

CASE STUDIES

Michigan Coastal Community Working Waterfronts BEST PRACTICES

SUMMARY OF TOOLS, STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES FROM 11 MICHIGAN CASE STUDY COMMUNITIES

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ZONING

CREATE A HYBRID ZONING ORDINANCE

Promote waterfront revitalization by adopting a hybrid zoning ordinance that fosters mixed use development along the waterfront, connection to the public waterfront and to open space, preservation of waterfront views, and walkability. Rezoning and subdividing former industrial property for mixed use can prepare a parcel for redevelopment that meets evolving community needs.

MAINTAIN PUBLIC ACCESS THROUGH ZONING

Include language in the zoning ordinance that specifies visual access to the waterfront in certain zoning districts. Utilize the community's zoning ordinance to emphasize the scenic value of the waterfront and encourage development that complements waterfront uses.

Permit uses that rely on access to the waterfront in many zoning districts. General commercial and industrial districts, for example, can accommodate uses such as public/private docks and boat launches, charter fishing, and marine service and repair facilities if a community's ordinance does not have a zoning district that specifically accommodates uses that require adjacency to the waterfront.

ESTABLISH INNOVATIVE ZONING DISTRICTS

Form-based code districts that regulate structure, design and form over land use provide greater flexibility with regard to creating a pedestrian-oriented, mixed use waterfront district that protects waterfront uses, public access and views of the water. Consider amending zoning ordinances if conventional, use-based zoning is not conducive to meeting the community vision for a walkable, well connected waterfront and downtown.

UTILIZE ZONING TO ESTABLISH RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL MARINE NODES

Zoning for water-related uses protects marinas, commercial fishing businesses and marine service and repair centers, for example, by preventing the encroachment of non-water-dependent uses. In addition, marine zones highlight the diversity of resources and variety of water-related amenities available in a community while also increasing convenience for users. These nodes of recreational and commercial marine activity also contribute to sense of place in the community.

ZONING

Designating marinas as a special use in zoning districts allows marinas to be appropriately sited and also to creates districts with mixed uses.

COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

COLLABORATION

Interlocal cooperation can help communities identify common harbor and waterfront goals, investigate the opportunity to utilize a joint site plan review process and consistent zoning, and establish a single entity to manage a harbor that was a waterfront shared by multiple jurisdictions. Adopting a shared waterfront goal encourages planning for future waterfront land uses and sustainable harbor and waterfront management. One example of a waterfront goal is: to protect and enhance the natural aesthetic values and recreation potential of all waterfront areas for the enjoyment of area citizens, while recognizing private property rights of waterfront property owners.

ENGAGE COMMUNITY IN PLANNING AND VISIONING

Engage the community in planning exercises in advance. Engaging citizens and professionals together can lead to an effective waterfront visioning and strategic planning process.

MARKETING

Collaborate with a regional convention or visitors bureau to develop marketing material that informs residents and visitors of the available marine assets and opportunities. Marketing should focus on the community and regional assets such as water-based tourism, marinas, charter fishing and tours and local businesses.

REGIONAL PORT COLLABORATION

Investigate the potential to increase the viability of ports through regional collaboration. Partner with local governments, regional councils of governments and universities to evaluate assets, challenges and needs across the region. Identify opportunities to increase efficiency and reduce the cost of shipping by receiving goods at one port in a region and exporting at another. Use resources such as Coastal Zone Management Program grants to assist with funding regional port studies.

LAND CONSERVATION, TRANSFER AND ACQUISITION

NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION

Clean up impaired ecosystems to improve the quality of natural resources as well as the opportunities for visitors and residents to enjoy these resources. Ensure the protection of undeveloped dunes — a valuable asset that can provide the public with access to the waterfront — through the acquisition of undeveloped dunes. Establish regulations for priority locations with sensitive lands such as dunes and wetlands.

MAINTAIN PUBLIC ACCESS THROUGH ACQUISITION

Preserve the waterfront as community open space through acquisition and by permitting public access.

PRIVATE INVESTMENT AND TRANSFER OF PROPERTY TO A COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Transfer ownership of water property to a community foundation to ensure that the space is protected from potential future development that would impair the public enjoyment of the waterfront and to prevent the property from reverting to wasteland.

WATERFRONT PROPERTY ACQUISITION

Use land acquisition as a tool to utilize, maintain and expand visual and physical access to the waterfront, preserve open space and help ensure that options for future uses along the waterfront are preserved, well planned and meet future community needs.

