

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



City of Newaygo

Revision:
June 25, 2019

Understanding Newaygo

The City of Newaygo's Economic Development, Marketing, and Promotional strategies reflect and promote the researched themes which have been deemed valuable by our large pool of community stakeholders. Cohesive and inclusive themes and goals emerged from multiple community engagement forums, promoted by IAmNewaygo!, held starting in Fall of 2017 throughout 2018, and into 2019.

Beyond our community stakeholders, we also have made every effort to communicate to our visitors and guests our unique community value proposition through thoughtful branding. We recognize that for these branding promises to be truthful, relevant, and compelling to our guests, we must first recognize how we are perceived in the larger economy of West Michigan and the Midwestern United States.

As an integral part of this process, the city reached out to include Subject Matter Experts from the greater West Michigan economy, and included contracting Suzanne Schultz, former City Planner for Grand Rapids to facilitate public meetings, and also sought input from George Heartwell, Mayor of Grand Rapids (retired) and local resident, to assist in guiding our thinking in accordance with regional planning.

Newaygo's Position within the Regional West Michigan Economy

We believe that the City of Newaygo is more accurately the nucleus of a greater Newaygo area (zip code 49337), which is itself an extension of the overall Regional West Michigan economy. As a result, our city is the recipient of both the blessings and challenges that come from that same vibrant regional economy.

Given the challenges Newaygo is experiencing in providing housing opportunities at all levels, along with filling hundreds of newly created job openings, one of our biggest challenges will continue to include *the preservation of our small town way of life and our attachment to our history and traditions*, while at the same time *accommodating the growth* which we are beginning to experience today. (See City of Newaygo Master Plan for pertinent census and demographic data)

Our City's Unique Identity and Direction

We believe our broader community, defined as the City of Newaygo, Brooks Township, and parts of Croton and Garfield Townships, is emerging into a period of prosperity and growth not seen in generations, perhaps since our collective founding in the 1800's. Fueled by a rapidly expanding West Michigan economy, Newaygo is still seen as *a welcome escape* from the relatively more complex economy and hectic pace of life experienced in Grand Rapids.

Consider also that Newaygo is still very much "Up North" to Grand Rapidians, Chicagoans, and Detroiters who place a high value on locations perceived as slower paced, lower in price, and more agreeable for starting new businesses. Many of our visitors also want to simply "disconnect" as they visit, an observation we will continue to emphasize in our branding promises.

Newaygo's Economic Development Focus

New industry attraction is generally prohibitively time consuming and expensive, and therefore largely outside the budget and scope of a small community like Newaygo. Therefore, we depend on the important relationship we enjoy with The Right Place Inc. for large-scale industry attraction, as well as the required involvement of State agencies such as the MEDC.

This allows us to focus our city-specific energies and resources on enticing targeted, small businesses to locate in our city, and on retention and expansion of existing businesses. In the past few years, the City of Newaygo has successfully endeavored to attract and expand a Brewery, a large retail furniture store, healthcare providers, artists, videographers, and niche retailers to the historic downtown, adding vitality to our retail mix and visitor appeal.

Newaygo's Built Environment and People Focus

The City of Newaygo is focused on its built environment, and it is within our power and central to our core mission to create spaces and mobility options that inspire people to visit and to locate in our community. We choose, through community development and public engagement initiatives, to create an environment that people want to experience and that also serves their many needs as individuals and families. We envision a Newaygo that is aesthetically uplifting, promotes healthy and balanced living, provides exceptional safety, and creates cherished memories for residents and visitors alike. The City of Newaygo values virtue, beauty and goodness in all its forms.

Newaygo's Five Pillars of Economic Development

Business Focus: Newaygo strives to be a magnet for new businesses large and small. To that end, the City's state of the art business incubator and co-working facility called "The Stream" continues to serve a vital function that allows new businesses to enter our market. (www.newaygostream.com) The City continues to partner very effectively with the River Country Chamber of Commerce, integrating their activities with our four key events held throughout the year, and in the operational management of The Stream facility. The city also has an active and fruitful relationship with the Fremont Area Community Foundation, who has provided valuable project funding support over many decades, including a recent \$250K grant to support the Newaygo County Museum and Cultural Heritage Center renovation and expansion in our city's downtown, which promises to be an important driver of additional economic vitality throughout the year.

Housing: Like many rural communities in Michigan and across the country, Newaygo shares a dramatic housing shortage across the spectrum, which greatly affects business expansion, relocation, aging-in-place options for seniors, and workforce attraction. The city is actively engaging West Michigan developers and construction firms to assist us in re-imagining what is possible given our site inventory, and is courting investment relationships for expansion into our Opportunity Zone and other designated areas within which the city has some control. We endeavor to create well designed and affordable housing, clustered in greater density whenever possible, to create critical mass to support area businesses.

Mobility: The city believes strongly in building an environment where people can live, work, and move in a variety of ways that adds to quality of life and provides the opportunity of reducing household transportation costs. To that end, the city engaged world-renowned walkability expert Jeff Speck in the fall of 2017 to perform a walkability study and analysis. (See Walkability Study on city website: www.newaygocity.org) Speck's recommendations have led to many important city decisions which have added dozens of new parking spaces, expansion of sidewalk assets, a tree planting initiative, a plan to calm traffic and improve safety in the downtown on M37, a cycle plan, and several other built features designed to make living in our city better for residents and visitors, including a dramatic pedestrian bridge crossing over the Muskegon River near Henning Park.

Key Development Sites: The city has identified several properties in the heart of the community which hold important strategic advantages that will ensure the orderly and authentic expansion of our footprint, without compromising the small town character enjoyed by residents. These sites are identified in the Newaygo 2019 Master Plan. (found on City website at: www.newaygocity.org)

Enhancements of Built Infrastructure: In order to fulfill the spirit of our Economic Development Strategy, the City will remain focused on the Key Development sites, several in-fill and downtown expansion opportunities, and pursue the preservation and restoration of our historic building inventory, such as the Muskegon River Inn and North Woods General Store projects, currently under rigorous and comprehensive renewal efforts. Future projects, which may include the enhancement and updating of City Park assets, expansion of the existing downtown footprint, a new connection to Henning Park via pedestrian bridge, the conversion of the old Powerhouse building to an open-air pavilion, and a comprehensive tree planting plan for shade and beauty are all intentional efforts to enhance our built infrastructure to enrich our citizens lives.