



Redevelopment Ready Communities City of Kentwood Marketing Strategy Best Practice 6.2.1

Summary

Background

The City of Kentwood was incorporated in 1967 by the vote of more than 6,000 residents, officially transforming Paris Township into the City of Kentwood. Since that time, Kentwood has grown into a thriving community, home to more than 51,000 residents. Recently, the City's 49508 zip code was recognized as the "hottest" in the country by [Realtor.com](#).

Kentwood is home to prime retail shopping in West Michigan, in addition to a portfolio of diverse industries, such as agribusiness, manufacturing and healthcare services. Businesses find it convenient to locate in Kentwood because of easy access to transportation, including the Gerald R. Ford International Airport, major highways and rail freight routes. Eight [Rapid](#) routes serve the City of Kentwood, including the [Silver Line](#) Bus Rapid Transit. Kentwood also maintains the highest average PASER-rated major street network in Kent County according to data compiled by the Grand Valley Metro Council in its 2018 Regional Pavement Condition Survey Report.

The City proactively works to make it easy to conduct business in Kentwood. Since the administration of the late Richard L. Root, who served as mayor from 2003 through June 2012, Kentwood has maintained an "Open for Business" initiative – a commitment to being a help, not a hindrance to current and prospective investors and those looking to do business in the City. The development process is streamlined by excellent customer service and access to robust online services, resources and incentives, such as tax abatements and other financial support opportunities.

The City of Kentwood is served by four outstanding public-school systems—Kentwood, Forest Hills, Kelloggsville and Caledonia. According to Niche.com—a website that analyzes and ranks school systems—Kentwood Public Schools continues to be rated [the most diverse school district in Michigan](#). In May 2018, [School News Network](#) reported Kentwood Public School enroll students who speak more than 60 languages, representing 90 countries. Options for charter, private or parochial schools are also available.

Within its 21 square miles are more than 13 miles of non-motorized trails, including a large portion of the Paul B. Henry Trail, as well as 14 parks that cover 301 acres and offer a variety of amenities. Over 700 recreational programs are offered through the City's Parks and Recreation Department.

The City of Kentwood maintains a culture of excellent customer service, actively providing a responsive and responsible local government with a focus on continual improvement.

Vision Statement

The City of Kentwood is a diverse Michigan community where people can find opportunity, safety, health and happiness.

Mission Statement

The City of Kentwood provides high quality services to foster a thriving community for all.

Strategic Areas of Focus

- Quality Services
- Strong Neighborhoods
- Sustainable Economy

Strategic Objectives

- Maintain financial vitality to provide quality services to help our community remain educated, healthy and mobile
- Support safe, livable and strong neighborhoods in a prosperous, diverse city
- Promote a healthy, sustainable economy reflecting community values

SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multi-agency collaborations – County associations, GVMC, emergency services, schools, Regis• Internal audit processes• Talented workforce• Woodland Mall retail growth• Infrastructure in place• Financial stability• Kentwood Community Foundation• City is welcoming, operates with integrity; servant leadership – in words and actions, for employees & community; and efficiency and frugality; provide services people need/want at high level of service, without excess; run lean, eliminate waste in processes	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No traditional downtown• Walk score
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Patterson farm development• City campus expansion• Division corridor and Breton Rd extended	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• City revenue sources• Economic stability

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pfeiffer Woods/Ravines potential developments • Community facelift – beautification • Road funding opportunities • Public safety/services – dispatch, ambulance services • Parks & Recreation – both programs and facilities • Community gathering place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate of change, instability, paradigm shifts that trickle down to related businesses, changes to industry and the need to be flexible, innovative • Aging infrastructure, housing • Available workforce – shrinking number of qualified candidates • Decline of some retailers
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Marketing Strategy

This marketing strategy will outline the City of Kentwood’s current activities and future action plan to transform the community by building awareness of and expanding existing assets. The strategy is to change public perception and behaviors to improve economic development. It will grow consumer confidence and reach by sharing the economic and social value of Kentwood through a comprehensive communication plan.

Target Audience

The City of Kentwood will target current and prospective local residents, local, regional and international businesses, the surrounding Kentwood communities within a 15- to 30-mile radius, local and regional media and the next generation of decision makers.

Community Partners

The City of Kentwood’s community partners include:

- Michigan Economic Development Corporation
- The Right Place
- Urban Metro Mayors and Managers
- Michigan Municipal League
- Grand Valley Metro Council
- Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce
- Wyoming-Kentwood Chamber of Commerce
- Division Avenue Business Association
- Rotary Club of Kentwood

Core Messages

- To a potential visitor: You should visit Kentwood, Michigan because...
 - It is West Michigan’s premier restaurant and retail destination.
 - It features multiple modes of access / easy transportation
 - Eight Rapid routes serve the City, including the Silver Line.
 - Kentwood has the highest average PASER-rated major street network in Kent County according to data compiled by the Grand Valley Metro Council in its 2018 Regional Pavement Condition Survey Report.
 - Within its 21 square miles are more than 10 miles of walking and bikes trails, including a large portion of the Paul B. Henry Trail.

