

Comstock Charter Township

Economic Development | Marketing and Branding Strategy
2022

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Planning Process

This economic development strategy for Comstock Charter Township is a collaborative planning project with support from the MEDC's Redevelopment Ready Communities program and Comstock Charter Township. The result of this project will be an economic roadmap to assist with job creation, marketing and branding along with redevelopment and investment strategies for the community. These actions will both strengthen and diversify the local economy. The roadmap will also help guide the coordinated effort between the greater economic region, Kalamazoo County and the Township to work in a cooperative manner that will integrate aspects of the regional economic development strategy with the local economic development effort.

When creating an economic development strategy, it is important to answer several questions:

1. Who are the largest employers in the community?
2. What drives the local economy?
3. What is the township's role in the larger region?
4. What are the strengths of the community and how can they contribute to growth?
5. What could be potential challenges to growth?
6. What overall image is the Township working to create?
7. What strategies can be implemented to execute the end vision?

As part of the planning process, a local steering committee has been assembled comprised of local leaders, businesses and other key stakeholders with a direct interest in the economic success of Comstock Charter Township. The steering committee will help guide the development of the overall strategy, as well as provide critical input on the future economic vision for the township. Lastly, the steering committee will assist with the identification of implementation projects throughout the community which can be benchmarked and monitored for success.

Economic Landscape

Comstock Charter Township is located in central Kalamazoo County along I-94 and borders the city of Kalamazoo to the east. The current population of the Comstock Charter Township is 15,231 according to 2020 US Census with 68.8% of the current population within the work age group between 16 and 65 years of age. Of that percentage, 67.4% are active in the labor force with 32.6% not currently active

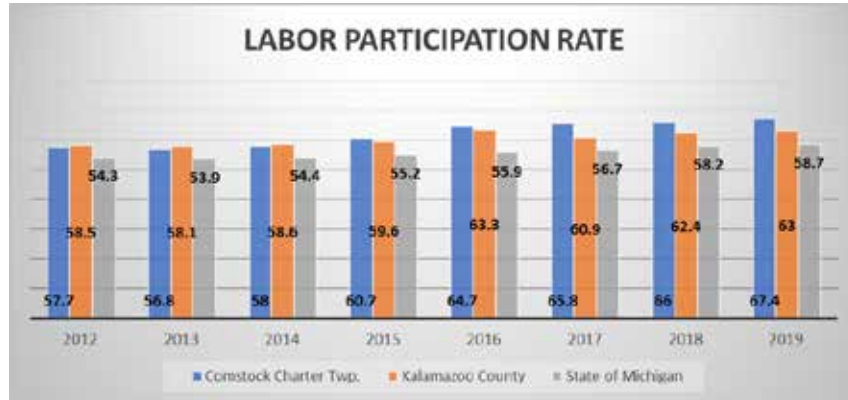


Figure 1: Labor Participation (2018 US Census)

participation rates have generally been in decline, locally, regionally and nationally, but not because of reduced employment opportunities. It is noteworthy though that the labor participation rate within the township has remained strong since 2012 with only a slight dip in 2013. This can be attributed to the high educational attainment and excellent job opportunities found within the township and the surrounding area.

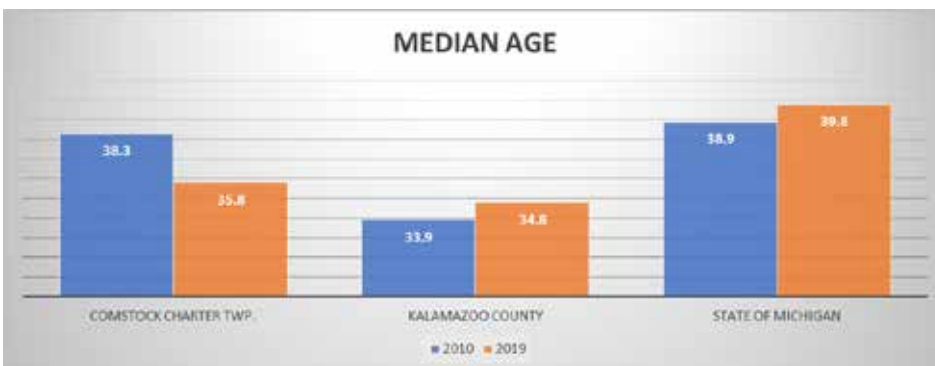


Figure 2: Median Age (2019 US Census)

Secondly, the largest age cluster is 18-44, which is nearly 42% of the total township population. This shows that numerous residents within the township are of family age or have families. Of the 6,200 total households within the township, 62.2% are families, leading us to believe that families are choosing to reside in Comstock Charter Township for a great quality of life along with a good school system as well as good work opportunities. Given the large age bracket between 10 and 29 years of age, it is anticipated that this trend will continue into the future should conditions remain consistent going forward.

in the labor force for any number of reasons. Currently, the US labor participation rate is 61.6%, which the township is considerably higher.

Historically, labor participation rate has been a good indicator of the strength or weakness within a local labor market. The higher the rate, the greater the availability of quality employment opportunities.

Since the last recession, labor

To better understand labor participation, we need to look at the age distribution within the township and surrounding communities. At quick glance, the population is younger, a sight not seen across many communities in Michigan. This demonstrates that the Township has a younger population for employers to draw workforce from.

Income, Employment, and Education

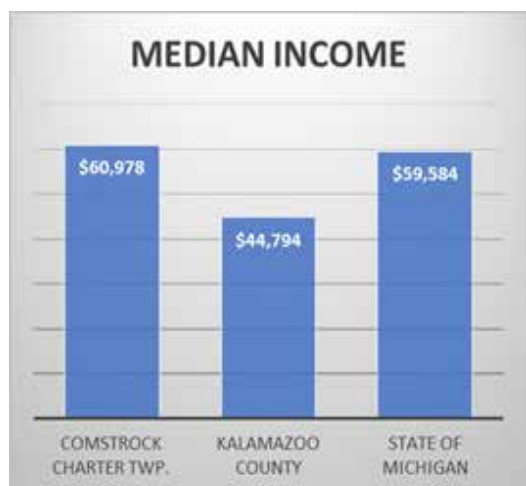
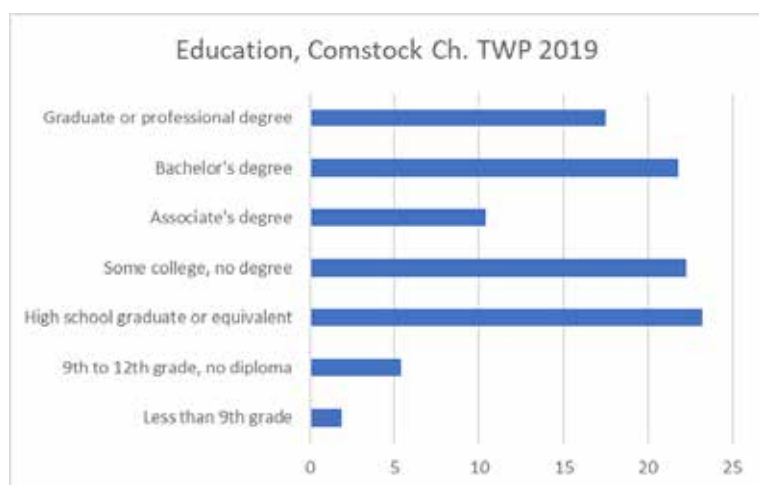


Figure 3: Median Income (2018 US Census)

high high-wage job sectors, specifically focused on high-tech manufacturing, expansions at Pfizer and Stryker, Bell’s Brewing, Comstock Public Schools, and having Western Michigan University nearby should continue the upward trend of wages within the community. Looking at families, the median household income for families is \$80,634. Median non-family income is \$39,292 which would generally be a single income, head of household.

Figure 5: Education Attainment (2018 US Census)



When looking to grow the economy of any community, it is extremely important to have a highly skilled and educated workforce. This has been identified as the highest priority for employers when seeking to expand their operations. It has also been identified as a top priority by the Governor for the State of Michigan.

The median household income in the township is \$60,978 which is higher than both Kalamazoo County and the State of Michigan. When you look deeper into the income data, understanding that many of the available jobs within the township revolve around manufacturing, educational services, healthcare and professional employment, it makes sense that the median income within the township is higher in general compared to the county and state. The addition of new



Figure 4: Community Assets

Looking at the educational attainment of the Comstock Charter Township, a large percentage of the population (72%) has completed some level of higher education. It is important to note that the Comstock Charter Township is far out pacing the State of Michigan for the number of both bachelor’s degree attainment (21.8 compared to 18%) and graduate degree attainment (17.5% compared to 11%). This should be a key item to highlight when looking to attract new companies, workers, and families to the Township.

The landscape of Kalamazoo County varies greatly including thousands of acres of productive farmland, international transportation routes such as I-94 along with several vital smaller cities, townships, and villages. Despite the county's diversity, it's residents and businesses share many of the same opportunities, assets, and challenges that can be more effectively acted upon with a coordinated effort.

The State of Michigan and many of its communities have been emerging from one of the most extensive economic recessions on record since the Great Depression. At its height, unemployment topped 7.8% across the state. Locally, unemployment wasn't nearly as high as seen in the Figure 6, but the same pattern was present as identified regionally, across the state and across the nation.

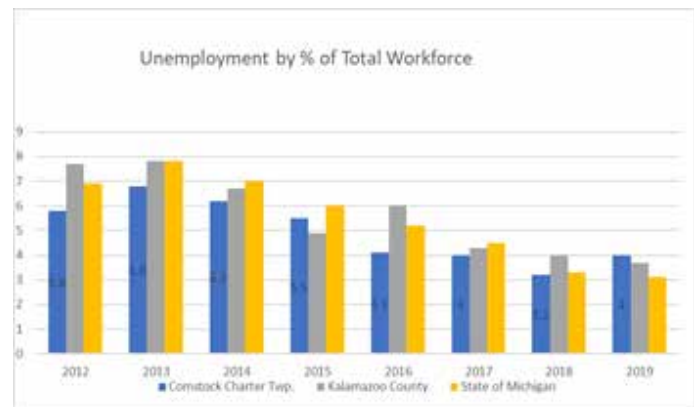


Figure 6: Unemployment (2018 US Census)

INDUSTRY OF EMPLOYED WORKERS (US Census 2019 Estimates)	
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	4,958
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining:	99
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	99
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	0
Construction	112
Manufacturing	1,248
Wholesale trade	195
Retail trade	494
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities:	294
Transportation and warehousing	276
Utilities	18
Information	28
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing:	315
Finance and insurance	214
Real estate and rental and leasing	101
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management	350
Professional, scientific, and technical services	171
Management of companies and enterprises	13
Administrative and support and waste management services	166
Educational services, and health care and social assistance:	1,119
Educational services	206
Health care and social assistance	913
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services:	218
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	42
Accommodation and food services	176
Other services, except public administration	223
Public administration	83

Figure 7: Industry of Workers (2019 US Census)

Comstock Township School System

The residents of Comstock Charter Township are currently supported by three public school districts being Comstock Public Schools, Gull Lake Community Schools and Galesburg-Augusta Community Schools. Township residents also have access to FBR Charter Schools – Forest Academy. Often, when communities think about economic growth and development, rarely are schools thought of as economic assets, and in even fewer cases, active participants or partners in economic development. That is not the case for Comstock Township, where Comstock Public Schools serve on the Economic Development Strategic Planning Committee, providing a voice for public education in the community.

The school systems currently serve a little more than 3,000 students throughout the township and according to Comstock Public Schools, enrollment is starting to trend up. All three

districts are also making active investments into their facilities and infrastructure to modernize and enhance the education experience for both students and parents within the community. These new investments represent a commitment to high education standards and will be beneficial as the community seeks to attract new families as well as employers to the community.

Lastly, it is important to ensure that the school systems are encouraged to continue to serve as active partners with the township's economic development efforts. Specifically, to enhance and expand conversations and engagements with local employers and future potential employers to ensure that students are not only meeting core curriculum standards, but are also prepared as the workforce for future jobs throughout the community.

Regional Economic Development

2021 – 2025 Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy: Planning Region 3

The regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is an opportunity to align regional economic development actors around shared goals and priorities. The aim of the Region 3 CEDS is to increase collaboration, to bring the region more resources for economic development, to uplift shared priorities, and to prepare the regional economy and workforce for the future. The CEDS is also a timely tool to help the region's businesses recover from the effects of COVID-19, compete in the global economy, and find the workers they need to succeed.

The CEDS goals are intended to guide regional collaboration among stakeholders, as well as leverage partnerships and funding to advance projects that benefit the entire region. From the goals, the CEDS Strategic Direction and Action Plan outlines the relationships, funding, and action steps needed to enable economic development across the region. The action steps leverage involvement of private-sector actors in local projects through the development of shared priorities, funding opportunities, potential projects, and stronger communication and support networks. The CEDS builds upon the existing work of the region's economic development actors while also incorporating new voices.

The CEDS process for Michigan Planning Region 3, representing Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph Counties, was convened by the Southcentral Michigan Planning Council (SMPC). SMPC is the regional planning organization that serves the four-county area. SMPC and the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, as SMPC's administrator, were awarded funding by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce to complete the CEDS in February 2020. In the future, SMPC will convene stakeholders around the CEDS goals, assist partners implementation of strategies, and measure progress toward the completion of the CEDS goals and strategies. SMPC will organize semiannual meetings of the CEDS committee, as well as production of annual reports on the data, goals, and priority action steps identified in this plan. SMPC will also continue its work serving and increasing the capacity of local units of government and other organizations across the region.

The CEDS is an opportunity to not only identify what is needed in Region 3, but also to highlight the important work around economic development that is already being done. The Region 3 CEDS will build upon the following ongoing efforts:

EDA-supported projects:

- Western Michigan University Business and Technology Research Park Phase II in Kalamazoo
- Southwest Michigan Accelerator Kitchen in Battle Creek; development of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in 2014 and 2020
- Regional Economic Development Strategy for Battle Creek
- Broadband planning in Calhoun County
- New housing millage in Kalamazoo County
- Upjohn Institute landlord research project
- Housing plan in St. Joseph County
- Plan 4 Housing website
- Upjohn research on identifying in-demand occupations and factors of resiliency
- Youth Village and Washington Heights Catalyzing Community Giving grant initiative in Battle Creek
- Regional philanthropy organizations getting more involved in equity and economic development: United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region, Kellogg Foundation, Sturgis Area Community Foundation, and Kalamazoo Community Foundation

Recovery from the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 and building equitable systems of resiliency will be key focus areas of CEDS implementation work in the future as well. Regional employment and business output have been adversely affected by the economic shutdowns and health impacts of COVID-19, and recovery is projected to take several years. Local governments anticipate not only a few years of reduced budgets and staffing, but also increased demand for public services. Beyond recovery, this context makes it critical to strengthen regional partnerships and networks that create systemwide resiliency.

The CEDS planning process has helped catalyze regional collaboration around economic development, but implementation of the strategies featured in the Strategic Direction and Action Plan will help strengthen these relationships going forward. The action steps that were prioritized all reinforce the aim of more than one goal, and these steps use partnerships to accomplish tasks. For SMPC, these steps include creating an inventory of workforce training programs and using that to inform workforce training programs; building relationships with community organizations and businesses around equity; increasing access to, and affordability of, broadband internet; and improving affordable housing development and access.

