Date: 08.28.2018

Community: Eaton Rapids

Meeting Notes

The focus of the meeting was on the five major issues that rose to the top during the focus group meetings. This meeting focused on housing, the river, and downtown.

Steering Committee’s Role

- The role of the Steering Committee is to meet regularly or as it sees fit to review the documents and provide feedback during the project’s progress
- A comment was made that the Steering Committee may not be representative of all socioeconomic groups of the City. It is up to the Committee to invite new members for broader representation

Community Vision

- A comment was made about the City needing an overall vision. In order to pursue other planning efforts or studies, we need to know what general direction we are heading so that any additional work aligns with the community’s vision
- The City is apart of an area wide master plan (not adopted) but is in the process of creating its own master plan with goals, objectives, and strategies that are specific to the city’s needs. During that process, sessions will be conducted with the public to establish a citywide vision

Michigan Main Street and Rising Tide

- Eaton Rapids is a member of Michigan Main Street and is applying for select level status. The purpose of MMS is to build a volunteer base for a community-driven process and for that reason using Rising Tide funds for this cause would undermine that effort

Development

- To satisfy RRC requirements, three priority properties should be identified, mapped, and information assembled for a more proactive approach of redevelopment
- For properties that have been sitting vacant for years, it could be an opportunity for the City to become more involved in promoting them
On the August 14th meeting, there was much discussion about redesigning the Main Street streetscape, however any more discussion on the topic should include MDOT because they are in charge of M-50.

Charlotte worked with MDOT to build an alternative truck route to recapture their downtown. This would be a long-term project.

MDOT is willing to work with communities on alternate routes or redesigning routes but there is no fixed set of criteria to meet to ensure that the project would advance.

Eaton Rapids had plans years back to improve pedestrian crossings on State Street and Knight Street with the hope of slowing traffic. This project was never completed.

In 2008, Main Street was dug up as a part of the Obama stimulus package and the drainage was improved, the road was replaced, and new lights were installed. About $6-7 million of work was done. There were bricks beneath the road but they were paved over again. Albion’s bricks were replaced twice by MDOT.

The condition of M-99 between Eaton Rapids and Lansing, as well as the poor condition of south Lansing, deters visitors from the north. An attractive, vibrant South Lansing would create more potential traffic for communities south of Lansing. M-99 is impacting our local economy and we should find a way to lobby for major work on this Michigan highway.

The M-50 approach from Charlotte also suffers from issues of poor property maintenance and possibly ordinance violations that make for a less welcoming appearance as you enter the City.

Are there opportunities to repurpose old buildings?
  - There is one successful example of converted industrial buildings in Eaton Rapids.

The floodplain has a large effect on what can be built and how expensive development will be there.

Identify blighted areas and start there.

Can the City purchase and tear down structures to make way for new development?

The City has 425 agreements with the Townships. If more land is needed to build housing, the City can work with the Townships to annex more land (if the Townships agree to it).

There is a need for retiree housing that is quiet and has views.
  - Should be able fit up to 24 condos on 3 acres - zoning will need to be reviewed to see if that density is permitted.
Building up density near downtown has helped to increase foot traffic

Downtown
- It’s an eyesore entering town from the north
- The façade of the homes near the entrance leaves a bad first impression
- There are ordinances against leaving trash in front of your home but it still happens
  - Code enforcement may not be enough if residents cannot afford the repairs or trash removal
  - This issue will be discussed at City Council on September 4th 2018
  - The City has a property maintenance code that deals with the exterior of a structure, rental inspection programs deal with interior as well
  - A new process is being discussed because the current one allows residents to appeal property maintenance violations in perpetuity. Thinking of changing the process to ticketing instead of issuing letters.
- Landlords are concerned about a rental inspection programs because rents are just starting to rise from the Great Recession
  - Mayor is interested in exploring topic but not without a thorough discussion with landlords and other interested parties first about its benefits and challenges
- The last downtown plan is from 2003 and could use some updates in terms of surveying consumer behavior, business owner’s perspectives, and a market analysis
- Businesses struggle to stay open daily
- Utility expenses are high but there is a lack of foot traffic (not even from locals shop downtown)
- There is a need for anchor institutions like in malls to draw people in
- What is the future of retail in small towns? The downtown is not what it used to be
  - May have to replace retail with services

River
- The City is not taking advantage of it (Rockford is a good example of a community that is).
- Another example of a recreational asset is island park is Dimondale
- Easements are in place to create a loop or walkway along the river
- Geese residue on the gazebo and the amphitheater prevent people from using these amenities
- There are maintenance issues that may need to be addressed first, overgrown vegetation and debris along river
• The 2011 plan should be revisited to see if it is still applicable
• The state has a blue trail plan that Eaton Rapids is apart of to make the river a more valuable corridor