

# SANDUSKY 2018

## CITY OF SANDUSKY BICENTENNIAL VISION STRATEGIC VISION 2016-2020



ADOPTED ON  
JANUARY 25, 2016

**STRATEGY**  
DESIGNPARTNERS





# TABLE OF CONTENTS



VIBRANT CITY

7



LIVABLE CITY

13



CONNECTED CITY

19



DESTINATION CITY

23



CELEBRATED CITY

29



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# SANDUSKY'S VISION

Nearly 200 years ago, Sandusky was founded as a city of visionaries – people who understood the unique advantages of building a city sheltered by a beautiful, natural bay and adjacent to Lake Erie's only island chain. Over time, that tradition of vision helped build Sandusky into the center of the entire Firelands region with a bustling downtown, thriving businesses, strong industrial presence, dedicated civic culture and institutions, and a world-class tourist economy.

Like many cities that benefited from industrialization in the 20th Century, Sandusky also has faced challenges recently as manufacturing has waned and urban sprawl has diluted its core. Despite these and other challenges, smart choices have helped Sandusky weather the storm better than many of its sister cities, and difficult times have not dulled the city's visionary spirit. It is fiercely alive in the people of Sandusky, and the plan you see before you is a testament to their dedication, innovation, energy, and hope for the future.

Our future will build upon our tradition. It is difficult to imagine Sandusky without the State Theatre, Firelands Regional Medical Center, Cedar Point, a masonic street grid, a beautiful park system, a historic library, or an iconic waterfront downtown. These and countless other assets of the city exist because of smart choices and the long term vision of the city's leaders and people over time.

A Bicentennial Vision, at this important time, must be worthy of those institutions and that legacy, with a focus on how to preserve those assets and not take their future for granted. But it must also be a vision ambitious and audacious enough to call for the creation of new assets that will grow and become part of the history and fabric of Sandusky over the next 200 years. The Bicentennial Vision is about identifying a direction and taking small, intentional, and foundational first steps as a unified community.

Before moving forward, it was essential that we listen first. The Bicentennial Vision is a reflection of the voices of thousands of community members who participated in this process. We heard ideas big and small, and we hope you will find your input and voice reflected in this document.

There are no silver bullets or easy solutions identified in this plan. Fully achieving Sandusky's potential will require forging partnerships between the public and private sector, as well as across jurisdictional borders. It will require better connecting safer and more livable neighborhoods, inhabited by a prepared workforce, to a stronger regional job market. It will require preserving Lake Erie, our most precious natural resource, while embracing and leveraging the destination status that Great Lake makes possible.

While Sandusky's bicentennial celebration will formally take place in 2018, this plan continues until 2020. The Bicentennial Vision has never been about the year 2018 or even the last 200 years. Since the inception of the Bicentennial Commission and passage of Issue 8 in 2014, it has been about building on what is best about Sandusky to position it for a bright future.

Decisions we make and actions we take over the next five years will determine whether Sandusky will thrive and grow. They will determine whether our own children, or children born in other corners of the world, will choose Sandusky. We believe they will, so long as we build on our assets, continue the momentum of the last two years and have the courage to stay focused and take calculated risks to create a vibrant, livable, connected, destination, and celebrated city.

Sincerely,

Dennis Murray, Commission President

Eric Wobser, City Manager



# ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Sandusky's Bicentennial Vision includes two planning documents: a strategic vision and a comprehensive physical master plan. The vision will guide the City of Sandusky through the next five years by outlining goals and strategic focus areas and the comprehensive plan recommends physical infrastructure and planning projects for the next 10 to 20 years.

The City of Sandusky engaged Strategy Design Partners (SDP) to lead the outreach and strategy for the visioning process and City Architecture to formulate the physical recommendations of the comprehensive plan. The outreach of both planning processes overlapped throughout a seven-month engagement to gather feedback and input from Sandusky's residents, stakeholders, visitors, commissioners, and staff about Sandusky's future.

## STEERING COMMITTEE & EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE

To guide the planning process, a steering committee was formed that included over 90 participants. The steering committee championed the outreach process and provided guidance and insight for the consultant teams.

An executive steering committee was created to serve as a more nimble working group, representing the steering committee at large. The executive steering committee provided strategic direction and feedback to help shape the vision priorities.

## EXTERNAL OUTREACH

Between March and December 2015, SDP and City Architecture directly engaged over 2,000 stakeholders, including residents, business owners, visitors, institutional, government, and city-wide leaders. SDP collected responses from nearly 1,300 residents and 130 visitors through a community survey (both online and print), held six focus groups, and spoke to over 30 people in one-on-one interviews. In addition, City Architecture held five neighborhood tours as well as a tour of the waterfront aboard the Goodtime III. Together, SDP and City Architecture held three public meetings that were all well attended.

The outreach and engagement efforts ensured that everyone had an opportunity to share their personal vision during the process, no matter what neighborhood one calls home or the extent of personal involvement in Sandusky's civic community. Throughout the process, the people of Sandusky continually shared their view of the positive momentum in Sandusky. Over 77% of survey respondents believe that Sandusky is headed in the right direction, a significant indication that there is much to build on in Sandusky.

## INTERNAL INVOLVEMENT

A strategic vision cannot be successful unless those who will implement and work within its goals feel that the strategies are realistic and achievable. Leadership and members of the City of Sandusky staff were involved throughout the process to ensure this vision will be a success. SDP engaged the City of Sandusky Commissioners and staff in order to gain consensus around the vision's primary goals through a commissioner retreat, staff retreat, and one-on-one interviews with the commissioners and senior staff leadership about action steps and how to measure success for the vision.

These efforts to involve stakeholders throughout the planning process have empowered the City of Sandusky to develop a compelling vision and physical plan for the future of our great city. The City of Sandusky owes a debt of gratitude to all those who participated for the thought-provoking input and feedback that challenged and inspired the vision you see within these pages.

### MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE

- Abbey Bemis of ECEDC
- Sue Daugherty of Serving Our Seniors
- Dora Grant of Conestoga
- Mary Jane Hill of Flynn, Py & Kruse
- Jim Miller of Civista Bank
- Anna Phipps of Erie County Community Foundation
- Matt Ouimet of Cedar Fair
- Eugene Sanders of Sandusky City Schools
- Martin Tursky of Firelands Regional Medical Center
- Joan Van Offeren of Lake Erie Shores and Islands
- Ryan Whaley of Green Door Mediaworks



# VIBRANT CITY



PHOTO BY ROBERT MYERS





## VIBRANT CITY

The Issue 8 community survey identified the local economy and jobs as the most important issues facing Sandusky. The need for jobs and economic development were also recurrent themes during the bicentennial visioning outreach, which included residents of Sandusky as well as regional residents and stakeholders. Many respondents mentioned the creation and retention of living wage jobs as critical to ensuring that Sandusky's revitalization is sustainable and beneficial to residents of all backgrounds. The Vibrant City strategies are designed to position Sandusky for lasting growth by leveraging existing assets and partnering to create new assets and support entrepreneurs and small businesses.

