

ADOPTED AUGUST 2024





RESOLUTION ADOPTING PORTAGE FORWARD TOGETHER 2045 MASTER PLAN BY THE PORTAGE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

At a meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Portage, Michigan, held on the 15th day of August 2024, at 7:00 p.m. local time at the Portage City Hall in the City of Portage, Michigan.

PRESENT: Baldwin, Joshi, Longjohn, Fries, Freiman, Corradini, Adams, Copp.

ABSENT: Youngs

The motion to adopt the resolution was offered by Commissioner Fries and supported by Vice Chair Baldwin.

WHEREAS, Act No. 33 of the Public Acts of the State of Michigan for 2008, as amended, mandates that the Planning Commission of a municipality prepare and adopt a Master Plan for the physical development of the municipality and fringe areas;

WHEREAS, the Portage City Planning Commission has prepared such a plan for the territory of the City of Portage; and

WHEREAS, after causing such notice to be given in the manner prescribed by law, and a public hearing having been held on August 15, 2024, in order to give the citizens of the City of Portage and surrounding areas an opportunity to be heard.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Portage Forward Together 2045 Master Plan, including the text together with Future Land Use Map and all other related maps, charts and graphic information, is hereby adopted in accordance with Act 33 of the Public Acts of 2008, as amended.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this action be recorded on the map and plan and descriptive matter by the identifying signature of the Chairman of the City of Portage Planning Commission.


BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that an attached copy of the Plan be certified to Portage City Council.

AYES: Baldwin, Joshi, Longjohn, Fries, Freiman, Corradini, Adams, Copp.

NAYS: None.

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.

This plan is hereby approved and adopted by the City of Portage Planning Commission.



Danny Corradini, Chairman

CERTIFICATION

STATE OF MICHIGAN)
)ss
COUNTY OF KALAMAZOO)

I, the undersigned, the duly qualified and acting City Clerk of the City of Portage, Kalamazoo County, Michigan, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and complete copy of a resolution adopted at a regular meeting of the Planning Commission of said City, held on the 15th day of August 2024, the original of which resolution is on file in my office.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto affixed my official signature this 27th day of August, 2024.



Erica Eklov, City Clerk

Approved as to Form:

Date 7-31-2024



City Attorney

Table of Contents

ABOUT THE PLAN	4
PLANNING CONTEXT	8
COMMUNITY OUTREACH	16
VISION AND GOALS.....	20
LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT.....	26
HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS.....	38
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	46
TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY.....	56
CITY PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT.....	70
LIVABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY	76
SUBAREA	82
IMPLEMENTATION	92



CHAPTER 1

ABOUT THE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2022, the City of Portage started the process of updating the Master Plan. The new Master Plan Update, the Portage Forward Together 2045 Master Plan, will continue to serve as the primary tool to guide future policy and land use decisions to inform future development and investment within the City. This visionary roadmap not only guides the City's growth over the next two decades but also ensures its reputation as a well-round, economically outstanding entity within the region.

WHAT IS A MASTER PLAN?

A Master Plan is a policy document outlining the community's vision for the future. It should be the basis for or the influence of the community's future, quality of life, land use, economic development, zoning, and other regulatory ordinances. It is a foundation for decision-making for stakeholders throughout the city, including elected and appointed officials, city staff, business owners and developers, residents, and community groups, coordinating taxing bodies, and more. The Master Plan is not regulatory but should guide the use and development of City land use regulations. The Master Plan outlines Portage's existing conditions, describes future goals and objectives for development, and includes an action plan on how to achieve the goals and objectives.

STATE MASTER PLAN REQUIREMENTS

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act, enacted by the state of Michigan, requires local governments to develop a Master Plan to guide development within its jurisdiction over a timeframe of 20 years or more. It also requires a local government in Michigan to assess its current master plan every five years to decide if the plan requires updating. This act sets the statutory requirements that all Master Plans in Michigan, including this plan, must meet. The Act requires that a master plan include maps, plats, charts, and other descriptive materials that show recommendations for physical development within the planning jurisdiction. The statute requires that the Master Plan also classify and allocate land for agriculture, residences, commerce, industry, recreation, and other uses. The City of Portage Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2014.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

This Master Plan will serve as a guiding document for establishing a city-wide vision for the next 20 years, as it will inform future development and investment within the City. Further, the Plan's thorough consideration of the community's priorities and vision, existing conditions, and local, regional, and national trends, makes it a vital tool for assisting with capital improvement programming. The plan helps coordinate collective impact across the interdependent strands of community life.

Though the Plan is comprehensive in that it considers all the elements that are essential to Portage achieving its vision, it cannot tackle every issue in sufficient detail to determine every necessary action. Decision-makers will need to adapt as new challenges and opportunities arise. However, following the plan should eliminate blind corners and keep the City moving towards its goals.

The Plan serves the following key functions:

- ▶ **Frames and Communicates a Vision to Guide Portage's Future** – serves as a clear, powerful statement of the City's vision for how it should grow and change.
- ▶ **Provides the Foundation for Evaluating Development Proposals** – clarifies where and how development should occur.
- ▶ **Establishes a Regulatory Framework** – informs zoning and subdivision regulations and other policies to support the City's long-term objectives.
- ▶ **Facilitates Local and Regional Coordination** – provides common ground to coordinate local and regional planning efforts at the city, county, and regional levels.
- ▶ **Informs Prioritization and Budgeting for Capital Improvements** – ensures that City resources are directed toward community priorities to support the City's vision and long-term objectives.
- ▶ **Illuminates Areas of Future Study** – help identify additional studies and strategies to address specific needs.
- ▶ **Informs and Educates** – provides vital information for policy makers, businesses, developers, and the public.



PLANNING PROCESS

The project was completed within an approximate 18-month timeline and consisted of extensive public and stakeholder engagement, subarea investigation, data collection and research, and staff coordination to create a cohesive Master Plan that provides a blueprint for how to respond to current and future needs of the City.

Task 1: Project Kick-Off

The City began the process to develop the Master Plan. To “kick off” the planning process on the right foot, meetings were conducted with key City staff, department heads, and elected officials prior to undertaking community outreach activities. This step included an assessment of existing conditions and the preparation of the Existing Conditions Memorandum.

Task 2: Existing Conditions Inventory and Analysis

The Existing Conditions Memorandum was an interim deliverable collecting and presenting data and information gathered in project kick-off and community and stakeholder engagement under a single memorandum to City staff. This was reviewed by City staff and was presented to the Planning Commission. The report served as the initial foundation for the development of the Master Plan.

Task 3: Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Extensive community engagement was conducted to gather community input about the issues and opportunities within Portage, beginning with the project website launch and continuing throughout the planning process. A total of 806 points of engagement were established, fostering the exchange of ideas and perspectives. These included 228 in-person and 555 online outreach opportunities comprising 9 workshops, 565 surveys, 7 key stakeholder interviews, and multiple Planning Commission meetings.

Task 4: Vision, Goals, and Land Use Framework

This Task established an overall vision to provide focus and direction for the City of Portage. This step included a Community Visioning Workshop to allow residents and stakeholders to provide input. All input received through the Community and Stakeholder Engagement was analyzed to identify shared community aspirations, values, and priorities. These were shaped into a vision—a strong statement, together with a Key Recommendations Memorandum and the Preliminary Land Use Framework.

Task 5: Land Use Development

This task involved planning for future growth and the refinement of the future land use map developed as part of the framework in Task 4, considering existing development trends and potential future developments. The Project Team closely examined and provided more detailed recommendations for Portage's land uses. The development of the Preferred Land Use Plan for Portage was characterized by transparency. The Preferred Land Use Plan was presented and discussed with the Planning Commission. Public open houses, staff coordination, and working groups also informed the Plan, ensuring a truly public process.

Task 6: Plan Elements

This step focused on the preliminary development of the core plan elements that guided the development of implementation strategies. In addition, the Subarea Frameworks are included within the Master Plan for the Crossroads Mall, City Centre areas, and Lake Center District. Community Open House was conducted to provide an opportunity for the Project Team, City staff, Planning Commission, and community members to discuss preliminary policies, plan recommendations, and initial maps and graphics.

Task 7: Master Plan

Based on the previous tasks in the planning process, the draft and final versions of the Master Plan documents were prepared for adoption. The City of Portage Master Plan is unique as this Plan lives online, ensuring it is accessible to all. The Master Plan uses a combination of ArcGIS Hub and ArcGIS Online StoryMap with powerful interactive maps, providing an engaging “digital” way to experience it. The draft Master Plan was reviewed by Planning Commission.

Task 8: Master Plan Adoption

The draft Master Plan ArcGIS Hub project website was distributed for review during the 63-day comment period required by the State of Michigan following a community open house to collect public feedback on the draft. The final Master Plan was adopted by the Planning Commission at a public hearing on August 15, 2024. After Master Plan Adoption, the final PDF version of Master Plan was created for printable document in addition to the interactive on-time access.



CHAPTER 2 PLANNING CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

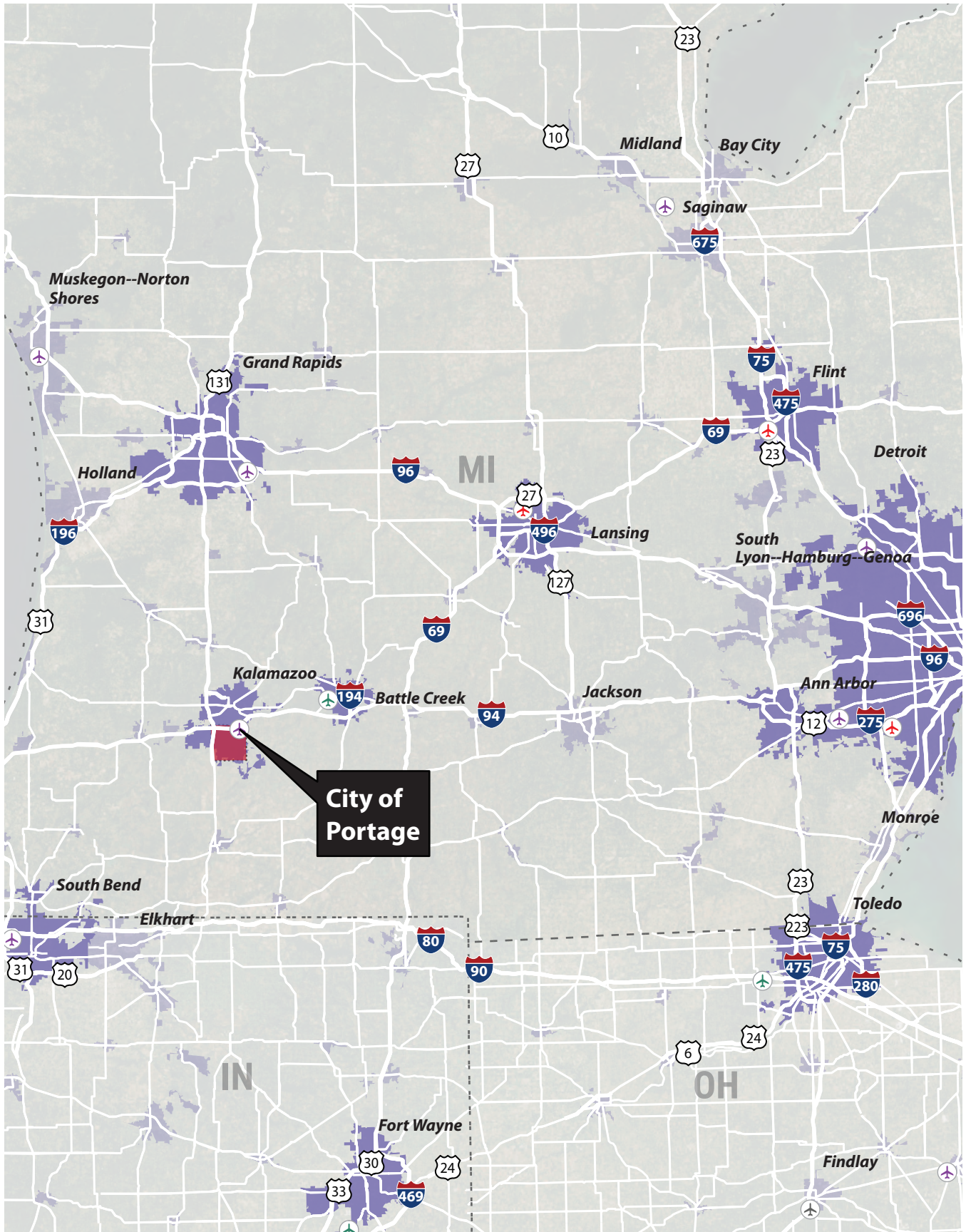
The Planning Context section places Portage in time and space by briefly describing the community's profile and regional location along with a snapshot of its demographic and market conditions. It also describes past planning efforts undertaken by the City prior to this Master Plan. These were reviewed as part of the Existing Conditions Report with suitable recommendations incorporated in this Master Plan Update.

PLANNING AREA

Portage surrounds the Kalamazoo/Battle Creek Airport at its northern border. The airport ties the City to the other nearby metropolitan areas as American Airlines and Delta Airlines fly passengers primarily to Detroit or Chicago. US-131 runs along the western border, while I-94 runs along the northern border. Both provide Portage with access to the regional and national transportation network.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Portage is located within Kalamazoo County in southwestern Michigan, about 45 miles east of Lake Michigan. Bordering Kalamazoo to the south. Portage is also located halfway between Chicago and Detroit, 65 miles north of South Bend, IN. Portage is a part of the Kalamazoo-Portage Metropolitan Statistical Area, which has a population of over 320,000 people. Portage sits in an advantageous location within the region with access to several large cities, Battle Creek 30 miles east, Grand Rapids 50 miles north, and Lansing 75 miles northeast. Portage is known within the region for being home to the largest retail center in Southwest Michigan and having numerous outdoor recreation opportunities that attract people from all over the region to shop.



DEMOGRAPHIC AND MARKET SNAPSHOT

The Demographic Snapshot looks at the current characteristics of the City of Portage's population. U.S. Census data was pulled from a variety of sources, including the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Decennial Survey, On The Map, and CoStar. Observing and analyzing these characteristics allows leaders within Portage to look at trends and patterns within the community. The demographic information collected ensures that the Master Plan addresses existing trends, issues, and opportunities.

Note: Overall population for the City and County is provided by the latest data from the 2021 ACS 5-year Estimates unless otherwise specified.

A detailed analysis of the Demographic and Market Analysis was conducted for Existing Conditions Memorandum and can be accessed here - [LINK](#).

Population

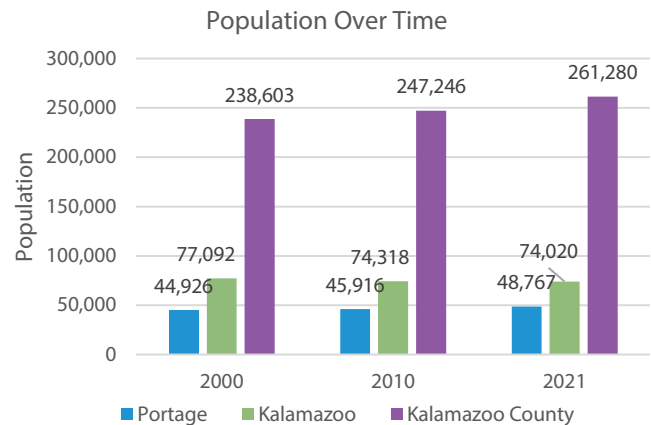
The City of Portage, with the exception of 2020-2021, has experienced steady growth over the last two decades in a region that has remained stable despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The population drop during the pandemic can be attributed to both a drop in immigration and fewer births.

Age

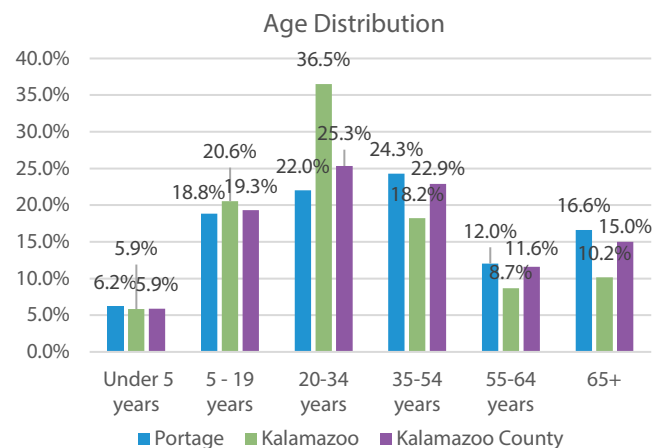
The population of Portage and the Kalamazoo region is aging into the 65-and-over demographic. While growth among those aged 25-34 years largely offset a decline among those aged 35-54, most growth was concentrated among older adults.

Race and Ethnicity

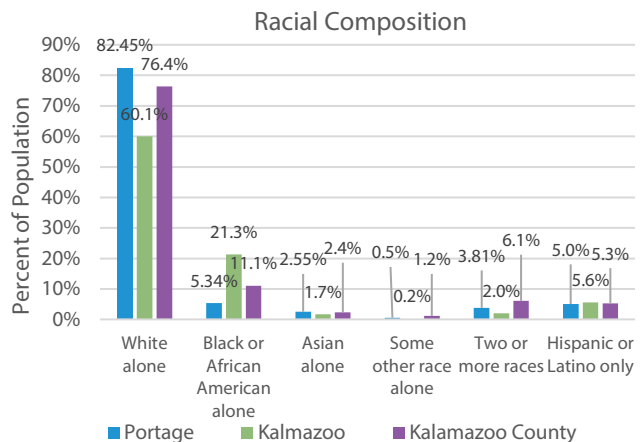
While Portage is still primarily a white community, recent trends indicate that the Hispanic population is increasing significantly and that the Black (African American), non-Hispanic, and Asian communities are shrinking.



Source: ACS 2000, 2010, 2021 5 Year Estimates



Source: ACS 2021 5 Year Estimates



Source: ACS 2021 5 Year Estimates

Housing

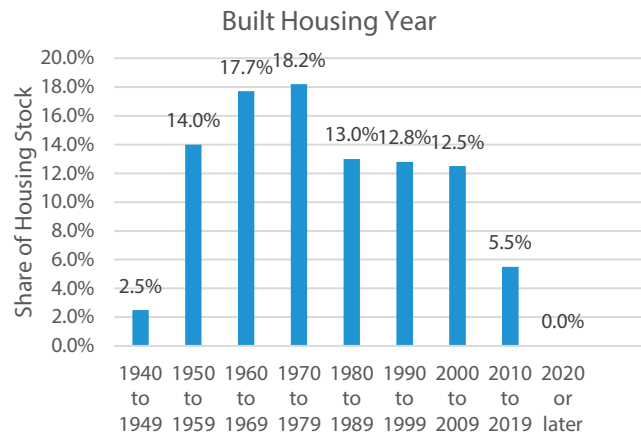
Portage has significantly expanded its housing units since 2000, with a majority being owner-occupied. Nearly half of Portage's housing stock predates 1980, with the majority built between 1970 and 1979 and a small percentage constructed after 2009.

Housing Type

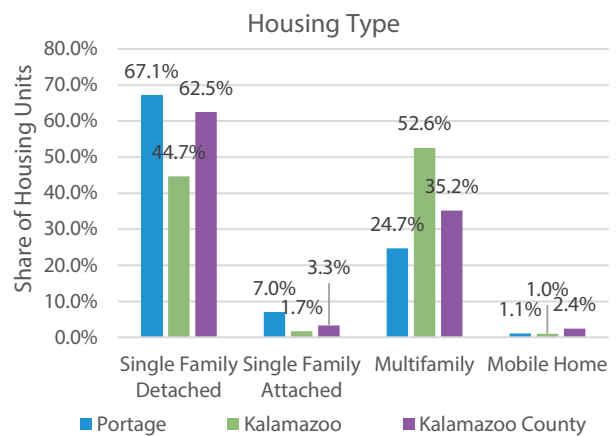
Portage has a higher proportion of single-family detached homes (67%) compared to Kalamazoo County overall and the City of Kalamazoo, which has a larger share of multifamily units (53%). Additionally, over half of Portage's housing comprises of one- or two-bedroom units, while larger homes with three or more bedrooms comprise 45% of the housing stock.