CEDS implementation will create platforms needed for welcoming new partners into regional economic development work, for improving access to data and expertise needed to make business decisions, and for supporting the ongoing work of regional organizations. The CEDS committee will look to form new partnerships and select projects that will work toward accomplishing the CEDS goals at its semiannual meetings. SMPC will share meeting information, updates, and reports on goal progress and metrics through their website, at spmcregion3.org/ceds, and will develop the CEDS site as an interactive tool for local governments, economic developers, and businesses to find data, track progress towards goals, and get engaged in implementation of CEDS strategies.

CEDS Goals

The CEDS vision is brought to life by partners uniting around regional economic development goals and taking coordinated steps toward those goals. The CEDS has six core goals, which align with the priorities listed in the vision statement.

Goals for Regional Economic Development:

Goal 1: Build on existing collaborative efforts to ensure that the regional economy is both resilient and inclusive.

Goal 2: Develop skills of the regional workforce to support workers' economic mobility and to meet the needs of employers in the region.

Goal 3: Increase the assets and prosperity of communities that have experienced historical disinvestment by improving their access to education, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Goal 4: Support the maintenance of existing housing assets and increase the available housing options that meet the needs of the region's current and future residents.

Goal 5: Strengthen infrastructure that is critical to the success of the region, particularly for transportation and broadband.

Goal 6: Retain and attract talent in the region by expanding local government's ability to support small businesses and enhance quality of life.

Southwest Michigan Regional Prosperity Initiative

Comstock Charter Township and Kalamazoo County are a part of Michigan's Prosperity Region 8. The Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI) is a voluntary process formed by former Governor Rick Snyder to create vibrant regional economies. The Governor identified ten regions throughout the state and asked leaders from the sectors of regional planning, adult education, workforce development, economic development, transportation, and higher education to pursue activities that promote prosperity. Region 8 is comprised of 7 counties: Berrien, Van Buren, Cass, St. Joseph, Branch, Calhoun and Kalamazoo.

Southwest Michigan First

Southwest Michigan First is an organization of privately funded economic development advisors who act as the catalyst for economic success in Southwest Michigan. Founded in 1999 on the principle that the most powerful force for change is a well-paying job, the organization works across all industries throughout the seven counties making up the Southwest Michigan Region.

Southwest Michigan First's unique model of philanthropy and capitalism is internationally recognized from Melbourne to Vancouver for its innovation in economic development. One of

their key messages states “Looking to expand, locate or start something new? Southwest Michigan First’s people and services are focused on connecting community capital to respond to its customers’ needs, wants and desires to generate meaningful results.

Community-driven, Southwest Michigan First is committed to company growth, government and education alignment, acceleration of its vibrant core communities, talent development and communication of its regional advantages.”

SWOT Analysis

On May 4, 2021, the Comstock Township steering committee and CIB Planning team performed a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) to understand the community’s assets and gain a clear understanding of how the community sees both the potential and limiting factors for the Township.

Strengths

Comstock Township’s most appealing assets or strengths for residents, investors, businesses, and visitors can be described in six community attributes or values: Affordability, accessibility, abundance of land, excellent infrastructure, strong and diverse workforce; and natural features.

1. **Affordability:** The housing stock is affordable for families and homes cost less than those in neighboring communities. In general, the older age and smaller size of homes in the township appeal to middle income residents when compared to homes in surrounding areas.
2. **Accessibility:** Comstock Township is located east of Kalamazoo and is halfway between Detroit and Chicago. Interstate 94 runs east and west through the township and Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport is located just southwest of the community.
3. **Abundance of Land:** The township maintains an abundance of available land that can accommodate commercial, retail, and industrial.
4. **Excellent Infrastructure:** Public transit, water, sewer, and utilities are in good condition and the area is zoned and positioned to be lucrative for manufacturers.
5. **Strong and Diverse Workforce:** Many industrial designers, engineers, industrial manufacturers, and related professionals call Comstock Township home. The strength and diversity of Comstock Township’s workforce is 3-4 times higher than the national average within the county.
6. **Natural Features (river, lakes):** Biking and hiking trails are maintained throughout the park system in the township and attract residents and visitors seeking scenic recreational outlets. Kalamazoo river, which runs east and west through the entire area, is considered the hidden gem of Comstock Township, providing water access for recreation and fishing, as well as habitats for many species of wildlife.

Weaknesses

It is beneficial to identify community weaknesses as part of the larger effort for growth and improvement. Understanding Comstock Township's weaknesses lays a framework that will focus development efforts.

During the SWOT exercise, the steering committee identified that the school system and infrastructure need improvement; enrollment is declining, and Comstock buildings are aging. There are three school districts within the 36 square miles in the township. Blight exists along the main riverfront corridor in Comstock Center, and some housing stock is deteriorating along the railroad area within a 4-5 block radius, adjacent to M-96. While the township has land for development available, there is a size ceiling of approximately 1300+ acres. Comstock Township also faces a negative reputation among residents and within the media.

Opportunities

Weaknesses are opportunities in disguise. Comstock Township has opportunities to improve the school system facilities, and they are undergoing phase three of a \$40 million bond to improve facilities throughout the Comstock Public Schools districts. Additionally, leadership is looking at a bond increase that would not increase taxes but would continue to rejuvenate the districts.

Opportunities exist for improved public transportation within the township, land acquisition by the DDA, commercial and industrial businesses looking for space in Comstock Commerce Park and Midlink Business Park; and additional recreational access to and emphasis on the waterways, parks and trail systems. Residentially, the township is seeing a new subdivision development at the southeast quadrant of S. 35th Street and I-94. Comstock Township also has an opportunity to access federal funding from the infrastructure stimulus package for broadband infrastructure. Lastly, the township continues to seek opportunities to improve its reputation.

Threats

The threats that exist to the township are interwoven with the weaknesses stated above. If long-term, dedicated planning is not focused on finding solutions to the issues that exist, the threats to the area will continue and potentially compound into the future.

The township should focus efforts on the following opportunities and challenges:

- Blight removal
- Housing deterioration prevention
- School system facilities need improvement
- Opportunities for improved public transportation
- Opportunities for land acquisition by the DDA
- Commercial and industrial developer coordination
- Residential development amplification
- Infrastructure need improvement
- Encouragement of waterway and trail access.

Comstock Township Master Plan

The township has the vision 2025 Master Plan which creates a development policy framework for the township. The following is the Master Plan Vision Statement along with economic development goals.

- As you arrive, whether by foot, bus, bicycle, or car, Comstock Township welcomes you with lush and colorful gateways, planted and maintained locally—an indication of the abundance of valued green spaces and recreation amenities within the community. Throughout the Township, multi-generational neighborhoods are safe, attractive, and connected to community assets via non-motorized pathways. A strong business climate, supported by excellent access to rail, roads, and an educated workforce, thrives with municipal collaboration and opportunities for expansion. Complementary land uses offer a mixed pattern of development that results in a strong jobs-housing balance. A diverse mix of residents have choices about the types of housing available, the means of moving about the community, and where to shop, play, and recreate. This is our vision for Comstock Charter Township.
- Comstock Township will have a variety of safe and affordable modes and means of travel choices available to its diverse population, which is considered a retention and attraction strategy. Transportation choices support local business, increase student performance outcomes, and result in better community health.
- Comstock Township residents will have ample employment opportunities within the community and employers will find a talent pool of highly educated and skilled workers. Land in close proximity to transportation networks will be available for industry growth, and complementary uses will support workforce needs.
- Comstock Township will be a place of natural beauty, and its neighborhoods will provide a safe environment for residents through quality building stock, regular code enforcement, upgraded infrastructure, and planned development where services (roads, utilities, transit, and schools) exist.
- Comstock Township will be a healthy community by ensuring that each resident has access to a public recreation facility that meets their recreational needs. Investing in parks and recreation is an economic development strategy. Healthy communities with robust place-based recreation features provide a desirable amenity to existing and prospective residents and employers.

Economic Development Goals and Objectives

Goals are high level policy statements that drive future decisions around projects and investment opportunities that can contribute to community growth.

Objectives are specific ideas, strategies, policy statements or projects that achieve goal results. The objectives identified in this plan will assist the township by providing measurable tasks that revolve around increasing economic activity within the township. Further these objectives will support other planning efforts in the township such as the Master Plan, the Comstock Township DDA, the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy along with future capital improvement plans. Integrating all the above planning efforts with a committed leadership will be the most important driver of success for the community.

	GOALS	OBJECTIVES
EDUCATION & WORKFORCE	Maintain and promote a high-quality education system to train tomorrow's workforce, attract new families and new businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue efforts to garner strong resident support for the public-school systems. • Promote the education system as a community strength to attract new families and residents to the community. • Consider establishing an education foundation to provide additional funding and support for the public school systems in academics, arts, and athletics. • Strengthen partnerships with industry and KRESA (intermediate school district). • Support infrastructure improvements for the school districts including the local bond to support infrastructure. • Support the KRESA CTE Center (opening in 2024-25) and identify opportunities for local students to participate in CTE programming. • Identify expanded childcare options to support greater workforce participation. • Identify opportunities to expand transportation options to ensure workers have reliable transportation to and from work.
INFRASTRUCTURE	Continue to develop, maintain, and reinvest in a strong infrastructure system to support existing residents and businesses as well as new.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand and update water and sewer lines throughout the township to provide more capacity for new residential and commercial development. • Work to continue to install broadband infrastructure assets to ensure access to the entire community. • Use of Act 381 (Brownfields) to further support public and private infrastructure. • Develop electric vehicle infrastructure throughout the township • Support potential solar power generation facilities at school properties and throughout the township where appropriate
REGIONAL COLLABORATION	Strengthen existing and create new collaborative partnerships to operate effectively as one voice for regional economic success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow existing partnerships with Kalamazoo County and neighboring communities. • Leverage relationship with Southwest Michigan First to improve access to business resources throughout the community. • Enhance relationship with Kalamazoo County Road Commission • Enhance relationships with EGLE, MDOT, MEDC, Airport, Metro Transit • Leverage more support from the MEDC

	GOALS	OBJECTIVES
INDUSTRY ACTIVITIES	Develop an ecosystem for creating, attracting, expanding, and retaining businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a long-term financial plan for the township to maintain fiscal stability for years to come. • Identify sites for redevelopment to attract new industry. • Create a fund or identify funds to assist with raising capital for small business startups and entrepreneurial support. • Complete an analysis of vacant industrial land and ensure property owners are partnering with the township for future development. • Access to Metro Transit Bus System to improve or enhance routes to provide transportation options for workers and employers. • Improve public transportation services to access retail and business community in a timely and efficient manner. • Develop partnerships between industry and public transportation. • Utilize state and locally authorized incentive programs, PA 198 abatements, Tax Increment Finance (DDA, CIA, Brownfield), MEDC Business Development Program and Community Revitalization Program. • Develop a township-wide incentive policy for future development projects. • Create a strategy to locate an inland logistics port within the community. • Identify new industry sectors that could locate in the township based on the strengths of the workforce.
DESTINATION	Continue efforts to make Comstock Township a destination community with a high quality of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinvest in the community. • Identify, strengthen, and attract new entertainment options for residents of the community (special events, movies in the park, comedy clubs, music venues...) • Promote connectivity and walkability of the community (bike trails, lakes, nature center...). • Continue to develop and evolve specific brand identity for Comstock Charter Township. • Strive to ensure there are quality attainable and affordable housing options throughout the township to attract new residents and workforce. • Promote the education system as a community strength to attract new families. • Work to improve the overall image of the community with positive press announcements.

Implementation

This plan serves as the policy guide for moving Comstock forward, guiding decisions about future physical and economic development. Transforming the plan's goals into reality will require a long-term commitment and political consensus. The plan is designed to be a road map for action, incorporating strategies, specific projects, and programs that will achieve the desired results.

This chapter synthesizes the many plan recommendations and identifies the actions and timing needed to transform the plan's vision into reality.

Tenets of Successful Implementation

The input received through the master plan process provided a foundation to help achieve the township's vision, community support, commitment, and involvement must continue.

Commitment

Successful plan implementation will be directly related to a committed township leadership. While elected and appointed officials will have a strong leadership role, many others - township department directors, staff, and leaders from the community's many institutions and organizations - will also be instrumental in supporting the plan.

However, commitment reaches beyond just these individuals and includes the array of stakeholders. Citizens, landowners, developers, and business owners interested in how Comstock develops must unite toward the plan's common vision.

Integrate with Project Design

Township officials and departments must embrace the plan, applying its recommendations to help shape annual budgets, work programs, and the design of capital improvements. For example, the Township's engineering practices can support implementation through infrastructure improvements designed consistent with plan policies and recommendations. Each department, staff person, and elected official should find it a benefit, if not an obligation, to reference the plan when making decisions and setting priorities.

Guidance for Development Decisions

This plan is designed for routine use and should be consistently employed during any process affecting the community's future. Private investment decisions by developers, corporations, and landowners should consider the plan's direction as it is the guide for economic growth and stability of the community and supports the goals and objectives of the overall master plan.

Evaluation and Monitoring

This plan has been developed with a degree of flexibility, allowing nimble responses to emerging conditions, challenges, and opportunities. To help ensure the plan stays fresh and useful, periodic reviews and amendments may be required. This will ensure plan goals, objectives, and recommendations reflect changing community needs, expectations, and financial realities.

Redevelopment Strategies

How to Attract Developers?

Developers typically look for project locations where the potential for success is fairly certain and risks limited. This means that they are attracted to communities with strong markets where the infrastructure is in place, reasonably priced, quality development sites are available, and the development review process is quick. They also look for opportunities to enter a market right before it “takes off” and capture the heavy demand and associated real estate price or rent increases.

Good developers are usually inundated with requests from municipalities and DDA’s to develop in their community, citing the advantages they can offer. Yet only a small percentage of communities provide the information necessary to interest developers. There is specific information they look for that will minimize the amount of time it takes to make a go- no-go decision. For example, is there a market for the type of development being sought by the community? What is the role of the community within the region (i.e. bedroom community, employment destination, transportation hub, etc.)? Are reasonably priced sites available for development of redevelopment? Is necessary infrastructure in place or will this be needed and add to the cost of the project? How accessible is the development location and how large a market area can they draw from?

These are all vital questions that can be partly answered by the community, making it easier to pique the interest of a developer. Time is money and the less time developers have to commit to looking at a project/community, the more likely they are to dig deeper and hopefully show interest in moving forward. Some of this information might already be available while additional work is needed to gather the remaining data. It is up to the Township, DDA, business leaders, and civic associations to work together to assemble developer information and then actively recruit developers and businesses.

Why Comstock Township?

Since developers look for strong or emerging markets, the township must prove that it fits into this classification and may have just been overlooked. What are the positives with Comstock that have created unmet demand for housing, commercial, office or industrial uses? This is information that must be gathered and uncovered to create the “elevator

speech” for developers: meaning why invest in Comstock as opposed to all the other communities that contact you? Also, what has changed in recent years causing the private sector to overlook the Township as a place to develop? A one-page handout summarizing this key information will be a good start. After that, a separate sheet can be created for each marketing item like housing, retail, office, hospitality, etc.

Understand the Market

Developers may not take the time to fully understand the dynamics of the local market and especially not unmet demand. The township can prepare a fact sheet for different market segments, working with local real estate professionals and companies. To achieve this, the township has recently completed Target Market Analyses for both Commercial/Retail and the Housing sectors.

Developer Matchmaking

Once the above information is collected and organized, invite developers to come in and learn about available sites and why they should consider the township for their next project. It would be best to invite them individually and be concise, enthusiastic, and to the point with what you would like them to consider. Be sure to share success stories from other companies and developments so they can see that others have already tested the market. It is equally important to have as much information available regarding property availability, price, rental rates, recent purchase prices, traffic volumes, etc. This will provide a positive impression regarding the recruitment effort and limit the number of items that need follow-up.

