



risingtide

Action Strategy

City of River Rouge
January 2016



rising tide

Rising Tide is an initiative envisioned by Governor Snyder and implemented by the Department of Talent and Economic Development (TED) with the mission of supplying at-risk communities with the tools they need to design and build a successful economic framework. Project Rising Tide supports vibrant, thriving communities to attract business investment and talent by creating a sustainable path toward economic stability and growth.

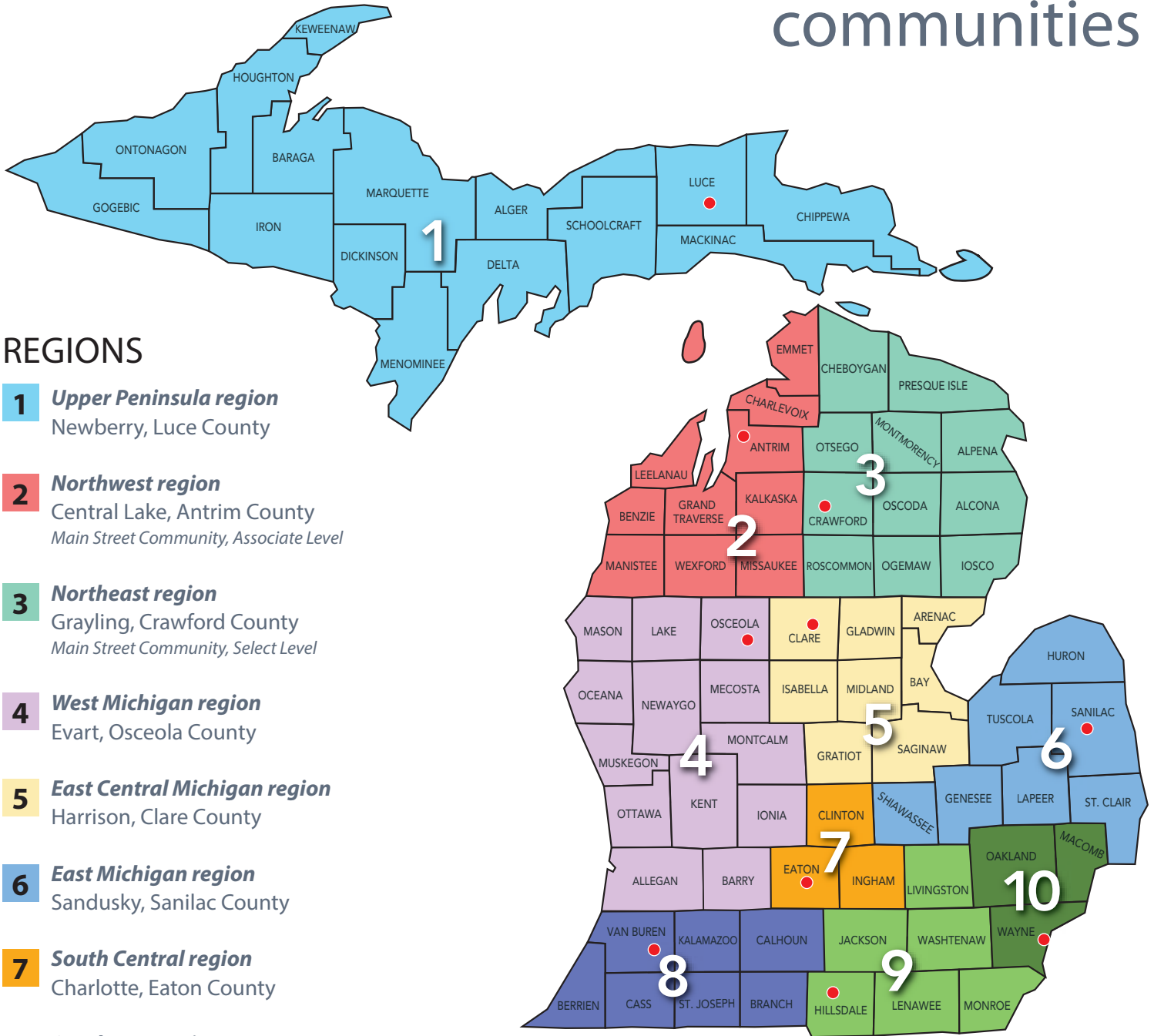
The Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Talent Investment Agency, and Michigan State Housing Development Authority (TED team) have committed their assets to engaging specific communities across the state in order to empower them to shape their future and maximize economic potential.