Housing Value

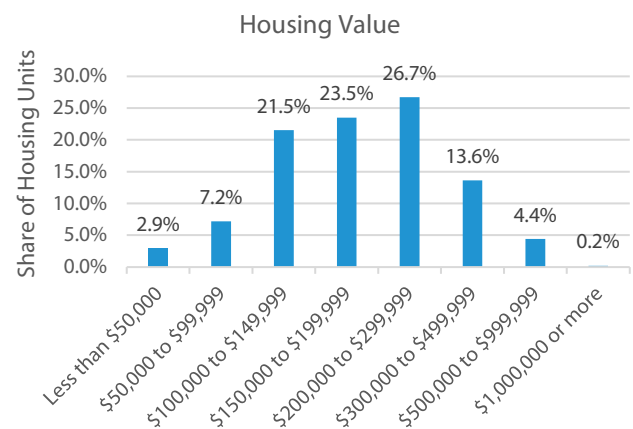
Median housing values in Portage have increased significantly from \$187,000 in 2021 to \$275,000 in 2023. Over half of Portage's homes are valued between \$150,000 and \$300,000, with very few homes at the extreme ends of the market, indicating a mid-range housing market.



Source: ACS 5 Year Estimates



Source: ACS 2021 5 Year Estimates



Source: ACS 2021 5 Year Estimates

Household Demographics versus Housing Stock Composition

The Portage Residential Market Analysis Study highlights a growing demand for rental, attached housing types like townhouses, with a market potential for rental units nearly four times larger than for-sale units. The study also notes demographic shifts toward single adults and childless couples, indicating a growing mismatch between the current single-family-oriented housing stock and the increasing demand for rental housing.

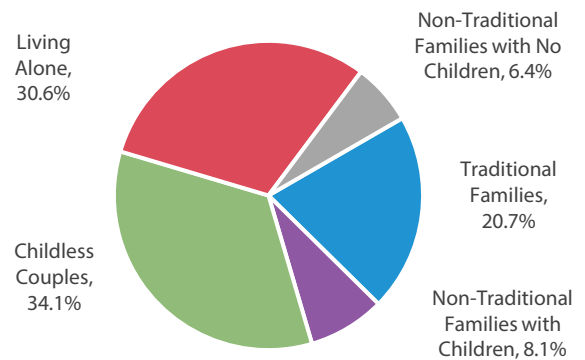
Cost Burden

In Portage, 17.3% of owner-occupied and 36.3% of renter-occupied households are cost-burdened, spending over 30% of their income on housing, which is lower than Kalamazoo City and County. Overall, 25% of households in Portage face financial hardship due to housing costs, highlighting a significant affordability issue.

Income

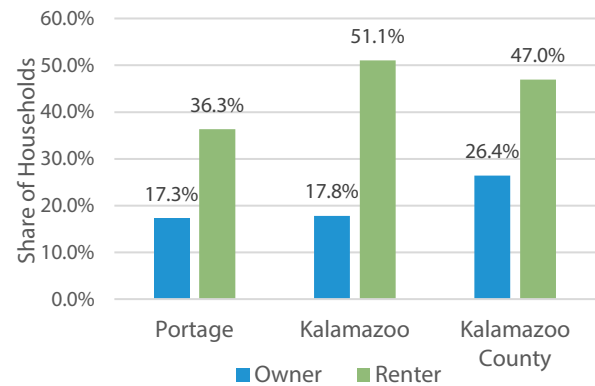
Portage's median household income has increased significantly over the past decade, surpassing the State, City of Kalamazoo, and Kalamazoo County. The proportion of households earning \$50,000 or less decreased significantly, while those earning \$150,000 or more nearly doubled.

Household Makeup, 2021



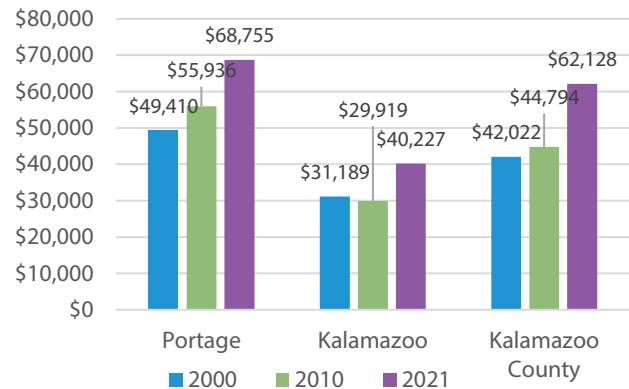
Source: ACS 2021 5 Year Estimates

Cost Burdened



Source: ACS 2021 5 Year Estimates

Household Median Income



Source: ACS 2000, 2010, 2021 5 Year Estimates

Poverty

Around 7% of Portage's labor force, over 2,100 individuals, live below the poverty level, compared to 31% in the City of Kalamazoo.

Employment

Portage's labor force participation decreased slightly from over 70% in previous decades to 68.9% in 2021, potentially due to the pandemic's impact or market fluctuations. Despite this decrease, Portage maintains a lower unemployment rate at 4.4% than Kalamazoo County's 6.7%.

Major Employment Sectors

In Portage, the economy is largely based on manufacturing, with over 20% of jobs provided by companies such as Pfizer and Stryker. The retail sector accounts for over 14% of the employment in the City, with the Crossroads Mall playing a vital role.

Labor Shed

Despite its reputation as a bedroom community, Portage hosts more jobs (26,203 jobs) than its resident population (21,044 residents), drawing nearly 22,000 commuters from surrounding areas, notably Kalamazoo City and Battle Creek. While around 4,414 Portage residents work locally, most (79%) commute to other areas for employment.

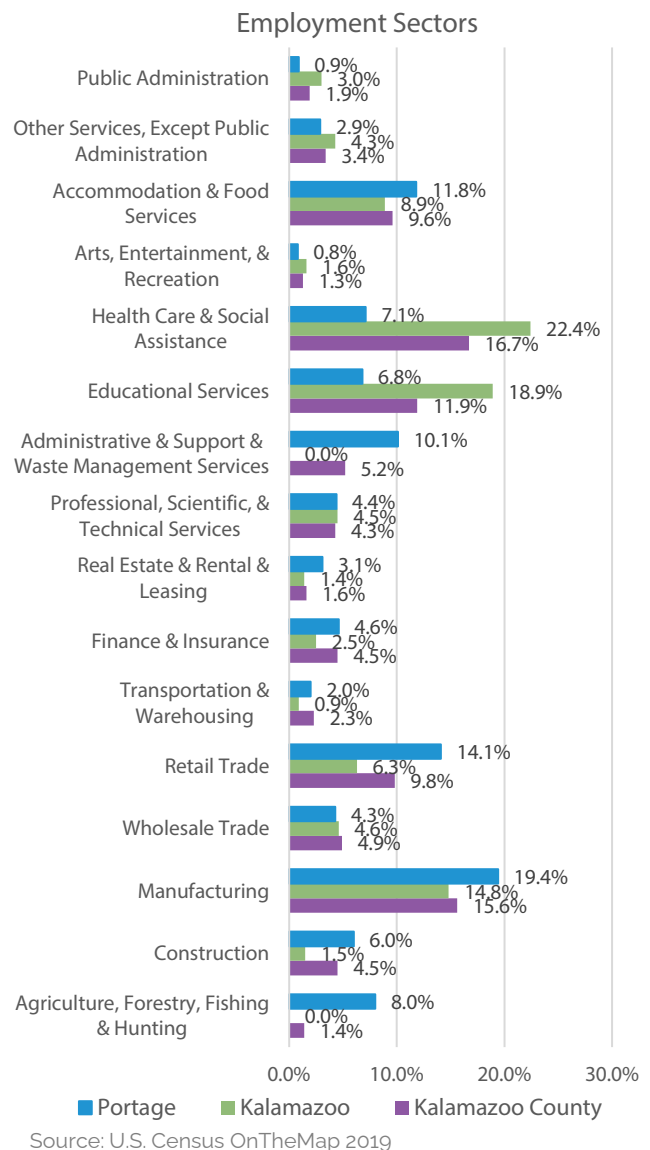
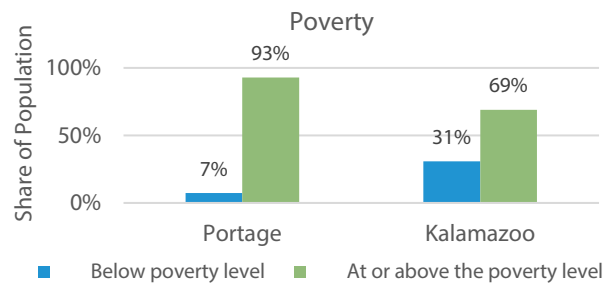
Job Centers

In Portage, manufacturing and retail dominate the industrial corridors along Sprinkle and Portage Road, near Crossroads Mall on Westnedge Avenue. Stryker, Pfizer, Summit Polymers, and MANN+HUMMEL are among the major employers in the City.

Commute

Portage residents have an average commute time of 20 minutes, shorter than the county average but longer than Kalamazoo's, with a high reliance on solo driving at 83.2%.

Note: Data used for this report predates pandemic impacts on commuter patterns.



Market Demand

Defining the Market Area

The submarket areas used to analyze the City of Portage real estate market vary based on the real estate type (e.g. multifamily residential, retail, office, and industrial). Data for the industrial, office, and retail markets are provided for two different submarkets: Southern Kalamazoo County submarket and a combined Western-Northeastern-Central Kalamazoo County submarket.

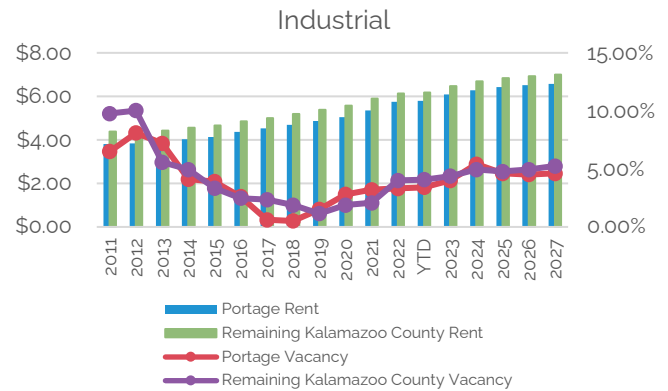
The Southern Kalamazoo County submarket data set includes the entire City of Portage and has been compared to the remaining Kalamazoo County submarket. Data was taken from these submarkets and averaged out to determine average rents and vacancies for the remainder of the County. For the purpose of this report, the Southern Kalamazoo County submarket will be referred to as “the City of Portage” and the remaining Kalamazoo County submarkets (Western, Northeastern, and Central Kalamazoo County submarkets) will be referred to as “Kalamazoo County”.

Industrial

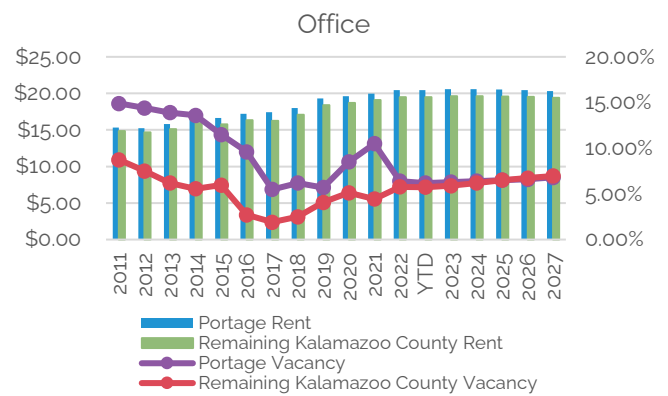
Despite the pandemic, industrial rents in Portage have steadily increased from \$3.81 to \$5.80 per square foot over the past decade. The vacancy rate in Portage and Kalamazoo County has historically been below 3%, but has increased to 3.4%.

Office

Office rent per square foot in Portage and Kalamazoo County has steadily increased over the past decade, with no pandemic-induced decline, and is projected to rise further by 2027. The recent decrease in office vacancies in Portage is due to the reduction in inventory due to demolition activities surpassing new construction, rather than an increase in demand.



Source: CoStar, Houseal Lavigne Associates



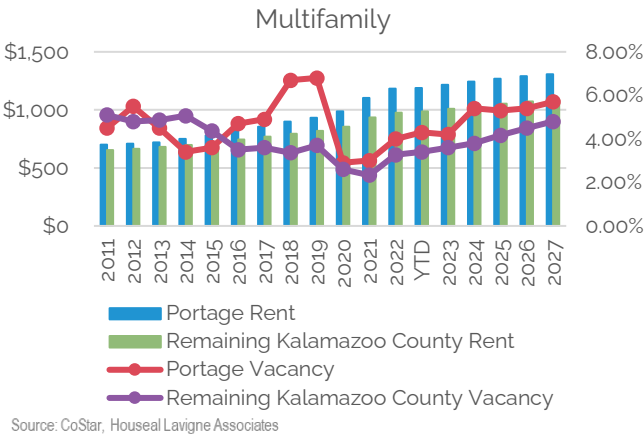
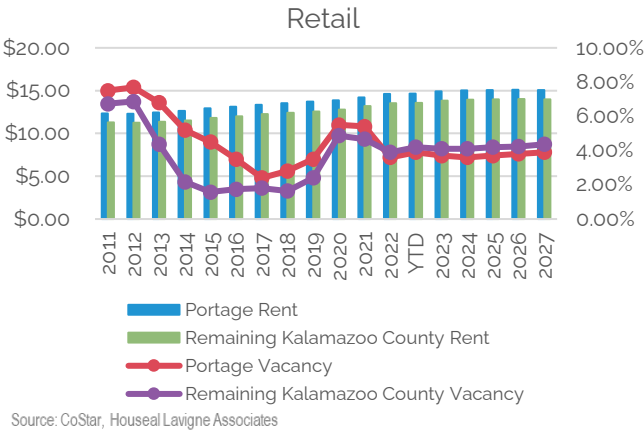
Source: CoStar, Houseal Lavigne Associates

Retail

The retail market has steadily increased over the past 10 years from \$12.34 on average in 2011 to \$14.64 in 2023. The retail vacancy rates were on a rise during the pandemic but have seen a decrease recently. Overall Portage appears to have a strong retail market and opportunities should exist to enhance existing commercial areas.

Multifamily

Portage's multifamily housing market outperformed Kalamazoo County, with rents growing from \$700 per unit in 2011 to \$1,184 in 2022. The vacancy rate in Portage decreased from 6.8% in 2019 to 2.9% in 2020 .





CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

INTRODUCTION

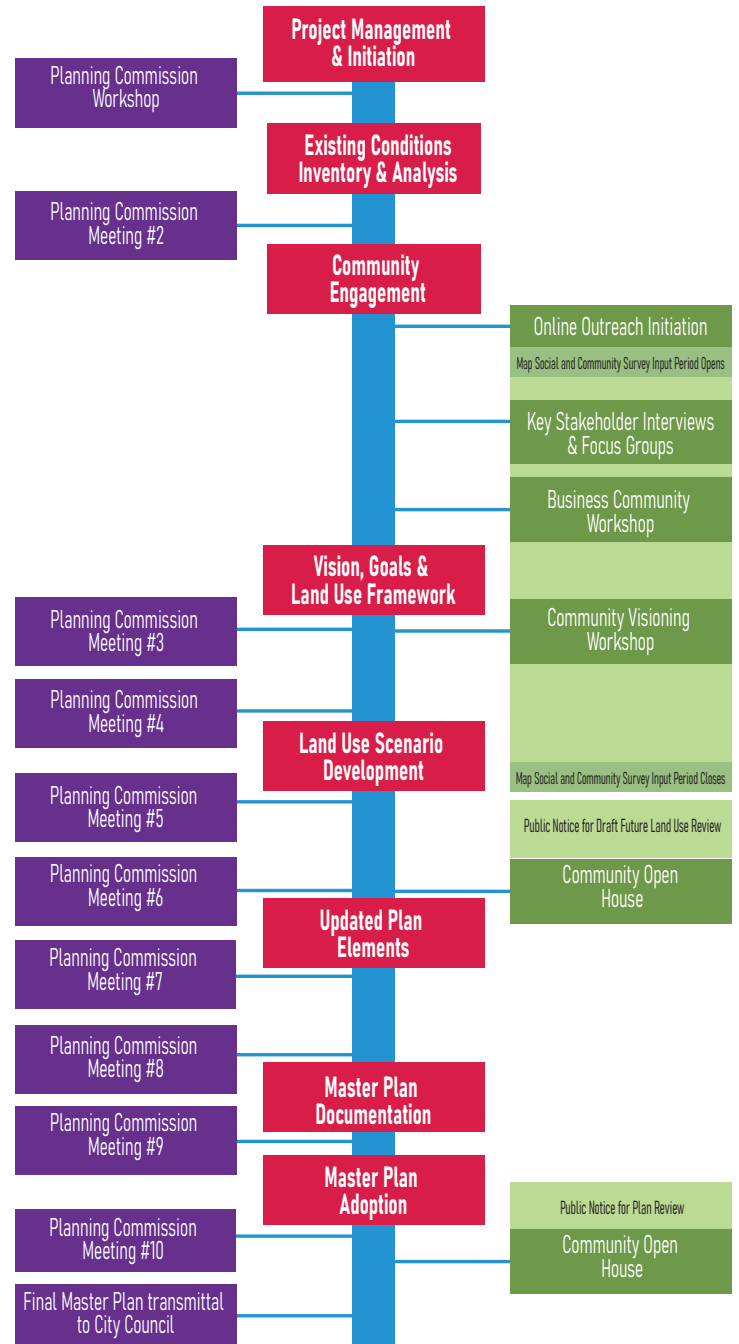
As part of the initial phase of the planning process, community outreach and engagement from citizens, focus groups, Planning Commission, and City staff was critical to understanding Portage's issues, opportunities, key strength, and assets. This chapter provides an overview of the various outreach efforts conducted and highlights key takeaways.