DDA/Township Property Acquisition

Property acquisition will be a necessary part of implementing the development projects contained herein, particularly for site development and redevelopment. By purchasing property in an area identified for new development, the DDA or the township will have an added tool to attract developers and build the desired project. For example, to develop new housing, the DDA or township can acquire several of the vacant lots and can contribute them to the project. This will provide an incentive to lower the cost, and minimize the risk, for the developer. Should the first phase be successful, the developer will more than likely undertake construction of additional units without any form of subsidy. The goal is to use tax increment financing to attract developers by minimizing risk, leverage private investment and eventually eliminate the need for financial assistance.

Gap Funding

Some projects may need financial assistance to kick-start the development. The township may, at its own discretion, commit project-specific future tax increment capture back to private projects for a specified period of time. The goal is to provide funding to close the “gap” that prevents the project from becoming a reality due to financial feasibility. There are many additional incentives that can also be utilized to support “gap” funding.

Business Development/Retention Program

Develop a program to take and keep the pulse of the local business community. Regular touches, or retention visits will begin to engage the business community beyond traditional networking opportunities. Typical discussions during retention visits include business growth plans, marketing, employment and obstacles that can hinder growth. There are many resources available to the business community for finding, hiring and retaining employees, obtaining financial support, learning about import and export programs and government contracting opportunities. Having a strong business retention program can be one of the most successful tools for supporting the local business community. Southwest Michigan First and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation can be a resource to Comstock Charter Township since it brings collaborative partnerships together around development, business growth and support, entrepreneurialism, workforce development, infrastructure and beyond.

Action Plan

For the Township Economic Development Strategy to be an effective document for the next several years, steps must be identified to guide community leaders towards implementation. This chapter summarizes the goals and the recommendations described throughout the plan and serves as a quick reference for the Township Leadership and others to monitor progress or serve as a checklist for implementing the plan.

The following items identify major planning efforts and projects designed to maintain and improve the township. Implementation of these items will have a positive impact on the character and vitality of the community. Many of the implementation recommendations presented herein will require the close cooperation of many bodies.

Capital Improvement Plan

Comstock Township recently prepared and adopted a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) which identifies with public input and prioritizes capital investments to be made throughout the Township over the next 5-6 years. The projects vary from community beautification, to improved recreational opportunities to major infrastructure improvements and property acquisitions.

The CIP has identified 21 investment projects, most with a priority ranking, however some where just identified as important with no implementation date. Projects with high economic impact potential have been included in the action plan matrix for this Economic Development Strategy.

Downtown Development Authority

The Comstock Township DDA will be a primary entity responsible for spearheading investment projects within the core of the community. The DDA was established in March of 2019 to create new growth and investment opportunities in Comstock Center Area.

While creating the Development Plan, the DDA identified a number of implementation projects which can be found in the table below.

Implementation Projects Table

Priority Key:

Short-Term = 1-2 years

Mid-Term = 2-5 years

Long-Term = 5 + year

Action	Priority	Responsibility
Infrastructure		
Identify funding and support and encourage installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure in strategic areas of the Township to create a destination within the region for electric vehicle support	Mid-Term	Township Board, EDA, Community Development, Consumers Energy
Identify areas of the township for expanded water and sewer for new residential and industrial development as needed. Utilize grant funding, COVID recovery funds and other funding sources identified in the Capital Improvements Plan	Ongoing as funding is available	Township Board, Community Development, EDA
Develop a plan to add fiber optic throughout the Township and downtown as needed	Mid-Term	Township Board, Administration, Community Development
Implement Capital Improvements Plan and incorporate projects of high economic importance	Short-Term	Township Board, Planning Commission, Community Development
Create a non-motorized or alternative transportation plan for the Township to identify ways to expand non-motorized or alternative transportation options for businesses and residents	Mid-Term	Township Board, Planning Commission, Community Development

Action	Priority	Responsibility
Connector Bike Path - Provide nonmotorized connections to the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail (KRVT) and the Gull Road walking/bike path and to the south Township limits to connect with the trail system in the City of Portage through and in cooperation with Pavilion Township.	Long-Term	Township Board, Administration, Community Development, Road Commission
Utilize Transportation Economic Development Dollars from the State of Michigan to improve roads around high priority economic development projects	Ongoing	Township Board, Community Development, Road Commission, MDOT
Talent & Housing		
Identify partnerships and make introductions with the private sector and school leadership to identify potential internship and employment opportunities	Ongoing	Schools, Community Development, Administration
Work with the school systems and local, County, and State childcare agencies to identify local childcare providers and create a focus group to assess community childcare needs and gaps and childcare action plan.	Short-Term	Schools, Township Board, Community Development, State of Michigan, Administration
Work with schools systems, local, County, and State childcare agencies to expand childcare options to support greater workforce participation	Mid-Term	Schools, Township Board, Community Development, State of Michigan, Administration
Create a local kiosk at Township Hall and other public facilities to connect local residents to local employment opportunities. Develop a partnership with local employers seeking to post local opportunities	Short-Term	Township Board, Community Development, Administration
Create a workforce housing strategy to target workforce housing development opportunities	Mid-Term	Township Board, Planning Commission, Community Development, Administration
Encourage the school districts and KRESA CTE to work with employers to identify available workforce for employment opportunities as well as talent gaps and needs for future workers	Ongoing	Community Development, Schools, Administration, Township Board
Promote new housing development opportunities on infill sites in the downtown and other prominent corridors of the Township	Mid-Term, Ongoing	DDA, Community Development, Planning Commission, Township Board

Action	Priority	Responsibility
Continue to enforce blight removal and improve the aesthetics of key Township corridors	Ongoing	Township Board, Community Development, DDA, Administration
To better connect the Township leadership with the school districts, convene regular meetings amongst the education institutions and development community to discuss matters such as student retention, land use policy, connectivity and mobility, recreation, etc. Inquire with leadership as to ways the Township can help support an environment of high expectation and achievement for youth in the community. Discuss ways for the Township to promote the quality education choices available to prospective employers and residents.	Ongoing	Schools, Township, Community Development, Administration
Industry Activities		
Create a small business resource center at the Township to identify service providers such as SBA, PTAC, MISBDC, MEDC and others that can assist small business with growth and establishment	Short-Term	Community Development, Southwest Michigan First, Administration
Continue working with developers and property owners to implement the Comstock Center Place Plan	Ongoing	Administration, DDA, Planning Commission, Community Development
Utilize state and locally authorized incentive programs, PA 198 abatements, Tax Increment Finance (DDA, CIA, Brownfield), MEDC Business Development Program and Community Revitalization Program	Ongoing	Administration, Township Board & Developers, Community Development
Develop an incentive implementation policy	Short-Term	Administration, Township Board
Prepare a commercial and industrial target market analysis to identify retail and industrial gaps in the community and to support the economic development marketing efforts	Short-Term	Community Development, Township Board, Administration
Encourage the re-occupancy of vacant retail buildings throughout the Township while upgrading the sites to meet current ordinance standards	Ongoing	Administration, Township Board, Planning Commission, DDA, Community Development






Action	Priority	Responsibility
Develop a business retention strategy to support local businesses within the Township	Ongoing	Administration, Southwest Michigan First, Community Development
Create promotional materials for unique areas of the Township to welcome new residents and businesses to highlight existing businesses and services throughout the Township	Short-Term	Community Development, DDA
Enhance partnerships with the MEDC and Southwest Michigan First to assist with new business attraction opportunities	Ongoing	Community Development
DDA		
Amend DDA Development Plan to allow for “Gap financing” of impactful investment projects through the use of “project-specific” Tax Increment Finance	Short-Term	DDA, Community Development, Township Board
Expand event and special occasion opportunities within the downtown to continue to drive traffic to the Township’s Downtown area	Short-Term	DDA
King Highway Streetscape Improvements - Installation of streetscape improvements along King Highway between Henning and Shirley consistent with Section B-B in the Comstock Center Plan. Elements include pedestrian-scale lighting, street trees, benches, trash receptacles, 6’ sidewalk on the north side of the road, and mast arms at the King Highway and River Street intersection	Long-Term	DDA, Township Board
King Highway Roadway Improvements - Installation of roadway improvements between Shirley and E. Michigan Avenue consistent with Section C-C in the Comstock Center Plan. Elements include roadway-scale lighting, street trees, benches, trash receptacles and 6’ sidewalk on the north side of the road	Long-Term	DDA, Township Board
River Street Streetscape - Installation of streetscape improvements on River Street between King Highway and Comstock Avenue consistent with Section A-A in the Comstock Center Plan. Elements include pedestrian-scale lighting, street trees, benches, trash receptacles, 5’ sidewalk on the east side of the street, and installation street trees along the edge of Merrill Park	Long-Term	DDA, Township Board
Pre-Development Services - These services include Phase 1 and Phase 2 studies, market feasibility assessments, project marketing, and site design as determined by the DDA Board to facilitate redevelopment within the District	Short-Term	DDA, Township Board

Action	Priority	Responsibility
Landscaping - Acquisition of hanging baskets and other landscape planters, including the annual refurbishment and maintenance of plant materials	Mid-Term, Ongoing	DDA
Signage – Design and installation of wayfinding signage throughout the downtown development district	Mid-Term, Ongoing	DDA
King Highway and E Michigan Avenue Intersection - Reconfiguration of the King Highway and Michigan Avenue intersection that calms traffic and serves as a gateway to the business district.	Long-Term	DDA, Township Board
Comstock Center Land Acquisition - Continue setting aside (earmarking) money for future land acquisition in the Comstock Center Area as opportunities arise and as part of implementing the 2014 Strategic Vision, Vision 2025 Master Plan, Comstock Center Place Plan for Redevelopment and Prosperity and the Downtown Development and Tax Increment Financing Plan	Assess opportunities as they arise	DDA, Township Board
Park Improvements - River access improvements to North and South Wenke Parks as determined by and in partnership with the Township Parks and Recreation Commission	Assess opportunities as they arise and when funding is available	DDA, Parks and Recreation Board
Phase 3 - Comstock Center Design Plan Implementation - Phase 3 of implementing the Comstock Center Design Plan for Prosperity and Redevelopment and the Downtown Development and Tax Increment Financing Plan. Similar to phase one, easier-to-accomplish aesthetic projects such as streetlights, benches, flowers, sidewalk improvements, etc., may be undertaken as selected by the Downtown Development Authority Board	Ongoing	DDA, Township Board
Continue working with developers and property owners to implement the Comstock Center Place Plan	Ongoing	Administration, DDA, PC, & Township Board, Community Development

Comstock Center Place Plan for Redevelopment and Prosperity

In 2017, Comstock Township commissioned a Place Study for the design and redevelopment of Comstock Center. This study included action items and identified six sites within the downtown area that could be prime redevelopment sites for new housing and retail in the core of Comstock Township. At the time of commission, the study was intended to meet RRC Best Practice 6 as well as serve as a guide for to-be established DDA for the Township.

Stakeholder Suggested Strategies for Improvement

THEME	Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
 Retail	Code enforcement focused on building maintenance, blight and removal of buildings; if deemed dangerous per code	Establish a Downtown Development Authority as the entity that champions redevelopment of the district	Improve the appearance; lighting, sidewalks, consistent signage.
 Housing	Code enforcement and blight removal program.	Housing improvement, rehabilitation program to maintain existing housing stock and neighborhoods	Improve appearance with sidewalks and lighting
 Appearance	Code enforcement and blight removal program.	Carry forward the "greenhouse" community theme and design public improvements that accommodate flowers and landscaping (requires volunteers and commitment from Township)	Improve the appearance; lighting, sidewalks, consistent signage.
 Branding	Agree upon a name - "River Center" "Comstock River Center" "Comstock Center"	Carry forward the "greenhouse" community theme and design public improvements that accommodate flowers and landscaping	Position the district as a "Trail Town" (land and water access)
 Investment	Code enforcement and blight removal program.	Establish a Downtown Development Authority as the entity that champions redevelopment of the district	Procure funding; grant, loans and possibly local bonding.

This plan should still be used as a primary guide for the redevelopment of Comstock Center as any of the sites identified and planned for within the plan could generate a significant economic boost for the downtown and serve as a model and catalyst for additional economic investment within the DDA Development Area.

Incentives Available to Assist Development

The following programs are a sampling of incentives available to both local communities and developers to assist with redevelopment projects. The Township has an existing policy for both Brownfield projects and PA 198 Industrial Facilities Abatements.

Business Development Program

The MiBDP is an incentive program available from the Michigan Strategic Fund, in cooperation with the MEDC. The program is designed to provide grants, loans or other economic assistance to businesses for highly competitive projects in Michigan that create jobs and/or provide investment. Comstock Township would utilize this program in partnership with Southwest Michigan First and the MEDC through their business retention/attraction strategy. This tool can work great for companies looking to expand or relocate within the township and are adding new and retaining existing jobs.

PA 198 Industrial Facilities Exemption

Industrial property tax abatements provide incentives for eligible businesses to make new investments in Michigan. These abatements encourage Michigan manufacturers to build new plants, expand existing plants, renovate aging plants, or add new machinery and equipment. High technology operations are also available for the abatement. Depending on the scope and type of project, real property taxes can be abated up to 50% for a period not to exceed 12 years for new construction. Further, the 6-mil SET may be abated up to 100% with approval from the MEDC.

In the case of a rehabilitation, the current assessed value of the property prior to improvement is frozen. This results in a 100% exemption from property tax on the value of the improvements. A PA 198 Exemption can be initiated by eligible applicants and require approval from the Township Board and the State of Michigan.

Commercial Rehabilitation Abatement

Encourages the rehabilitation of commercial property by abating the property taxes generated from new investment for a period up to 10 years. Commercial property is qualified facility that includes a building or group of contiguous building of commercial property that is 15 years or older, of which the primary purpose is the operation of a commercial business enterprise or multi-family residential. The CRA freezes the taxable value of the building and exempts the new investment from local taxes.

The CRA requires multiple levels of approval including the creation of the CRA District which is established by the Township Board and approved by the Board and the County. Upon creation and approval of the district, the abatement itself is approved or denied on a project specific application basis.

Community Revitalization Program

The Michigan Community Revitalization Program (MCRP) is an incentive program available from the Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF), in cooperation with the Michigan Economic

Development Corporation (MEDC), designed to promote community revitalization that will accelerate private investment in areas of historical disinvestment; contribute to Michigan's reinvention as a vital, job generating state; foster redevelopment of functionally obsolete or historic properties; reduce blight; and protect the natural resources of this state. The program is designed to provide grants, loans, or other economic assistance for eligible investment projects in Michigan. This program is available to communities with a defined traditional downtown or those communities that have been certified Redevelopment Ready. There is a specific application process and requires approval both by the MEDC as well as a match from the local community.

Brownfield

The Brownfield Program uses tax increment financing (TIF) to reimburse brownfield related costs incurred while redeveloping contaminated, functionally obsolete, blighted or historic properties. It is also responsible for managing the Single Business Tax and Michigan Business Tax Brownfield Credit legacy programs (SBT/MBT Brownfield Credits).

The Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF) with assistance from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), administers the reimbursement of costs using state school taxes (School Operating and State Education Tax) for nonenvironmental eligible activities that support redevelopment, revitalization and reuse of eligible property. The MEDC also manages amendments to SBT/MBT Brownfield Credit projects approved by MSF. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) administers the reimbursement of environmental response costs using state school taxes for environmental activities, and local units of government sometimes use only local taxes to reimburse for eligible activities (i.e., "local-only" plans).

