zoning

Exclusionary zoning is defined as the use of the zoning ordinance to exclude certain types of land uses from a given community. When discussing housing and zoning, exclusionary zoning laws place restrictions on the types of homes that can be built in a particular neighborhood. Common examples include minimum lot size requirements, minimum square footage requirements, prohibitions on multi-family homes, limits on the height of buildings, and putting restrictions on limited-income and affordable housing units.

To provide context to the topic of housing and exclusionary zoning, three articles are included in this packet:

1. Regulatory Barriers to Manufactured Housing Placement in Urban Communities
2. Understanding Exclusionary Zoning and Its Impacts on Concentrated Poverty
3. Behind the Smokescreen: Exclusionary Zoning of Mobile Homes

Action

This discussion is solely for educational purposes at this time.

Way forward

The way forward will be discussed and decided by the Planning Commission and supported by City Staff.