- Kentwood is near the Gerald R. Ford International Airport, major highways and rail freight routes.
 - It is located just 15 miles southeast of Grand Rapids and 30 miles from beautiful Lake Michigan.
 - To an existing or potential resident: You should live in Kentwood, Michigan because...
 - The City's 49508 zip code was recognized as the "hottest" in the country by [Realtor.com](https://www.realtor.com).
 - The area is known for its diverse and close-knit community, affordable homes and quick commute to Grand Rapids.
 - There are a variety of price points for housing as well as housing options, ranging from apartment to single-family to condominium.
 - Young families are drawn to Kentwood's affordable neighborhoods because of its strong schools.
 - The average home listing views in ZIP 49508 are up 4 percent over last year, with homes receiving nearly four times more views than those in the rest of the country.
 - Homes in Kentwood's 49508 ZIP code sell in 14 days, 52 days faster than the rest of the U.S., with a median list price of \$193,168, up 9.5 percent over last year.
 - A pocket of relative affordability, prices in 49508 are 33 percent lower than the surrounding county.
 - Kent County is expected to add 8,000 jobs this year, an increase of 2.3 percent.
 - It offers an ease of living due to its location; everything is close (i.e. dining and recreation options, modes of access/transportation)
 - It's a place you can grow with / age in place, with opportunities to rent, own and retire (senior living).
 - It includes numerous community events and recreational programs year-round to improve quality of life.
 - Local police and fire services serve the community with excellence.
 - The City of Kentwood is a welcoming, diverse and vibrant community.
 - The resident unemployment rate was 2.3 percent in November 2018, compared to Kent County, 2.5 percent; Michigan, 3.4 percent, US, 3.5 percent.
 - To a potential investor: You should invest in Kentwood, Michigan because...
 - Kentwood is "Open for Business"
 - We are committed to being a help, not a hindrance.
 - We provide helpful resources and incentives, such as tax abatements, for investors and those looking to do business in Kentwood.
 - Kentwood has a history of creating ways to make it easy to conduct business in Kentwood. We focus on continued economic stimulation as well as job creation.
 - It has varying sizes of land and real estate to fit specific needs; there's a nice balance between residential, commercial and industrial properties.
 - Location, location, location.
 - Eight Rapid routes serve the City, including the Silver Line.

- Kentwood is near the Gerald R. Ford International Airport, major highways and rail freight routes.
 - Access to downtown Grand Rapids and cultural offering
 - Easy access to the Gerald R. Ford International Airport
- It is home to a large and diverse community/workforce with more than 50,000 residents.
- It has quality infrastructure, including the highest-rated major street network in Kent County according to data compiled by the Grand Valley Metro Council in its 2018 Regional Pavement Condition Survey Report.
- Property value is high (Average value of Kentwood property in 2018 was \$157,795)
- Low tax to high service ratio. (Based on the 2018 City of Portage survey of Michigan cities with a population between 30,000 – 80,000, City of Kentwood remains the City with the lowest total millage for cities without an income tax.)
- 90 percent of property tax revenues support public safety.
- Kentwood’s pension and retiree benefit plans are extremely well funded.
 - Pension: Funded over 99 percent
 - Retiree medical benefits: Funded over 100 percent

Action Plan

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- **Objective:** Increase consistent, positive communications, messaging, events and stories that illuminate economic growth, history, diversity of the community to target audiences
 - **Action:** Currently working with a full-service communications firm to support ongoing efforts to create and disseminate news and information for events, activities, initiatives and issues via social media, press releases, website and intranet updates, eNewsletters, etc. Contracted in 2016, ongoing until further notice.
 - **Action:** Continually collaborate with community partners in the region to gather and highlight current data, marketing materials, news and other development resources
- **Objective:** Improve brand recognition and consistency
 - **Action:** Develop brand guidelines (in progress)
- **Objective:** Work to establish City Hall campus as a community gathering place
 - **Action:** Center large community events around City Hall (ongoing)
 - **Action:** Develop City Hall campus master plan (complete)
 - **Action:** Offer free wifi access at library and City Hall (complete by 2020)
- **Objective:** Promote safe and desirable building and street design
 - **Action:** Adopt and promote form-based code system (ongoing)
 - **Action:** Educate property and business owners through master plan process during 2019 update
 - **Action:** Require rental properties within the City of Kentwood to be registered and inspected by the Kentwood Inspections Department (ongoing)

Diverse Business Community

- **Objective:** Provide resources businesses need/want at high level of service to spur development
 - **Action:** Educate business owners about incentive programs (ongoing)
 - **Action:** Ensure a list of resources/incentives is regularly updated on website (ongoing, last updated November 2018)
 - **Action:** Create a “starting a new business” webpage (completed in 2017)
 - **Action:** Support the Division Avenue Business Association (ongoing support)
 - **Action:** Conduct business visits with EDC members (four per month, ongoing)

- **Objective:** Continue to cultivate a business-friendly environment through an “open for business” approach
 - **Action:** Currently offering centralized permitting process with very responsive staff.
 - **Action:** Currently working with a consultant to keep up with demand of commercial/industrial plan review requests / maintain a fast turnaround time and preserve excellent customer service. Contracted August 2018 as needed until further notice.
 - **Action:** Streamline services online through virtual City Hall. Online permitting launched in 2017. Communications support to work with Engineering and Inspections departments to identify other opportunities or updates needed on a quarterly basis. We processed more than double the number of online permits in 2018 – 903, up from 438 in 2017.

- **Objective:** Increase density as it relates to economic development in the City of Kentwood
 - **Action:** Become a Redevelopment Ready Community (in progress)
 - **Action:** Identify and analyze areas of opportunity (in progress)
 - **Action:** Market redevelopment of properties/sites online, in print materials, face-to-face and through RFP processes (ongoing)

Evaluation

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- Number of media placements, content in media placements
- Increase in social media metrics (likes, follows, engagement)
- Increased webpage visits
- Benchmarking
- Establishment of brand guidelines, consistency in materials
- Increase in visitors at City Hall campus, as a community gathering place
- Adherence to design guidelines

Diverse Business Community

- Percentages of different industries in Kentwood
- Entrepreneurial business increase
- Utilization of ED resources