Corridor Improvement Authorities

A Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA) allows the use of tax increment financing to make capital improvements within an established commercial district. It allows communities that already have Downtown Development Authorities (DDAs) to extend similar benefits to aging commercial corridors outside the DDA district or that extend through more than one municipality.

Michigan Transportation Economic Development Fund

The mission of the Transportation Economic Development Fund (TEDF) is to enhance the ability of the state to compete in an international economy, to serve as a catalyst for economic growth of the state, and to improve the quality of life in the state.

The funds are available to state, county, and township road agencies for immediate highway needs relating to a variety of economic development issues. Similar to the Business Development Program identified above, this is a great tool to help communities improve transportation routes supported by large economic development projects. In the case of Comstock Township, the applicant for these funds would be the County Road Commission. Similar to the Business Development Program identified above, this is a great tool to help communities improve transportation routes supported by large economic development

projects. In the case of Comstock Township, the applicant for these funds would be the County Road Commission.

Housing Development Assistance Program

Consider creation of a housing development assistance program (HDAP) in partnership with the local Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (MCL Act 381) and the Land Bank for the State of Michigan.

The purpose and intent of the HDAP is to provide financing assistance to developers who are interested in building new housing (attached or detached formats) within the township for buyers that are within the HUD defined range of 80% to 110% of local Area Median Income. This would translate to a sales price range of \$150,000 - \$225,000.

It is known that in order for a builder to build a new housing structure in this sales price range, that a gap in finance may exist between the final sales cost and the final construction cost. The HDAP program will utilize Tax Increment Finance established by a TIF district to assist with closing the financial gap noted above.

Project Specific Tax Capture in Downtown Development Authorities (DDA) and Corridor Improvement Authorities (CIA)

Recognizing that the cost of mixed-use, traditional development is higher than it is for undeveloped sites, the Township may, at its own discretion, commit project-specific future tax increment capture back to private projects for a specified period of time. The goal is to provide funding to close the “gap” that prevents the project from becoming a reality due to financial feasibility.

For example, if the pro-forma for a project indicates that it cannot generate enough income to cover the cost of construction and a reasonable rate of return for a developer/investor, future tax increment can be committed to that development to make it feasible. It can also be used as a tool to attract companies and businesses to the township to create new employment opportunities within the DDA District.

For the Township to use this option, it will need to amend its existing DDA Development Plan to include “Gap Funding” as an eligible expense and utilization of captured funds from the DDA. This tool could be very useful for “game changer” projects located within the Downtown Development area and could potentially serve as a definitive financial tool for getting major projects across the financial finish line and into the implementation success column.

Public-Private Partnerships

Public-Private Partnerships can exist in a number of different formats but may present one of the best opportunities for redevelopment of both residential and retail spaces within the Township.

This opportunity would allow a municipality or non-profit agency the ability to partner with a for-profit builder to develop new housing, mixed-use or campus options within the community. By partnering, it is possible for the developers/builders to get land at a lower cost, thereby reducing total construction costs.

In theory, the municipality/non-profit could hold the land, reducing holding costs and taxes while the project is under construction. The P3 could also be instrumental with infrastructure development on the property and eventually recuperate initial costs upon final sale or redevelopment of property.



Community Marketing & Branding Overview

A community marketing strategy outlines deliberate steps to promote a community and communicate its economic assets and positive community attributes. It shows how the community intends to take control over its perception and leaves less to chance. Rather than hoping that word gets out, or that somehow the community will be discovered, an economic development marketing strategy identifies steps to highlight opportunity and community assets. Without a strategy, communities would be at a competitive disadvantage because:

- Other municipalities who understand the power of marketing are fine tuning efforts to draw distinction between their community and others. This can further widen the gap in perceptions about desirable communities.
- Positive attention to development opportunities, progress toward economic development goals, or other image-enhancing tactics would be more happenstance than intentional and deliberate.
- The community would continue to be defined by past experiences and inaccurate stereotypes.
- Without an understood position in the wider region, the area struggles to be defined or stand out.

The emphasis of this marketing plan is about rethinking how Comstock Township can use its new economic development and planning strategies to express its identity, uniqueness, and brand values more deliberately. It also draws attention to how Comstock Township and Comstock Center can take steps to manage and develop its brand to add strength. It is also worth noting that these goals are not intended to be met in a few weeks, a month, or even a year. Commitment to the goals and objectives and intentionally communicating the key messages across all community stakeholders is imperative to reap maximum rewards in the Township's development.

Community Background

Comstock Township is located in southwest Michigan in the County of Kalamazoo, approximately halfway between Chicago and Detroit. Comstock Township has a population of 15,231 according to 2020 US Census.

The fertile soil along the Kalamazoo River valley led the Comstock area to become known as the "Bedding Plant Capital of the World," and is home to the largest bedding plant cooperative in the United States. Hundreds of thousands of plants, many varieties of which can be found throughout the county's parks and boulevards, are supplied by Kalamazoo Valley Plant Growers, Pineview Greenhouses, Tuinier Brothers Greenhouses, Wenke Greenhouses, Westrate Greenhouses and others to retail garden centers worldwide.

In fact, the bedding plant nurseries in the township supply plants and flowers to big box stores across the nation like Home Depot, Walmart, and Lowes. Comstock Township is home to companies that manufacture products that support an outdoor lifestyle. InterKal Corporation, a spectator seating manufacturer, made bleachers for the 2021 summer Olympics in Tokyo, Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet is a high-end outdoor grill company that is rated number one in the world, and Landscape Forms fabricates the outdoor furniture in Manhattan's Central Park. Comstock Township is seen by many as an outdoor lifestyle community because of these businesses.

Place Branding

Branding is both an overarching image and an underlying force that should determine the direction of any marketing or communications effort. In its simplest sense, it is “who you are” as a region or organization and what sets you apart from your competitors.

You don't control the position your brand occupies—your “customers” do. That's why it's important to first determine how your target audience (CEOs, investors, site selectors, community members, etc.) perceives your region in order to help determine your brand strengths and areas for improvement.

This research should help to determine your “brand promise” or “value proposition”—an authentic statement of what sets your region apart and what your region uniquely brings to the table for your target audience. This should then inform your branding efforts and, more broadly, all subsequent marketing activities.

It was stated during the SWOT analysis during a steering committee meeting that Comstock Township and Comstock Center could benefit from a more cohesive and consistent branding and marketing effort, and that not much marketing or branding has been done in the past.

Criteria for Power Positioning

1. **Differentiation:** Strong brands stand out from the crowd and are different in ways that are valued and relevant to customers. How important is your point of difference? Will it enable you to lead with experiences that competitors can't easily match? Will you be the only or best choice based on this proposition?
2. **Compelling:** For the brand to be relevant, the positioning must be more than just different. If the difference is not sufficiently persuasive to stimulate or pique customer's interest, it will not stimulate demand. The positioning should feature attributes that will be most effective at hitting customer hot buttons.
3. **Authentic:** A sustainable brand must be true to itself and not attempt to present itself as something it's not. Is the positioning credible, trustworthy, and believable? Can you always deliver on this promise?

4. **Sustainable:** Is this a short-term proposition based on a current trend or fad? Or is this closely associated with the brand essence of the place and how locals see themselves? Will it unify stakeholders? Will it last in tough times? Can it survive more than one electoral or budget cycle? Is it sustainable from an environmental perspective? Is it dependent upon significant future investments? How will it be affected if the investments do not occur promptly? Does it create opportunities for new opportunities and businesses?

The Brand Platform

The Brand Platform provides footing for the brand promise and all future brand actions and experiences. It is the foundation or engine of the brand. The components of the Brand Platform are typically:

1. Brand Vision

The brand vision clarifies the high-level role that the brand will play in assisting the community in achieving its long-term vision and goals. The brand vision should be linked to the community's long-term vision.

As you arrive, whether by foot, bus, bicycle, or car, Comstock Township welcomes you with lush and colorful gateways, planted and maintained locally—an indication of the abundance of valued green spaces and recreation amenities within the community. Throughout the Township, multi-generational neighborhoods are safe, attractive, and connected to community assets via non-motorized pathways. A strong business climate, supported by excellent access to rail, roads, and an educated workforce, thrives with municipal collaboration and opportunities for expansion. Complementary land uses offer a mixed pattern of development that results in a strong jobs and housing balance. A diverse mix of residents have choices about the types of housing available, the means of moving about the community, and where to shop, play, and recreate. This is our vision for Comstock Charter Township. (Comstock Charter Township Vision 2025 Master Plan)

2. Tangible Benefits

What are the credible physical and functional assets and features that are valued by customers? What are the assets that describe what the community has or does best?

- Room to grow
- A lot of potential (especially Comstock Center)
- Strong and diverse labor force
- Good infrastructure
- Kalamazoo River
- Extensive trail system

3. Experience Themes

What are the key experience categories in which the place excels—the industry clusters from an economic development perspective. These experiences represent the value proposition and provide a competitive edge with target audiences.

- Recreation on land and in the water
- Natural wonders (Kalamazoo River, parks, trailways through parks)
- The home of Bell's Brewery
- Home to the largest number of bedding plant growers in the world

4. Emotional Benefits

What are the positive feelings that people receive from the place?

- Safety and freedom
- Neighborly; a very united community
- Homey/cozy/charming/small town feel
- Pride
- Excitement/fun/outdoorsy/adventurous
- Forward-looking

5. Social Benefits

How do we want others to see us? What are our bragging rights?

- Affordable housing/cost of living
- Recreational/sports options (trails, parks and splash park, river)
- Strong and diverse workforce
- Accessible and strategically located between Chicago and Detroit
- Comstock Township is home to the largest bedding plant cooperative in the United States and has become known as the “bedding plant capital of the world.”

6. Personality

The brand personality influences the brand's “look and feel” or “tone and style.” It describes the brand in human terms.

- Appreciative and neighborly
- Socially and economically diverse
- Easy-going
- Intelligent
- Kind/nice/welcoming

- Spiritual
- Respectful
- Proud
- Open-minded
- Happy and fun-loving
- Reasonable
- Authentic/genuine

7. Brand Values

Fundamental principles the constituents live by and believe in. They are the values by which residents want their communities to grow and be shared with others.

- Authenticity
- Affordability
- Accessibility
- Diversity and Strength of Workforce
- Excellent Recreational & Natural Features
- Safety
- Community spirit and support
- Environmental care

8. Brand Credentials

Reasons to believe; they help validate the brand. Brand credentials may include achievements, media acknowledgements, historical facts, endorsements from famous people and experts, or the occurrence of important events.

- Known as the “bedding plant capital of the world,” and is home to the largest bedding plant cooperative in the United States
- Home to Bell’s Brewery



9. Brand Essence

The brand essence is the DNA from which the brand’s narrative can evolve. It is the basic building block or glue that informs and holds together all brand experiences and messages. The brand essence may be summed up by saying “our brand is about being...” For Nashville, TN, it’s “America’s music city,” and for Oshkosh, WI its “Wisconsin’s event city.” These are not taglines, although they can be. They are concise encapsulations of what the brands are about.

For Comstock Township and Comstock Center, the most unique asset that the community encapsulates, which also drives a portion of the local economy, are the bedding plant growers. By leveraging this brand essence in the branding elements, the community would benefit from owning that identity rather than claiming a point of parity that any community can claim.



Internal Branding Audit



Comstock Center Visual Brand and Elements

The Comstock Center Downtown Development Authority (DDA) recently developed a logo, which can be seen on banners within the Comstock Center DDA district, signage, in social media, and on the Township's website. The logo displays a colorful flower blossom as an ode to the long history of bedding plant growers in the community and contains a sweeping curve indicative of the Kalamazoo River that runs through the Township.

Establish a Strong Township Visual Brand

Existing branding elements of the wider Township include the Township seal, which reflects the iconic waterfall, a strong identification and connection point for the community. The positioning statement for the Township is “A Community with Opportunity.”



While the concept of opportunity in the Township is an accurate and tangible brand element, many communities could make the same statement and correctly reflect their community. Community brands should embrace their point(s) of differentiation as opposed to points of parity. To maintain the existing brand elements that still reflect the unique attributes of the Township, we recommend making minor updates to the existing Township logo.

Keeping the iconic waterfall imagery and the same seal format and layout of the Township logo, updating the positioning statement to feature the community's unique attribute, and incorporating a connection to the Comstock Center logo would help the Township stand out and present a unified message.

Adding the distinctive element of the community—an illustrated image of a classic bedding plant flower blossom—and updating the positioning statement to read “Blossoming with Opportunity” or alternatively, “A Community in Bloom” would more accurately reflect the unique assets and existing brand of the community.



Blossoming and blooming metaphorically refer to fulfilling potential, and the community’s notoriety as the bedding plant capital of the world should be featured.

Incorporating the Eras Medium ITC font used in the new Comstock Center DDA logo into the Comstock Township logo positioning statement and adding the layered flower image on either side of the positioning statement would fuse the major branding elements of both the Center/DDA and the Township together.

By sharing these similar elements, the community would benefit from a collaborative and consistent look and feel across both spaces, which is a critical component to successful place branding within communities.



Visual Brand Recommendation: Work with a professional logo designer/graphic designer to modernize the township logo to incorporate the agreed upon positioning statement (either “Blossoming with Opportunity” or “A Community in Bloom”) that also correlates with the DDA logo. If the Township moves forward with the logo

update, additional supporting brand elements could be created in alignment with the updated logo and positioning statement.

For example, an email header for email newsletters that coordinates with the updated logo could be created, as well as other brand application uses through print, online, official township decals, and in merchandise.

Comstock Township and Comstock Center Attributes & Values

Based on the steering committee SWOT analysis, economic landscape analysis, and brand platform process, community attributes/values and supporting key messages can start to materialize and form. The chart below encapsulates the key community attributes and articulates supporting key messages.

Comstock Township Attribute/Value	Supporting Key Message(s)
Affordable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing stock is older and smaller, but affordable for families Lower cost of living than neighboring communities
Accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Halfway between Detroit and Chicago (140 miles each direction) Interstate 94 runs through the Township
Abundance of land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability of land that can accommodate commercial/retail, industrial, and residential
Excellent Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comstock Township maintains water, sewer, good utilities, and zoning that is lucrative for manufactures Public transit is available in some areas of the Township through Metro
Diversity and Strength of Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comstock Township has a young and highly educated workforce, with the number of graduate degrees outpacing the state average by 7% Comstock Township is home to industrial designers, engineers, industrial manufacturers, and related professionals Comstock Township has a high labor participation rate of 67.4%
Excellent Recreational & Natural Features (River, lakes, parks, paths)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many unpaved trails throughout park system, and over 7 miles of paved trails through the Township. Kalamazoo river is the hidden gem of Comstock Township Comstock Township is home to bedding plant growers who supply flowers worldwide

With these key messages as a guide, everything from your social media presence to media interviews by key spokespeople should work to reinforce a singular brand through consistent and clear communication.

Key Target Audiences

Identifying the marketing opportunities starts with first defining the target market segments with differentiated needs. There are many diverse individuals and groups who may be considered “customers” of the community, from residents to the Township Board, community leaders, local businesses, and potential businesses. To ensure adequate focus on moving the community closer to its economic development vision of attracting new businesses, we identified primary audiences and secondary audiences. Primary audiences include location advisors/site selectors/corporate executives, developers, and regional organizations.