When looking at strategies for rebuilding Sandusky's economy, it is important not to limit the conversation to the public sector. The City of Sandusky cannot successfully revitalize the local economy by acting alone. The passage of Issue 8 set aside new admission tax revenue for economic development purposes. While these resources are substantial, they must unlock and leverage private investment in order to make an impact on the local economy. Sandusky must work across sectors to partner with and attract investment from large companies, small business owners, educational and health care institutions, civic nonprofits, cultural anchors and philanthropy. Sandusky needs a shared agenda for economic vibrancy that is developed, nurtured, supported and invested in by partners from all sectors.

Sandusky must also understand that it does not compete with nearby municipalities, townships, and villages for economic development. Competing against one another merely shuffles tax base from one community to the next without creating regional wealth. Sandusky must begin to define itself and to act as the largest city and economic and cultural hub of the Firelands region. Sandusky must compete in unison with neighboring communities against the rest of the world. By building and leading a coalition of regional entities, Sandusky and its neighbors can strengthen infrastructure, build on shared natural resources, and attract investment that will transform the economy and lead to a higher quality of life for area residents.

It is not enough to focus on attracting companies to the region – there will be no silver bullet, big win to rebuilding Sandusky's economy. Rather, economic growth must be organic, incremental, sustainable, and built upon core assets. Companies are attracted to locations with an educated workforce, high quality of life, connected infrastructure, and affordable, readily available land. Further, according to the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council, most job creation comes not from the attraction of large companies but instead from the creation of new businesses and the growth of small to medium-sized companies already located within a region.

Therefore, in order to create jobs and strengthen the local economy, Sandusky must take a long view. It must partner across sectors and think regionally. It must make long-term investments in infrastructure, education, reclaiming vacant land and preserving natural resources such as Lake Erie. It must also nurture entrepreneurs and small businesses in order to create a diversified network of businesses that are entrenched in and committed to the region. The following strategies suggest a clear path forward in building the economy of the future for Sandusky.



PHOTO BY EAGLE EYE PRODUCTIONS





# VIBRANT CITY



## FOCUS ON A REGIONAL ECONOMY

The strength of the regional labor market, as well as the quality of its infrastructure and natural resources, will dictate whether companies or individuals choose to invest in and make Sandusky their home. Sandusky is the largest city and economic and cultural hub of a Firelands region that includes all of Erie, Huron, Ottawa, and Sandusky counties as well as portions of western Lorain and eastern Seneca counties.

Together, this region boasts a population of well over 200,000 and is well-positioned through its proximity to the major metropolitan regions of Cleveland, Columbus, Detroit and Toledo. To ensure a vibrant economic future for its citizens, the City of Sandusky must be a leader in the creation of a coalition of private and public stakeholders committed to the betterment of the Firelands and the Lake Erie Shores & Islands. This will require Sandusky to support efforts to build on regional economic assets and strengthen regional coalitions designed to develop and advocate for a strong regional economy. Examples include:

### **Identify and Build on Regional Assets**

- Leverage NASA-Plum Brook by supporting the “Friends of NASA-Plum Brook” to solidify and enhance NASA’s presence and brand in the region, advocate for continued federal investment and reposition excess federally-controlled land into an industrial/technology/corporate park that attracts high-paying and technologically-advanced 21st century jobs
- Create “Eds & Meds Corridor” on Hayes Avenue / Route 4 by rebranding the corridor as a district that builds on the presence of Firelands Regional Medical Center, Sandusky City Schools, and NOMS to attract institutional, medical, and education investment between the turnpike and Downtown Sandusky
- Support early stage entrepreneurs and reevaluate the success of existing entrepreneur programs such as “RISE,” partnering with entities such as BGSU-Firelands, Civista Bank and ECEDC to strengthen the mentorship, financial and in-kind resources made available to start-up and small businesses within the region
- Embrace and diversify the destination economy through partnerships with regional entities such as Cedar Fair, Erie County, Lake Erie Shores & Islands, and Erie Metroparks by developing assets that will benefit locals and attract increased investment and spending from tourists and seasonal residents

### **Strengthen Regional Partnerships**

- Support the efforts of the Firelands Partnership, an emerging coalition of private and public stakeholders that seeks to develop and advocate for a regional economic development agenda
- Convene existing economic development nonprofits such as ECEDC, Sandusky Main Street, and the Erie County Chamber of Commerce to encourage increased collaboration and potential co-location to maximize efficiencies of limited resources and to scale impact



# VIBRANT CITY

## DEVELOP & ATTRACT A TALENTED WORKFORCE

Sandusky benefits from an energetic and dedicated workforce. For decades locally, a strong work ethic and high school education were enough to secure a living wage job with an area manufacturer. In a globalized economy, this is no longer adequate. Higher education and advanced training and skills are critical to securing sustainable employment in the 21st century.

The Firelands region and Sandusky in particular are challenged by poor higher educational attainment, with only 13% of city residents holding a Bachelor's Degree or higher – compared to 25% for Ohio and nearly 29% nationally. To compete in the global economy, Sandusky must develop and attract a 21st century workforce. This is a long-term strategy that will likely take a generation or more to fully transform the region.

The City of Sandusky must be an active, supportive partner to the Sandusky Municipal School District's Transformation Plan, as well as the work of Sandusky Central Catholic and other private education options. These efforts will ensure local high school graduates are prepared and positioned for higher education and the jobs and careers of the future.

The city must also work with local schools and employers to better train area residents for currently available jobs. In the bicentennial visioning process, many area residents opined that there were not enough jobs, even as area employers stated that they are having a difficult time finding workers with the appropriate skills and work ethic. The city must play a supporting role in better connecting employers and area workforce development programs to ensure the necessary connections are being made between those seeking work and employers looking for a reliable work force.

In addition to Pre-K through 12th grade education and improved workforce development, higher education options in the region must also be expanded and improved not only to educate students born and raised locally, but also to attract talented students to study and potentially stay in Sandusky after graduation. While BGSU-Firelands does an outstanding job and offers higher education for regional commuters, and Firelands Regional Medical Center recently partnered with the University of Toledo to expand its nursing program, there is no dedicated four-year higher education institution within the entire four-county Firelands region.

However, the infrastructure for a more comprehensive higher education option is in place. Over 5,000 college students arrive in Sandusky each summer to work at Cedar Point and other hospitality businesses. Sandusky is clearly attractive to college students and possesses many assets that could be leveraged for a four-year institution of higher learning downtown – including dorms, cultural institutions, a historic waterfront and historic school buildings and other structures that could be repositioned to support a university presence.