One community in each of the 10 prosperity regions was selected using the following data cross matched by population (the data are provided in Appendix A):

- Poverty level
- Unemployment level
- Labor participation rate
- Renter occupied units
- Vacancy rates
- Percentage of households receiving food stamps

This initiative will employ the MEDC's Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) program as the initial mechanism to support the Rising Tide platform in each of the 10 prosperity regions. Depending on each community's unique challenges, additional supportive services may be provided.





REGIONS

- 1
Upper Peninsula region
 Newberry, Luce County

- 2
Northwest region
 Central Lake, Antrim County
Main Street Community, Associate Level

- 3
Northeast region
 Grayling, Crawford County
Main Street Community, Select Level

- 4
West Michigan region
 Ewart, Osceola County

- 5
East Central Michigan region
 Harrison, Clare County

- 6
East Michigan region
 Sandusky, Sanilac County

- 7
South Central region
 Charlotte, Eaton County

- 8
Southwest region
 Paw Paw, Van Buren County

- 9
Southeast Michigan region
 Hillsdale, Hillsdale County
Redevelopment Ready Communities, evaluation completed

- 10
Detroit Metro region
 River Rouge, Wayne County
Redevelopment Ready Communities, evaluation pending

SUMMARY FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Over the past three months, the TED team has interviewed a variety of stakeholders including representatives from city staff, city council, the Downtown Development Authority, the school district, Wayne Metro Action Agency, local business owners, and area human services partners.

The stakeholders identified many community assets, including River Rouge’s “small town” feel, growing student enrollment, former River Rouge residents returning to their hometown, homeowner pride, comparatively affordable housing stock, and the community’s proximity to large, regional employers. River Rouge’s strongest asset is the dedicated community partner’s and its residents. All stakeholder feedback sessions were well attended by devoted individuals who were eager to identify solutions and participate in the community’s rebound.

From these interviews, it was clear there are several factors impacting the data sets used to identify this community as a priority for the Project Rising Tide (PRT) pilot. A reoccurring theme throughout the interviews was the need to develop a cohesive vision for the community and better coordinate activities of stakeholder groups contributing to talent and economic development. A lack of quality housing stock was also identified as a barrier for community investment and reduces options for current and future residents. A reduction in traffic through the city, resulting from an inoperable drawbridge, has greatly impacted the viability of businesses and downtown. Stakeholder input also made a case for the development of a strong community brand to overcome negative perceptions about the city as well as increase community pride.

To assist the city in moving forward, the TED team has put together an action strategy to act as a guide over the next nine months to begin to tackle some of these issues. Based on stakeholder feedback, the action strategy will mainly focus on issues related to housing, which will be a first step in assisting to

- ✓ Increase quality housing stock
- ✓ Connect residents to job and training opportunities
- ✓ Strengthen community brand
- ✓ Redevelop the downtown
- ✓ Improve coordination of activities and stakeholders

create an infrastructure for community development in the city of River Rouge. Below is a summary of the stakeholder meetings.