Primary Audiences

1. Location Advisors/Site Selectors & Corporate Executives

Location advisors, also known as site selectors, are the executives within an organization or who work on behalf of an organization who are responsible for deciding where to locate next. Other c-level executives (CEOs, COOs, CFOs, etc.) would have significant influence in the decision as well. Case studies on successful business clusters indicate that this group is at the core of the target segment.

2. Developers, Investors, Entrepreneurs

Developers play a highly active role in economic development. Because of the location midway between Chicago and Detroit, suppliers and some logistics companies have chosen to invest here. Since the Township is home to companies who manufacture outdoor lifestyle products and many of the worlds’ providers of bedding plants, related businesses and suppliers of those businesses are attracted to the community. Businesses that support Bell’s Brewery, Michigan’s largest brewery, also locate here. Due to its location “next door” to Kalamazoo and it’s more affordable cost of living, residents are also drawn to the community. Continuing to reach out to industry suppliers related to the Township’s major industries as well as residential developers will aid in maintaining industry growth and attracting new businesses.

3. Regional & Intermediary Organizations and Public-Private Partnerships

Regional and intermediary organizations and public-private partnerships serve as catalysts and neutral meeting grounds to connect universities, the private sector, and the public sector. These organizations are or will be key partners and can provide Comstock Township and Comstock Center access to a network on a much larger scale. Some examples of such organizations include, but are not limited to:

- [Southwest Michigan First \(SWMF\)](#)
- [Michigan Economic Development Corporation MEDC](#)
- [Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\)](#)
- [KRESA \(Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency\)](#)

- [Western Michigan University](#)
- [Irving S. Gilmore Foundation](#)
- [The Kalamazoo Community Foundation](#)
- [MDOT](#)
- [Going PRO in Michigan \(Workforce Development\)](#)
- [Pure Michigan Talent Connect \(Workforce Development\)](#)

Secondary Audiences

- Existing businesses
- Current residents
- Prospective residents
- Visitors
- Local and state-wide media outlets



Key Attributes & Key Messages

Comstock Township and Comstock Center's key attributes are the values that make Comstock unique and that attract key target markets to the community. Those attributes help determine the key messages that communicate to the consumers and target audiences. Those messages are also an important tool in keeping your organization and its stakeholders unified in their communications. These should consist of the most distinctive and important claims that you can make about your region and should take into account your value proposition and key brand elements. With these key messages as a guide, everything from your social media presence to media interviews by key spokespeople should work to reinforce a singular brand through consistent and clear communication.

Marketing Tools and Messages Chart

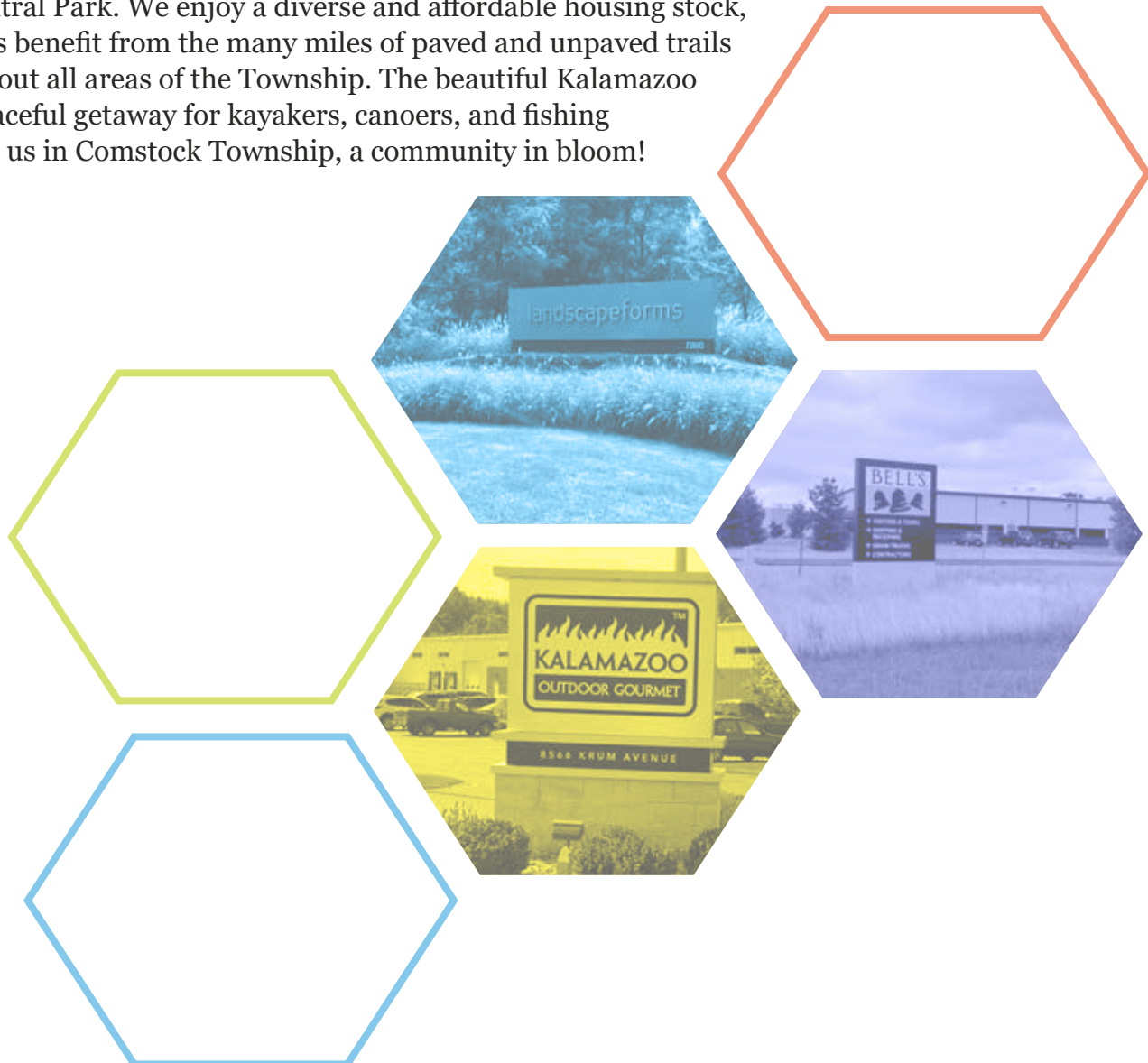
Segment	Primary Interests	Outreach Tools	Suggested Key Messages to Segment
Location Advisors/ Site Selectors & Corporate Executives (with site influence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available and skilled workforce • Accessibility and location • Reducing risk, credible and trustworthy sources • Incentives and taxes • Predictable permitting process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings at industry events • Website/social media • Partnerships and industry networks • Industry press • Briefings/tours • Social media • Info sheets/brochures 	<p>"Comstock Township is Blossoming with Opportunity"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are accessible: Comstock Township is located midway between Detroit and Chicago-- 140 miles • We have a diverse and strong workforce: Many highly educated professionals call Comstock Township home. Comstock residents are out pacing the State for the number of both bachelor's degree attainment (22% compared to 18%) and graduate degree attainment (18% compared to 11%). The core age group is 15-21 years—a healthy population representing your future workforce. The labor participation rate is high at 67.4% • We offer an abundance of land and excellent infrastructure • We are affordable: housing stock is accessible to a diverse population and Comstock has a lower cost of living than neighboring areas • We have excellent recreational opportunities: Many miles of unpaved trails, over 7 miles of paved trails, and the Kalamazoo River run through the community

<p>Developers, Investors, Entrepreneurs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return on investment • Reducing risk • Quality/style of development • Quick tenant placement • Predictable permitting process • Zoning and land use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in community building vision • Trade media and press • Briefings/tours • Website/social media • Area business reports • Social media • Info sheets/brochures (i.e. Business development packets) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are accessible: Comstock Township is located midway between Detroit and Chicago • We have a diverse and strong workforce: Many highly educated professionals call Comstock Township home. Comstock residents are out pacing the State for the number of both bachelor's degree attainment (21.8% compared to 18%) and graduate degree attainment (17.5% compared to 11%). The core age group is 15-21 years—a healthy population representing your future workforce. The labor participation rate is high at 67.4% • We offer an abundance of land and excellent infrastructure • We are affordable: housing stock is accessible to a diverse population and Comstock has a lower cost of living than neighboring areas • We have excellent recreational opportunities: Many miles of bike trails and the Kalamazoo River run through the community • We are Redevelopment Ready Community Certified • You can play an integral role in making the Township a great place to live and do business
<p>Regional & Intermediary Organizations, Public-Private Partnerships (Southwest Michigan First, Schools, Foundations, Colleges and Universities, etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting and expanding economic development in the region • Growing the organization's reputation and credibility • Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Websites • Social media • Brochures/Fact sheets • Briefings, meetings • Engagement in community building vision • Community educational forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Together we can make Comstock Township a great place to do business and development projects • Forward-thinking leadership is open to change • We are leveraging your investment • Comstock Township and Comstock Center are accessible, affordable, have an abundance of land, excellent infrastructure, a diverse and strong workforce, and offer variety of recreational opportunities.

Pulling it Together: Comstock Township's Story

Comstock Township is blossoming with opportunity. The accessibility of the community along Interstate 94, a strategic location midway between Detroit and Chicago in Kalamazoo County, is a major asset to the economy. The strength of our workforce is demonstrated by the rate of residents with graduate degrees, which outpaces the state by 7%, and offers an extremely attractive talent pool to prospective employers. The Township's high population of youth aged 15 to 21 represents a bright future workforce for the community.

Known as the "bedding plant capital of the world," Comstock Township is home to many bedding plant growers who supply much of the world's beautiful flower bed blossoms. We offer an abundance of land and excellent infrastructure to support a healthy business community, including one Bell's Brewery, Michigan's largest brewery. Other local manufacturers produce products that support an outdoor lifestyle, like Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet is a high-end outdoor grill company that is rated number one in the world, and Landscape Forms, which fabricates the outdoor furniture in Manhattan's Central Park. We enjoy a diverse and affordable housing stock, and our residents benefit from the many miles of paved and unpaved trails that run throughout all areas of the Township. The beautiful Kalamazoo River offers a peaceful getaway for kayakers, canoers, and fishing enthusiasts. Join us in Comstock Township, a community in bloom!



Marketing Responsibilities

The strategies outlined in the marketing plan will be successful if the Township is able to have shared responsibility between staff and appointed and elected officials in collaboration with its area partners. Success of the strategies outlined in the marketing plan will rely on a combined, cohesive effort of the Township, regional Economic Development Organization (Southwest Michigan First), and other local affiliate organizations and foundations. The goals of the plan will only be met through a shared commitment to implement the strategies delivered to the target marketing audiences.

Ensuring Marketing Success

It's important to hold all marketing efforts and materials to a standard and evaluate them on the following criteria:

- **Coherence:** The message is clear and sensible from beginning to end.
- **Relevance:** The materials contain the information that businesses care about.
- **Consistency:** The message and information is the same from beginning to end, and the graphics and illustrations reinforce the message.
- **Reliability:** The materials are recognized sources of info that are verifiable.
- **Credibility:** An accurate account of the subject or information presented.
- **Organization:** The materials permit users to access the information they want.
- **Originality:** The materials differentiate the community from the competition and are different from the competition.
- **Accessibility:** How people access your materials—contact info is clear and available, easy to navigate, access and download.

Reaching Our Goals

Goals are general guidelines that explain what you want to achieve in your community. They are usually long-term and represent global visions such as “protect public health and safety.” Objectives define strategies or implementation steps to attain the identified goals. Unlike goals, objectives are specific, measurable, and have a defined completion date. They are more specific and outline the “who, what, when, where, and how” of reaching the goals. During the SWOT analysis, the following economic development marketing goals were identified:

- 1. Grow economic viability of the Township**
- 2. Create and retain jobs in the Township**
- 3. Attract residents, visitors, investors**

The economic development marketing efforts that would support the achievement of the goals listed above are outlined in this document.

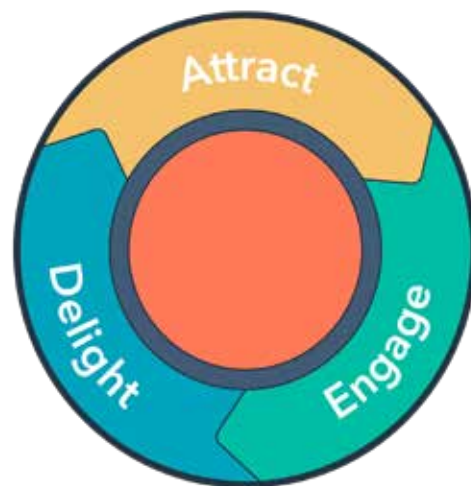
Achieving Objectives

Inbound Marketing Tactics

According to Hubspot, a respected marketing industry source, inbound marketing is a strategy that utilizes many forms of pull marketing—content marketing, blogs, events, search engine optimization (SEO), social media, and more—to create brand awareness and attract new business.

Inbound marketing is a strategy where you create content or social media tactics that spread brand awareness so people learn about you, might go to your website for information, and then show interest in the community. Inbound strategies allow you to engage an audience of people that you can more easily qualify as a prospect or lead.

Outbound marketing is a traditional method of marketing seeking to push messaging out to potential customers. Outbound marketing includes activities such as trade shows, seminars, and cold calling.



Attract Tools

- Ads
- Video
- Blogging
- Social media
- Content strategy

Engage Tools

- Lead flows
- Email marketing
- Lead management
- Conversational bots
- Marketing automation

Delight Tools

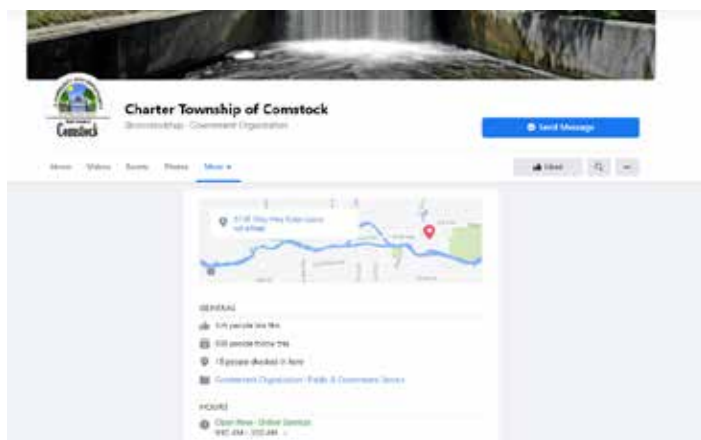
- Smart content
- Email marketing
- Conversations inbox
- Attribution reporting
- Marketing automation

Website Audit

The Township's official website (<https://comstockmi.gov>) meets most of the RRC website best practice criteria. The proper official documents are available for download, navigation is easy, search is available, the appealing imagery and format of the homepage meets the standards of a well-designed website, and there is a link to BS&A Online where tax payment can be received.

Recommendations for website improvement include building an economic development page and working with the appropriate township staff member responsible for the website to ensure the website follows ADA compliance requirements. More information about the economic development page can be found in the "Website Recommendations" section of this strategy. A free online tool for ADA compliance testing for the website can be found at www.accessibilitychecker.org. The tool also provides a report on the webpage elements that need particular attention.

Social Media Audit



At the time of this writing, Comstock Township and Center primarily use Facebook as a way to communicate on social media. Official twitter accounts, LinkedIn accounts, and Instagram accounts could not be located.

The official Facebook account maintained by the Township can be located at <https://www.facebook.com/comstocktwp>. The administrators post important communications and images of events for residents on a regular frequency. The Facebook account has 660 followers at the time of this writing.