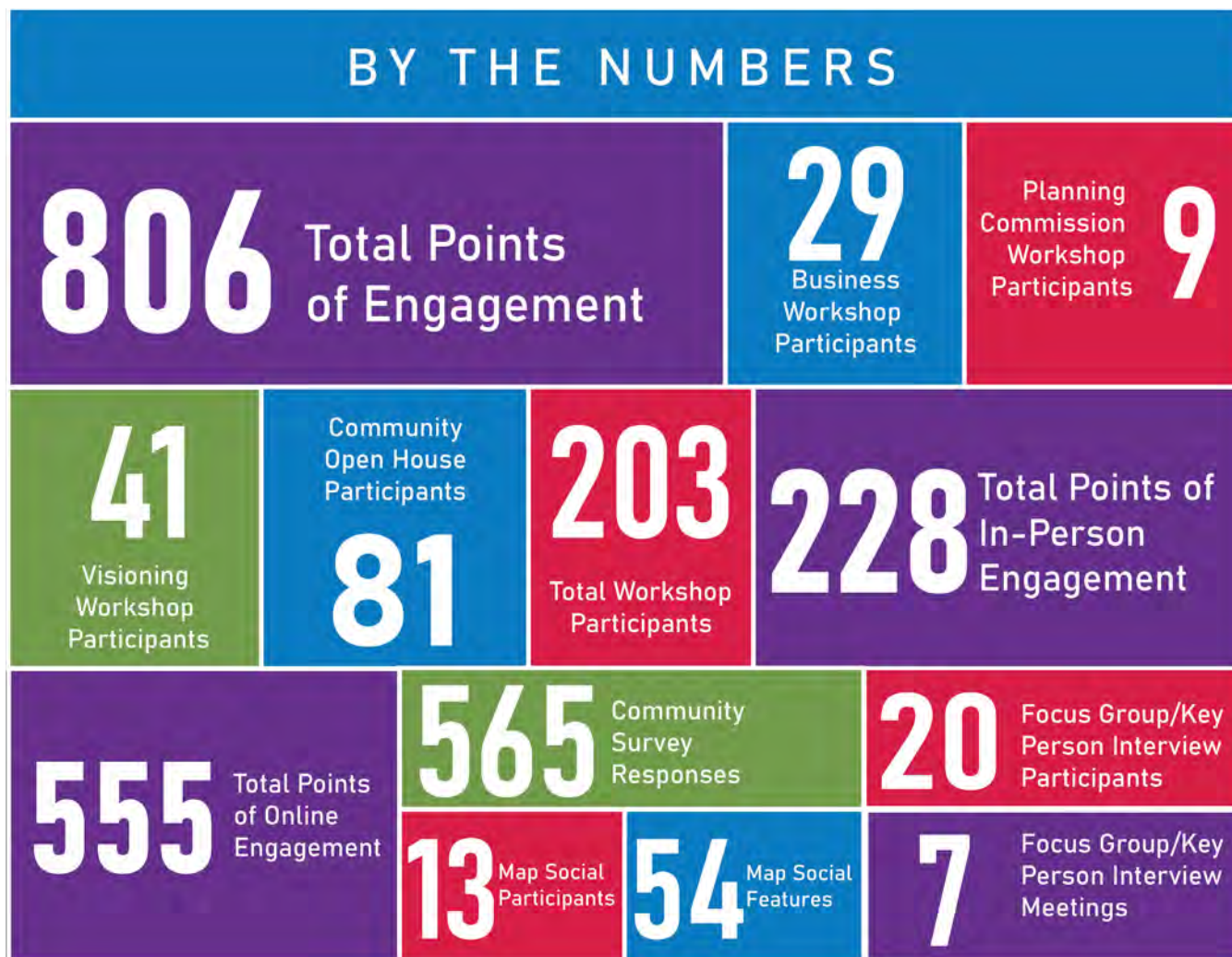
OUTREACH OVERVIEW

Throughout the Master Plan planning process, various outreach initiatives such as workshops, surveys, interviews, and meetings were conducted. These opportunities allowed diverse stakeholders to offer their input and feedback in person and online. The graphic outlines the steps to the planning process and where planning commission meetings, workshops, and community meetings occurred.

OUTREACH CONDUCTED

The Portage Master Plan's project team has undertaken extensive community outreach to gather input about the issues and opportunities within Portage. To date, there have been 806 points of engagement with a combination of in-person and online activities. The graphic displays the participation statistics and engagement methods utilized throughout the process.





In-Person Outreach

Staff Kick Off Meeting and Tour

November 9th-10th 2022

An initial kick-off meeting was held with the City staff assigned to the Master Plan project and other department heads. This first face-to-face meeting allowed for the review of the project scope, schedule, and deliverables and address any issues identified in previous communication regarding the planning process.

Key Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups

November 10th - 11th, 2022

Seven confidential interviews were conducted with individuals to discuss existing conditions and potential opportunities as part of the Community Engagement Phase of the Portage Master Plan. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes, and a variety of topics were discussed. These interviews were framed around a sequence of questions regarding the community and were conducted in a conversational style.

Development Community Workshop

November 9th, 2022 | Portage Zhang Senior Center

The Development Community workshop allowed for the review and discussion of the overall direction and policy issues facing the community. This workshop was conducted with the development community to gain insights into the specific challenges that they face.

Planning Commission Workshop

November 10th, 2022 | Portage Zhang Senior Center

Following a similar format to the Development Community Workshop, this workshop allowed for the review and discussion of the overall direction and policy issues related to the Planning Commission. The meeting concluded with a workshop exercise to identify and discuss issues and opportunities facing the Portage community.



Visioning Workshop

March 20th, 2023 | Portage Zhang Senior Center

Portage staff and the Project Team hosted a Visioning Workshop to facilitate community input. The workshop allowed residents and stakeholders to discuss ideas and provide visioning input before the plan and recommendations were crafted, helping to inform the vision, goals, recommendations, and policies for the Master Plan.

Community Open House

January 20th, 2024 | Portage Zhang Senior Center | 81 Participants

Residents were invited to participate in an open house to learn more about the drafted land use plan and preliminary subareas framework and provide their feedback. The event was well-attended, with over 80 participants and an impressive 156 comment cards collected. The Project Team collaborated with staff to incorporate the feedback received into the final revisions of the Future Land Use Plan.

Master Plan Public Meeting

June 24th, 2024 | Portage Zhang Senior Center

Residents and stakeholders participated in a community open house to review the draft Master Plan and provide feedback to the Project team and City staff. The open house was soon followed by a 63-day review period to collect as much public feedback as possible before the public hearing. The Project Team and staff incorporated the comments received during the open house and the review period and presented a revised draft to the Planning Commission in August.

Online Outreach

Project Website

The project website was designed to support the planning process. The website contains information and updates concerning the project, including meeting notices and project documents. In addition, the website hosts outreach tools, including online questionnaires and map.social. The website is critical to Portage's planning process as it hosts the Existing Conditions Memorandum and will eventually host the Master Plan.

Online Community Survey

An online community survey was provided on the City of Portage project website. The survey enabled community members to participate in the outreach process at their own pace. The community survey asked a series of questions about the quality of the City's character, quality of life, housing, land use, infrastructure, transportation, and open spaces. There was a total of 565 questionnaire responses and features multiple-choice questions in nine sections organized by topic.

map.social

map.social, a web-based interactive mapping tool, was used to collect location-specific input on issues and assets from Portage stakeholders. A total of 54 points were identified by map.social participants. Assets and opportunities include 11 points for community assets, 2 points for pedestrian connections, 4 for trail connections, 7 points for preservation, 13 for problematic areas, 1 for residential development, 1 for sustainability/environmental opportunities, and 9 for other. Some of the other points were labeled as high traffic areas, improper pavement markings, or flooding.



Outreach Takeaways

Several issues were identified as top priorities or concerns across all input received from the community.

Redevelopment Opportunities

Participants cited the mall as a potential site for a downtown or mixed-use area to inject a sense of identity to Portage. Discussion in the workshops also highlighted the potential for additional housing in the Crossroads area as well as amenities such as public plazas and outdoor entertainment.

Policies to Support Redevelopment

Several participants in both workshops talked about the need to have policies to support desired redevelopment at key locations such as the Crossroads Mall, City Centre, and Lake Center District. Participants in the Development Community Workshop cited the need for zoning changes to allow for more dense, diverse uses.

Attracting All Life Stages

By rethinking current housing trends and providing more affordable housing options, participants in the Development Community Workshop and the Planning Commission Workshop thought that Portage could support a more diverse population.

Improve Walkability

Participants in various stages of outreach stated that there was an overall lack of walkable areas in the commercial corridors throughout the City. Access to the commercial spaces was cited as limited for pedestrians with participants voicing their desire for an interconnected and well-integrated trail and sidewalk system. Most of the problematic areas indicated on map.social focused around the commercial areas near South Westnedge Avenue. Specific sidewalk and trail improvements recommendations were mentioned from the Community Open House around the Lake Center District, including Osterhout Avenue between Eliason Trail and Portage Road, and new pavement on Portage Road & East Shore Drive.

Housing and Residential Areas

Participants indicated their resistance to more housing development in the existing low-density neighborhoods or other natural areas, especially around Austin Lake. There was support for mixed residential in the City Centre and Crossroads.

Parks, Open Space, and Environmental Features

Participants expressed strong desire to preserve existing open spaces and wooded areas.

Commercial and Industrial Areas

Comments noted the need for natural buffers around commercial and industrial development to protect adjacent neighborhoods from pollution and traffic. People felt there were challenges with commercial and industrial areas near single family residential, particularly in the lake district. People were concerned about the increasing traffic flow and accidents resulting from new developments.



CHAPTER 4

VISION AND GOALS

INTRODUCTION

The Master Plan establishes the long-term vision for the community. The community's vision is supported by a series of goals and key policies that will work collectively to achieve measurable change. The vision, goals, and key policies were developed based on extensive public engagement input from decision-makers, staff, and key stakeholders to help guide the future of Portage.

VISION STATEMENT

In 2045...Our City continues to prove itself as an economic hub for southwest Michigan and a great community to call home. We are known throughout the region as a place for everyone to plant their roots. We have established our reputation as a well-rounded City with a thriving business community, safe neighborhoods, outstanding parks, top ranked public school system, and amenities for all.

The neighborhoods of Portage are vibrant and inclusive – not just a collection of homes and streets, but true communities that are attainable, catering to the needs of existing residents and welcoming to families and young professionals new to the area. Individuals and families in Portage can thrive and build their lives within the community. Seniors and empty nesters have a variety of housing options to ensure they can continue to call Portage home and benefit from opportunities to actively participate in the community. Moreover, the seamless integration of City parks and trails within our community stands as a source of pride, enhancing our overall quality of life.

Portage continues to support and attract businesses both large and small globally recognized employers, as well as local businesses, thrive in our City and its numerous commercial districts. Successful partnerships between schools, surrounding universities, local businesses, and quality employers in Portage are developing a skilled workforce. These efforts, combined with investments in placemaking, have helped retain talented workers with quality high-paying jobs and desirable community amenities, ensuring a stronger and more resilient local economy.

The community is also well regarded for our collection of mixed-use, walkable districts that serve residents and visitors alike. Our commercial areas have long drawn crowds from throughout the region offering unique experiences for shopping, gathering, and community events – establishing Portage as a destination in the Midwest.

Our City has cultivated an environment where everyone, regardless of age or stage of life can live, work, and experience the best Portage has to offer. With this vision, Portage has become a thriving community where anyone can find a sense of belonging and flourish.

GOALS AND KEY POLICIES

The goals support the vision and further define what the City is aiming to achieve in the future. They represent broad categories that will help the City realize its vision. The key policies are specific and measurable. They support the goals and provide an indication of policy direction to be included in the later chapters of the Master Plan. The goals and key policies work in conjunction to provide clear direction to realize the community vision.

Goal 1

Maintain the existing residential, commercial, and industrial land use pattern while repositioning strategic areas as redevelopment opportunities with additional focus on creating mixed-use nodes throughout the City.

Key Policies

- ▶ 1.1. Prioritize redevelopment of established places, such as the Crossroads Subarea, Lake Center Subarea, and City Centre Subarea, with a mix of commercial and residential uses in strategic, mixed-use nodes.
- ▶ 1.2. Promote the reuse and redevelopment of underused commercial properties, such as the commercial areas along South Westnedge Avenue to create vibrant commercial spaces.
- ▶ 1.3. Update zoning regulations to allow more diverse uses such as mixed-use development and address housing needs in strategic locations.
- ▶ 1.4. Encourage collaboration between the City and property owners to establish new right-sized parking requirements to allow for redevelopment in overparked areas.
- ▶ 1.5. Implement the recommendations of the Lake Center District Corridor and Placemaking Study to introduce attractive and walkable mixed-use business district nodes.
- ▶ 1.6. Utilize development regulations and capital improvement programming (CIP) to guide development to priority areas and sites and foster development that reflects the desired character of the Portage community.
- ▶ 1.7. Preserve and enhance Portage's neighborhood parks network and promote the conservation of natural areas as part of future development.
- ▶ 1.8. Strengthen established employment districts and continue to encourage their expansion in alignment with the Future Land Use Plan.
- ▶ 1.9. Recommend and promote planning efforts that evaluate and address lakefront issues such as variance requests, stormwater management, site layout, quality infrastructure, and more.

Goal 2

Foster reinvestment and rehabilitation in the City's established neighborhoods, provide for a range of housing options, and support a high quality-of neighborhood for all residents, regardless of age or background.

Key Policies

- ▶ 2.1 Prioritize establishing complete neighborhoods which provide a mix of housing and access to amenities such as schools, parks, grocery stores, and transit.
- ▶ 2.2 Continue to preserve and reinvest in established residential neighborhoods through code enforcement and property maintenance.
- ▶ 2.3 Encourage the development of multifamily housing and mixed-use development between single family residential and commercial areas, and within/adjacent to established commercial areas to strengthen businesses with a growing base of local customers.
- ▶ 2.4 Amend development regulations and prioritize strategies to encourage the development of different types of housing development to support people in all stages of life.
- ▶ 2.5 Provide housing options attainable at a variety of incomes.
- ▶ 2.6 Amend the zoning code to promote a mix of housing choices.
- ▶ 2.7 Support neighborhood planning efforts to establish more delineated boundaries.

Goal 3

Maximize the potential of commercial corridors throughout the City by encouraging more dense, focused development along previously established commercial corridors.

Key Policies

- ▶ 3.1 Encourage mixed-use nodes throughout the City to increase economic activity at a neighborhood level.
- ▶ 3.2 Adjust parking requirements to maximize development potential while allowing market forces to dictate needed parking.
- ▶ 3.3 Evaluate the use of creative zoning solutions such as overlay districts or form-based design to incentivize developers to reimagine commercial areas throughout the City.
- ▶ 3.4 Support redevelopment of the Portage Road corridor as a cohesive district to complement the functions of the Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport.

Goal 4

Attract and support local businesses and major employers to strengthen the local tax base and provide well-paying, high-quality employment opportunities.

Key Policies

- ▶ 4.1 Encourage industrial employers and surrounding schools to create vocational training programs and internships to develop the desired future workforce.
- ▶ 4.2 Continue to work with the Southwest Michigan First Chamber as well as the business community to promote businesses, professionals, and organizations within the City.
- ▶ 4.3 Promote and encourage the development of more family resources for working families, including daycare, after school programs, and flexible working hours.
- ▶ 4.4 Gradually transform office parks to more local commercial or mixed-uses to reflect shifting trends while continuing to support small businesses looking for space within the City.

Goal 5

Support pedestrians and cyclists throughout the City by providing adequate infrastructure to ensure that they are safe and comfortable.

Key Policies

- ▶ 5.1 Build upon the 2015 Complete Streets Policy and ensure that new roadway projects integrate multimodal facilities where feasible.
- ▶ 5.2 Continue to use the City-wide sidewalk inventory as well as the Future Land Use Plan to guide future capital improvement planning.
- ▶ 5.3 Ensure safe walking and biking routes for school-age children by utilizing traffic calming techniques such as road balance, curb bump-outs, protected bike lanes, adequate signage, and accommodating sidewalks.
- ▶ 5.4 Support pedestrian and cyclists' goals from the City's Recreation and Open Space Plan.

Goal 6

Ensure multimodal transportation connections between homes, schools, parks, public transportation, employment centers, dining, and shopping destinations.

Key Policies

- ▶ 6.1 Ensure new bike trails join existing City and regional trails to better connect Portage's growing bike network.
- ▶ 6.2 Work with Share the Road Portage, MovePortage, KATS, and other key stakeholders to identify further steps that can be taken to encourage cycling within the City.
- ▶ 6.3 Evaluate the success of the Bike Portage bike share service and utilize ongoing monitoring to determine the program's success and consider expansion.
- ▶ 6.4 Work with the Kalamazoo Metro bus service to evaluate current routes and plan additional service to accommodate those who cannot drive or do not wish to use a car. This could include additional or alternate routes, stops, or expanded service hours as well as more frequent intervals during peak traffic times.
- ▶ 6.5 Work with the Kalamazoo Metro bus service to determine levels of usage and feasibility regarding its new micro transit pilot program.
- ▶ 6.6 Promote "last mile" strategies to fill gaps in the transportation network.

Goal 7

Promote the development of excellent transportation systems and supporting infrastructure that caters to diverse transportation modes that align with community needs and fosters economic growth.

Key Policies

- ▶ 7.1 Utilize economic development priorities when planning and implementing vehicular transportation improvements.
- ▶ 7.2 Continue to improve vehicular infrastructure using best practice Engineering methods, such as Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER), to prioritize street improvement projects throughout Portage.
- ▶ 7.3 Continue utilizing best access management practices for safe and efficient street network system.

Goal 8

Continue to expand and enhance recreational facility options for residents of all ages and abilities.

Key Policies

- ▶ 8.1 Incorporate open space for new residential developments to increase access to parks/recreation within neighborhoods, especially in the areas north of the Moors Golf Club and south of West Lake.
- ▶ 8.2 Seek opportunities to acquire land for recreation activities in areas with no or limited access to parks as properties become available within the City.
- ▶ 8.3 Connect parks and recreation areas with trails on existing rights-of-way and through neighborhoods where possible to support a more connected park system.
- ▶ 8.4 Utilize the 2023 Recreation and Open Space Plan to determine specific upgrades to existing parks and recreation facilities throughout the City.
- ▶ 8.5 Continue to program and encourage recreation in and around the various lakes within the City to ensure residents and visitors feel a connection to the uniqueness of the Portage community's lakes.
- ▶ 8.6 Connect parks and recreation areas to neighborhoods through trails, sidewalks, and rights-of-way to ensure neighborhood accessibility.

Goal 9

Preserve and improve ecologically sensitive areas.

Key Policies

- ▶ 9.1 Balance new development and growth with the need to preserve existing and future open space and natural areas.
- ▶ 9.2 Prioritize findings from the Invasive Species Management Plan to remove, mitigate, and suppress invasive species in the City.
- ▶ 9.3 Promote collaboration among environmental organizations, utility providers, governmental entities, and community stakeholders to conserve wetlands and other natural areas, protect flood-prone areas, manage stormwater, and improve water quality in the community's waterways.
- ▶ 9.4 Identify and acquire ecologically sensitive areas for conservation or preservation purposes.
- ▶ 9.5 Support land development swap to encourage preservation of sensitive environmental lands.

Goal 10

Establish a unique community identity using placemaking and public realm improvements and highlighting Portage's arts and culture.

Key Policies

- ▶ 10.1 Incorporate branding and other identifiers, like character improvements, at Portage's gateways to establish a stronger sense of identity that builds on existing investments and emphasizes Sub-Area treatments.
- ▶ 10.2 Create a more attractive and inviting public street realm with elements such as planter boxes, street trees, street furniture, improved street lighting, bike infrastructure, bioswales, and decorative permeable pavement.
- ▶ 10.3 Establish a long-term location for Portage's farmers market that provides a center for activity to complement future mixed-use development in accordance with the Future Land Use Plan.
- ▶ 10.4 Identify locations for a centralized, cultural arts center that could support events, exhibits, and performances.
- ▶ 10.5 Expand efforts to display and highlight public art throughout Portage by working with the Arts Committee to identify new locations for exhibits or installations.

Goal 11

Improve, modernize, and expand City infrastructure to support existing residents and businesses and prepare for future growth.

Key Policies

- ▶ 11.1 Ensure that the City's infrastructure meets the needs of current and future residents and businesses, including broadband internet, water, wastewater, and energy, particularly in areas where density and activity may increase in the coming decades.
- ▶ 11.2 Work with utility providers to proactively improve and expand infrastructure in alignment with the Future Land Use Plan.
- ▶ 11.3 Improve stormwater management and water quality through sustainable development practices and the inclusion of green infrastructure low impact design in areas to reduce environmental impacts of development.
- ▶ 11.4 Identify water and sewer projects that are needed to serve the growth and development anticipated in the Future Land Use Plan.

Goal 12

Promote the use of sustainable development best practices.

Key Policies

- ▶ 12.1 Consider adopting conservation design policies for new development to preserve the natural features of a site and promote density neutral design.
- ▶ 12.2 Strive to be a leader in municipal sustainability by prioritizing the installation of green and renewable energy infrastructure features on public land, including parks, public rights-of-way, and the sites of public buildings while also transitioning existing energy consuming operations.
- ▶ 12.3 Prioritize green infrastructure projects that are slated for continued commercial and residential development in accordance with the Future Land Use Plan.
- ▶ 12.4 Promote policies that encourage environmentally responsible and energy-efficient construction techniques, such as those promoted through the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building system, the Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES), or Energy Star, to reduce the environmental impact of future development.
- ▶ 12.5 Address resiliency and hazard mitigation as a proactive measure for the community.