Stakeholder meetings

1. Community leaders stakeholders: November 12, 2015

Participants: United Way, Regional Transit Authority, SEMCOG, Guidance Center, Wayne Metro, Downriver Community Conference, Downriver Delta CDC, River Rouge Economic Development Corporation and Downtown Development Authority, River Rouge Housing Commission, Telegram (local newspaper), SEMCA, Southeast Michigan Regional Energy Office

Take aways:

- Need housing strategy; encourage purchase of vacant lots; provide residents with sense of pride and ownership; need to bring block clubs back and introduce blocks clubs in the public housing areas;
- Jobs in region are not available to a lot of River Rouge residents; they lack basic skills, transportation is not efficient or reliable; need access to certificate programs;
- Transportation is a challenge for residence. Basic necessities (food, health care) are not walkable; few have cars or can legally drive; limited SMART service in city and long walks to bus stops;
- There is a lack of understanding throughout the region what River Rouge has to offer. School enrollment is growing, people are moving back to RR, it has a “small town” feel. There is no marketing efforts and a brand that doesn’t resonate;
- Residents receiving assistance (public housing, Bridge cards, etc.) are discouraged from work; work is temporary and benefits are cut when work is obtained; quality childcare is not readily available.

2. River Rouge School District stakeholders: November 12, 2015

Participants: Approximately 10 representatives from River Rouge School District and other partners of the school district that ranged from Superintendent Derrick Coleman, several school principals and the guidance center.

Take aways:

- Graduation rate is 84–85 percent; 94 percent receive free/reduced lunch; college enrollment is 72 percent (2- and 4-year schools);
- Transportation is a challenge. Students attending come from five different communities and transportation issues impact student performance; parents have a hard time getting to school for parent/teacher conferences and after-school activities. Students with children do not have transportation to daycare, then to school;

- Poverty is the No. 1 issue: students lack basic necessities; families don't have access to Internet or personal computers; no phones or often changing numbers; lack of health care/mental health; lack of access to laundry services;
- Schools are collaborating with philanthropic and corporate supporters: Home Depot, Lowes, DTE, Marathon, GM and United Way (assist with housing improvements, other family needs);
- Additional programs available, but getting the word out is challenging (Jobs Corp, tuition assistance from DHS, foster care scholarship). Need to boost communication and tap partners;
- Need to identify community partners to assist with programming, events and activities.

3. Business leaders roundtable: November 13, 2015

Participants: Approximately 40 representatives from local businesses ranging from small restaurants to large manufacturing companies. The roundtable was facilitated by the Workforce Intelligence Network (WIN) and attended by MEDC's business development manager, representatives from Wayne County Economic Development and the local Michigan Works! agency, all of whom shared information on resources available.

Take aways:

- Engaged local employers in conversations about their talent needs;
- Discussed opportunities for employers to connect with the local Michigan Works! agency and the no cost services to businesses;
- Businesses expressed challenges in finding qualified talent with specific skills sets and credentials, retention and soft skills;
- SEMCA introduced business services and job seeker services staff members who informed the business leaders about no cost services available to them through the nearest Michigan Works! service center in Southgate. Services to employers include assistance with job postings on Pure Michigan Talent Connect, talent recruitment, pre-screening and more. Job seeker services include résumé writing and critique, job search assistance, interview skills, labor market information and more;
- SEMCA and the Michigan Works! business services staff agreed to host an event for area employers to learn more about Pure Michigan Talent Connect including registering their business and navigating the website. The event was hosted at the city of River Rouge office on 12/17/15, which was attended by 14 local employers.

4. Housing Stakeholders: November 24, 2015

Participants: Wayne County Economic Development, SEMCOG, Michigan Land Bank Authority, Wayne Metro, WCA Assessing, city attorney/code enforcement

Take aways:

- WCA Assessing will be taking pictures of all residential properties in the spring of 2016. The pictures can be downloaded on the Loveland website for River Rouge;
- Integrate data from SEMCOG and city assessing information into one system such as the Loveland website for River Rouge;
- City need assistance with code enforcement such as rental properties;
- City attorney will work with Wayne County to assist with the Wayne County Treasurer bidding process;
- Waiting list for homeowner rehabilitation grants;
- Wayne Metro would like to do more housing projects in the city.

