

CENTERTOWN VISION PLAN



A Strategic Plan for the Future Development of Centertown

Prepared By:



The Johnson Hill Land Ethics Studio, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Urban Innovations, LLC, Holland, Michigan

CENTERTOWN VISION PLAN

for Downtown Grand Haven, Michigan

Created with the help of:

Stakeholder Groups

Centertown Business Owners
Centertown Property Owners
Centertown Residents
City Council
Main Street DDA
Planning Commission
City Staff

Project Steering Committee

Geri McCaleb, Mayor
Pat McGinnis, City Manager
Dale Kwekel, Main Street DDA
Dan Borchers, Main Street DDA
John Steinbach, Main Street DDA
Sam Janson, Assistant City Manager
Jennifer Howland, Community Development Manager
Dana Kollewehr, Executive Director, Main Street DDA

Grand Haven City Council

Geri McCaleb, Mayor
Mike Fritz
Bob Monetza
John Hierholzer
Dennis Scott

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
Overview of Centertown District	2
New Centertown Initiatives	2
VISIONING PROCESS	4
Visioning Workshop	4
Land Use within Centertown	5
Centertown Site Analysis	6
CENTERTOWN VISION	7
Vision Statement	7
Goals	7
Recommendations.....	7
CENTERTOWN VISION - STRATEGIES	9
Street Improvements	9
Property Improvements	13
Marketing Initiatives	16
SUMMARY	17

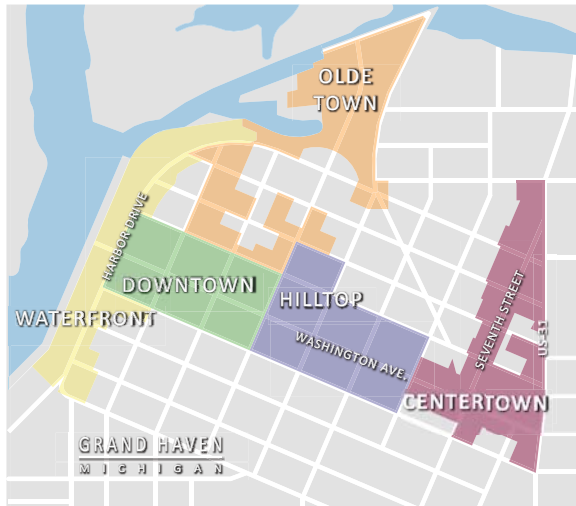
For more information contact:

City of Grand Haven
519 Washington Avenue
Grand Haven, Michigan 49417-1486
(616) 847-4888
(616) 847-3490
www.grandhaven.org

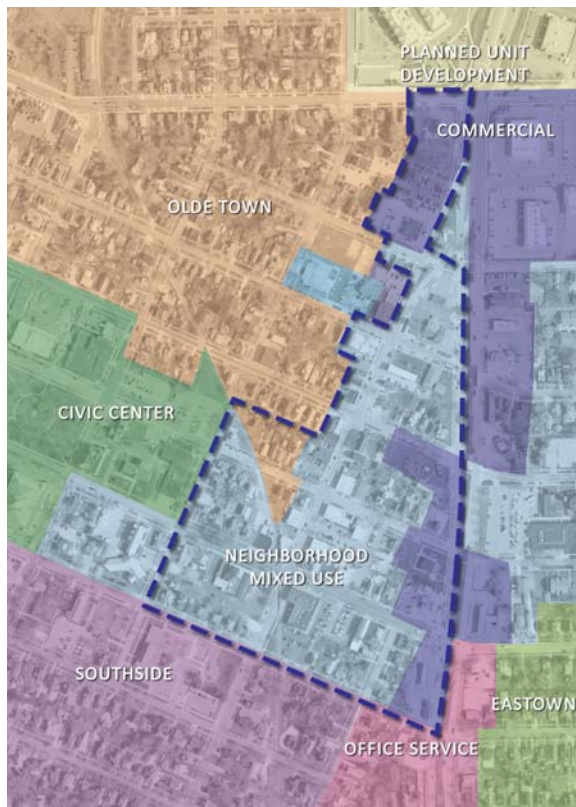
INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW OF CENTERTOWN DISTRICT

Centertown is the natural gateway into downtown Grand Haven for many local citizens and most visitors. This friendly, modest neighborhood commercial district lies westward of the main north-south arterial, US-31, acting as a critical transition zone between downtown and US-31 along Columbus, Washington, and Franklin Avenues.



Centertown is one of five districts in downtown Grand Haven



Zoning in and around Centertown

Centertown contains a variety of retail shops, business services, and restaurants that are important to local residents. These establishments are located primarily along Seventh Street, the primary business corridor within the Centertown district.

While Centertown lies within the Downtown Development Authority District and the Principal Shopping District, it has received fewer public capital resources over the past decade or so, due in part to the significant public investments made in the core Downtown commercial district along Washington Avenue between Harbor Drive and Third Street. These public investments have transformed the area with fresh streetscape treatments, a snow melting system, and other improvements which have, in turn, encouraged and prompted very significant private investments in new and renovated residential, office, retail, and civic/institutional building projects.

NEW CENTERTOWN INITIATIVES

During the past year, the City of Grand Haven has acted decisively to address Centertown needs and opportunities as part of an overall Downtown Improvement Strategy. A Centertown survey was conducted by the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and the Recruitment and Retention Committee (RRC) which was followed up by two major initiatives within Centertown by the City of Grand Haven: the *Downtown Linkage Project* and the *Centertown Vision Plan*.

Centertown Survey

In early 2012, the DDA established a goal of working more effectively to include Centertown businesses in DDA activities. A survey was developed and distributed to 59 business owners within the Centertown district as part of an overall core business district improvement strategy.