CHAPTER 5

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Land Use and Development chapter will identify future land uses for all areas of the City and provides a framework for future planning decisions that builds upon the desired characteristics of Portage's established residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, and employment areas. Retaining an appropriate mix of land uses in the community is key to ensure that the City develops and maintains itself in an economically and environmentally sustainable manner. Additionally, the chapter will seek to identify opportunities for strategic investment and development, informed by the Future Land Use Plan.

GOAL

Maintain the existing residential, commercial, and industrial land use pattern, while repositioning strategic areas as redevelopment opportunities with additional focus on creating mixed-use nodes throughout the City.

CONSTRAINTS AND INFLUENCES

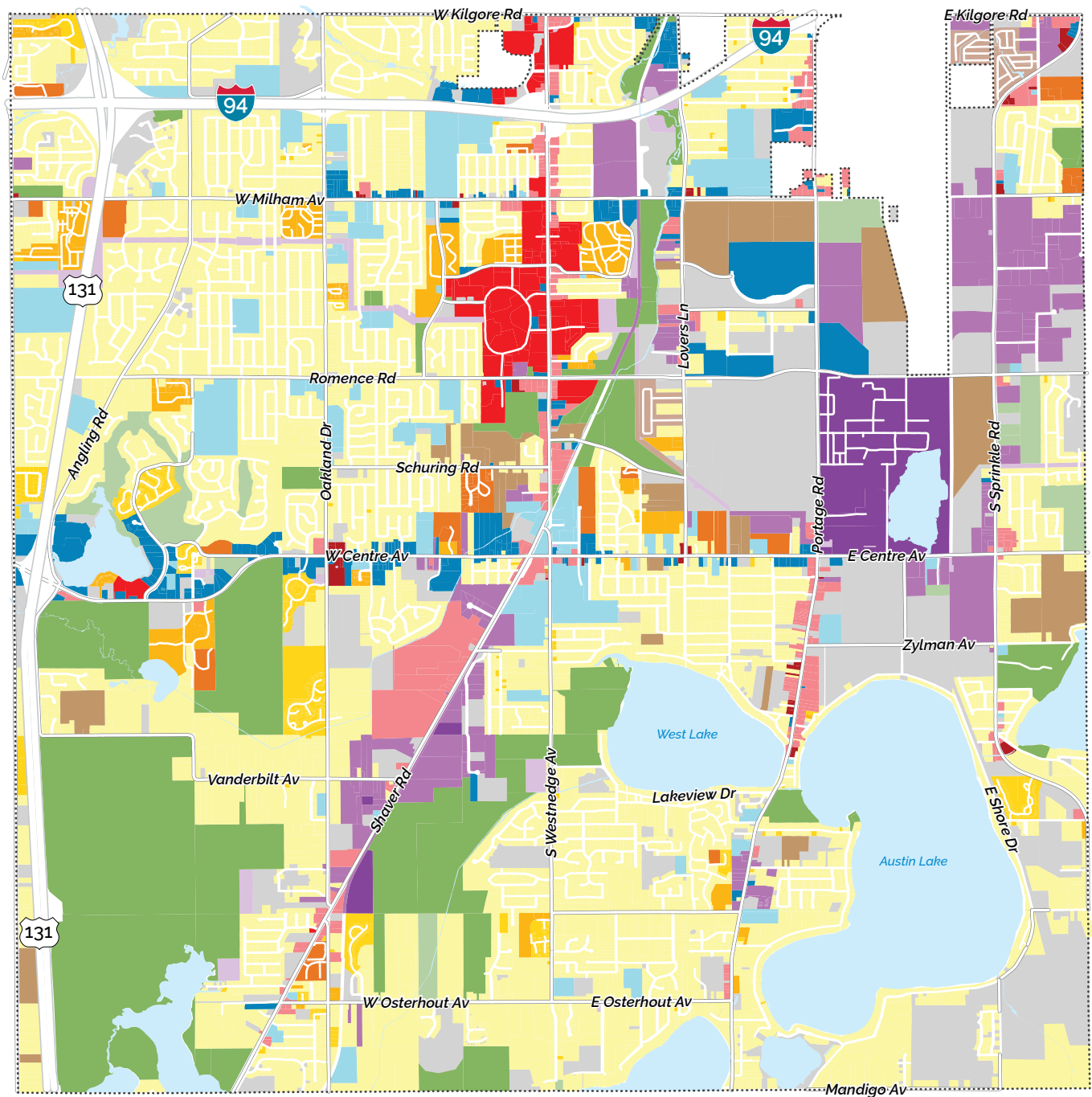
The Future Land Use Plan is influenced and constrained by population and growth trends, floodplains, watersheds, infrastructure, and planned transportation improvements. This section of the Land Use and Development Chapter examines these factors to provide context for future growth and development.

Population and Growth Trends

Portage's population is seeing steady growth. Over the past 10 years, there has been an average growth rate of 4%. Based on the Strategic Market Analysis by Tracy Cross, the City is expected to see a continuous increase in population. By 2028, the projected population is expected to be 49,617, while the projected total households are expected to be 21,434. Though this projection is an estimate, it offers a glimpse into what the City can expect in terms of population growth.

Existing Land Use

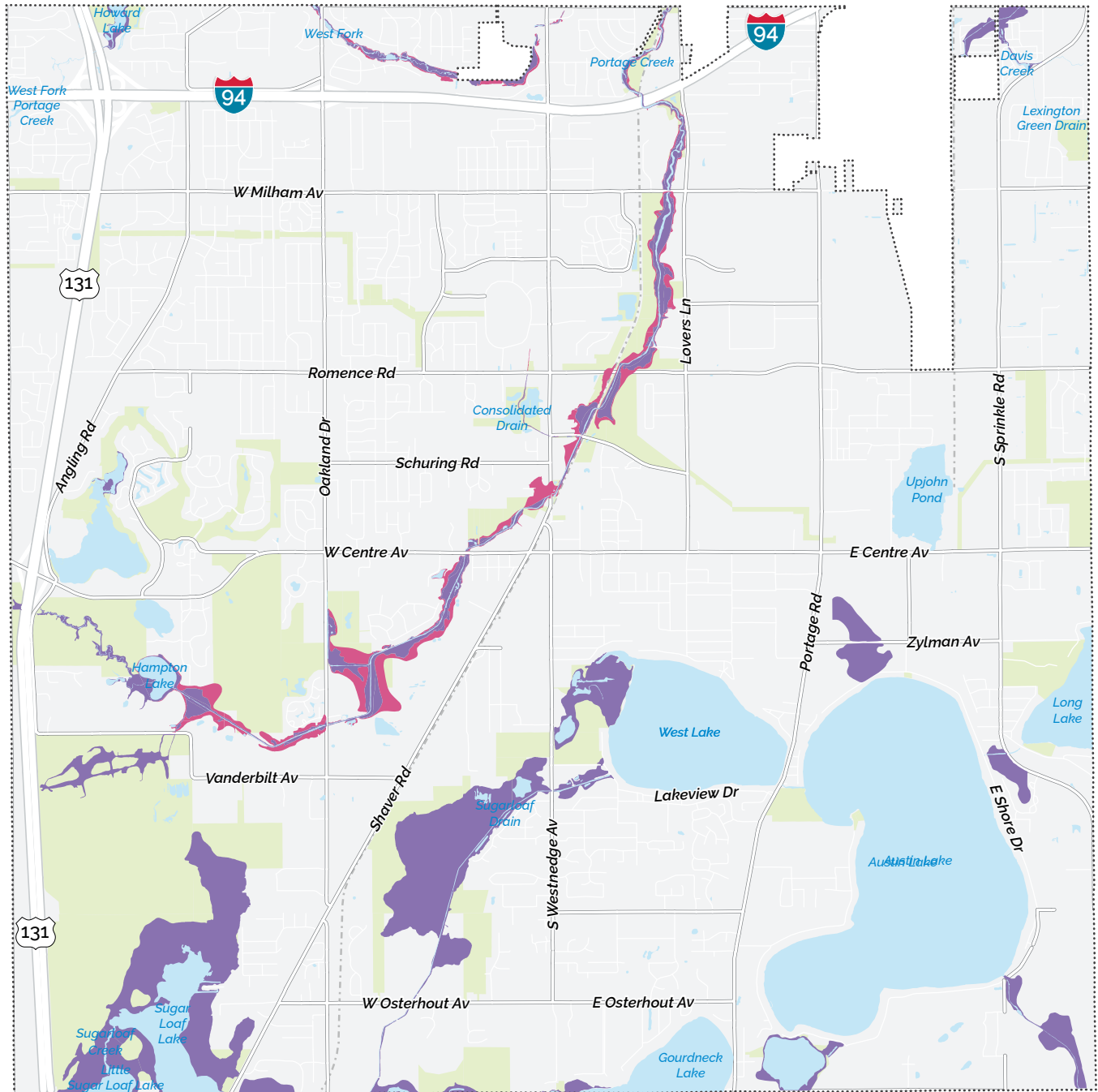
Portage's current land use sets the stage for future development, shaping the City's identity. Established neighborhoods, commercial corridors, industrial areas, parks, and natural areas form the existing fabric of Portage and present opportunities for enhancement and development. The Future Land Use Plan will look to strengthen and enrich these areas, and preserve the City's unique character and identity.



Existing Land Use



Agriculture	Multi Family High Density	Private Recreation	Light Industrial
Agriculture Intensive	Mobile Home	Public Recreation	Heavy Industrial
Single Family Detached	General Business	Park/Open Space	Utilities
Single Family Attached	Local Business	Office	Vacant
Multi Family Medium Density	Regular Business	Public/Semi Public	



Flood Hazard

- 100-year Flood Zone
- 500-year Flood Zone
- Waterbody
- Parks and Open Space





Floodplains

The City of Portage's development patterns have historically been shaped by its water resources. The City's water resources continue to influence its development patterns and were a guiding tool as the Future Land Use Plan was developed. As shown on the Future Land Use Plan, there are several areas throughout the City located within the 100-year flood area. Land use decisions were influenced by the flood hazard areas as more intense uses outside of the flood zone and consideration was given to maintaining open spaces in and around the flood zones.

Planned Transportation Improvements

Transportation improvements strongly influence land use planning as new roads, traffic patterns, and construction projects can either promote or stifle plans for development. A lack of infrastructure to support new subdivisions can hinder progress. However, new road connections, extensions, and enhancements have the potential to unlock development opportunities for properties. These improvements can provide access to previously inaccessible parcels, enabling denser development in nearby areas. There are several planned transportation improvements that will be expanded upon in the Transportation Chapter.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Throughout the community engagement process, residents, business owners, landowners, developers, and representatives from local organizations commented on the direction of the plan's policies and recommendations. The following is a list of the most frequently mentioned themes that came up across all outreach forms.

- ▶ Identify an appropriate mix of land uses that respond to the changing demand in the retail market.
- ▶ Identify appropriate sites for mixed-use and residential uses.
- ▶ Ensure that current and future residential areas are diverse and affordable for all including senior and attainable housing options.
- ▶ Create a space that will function as a downtown offering a mix of uses, public gathering spaces, diverse residential and retail options.
- ▶ Preserve and enhance Portage's neighborhood parks network and promote conservation of natural areas as part of future development.
- ▶ Prioritize redevelopment of established places, such as the Crossroads Subarea, Lake Center Subarea, and City Centre Subarea, with a mix of commercial and residential uses in strategic, mixed-use nodes.
- ▶ Utilize strategies to incorporate placemaking to provide a better sense of place and identity for the City.

DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Several key considerations were identified regarding future development in Portage and its alignment with the City's current approach to land use. Portage's existing land use serves as a guide in shaping the City's growth trajectory by depicting the existing land use patterns and urban structure. Future development initiatives take into account these existing land use dynamics while assessing property values, proximity to amenities, development regulations, the Capital Improvement Program, and availability of vacant land. This strategic evaluation aims to promote strategic development that meets the needs of the community and enhances livability.

Assessed Value

In Portage, higher assessed values are generally found in areas that are built at higher densities and served by water and sewer infrastructure. Residential areas in the northwest, which make up the City's primary neighborhoods, have values generally ranging from \$200,000 to \$500,000 per acre. Residential areas surrounding West Lake and Austin Lake have significantly higher values, ranging anywhere from \$100,000 to \$2 million, per acre and contain a few properties with the highest assessed values in the City. Commercial areas on South Westnedge Avenue and Centre Avenue differ greatly. South Westnedge Avenue, home to Crossroads Mall, is the highest concentrated commercial corridor in the City, holding higher assessed values than Centre Avenue and other commercial areas. Industrial areas in the northeast share values with residential areas in the northwest, but land value isn't proportional to land size.

Development Regulations

Ensuring that the Future Land Use Plan and the zoning code complement each other is a pivotal piece of guaranteeing the success of the Master Plan. It is critical that the City updates the zoning regulations to allow more diverse uses such as mixed-use development and address housing needs in strategic locations. Making strategic amendments to the zoning code will allow for the development of Complete Neighborhoods and more mixed-use nodes throughout the City. In addition, it was frequently mentioned that the City should recommend and promote planning efforts for lakefront properties and evaluate strategies to address issues related to variance requests, stormwater management, and quality infrastructure.

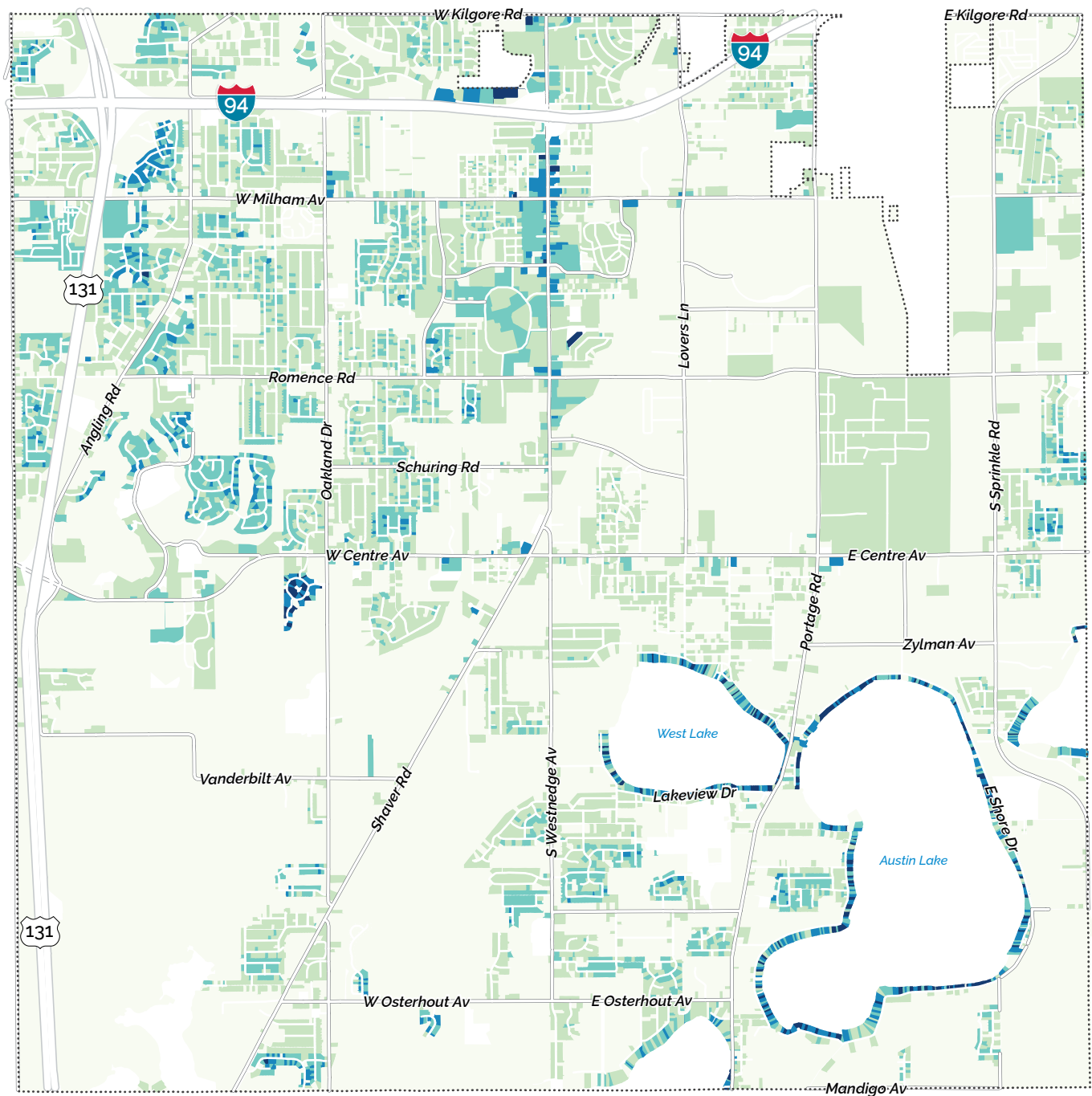
Vacant Property

Currently, the city has nearly 400 acres of vacant land that could accommodate potential development opportunities. An analysis was done to determine the number of new residential households, commercial and industrial developments that could be accommodated based on the City's current zoning standards and regulations.

Residential. The City has nearly 200 acres of vacant land zoned for residential use. Based on the current zoning code regulations, Portage can accommodate about 880 new units.

Commercial. The amount of vacant land zoned for commercial uses is 40 acres. With an estimated development of 10,000 square feet per acre of developable land, Portage can accommodate about 400,000 square feet of additional commercial space.

Industrial. There are about 150 acres of vacant land within Portage that is zoned to allow for industrial uses. However, much of that land is owned by existing industrial users. Additional analysis is needed to determine how much of that industrial land is vacant and truly available.



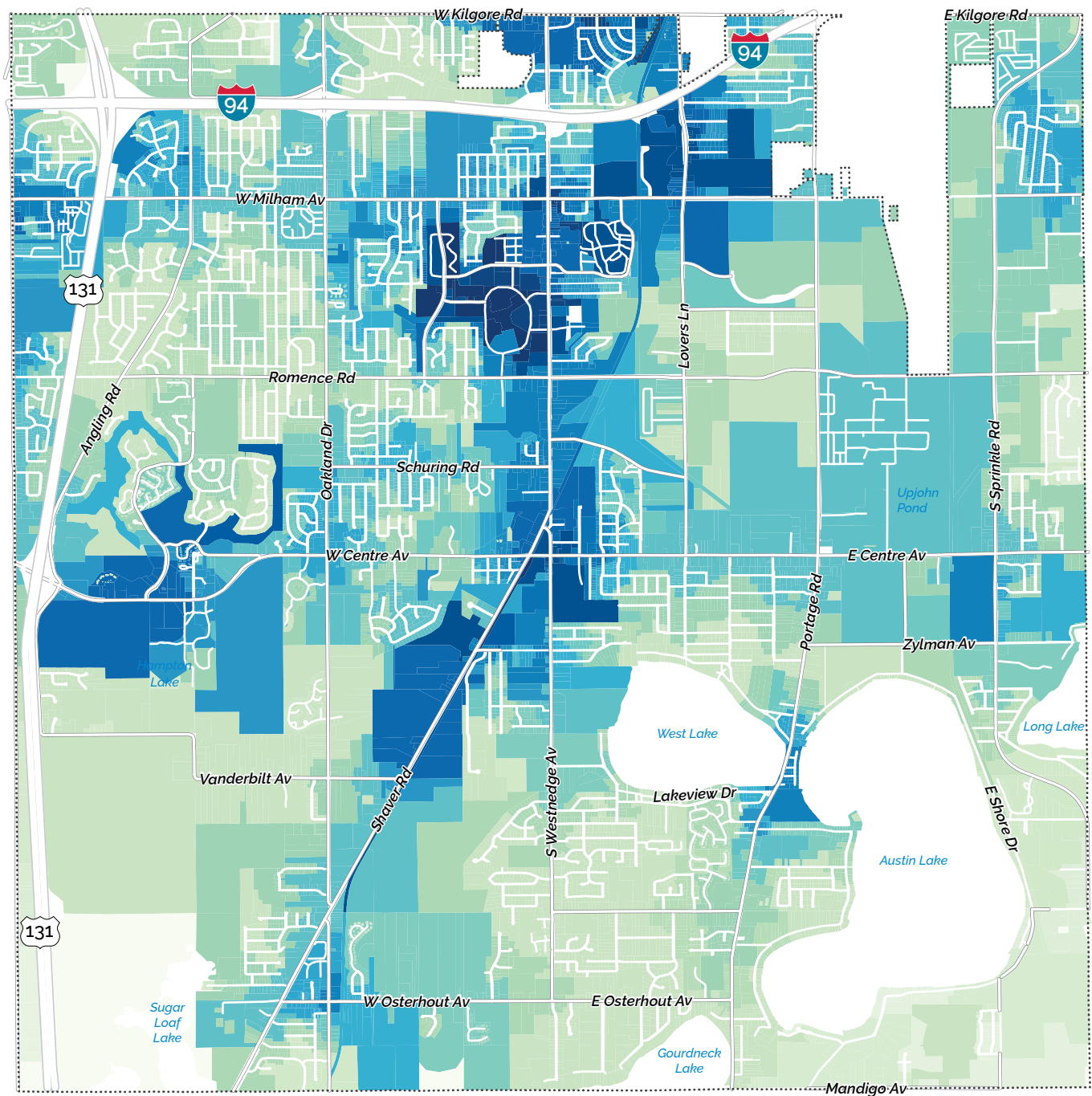
Assessed Value Per Acre



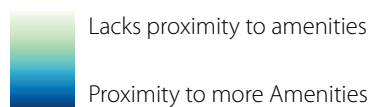
Complete Neighborhoods

Community outreach revealed a strong desire for better connections for pedestrians and cyclists between residential, retail, and recreational areas, aiming to reduce the need to drive along South Westnedge Avenue for dining or shopping. In addition, the three subareas were specifically highlighted as areas where more attractive and walkable mixed-use nodes should be accommodated. This sentiment indicates that there is community support for the concept of “15-minute neighborhoods” or “complete neighborhoods,” where residents have access to a variety of amenities within a 15-minute walk.