5. Transportation stakeholders: November 24, 2015

Participants: SEMCOG, SMART, Regional Transit Authority

Take aways:

- Regional transit authority is looking at the main bus route in RR and the cross-county connectors. Goal is to get to 20-minute time between buses;
- Ballot question in 2016 is asking for 1.0 or 1.1 mills for RTA; would fund 2017 and 2018;
- RTA wants to schedule feedback sessions to meet with the public;
- SEMCOG is doing an evaluation of access to core services, setting access benchmarks and travel times, then identifying gaps. Report due early 2016;
- SMART currently collects one mill; provides "credits" back to communities to fund local transportation initiatives; flexible. Help getting buses, maintenance, route mapping;
- SMART's current challenge is getting best route information out to riders (no one-stop-shop information system). SMART is willing to attend events to educate about services.

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

The TED team met with the mayor, city council and community development director to discuss the findings from the interviews, stakeholder meetings and site visits. The following priorities, in order of importance, were set from that meeting.

Housing

Assist with current and future housing needs. Areas to address should include:

- Develop a comprehensive housing strategy
- Target market analysis
- Evaluation of housing stock
- Identifying housing programs, resources and opportunities to enhancing relationships

Workforce development

Develop a strategic plan for strengthening the local workforce. Areas to address should include:

- Educational opportunities including: life skills training, technical training, job search assistance, etc.
- Programming with local high school students to enhance workforce readiness and make connections to local employers
- Create partnerships with faith-based and other community organizations for greater awareness of Michigan Works! programs and services
- Increase Michigan Works! presence in River Rouge

Community image/branding/marketing

Why River Rouge

- Highlighting community assets: physical and non-physical (e.g., the school district)
- Marketing strategies for both businesses and new residents

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

This action strategy will be the shared responsibility of city staff and city council, with the assistance of the TED team when appropriate.

In addition to the items listed in the action strategy, the TED team recommends the city explore the following:

- Updating the city's master plan and zoning ordinance.



JANUARY–MARCH 2016		
Action item	Owner	Deliverable
Identify housing steering committee members	City staff	Select committee members to assist community development director with housing action items; identify roles, expectations, and meeting frequency
Identify homeowner programs	City staff, housing steering committee	Identify funding for homeowner rehabilitation and emergency homeowner repair programs
Plan for city’s promotional video	City staff, TED team	Identify area of focus for the video and submit plan to MEDC’s video producer.
Review zoning ordinance	TED team	Feedback on zoning ordinance presented to city staff
Educate city staff regarding target market analysis (TMA). Outreach to other interested communities in region.	CATeam specialist	City decides if TMA is desired in community. If desired, city identifies funding for TMA match requirement.
Educate local employers on talent resources available	SEMCA, Michigan Works!	Host at least one employer event in the city

APRIL–JUNE 2016		
Action item	Owner	Deliverable
Determine if housing stock committee should be created	City staff, housing steering committee	Create a housing stock committee (either subcommittee of steering committee or independent), select members, identify roles, objectives, expectations and meeting frequency (if deemed necessary)
Update River Rouge map of current housing stock	City staff, housing steering committee (or housing stock committee, if created)	Gather data to update mapping system
Promote homeowner/home buyer counseling assistance	City staff, housing steering committee	Counsel/educate residents on homeowner and home buyer opportunities
Identify and attend placemaking training	City staff	Identify training opportunities through MSU Extension; educate city on connection between place, talent and housing
Complete promotional video	TED team, city staff	Post promotional video to website and distribute to partners.
Review city’s development process	TED team	Flow chart of development process and additional feedback presented to city staff
Increase Michigan Works! presence in River Rouge	Michigan Works!	Organize an event for job seekers to learn about resources available and possible job opportunities available in the area