The survey results were evaluated and summarized, and recommendations were made by the RRC in the 2012 *Centertown Survey Summary*. Recommendations by the RRC to the DDA included but were not limited to:

1. Review recruitment suggestions and consider making appropriate revisions to the business types targeted for Centertown;
2. Continue to refer to the area as *Centertown*;

INTRODUCTION

3. Adopt and implement suggestions for increasing the number of shoppers in Centertown;
4. Petition the City of Grand Haven to consider changing the zoning ordinance to permit seasonal rental of residential properties;
5. Petition the City of Grand Haven to develop a master design plan for Centertown and implement it; and
6. Adopt and implement appropriate survey participant suggestions that are within our ability to accomplish and encourage the City to do the same.

Downtown Linkage Project

In November 2012, the City of Grand Haven applied for and received a \$711,449 grant from the State Michigan Economic Development Corporation under the Michigan Community Block Grant Program/ Michigan Strategic Fund. The grant will be used to build the Downtown Linkage Project along Washington Avenue within Centertown. To match this grant funding, the City approved \$237,150 in General Funds. Several other important projects were identified by the City for funding, but the Centertown Washington Avenue project was felt to be the highest priority.

The *Downtown Linkage Project* will:

1. Improve the Washington Avenue gateway into the “Heart of Grand Haven” from US-31 with improved identification and signage for this key gateway entrance;
2. Improve the attractiveness of Washington Avenue within the Centertown district with significant public investment in streetscape improvements, such as new sidewalks, streetlights, benches, landscaping, trees, and trash receptacles; and
3. Upgrade the utilities and infrastructure along Washington Avenue within this district to extend their expected service life and improve public safety. These include water mains, sanitary and storm sewer pipes, catch basins, and approximately 25% of the roadway surfaces.

Land Ethics Studio to design, engineer, and oversee the implementation of the funded improvements.

Centertown Vision Plan

By selecting the Centertown section of Washington Avenue for grant funding, the City confirmed their belief that public improvements in the Centertown district was a high priority. The Johnson Hill Land Ethics Studio and Urban Innovations (JHLE/UI) team was subsequently hired to conduct a visioning workshop to meet two primary goals:

1. Provide input to the City’s master plan for Centertown; and
2. Refine the community’s vision for the future of Centertown, identify goals, and identify strategies for achieving the vision and goals.

In the past, the JHLE/UI team has assisted the City with the preparation of numerous master plans, including:

- The 2003 Downtown Vision Plan*
- The 2004 Waterfront Strategic Plan
- Chinook Pier and Mulligan’s Hollow Master Plans and the Waterfront Stadium Redesign

*The *Centertown Vision Plan* is an outgrowth of the *Downtown Vision Plan* efforts. The Grand Haven Downtown vision from the 2003 *Downtown Vision Plan* reads as follows:

The vision for Downtown Grand Haven is to revitalize the “heart of the community” with a healthy mix of new and re-furbished retail/restaurant and office/service business locations, a range of additional housing options, one or more new lodging properties, and a variety of public gathering spaces and attractions that interest and serve local community members and visiting guests. In so doing, Downtown Grand Haven will continue to be the historic and predominant Downtown for the Tri-Cities community.

City Council approved staff recommendations to hire Fishbeck Thompson Carr & Huber and the Johnson Hill

VISIONING WORKSHOP

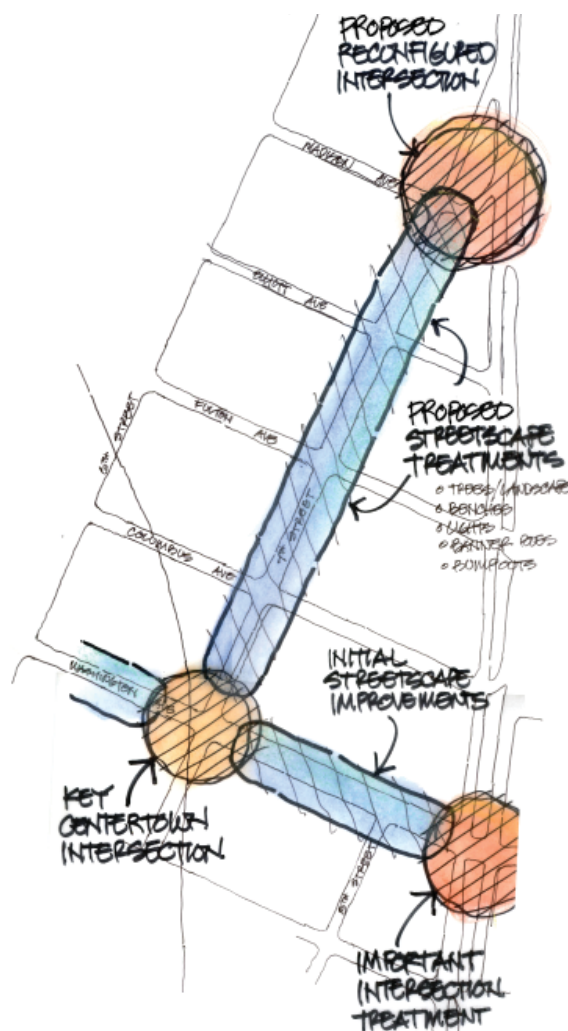
The original *Downtown Vision Plan* and the *2010 Grand Haven Master Plan Update* highlighted the need for a more detailed and focused look at the Centertown area. A workshop was conducted on April 18-19, 2013 to determine a consensus on the vision for the Centertown district, to gather input from key stakeholders in Centertown and from the community, and to provide strategies for reaching the vision.