As a part of the existing conditions, a Complete Neighborhoods Index was created, mapping access to parks, stores, schools, and transit within a 15-minute walk or 10-minute bike ride. Darker areas on the map indicate higher access to amenities, mainly along South Westnedge Avenue and near the Crossroads Mall. For example, South Westnedge Avenue scores high on the Complete Neighborhoods Index, reflecting the corridors rich amenities. An analysis of current development trends shows that residential building permits were issued mostly in areas lacking nearby amenities. The Future Land Use Plan suggests repurposing commercial zones like the Westnedge corridor for mixed-residential and multifamily housing to improve access to amenities and support local businesses. This strategy aims to enhance both residential access and amenity availability through targeted development at key intersections.



Complete Neighborhood Index



FUTURE LAND USE

All parcels within the City have been assigned to one of nine land use designations. These land use designations cover the full range of Portage development types and should serve as the basis for development review and approval and future zoning amendments and regional/neighborhood plans, which may be needed to realize the full implementation of the Master Plan's recommendations. However, deviations from the Future Land Use Plan may be appropriate when justified by more detailed information, changes to conditions, or in cases where a deviation is not contrary to the overall intent and purpose of the Plan.

Single Family Residential

Single-family residential includes the City's residential areas consisting of single-family detached housing units. A variety of single-family attached and detached residential formats exist such as traditional 1960s ranch-style homes in the north, modern 1980 and 1990s two-story suburban homes situated in curvilinear subdivisions primarily in the south and west, and updated larger, luxury homes surrounding the lakes.

Single-family detached homes are expected to remain the main housing type in Portage. However, it is also important to introduce other low-intensity options like duplexes and accessory dwelling units that offer more variety. These can be developed on infill lots for those looking for alternatives to large single-family homes but wishing to stay in single-family neighborhoods. These areas could be paired with neighborhood-scale commercial/retail at key intersections to create mixed-use nodes providing residents easy access to goods and services near their own neighborhoods. Within these nodes, efforts to enhance the aesthetic quality of neighborhoods and ensure the visual quality of properties should be a focus. The zoning code could be amended to encourage different neighborhood scales and densities throughout the City.

Mixed Residential

Mixed Residential consists of multiple housing types including townhomes, duplexes, and multifamily buildings. These areas encourage greater variety within Portage housing stock and allow for greater flexibility to build denser residential development in proximity to the City's major roadways, including South Westnedge Avenue, Centre Avenue, Oakland Drive, Lovers Lane, and Portage Road. Mixed Residential areas may provide a transition between the major corridors and the single-family neighborhoods. Multifamily and single-family attached residences should be sited and designed to create a cohesive neighborhood setting that allows for walking and biking, and promotes an overall sense of place and identity. These areas would also serve as desirable locations for mixed-use nodes.

As the three subareas evolve, potential locations for local-serving mixed-use development should also be considered. These nodes can be strategically placed around the community to create more complete neighborhoods where current services and amenities may be lacking. Opportunities in the northwest and southern parts of Portage exist to implement this approach as these areas have been identified as missing parks, grocery stores, public transit, and schools.

Local Commercial

Local Commercial includes small commercial businesses, typically along major and minor routes near residential neighborhoods and throughout the City which provide goods and services to residents in nearby neighborhoods. These areas provide local shopping options and eliminate long trips to larger commercial corridors for everyday needs. These areas should be accessible by car, walking, biking, and transit. As development and redevelopment occurs opportunities for adaptive reuse should be prioritized to create more sustainable building practices

Community Commercial

Community Commercial includes a mix of retail, service, dining, and professional office uses along the City's major vehicular corridors, such as South Westnedge Avenue, Centre Avenue, Shaver Road, and Portage Road. These areas encompass a mix of scales including large retailers that attract patronage from outside the City. A flexible range of formats are encouraged including plazas and visually appealing multi-tenant developments. Special attention to site aesthetics, landscaping, building design, and signage is recommended to ensure visually appealing development that enhances the community's aesthetic quality. Underutilized parking areas on larger sites should be considered for outlot development to improve the relationship between older commercial properties and the public realm and provide opportunities to grow retail environments. As development and redevelopment occurs, opportunities for adaptive reuse should be prioritized to create more sustainable building practices.

Mixed-Use

Mixed-use areas consist of either vertical or horizontal developments. Vertical mixed-use developments consist of commercial/retail uses on the ground floor with residential and/or office uses located on the upper floors while horizontal mixed-use developments consist of commercial/retail uses located adjacent to residential and/or office uses. The intent is to provide an appropriate mix of land uses by locating higher trafficked businesses on the ground floor with sidewalk frontage to create a more inviting and interesting pedestrian experience, while still accommodating service-oriented and residential uses to complement the development. These areas should be designed in a way that provides a safe, attractive, and walkable pedestrian environment. The three primary areas for mixed-use are the Crossroads Subarea, the City Centre Subarea, and the Lake Center Subarea.

Industrial

Industrial areas include employment-related uses including manufacturing, warehousing, and the distribution of goods and materials. These uses should remain in the established areas along Shaver Road, Portage Road, and South Sprinkle Road. Future industrial uses should be prioritized in these areas. These uses should contain buffers from residential land uses. As development and redevelopment occurs, opportunities for adaptive reuse should be prioritized to create more sustainable building practices.

Parks / Open Space

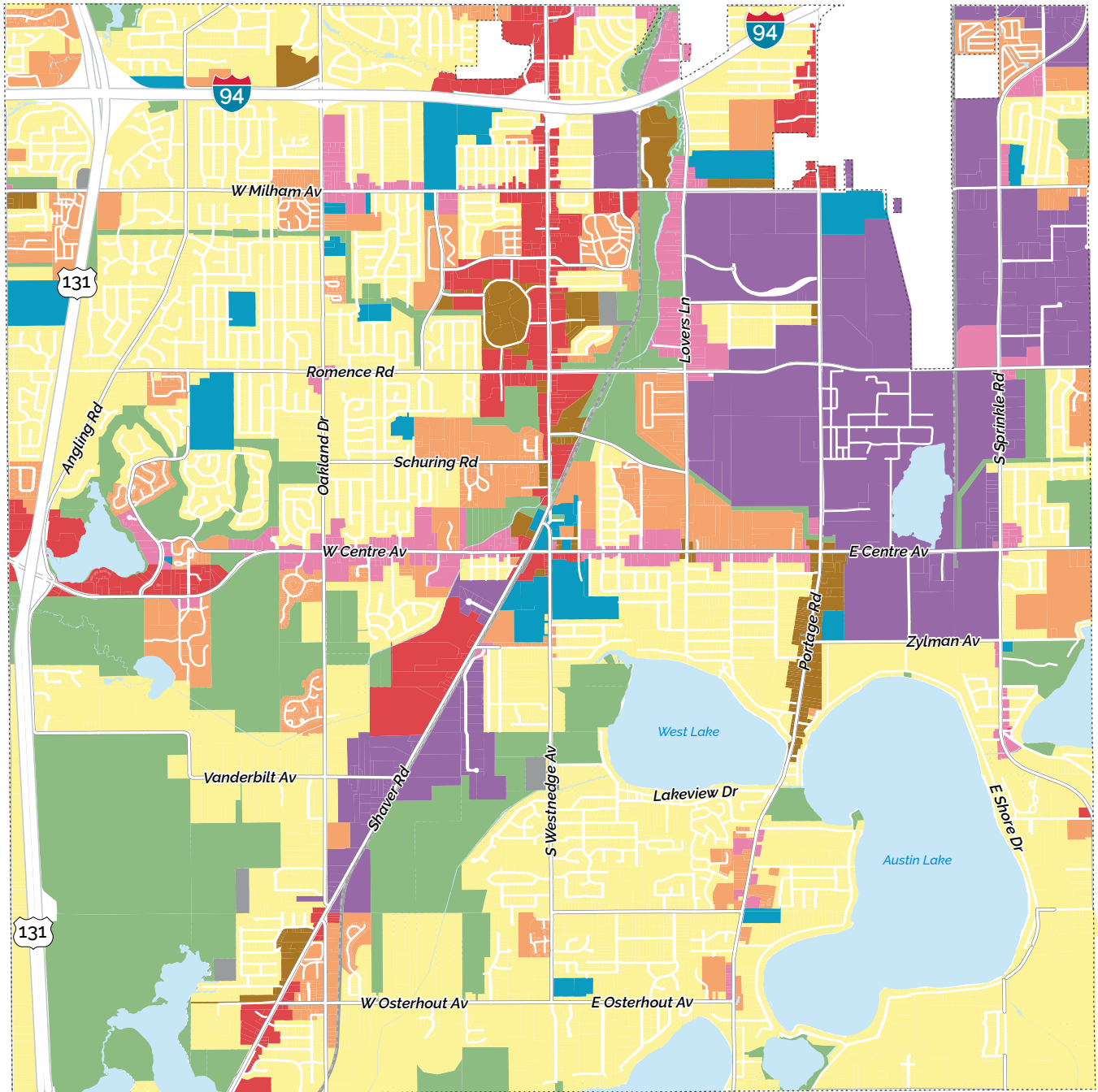
Parks and Open Space areas include recreational facilities, such as Celery Flats Historical Area, Portage Creek Bicentennial Park, and Ramona Park are key community assets. These recreational assets should continue in their current state to allow residents and visitors to recreate and enjoy the City's natural setting. This designation also includes key environmental features such as wetlands, wooded areas, which should remain undeveloped, natural areas. These preserves include West Lake Nature Preserve, Bishops Bog Preserve, Eliason Nature Reserve, and Betty Lee Ongley Nature Preserve.

Public / Institutional

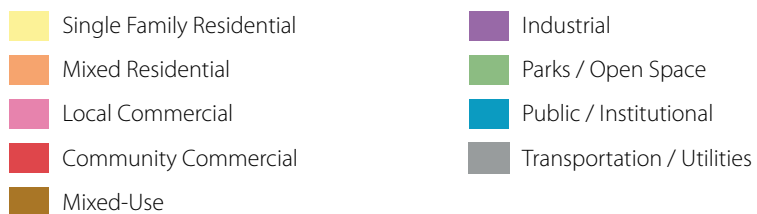
The Public/Institutional designation includes local government uses, municipal facilities, community service providers, and schools. City Hall, Portage District Library, Portage Fire Division, Portage Police Division, Zhang Senior Center, Portage Community Center, and 14 schools are included within this designation. These uses should continue to be located throughout the community. Connection to the surrounding neighborhoods and access for senior citizens should be considered for any future facilities.

Transportation / Utilities

Within the use of transportation is the Norfolk Southern railroad line which runs diagonally through the City. Included in this use is the associated Right of Way (ROW). Utility uses support local infrastructure and provide right-of-way or easements for the transmission of gas, electricity, water, sewer, stormwater, and other infrastructure essential to the community. These uses include both facilities and infrastructure. These areas should continue to provide an essential role in maintaining and supporting the City and the community. Further locations should be determined by the appropriate entities/ organizations based on the needs of the community.



Future Land Use





CHAPTER 6

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

INTRODUCTION

Portage is known as a strong and healthy community with flourishing neighborhoods and housing options. The Housing and Neighborhoods chapter provides guidance on key recommendations impacting residential areas of the City. The Housing and Neighborhoods chapter will strive to preserve and enhance Portage's established residential neighborhoods while promoting opportunities for a greater mix of housing types, including diverse, attainable housing types and choices for all.

GOAL

Foster reinvestment and rehabilitation in the City's established neighborhoods, provide for a range of housing options, and support a high quality-of neighborhood for all residents, regardless of age or background.

CONTEXT

Throughout the community engagement process, residents, business owners, developers, staff, and other stakeholders repeatedly mentioned the need for more housing options. Feedback varied on the different housing types but the general consensus was that the City needed to ensure that people of all life stages have the ability to live in Portage. Attainable housing for young families, young professionals, and seniors was frequently mentioned as lacking in the City. This was supported by the data which shows that over two-thirds of housing in the City is single-family detached. The recent Strategic Market Analysis indicated that townhomes, apartments, and mixed-use buildings would specifically target these populations and would be appropriate for development in the City.

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS FRAMEWORK

Portage offers a variety of housing in distinct environments, extending from the lake neighborhoods to established subdivisions. The Residential Areas Framework addresses the City's residential areas and guides change over time. The Framework should help the City enhance its residential character and ensure Portage offers housing products to meet existing and future needs. The Residential Areas Framework builds on the residential categories established for all residential areas in the Land Use Plan. The Framework supports the City's identity and further defines the type and character of each residential land use. The Framework should be used to achieve the goals and objectives articulated by community residents and leaders.

Context Sensitive Infill

Context-sensitive infill areas primarily consist of the more established neighborhoods of the City. These areas range from the dense, high-valued homes around the lakes, to the sparse, spread-out neighborhoods along Vanderbilt Avenue. These areas are the most prominent residential land use in the City and should continue to draw people to Portage looking for quality single-family homes. As vacant or underdeveloped lots are identified for development and properties come onto the market, these areas should be targeted for context-sensitive infill. This means that new development or redevelopment should complement the existing built and natural environments. Development and redevelopment to increase residential density is appropriate but must fit within the surrounding buildings. Examples of residential development types could include duplexes, fourplexes, townhomes, and multiplexes.

Complete Neighborhoods

The complete neighborhoods of the City primarily consist of mixed-residential and mixed-use land uses. These areas have been identified for more intense residential development offering a variety of housing options to fill the “missing middle” housing gap that currently exists in the City. These areas will be the most critical in creating more affordable and attainable housing options. Housing types should be flexible to fit within the context of the surrounding neighborhoods but also should provide creative solutions to increase density and ultimately affordable. These areas have been selected because of their proximity to arterials, existing land use, and proximity to amenities. Key areas for development include the former greenhouse operations or industrial zones in and around the City Centre subarea, the expansive property along Garden Drive and Lovers Lane, and the agricultural region along Centre Avenue east of Sprinkle Road. In addition, less intense mixed-use developments should be found in the areas along Shaver Road, Milham Avenue, or Oakland Drive.

New Growth

New Growth areas consist of new single-family areas primarily on the southeastern side of the City. These areas should continue to support the residential fabric of the City, providing housing options for families and new Portage residents. New residential areas should allow for traditional single-family homes as well as single-family attached units and accessory dwellings. These areas should allow for flexibility in lot size standards, allowing for more dense single-family areas. Affordability should be prioritized rather than pushing for low-density, large lot development.

Development Intensity

Development Intensity areas can be categorized as dense, mixed-use districts which should be found in the Crossroads and City Centre Subareas. These mixed-use development types should be used to intensify and diversify key areas throughout the City. These locations were identified by the community as areas where more dense, walkable, mixed-use areas would be appropriate. Development Intensity areas within the Crossroads Subarea should consist of cohesive, mixed-use district that fosters connections from residential neighborhoods to trails and open spaces. It should support and expand the existing commercial areas and include a complementary mix of housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sections make up the recommendations which support the Housing and Neighborhoods Framework. Under each section is a reference to the categories established in the Housing and Neighborhoods Framework. The recommendations within each section should be prioritized in these key areas of the City to align with the goals and overall vision for the community.

Housing Variety

Portage consists of a variety of housing types, ages, values, and styles. The City experienced most of its residential growth throughout the 60's 70's as the northwest neighborhoods were built out during that period. Of the nearly 22,000 housing units in Portage, the most prominent are 3-bedroom, single-family detached homes. While Portage's homes are a significant strength and a major part of its identity, traditional residential development patterns are not aligned with the current and projected residential needs.

Housing Mismatch

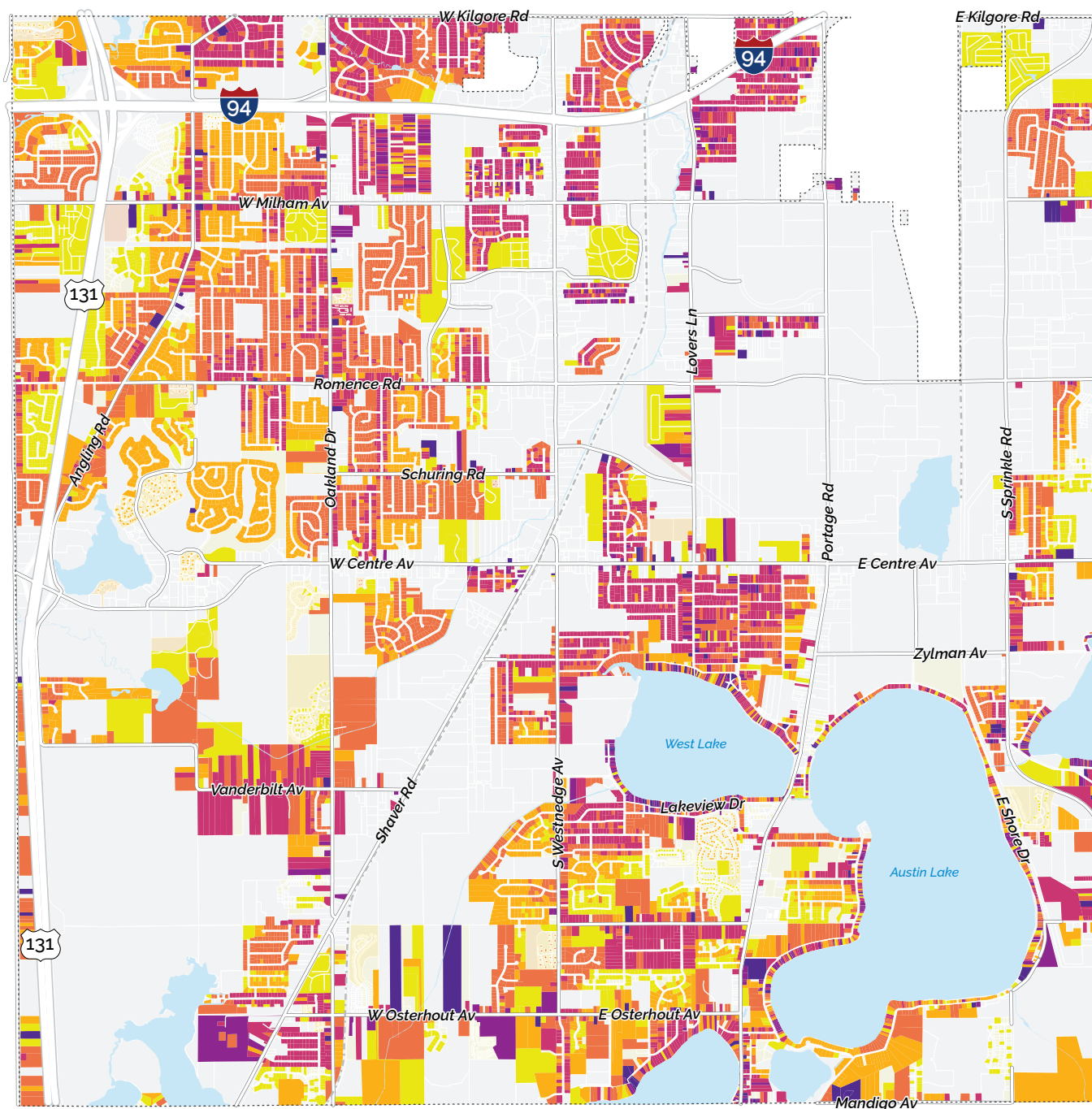
To address the changing demographics and housing needs in Portage, it's recommended that the City focuses on diversifying housing options. Recent studies show significant growth in the 20-34 and 55+ age groups, with many renters seeking attached housing types like townhouses and walkups. However, there's a limited supply of such housing in Portage. Census data also confirms shifts in household makeup, highlighting a need for more diverse housing options. Specifically, there's a demand for rental housing for single adults and alternative housing types for young professionals, downsizing empty-nesters, and older retirees. To bridge this housing gap, Portage should reposition its residential areas to accommodate a wider range of housing options, including rental and ownership forms.

