

## **Background and Overview**

Newaygo's Marketing and Branding strategy is derived from the cities 2019 Economic Development Strategy (EDS) and is designed to directly assist and support the city in achieving our economic development goals. Going forward, our goal will be to make certain the EDS drives the Marketing and Branding of our city.

As we communicate to our residents and prospective residents, business interests, and visitors, our unique community value proposition, it is imperative that our branding promises remain truthful, relevant, clearly linked to our resources and history, and at the same time interesting and compelling to each of our target audiences.

## **Marketing and Brand Requirements**

In concert with both the River Country Chamber of Commerce and Newaygo County Tourism Council, whose footprints include all of Newaygo County and beyond, multiple meetings have occurred with the goal of unifying branding and messaging to visitors and business interests. While each of these organizations have their own unique branding identities and messages, it is nonetheless very important that the City of Newaygo's branding and marketing dovetail and enhance their efforts as well. One brand must not disrupt or counter the messaging of the other in order for our region and County to prosper.

In addition, after almost two years of Public Engagement activities through the "IAmNewaygo" initiative, it is clear that our local branding and marketing must include a requirement that combines the preservation of our small town way of life and our attachment to our history and traditions, and at the same time points to the protection and intentional enhancement of our single most important and valued natural resource, the Muskegon River. This must be done even as we welcome the unprecedented growth in business and increasing population.

Branding and Marketing must also reflect the simple truth that our city is still seen as a welcome escape from the relatively more complex economy and hectic pace of life experienced in Grand Rapids, and that our city is still very much "up north" to Chicagoans and Detroiters, who place a high value on small towns 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. Intentional, proprietary placemaking will be at the center of our branding promises.

## **The Essence of our Brand**

Our branding and marketing promises will reflect a Newaygo that is aesthetically uplifting, promotes healthy and balanced living, provides exceptional safety, and creates cherished memories for residents and visitors alike. Our branding promises will place a high value on virtue, beauty and goodness in all its forms, and will strive to support our five pillars of Economic Development: Business, Housing, Mobility, Key Development Sites, and Enhancements of Built Infrastructure, all in a meaningful way. Again, our essential marketing and branding promise will be concurrently targeting three audiences: Existing and prospective residents, business interests, and tourists. Our promise must also appeal to multiple generations of residents and visitors.

## **Our 2020 Brand**

### ***Newaygo: Heart of the Muskegon River***

Geographically, the City of Newaygo is nicely situated between the headwaters of the Muskegon River in Houghton Lake, and its tailwaters in Lake Michigan. As such, Newaygo is in a favorable position to simply claim its position as the “Heart” of the second largest watershed in the State of Michigan. This is very much in keeping with best practices well in use in other West Michigan branding initiatives wherein Grand Rapids “annexes” Lake Michigan beaches, or Traverse City simply “borrowing” Sleeping Bear Dunes in its marketing. In each case, many valuable assets that often reside in adjacent counties are integrated into localized messaging.

The Muskegon River has for generations afforded Newaygo a unique organizing opportunity that allows competing groups a chance to agree on this single, irreplaceable, spectacular asset. Environmental protection organizations, commercial fishing guides and liveries, residents, visitors, business interests, and education all have both a vested interest in, and deep affection for the Muskegon River. Most Newaygo residents believe it is “their river”, and for good cause—our city would likely not be here at all, were it not for the Muskegon River.

Positioning Newaygo as the *Heart of the Muskegon River* also sets in motion multiple branding angles for the entire target audience spectrum. Examples might include:

**Residents:** “Living at the *heart of the Muskegon River* means beauty is everywhere and recreational opportunities abound.”

**Visitors:** “You should visit Newaygo in order to experience the *heart of the Muskegon River*, where lifetime memories are made every day.”

**Business:** “You should invest in Newaygo because it provides a remarkable economic value, a quality lifestyle for a highly efficient workforce, and offers exciting brand placement at the *heart of the Muskegon River*.”

### ***Newaygo: The Heart of the Muskegon River as Placemaking***

*Newaygo: The Heart of the Muskegon River* brand strategically leverages local and regional assets and highlights Newaygo's importance in that context:

- ◆ The brand establishes / re-establishes our city as a focal point of the region.
- ◆ The brand integrates upriver and downriver assets, such as Croton/Hardy Dams, The Dragon Trail, Bridgeton, even the Lake Michigan shoreline at Muskegon. Newaygo will be correctly positioned as the “heart” of all of these assets, and serve as a desired central destination, particularly for families planning vacations.
- ◆ The brand places our river-based business, particularly liveries and fishing guides to great advantage.
- ◆ The brand generates “buzz” and elevates our city as the place you simply *must* visit along the Muskegon River. Newaygo is the heart of it all.
- ◆ The brand will leverage additional future assets, such as the Newaygo Crossing Suspension Bridge, and the Newaygo Powerhouse Renovation. These projects will serve as additional evidence that Newaygo is in fact the *Heart of the Muskegon River*.

### **Using the new Brand**

*Newaygo: The Heart of the Muskegon River* will be used in:

- ▶ Targeted Marketing materials that draw attention to key development sites.  
Example: “This available parcel is located at the Heart of the Muskegon River”
- ▶ Develop an RFP for developers in positioning our city as particularly attractive.  
Example: “Expand your portfolio in the Heart of the Muskegon River”.
- ▶ The development of a new city logo. (Now decades old)  
Potentially update logo and “Recreation - Education - Commerce“ tagline.  
Revision/replacement of aging “River Stop Landing” and “River Valley Wonderland” signs and branding that have run their course.
- ▶ Attach the brand to all city-sponsored events through River Country Chamber:  
Example: “Experience the Heart of the Muskegon River at Logging Festival”
- ▶ Express the message publicly.  
Example: add “The Heart of the Muskegon River” to all city meeting documents.
- ▶ News Releases  
Always use “The Heart of the Muskegon River” in testimonial and summary comments.
- ▶ Update City Website and Social Media assets.

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One last Reality Check: The MEDC, under the Redevelopment Ready Community Program, advises cities to contemplate the following seven questions when adopting a new brand:

1. How would you express the essence of Newaygo, Michigan?
2. What is the one positive thing that Newaygo, Michigan can always deliver on?
3. What is your favorite place in Newaygo, Michigan?
4. Are there any images or associations with Newaygo, Michigan that you think are overdone and should be avoided?
5. What personality traits does Newaygo, Michigan have?
6. What are the most common values that residents of Newaygo, Michigan, have?
7. Is there an obvious tagline that Newaygo Michigan should use?

We would like the City of Newaygo Boards to contemplate how “*Newaygo: The Heart of the Muskegon River*” brand measures up to those criteria prior to adopting the brand.