Individual workshop initiatives were mailed to 98 business owners, property owners, and residents in the Centertown district. In addition, a meeting notice was published in the *Grand Haven Tribune* for five days in the week prior to the workshop. **Thirty-five business owners, property owners, and residents, attended the meetings and presentations, along with 34 policy makers (MSDDA, City Council, and Planning Commission) and staff.**

The overall purpose of this Centertown visioning effort is to **identify and prioritize strategic public and private projects that will provide the impetus for the overall Centertown district to become a more attractive and vibrant commercial district so that similar investments might be encouraged in this area.**

During the workshop, the JHLE/UI team conducted numerous information gathering meetings: **four with the Steering Committee; two with Centertown business and property owners; two with policy makers including the City Council, Planning Commission, and the DDA; and one with the general public.** Presentations and discussions during these meetings enabled the team to share information, aggregate feedback, and then form the vision, define goals, and develop strategies for Centertown. At the end of the two-day workshop, a presentation of preliminary findings was made to all participants.

Key workshop findings included the need to create a distinct identity for the district and to improve the attractiveness, vibrancy, and value of the businesses and properties within the district. Specific recommendations were formulated for street improvements, property improvements, and new marketing initiatives.



Key streets and intersections within Centertown were identified in the workshop



Public input session

VISIONING PROCESS

LAND USE WITHIN CENTERTOWN

A variety of business types located within the Centertown district, including a mixture of retail, professional and automotive services, restaurants, and residential. The diversity of land use types within Centertown are a key component to the unique identity and character of Centertown.

There are many well-established businesses that serve as anchor stores within the district and bring local customers into the district for the specific purpose of shopping at these locations. The residential houses are primarily spread throughout the southern half of the district.



Land use within Centertown

■ ■ ■ Centertown Boundary	■ Professional Service
■ Restaurant	■ Residential
■ Retail	■ Other
■ Automotive Service	■ Vacant



Existing business establishments within Centertown

VISIONING PROCESS

CENTERTOWN SITE ANALYSIS

The site analysis of Centertown identifies the key streets, intersections, vehicle circulation movements, and potential expansion zones for the Centertown district. The intersections at US-31 and Washington Avenue and US-31 and Seventh Street are key entries to both Centertown and Downtown Grand Haven and should be clearly identified as gateways.

The current configuration of the intersection at US-31 and Washington Avenue restricts the flow of vehicle traffic into and out of Grand Haven. Inbound

and outbound traffic is diverted to Franklin Avenue and Columbus Avenue. The efficient movement of this one-way pair moves vehicle traffic through Centertown instead of promoting Centertown as a potential destination for traffic.

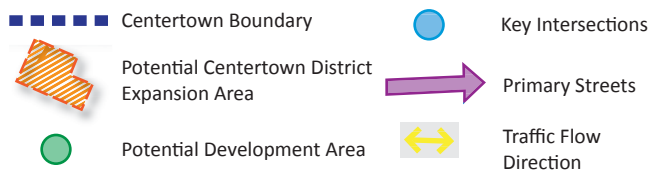
The intersection of Seventh Street and US-31 also serves as an entryway into Centertown, especially with the Coast Guard boat demarcating Grand Haven as the “Coast Guard City.” However, visibility of this entrance into Grand Haven from US-31 is limited and can be easily missed with the high traffic volume.

Seventh Street serves as the primary business corridor for Centertown with services ranging from restaurants to local shops and automotive services. Cross streets serve as connectors to and from adjacent residential neighborhoods to the Centertown district and US-31.

Due to the importance of both Washington Avenue and Seventh Street to the Centertown district, the juncture of these two streets is perhaps the most key intersection for identifying Centertown as a distinct district.

It is notable that Seventh Street and Washington Avenue, the most important streets within Centertown, were formerly key links through Grand Haven along the “Michigan Pike,” the historic travel route between Lake Michigan communities at the dawn of auto travel in Michigan.

There is potential for expansion of the Centertown district boundary to include the block between Elliot Avenue, Madison Avenue, Seventh Street and Sixth Street to round out and add to the economic opportunities within Centertown. There are a series of businesses including professional services and retail, as well as vacant land, that are associated with Centertown and would complement the district’s redevelopment opportunities.



Centertown site analysis

VISION STATEMENT

The vision for Centertown is to be a more attractive, vibrant, and valuable district with its own distinct identity.

This vision can be achieved by implementing strategic public and private projects that focus on the key components of the vision statement: improved attractiveness, vibrancy, value, and distinctiveness. For this report, these four key components have been defined as goals for achieving this vision.

GOALS

Attractiveness

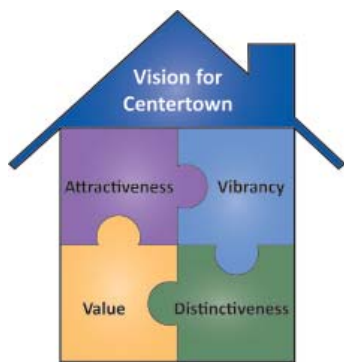
Improve Centertown's physical appearance by implementing streetscape improvements, upgrading buildings and properties, improving maintenance, and through the construction of new projects. Making Centertown more attractive will raise the community's awareness of Centertown, attract more customer traffic and sales, strengthen the pride of business and property owners, improve the marketability of the district to new businesses and tenants, and increase property values.

Vibrancy

Create a heightened atmosphere of real and perceived excitement and activity. Vibrancy will be achieved by improved customer- and community-driven events and promotional activities, enriching the mix of businesses, joint promotions and advertising, and strengthening Centertown business associations.

Value

Increase business and property values through a combination of physical improvements, intensified programming, and increased customer traffic and sales.



The four goals of the vision statement are interrelated, as recommendations will generate benefits that meet multiple goals

Distinctiveness

Introduce improvements that are unique to the Centertown district to sharpen the area's "brand." Centertown is already a distinct commercial district with businesses geared primarily toward local customers; however, attracting new customers and businesses has not been particularly successful because its image is not as strong as possible. Improving upon this quality will enable Centertown to distinguish itself from other portions of downtown Grand Haven so that it can market itself more effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended initiatives have been compiled in a matrix, located on the following pages. These initiatives have been categorized into three focus areas: street improvements, property improvements, and marketing initiatives. The intent of these initiatives is to promote an attractive, vibrant, valuable, and distinct community.