Prioritized Areas

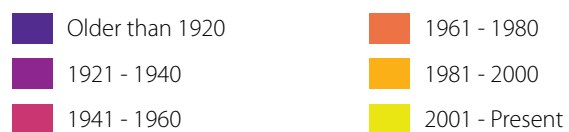
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods
- ▶ New Growth

Recommendations

- ▶ Undertake a zoning analysis to create a pilot program targeting specific areas for a mix of housing types.
- ▶ Amend the zoning code to allow a wider variety of housing as-of-right to minimize the reliance on Planned Developments.
- ▶ Streamline the permitting process by expanding administrative approvals in lieu of planning commission review.
- ▶ Host regular meetings with real estate experts familiar with the community to identify emerging trends, issues, and potential projects related to housing.
- ▶ Promote areas for new mixed-residential and mixed-use developments per the Land Use Plan.



Housing Age



Residential Areas of Change

In order to analyze the housing yield based on the Future Land Use Plan, it is important to identify areas that are going to change to a residential land use or to a higher residential intensity and calculate net household gain based on anticipated density and intensity of the proposed land use.

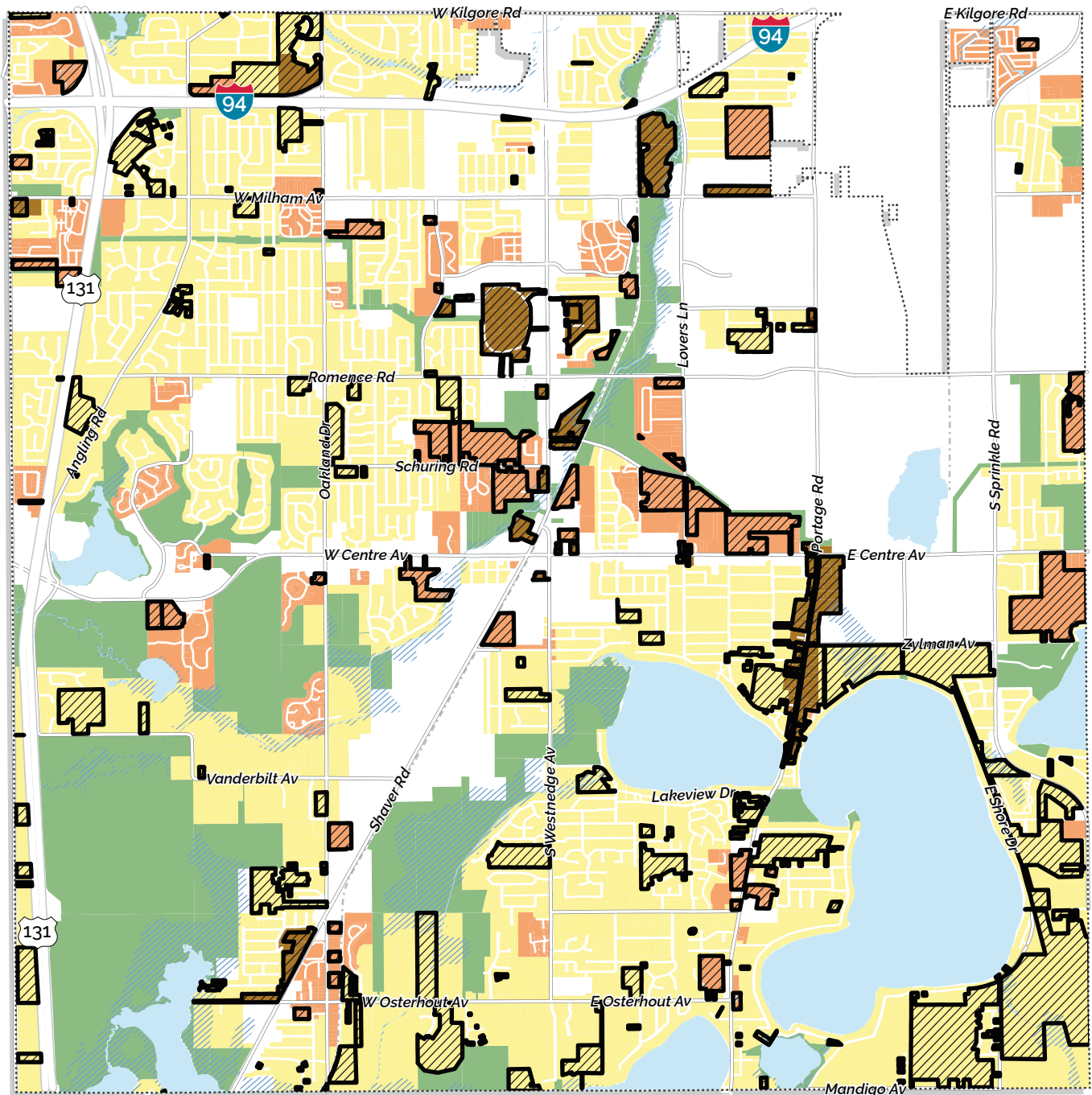
The table shows the residential land uses proposed in the Future Land Use Plan. The “Areas of Change” map outlines existing residential properties that are proposed for a higher density/intensity residential land use, and non-residential existing land use that would change to a residential land use. For example, the existing agricultural land between Centre Ave and Zylman Ave north of Ramona Park has now been changed to the mixed-residential category. Conversely, the residential areas surrounding Amberly Elementary School have not changed from their single-family designation. Shown below in the map, and the supporting table, are several non-residential existing land uses that now have a residential land use assigned (outlined and hatched) in the Future Land Use Plan.

There are over 1,900 acres of new residential land use proposed in the Future Land Use Plan. It includes 1,200 acres of new single-family residential, over 500 acres of new mixed-residential, and over 130 acres of new mixed-use land use. Next, the development density – Dwelling Unit per Acre (DUA), was calculated based on existing development patterns and the City’s current zoning standards and assumptions on the ratio of residential/commercial/office uses for the mixed-use category.

Based on the Future Land Use Plan, zoning, and development assumptions, the City of Portage can accommodate 7,500 residential units at a minimum and nearly 15,000 units if the properties are developed at a higher density and intensity. This is 1,300 units more than what the City can currently accommodate based on the existing land use and proposes denser development close to community amenities such as retail, parks and open space, and transit. With the Future Land Use Plan, the City can accommodate the projected growth reported by the Strategic Market Analysis over the next two decades while providing a much greater variety of housing choices for all ages and at differing price points.

Note: Although these calculations indicate the total residential development potential, it is unlikely that all proposed land use changes will produce developments with the estimated densities. A combination of market factors and development patterns will ultimately dictate what gets developed. In addition, the population and household projections are limited by the assumptions used. While it is useful to use these projections as a starting point, it is important to recognize that these numbers could fluctuate based on real-world scenarios.

Future Land Use	Acreage	Min DUA	Min Households	Max DUA	Max Households
Single Family Residential	1237.59	3	3,713	5	6,188
Mixed Residential	564.34	5	2,822	12	6,321
Mixed-Use	138.03	7	966	16.9	2,332
Total	1,939.96		7,501		14,841



Residential Areas of Change

 Areas of Change

Future Land Use

 Single Family Residential

 Mixed Residential

 Mixed-Use

 Parks / Open Space



Missing Middle Housing

Missing middle housing types allow the City to increase the diversity of housing types through gentle increases in density while maintaining the existing character neighborhoods. The idea behind missing middle housing is to allow housing types that may have previously been illegal due to zoning or building code restrictions. Missing middle housing types could range from low density duplexes to mid-density multiplexes. Within Portage, existing single-family or commercial lots can be utilized to accommodate multiple units while preserving the existing neighborhood identity.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods
- ▶ New Growth
- ▶ Development Intensity

Recommendations

- ▶ Reduce minimum house size, lot size, setbacks, and frontage requirements to allow for more diverse housing options.
- ▶ Consider permitting duplex and/or multi-plex housing in some designated single-family zoning districts.
- ▶ Reassess parking requirements for multifamily housing projects to reflect decreasing auto dependency and overly restrictive historical standards.
- ▶ Reassess setbacks for multifamily housing projects to facilitate better site efficiency design.
- ▶ Utilize “Planned Development” (PD) development opportunities where amenities exist for providing neighborhood/community benefits.

Housing Affordability

Housing affordability is affecting Portage like many other communities throughout the country post-COVID. Housing affordability, often synonymous with “cost burdened”, is defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as those who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing. Paying more in housing may lead to difficulty affording other necessities including food, clothing, transportation, and healthcare. In Portage, 17.3 percent of owner-occupied homes and 36.3 percent of rentals are cost burdened. This means that collectively nearly 1-in-4 households in Portage struggle to afford the home they live in.

Portage’s current housing stock caters towards more middle-class homeowners while market demand indicates that for-lease housing products would be an attractive and more affordable option to those who cannot afford to purchase a home. Median home values have increased to \$275,000, making affordable options scarce. In order to offset this challenge, the City should allow for, and in some cases incentivize developers to build more affordable housing options.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ New Growth
- ▶ Development Intensity

Recommendations

- ▶ Incentivize developers to include rent-stabilized or below market-rate units in new housing developments.
- ▶ Establish a down-payment assistance program to reduce the barriers of entry into Portage’s residential market.
- ▶ Work with developers to encourage new housing based on findings from the 2024 Housing Market Study.
- ▶ Advertise grants, low-interest loans, or tax credits to property owners to help fund private property improvements.
- ▶ Consider density bonuses, fee waivers, and waivers for parking minimums for opportunity sites identified in the Crossroads, City Centre, and Lake Center subareas.

Aging in Place

To address the challenges posed by an aging population in Portage, it's crucial to adapt development regulations and prioritize strategies that support aging in place. With the 55+ population growing significantly, there's a pressing need to accommodate residents in all stages of life. By amending development regulations, Portage can encourage the development of various housing options tailored to the needs of older adults, including age-friendly design features and accessible amenities. Additionally, promoting mixed-use developments with access to essential services and transportation can enhance the livability and independence of older residents. Prioritizing these strategies ensure that Portage remains a vibrant and inclusive community for people of all ages.

Note: The City of Portage has taken steps to increase opportunities for missing middle housing and aging in place. In December of 2023, the City of Portage passed a zoning amendment which amended the zoning code to establish an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) regulation and permitting process. The amendment allows ADUs on single-family properties. ADUs should be incorporated into neighborhoods in a variety of ways to preserve the context and character. ADUs can take the form of detached, attached, or interior units, all of which are permitted under the City's code.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods

Recommendations

- ▶ Continue to market and encourage property owners to construct permitted Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).
- ▶ Encourage a variety of housing types that anticipate future market demand and allow seniors to age in place. The variety of housing types should not be isolated but rather integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood.
- ▶ Collaborate with healthcare providers to offer preventive care, wellness programs, and chronic disease management services tailored to older adults' needs.
- ▶ Facilitate intergenerational programs and volunteer opportunities to foster connections between older adults and younger residents.
- ▶ Improve sidewalk infrastructure, crosswalks, and traffic signals to enhance pedestrian safety, particularly near senior living facilities, parks, and community centers.
- ▶ Encourage the development of universally designed housing options that accommodate varying mobility needs, such as single-story homes, zero-step entrances, wider doorways, and accessible bathrooms.
- ▶ Consider a senior home repair program to ensure the City's elderly residents can continue to maintain safe homes.
- ▶ Support the development of age-targeted residential and other residential products that are accessible and attractive to seniors, offered at attainable price points.

Neighborhood Character

Portage is a sought-after community where people choose to raise their families largely due to its quality neighborhoods. According to the results from the community survey, half of survey respondents indicated that Portage is appealing for its housing options, neighborhood character, and quality of housing. To preserve this asset overtime, the City should work to maintain and improve the desirability of its neighborhoods.

Strengthening Neighborhoods

Though Portage is known for having strong, established neighborhoods, community feedback suggests a need for more distinct neighborhood identities, particularly in subdivisions without homeowner associations (HOAs). To address this, the City should actively support neighborhood planning initiatives aimed at defining clear boundaries and fostering a stronger sense of community and connection among residents.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill

Recommendations

- ▶ Work with HOA's and residents to create distinct neighborhood groups to provide connection and community within the City.
- ▶ Support neighborhood beautification that encourages gateway and landscaping improvements to preserve and promote neighborhood character.
- ▶ Work with neighborhood and non-profit organizations to promote the awareness of housing rehabilitation programs.
- ▶ Encourage rehabilitation of older homes rather than demolition to ensure that existing entry-level homes remain available.
- ▶ Utilize subdivision regulations and design review to provide developers with the flexibility to cluster residential development in certain portions of a site, thereby leaving larger contiguous areas of wetlands, streams, tree stand, and other assets undisturbed.

Code Enforcement

Given the aging housing stock in Portage, with over 50 percent of homes built before 1980, it's crucial to address signs of deterioration to preserve the appeal of neighborhoods. Community feedback underscores the need for effective property maintenance enforcement to uphold standards that contribute to the attractiveness of Portage's neighborhoods. Many homeowners may struggle with maintenance due to financial constraints or accessibility issues, particularly as residents age and retire. To address this, the City should explore initiatives to assist property owners in maintaining their homes, ensuring the long-term vitality and desirability of Portage's residential areas.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill

Recommendations

- ▶ Identify areas within the City that have chronic code enforcement issues and create a city-wide assistance program to work with property owners to aid in upkeep.
- ▶ Establish housing inspection program including inspections for both single and multifamily buildings.
- ▶ Explore partnerships between the City and health providers to ensure high quality of living environments through home safety inspections and wellness checks.
- ▶ Utilize programs such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to help fund home rehabilitations.
- ▶ Allow for infill housing within established neighborhoods with context-sensitive designs.
- ▶ Consider updating subdivision regulations to include standards for materials, siting, and architectural styles to provide a more consistent aesthetic for infill development.



CHAPTER 7

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Portage has historically been a well-known shopping destination and a major employment hub drawing regional patrons to its South Westnedge Avenue corridor. The Economic Development chapter seeks to strengthen Portage's commercial and industrial corridors by repositioning its assets, developing its future workforce, supporting existing businesses, and attracting new businesses. The chapter provides key priorities and recommendations to help Portage develop the required workforce and grow the economy with a business-friendly environment that encourages reinvestment in the community's commercial and industrial areas.

GOAL

- ▶ Maximize the potential of commercial corridors throughout the City by encouraging more dense, focused development along previously established commercial corridors.
- ▶ Attract and support local businesses and major employers to strengthen the local tax base and provide well-paying, high-quality employment opportunities.

CONTEXT

Throughout the community engagement process, residents, business owners, developers, staff, and other stakeholders repeatedly mentioned the need for mixed-use nodes to support neighborhood retail options, the redevelopment of specific areas of the City with the Crossroads Mall as one of the most cited areas, and a downtown. The City sits in an advantageous position as an employment hub with nearly 22,000 people commuting into the City on a daily basis, easy regional access along I-95 highway, and connection to regional cities such as Grand Rapids, Chicago, and Detroit. Retail, office, and industrial rents have been steadily rising indicating healthy growth. Due to the City's stable economic position, the City has the flexibility to work to achieve the goals and priority projects laid out by the community during outreach. The feedback collected during the engagement process, in addition to industry best practices, informs the recommendations outlined in this chapter.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The Commercial and Employment Areas Framework guides areas of the City that should be planned and promoted for long-range business growth. These are Portage's tax generating land uses that provide employment opportunities and goods and services to the community and the surrounding area. For simplicity, the categories found in the Economic Development Framework mirror the categories established in the Housing and Neighborhoods Framework reorganized for the commercial, office, and industrial areas of the City.

Context Sensitive Infill

To promote context-sensitive design in Portage, it's essential to focus on infill development areas that complement existing commercial, office, and industrial properties. These areas should prioritize enhancing the character of commercial and industrial corridors by implementing various improvements such as street trees, landscaping, burying utilities, buffering sidewalks, cross access, and rear access to reduce curb cuts, and improving the pedestrian environment. By building upon existing infrastructure and established businesses, Portage can create more cohesive and visually appealing commercial areas that benefit both businesses and the community. Development or redevelopment within these infill areas should prioritize filling vacant lots, underutilized properties, and outlots. Key areas for context-sensitive infill development include West and East Centre Avenue, along South Westnedge Avenue north of I-94, and along Shaver Road.

Complete Neighborhoods

To support complete neighborhoods and encourage economic growth in Portage, it's important to focus on areas designated as Complete Neighborhoods. These areas are strategically selected due to their proximity to existing residential neighborhoods. By developing these areas, Portage can ensure that residents have access to essential goods and services within walking distance, reducing reliance on cars for daily needs like groceries and services. Complete Neighborhoods typically include local commercial land use designations and support more intense residential uses. Additionally, they incorporate neighborhood-scale mixed-use developments, which combine a variety of uses to increase density and promote a diverse range of businesses. Key areas designated as Complete Neighborhoods in Portage include strategic nodes like Romence Road and Oakland Drive, South Sprinkle Road and East Centre Avenue, and West Milham Avenue and Oakland Drive. Supporting the development and enhancement of Complete Neighborhoods will not only improve the quality of life for residents but also foster economic growth and vitality within the community.

New Growth

New Growth areas include property already owned by businesses, such as the industrial land on the northeast side of the City. While these areas are currently vacant or undeveloped, they are being held by larger industrial users for future expansion. Once developed, they will represent greenfield developments, offering the opportunity to incorporate various improvements and amenities into future development plans establishing an employment campus setting. To ensure compatibility with surrounding uses, strategies like landscaped buffers or berms can be employed to shield more intense uses from neighboring residential or local commercial areas. Additionally, integrating trails, bike lanes, sidewalks, and placemaking elements such as fountains, public art, and wayfinding signage can enhance the appeal and functionality of these new developments. It's crucial to accompany greenfield development with essential infrastructure like water, sewer, power, and internet access to adequately support businesses. Key New Growth areas in Portage include locations along Portage Road, South Sprinkle Road, Zylman Avenue, and Lovers Lane. Prioritizing thoughtful development in these areas will not only accommodate growth but also

enhance the overall livability and attractiveness of Portage.