Funding sources for acquisition or the installation of amenities such as floating docks and trails along the waterfront may include the DNR Trust Fund, Great Lakes Fisheries Trust Fund, and the Robert Woods Johnson Foundation, for example. Private land donations are an additional way the community may acquire waterfront property.

POLICY, REGULATION AND AUTHORITY

MAINTAIN PUBLIC ACCESS THROUGH REGULATIONS

Adopt regulations that require new development and redevelopment to provide space on waterfront sites to help maintain the water as a significant natural feature. Protect priority locations including sensitive lands and the most visible open spaces through scenic easements, transfer or donation programs and design guidelines — along with regulations and zoning ordinances. Enhance access sites by installing platforms for wildlife viewing.

DREDGING AND HARBOR MAINTENANCE

Identify alternative sources for dredging funds. For example, at Kalamazoo Harbor, a Water Resources Tax Improvement Finance Authority is one potential means for generating maintenance funds. Reevaluate options for dredging, such as dredging channels in priority areas, to identify more cost-effective strategies to ensure the viability of the harbor.

Looking again at Kalamazoo, the Kalamazoo Lake Harbor Authority, Inc. (KLHA) was created through Act & Interlocal Cooperation Agreement pursuant to Act No. 7 PA 1967 the Urban Cooperation Act), Act No. 451 of PA 1944 the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection act, and Act 94 of PA 2008 the Water Resource Improvement Tax Increment Finance Authority Act. KLHA was created as a separate legal entity and public body corporate to administer economic development objectives related to the harbor. The Authority has the power to create a Kalamazoo Lake Master Development Plan, a Water Resource Development Plan, Tax Increment Financing and Development Plan or similar plan. KLHA is charged with the protection and maintenance of harbor and waterfront properties through the establishment of a Water Resource Improvement TIFA.

REGULATE LAND USE ALONG WATERFRONT ROADS

Use the a road as a divider between the public and private realm along a waterfront. Permit public use on the waterside of the road and private development on the inland side.

ESTABLISHING A PORT AUTHORITY

Establishing a port authority can provide a functional industrial and economic base for the community and state while maintaining adequate access for industry and shipping. For example, the Port of Monroe was established in 1932 pursuant to the Port District Act, Public Act 234 of 1925 and continues to work to attract development and industries and to make improvements in the port.

PLANNING

ESTABLISH STRONG CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN THE WATERFRONT AND DOWNTOWN

Redevelop a downtown waterfront park to establish a stronger connection between water resources and the downtown. Expand and enhance a downtown municipal marina through the addition of amenities such as an overlook platform, trout stream, music shell and greenspace and pedestrian paths that provide more options for residents and visitors, a greater mix of uses and more opportunities to attract people to the waterfront.

PROVIDE VISUAL ACCESS TO THE WATERFRONT

Use pocket parks and public right-of-ways to provide physical and visual access to the water and an opportunity to view boats and ships passing through. A waterfront park system promotes walkability and recreation along the water.

CREATE CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Develop connections to boat launches, beaches, marinas, significant waterfront viewing areas and key features and open spaces through a multimodal transportation network that includes water trails, pedestrian paths, regional trails and public transit. A unified community-based open space system that provides scenic access throughout the city offers opportunities for recreation and personal interaction.

RIVERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT

Redevelop underutilized, vacant brownfields with compact, strategically located condominiums where more downtown housing options are needed and there is ample existing waterfront park space and access for water-dependent uses. Spur revival of a downtown riverfront with new mixed use development.

ESTABLISH A SENSE OF PLACE ALONG THE WATERFRONT

Incorporate placemaking strategies — planning, designing and managing public spaces through identifying a common community vision — to promote talent attraction and retention, economic development opportunities, and establish a sense of place on the waterfront. Things like identifying historic corridors or hosting events and festivals in public waterfront spaces can contribute to the public value of the waterfront. Resources including the Placemaking Technical Assistance Workshops, offered by the Michigan Municipal League and Michigan State University through an MI Place Partnership, help a community design and plan for transformative placemaking projects.

ADAPTIVE REUSE OF WATERFRONT PROPERTY

Identify new uses for underutilized, former industrial waterfront property and structures. A mix of uses that includes traditional industrial that utilize existing port infrastructure, open space that provides visual and physical access to the waterfront and innovative new technologies ensures the community can continue to adapt and grow with a changing economy as well as provide local jobs.