Street Improvements

Street improvements aim to facilitate efficient and safe vehicular and pedestrian circulation throughout the district by improving intersections and crosswalks, upgrading roadways and sidewalks, and adding parking throughout the district. A variety of streetscape improvements will promote wayfinding and walkability within Centertown, and enhance the appearance and identity of the district. The potential for new pocket parks and pocket park improvements is also explored.

Property Improvements

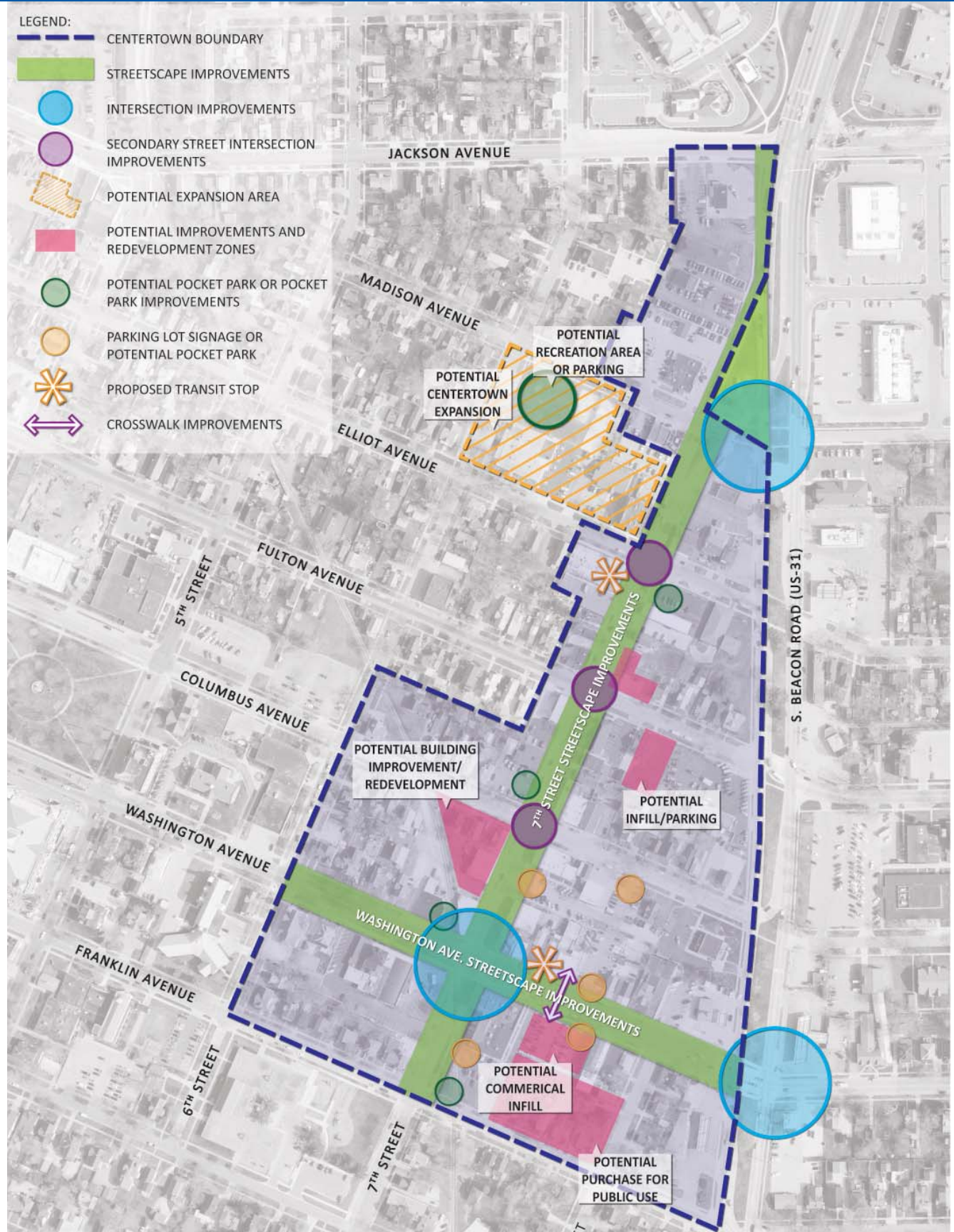
Property improvements identify potential areas for redevelopment, parking, and open space additions and improvements. These improvements promote the appearance and value of Centertown.

Marketing Initiatives

These recommendations seek to improve communication among business owners and the City, and create a distinct identity for Centertown. Marketing initiatives also strive to promote business and increase property values within Centertown through branding techniques.

The following graphic depicts the potential locations of many of the street improvements and property improvements. The following matrix provides more detail and discusses other recommendations.

CENTERTOWN VISION



Street Improvements

Potential outcome rating:

● = very strong ● = strong ○ = modest

Attractiveness
Vibrancy
Value
Distinctiveness

US-31 and Washington Avenue Intersection

Reconstruct intersection for full access to Washington Avenue from northbound and southbound US-31.¹ Explore and evaluate all configurations including a possible roundabout.

● ● ● ●

Explore potential for additional right-of-way/easement purchase to allow for enhanced gateway treatments.

● ● ○ ●

Install significant gateway improvements to draw attention to this key intersection. Evaluate improvements including walls, columns, lights, flagpoles, banners, signs, and landscaping.

● ● ○ ●

Modify Franklin and Columbus Avenue intersections as necessary to accommodate the reconfigured Washington Street intersection.