The [Comstock parks and recreation group](#) maintains a Facebook page as well with relevant posts and images for the community and has 550 followers at the time of this writing.

Marketing Strategy 1: Improve Online Presence

Township Website



It is recommended that the Township add economic development key messages and related images to the Comstock Township website. For instance, Flint Township (shown here) maintains a specific page about economic development outlining their key messages. The addition of this page would help get the message to the business and investment community that Comstock Township is a great place to live, work, and play.

Website recommendations:

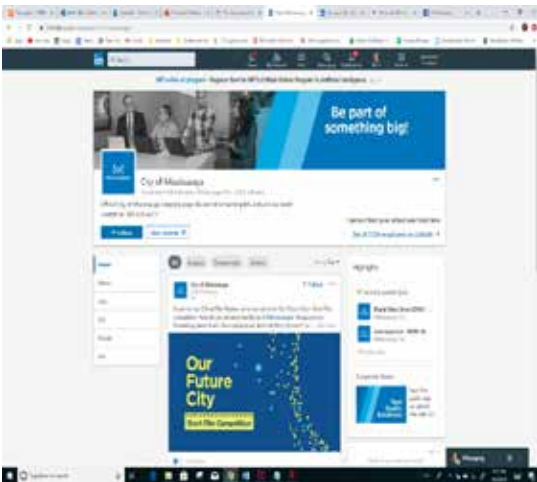
- Build out an economic development page with the key messages, key data about the location, population, largest employers, average household income, education, and available sites in text, infographic and graphic format similar to these pages: <https://www.choosedeerfield.com/government/economic-development/community-profile/>, <https://www.choosedeerfield.com/government/economic-development/economic-development/>, <https://www.miamiTownship.com/127/Economic-Development>
- Comstock Center: Add a description of Comstock Center, the services offered (parks, community center, library, etc.), the opportunities that exist for businesses in that space, and more images of the area on the existing DDA page (<https://comstockmi.gov/community-development/>)
- Priority Sites: Site specs, images, available incentives, other real estate data
- Developments: Planned, existing, and redevelopment

Social Media Recommendations

LinkedIn

Consider creating a Comstock Township account on LinkedIn for economic development purposes and outreach to site selectors and developers. Include information in the “About” copy to include economic development key messages. This will give the Township an opportunity to engage with target audience members in a professional environment, target key prospects utilizing LinkedIn’s professional data, and nurture professionals by delivering insightful, relevant, and educational content in a native newsfeed format. Posting both created and curated content will enable the community to interact with target audience members and will extend your reach when content is shared.

Sponsored Ads: LinkedIn rates highest for B2B social media and buying sponsored ads on the platform can be extremely targeted and effective. However, the recommendation is to make sure the campaign, landing page and/or content that is being promoted is extremely tight and well thought out due to the fact that the pay per click rate averages \$15-\$25.



More information: <https://business.linkedin.com/marketing-solutions/success/brand-awareness>

Local, regional, state, and national level economic development organizations are successfully utilizing LinkedIn for marketing and lead generation initiatives. Shown here are examples of the City of Mississauga, Canada, and the City of Largo, Florida’s LinkedIn pages.

Comstock Center DDA on Instagram

Instagram is a good channel when it comes to reaching a younger audience and using images to create awareness and promotion. It is recommended that Comstock Center consider setting up an Instagram page on behalf of the community to reach younger residents and potential residents, as well as a younger portion of the population within the economic development target audience. Comstock Center's commitment to park, garden, and trail beautification translates well in images, which is Instagram's main method of communication. Building development and available property images could be posted to promote economic vitality.

Grow followers by first following them—reach out and follow residents, businesses, schools, and others that live, work, and play in and around Comstock.

Twitter

There are some good examples of cities that are aiming for increased communication and transparency and they do a good job using twitter to reach their audiences. Setting up a Twitter account and using a tool like Hootsuite to enable staff to generate posts efficiently and enable them on various accounts will streamline staff time and will enable a wide reach. Access this link for more information about case studies on cities using Twitter: <https://www.clearpointstrategy.com/cities-using-twitter-foster-transparency/>

You Tube

As video content is created, it is highly recommended to create a YouTube channel to reach a wide audience. Not only are target audiences on YouTube, but it is also the internet's second largest search engine. YouTube can help improve SEO and overall brand presence. YouTube allows people to present unique content that's easy for viewers to consume and share. You can upload your logo to communicate the Township's brand. Here is more information and a step-by-step guide: <https://www.hubspot.com/youtube-marketing>

Social Media Content Planning

The best way to get organized, efficient, and effective on social media is to build an editorial calendar for social media posting. A simple spreadsheet can be used to organize the content pieces, links, dates, and statistics. This tool could also help guide and plan content with the wider team as events and business openings happen and will provide a cohesive voice in your online communications channels.

Metrics to measure success for online presence and social media:

Website:

- Use Google Analytics on the website to track website traffic, page views, average time spent on website, referral links from partner sites; leads generated.

Social Media:

- Track follower growth on social media channels
- Likes and reactions for your posts
- Monitor mentions
 - On Facebook, you'll get notifications whenever someone tags your page name in their post
- Determine reach
 - On Facebook, go to your Insights tab and click the reach option in the navigation panel on the left. The top graph you see displays your post reach, which is basically the number of people who saw your post. Scroll to the bottom of the page to find your total reach. This is the number of people who saw any activity from your page as a result of follower interactions, ads, mentions, check-ins, and so on.
- Review replies and comments for your posts
 - Replies and comments on your posts can help you gauge how interesting or engaging your topics are. As with reactions, they're direct response metrics that help you weed out uninteresting content from your publishing schedule. Because replies are typed out, you can also view individual posts that performed well to measure follower/fan sentiment. To find this information on Facebook, go to your Insights and click the Posts option in the left navigation. Scroll down to All Posts Published and click the right drop-down arrow to view Reactions, Comments, and Shares.
- Find out and track what content is being shared

Marketing Strategy 2: Improve Communications

Communication materials to provide to the target audiences are useful both online as PDFs and in print for face-to-face opportunities. It provides an opportunity for branding, building awareness, and promotion.

Email newsletters

Email newsletter sent to target audiences on a consistent basis would be a useful tool to update targets on the latest events in the Township, and specific happenings in Comstock Center, including re/development projects.

Within the email, a dedicated space for Comstock Center could be provided to communicate specific projects, programs and events going on in the town's center

The objective of an email newsletter is to help tell the story of the community—it is a form of branding and promotion and must be done with the target audience in mind. Including a subscription opt-in box on the Township website would allow people to sign up, and encouraging people to share their sign-up on social media once they've submitted would help increase the number of newsletter opt-ins.

Site selectors, investors and developers receive a lot of email, so to stand out, the community must consider design and content. John Longshore, Principal and VP of Innovation with Global Location Strategies, states the following in his blog:

Design matters. The message matters. Send me an email newsletter with bad graphics and an unclear message and I will delete it faster than Usain Bolt. Don't come to our office and give us a half-hearted, 'I only am here because it's my job,' type of pitch. Make sure that your content is compelling and draws me in. Be innovative in the medium that you use. Give me a story that I will remember! Believe in the community you represent!

Using an online tool like [ConstantContact](#), [SendInBlue](#) or [MailChimp](#) simplify the process through templates and some services offer free plans to limited numbers of contacts (SendInBlue and MailChimp).

Some recommendations when building and deploying an email newsletter:

- Make sure to have an unsubscribe process in place with clear links to an unsubscribe page at the bottom of the email newsletter to be in compliance with the [CAN-SPAM Act](#) of 2003.
- Decide upon a frequency (monthly, quarterly, etc.) and stick to it. If a monthly email newsletter is the goal, send it to the audience the same week every month, i.e. the third Thursday of each month.

- When targeting recipients and considering content, keep in mind that area business and their suppliers would be interested in receiving the email newsletter. For example, when building the list, target suppliers of area companies since they have a vested interest in what their partners and customers are doing.
- Use social media accounts and post images, stories, and links from the email newsletters to drive traffic to online content and increase email newsletter registration.

Keeping the target audience abreast of updates and progress through a well-designed email newsletter that is disseminated on a set frequency (monthly, quarterly, etc.) will keep the Township front of mind.

Printed and Online Brochures

By using key, relevant data about the community, we recommend the township develop, print, and post brochures that describe the community and highlight key messages including useful demographic information. These brochures would be a leave-behind tool for target audience members. Brochures also provide an opportunity to present the Township brand and communicate the key messages outlined above. A PDF of the brochure should be sent as a follow up email attachment after conversations with investors, site selectors, and other target audiences.

Another communications tool that would help the community stand out is a **Business Information Packet** that can be developed to give potential investors and outside business owners straightforward and useful information about the community and its economy. It can include charts on economic aspects such as market size, proximity to talent, major employers, affordability, labor market, quality of life using information about the school systems, river and trail systems, incentives, as well as brief information and pictures about available sites throughout the area. The packet could contain a base bi-fold brochure and could use inserts to appeal to the key targets and industries that exist in the Township.

Communications Metrics to Measure Success:

Email newsletter metrics: Registrations, list size, list growth rate over time, opens, views, click throughs (on articles and other links), shares.

Brochure metrics: Determine how quickly brochures are distributed by subtracting the number of available brochures at a certain point in time subtracted from the quantity printed.



Marketing Strategy 3: Build Media Relations using the PESO model

What Is an Integrated PESO Model?

The PESO Model takes the four media types—paid, earned, shared, and owned—and merges them together.

Paid Media: Paid media for a communications program is social media advertising, sponsored content, and email marketing.

Earned Media: Earned media is either publicity or media relations. The media outlets include local and state-wide news media, radio, and publications, both online and in print. It's getting the community's name in print, having a newspaper or media outlet write about you, appearing on the news, radio, or podcasts.

Shared Media: Shared media is also known as social media. It includes not just social networking, but partnerships, distribution, and promotion.

Owned Media. Owned media is otherwise known as content. It is something owned, and it lives on the website. You control the messaging and tell the story in a way you want it told.

By integrating paid, earned, shared, and owned media, the authority of the community can be further established and its reach more concentrated. When you integrate the four media types, you may find you also have influencer engagement and partnerships that extend beyond your internal walls.

Where to start?

Owned Media

The easiest place to start is owned media because the organization has control over the messaging. Content generation plays a role in the effectiveness of marketing/branding your community, and public relations relies heavily on content. As we think about the primary audiences for Comstock Township's economic development marketing, we need to think about the type of information that would both interest them and form a concept of who and what Comstock Township is all about.

Start with businesses in the community like the flower growers, Bell's Brewery, health care providers, and restaurant owners. Ask about the reasons they chose Comstock Township, what challenges they face, what successes they experience, how they find employees, and any long-term plans they may have. Compiling those stories will develop and generate content to provide to media. Learn the story of the businesses that are

experiencing success in the community and share them with media outlets through press releases and story outlines. Proactively provide branding elements and images to the media to accompany stories and releases.

Using a social media hashtag (#BlossomingWithOpportunity) when you post or share these stories would enable residents, business owners and visitors to easily find related content online and would encourage them to use the hashtag. Encouraging the current business owners to use the hashtag when sharing on their social media channels will catalyze the ripple effect and continue to help build awareness of the Township for the target audiences.

Public Relations Campaigns and Content Ideas:

- Completion and updates of plans related to economic development
- Local business spotlight (interview and photo of the business owner)
- “Entrepreneur Corner” or “Entrepreneur of the Month” (interview and photo of a business owner who started their first business)
- Community history lesson (interview and photo of a long-term resident who is knowledgeable about the history of Comstock Township)
- “Commercial real estate site of the week” (vacant land or building with photo and the story behind it/info about it)
- Non-profit spotlight (interview, background story, and photo)
- Pre-event preparation with photos
- Post-event summaries with photos
- Sharing stories of events and other news from neighboring communities
- Photo contests

To organize the content marketing plan, the team can use an excel spreadsheet listing the data categories of date, type, channel, author, and link to photo; and share it for accountability. The important factors to keep in mind when putting together a content marketing strategy is frequency and consistency. It is recommended to determine a set frequency for the content types, so your followers keep the Township front of mind. Making sure the content can easily be shared and even asking people to share it will expand your reach.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of relevant media outlets including radio:

- Site Selection Magazine: <https://siteselection.com/>
- MLive: <https://www.mlive.com/kalamazoo/>
- WKAR: <https://www.wkar.org/#stream/o>
- WWMT: <https://wwmt.com/news/local>
- Michigan Radio: <https://www.michiganradio.org/>

Once the content is available, you’ll use shared media to distribute it, paid media to amplify it, and earned media to rubber-stamp it.

Shared Media

**Content in this section is sourced from www.spinsucks.com and is adapted for the community.*

Shared media is not one size fits all, but there are some good rules of thumb to start with.

Facebook: While the algorithm at Facebook keeps changing so only those who pay get their content to show up in the news feeds of their followers, you don't want to ignore your page. Post your content there once a day, and then consider sponsored content as part of your paid media campaign. Also consider Facebook Live for videos on location.

Instagram: Keep in mind that, while you can post to both Instagram and Facebook at the same time, it doesn't mean you should. There are lots of things you can do on Instagram that aren't as effective on Facebook, like Collections, Reels, Live, and Stories.

LinkedIn: Post once a day to your personal account, your company page, your showcase page, and to the groups you belong to.

Twitter: On the day your content is published, tweet the link four times (three hours apart). On day two, tweet it twice, and once on day three.

The Others: It's important not to ignore Reddit, Pinterest, TikTok, and some of the others. Test post in those spots just once a day and see what happens. For instance, if you have a nice image on a piece of content and you pin it to a board on Pinterest, it could help drive a good number of new readers.

Paid Media

Paid media may be in the form of paid amplification (such as [Outbrain](#) or [Sprinklr](#)), sponsored content, [native advertising](#), or sponsorships of influential blogs. It also could take the form of sponsored content on Facebook or LinkedIn or sponsored tweets on Twitter. You can start with a budget of as little as \$5 a day. LinkedIn also often offers free advertising coupons to those who use the social network often. While you don't want to spend money to sponsor all your content, it's a good idea to test it with one piece each month.

Earned Media

Now it's time to build relationships with industry bloggers, journalists, and other influencers who may share your content—after they learn who you are and what value you might bring to their readers or followers.

On Twitter, create a list of bloggers and journalists you want to collaborate with. This will make it easy to follow them, share their work, and start conversations with them. An example of a good blog and Twitter account to collaborate with is [@johnlongshore](#) and other similar bloggers.

Create a list of books and podcasts you want to review. Every author and podcaster need reviews and ratings to gain more traction. They may be appreciative of the work you do there and may be willing to do something for you in return.

On LinkedIn, create tags (<https://www.natlawreview.com/article/why-you-should-use-tagging-feature-your-linkedin-posts>) so you can augment your LinkedIn visibility and follower growth. This may lead to new relationships where you can ask them to share your content later.

On [Pocket](#), create a list of bloggers to watch. Then any time they publish new content, share it with your own networks. Eventually, these influencers may share your content, include it in their own content or interview you for a piece they're producing.



Owned Media

Owned media is content that you own. If you want to truly own it—and never lose it—always publish on your site first and then use those outposts for distribution and promotion. Answer questions customers, clients, prospects, loyalists, stakeholders, your family, and even the trolls ask. Build your content so one big piece can be repurposed into several smaller pieces.

What Should be Measured in the PESO Model?

For each media type, there are different metrics to track.