Expanding higher education options for locals and non-locals has the potential to impact the local economy in a variety of ways, including by attracting students during the school year and balancing out the seasonal nature of the current tourism-oriented economy. It would also serve as an additional anchor for Downtown Sandusky and would raise educational attainment levels within the region, a critical factor in attracting and growing businesses that will create jobs.



PHOTO BY KYLE ROTH DESIGN

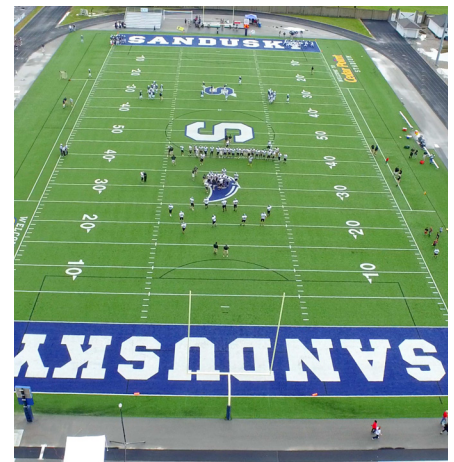


PHOTO BY EAGLE EYE PRODUCTIONS



PHOTO BY KYLE ROTH DESIGN



# VIBRANT CITY

Overall, Sandusky will continue to work with the Firelands Partnership and other local leaders to identify specific strategies to bridge the talent gap and help locals gain the skills they need to compete while also attracting new and talented residents to the city.

## ***Support Primary Education Efforts***

- Support the campus planning efforts of Sandusky City Schools and Sandusky Central Catholic Schools
- Assist in marketing efforts to attract families, students, and quality teachers
- Identify whether adequate pre-school options exist and are accessible to all Sandusky children
- Partner with entities such as Erie County's Public Health Department and the Boys and Girls Club of Erie County to provide supportive environments for children and teens and remove outside the classroom barriers to learning such as lead paint

## ***Life-Long Training***

- Participate in efforts to better link area residents to the programs and training necessary to prepare them for available jobs, identify existing programs and partners engaged in these efforts

## ***Expand Higher Education Options***

- Partner with key stakeholders, including area employers such as Cedar Point, governmental partners such as Erie County, and existing education institutions to explore feasibility of expanded higher education options within the region, particularly in Downtown Sandusky
- Identify potential sites and resources to attract and expand higher education options

## REVITALIZATION OF VACANT BUILDINGS & BLIGHTED LAND

Like most Great Lakes cities, Sandusky benefited from the jobs and investment that heavy industry supplied in the 20th century. It also had the foresight to develop a walkable waterfront downtown. But the city is now challenged by the legacy of sprawl, disinvestment, abandonment and environmental degradation presented by vacant buildings and properties.

These vacant and blighted buildings and sites must be returned to productive use and transform from health and safety hazards that drain the tax base into active engines for the local economy. With targeted investment in vacant buildings and blighted property, Sandusky can make large sites available for industrial and commercial investment and also take advantage of increased demand for downtown office and living space.

The City has moved aggressively to create the resources necessary to tackle blight. It dedicated a portion of new income tax dollars from the passage of Issue 8 specifically to blight elimination. Additionally, legislation passed by the City Commission allows overages in an EMS account to be spent on removing dangerous vacant and blighted structures from the city. With these tools and resources now in place, the city will aggressively position land and buildings for the future.

## ***Remediate Blighted Land***

- Utilize local Issue 8 and EMS funds, leveraged with grants and other additional resources, to perform environmental due diligence, determine highest and best uses, and position vacant and blighted commercial and industrial sites for redevelopment

## ***Repurpose Vacant Buildings***

- Target redevelopment efforts toward repurposing vacant buildings, including the upper floors of buildings that are only occupied on the first floor, to create mixed-use office, residential, retail and hospitality opportunities within the city, particularly downtown





# VIBRANT CITY



PHOTOS BY KYLE ROTH DESIGN

## SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURS & SMALL BUSINESS

The best economic development tactics focus less on chasing smokestacks or corporate headquarters from other communities and more on growing small and local businesses organically. These businesses are likely to stay local with roots and leadership invested in Sandusky. The City will help existing small and local businesses expand and diversify while attracting and recruiting new entrepreneurs and start-ups that see Sandusky's location, quality of life, affordability, and connectivity as assets they can use to build their business.

### ***Create Programs for Start-ups and Expanding Businesses***

- Program Issue 8 dollars dedicated to economic development toward supporting the creation and expansion of existing small businesses within the city
- Work with philanthropy, the private sector, and civic partners to expand and/or improve existing entrepreneurial support programs

### ***Develop Affordable and Attractive Office Space***

- Support the redevelopment of upper floors of downtown buildings to provide ready-to-lease office space for emerging and growing businesses
- Explore, with civic and philanthropic partners, the feasibility of co-work and incubator space options to nurture small business development
- Explore opportunities to provide fast, affordable wireless service in major employment centers including Downtown Sandusky





# LIVABLE CITY



PHOTO BY SANDUSKY REGISTER





## LIVABLE CITY

Quality of life for residents in Sandusky's neighborhoods is essential to the future health and vitality of the city. Strong neighborhoods anchored by valued civic assets are the lifeblood of strong cities. In the past half century Sandusky and most other core cities were losing population to the suburbs, especially people who were more mobile, more educated, and had more choices. Fortunately, demand for urban living has increased nationally among young college educated millennials, empty nest baby boomers, and families committed to urban living. Sandusky's future will be determined by its ability to attract new residents while also working to retain and improve the quality of life of existing residents.

Sandusky is poised to benefit from this urban movement with smart strategic initiatives that will demonstrate that this is a city filled with neighborhoods of choice, keeping existing residents and convincing those on the move to make Sandusky their home. Successfully attracting new residents and retaining existing residents in the city will require that the city successfully stabilize its housing stock, improve safety, and ultimately better connect its neighborhoods to anchors such as schools, parks and other assets.



PHOTO BY NEW DEPARTURE FILMS



PHOTO BY KYLE ROTH DESIGN



# LIVABLE CITY

## IMPLEMENT HOUSING PROGRAMS TO MAINTAIN SUPPLY & STIMULATE DEMAND

The quality of housing in Sandusky is an asset that must be maintained, preserved, improved, and protected. A recent survey by the Western Reserve Land Conservancy demonstrated that Sandusky has a stable but threatened housing stock. The report stated that, through aggressive intervention, Sandusky could stabilize and even grow its housing market. The city dedicated specific resources from the passage of Issue 8 to stabilizing the housing stock and will formally adopt and begin implementation of several new programs in Year 1 of the Bicentennial Vision.