○ ○ ● ●

Washington Avenue Streetscape Improvements

Upgrade roadway, curbs, and sidewalks.

● ○ ● ●

Continue Downtown streetscape improvements to the US-31 intersection.

● ○ ● ●

Evaluate the feasibility of extending the snowmelt system into this area.⁶

● ○ ● ●

Evaluate the possibility of adding angled parking to north or south side of the street to increase parking capacity and slow traffic.

● ● ● ●

Provide an improved mid-block crosswalk on Washington Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Street to improve pedestrian access and safety.

● ○ ● ●

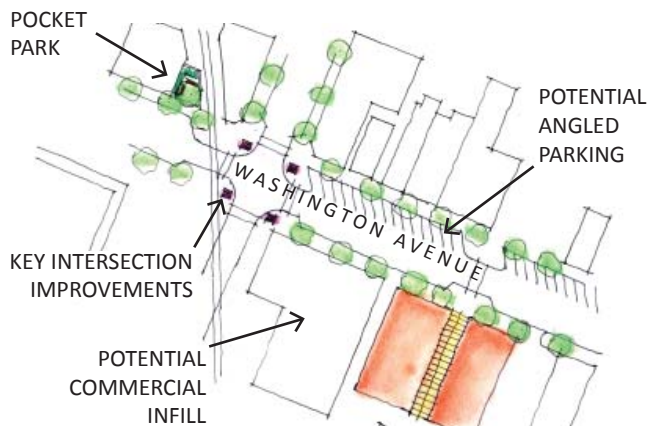
Install public transit stops on Washington Avenue between Seventh Street and Eighth Street.

● ● ● ○

Install directional signage at the corner of Fifth Street and Washington Avenue to identify Centertown and Downtown for those driving to Grand Haven from the south on Lakeshore Drive.

● ● ● ●

1. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has expressed a willingness to discuss this possibility with the City of Grand Haven and as such, this opportunity should be immediately pursued. Improving the traffic connections between US-31 and Centertown, particularly at Washington Avenue, will significantly benefit the Centertown district and all of downtown Grand Haven.



Potential streetscape improvements along Washington Avenue



Elements from Downtown to carry-through along Washington Avenue to US-31 Intersection

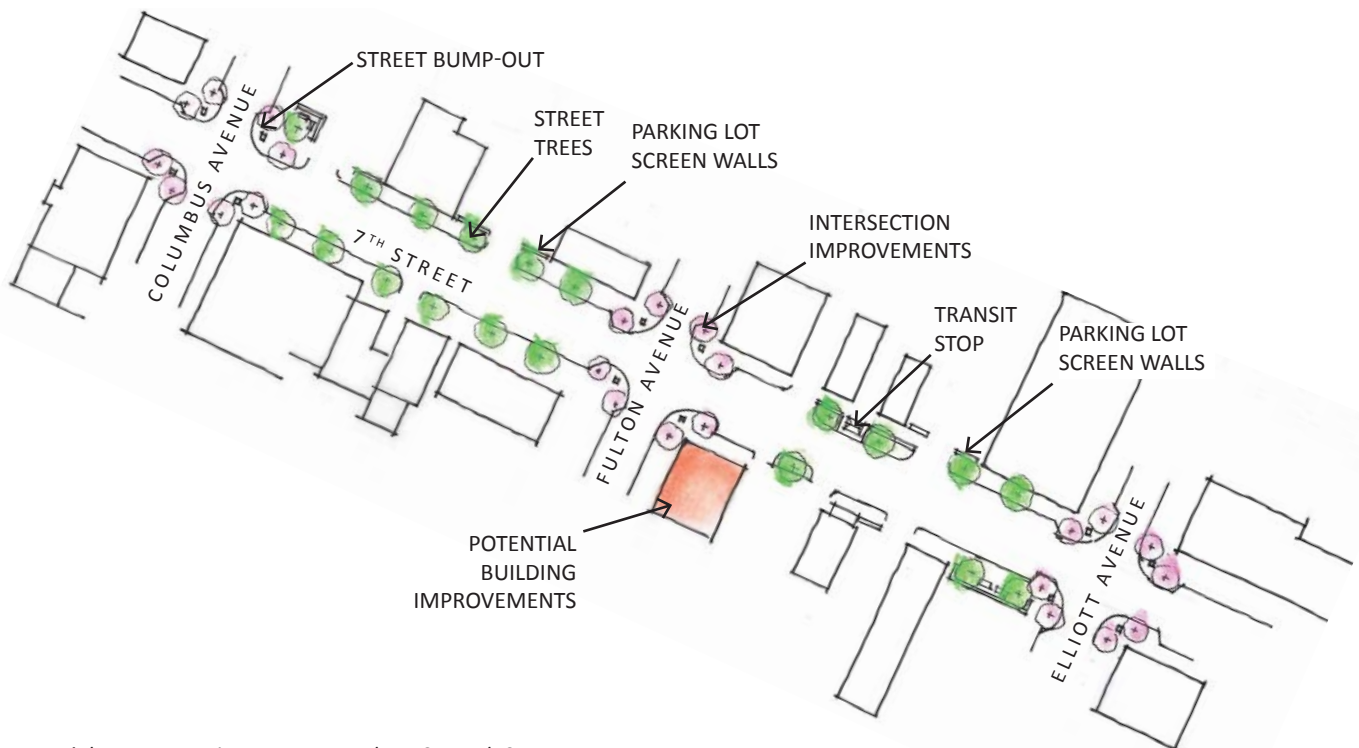
Street Improvements

Potential outcome rating:

● = very strong ◐ = strong ○ = modest

	Attractiveness	Vibrancy	Value	Distinctiveness
Seventh Street Streetscape Improvements^{2,3}				
Upgrade roadway, curbs, and sidewalks.	●	◐	●	◐
Install streetscape improvements that differentiate this corridor from Washington Street.	●	◐	●	●
Provide distinctive lighting, ⁴ pavements, planters, banners, and artwork.	●	●	●	●
Utilize standard City items such as benches, bike racks, and trash receptacles for basic furniture needs to reduce inventory and maintenance needs.	◐	◐	◐	◐
Consider the possibility of year-round twinkle lights in street trees, the use of neon sign lighting, and sidewalk seating and vending for businesses.	●	●	◐	●
Evaluate a three-way stop at the intersection of Columbus Avenue and Seventh Street.	◐	○	◐	◐
Add a public transit stop on Seventh Street between Fulton Avenue and Elliott Avenue.	○	◐	◐	○

2. A variety of improvements within or near the sidewalk network within Centertown will make it a more attractive place to stroll among shops and restaurants, window shop, and relax. Can be improved with more attractive and plentiful seating, public art expressions, banners, mini-parks, etc.
3. Modifications and redevelopment within Centertown should reflect the character and identity of Centertown.
4. Additional distinct streetlights will improve Centertown's appearance, as well as pedestrian and vehicular safety.



Potential streetscape improvements along Seventh Street

Street Improvements

Potential outcome rating:

● = very strong ◐ = strong ○ = modest

	Attractiveness	Vibrancy	Value	Distinctiveness
Washington Avenue and Seventh Street Intersection Improvements				
Provide distinctive identifier elements such as columns, banners, and lights to draw attention to this key Centertown intersection.	●	●	◐	●
Install curb extensions on all four corners to allow more room for the identifier elements, to decrease the amount of pavement, and to improve pedestrian safety.	●	●	◐	●
Seventh Street, Madison Avenue, US-31 Intersection Improvements				
Provide an attractive introduction to the district with gateway enhancements to draw visitors to Centertown. Include improvements such as colorful banners, artwork, cohesive landscape treatments, low walls to screen parking lots, and improved directional signage. ⁵	●	◐	●	●
Evaluate the impact on Seventh Street business commerce that will result from the proposed 2018 MDOT changes to the Seventh Street, Madison Street, and US-31 intersections. If detrimental, revisit the proposed reconfiguration with MDOT to determine if alternative alignments could be considered.	◐	○	●	○
Consider a gateway treatment at the corner of Seventh Street and Madison Avenue that is similar to the Seventh Street and Washington Avenue intersection to increase recognition of the Centertown district.	●	●	◐	●
Utilize excess right-of-way for additional landscaping or a pocket park.	●	◐	●	●
Other Streets				
Implement streetscape improvements on minor streets within Centertown district such as roadway and sidewalk repairs, street trees, etc.	◐	◐	●	◐

- The US-31 and Seventh Street intersection is proposed to be significantly modified by MDOT in 2018 and will include rerouted streets and opportunities for improved gateway, directional signage, and landscaping improvements.
- The scope of visioning workshop did not extend to other discussions concerning the introduction of snowmelt into the Centertown district. This issue did surface in conversations after the workshop but considerations of snowmelt are beyond the scope of this workshop assignment. It is important, however, that such discussions be resolved prior to the initiation of the *Downtown Linkage Project*. The introduction of snowmelt into planning and design for that project would have a very significant time and cost impact on its scope, cost, and schedule.

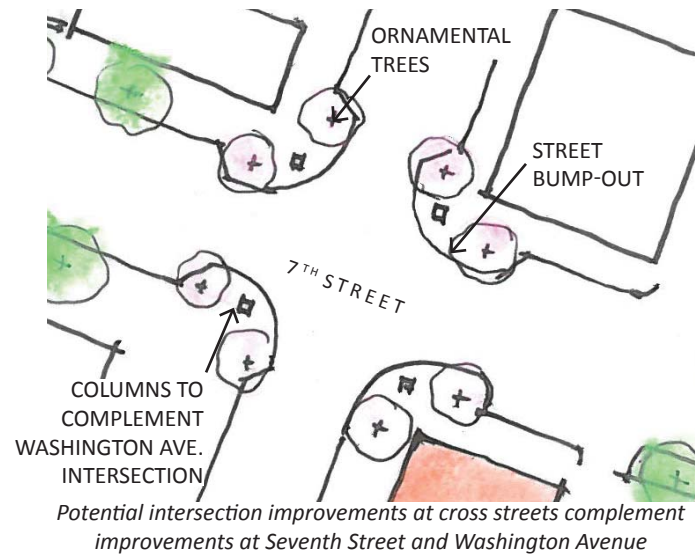


Potential pocket park at Madison Avenue and Seventh Street



Entrance to Centertown at US-31 and Seventh Street

CENTERTOWN VISION - STRATEGIES



Property Improvements

Potential outcome rating:

● = very strong ● = strong ○ = modest

	Attractiveness	Vibrancy	Value	Distinctiveness
Underutilized Properties and Properties Susceptible to Change ¹				
Undertake building and property improvements. ²	●	●	●	○
Construct new buildings – either as infill opportunities or in tear-down situations. ³	●	●	●	○
Strengthen street corners. ⁴	●	●	●	●
Increase parking supply. ⁵	○	○	●	○
Develop green and open spaces for new active and passive recreation opportunities. ⁶	●	●	○	●
Promote art and creativity. ⁷	●	●	○	●