ATTRACT NEW BUSINESS

Revive former industrial waterfront, and transition and transform the local waterfront economy by creating a Smartzone. Through a suite of incentives a Smartzone — which may be established through a partnership between educational institutions and state and local government — can attract a mix of new uses including research and technological facilities, and office, retail, residential and recreational projects. Establishing a smart zone also aids in planning for desired uses along the waterfront.

INCORPORATE PLACEMAKING

Capitalize on the economic value of placemaking to increase both private development and public access to the waterfront as well as create a more walkable downtown that embraces water resources.

ENGAGE IN SMART GROWTH PLANNING

Incorporate Smart Growth planning into community master plans. EPA/NOAA's waterfront Smart Growth planning principles can help guide future development that protects water resources, supports diverse, mixed-used waterfront land uses, and promotes visual and physical access to the waterfront. Resources such as EPA/NOAA's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance for Coastal Communities pilot program provide technical assistance for creating form-based code. Participate in Michigan's Smart Growth Readiness Assessment Tool workshop to self-evaluate community planning through the lens of Smart Growth planning.

BUILD RESILIENCE

Build capacity to recover from adversity, reduce sensitivity and exposure to hazards and enable flexibility under environmental, economic or social change through resiliency and adaptation planning. Through regional resilience planning, communities can strengthen the economic resilience of waterfront-dependent uses as well as identify strategies to adapt physically to changing water levels or increased storms.

RESTORE THE RIVER

Establish partnerships and use a variety of funding sources, such as Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funds, for river improvements including dam removal, contaminant removal and bank stabilization.

RECREATION AND ACCESS TO WATERFRONT AMENITIES

CLEAN MARINAS

Participate in a Clean Marina voluntary training and certification program to protect the health of boaters, staff and the environment by preventing the discharge of pollutants to the water, land and air. The Michigan Clean Marina Program provides technical assistance and a best practices guide for preventing the spread of invasive species. In addition to promoting environmental stewardship and protecting habitat, marinas that participate in the program reduce waste disposal costs, attract knowledgeable customers and reduce potential legal liability associated with regulatory requirements.

CONSTRUCT A RIVERWALK

Capitalize on local assets, incorporate local heritage, link maritime assets and increase connectivity between the downtown and waterfront by converting a formerly industrial waterfront to public and recreational use. Include interpretive signs along a riverwalk to educate residents and visitors and help to create a sense of place along the river. Install rain gardens to create visual interest and manage stormwater. Use a riverwalk to connect downtown to various areas of the waterfront and to link amenities such as charter fishing docks, fishing piers, beaches and historical sites. Grants from the Cool Cities and Coastal Zone Management Programs can help a community plan and implement a riverwalk.

INCREASE PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Convert former industrial property to public parks and install amenities such as benches, fishing platforms and shelters to increase visual and physical access to the waterfront. Parks, conservation areas and waterfront trails increase the recreational and tourism value of a waterfront. A waterfront location for community events can promote community ties to the waterfront and contribute to a sense of place. Diverse amenities, such as a specifically designated dog-friendly beach can help to meet the needs of visitors and residents, as well as reduce use conflicts.

FISH CLEANING STATION

Create public fish cleaning station areas and incorporate universal design to increase the value and public benefit of a fish cleaning station. An innovative method for dealing with fish waste is to establish a public-private partnership between the municipality and a private entity that will freeze, transport and process byproducts as pet food.

UNIVERSAL ACCESS

Provide access to a variety of waterfront resources in a variety of ways. Walkways along beaches that allow visitors and residents to get down to the Great Lakes and accessible fishing piers, for example, are significant assets in a community. A network of universally accessible sites that provides all people

with the opportunity to experience the waterfront such as the Explore the Shores initiative is a regional destination that can attract visitors, educate the community and increase appreciation of water resources.

CAPITALIZE ON TOURISM

Offer diverse activities, such as charter tours, historic maritime museums and ship viewing, to attract tourist and offer visitors a variety of ways to experience the waterfront. Assets including a range of lodging options, transient slips, information centers as well as a well-connected downtown waterfront with shops and restaurants that meet the needs of visitors increases the economic potential of the local tourism industry.

CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Link a municipal marina to the core downtown via a walking path to allows visitors who arrive by boat to access downtown shops and restaurants without a car and to open up the downtown to the waterfront. A well-connected trail network linking parks, natural areas, waterfront amenities and the downtown business district promotes non-motorized transportation, increases use of assets and provides opportunities for recreation.