The city will also build upon recent policy momentum achieved in housing through a mixture of incentives to help owners maintain their homes and enforcement and demolition for problem properties. Sandusky's existing housing stock is of primary importance, but the city will also seize opportunities for new housing through possible infill construction on individual lots and through assembling development sites in appropriate areas.

### ***Stabilize Existing Housing Stock via Strong Code and Demolition Programs***

- Build on and implement recent policy achievements, including the creation of an enhanced rental registration program, streamlined nuisance abatement laws, and vacant property registration to hold property owners accountable for maintaining their properties and protect the investment of law abiding property owners
- Scale up demolition efforts by increasing local resources made available and analyzing opportunities to finance demolitions to remove hardest hit properties more quickly and prevent further loss of value in adjacent homes
- Strengthen the city's partnership with the Erie County Land Reutilization Corporation to better streamline available resources for demolition
- Introduce curbside recycling and ensure consistent trash collection across all neighborhoods to improve neighborhood appearance – recycling and waste collection were rated worst and third worst city services in the bicentennial survey, with many comments also focused on improving these services

### ***Increase Investment in Diverse Housing Types through New Incentive Programs***

- Create down-payment assistance program to assist first-time homebuyers looking to purchase in the city
- Develop gap financing and grant assistance for the construction or rehabilitation of new housing units to stimulate an adequate supply and diversity of attractive housing options in the city
- Beautify housing stock by creating exterior improvement program designed to incentivize investment in housing exteriors through matching grants
- Explore viability of additional incentives such as residential tax abatement to stimulate additional demand for new or rehabilitated housing in Sandusky
- Support the development and rehabilitation of a variety of housing types that meet the needs of current and future residents including: rehabilitated homes, townhomes, new in-fill single family housing, upper floor condos and lofts, affordable housing, senior housing, permanent supportive housing, assisted living, and short-term transient rental





# LIVABLE CITY

## FOCUS ON IMPROVING NEIGHBORHOOD AMENITIES

Choosing a home means more than choosing a house. It means choosing a neighborhood and making that selection based on nearby amenities and assets. Sandusky is blessed to have many such anchors, including neighborhood parks, schools, churches, libraries, and small businesses all within a walkable setting. But there is much that can be done working with partners to ensure that these assets are maintained, improved, activated, and connected. Work in this area will likely include development of a neighborhood trail network, master planning improvements for parks and greenspace, and pedestrian friendly upgrades such as trees, sidewalks, and traffic calming.

Investing in housing stock and neighborhood amenities will help maintain and attract residents, but for these efforts to ultimately be successful there must be a sense of neighborhood pride and community among residents. The City can help support community building in neighborhoods by supporting existing community organizations and networks and assisting in creating them where they do not currently exist. To accomplish this goal, the city will seek to create a Community Outreach Coordinator position with support from the philanthropic sector to facilitate neighborhood outreach and engagement efforts.

Finally, Sandusky must be strategic in developing specific approaches for unique neighborhoods. Not every neighborhood requires the same type of investment, and targeting resources to the needs of each neighborhood will allow the city to strengthen its healthiest neighborhoods and stabilize struggling neighborhoods.

### ***Increase Investments in Sidewalks, Trees, & Traffic Calming***

- Analyze options and reinstitute a sidewalk maintenance program, potentially utilizing a matching assessment program to leverage finite resources, and also explore options such as the West Side Walkability Plan, which seek to create pedestrian infrastructure where it is needed but currently does not exist
- Calm traffic via signage, striping, and infrastructure improvements, and fine tune these tactics as part of an initial “Walk Wayne” pilot project
- Continue investment in tree maintenance and develop and implement an aggressive planting program to sustain the urban forest, which has been demonstrated to benefit neighborhood property values and the environment

### ***Anchor and Connect Neighborhoods***

- Link neighborhoods to each other, the waterfront, and commercial centers via a neighborhood trail network that spans all of Sandusky
- Develop park masterplans that seeks to create a vibrant system of neighborhood parks within walking distance of all city residents
- Support neighborhood anchors and mixed-use amenities such as the library, schools, churches, and small businesses
- Place particular emphasis on supporting the campus plans of Sandusky City Schools and the implementation of the Transformation Plan, as a strong school system will be critical to the revitalization of Sandusky’s neighborhoods



PHOTO BY SANDUSKY REGISTER

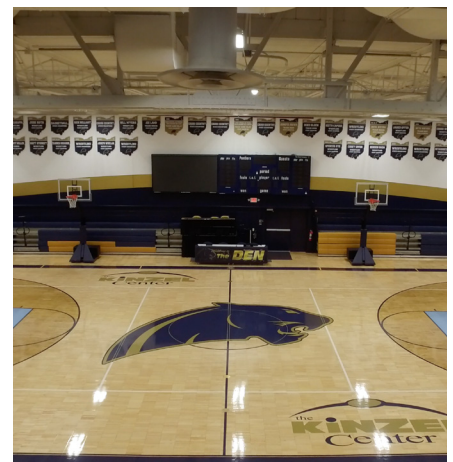


PHOTO BY NEW DEPARTURE FILMS





# LIVABLE CITY



PHOTO BY KYLE ROTH DESIGN

- Ensure all neighborhoods are meaningfully connected to employment and everyday needs via a comprehensive, sustainable public transportation system

## ***Build Community***

- Support existing neighborhood groups and facilitate neighborhood events, improvement projects, park planning, clean-ups, and other activities
- Organize a Neighborhood Leadership Development Council in which leaders from neighborhoods across the city come together to share ideas, build relationships, and access resources to conduct small scale neighborhood improvements
- Lead a reinvigorated Youth Leadership Group in partnership with local schools in which young city residents are given the tools they need to be leaders within the community and advocates for a brighter future for Sandusky
- Identify neighborhood leaders and encourage them to become involved in serving on city boards and commissions

## ***Strategically Target Neighborhood Investment***

- Select five to seven geographically and economically diverse neighborhoods for targeted investment over the next five years. Neighborhoods selected should include stronger neighborhoods in which targeted investments can lead to increased private investment, as well as distressed neighborhoods in which investment will help stabilize blighted housing stock and provide a higher quality of life for residents
- Conduct a neighborhood planning process for each targeted neighborhood, in which stakeholders have an opportunity to participate in and lead plans and activities for their community
- Identify Model Blocks within targeted neighborhoods and focus rehabilitation and exterior renovations within those areas
- Invest in anchor projects in targeted neighborhoods, such as revitalizing a corridor or renovating a park
- Assist in community building and marketing programs within targeted neighborhoods, potentially including historic district signage, public art projects, and community events



# LIVABLE CITY

## SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY

All efforts to revitalize Sandusky will fail if the city is not perceived as safe. If current and future residents and businesses do not believe their families or employees are safe they will not invest in the city's future. Therefore, it is critical that the Bicentennial Vision places a priority on all of the diverse factors that will make Sandusky a safer place. This includes not only our first responders but all other facets of the city, including economic development, public services, code enforcement, infrastructure investments, and neighborhood planning.