1. These terms refer to buildings and properties that are not presently functioning in their “highest and best use,” and could be upgraded to create higher market value, as well as add vitality to Centertown. Several such parcels were identified and shared during workshop meetings. For infill and new building guidelines, refer to the Zoning Ordinance - Article 4, District Standards: Neighborhood Mixed Use District, pages 50-54.
2. Building and property improvements are generally private projects, and could include facade and other exterior building changes, site improvements, and interior systems upgrades and fresh finishes.
3. Construction of new buildings could include new custom-built buildings for specific business purposes, speculative buildings suited to a range of tenants, and multi-story mixed-use buildings. Two- or three-story buildings are appropriate and entirely compatible in this district. Ground floor uses should be limited to retail, restaurant, and some office and service functions, while appropriate upper floor uses include residential, office, service, and other destination uses.
4. Corner locations have a particularly strong impact on value creation as well as the attractiveness of the entire district, and special attention should be given to such redevelopment sites.
5. Increasing the supply of public or private parking will generally make Centertown more valuable, especially if additional spaces can be added close to under-served properties.
 - It is possible that some short-term parking spaces – designated for pickup or delivery – would be very helpful to many Centertown businesses, especially restaurants and other businesses with frequent deliveries.
 - Seek new parking locations along Seventh Street and side streets.
 - Integrate modest-sized lots within the district but not on corners.
 - Continue to view parking in some locations as interim uses, with the longer term goal of constructing new buildings.
6. Includes small pocket parks for landscaping, seating, art, signage and larger playground-scale parks for neighborhood use. The empty lot near Elliot and Sixth Street is ideally located for such a larger, more active park to serve both Centertown and Olde Town.
7. Underutilized parcels can be greatly enhanced with artwork. This could involve any or all of the following approaches: art walls, sculpture, banners, murals, plaques on walls and in sidewalks, street furniture, public art competitions, etc.
8. For parking area screening guidelines, refer to the Zoning Ordinance - Article 8, Landscaping, page 8-3.



Typical buildings within Centertown

Property Improvements

Potential outcome rating:

● = very strong ○ = strong ○ = modest

	Attractiveness	Vibrancy	Value	Distinctiveness
Redevelopment and Infill Zones, Parking, and Beautification				
Consider a redevelopment zone at southwest corner of Columbus Avenue and Seventh Street.	○	○	●	○
Consider infill or parking opportunities at the vacant lot on Fulton Avenue east of Seventh Street.	○	○	●	○
Explore possibility of property for purchase for additional public parking along Franklin Avenue.	○	○	●	○
Explore potential commercial infill on Washington Avenue to take advantage of desirable street front location if parking can be relocated without a net loss of parking spaces.	●	○	●	○
Consider expanding Centertown district boundary to include the block between Sixth and Seventh Streets and Elliott and Madison Avenues.	●	○	●	○
Encourage efforts to screen private parking lots and storage areas. ⁸	●	○	○	●
Investigate opportunities for additional public parking and/or short-term parking along the northern portion of Seventh Street.	○	○	●	○
Explore opportunities for new and improved signage, banners, murals, etc. ⁹	●	○	○	●
Encourage private investment to improve the attractiveness and architectural character of the buildings. ¹⁰	●	●	●	○

9. There are already several distinct building signs (such as on the Ver Duin Building) that could be used on other buildings. Such low- to medium-cost improvements can greatly improve the attractiveness and identity of the district and help customers find Centertown shops, services, and restaurants.
10. A key strategy for many property and business owners is to improve the quality and performance of Centertown buildings and all property within the district. This can be accomplished through several approaches, outlined as follows.
 - From simple but important ongoing maintenance, to rigorous building rehabilitation, buildings naturally require “care and feeding” to maintain their attractiveness and functionality. Be it a new façade or roof or repainting of siding, building owners must pay attention to their own buildings, which will benefit the entire district.
 - Internal systems must be maintained to assure safe and effective operations. Electrical, heating and cooling, and other systems must be kept up in good operating order.
 - In addition to attending to buildings in Centertown, it is important that all Centertown property owners – public and private alike – properly maintain the entire property with attention to landscaping, basic maintenance, and cleaning.



Distinctive streetscape elements in Centertown



Distinctive signage in Centertown



Property Improvements

Potential outcome rating:

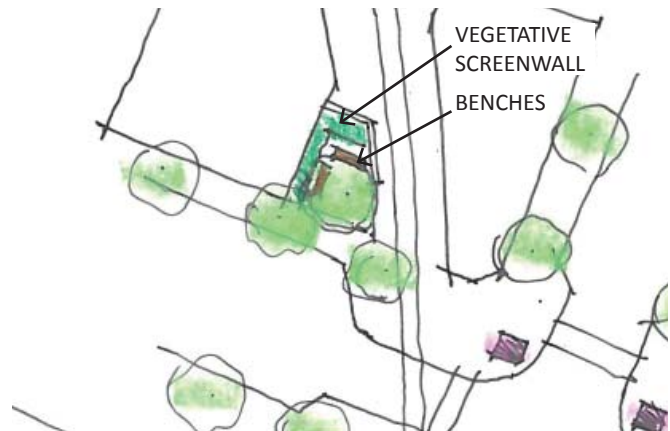
● = very strong ● = strong ○ = modest

	Attractiveness	Vibrancy	Value	Distinctiveness
Open Space Additions and Improvements				
Provide park amenities to improve character and comfort. Possibilities include additional landscaping for screening and shade, benches, tables, and an art wall adjacent to the railroad.	●	●	●	●
Explore other potential locations for open space improvements including Willow Park, the northwest corner of Washington Avenue and Seventh Street, and the northwest corner of Columbus Avenue and Seventh Street.	●	●	○	●
Investigate the potential for an active neighborhood park at the vacant corner lot at Madison Avenue and Sixth Street. ¹¹	●	●	○	●
Utilize entrances to public parking as an opportunity to increase open space amenities such as benches, as well as improve signage to public parking.	●	○	○	○

11. Includes small pocket parks for landscaping, seating, art, signage and larger playground-scale parks for neighborhood use. The empty lot near Elliot and Sixth Street is ideally located for such a larger, more active park to serve both Centertown and the Olde Town Neighborhood.