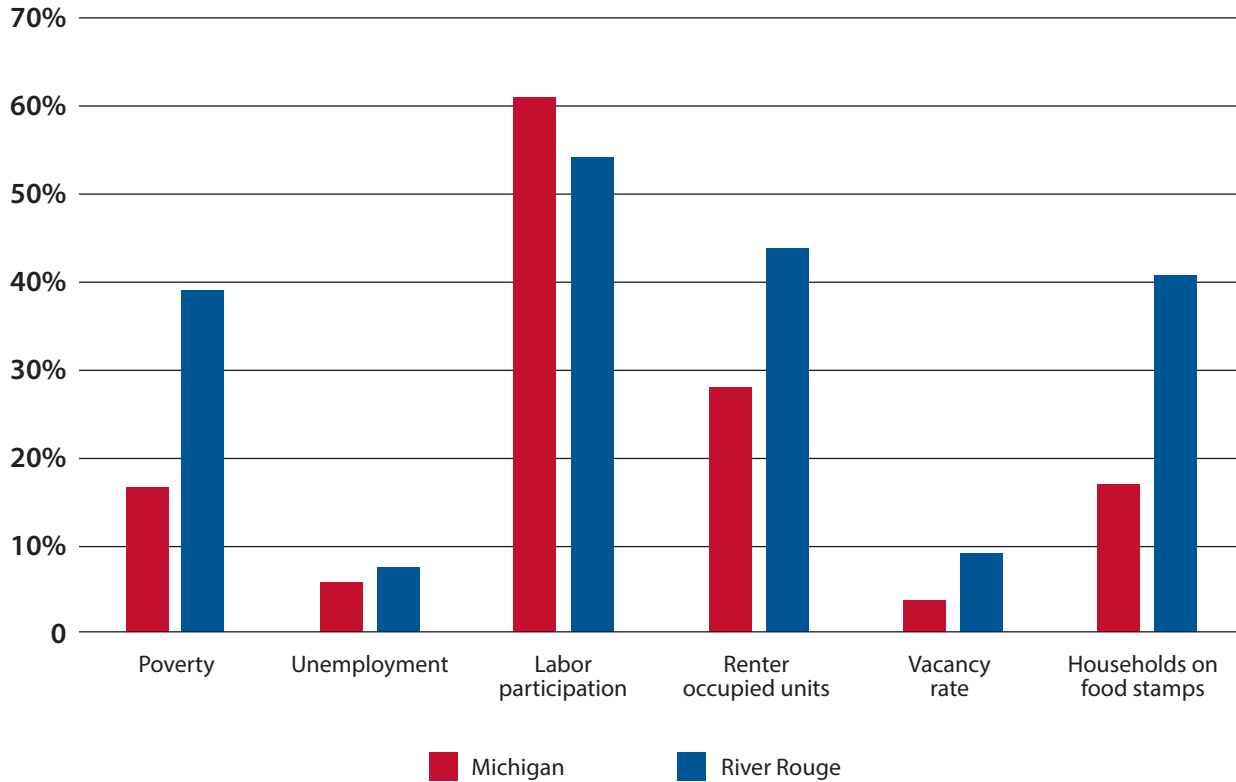
JULY–SEPTEMBER 2016		
Action item	Owner	Deliverable
TMA application submitted (potentially)	City staff	TMA application submitted
TMA consultant awarded (potentially)	City staff	Award TMA contract to consultant
Complete update of housing stock inventory	City staff and housing steering or housing stock committee	Present Loveland and SEMCOG mapping system to city
Identify buildings in downtown for mixed use redevelopment	City staff, housing steering committee and CATeam specialist	Educate building owners on funding resources and other redevelopment tools
Identify interested building owners for rehabilitation of multifamily housing	City staff, housing steering committee and CATeam specialist	Identify funding for a multi-family rehabilitation assistance
Inventory redevelopment sites	City staff, city council and TED team	List of sites available for redevelopment.
Draft comprehensive housing strategy	City staff, housing committee(s); city council	Staff and committee(s) draft strategy; seek adoption by city council