The bicentennial vision outreach revealed an interesting dichotomy pertaining to safety – Sandusky's safety forces (Fire, EMS, and Police) were clearly rated highest in terms of service among all city departments. Yet, many clearly perceived the city as not safe enough and felt that more proactive safety strategies will help to address real safety concerns, improve perceptions and misperceptions around safety, and create efficiencies in service.

With Sandusky police, a focus on proactive policy will lead to the development of a comprehensive and transparent culture of community policing that builds trust and reduces crime. By establishing and growing stronger relationships with residents and businesses, Sandusky Police will be in better position to anticipate conflict and crime. Community policing will also help build trust with marginalized communities that experience feelings of mistrust with Sandusky Police, humanizing both the police and the public and creating active dialogue that builds common ground and common interest. As the public increasingly sees the police as truly being there to "protect and serve," the perception and reality of safety in the community will improve.

In addition to comprehensive community policing, the Sandusky Police will seek to use data to better monitor "hot spots" where, for example, a high number of gun shots are being fired. Understanding where crime is happening more often will allow officers to identify trends and respond and diffuse problems more quickly.

A large share of Fire and EMS services are consumed through serving as first responders to a small amount of chronically ill residents and by dealing with dangerously blighted structures. For Fire and EMS to be most effective and efficient, a proactive approach is critical. This will include exploring healthy connections through first responders that will connect the chronically ill to the services they need and thus reduce reliance on emergency services from EMS and Fire.

With respect to dangerous structures, the fire department will partner with other city departments to proactively identify and remove hazardous structures through demolition. Creative use of surplus EMS funds will be dedicated toward demolition of the most blighted structures, which helps keep our citizens safe in their communities and our firefighters safe on the job.

### ***Proactively Protect and Serve the Community***

- Develop comprehensive community policing program to create trust within community and open dialogue that will lead to issues being resolved before crimes are committed
- Effectively utilize data to track and solve crime more quickly
- Identify chronic emergency medical service users and connect them to necessary resources
- Utilize EMS surplus to proactively remove the most blighted and dangerous structures from Sandusky
- Develop, execute, and monitor effectiveness of policing strategies targeting identified priority areas including gun violence, drug abuse, quality of life issues, and youth violence





# CONNECTED CITY



PHOTO BY ROBERT MYERS





## CONNECTED CITY

Throughout its history, Sandusky has benefitted from being a connected city – by its unique position on a sheltered bay on Lake Erie, by the establishment of the first railroad west of the Allegheny Mountains, by proximity to Ohio's first turnpike, and by its compact and walkable urban core. The city's future health and vitality are directly dependent on connecting visitors and new investors to Sandusky. Equally important is connecting Sandusky residents to assets, resources, and employment centers of the city and region through safe, affordable, convenient, and pleasant modes of transportation. Sandusky will position itself to be connected to the region and the world, allowing commerce and visitors to find, explore, and engage in all the city has to offer.

Sandusky will make investments to position itself as a more walkable and bikable city, strengthening connections between neighborhoods, employment centers, the waterfront, and other amenities. Public transportation is critical to the future of all urban cities, and Sandusky will work to ensure that its residents are connected to opportunities for employment via an affordable and reliable public transportation system. However, the city will also work to ensure that this system is truly regional in nature, and that its future is supported by all jurisdictions that benefit from connecting affordable workforce housing to service jobs and necessity shopping.

The reestablishment of a ferry service between downtown Sandusky and Cedar Point was consistently mentioned in public outreach as a desired goal. While nostalgic, such a service would also be symbolic and functional – connecting national visitors with the city's core and local workers to Cedar Point as part of a more robust transit system. Sandusky will explore the viability of such a ferry service and ways to build on nautical connections to and from the Lake Erie Islands. By better connecting the city's core to regional destination assets via water, Sandusky will take advantage of its strategic assets and position itself as the recognized heart of Lake Erie's leisure community.

Dynamic corridors are critical to the viability of any city, and the Bicentennial Vision Plan seeks to revitalize Sandusky's corridors, beginning by targeting investments along Cleveland Road and Hayes Avenue. Targeted investment in wayfinding signage will better link these corridors to destination assets including Cedar Point, Downtown Sandusky, and Firelands Regional Medical Center.

Investments in infrastructure will be planned and prioritized based on the Comprehensive Master Plan created as part of the Bicentennial Vision process. These investments will be transparent as the City will create its first Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan, which will identify planned investments in streets, parks, facilities, equipment, and vehicles.

Finally, being connected in the 21st century involves more than transportation infrastructure – it also means technological infrastructure. Sandusky, including its residents and its employees, must be connected to the world via seamless and wireless internet access.

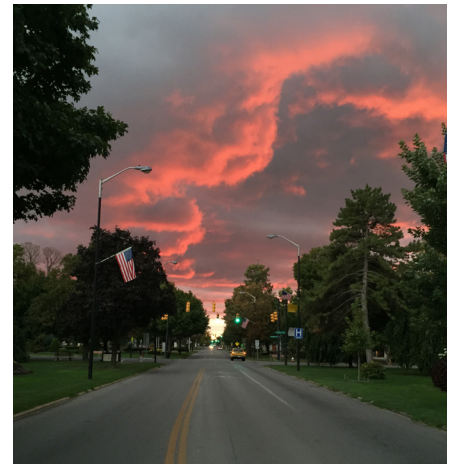


PHOTO BY KYLE ROTH DESIGN







# CONNECTED CITY



PHOTO BY VOGONTZ BIKE SHARE



## WALKING & BIKING

Sandusky's human scaled street grid is a strategic advantage that must be built upon and improved. Pedestrian amenities, walkability, and bikability are increasingly demanded by people seeking a new place to live or work – but they are also fundamental for a high quality of life for existing residents. Sandusky will become even more pedestrian and cycle friendly through low cost interventions and strategic investments.

### ***Walkable City***

- Improve walkability by creating more visible crosswalks, parking bumpouts, traffic signalization, improved street lighting and trees, and additional sidewalks, starting with pilot projects such as “Walk Wayne” and the “West Side Walkability” Plan

### ***Bikable City***

- Build a connected bike network including pedestrian paths, striping, protected bike lanes, bike racks and support private bike rental and bike sharing efforts
- Refresh and implement the Bayfront Corridor Bike Path Plan

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

A healthy public transit system is key to a thriving urban economy and empowers residents with the opportunity to affordably and conveniently access employment and shopping. Sandusky currently provides the only public transit in Erie County –traveling outside city and county borders and benefiting those who do not pay into the system. To better align with community needs and equitably involve others, Sandusky will evaluate its public transit system and explore regional involvement to create long-term sustainability and high quality service. This will include looking at the existing bus system and possibly waterborne transportation such as a ferry to Cedar Point.