Paid Media: It depends on the tactics you use under this umbrella, but could include the following:

- Social media marketing, such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, or Twitter ads and boosted content
- Landing pages and how many people download your content and go into your email marketing database
- New fans or followers who come from reading your sponsored content
- Leads and conversions.

Earned Media: To measure the effectiveness, consider the following metrics:

- How much Web traffic comes from a story about your organization? See if those news outlets and blogs are sending visitors to your site
- An increase in new audiences
- If you have access to a CRM (customer relationship manager), the number of new email subscribers that resulted from the story
- An increase in search rankings for the topic for which the story is about

Shared Media: You have to track the number of fans and followers because sharp declines—or a trend of decreasing followers—will tell you something is wrong. Try these options:

- Are you using brand ambassadors to help spread the word about the area and local events? If you are, track their effectiveness.



- Assign points to things such as likes, retweets, shares, and comments. This gives you numerical data on whether something works.
- Use [unique URLs](#), coupons, discount codes, or even telephone numbers only in your social media efforts. This will tell you whether you're getting results from these efforts.

Owned Media: The beauty of owned media is it completely integrates with the other three media types.

Think about the following:

- Pay attention to unique visitors, time spent on the site, and bounce rate. Those things, such as an increase (or decrease) in social media followers, can indicate success or failure.
- If you have an organized owned media program, you're likely distributing through email marketing. When you integrate your content with this paid media tactic, you can track things such as downloads and shares. Do people download the content? Do they read or watch or listen to it once it's been downloaded? Is it so good they can't help but share it with their communities?
- Are people sharing your content? This is important to know because it provides proof to a new reader that you know what you're doing.
- Track the effectiveness of a community (people who comment on and share your content) by whether they're referring business to you.



Marketing Strategy 4: Host Local Events in Comstock Center

Local events are an excellent way to build community pride, showcase the area, and invite visitors in to experience the welcoming and warmth of the residents. Events hosted by the DDA in Comstock Center would provide an opportunity for additional exposure to the area by all members of the primary and secondary target audiences.

When the Township hosts or supports live events, there is opportunity to not only promote the community from an economic enhancement perspective, but to also show support of the local business community. Live, in-person events offer an opportunity to build awareness of the services available through the community to support businesses, and present possible networking opportunities with potential target audiences. Additional benefits also include reinforcement of the Township's brand, improving face-to-face communications, and creating opportunities to make new connections with residents and businesses. The Township can capitalize on opportunities to distribute marketing materials during community events.

When considering introducing new events, goal setting, and benchmarking is critical to ensure that the event accomplishes the initial intent. It will help focus promotional efforts and provide metrics to measure the success of the event.

When considering ideas for new events, consider the area's heritage, the bedding plant industry, its focus on providing recreational opportunities and access to waterways, seasonal opportunities, business-relevant occasions, and family-friendly opportunities. Some local event ideas could include:

“Bells in Blossom”: Similar to Holland's tulip festival, Comstock Township could create a draw by celebrating the local bedding plant industry and combining it with the community's well-known business anchor, Bell's Brewery. It could be a combined beer and blossom festival with beer tasting, live music and tents surrounded by potted flowers and related flower attractions. Sponsor opportunities could also be offered to area businesses, and the DDA could be the headlining event sponsor. This would further instill community pride and gain exposure from outside the community as word spreads about the event.

Host Organized Recreational Events: Continue to host events that leverage the Kalamazoo River and the biking trails throughout the community or support local organizations with an interest in organizing such events where participants can bike and paddle competitively.

Seasonal/Holiday Events: Holidays in May, July, October, November, and December offer opportunities for holiday-related events to bring people together and celebrate the community. Weekend festivals that promote tree-lighting in December, fireworks and parades in July coupled with organized run/walks or other recreational events give community members a way to connect. The community benefits from the ability to draw in visitors, build a more cohesive sense of place, and begin new annual traditions.

Comprehensive Promotional Plan for Special Events

1. What are the event basics?

- Event Name
- Event Purpose
- Event Type (In-person, Virtual, or Hybrid)
- Theme
- Tagline

2. Build an event-specific webpage on the website

The next step is to make sure event information can be found online. The page should contain all the important information about the event and why people should attend. Event partners and/or sponsors should also have exposure on the webpage by name listing or logo.

The event webpage should include:

- Time and Date
- Location
- Cost if any
- Call to Action
- Links to sponsors, vendors
- FAQs
- Rich content, images

3. Create an Event Page on Facebook

Using Facebook to promote the event will help spread the word to the community and will enable the target audiences to see event information. Plus, when they respond that they will attend the event, that information can be shared with their network, leading to additional exposure. Once the event is published and shared, analytics like reach and responses are available.



4. Gaining Event Partners and Sponsors

Partners and event sponsors are a big driver of event participation and success. For one, sponsors and partners can help with the financial burden of the event and can leverage their network to gain additional exposure for promotion. The potential event participation and exposure opportunities for sponsors and partners is a major selling point. Work out clear sponsorship packages that can be conveyed easily, but also be ready to be flexible.

Tips for identifying sponsors and partners:

- Reach out to sponsors from related events
- Narrow down your options to companies and brands who strongly align with the community
- Research what the audience is interested in: Identify which local companies your Facebook followers are liking or recommending with their network

Promotional Tools

Digital

- Direct Email
- Social media: Use hashtags, promote on a set frequency; tag vendors, sponsors, and partners
- Paid Digital Promotion: Boosting posts on social media is an effective way to reach a wider audience online
- SMS text messaging: If a database with phone numbers is accessible, promoting the event via text is a good way to spread the word. More information can be found here: <https://mosaicnetworkx.com/sms-event-promotion/>

Analog

- Direct Mail
- Press releases and/or calls to media and radio
- Event signage: Physical signage using flyers, posters, postcards, yard signs, and banners in high-traffic locations and store windows
- Event ambassadors: Ask active residents to be spread the word via word of mouth and social media. Use printed flyers or postcards as reminders and ask ambassadors to pass them out to local businesses
- Paid Advertising: Paid newspaper ads are effective, and newspapers are willing to promote the event on their social media pages for a nominal fee. For large events with healthy budgets, outdoor advertising (billboards) are also effective.

Benchmarking Events

How do event marketers define success? The metrics for event marketing success encompass financial results, event attendance, lead generation, overall awareness, and post-event analysis, all aligned with the overall business goals.

Event Attendance: Measuring the total attendee draw is a natural gauge for event success. Higher attendee numbers have a trickle-down effect as they can translate into greater event buzz for subsequent future events.

Media Impact: The media metric has several component parts encompassing social media traffic and new followers generated; clicks and website visits; and press coverage, both quantitative and qualitative.

Post-Event Surveys: These surveys can provide an accurate and timely read on the experiences and satisfaction levels of event attendees. The survey can also touch on other helpful areas such as likelihood to purchase from vendors, partners, and sponsors.

Event ROI

Costs: To determine ROI, getting a handle on the costs of hosting an event is important. Examples of direct costs include venue costs, food and beverage, travel, entertainment, and rental equipment. Indirect costs offer a more complete view of the investments to run an event. They include salaries and overhead of the teams involved in staging an event as well as other shared expenses. Events also have an opportunity cost. The community chooses to deploy its resources to an event as opposed to some other activity. These alternative sources of value comprise opportunity costs. To understand this cost, you need to know the benefits the other activities would yield as compared to your events.

Marketing Strategy 5: Redevelopment Ready Site Marketing

To be vibrant and competitive, Michigan communities must be ready for development by planning for new investment and reinvestment, identifying assets and opportunities, and focusing limited resources. A major part of the RRC program focuses on the creation of a predictable and straightforward experience for investors, businesses, and residents working within the community. As part of that effort, this strategy provides Comstock Township with a plan to land new and reinvestment. One of the most direct and implementable actions a community can take is the marketing of the redevelopment ready sites in the township.

In this section, approaches to market redevelopment ready sites in Comstock Township are identified and described.

Dedicated Webpage(s)

A page on the township's website that contains information about the township's visions for the redevelopment sites is an effective way to spread the word about and generate excitement about the redevelopment opportunities. The webpage should include existing relevant information to generate interest and increase reach including the list below.

- Site information including a description, specs, maps, images, incentives, and contact information
- Community assets
- Competitive advantages
- Community demographics
- A link to the development process overview

Property Information Packages

As the community has identified sites for redevelopment, the community should develop property information packages for print and online that contain key information about the sites including financial information, community demographics, images, incentives, and testimonials from related and proximate business owners to appeal to developers. These property information packages can be submitted to MEDC to be included on their RRC site redevelopment webpages.

Business Information Packet/Developer Tool

A valuable tool that would help the community stand out is a Developer Tool or Business Information Packet that can be developed to give potential investors and outside business owners straightforward and useful information about the community and the economy. It can include charts on economic aspects such as market size, proximity to talent, major employers, affordability, labor market, quality of life, trail systems, incentives, as well as brief information and pictures about available sites throughout the area.

Partner with MEDC

Additionally, support from the MEDC's Redevelopment Services Team (RSTeam) will aid in marketing the Township's redevelopment ready sites. Comstock Township's economic and community development team can work with the RSTeam to build the community's redevelopment ready site map page. An example of this is here: <https://www.miplace.org/redevelopment-ready-sites/dearborn/>

It is recommended to be proactive in development efforts by engaging with community stakeholders potentially affected by each re/development. The material should also be duplicated and shared with the community center, schools, and other public places that have access to public audiences. Use social media channels to communicate project status, updates, images; and gauge and respond to public perception and feedback.

As development occurs and as site projects are completed, dedication ceremonies where partners and supporters are invited shall be held to celebrate success. Post-project signage should identify any grant funding, partnership support, financial support, and other incentive programs that assisted in development.

Outbound Marketing Channels

As stated earlier in this document, outbound marketing is a traditional method of marketing seeking to push messaging out to potential customers. Outbound marketing includes activities such as trade shows, seminars, and cold calling, and has a higher financial demand than inbound marketing channels.

Advertising

Paid advertising campaigns are typically based upon timing of an event or related occasion. Advertising in print, online and outdoor should correlate with a specific event or campaign with a clear call to action.

Magazines/Online Media

Targeted media like Site Selection magazine and Business Facilities offers access to site selectors and corporate executives with location influence. According to their website, [Site Selector](#) has a total qualified audience of 48,700. The publication offers advertising options in print, online and in their digital magazine at various cost points.

Running paid advertisements in publications like Site Selection could be a tactic used in partnership with Kalamazoo and/or Southwest Michigan First to draw attention to the wider region based on the high price point for business-to-business publishing. Additionally, it is recommended that advertising pricing should be negotiated below the listed rates on the media kit. These outlets are always seeking good content for their websites and publications, so outreach on a PR basis should also be part of the mix. A [QR code](#) should also be utilized in print media ads driving people to the economic development webpage or website, and offers an opportunity to track viewers originating from the ad. Detailed information about Site Selector's circulation can be found here: <https://siteselection.com/advertising/ss-BPA-Dec-2018.pdf>

Outdoor

Billboard advertising is on the more expensive end of the spectrum, so timing and content should be carefully considered. The call to action should be clear and the economic development website/webpage should be fully tested and airtight prior to running the outdoor campaign. Digital displays on a rotating basis are typically less expensive than the traditional printed billboard and messages can be quickly updated if needed.

Recommended county locations for outdoor advertising:

- Along I-94 Corridor from Chicago to Kalamazoo to Jackson
- Along US 131 north to Grand Rapids
- Along I-69 from Coldwater to Lansing

Metrics to measure success:

Viewership data for outdoor advertising, print, and digital can be provided by the media or advertising companies.

Supporting and Retaining Existing Businesses

Major assets of the Township are its existing businesses, and the marketing plan must include a focus on the retention and expansion of those existing businesses. The key messages that existing businesses must hear are similar to the messages outlined for other target audiences above; as they emphasize the key assets of the community that are of interest to existing businesses and business prospects. Specifically, we should be targeting:

- Businesses with connections to other businesses located in Comstock Township, such as suppliers or buyers
- Home-grown business start-ups and entrepreneurs
- Companies looking for a strategic location as Comstock Township offers

Strategies to support existing businesses

1. **Listening Tour:** It's important to the Township's future success to have a comprehensive understanding of why businesses have selected to locate in the community and why they remain. Opening a line of communication up with existing businesses by starting a listening tour would enable the Township to have a realistic grasp of what business owners really need, what they want and how the Township can help. A listening tour would provide extremely valuable insight that will support successful future planning and implementation efforts.
2. **Signage with branding and campaign elements** at available sites.
3. **Fact sheets, brochures:** the main factors that retailers take into consideration when making a location decision are: number of households, average disposable income, market growth trends, and presence and proximity of other retail businesses.
4. **Outreach/Content strategies:** identify existing retail and commercial companies looking to franchise to initiate engagement strategies and invite them on virtual tours/meetings to present opportunities to corporate decision makers—this is an ongoing strategy that incorporates regular outreach and communication.
5. **Maintaining a business and building database:** the database should include information that is updated on a consistent basis as a tool that would allow the Township to maintain knowledge and information about the existing businesses in the Township. Data points could include: Business name, property address, local contact email, available (on or off market?), business location (basement, floor level), year established, number of employees on payroll who reside in the Township, number of full-time positions, number of part-time positions, business hours, estimated annual sales, rent per month, size (sq ft), owner name, owner contact, and notes.

Fostering Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development

To ensure continued growth and prosperity, Comstock Township must ensure that small businesses are being created, and that new businesses have optimal opportunities for success. This will generate new jobs and additional earned income tax revenues for the Township and can build a business base that is less dependent on a small number of large companies. For entrepreneurs to flourish, a variety of supports and resources are needed. Promoting an entrepreneurial culture should be a primary goal of the economic development team. Entrepreneurs are inherently risk-takers, who marshal their own and others' resources to create products and services and often create new jobs. Many communities and governmental agencies have developed support platforms to assist entrepreneurs with financial and knowledge resources. Comstock Township and its partner organizations should consider the benefits of adopting a strategy of "economic gardening." Economic gardening is a philosophy based upon the growing body of research that indicates that most new jobs are produced by small local companies.

Economic gardening emphasizes entrepreneurship and small business assistance for new development, rather than recruitment. Locally grown businesses are thought to have more emotional investment and loyalty to a community than recruited businesses do. Economic gardening focuses on the assets already in a community and provides assistance to local business developers.

Growing, developing, and supporting local or regionally based entrepreneurs is an important avenue to expand the Township's economic footprint. By incorporating the existing platforms that exist online, in print, and in person, the Township can focus efforts to provide the necessary support to future and existing entrepreneurs.

1. Build a webpage on the website that outlines the steps to starting a small business. Include fact sheets, testimonials of existing business owners, and resource links to partnering organizations.
2. Consider opening a co-working space in the Township that offers start-up support through programming, networking, resources, training, etc. [More information about a similar program in Winston-Salem can be reviewed here.](#)
3. Expand/build partnerships with regional colleges and vocational/tech schools:
4. Sponsor/support career day events and workshops
5. Host student networking functions in partnership with chamber and SWMF
6. Develop an entrepreneurial mentorship program that connects existing long-term business owners with new entrepreneurs (new grads) to drive the new business support network
7. Enable the DDA to provide necessary resources to entrepreneurs and small businesses to help them grow. As an example, the Ferndale DDA has a number of business assistance programs, including "business consultations," in which business development support professionals make onsite interviews with participating business owners to provide consultation services and recommend strategies to increase foot traffic, give tips on developing a business plan, and advise on marketing and branding initiatives.
8. Promote entrepreneurship and small business development programs and resources provided by partner organizations via social media, press releases, email communications, and signage/flyers in community posting locations.