Existing pocket park along Seventh Street



Potential pocket park along railroad tracks on Washington Avenue

Marketing Initiatives

Potential outcome rating:

● = very strong ● = strong ○ = modest

	Attractiveness	Vibrancy	Value	Distinctiveness
Organization and Management				
Establish or revitalize a business and property owners' committee. ^{1,2}	●	●	●	●
Coordinate City Hall, DDA, and PSD actions in the Centertown district more closely with property and business owners.	●	●	●	●
Promote business incubators – start-ups, scale-ups, “seeds and sprouts” – to provide new energy. ³	●	●	●	●
Identity ⁴				
Develop a logo or brand that can be applied to banners, wayfinding signs, promotional materials for creating a stronger Centertown identity. ^{5,6}	●	●	●	●

- Centertown's vibrancy would benefit from a revitalized business and property owners' group whose members would meet regularly to exchange information and news, discuss opportunities for new collaborations, and provide mutual support and strength in addressing issues and opportunities within the district and in interactions with the City, the DDA, and any other organizations with an interest in Centertown. While individual businesses or small groups of businesses can achieve significant events and excitement, a stronger “Centertown Business Owners Committee” would broaden support, marketing reach, and sales impact with present customers and the community at large.
- The stakeholders that actively participated in the visioning process along with DDA and Community Development staff, would be a very good starting point in establishing organizational strength within Centertown. Another possible starting group could be the stakeholders that actively participated in this visioning process, along with City Community Development staff.
- The modest, open, and quirky nature of the Centertown district, as well as its lower rent levels, suggest that Centertown is ripe for business incubator efforts. Such entrepreneurial activities rely on welcoming initiatives by Community Development and/or Chamber of Commerce.
- Creating a stronger identity and clearer visibility and presence for the Centertown district was a high priority for nearly all workshop participants. While Centertown is part of Downtown Grand Haven, it is a distinct business center with a different clientele than many businesses along Washington Avenue between Harbor Drive and Third Street. Thus, there is a need for and an opportunity to distinguish Centertown from other Downtown districts.
- This stronger identity presence can be applied in a variety of locations and circumstances, such as:
 - Gateway signs and banners,
 - Wayfinding signs,
 - Streetscape improvements,
 - Parks and seating areas,
 - Unique signs, logos, and art,
 - Building renovations and new buildings to reflect the character, materials, and scale, of Centertown.
- Changes to the Zoning Ordinance - Article 7: Signage would be required to use neon signs on buildings in Centertown. Such a change may give Centertown business owners the option to add such exterior signs.



Branding examples from Columbus Indiana, which uses its “C” effectively.

SUMMARY

OUTCOMES OF THE PLAN

The *Centertown Vision Plan* serves as a framework for creating a more attractive, vibrant, and valuable downtown community with a distinct identity through street improvements, property improvements, and marketing initiatives.

Street Improvements

Street improvements are concentrated along Washington Avenue, Seventh Street, and at several key intersections. Street improvements aim to:

- Improve vehicular and pedestrian circulation and safety by upgrading roadways, intersections, curbs, and sidewalks;
- Create a sense of identity for Centertown by providing several gateway treatments at key intersections; and
- Improve walkability and attract visitors to Centertown by implementing streetscape improvements, such as sidewalk seating, lighting, street trees, and pocket parks. Streetscape improvements will also differentiate Centertown from other districts in Grand Haven.

Property Improvements

Property improvements identify underutilized properties and properties susceptible to change, potential redevelopment and infill zones, parking areas, and open space additions and improvements. These initiatives strive to:

- Improve the appearance and vitality of Centertown by initiating building and property improvements and constructing new buildings;
- Increase the value of the district and attract customers to the area by increasing the parking supply;
- Provide new recreation activities by developing green space and open space within Centertown; and
- Promote art and creativity by enhancing underutilized properties with artwork such as murals, sculptures, banners, site furnishings, and public art competitions.

Marketing Initiatives

Marketing recommendations are intended to establish or improve the organization and management of a business-owners' association and facilitate coordination with the City and business owners. These recommendations are intended to:

- Foster collaboration, communication, and mutual support among stakeholders in the business community by establishing or revitalizing a business and property owners' association;

- Encourage new business that will bring about new entrepreneurial energy to the district by promoting business incubators, such as starts-ups;
- Create a stronger identity for the district and draw attention to the business center by developing a Centertown "brand" that can be applied to streetscape elements, such as banners, way-finding signs, and promotional material.

Recommendations were created to meet the four goals of the plan, all of which are interrelated. Street improvements not only improve the appearance of Centertown, but also add to the value and vibrancy of the district by attracting new visitors and customers to the area. Streetscape improvements that are distinct only to Centertown enhance the identity of the district. Additionally, improvements to roads, intersections, parking, and sidewalks improve circulation and safety concerns.

Property improvements bring added value to the district by attracting new visitors and businesses, which in turn enhances the vibrant atmosphere of the district. Building and property improvements bring a reenergized and lively appearance to Centertown.

Marketing initiatives that were primarily intended to increase the economic value of the district also enhance vibrancy of the district by attracting new visitors. The identity of Centertown is solidified through branding techniques.

NEXT STEPS

The *Centertown Vision Plan* is intended to be used as a means of facilitating improvements in the district. Although these improvements may take considerable time, budget, and planning efforts to implement, several initiatives could be started this year.

- The *Downtown Linkage Project*
- New benches could be placed throughout Centertown, along with new landscape treatments.
- A new public art project, such as a sculpture or banners, could be implemented.
- Several on-street short-term delivery parking spaces could be created.
- Establish or revitalize a business and property owners' association.

The recommended near- and long-term improvements will bring about many of the many benefits discussed above, and will extend well beyond the borders of Centertown, benefiting the entire Grand Haven area.