### ***Regionalizing Public Transportation***

- Develop a regional taskforce consisting of public and private stakeholders to explore the feasibility of a regional transit system that improves service and financial sustainability, better aligning incentives and costs of those who provide and benefit from public transportation

### ***Explore Seasonal Transit Opportunities***

- Explore seasonal public transportation options, most notably reinstituting ferry service from Downtown Sandusky to Cedar Point but also analyzing better connecting the seasonal workforce and boaters to Downtown Sandusky and other quality of life amenities

### ***Hub Fixed Bus Routes out of Downtown Sandusky***

- Develop a hub system that begins and ends all current and future fixed bus route services out of Downtown Sandusky, creating a more consistent and easy to understand routing system for riders and connecting all routes to the growing list of amenities and employment in Downtown Sandusky



# CONNECTED CITY

## WAYFINDING

Sandusky's masonic street grid is one of two in the nation, so it is unique and historic, and a draw for some visitors. However, it also can be confusing to visitors from outside the city, including our regional Firelands communities. To make it easier and more pleasant to navigate and find local businesses and attractions, Sandusky will implement wayfinding and gateway projects. The city will involve key institutional partners such as Cedar Fair, Firelands Regional Medical Center, Erie Regional Planning, Sandusky Main Street and Lake Erie Shores & Islands.

## CORRIDORS

Sandusky's corridors continue to be the main path to reach the city, driving traffic into the city's core and providing the first impression of the community. These corridors are experiencing catalytic development, including continued investment by Firelands Regional Medical Center on Hayes Avenue / Route 4 and the Griffing sports project on Cleveland Road. Sandusky will leverage and enhance its main corridors through infrastructure investments, streetscaping, development, and branding, using targeted public resources to make the most of current or planned private investment. The ultimate goal will be seamless movement of traffic of all kinds – pedestrian, cycling, automobile – along the tastefully designed and decorated arterial streets of Sandusky.

### ***Healthy Hayes Avenue Corridor***

- Partner with Firelands Regional Medical Center, Sandusky City Schools, and other stakeholders to rebrand Hayes Avenue as an “Eds and Meds” corridor. Projects can include supporting anchor institutional investment, blight elimination and a unifying streetscaping project that includes lighting, benches, banners, transit stops and more

### ***Capitalizing on Cleveland Road Corridor Investments***

- Take advantage of the planned recreational investment by Erie County, Cedar Fair, and Sports Force to plan a multi-modal improvement project to Cleveland Road that includes repositioning under-utilized property for reinvestment and strengthening this critical regional corridor

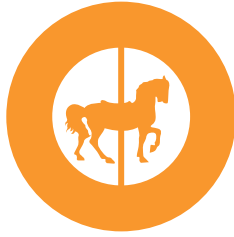
## CAPITAL PLANNING

A transparent five-year capital improvement plan will be adopted that will assist in prioritizing the city's planned investments in infrastructure over the next five years. This plan will be implemented with assistance from increased investment in infrastructure made possible by the passage of Issue 8.

The five-year capital improvement plan will prioritize investments based on several factors, including the recently adopted Master Plan, the street condition survey conducted in 2015, planned investments in water and sewer infrastructure, and existing and to be completed plans for parks, neighborhoods and the regional bike network.

## TECHNOLOGY

Participating in the global economy demands 21st century connections – moving beyond just physical connections to technological ones. Sandusky will build the infrastructure for the next generation of businesses. In partnership with key institutions, businesses, and foundations, Sandusky will explore opportunities to establish affordable and high-speed wireless internet connectivity throughout the city. This network connectivity will prime the city for future investment while also improving the ability of residents and students to access information.



# DESTINATION CITY



PHOTO BY SANDUSKY REGISTER





# DESTINATION CITY



PHOTO BY EAGLE EYE PRODUCTIONS

For most of its history, Sandusky has been a destination for amusement park enthusiasts, boaters, and fishermen, while also serving as the jumping off point to the Lake Erie islands. Recently, new waterparks have extended the tourist season and brought more visitors to the region. Visitors will continue to be an important part of the local economy and thus it is critical to investigate opportunities to grow the visitor base and to anticipate changes in the tourism industry that will impact Sandusky and the surrounding Lake Erie Shores & Islands area.

Increasingly, people are choosing to visit the same types of places where they would choose to live. In addition to tourist attractions such as indoor water parks and amusement parks, visitors are looking for historic mixed-use waterfronts, cultural amenities such as live music and art galleries, and recreational opportunities such as biking, kayaking, and birdwatching.<sup>1</sup> Sandusky must look at opportunities to attract visitors who will stay longer and consider investments in real estate in addition to purchasing tickets. The presence and investment of these visitors in second homes, retirement homes, or weekly rentals will drive the local construction market. Their spending on arts, culture, dining and other amenities will import wealth into Sandusky from surrounding regions and help support local jobs.

Further, the presence and investment of millions of visitors in Sandusky annually provides enough scale to support destination amenities unavailable in most small cities. These amenities will benefit the quality of life for local residents in addition to attracting visitors. For example, building up Sandusky's historic downtown on Lake Erie will attract and be supported by visitors, but will also be a magnet for professional offices and a selling point for adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Building up waterfront parks and trails and additional investment in recreation facilities will serve as an amenity for residents while also providing a reason for visitors to spend an extra day. Cultural programming, public art, and a stronger visual and performing arts scene will enlighten locals and tourists alike. Ultimately, the line between local and tourist will blur as the quality of life and local economy improve and some of those who visit inevitably choose to make Sandusky home.



PHOTO BY KYLE ROTH DESIGN

<sup>1</sup> According to U.S. Cultural and Heritage Tourism Study (October 2009) Conducted by Mandala Research, LLC for U.S. Cultural & Heritage Tourism Marketing Council, U.S. Department of Commerce, which analyzes cultural, historic and natural resource tourism and states these segments are fast-growing and tourists spend more while visiting these assets than other tourism amenities.



# DESTINATION CITY

## DESTINATION DOWNTOWN

Downtown Sandusky is the only historic downtown of scale that sits directly on Lake Erie. As such, it is positioned to serve as the centerpiece of the Lake Erie Shores and Islands region and to draw visitors and investment from throughout Ohio and beyond.

Positioning Downtown Sandusky as a destination will require building on downtown's historic fabric and iconic waterfront setting to create a vibrant and dynamic mixed-use, fully tenanted urban core. Balancing office, residential, hospitality, and retail investment will create year-round, day and night activity in the center of the city.