Development Intensity

Development Intensity areas can be categorized as dense, mixed-use districts, which should be found in the Crossroads, Lake Center, and City Centre Subareas. These areas should be envisioned as dense, mixed-use districts aimed at intensifying and diversifying key parts of the City. Identified by community input, these locations are seen as suitable for more compact, walkable, and mixed-use developments. Because the City doesn't have a traditional downtown, the City Centre should be used to fill that void. Mixed-use development complemented by retail, civic, and residential uses should contribute to a centralized area that hosts community events and functions as the City's civic core. Within the Crossroads Subarea, Development Intensity areas should foster cohesive, mixed-use districts that enhance connections from residential neighborhoods to trails and open spaces. Additionally, Development Intensity should also support existing commercial areas while incorporating a complementary mix of housing options to promote a vibrant and balanced urban environment. These areas should seek to utilize existing buildings to promote adaptive reuse. The Crossroads Mall is a clear example of how adaptive reuse could be used to retrofit the mall into new uses if redevelopment were to occur. Within the Lake Center subarea, the Portage Road commercial corridor should promote a revitalized, more walkable, mixed-use area with a focal point being the section of the road nearest the convergence of West Lake and Austin Lake.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sections make up the recommendations which support the Housing and Neighborhoods Framework. Under each section is a reference to the categories established in the Housing and Neighborhoods Framework. The recommendations within each section should be prioritized in these key areas of the City to align with the goals and overall vision for the community.

COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

Commercial areas serve as the economic engine of Portage, offering employment, recreational activities, shopping, and community gathering spaces. Commercial areas draw visitors from both within and outside the City, contributing to economic growth through spending. Carefully planning for these areas creates destinations for both employment and leisure which are inviting, easy to get to, and diverse.

Transformation to Mixed Use

Portage's major commercial corridors along South Westnedge Avenue and Centre Avenue promote distinct characteristics and functions in the City. South Westnedge Avenue includes a variety of commercial and retail establishments while Centre Avenue is predominantly office uses. As part of the Master Plan the City should identify opportunities along the corridors and throughout the community for redevelopment and encourage a variety of uses to strengthen commercial districts and promote revitalization.

Alongside this redevelopment, strategic updates to zoning regulations could streamline the redevelopment process and facilitate the implementation of mixed-use developments. Through repositioning commercial development, Portage can create vibrant destinations throughout the community that integrate residential and recreational spaces.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Development Intensity
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods

Recommendations

- ▶ Work to consolidate and reposition commercial corridors to create mixed-use nodes throughout the City to increase economic activity at a neighborhood level.
- ▶ Update zoning code to allow for areas of mixed-use development as-of-right to support neighborhood commercial and residential development.
- ▶ Encourage residential uses, including multifamily development, in underperforming commercial areas and key corridors such as Lake Center on Portage Road.
- ▶ Identify vacant or underutilized parcels or buildings suitable for infill commercial development and redevelopment.
- ▶ Evaluate the use of creative zoning solutions such as overlay to incentivize developers to reimagine commercial areas throughout the City.

Reposition Office Parks

Centre Avenue supports the majority of office and small-scale commercial uses within the City. To better revitalize this corridor, specific strategies and regulations should aim to accommodate non-traditional office uses such as residential spaces, public/semi-public buildings, co-working spaces, and other uses that promote both live/work needs.

By promoting a wider range of uses and offering flexibility in zoning regulations, these office parks can transform into dynamic hubs that attract residents and sustain commercial growth and job opportunities. Such revitalization efforts will enhance the vibrancy and economic vitality of Portage's Centre Avenue corridor.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods

Recommendations

- ▶ Support redevelopment or underutilized office parks to more local commercial or mixed-uses to reflect shifting trends while continuing to support small businesses looking for space within the City.
- ▶ Encourage flex-office uses and coworking spaces.
- ▶ Accommodate non-traditional office park users in office space to allow for a mix of uses
- ▶ Consider expanding the definition of office uses within the zoning code or eliminate the designation in order to accommodate flexibility of uses.
- ▶ Promote adaptive reuse to encourage sustainable building practices and offer creative opportunities for retrofitting existing buildings.

Prioritizing Mixed-Use Development

During community outreach, the idea of utilizing a mix of uses to create more dense developments was repeatedly mentioned. People wanted access to goods and services within close proximity to where they lived. By concentrating development into nodes, residents would be able to walk or bike to stores, restaurants, or other commercial uses. Mixed-use developments were identified in the Strategic Market Study as a product that does not currently exist in the City.

The study highlighted different densities, building types, and detailed the potential success of this type of development. The proposed River Caddis development, occurring within City Centre will exhibit the potential of mixed-use developments to strengthen areas by increasing activity and the user base.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Development Density

Recommendations

- ▶ Evaluate the success and challenges of the River Caddis development to ensure that additional mixed-use projects address the current short comings and carry-through the successes.
- ▶ Prioritize redevelopment of established places, such as the Crossroads Subarea, Lake Center Subarea, and City Centre Subarea, with a mix of commercial and residential uses in strategic, mixed-use nodes and areas.
- ▶ Reevaluate the City's density requirements to allow more dense mixed-use developments.
- ▶ Implement the recommendations of the Lake Center District Corridor and Placemaking Study to introduce attractive and walkable mixed-use business district areas.
- ▶ Market and promote sites identified as mixed-use in the Future Land Use Plan to developers to encourage this type of development.
- ▶ Consider providing tax incentives, density bonuses, or reduced fees for projects that include mixed-use components.
- ▶ Consider creating Mixed-Use districts to include the boundaries of the Crossroads, City Centre, and Lake Center.
- ▶ Consider allowing mixed-use development within the Complete Neighborhood areas identified in the Economic Development Framework.

Rethinking Parking Lots

Surface parking lots can present distinctive issues while planning for future development. While some lots are necessary for the market success of specific developments, they also increase runoff of stormwater, create heat islands, increase glare and light pollution, and impact the character of the surrounding area. Minimizing parking requirements for new developments to allow only needed parking can reduce the environmental impacts.

Parking lots can also be utilized to serve a crucial social function, creating attractive spaces for urban gardens and micro parks, food trucks, and festivals or other events. The City should encourage the activation of these lots to promote density and social connectivity.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods

Recommendations

- ▶ Adjust parking requirements to maximize development potential while allowing market forces to dictate needed parking.
- ▶ Encourage redevelopment of existing parking lots to make space for additional outlot development.
- ▶ Redevelop existing parking lots to create a more pedestrian environment within key areas such as the Crossroads, City Center, and Lake Center Subarea with amenities such as plaza spaces and other gathering spaces.

Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport

- ▶ To capitalize on the proximity of the Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport, Portage should strategically support complementary commercial, industrial and office uses, while ensuring adherence to noise restrictions. It's essential to incorporate adequate screening and buffering measures to minimize the impact on nearby residential and low-intensity areas during redevelopment.
- ▶ Portage should take a proactive role in coordinating efforts with both the airport authority and the City of Kalamazoo to maximize the economic potential of this area while maintaining a high quality of life for residents.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill

Recommendations

- ▶ Support redevelopment of the Portage Road corridor as a cohesive district to complement the functions of the Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport.
- ▶ Work with the airport and City of Kalamazoo to support complementary development and coordinate long-term planning efforts to enhance the corridor.
- ▶ Install new placemaking elements and gateways outside of the airport to announce entrance into Portage.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Portage has a highly educated, growing middle class with job salaries significantly higher than other communities within the region. With a median household income nearing \$69,000 and only seven percent of the workforce below the poverty line, the City's economic potential is vast. Key sectors like manufacturing, healthcare, retail, and hospitality drive employment growth. Contrary to the perception of being solely a bedroom community, Portage hosts over 26,000 employees within its borders, with approximately 4,400 residents working locally. This translates to around 22,000 daily commuters to Portage for work. To sustain this economic vitality, the City must actively engage with the business community, promoting growth and fostering local job opportunities.

Supporting Existing Workforce

A pivotal aspect of the Master Plan is ensuring that the existing workforce is supported and has the opportunity to work, live, and spend time in the City. With over 40 percent of individuals working in either manufacturing, healthcare, or retail, opportunities exist to strategically support individuals in those employment sectors.

To support additional employment sectors, the City should work to build strategic partnerships with education providers and employers to understand workforce needs. This could include identifying gaps in education or technical skills and fostering solutions to close these gaps.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods
- ▶ New Growth
- ▶ Development Intensity

Recommendations

- ▶ Advertise existing workforce development programs such as the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Southwest Michigan First, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and the Kalamazoo Chamber of Commerce.
- ▶ Partner with Portage Northern and Portage Central High Schools and major employers to facilitate internship opportunities, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities.
- ▶ Partner and promote existing efforts to create training programs with Kalamazoo County, KRESA, and Career Connect.
- ▶ Utilize the internship program with the City to market public sectors jobs to students in school.
- ▶ Support post-secondary and trade school programs within the City and work with higher education institutions such as Western Michigan or Kalamazoo College to maintain and increase program offerings.
- ▶ Examine the City's economic assets and competitive disadvantages to determine achievable target industries for business recruitment and necessary infrastructure updates.

Supporting Working Families

Throughout the community engagement process, community members cited the need for expanded childcare options and facilities. In order to support those participating in the workforce and raising children, childcare services should be expanded. Accessible, affordable, and quality childcare benefits the social and financial needs of parents and the educational and developmental needs of children. The location and availability of childcare can affect other community development goals and activities including smart growth and sustainability planning initiatives.

Addressing community childcare needs in long-range planning documents and development reviews results in more family-friendly neighborhoods. The City should promote and encourage the development of more family resources for working families, including daycare, after school programs, and flexible working hours.

Note: In 2022 Governor Whitmer signed House Bills 5041 through 5048 which expand access to quality, affordable childcare for families and make it easier for childcare businesses to get started. This follows a bipartisan budget of \$1.4 billion that was signed in 2021 which expanded low or no cost childcare to 1 in 3 Michigan families, delivered \$1,000 bonuses to 38,000+ childcare professionals in Michigan and helped nearly 6,000 childcare businesses remain open.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods
- ▶ New Growth
- ▶ Development Intensity

Recommendations

- ▶ Advertise existing workforce development programs such as the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Southwest Michigan First, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and the Kalamazoo Chamber of Commerce.
- ▶ Partner with Portage Northern and Portage Central High Schools and major employers to facilitate internship opportunities, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities.
- ▶ Utilize the internship program with the City to market public sectors jobs to students in school.
- ▶ Work with the public schools to ensure that after school programs are effective, engaging, and reliable to allow for working parents to take advantage of the services provided.
- ▶ Work with large employers to consider offering childcare services on-site to give working parents the flexibility and convenience of being able to pick up and drop off their children within close proximity to their work.

Attracting New Businesses

To foster economic development, Portage can deploy various strategies and tools such as tax increment financing, special service areas, corridor improvement authorities, and business development districts. These tools are instrumental in stimulating economic growth, revitalizing underdeveloped areas, and directing planning efforts effectively.

In addition to these tools, establishing clear regulatory boundaries and streamlined permitting processes offers business owners and operators certainty and simplicity in advancing development projects. By ensuring mechanisms that support growth for all types of businesses, Portage can attract new uses and spur development across the community.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods
- ▶ New Growth
- ▶ Development Intensity

Recommendations

- ▶ Use economic development tools such as tax increment financing, Industrial Development Districts, brownfield grants, special service areas, corridor improvement authorities, and business development districts to facilitate desired commercial developments, when appropriate.
- ▶ Provide clear regulatory and permitting processes, giving business owners and entrepreneurs fair certainty for new ventures in the City.
- ▶ Consider providing incentives to attract new businesses such as reduced permit fees, expedited review processes, grants, and low interest loans.
- ▶ Create an available property database on the City's website to market available sites and attract investment

Promote Local Businesses

Local businesses and organizations play a significant role in the local economy. Local businesses contribute to the area's unique character, provide local employment opportunities, and contribute to sustainability efforts by reducing environmental impacts. Collaborating with organizations like the Southwest Michigan First Chamber, the City can actively support and promote local businesses, fostering growth and cultivating a sense of community identity and pride.

Implementing programs such as a business retention and expansion initiative will further strengthen Portage's economic base by providing existing businesses with the support and resources needed to thrive and expand within the City. By encouraging active participation from local businesses and organizations in community development efforts, Portage can create a vibrant and resilient economic environment for all stakeholders involved.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods
- ▶ New Growth
- ▶ Development Intensity

Recommendations

- ▶ Continue to work with the Southwest Michigan First Chamber as well as the business community to promote businesses, professionals, and organizations within the City.
- ▶ Evaluate the potential of a business retention and expansion program.
- ▶ Create a business registry to showcase restaurants, retail, and other businesses within the City.
- ▶ Encourage local businesses to engage with the chamber to stay involved.
- ▶ Create local business events such as farmers markets, artisan markets, and community events where the community is able to interact with local businesses.
- ▶ Encourage local business participation at City meetings to foster a culture of collaboration.

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL CHARACTER

Fostering robust commercial and industrial uses are crucial for the City's economic growth and cultural identity. Developing industrial areas will require strategies to minimize any negative impacts to surrounding areas. Along with industrial development improvements, commercial corridors can be enhanced through landscaping, streetscaping, and other architectural facade improvements to create visually appealing environments and attract new businesses. Investing in these aesthetic upgrades and building a distinct character for these commercial and industrial districts will strengthen the economic base while promoting the overall identity of the City.

Conservation Design

Conservation design is an approach to land planning and development that prioritizes the preservation and enhancement of natural resources and ecological systems. Unlike conventional development practices that focus solely on maximizing building density and land use efficiency, conservation design seeks to minimize the environmental impact of development while promoting sustainability and biodiversity. This approach typically involves clustering development in designated areas while preserving large portions of land as open space, green corridors, or wildlife habitats. By integrating land use planning with ecological considerations, conservation design aims to create communities that are not only functional and aesthetically pleasing but also environmentally responsible and resilient. Though often considered a strategy for residential and subdivision development, conservation design strategies can be successful in industrial areas which have a lot of undeveloped open space, such as the areas on the northeast side of the City.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ New Growth

Eliminating Visual Clutter

Visual clutter is the excessive or seemingly disorganized stuff that one experiences while walking on a sidewalk or driving on a street. Various commercial corridors such as South Westnedge Avenue and Centre Avenue have elements that add to the visual clutter and detract from establishing a cohesive character and identity for the City. Elements such as signs, advertising, utility infrastructure, abundance of road markings, and lack of green space all contribute to the visual clutter that one may experience. The City should reevaluate the sign ordinance to determine if there are other ways to enhance community character through signage, such as amortizing pole signs.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Development Intensity
- ▶ Creating Cohesive

Commercial and Industrial Areas

Portage has taken several steps to ensure that commercial and industrial areas develop with care. Despite this deliberate effort, there are areas of the City that could benefit from more synergy and connection to surrounding uses. In several areas of the City, development has popped up before an identity could be established. Areas such as, Kilgore Road, Portage Road, some parts of South Westnedge Avenue, and Shaver Road, all contain areas that could benefit from some reinvestment and beautification. Creating cohesive commercial and industrial areas takes strategic investment, strong policy, and property owner involvement. In order to create more compatible commercial and industrial areas, the City should consider establishing design guidelines for the South Westnedge corridor and other key areas of the City. Design guide—lines should be clear, concise, and easy to interpret for developers and architects and specify the type of desired development in this area. Design guidelines would ensure that new constructions and renovations maintain a certain level of harmony with their surroundings.

Prioritized Areas

- ▶ Context Sensitive Infill
- ▶ Complete Neighborhoods
- ▶ New Growth
- ▶ Development Intensity

Recommendations

- ▶ Enhance beautification improvements of commercial corridors, particularly at main entry points into the City.
- ▶ Consider utilizing conservation design strategies in the City's zoning ordinance to promote preserving and enhancing the natural areas of the City.
- ▶ Gradually phase out pole signs along the commercial corridors to create a more connected and uniform streetscape.
- ▶ Reevaluate the sign ordinance to create uniform regulations around sign materials, sizes, locations, and design elements.
- ▶ Consider offering incentives to businesses that want to update their signs but need financial assistance to do so.
- ▶ Review and enhance property maintenance requirements as necessary to ensure that parking lots, building facades, landscaping, and other elements remain attractive.
- ▶ Require high-quality architecture on all sides of the building – known as “360-degree architecture,” and include well-designed or screened service areas.
- ▶ Ensure streetscaping and public improvements are unified in design and promote a distinctive image that emphasizes pedestrian-friendly character.
- ▶ Work with businesses to upgrade facades, internal and perimeter parking lot landscaping, and screening of utility areas.
- ▶ Ensure underground placement of utilities in all new or reconstructed projects, particularly along Centre Avenue, and Portage Road.



CHAPTER 8

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

INTRODUCTION

The Transportation and Mobility chapter presents recommendations that guide investment toward a well-balanced, multi-modal transportation system. The chapter provides strategies to ensure that everyone in Portage has access to key community services and amenities.

Because land use relies heavily on the efficacy of its supporting transportation systems, these and their related community infrastructure must be closely aligned to meet goals and drive the social, environmental, and economic outcomes that Portage is seeking.

This section includes three overarching goals to develop excellent transportation systems for Portage. Managing transportation implementation projects, no matter the mode, through this lens will drive the success of the intentions outlined in the other sections of this plan.

Portage's current vehicular infrastructure can adequately accommodate planned growth as outlined in the Land Use chapter. The City should utilize road balancing and complete street initiatives in priority infill areas, especially in the Lake Center Subarea. Additionally, vehicular improvements should also complement land use changes near industrial and commercial centers.

GOAL

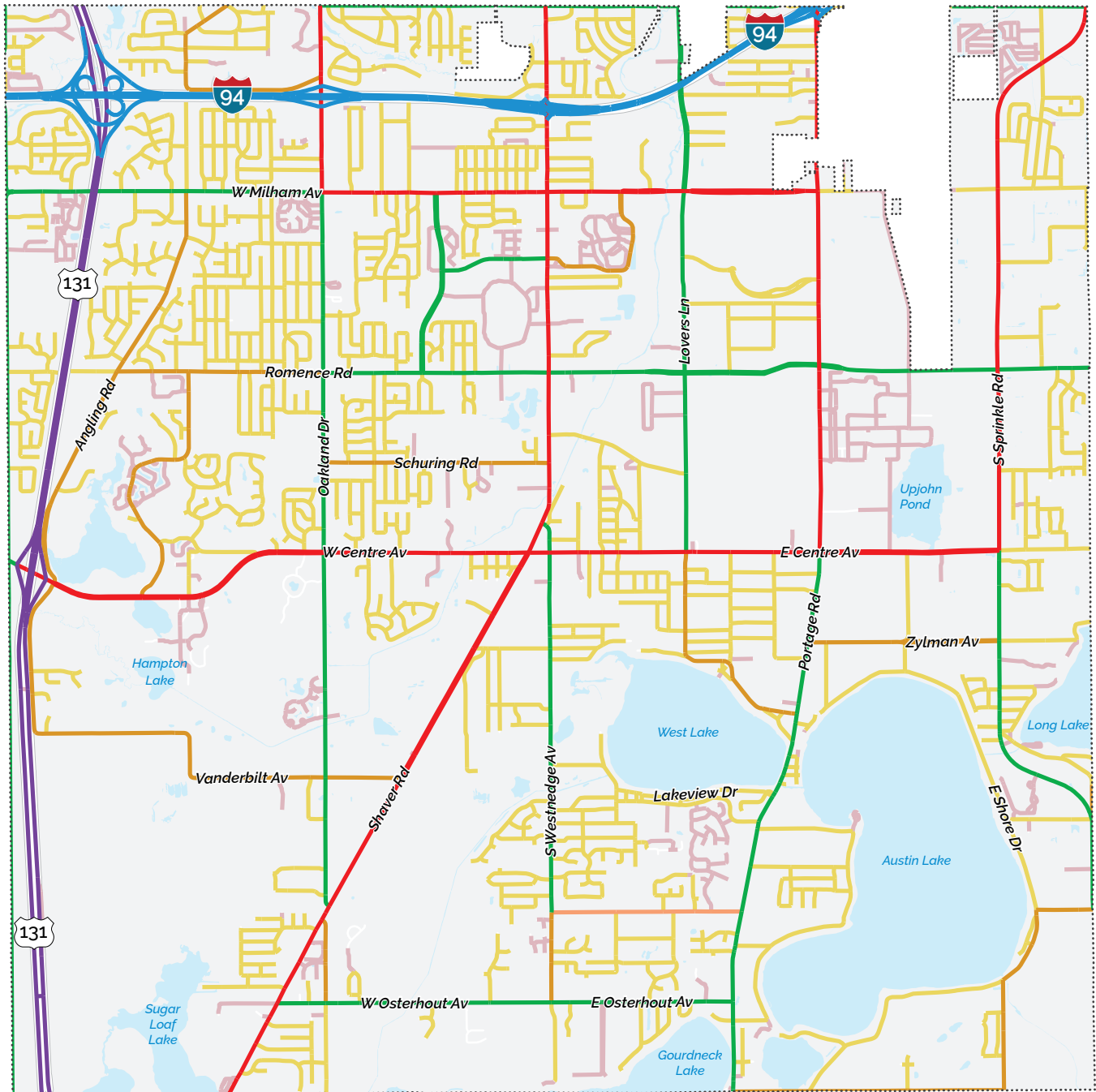
- ▶ Provide adequate infrastructure that is safe and comfortable for pedestrians and cyclists.
- ▶ Promote excellent transportation systems and supporting infrastructure that align with community needs and foster economic growth.
- ▶ Ensure multimodal transportation connections to and between neighborhoods, schools, parks, public transportation, employment centers, dining, and shopping destinations.