OCTOBER–DECEMBER 2016		
Action item	Owner	Deliverable
TMA presented to city and stakeholders (potentially)	City staff, city council	TMA marketed to possible investors and posted online
Implementation of housing strategy action items	City staff, city council	Implementation of short-term action items; planning/preparation for long-term action items identified in plan

ONGOING		
Action item	Owner	Deliverable
Utilize the RRC best practices, RRC guides and city’s completed self-evaluations	City staff	Accomplish required criteria for RRC certification
Work with SEMCA to engage residences and employers in talent/workforce development programs	City staff	Increase Michigan Works! presence
Support students with college and career exploration	Wayne County College access network advisor (administered through SEMCA)	One advisor on-site at the River Rouge High School through 2018

APPENDIX A

DATA USED TO SELECT PROJECT RISING TIDE COMMUNITIES											
	Michigan	Region 1: Newberry	Region 2: Central Lake	Region 3: Grayling	Region 4: Ewart	Region 5: Harrison	Region 6: Sandusky	Region 7: Charlotte	Region 8: Paw Paw	Region 9: Hillsdale	Region 10: River Rouge
Population	9,886,095	1,673	1,078	1,849	1,569	2,324	2,651	9,064	3,498	8,257	7,857
Poverty	16.8%	34.2%	21.1%	32.7%	36.4%	32.9%	26.2%	18.00%	46.3%	31.60%	38.50%
Unemployment	5.9%	7.3%	7.5%	7.7%	6.8%	7.9%	6.6%	4.70%	6.5%	5.80%	7.70%
Labor participation	60.5%	58.4%	53.6%	50.2%	50.3%	47.9%	53.8%	57.30%	57.6%	56.50%	53.60%
Renter occupied units	27.9%	38.0%	35.4%	52.7%	53.6%	39.5%	42.5%	35.90%	62.1%	46.20%	43.50%
Vacancy rate	4.0%	9.0%	10.7%	11.9%	4.7%	9.7%	5.0%	6.50%	7.4%	7.00%	9.50%
Households on food stamps	16.9%	30.6%	30.9%	35.6%	40.9%	39.1%	31.4%	24.20%	34.1%	28.10%	40.80%



APPENDIX B

Project Rising Tide website review: City of River Rouge

A municipal website serves numerous purposes. At a basic level, it is a way to share information about public meetings, access public documents, find links to other community organizations and to obtain general community information. The main audience for this basic information is local residents and officials. Beyond this, a municipal web site is also a demonstration of community character and image. People unfamiliar with a community will often look to a website for information and form first impressions and conclusions. In the context of the RRC program, it is essential that communities meet the threshold of functionality. Beyond basic functionality, a municipal website should also communicate an appealing community image. The city of River Rouge's website has some organization and is functional in the sense that information available can be accessed. However, the website lacks basic information (potential) residents, (potential) business owners, and developers would look for on the municipal website. In addition, there is a significant amount of information that is outdated and relevant, current information is not available. In late 2015, the city installed a new, larger capacity server that should allow the city to rebuild a highly functional website with current and valuable resources.

Assessment of community website and potential future steps

1. Does the website incorporate basic methods of public notification?

On the contact section of the site, there is a phone number for each city department listed. However, there are no individuals listed by name, hours of operation, etc. There is a phone number for the Beechwood Center and the Reno Building, but there is no information regarding what those are, if they are city departments or separate entities. The contact page does give people the opportunity to sign up for alerts from the city police and fire departments via cell phone and email. The page also has a list of "What's Coming up?" that provides a list of public meetings and office closures (this list appears to be on every page). The department pages do provide better contact information, but it is inconsistent. Some pages provide names, emails and direct phone numbers, where other only provide a general phone and an email, but no specific person identified to the email. Department pages also provide hours of operation.