The City of Sandusky will partner with anchors such as the State Theatre and civic organizations such as local foundations and Sandusky Main Street to position Downtown Sandusky as the premier waterfront downtown in the State of Ohio and on Lake Erie. This will require ensuring downtown is clean and safe, providing cutting edge festivals and events, repurposing under-utilized land and buildings, investing in infrastructure and beautification, creating vibrant waterfront parks and supporting anchor developments that will attract people into the city.

Providing these amenities will require identifying unique financing options so that the majority of public investment in Downtown Sandusky is supported by economic activity taking place downtown. This will allow the vast majority of general fund spending to continue to support existing city services and an ambitious neighborhood development agenda.

### **Operations**

- Support Sandusky Main Street in passing a special improvement district to create a revenue stream to support ongoing maintenance and programming of Downtown Sandusky, consider a partnership between Sandusky's Greenhouse and Main Street to administer and implement program goals
- Implement projects designed to improve the first impression for downtown visitors, with examples including a wayfinding signage program and beautification of Jackson Street Parking Lot
- Identify small scale beautification efforts to improve visitor experience with potential examples including improvements to the alleys linking downtown parking lots to destinations on Columbus Avenue
- Support efforts such as the Community Impact Officer Program to ensure that Downtown Sandusky is perceived as vibrant and safe

### **Placemaking & Programming**

- Support partners in ensuring that Downtown Sandusky is consistently brought to life by programming including street festivals, farmers markets, live music, cultural programs and more
- Create winter programming to support year-round activity such as an ice skating rink at Washington Park
- Implement streetscaping recommendations of Comprehensive Plan for Columbus Avenue, Shoreline Drive, and Water Street
- Activate and improve waterfront parks at the Marina District, Jackson Street Pier, Shoreline Park, and Battery Park
- Identify opportunities for public art and activating unique public spaces such as Peddler's Alley and Washington Park





# DESTINATION CITY

## DESTINATION DOWNTOWN CONTINUED

### ***Anchor Developments***

- Support the continued success of existing anchors such as the State Theatre, Maritime Museum, Harlequins, Firelands Symphony Orchestra, and Merry-Go-Round Museum
- Expand ferry and boating options including analyzing feasibility of returning ferry service to Cedar Point
- Create new anchors for downtown potentially including a university, gym, specialty food market, conference center, anchor hotel and cinema

### ***Repurposing Under-Utilized Buildings and Land***

- Focus on filling vacant upper floors with office workers, residents, and hospitality uses that will support local businesses, eliminate blight, and grow the tax base
- Reposition under-utilized land and unnecessary surface parking for housing and other development opportunities
- Beautify historic buildings through a comprehensive storefront and signage program

## RECREATION & WATERFRONT

Consistently throughout the Bicentennial Outreach Process, citizens stated that Lake Erie was Sandusky's most precious asset and needed to be protected, activated, and leveraged. The Bicentennial Vision seeks to improve and prioritize waterfront access of all kinds, as well as ensuring additional recreational opportunities are available to enhance quality of life for Sandusky residents.

### ***Preserve Lake Erie***

- Continue aggressive efforts to create sustainable water and sewer systems, including designing and implementation of stormwater and green infrastructure program designed to divert untreated water from Lake Erie
- Support regional advocacy efforts to identify policy changes and resources necessary to combat algal blooms and other threats to the Lake Erie and Great Lakes ecosystems
- Pursue federal and philanthropic funding made available by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and other sources to implement projects that improve environmental health

### ***Improve Waterfront Access and Parks Citywide***

- Improve waterfront access citywide, with investments in masterplans for Lion's Park, Paper District Marina, Jackson Street Pier, Battery Park, Big Island, and Griffing

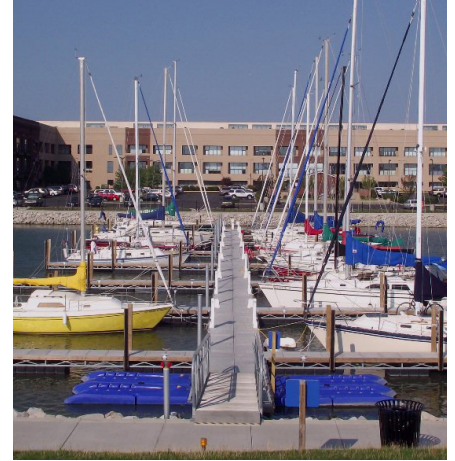


PHOTO BY ROBERT MYERS





# DESTINATION CITY



PHOTO BY EAGLE EYE PRODUCTIONS

## ***Position Back Bay as Eco Tourism Hub for Active Recreation***

- Partner with Erie Metroparks to position the Back Bay as a destination for active recreation and eco-tourism, including non-motorized boating such as canoeing and kayaking, and waterfront activities such as biking, birding, and cross-country skiing

## ***Support and Leverage Sports Force Development***

- Partner with Erie County, Erie Metroparks, Lake Erie Shores & Islands, Cedar Fair, Sports Force, and neighboring jurisdictions to leverage the pending development of the former Griffing Airport site for both maximum tourist attraction and local recreation opportunities, while maintaining as much public access to the Back Bay as possible
- Make targeted investments to better connect the site to neighborhoods and adjacent public greenspace by partnering with the Erie Metroparks and neighboring communities to design, fundraise, and implement a trail network that links regional assets and city neighborhoods

## ***Explore Opportunities for Indoor Recreation***

- Explore the potential for more indoor recreation amenities through potential partnerships with civic entities such as the YMCA and Sandusky City Schools



# DESTINATION CITY

## ARTS & CULTURE

Culture is a classic example of a quality of life issue that also drives a destination economy. Children, residents, and future residents value strong cultural assets like the State Theater, Maritime Museum, Merry-Go-Round Museum, Sandusky Cultural Center, and more. In addition to these cultural institutions, a thriving organic art scene that includes visual and performance art helps stimulate residents and visitors. Further, investments in public art have been demonstrated to increase private investment and raise property values according to *Urban Land*, a publication of the Urban Land Institute in 2012.

Unfortunately, the philanthropic environment to support arts and culture in the Firelands region is threatened due to recent changes in the foundation community. Thus, the City and community must come together to explore and pursue alternative funding models that will support and grow arts and culture in Sandusky.

The City of Sandusky will engage partners including local foundations, the County, and others to analyze the importance of arts and culture in our economy and evaluate models for public support that have succeeded elsewhere. The City also will increase cultural programming & events to activate and take advantage of our arts community and build upon the nascent artist economy through activating public spaces with public art installations.