Talent attraction and retention

When compared to other cities of the same or similar size in the state, Comstock Township is in a good position relative to the workforce, with the labor rate at 67.4%. Compared to the state of Michigan rate at 61.6%, and the US participation rate at 61.4%, Comstock Township can say that many within their population are working or are looking and able to work, but that doesn't mean that a talent retention/attraction strategy should be ignored or put on the back burner. The up-and-coming, future talent pool living within and around the community

is a prime population to maintain and/or recruit to Comstock Township. The recommendation to attract and retain talent is multi-dimensional and puts a strong emphasis on regional partnership with educational institutions.

1. Continue to build partnerships within schools, universities, and local businesses to develop and expand internship programs and entrepreneurship support programs.
2. Sponsor and support career day events.
3. Host student networking functions and bring in local businesses in partnership with chamber and SWMF.
4. Request participation in existing programmatic meetings with talent attraction/retention staff at SWMF.
5. Engage a social media campaign.
6. Connect to students and student groups to engage them in conversation via LinkedIn, use the discussion feature to initiate themed topics for discussion groups and content gardening.
7. Consider LinkedIn paid advertising to promote networking and business recruiting events.
8. Highlight and promote events via Facebook and Twitter.
9. Connect job seekers and underemployed with the resources that exist to serve that population.
10. Resources: MichiganWorks!, SWMCA, Pure Michigan Talent Connect, GoingPRO in Michigan, Advance Michigan.
11. Continue to populate the economic development webpages with updated information about the agencies that exist to connect employers to job seekers and vice versa.
12. Assess Employer Needs: To provide opportunities for workers to compete in the changing economy, it is recommended that the team develops a process to assess the workforce needs of Comstock Township's current employers and project the workforce needs of its future employers. Partnerships with SWMF, MEDC, and other agencies mentioned in point number 4 above continue to be fostered or developed to provide a clear picture of the skills and educational needs of current and future employers.
13. Reach out to staffing and employment firms to find out what resources they need to help local talent find opportunities.

Benchmarking Economic Development

When tracking economic development metrics, it is critical to have a set of metrics that are used consistently year over year. A simple excel spreadsheet can be used to track the community's economic development metrics.

Metrics include:

- New investment
- Number and type of new business openings
- Number and size of new business expansions
- New job creation (as result of new investment)
- How many jobs retained by staying in the community rather than going elsewhere
- Business closures
- Jobs lost

The best way to determine most of the information outlined above is to work with the Building Official and ask which entities pulled building permits for construction. This information would indicate the main contact, who can then be asked about the investment, job retention and/or creation, and other data that may be helpful.

At the end of the year, a report of all the above information can be developed for business purposes and leveraged as content on the site and in social media (owned and shared content according to PESO).

Economic Development Marketing Sources

- Comstock Township Official Website: <https://comstockmi.gov/>
- Comstock Charter Township Vision 2025 Master Plan: <https://www.comstockmi.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/forviewingonlineandonacomputer-masterplanspreads08-03-16.pdf>
- Comstock Township Capital Improvement Plan
- Charter Township of Comstock / Comstock Center Place Plan for Redevelopment and Prosperity: https://www.comstockmi.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/comstock_center_place_plan_redeveloment_and_prospertity-report_10-12-18_final.pdf
- Comstock Township Parks & Recreation Plan 2020-2024: <https://comstockmi.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FINAL-5year-Strategic-Plan-2020-2024.pdf>

APPENDICES



Comstock Center Brand Usage Guidelines

Logo Usage Guidelines

Size The intended size ratio is 5.5:2. It is recommended that these proportions be constrained for all applications of the logo.



Colors It is recommended that colors used in any publication or complimentary material use the following colors.



#FFFFFF
C: 0% M: 0%
Y: 0% K: 0%



#F7EE23
C: 7% M: 0%
Y: 93% K: 0%



#000000
C: 75% M: 68%
Y: 67% K: 90%



#AB4C9C
C: 35% M: 84%
Y: 0% K: 0%



#23A7DF
C: 71% M: 17%
Y: 0% K: 0%



#B2D238
C: 35% M: 0%
Y: 98% K: 0%



#273C91
C: 100% M: 91%
Y: 7% K: 0%



#F15B29
C: 0% M: 80%
Y: 94% K: 0%

Typeface The logo is created with **Eras Medium ITC** which is a sanserif, modern style font. It is recommended the user compliment the typeface with a serif style such as:

Bookman Old Style Century
Cambria Georgia

Once a font is chosen, it should be used in all communications, including promotional and informational materials, generated by Comstock Downtown Development Authority.

Community Assets and Attributes

The images below are a sample of the many assets that Comstock Township offers.



Paved Trail System



Community Center



River Oaks County Park



Comstock Township Offices & Library



Comstock Center trails and river access



Merrill Park



Comstock Center beautification



Comstock Center DDA banners



Flower gardens



Bell's Brewery HQ



Kalamazoo Flower Group



Comstock Commerce Park



Bedding plant manufacturer



Retail Greenhouse



Iconic Waterfall at Cooper Park



Landscape Forms



Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet



TecNiq



Interkal



Greenhouse Example



Township Offices

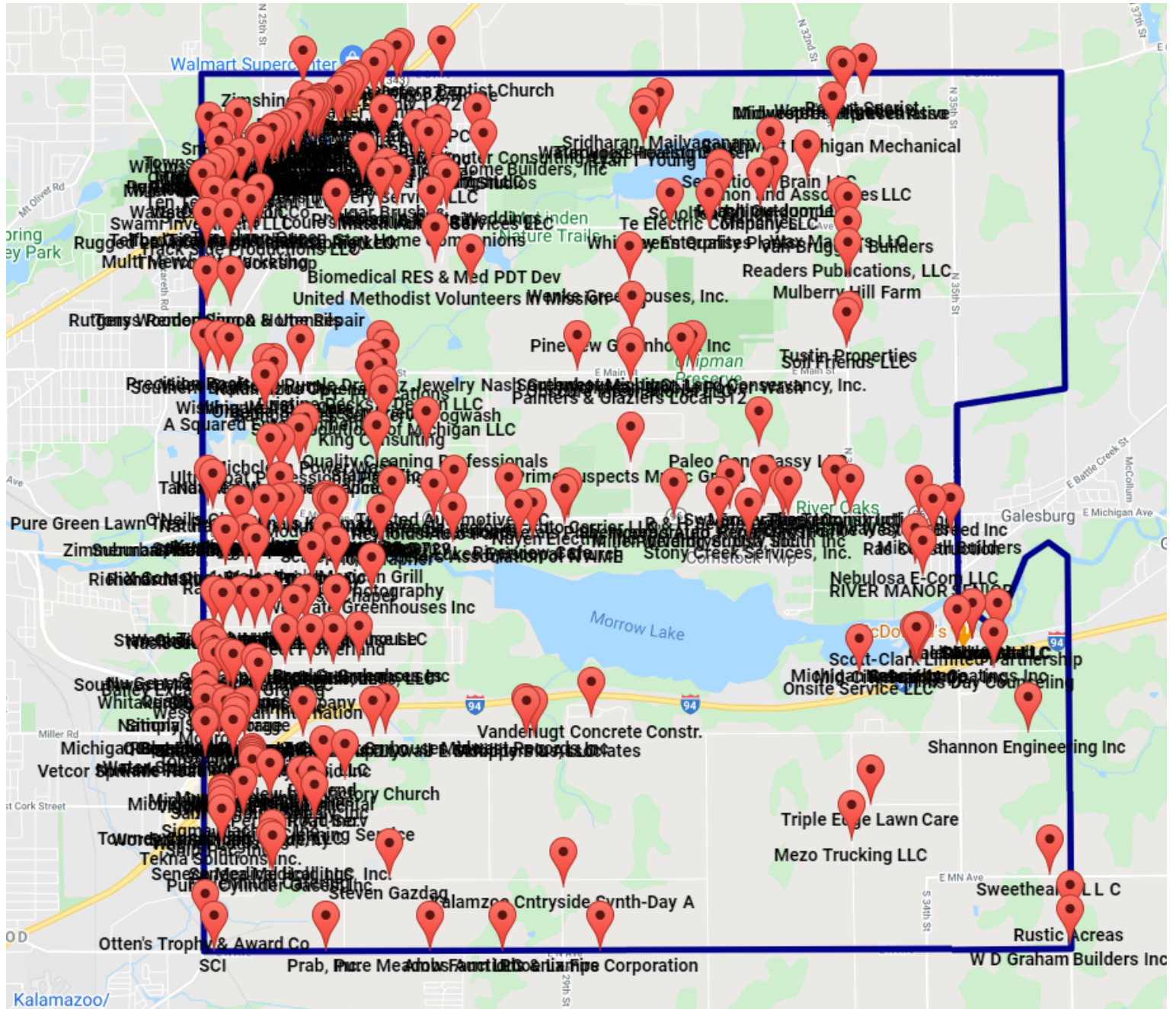
Digital Community Assets:

Updated website with professional images, comprehensive content
Official and active Facebook page

Key Non-Physical Community Assets and Values:

Accessible
Abundance of Land
Affordable
Excellent Infrastructure
Diversity and Strength of Workforce
Excellent Recreational & Natural Features

Businesses in Comstock Township



Economic Development Marketing Implementation Plan

GOALS: Grow economic viability of the Township Create and retain jobs in the Township Attract residents, visitors, investors	Comstock Township/Comstock Center Economic Development Marketing Implementation Plan						
	Branding Strategy: Establish Strong Township Brand	Responsible/Involved Parties	Priority	Timeframe	Benchmarks/Metrics	Budget	Status
	Update Comstock Township logo to reflect new positioning statement and integrate with Comstock DDA logo	Twp staff, DDA, graphic designer	Medium	1-5 years			
	Continue to work toward construction of physical gateway signage at prominent entrances	Twp staff, DDA, funding partners	Medium	1-5 years			
	Integrate brand on Comstock Center wayfinding signs						
	Marketing Strategy 1: Improve Online Presence	Responsible/Involved Parties	Priority	Timeframe	Benchmarks/Metrics	Budget	Status
	Township website updates (see <i>Website Recommendations</i> in marketing plan)	Twp staff	High	Within the year	Google analytics		
	Expand social media channels and content	Twp staff, DDA, marketing professional	Medium	Ongoing (social media)	Social media analytics include follower growth, likes/reactions, reach, shares, mentions		
	Marketing Strategy 2: Improve Communications	Responsible/Involved Parties	Priority	Timeframe	Benchmarks/Metrics	Budget	Status
	Email newsletters with Township events, updates, news, business owner stories	Twp staff, DDA, marketing professional	Medium	1-2 years and ongoing	Registrations, list size, list growth rate over time, opens, views, click throughs (on articles and other links), shares.		
	Printed and Online Brochures highlighting Comstock Twp's key messages and relevant data	Twp staff, DDA, marketing professional	Medium	1-2 years and ongoing	Online: downloads, inquiries Printed: Quantity given minus quantity printed, inquiries		
	Marketing Strategy 3: Build Media Relations	Responsible/Involved Parties	Priority	Timeframe	Benchmarks/Metrics	Budget	Status
	Share stories of local businesses with media and utilize the PESO model (see strategy 3 in marketing plan)	Twp staff, DDA, marketing professional	Medium	1-2 years	New fans or followers Web traffic from a story An increase in new audiences number of new email subscribers that resulted from the story increase in search rankings likes, retweets, shares, and comments unique visitors, time spent on the site, bounce rate		
	Marketing Strategy 4: Host Local Events	Responsible/Involved Parties	Priority	Timeframe	Benchmarks/Metrics	Budget	Status
	Introduce new events and promote them: Bells in Blossom, Organized Recreational Events, Seasonal/Holiday Events (see strategy 4 in marketing plan)	Township staff, DDA, partners/sponsors, marketing professional	Medium	Ongoing	financial results event attendance overall awareness post-event analysis media impact post-event surveys		
	Marketing Strategy 5: Development & Redevelopment Ready Site Marketing	Responsible/Involved Parties	Priority	Timeframe	Benchmarks/Metrics	Budget	Status
	Dedicated Webpage(s) with site information including a description, specs, maps, images, incentives, and contact information, community assets, competitive advantages, community demographics, a link to the development process overview	Twp staff, DDA, Marketing Professional	High	Within the year	Site views, inquiries, downloads		
	Business Information Packet for potential investors with useful information about the economy in the Township and a list of priority sites for development/redevelopment (tie in to website).	Twp staff, DDA, Marketing Professional	Medium	1-2 years	Site inquiries, downloads		
	Development property information packages in print and online that include key information about the sites including financial information, community demographics, images, incentives, and testimonials from related and proximate business	Twp staff, DDA, Marketing Professional	Medium	1-2 years	Site inquiries, downloads		
	Partner with MEDC's RSTeam for support and leveraged exposure to a wide audience	Twp staff, MEDC	Medium	1-2 years	Page statistics for Comstock-specific sites on the MEDC website		
Business Development & Talent Retention	Retaining & Growing Existing Business	Responsible/Involved Parties	Priority	Timeframe	Benchmarks/Metrics	Budget	Status
	Support existing businesses by establishing a listening tour, branded signage at available sites, fact sheets with demographics, outreach, maintain a business and building database	Twp staff, DDA, SWMF support	Medium	Ongoing	Formation of business visitation program, Increase in business-related events and supporting programs, local business growth		
	Foster Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development	Responsible/Involved Parties	Priority	Timeframe	Benchmarks/Metrics	Budget	Status
	Develop and post business start up resources on twp/DDA website	Twp staff, DDA, SWMF support	Medium	1-5 years	Local business growth		
	Establish a co-working space	Twp, DDA, SWMF, partner organizations, foundations	Medium/Low	1-5 years	Inquiries, # of companies partnering with space, local business growth		
	Expand/build partnerships with regional colleges and vocational/tech schools	Twp, DDA, SWMF, KRESA, community schools, universities, vocational schools	Medium	1-5 years	# of partnerships with local edu. Agencies		
	Enable the DDA to provide growth resources to entrepreneurs and small businesses	Twp, DDA, SWMF, partner organizations	Medium	1-5 years	Inquiries, local business growth		
	Promote entrepreneurship and small business development programs and resources provided by partner organizations	Twp, DDA, SWMF, partner organizations	Medium	1-5 years	Inquiries, local business growth		
	Talent attraction and retention	Responsible/Involved Parties	Priority	Timeframe	Benchmarks/Metrics	Budget	Status
	Continue to build partnerships within schools, universities, and local businesses to develop and expand internship programs and entrepreneurship support programs	Twp, DDA, SWMF, KRESA, community school districts, regional colleges/universities, vocational schools	Medium	Ongoing	# of partnerships with local edu. agencies, # of internships and programs		
	Request participation in existing programmatic meetings with talent attraction/retention staff at SWMF	Twp/DDA, SWMF, partner organizations	Medium	1-2 years and ongoing			
	Engage a social media strategy: -Connect to students and student groups to engage them in conversation via LinkedIn, use the discussion feature to initiate themed topics for discussion groups and content gardening -Consider linked in paid advertising to promote networking and business recruiting events -Highlight and promote events via Facebook and Twitter	Twp/DDA, school districts, regional colleges/universities	Medium	1-5 years	Engagements, likes/reactions, reach, shares, mentions		

Connect job seekers and underemployed with the resources that exist to serve that population (Resources: MichiganWorks!, SWMCA, Pure Michigan Talent Connect, GoingPRO in Michigan, Advance Michigan)