Relevant information is very out dated. The available "Meeting Schedule" (which is not identified as city council's schedule, but assumed to be) is last available from 2014. The home

screen offers "Read Meeting Meetings" and instructs users to "click here", but the link is only on the word "here" and it is the same color as the rest of the text and does not stand out as link. If clicked, it only provides meeting meetings from 2013 and 2012.

News and Events are posts as recent as November 2015, so updates are being made.

Not all city boards and commissions are listed on the website and should be. Users of the site cannot determine what boards and commissions are operating in River Rouge, what they do, who and what they are accountable for and what public funds they are spending and what they are spending those funds on.

Recommendations

Provide thorough contact information for each city department, including a specific person with name and title, direct phone, email and a description of the basic functions of each department. Update all public information on the site, so residents can access up to date city council meeting schedules and minutes, as well as schedules for all other boards and commissions. Update the city site to include relevant information for all city boards and commissions, including missions and goals, action plans, financial information, and contact information (in addition to the schedules and minutes).

2. Is it easy to locate pertinent planning, zoning and economic development documents on the city's website?

No, the site does not have the city's master plan, zoning or any other relevant documents. Basic permit applications are online.

Recommendations

The city should immediately post the city's master plan, zoning ordinance, downtown development plan and all other relevant community and economic development information, such as the city's use of CDBG funds, how to apply for assistance, etc. The city does not have a capital improvements plan (CIP) or development review process outline or flow chart. In addition, the city's master plan and zoning need to be updated and the city is working to identify funding for those updates. After they are updated, they should be posted online. After the CIP and development review process document are created, they should be posted and searchable. The city should also consider creating fillable permits that can be submitted through the website and offering the ability to make payments online.

3. Does the community website include housing and talent information and link to external partner organizations?

No, the website does not include housing or talent information, or links to external partner organizations. There are two sections under departments (Assessor and Building Department) that includes some information including basic permit applications and city building ordinances.

Recommendations

The city should include information on resources available to job seekers in need of employment and businesses in need of talent. This should include a link to the local Michigan Works! service center. The city should also consider highlighting some of the great qualities of the city to attract individuals who should consider working in River Rouge. Information on transportation and parking would also be helpful information for individuals considering employment in River Rouge; such information should include public transportation options, ride sharing resources if any exist, public parking options and any bike trails for commuters. Similar to item No. 2, there should be information for businesses considering starting, expanding or relocating to River Rouge. Some examples include a directory of resources, incentives and a directory of available properties in the city.

The city website should have a tab for the "Community and Economic Development Department." The tab should include the mission/objective/responsibilities of the department. It should list the housing programs, including the side lot purchase program, homeowner rehabilitation program and the \$500 home purchase program. The city should post the applications to the housing programs, the procedures and regulations on the "Community and Economic Development" tab. The city should attach links to external housing partners such as Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), Wayne County Economic and Community Development, and Wayne Metro Community Action Agency.

River Rouge does not have information regarding their economic development corporation and downtown development authority. They should add information regarding both entities including the mission/objectives of the corporation/authority, by-laws, programs and applications.

4. Does the website serve as a community marketing tool?

The website has information on River Rouge's history, historically museum, information on the city's largest and only waterfront park, and random promotional information embedded in "News and Events."

Recommendations

The city should identify priority redevelopment sites in the city and produce promotional materials that contain information relevant to potential developers, then post those materials to the site. The information should include current ownership, site conditions and existing utilities, zoning and potential future uses, and contact information.

The city should provide better visual pictures on the site, showcasing the strong neighborhoods, the "mom & pop" businesses, the downtown and the large anchor employers. There are pictures or "posters" on each section of the website, but they are not representing the best assets of the city.

The city of River Rouge should provide more information about the city's parks and promote more than just Belanger Park. In addition, the site should include information about the recreational programs offered by the city, including contact information, costs, schedules, etc. "Rouge Days" are an annual event in the city and there should be ample information about the event on the site including when and where the event will take place, prices, things to do, and volunteer opportunities.