### ***Understand Economic Impact of Arts & Culture on Region***

- Work with county, local foundations, and private sector to gauge the current and potential impact of arts and culture investment on the local economy
- Determine how to better leverage existing resources and identify new resources necessary to support a robust program of arts and culture in the community that supports existing institutions, incentivizes the creation of visual and performance art, supports festivals & events, and commissions public art in the community

### ***Partner to Provide Rich Cultural Programs and Events***

- Establish a committee in 2016 to analyze existing cultural programming offerings and locations and make recommendations to the City Commission regarding the appropriate partners, programs, events, locations, and infrastructure necessary to ensure consistent and quality events, festivals, and programming on a year-round basis

### ***Utilize Public Art as Lasting Legacy of Bicentennial***

- Work with local foundations and Bicentennial Commission to put together a public art program for the bicentennial that includes neighborhoods and the waterfront and utilizes murals, sculptures, lighting, and other elements to add to a public art legacy that includes the Boy with the Boot and the Underground Railroad Monument at Facer Park





# CELEBRATED CITY



PHOTO BY KYLE ROTH DESIGN





# CELEBRATED CITY

Outreach during the Bicentennial Vision Process demonstrated that the people of Sandusky have great pride in their city, but also a profound understanding that the city needs to do a better job of defining itself by its many assets, rather than let others define it only by its challenges. Sandusky's assets include a stunning waterfront, walkable historic neighborhoods, an incredible park system, cultural institutions such as the library, churches, & theaters, emerging local businesses, and regional employers. Simply stated, Sandusky is the heart and soul of the Firelands region, its most historic community and economic engine. The city is poised to benefit from increased interest nationally in living, working, and recreating in urban settings.

None of the elements of the Bicentennial Vision will be effective if existing and future residents and businesses do not choose to invest in the city. For this to take place, the city must work to change the perception of the city within the Firelands region, and to establish a brand beyond just Cedar Point statewide, nationally, and internationally.

The City of Sandusky must reintroduce itself and its progress to the surrounding region. It must position itself as place to live, work, and recreate. With Sandusky's bicentennial on the horizon, the City of Sandusky has an ideal opportunity to tell its story in a new light, plan for the future, and celebrate a unique and special place.

## 2018—THE BICENTENNIAL

The City of Sandusky will partner with the Bicentennial Commission and community anchors to plan, fund, market, & execute investments, campaign, events, and legacy commemorations. The City will utilize the 2018 Bicentennial as a date to work backwards from to complete infrastructure projects, beautify the city, and change the perception and narrative of Sandusky from one of loss and decline to one of rediscovery and revitalization. The Bicentennial is an opportunity to draw in new people and media who otherwise might not take interest in the city. If well done, the Bicentennial will create momentum that will launch Sandusky into an era of new growth and a strong brand and reputation as a community-minded city that gets things done.

### ***Signature Events***

- Partner with the Bicentennial Commission to produce signature events to commemorate the bicentennial and give residents reasons to come together

### ***Legacy Projects***

- Work with the Bicentennial Commission and other community partners to memorialize Sandusky's history by producing videos, books, websites & online materials, and other content as part of Bicentennial Celebration
- Utilize the Bicentennial as a deadline to complete lasting community improvements to neighborhood parks, public art, and the waterfront



PHOTO BY KYLE ROTH DESIGN



PHOTO BY KYLE ROTH DESIGN



# CELEBRATED CITY

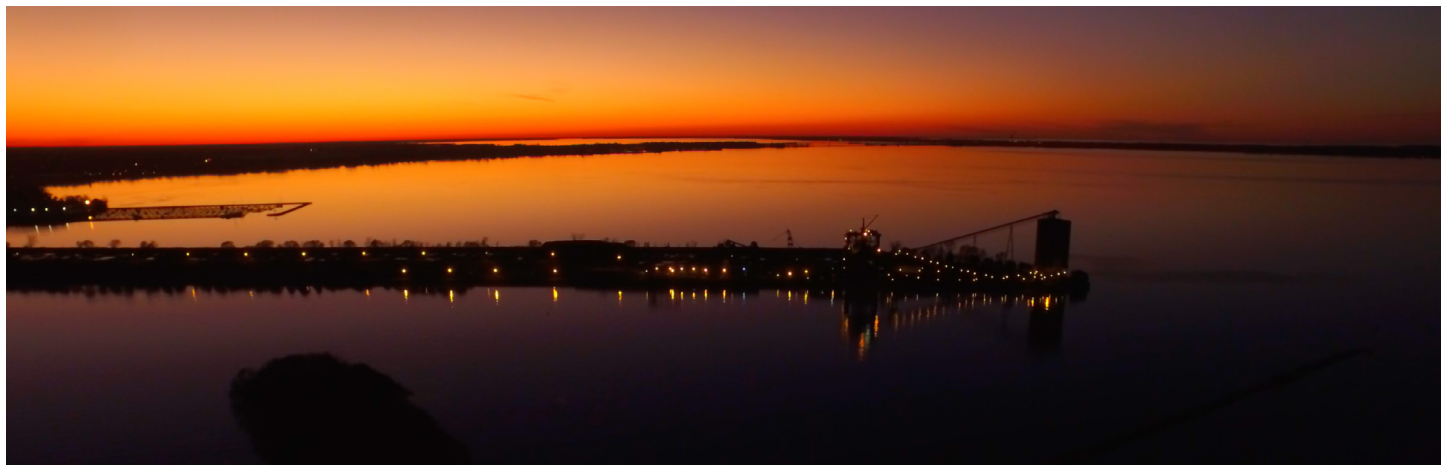


PHOTO BY NEW DEPARTURE FILMS

## BRAND, MARKETING & STORYTELLING

Communities, particularly urban communities, are products that need to be marketed to attract visitors and future residents. People choose to stay or invest in a community based on emotional connections and momentum. While Sandusky is a destination by way of other attractions like Lake Erie's islands or Cedar Point, The City of Sandusky has an opportunity to tell the story of its history, neighborhoods, and quality of life in a way that will resonate with regional residents and grow Sandusky's market share of office workers and residents of choice. Repositioning the way Sandusky markets itself will give current residents additional pride in where they live and encourage others to discover or invest in the City. It will also help area employers attract talented individuals to fill critical jobs.

### ***Partner with Philanthropy and Private Sector to Market Sandusky***

- Utilize modest portion of Economic Development Issue 8 Dollars to leverage commitments from private sector and philanthropic sector to support marketing efforts to attract residents and employers to Sandusky
- Build on successful video campaign to include additional videos, written publications, merchandising, public relations, and modest advertising to promote Sandusky as a place to live and to assist employers with attracting a talented workforce

### ***Create Strong Web and Social Media Presence***

- In addition to formal marketing campaign, utilize social media and a revamped city website to communicate directly and affordably with Sandusky citizens and stakeholders





PHOTO BY ROBERT MYERS



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