VEHICULAR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The City of Portage's strategically advantageous location within the region as well as its proximity to major highway infrastructure positions the community well for potential growth, both residentially and commercially. To capitalize on land use and other economic development goals, this system must remain safe, reliable, accessible, and well connected, especially at the regional scale.

Current Transportation System

Roadways serve two primary purposes, to provide mobility throughout the City and to provide access to destinations. Roads throughout Portage are controlled by a variety of entities. The City of Portage controls most of the roads while the Michigan Department of Transportation, the City of Kalamazoo, and the Road Commission of Kalamazoo County controls others. All roadways in Portage are classified according to a national system utilized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The classification establishes the function of each segment within the larger transportation network. The roadway classification of Portage's roads corresponds with the annual average daily travel numbers. The major and minor arterials typically share the highest traffic volumes. Streets such as South Westnedge Avenue experienced traffic volumes of almost 40,000 near I-94 and over 26,000 adjacent to Crossroads Mall. There are inconsistencies, however. For example, Lovers Lane is classified as a minor arterial, but traffic volumes are only slightly over 10,000 in the most highly traffic area. Compared to Romence Road, which is classified as a collector, with volumes over 20,000 trips per day. For further details, see the Transportation Section of the Existing Conditions Report.



Roadway Classification



- | | |
|---|---|
| — Interstate | — Major Collector |
| — Other Freeway | — Minor Collector |
| — Other Principal Arterial | — Local |
| — Minor Arterial | — Not a certified public road |

Major Street Corridors

In the 2014 Portage Comprehensive Plan the City's major streets were classified into five categories which describe the conditions of each of the roads. The descriptions below have been updated with the current conditions to reflect changes in the Land Use Plan.

Residential Conservation Corridors (RCC)

Residential Conservation Corridors are streets with a generally lower intensity and residential character, even with some non-residential uses. These streets require regular maintenance to preserve their quality and capacity. Improvements should include aesthetic features like landscaping, streetscape amenities, and pedestrian crossings in key locations. These corridors typically have two travel lanes with a left-turn lane at major intersections and high-volume access points. If traffic volumes or turning movements support more lanes, three lanes are preferred. These streets may need upgrades to accommodate more local commercial developments.

Preservation Corridors (PC)

Preservation Corridors are streets passing through areas not fully developed or with potential for significant redevelopment. These parcels should be reviewed to prevent land use and thoroughfare conflicts through zoning and access management standards. These corridors need minor improvements to preserve existing capacity and improve safety, such as access management, intersection improvements, or pedestrian refuge islands. The segment along South Westnedge Avenue was previously identified as Correction Corridor but has transitioned to Preservation Corridor resulting from the increased density proposed in the Crossroads Subarea. Additionally, as the Lake Center Subarea continues to develop, Portage Road should transition to include the improvements outlined in the Lake Center Corridor and Placemaking Plan.

Limited Access Boulevards (LAB)

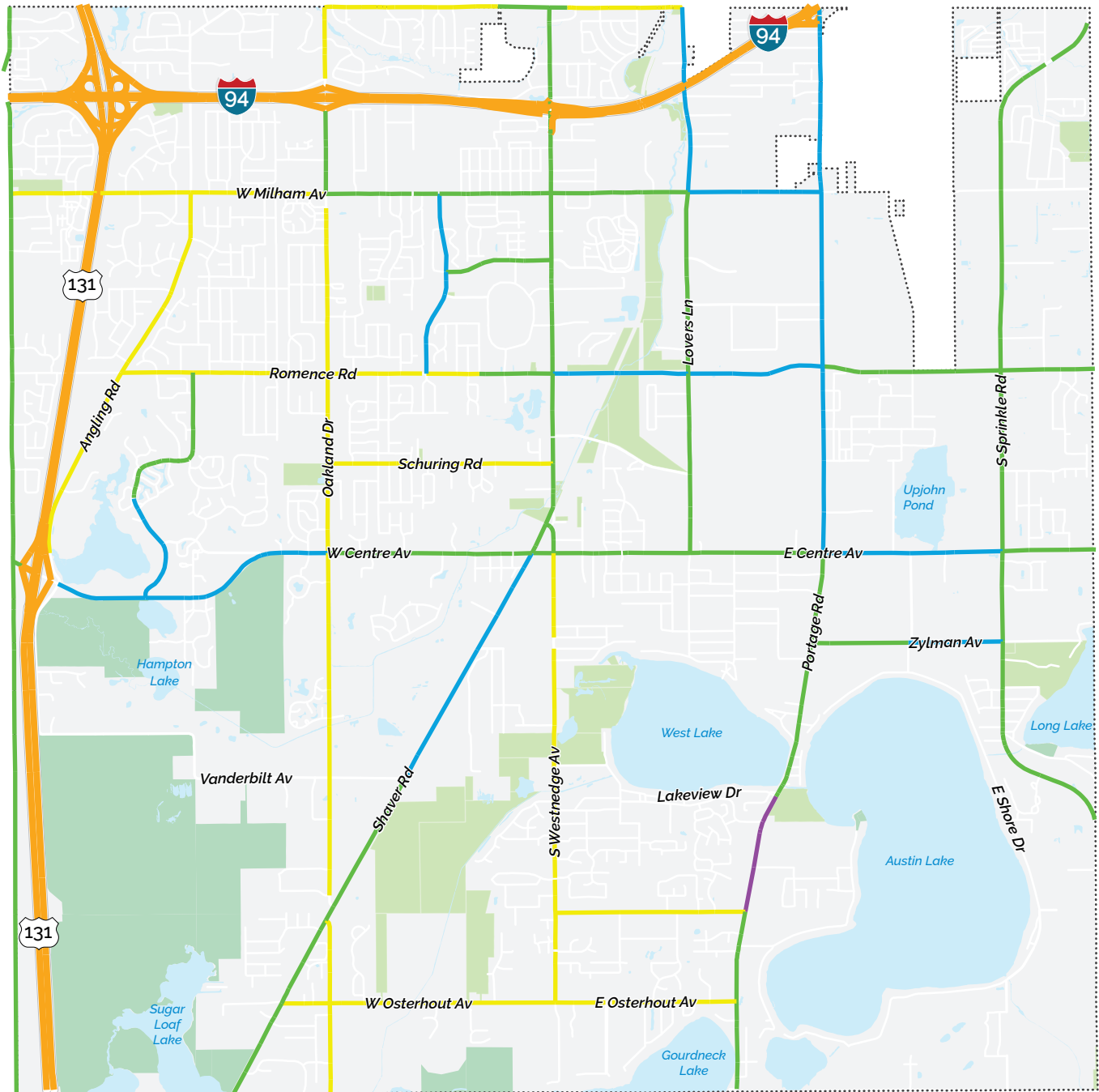
Limited Access Boulevards are designed for smooth through traffic with limited access medians within residential, commercial, or industrial areas. A boulevard design enhances traffic safety by separating opposing traffic with raised median islands, providing controlled turning movements, and eliminating crash potential associated with continuous left-turn lanes. Additionally, they encourage higher quality development like technology/business parks.

Transformation Corridors (TC)

Transformation Corridors have current and projected traffic volumes that are below the street's capacity. A reduction in lanes (e.g., four travel lanes to three) to reduce speeds and improve safety with the addition of a center turn lane and/or to provide non-motorized transportation options may be considered.

Expressway Corridor (EC)

Interstate corridors to be treated as a "Front Door" for the community to create more aesthetic views by utilizing high quality road design and materials. The two roads identified as Expressway Corridor are I-94 and US Route 131.



Corridors Character

- Preservation Corridor (PC)
- Residential Conservation Corridor (RCC)
- Limited Access Boulevard (LAB)
- Transformation Corridor (TC)
- Expressway Corridor (EC)



TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS

At its current carrying capacity, the City's vehicular infrastructure is well suited to support the anticipated growth in accordance with the Future Land Use Plan. Balancing multimodal initiatives, vehicular improvements should concentrate on land use changes, that may require freight improvements. As indicated on the Land Use Plan, increasing intensity of uses within the City Centre, and Lake Center Subarea may require additional vehicular improvements to maintain levels of service and to reduce congestion. The City should pursue a dedicated Transportation Plan to further study specific roads that may need improvements. For further details see the Subarea Plans and the 2023 Asset Management Plan.

Access management guidelines should be followed to prevent potential traffic problems and/or alleviate an existing problem. Along several major corridors, businesses have multiple driveways and in some locations there is pavement across the entire frontage of property. Site plan approvals should encourage access agreements with adjacent property owners for efficient traffic flow and to minimize the conflict points along a major corridor. Businesses that have multiple driveways or access to multiple streets should be reviewed and modifications made as part of site plan redevelopment and road improvement projects, including conformity to the City's Contract Conditions and Specifications for driveway width and layout. Fewer access points on roadways will also reduce the number of conflict points between vehicles and pedestrians and cyclists.

The Future of Vehicular Infrastructure

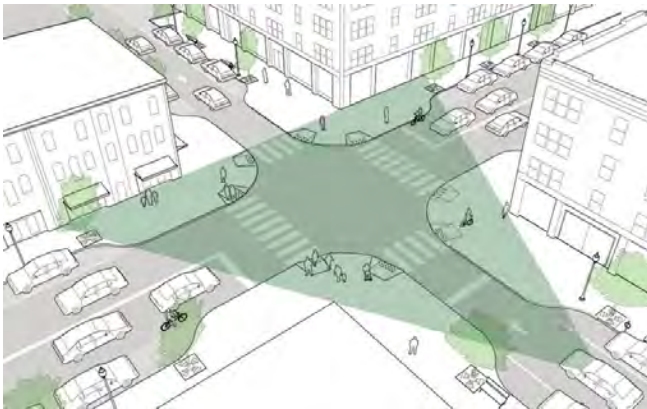
New technology will have an impact on the development and experience of Portage, particularly with vehicular infrastructure. From evolving energy needs to emerging transportation modes to changes in the way vehicles interact, physical infrastructure must respond to digital and technological influences. Changes may feature more electric car support or additional wireless technology integration. The complexity of these changes necessitates substantial coordination and planning to evaluate safety, congestion and financial obligations.

Recommendations

- ▶ Prioritize the development of corresponding vehicular transportation plans that reflect best practices and addressed anticipated funding needs.
- ▶ The City should integrate near-future technology improvements and incorporate policy and regulatory updates as well as infrastructure improvements and pilot-project opportunities.
- ▶ Support high-quality vehicular infrastructure improvements that align with economic development strategies.
- ▶ Ensure that all future developments are required to implement interconnected street networks to increase connectivity between areas and multi- modes of transportation..
- ▶ The City should study traffic patterns throughout the community and implement various safety measures to decrease traffic speeds.
- ▶ Roundabout should take into consideration pedestrian and bike safety access.

SMART TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

Performance measures that reflect smart transportation systems, including total development investments, transit ridership, and bicycle/pedestrian Levels of Service (LOS) – are different than typical transportation measures, but give greater insights to more layered solutions. Additionally, traditional engineering metrics will help evaluate maintenance requirements of the system, and will ensure vehicular infrastructure continues to perform as needed to meet demand.



Improving Transportation Systems Through Growth

Utilizing economic development priorities when planning and implementing vehicular transportation improvements is crucial for fostering sustainable growth and prosperity in communities like Portage. By aligning transportation projects with economic development goals, Portage can enhance accessibility to new and existing business districts, industrial areas, and commercial centers, thereby attracting investment and facilitating job creation.

Recommendations

- ▶ Utilize appropriate character and capacity of street corridors to support surrounding land use context in both existing corridor improvements and proposed development transportation routes.
- ▶ Update existing street design and engineering standards, details, and specifications to reflect alternative transportation priorities and multimodal opportunities.
- ▶ Review the existing corridor designations to ensure that adequate capacity is provided and Level of Service (LOS) goals are met.
- ▶ Continue to improve vehicular infrastructure using best practice Engineering methods, such as Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER), to prioritize street improvement projects throughout Portage.

PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLIST SAFETY

Portage can improve pedestrian and cyclist safety by prioritizing innovative ways to increase equity in implementation of projects, particularly for the most vulnerable users of the transportation system. Additionally, incorporating bicycle and pedestrian safety strategies into related roadway projects - such as updating paving, including new sidewalks, street lighting, and bus stops - while balancing overall expenses and leveraging funding sources/types supports this effort even more. Engage residential and nonresidential neighborhoods to gain support for multimodal transportation strategies.

Auto-Oriented Infrastructure

In Portage, like many cities across the United States, auto-oriented planning and transportation infrastructure have deep roots in the region's history. Dating back to the mid-20th century, the Midwest experienced a surge in automobile ownership and suburbanization, spurred by the rise of the automobile industry and post-World War II economic prosperity. This era saw a shift in urban development patterns towards sprawling suburban communities, characterized by wide roads, segregated land uses, and limited pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure. The prioritization of motor vehicle travel over other modes of transportation led to the proliferation of highways and thoroughfares, facilitating suburban sprawl while diminishing the walkability and connectivity of urban areas. Portage must continue to embrace a fundamental shift in transportation planning. This entails building upon the 2015 Complete Streets Policy and ensuring that all roadway projects integrate multimodal facilities where feasible. By embracing sustainable transportation solutions and prioritizing efficient land use and community connectivity, Portage can move into the future fostering vibrant, livable neighborhoods and urban centers for its residents.

Recommendations

- ▶ Utilize National Best Practices – such as National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Design Guides and Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Multimodal Networks guides – to supplement policies and Engineering Standard Details and Specifications.
- ▶ Create tiered solutions for accessibility throughout the neighborhoods.
- ▶ Develop a plan to properly prioritize work on local streets as well as major thoroughways, and efficiently spread investment where it will be the most impactful for safety and accessibility.
- ▶ Engage the community to better understand their desired multi-modal use of specific roads, local streets, and trails/greenways.
- ▶ Identify streets that should be kept for moving cars most efficiently, and those that should be for targeted multimodal integration.
- ▶ Continue strategic investment and maintenance along major corridors to support existing and future employment, shopping, and tourist needs.
- ▶ Host stakeholder engagement and pursue public-private partnerships to address underutilized commercial parking which could be repurposed for future development or multimodal connections.
- ▶ Work with County government to address pedestrian and bike infrastructure within their jurisdiction to support employers.

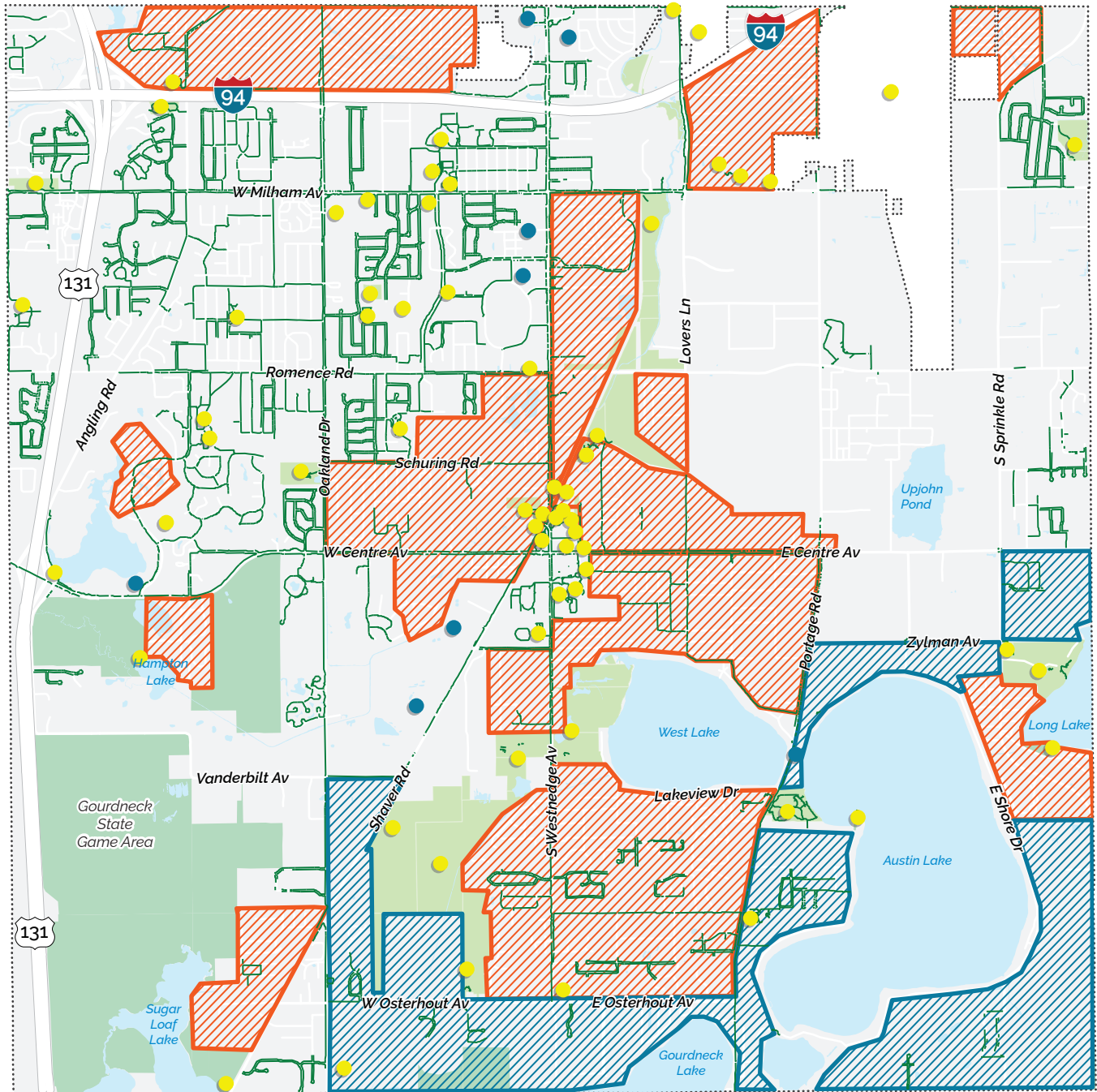
Investment and Infrastructure Gaps

Suburban housing and commercial development patterns result in auto-dependency to reach basic needs, including housing, shopping and dining, parks, and employment centers. This all is exacerbated by several contemporary factors, including infrastructure investment gaps, reluctance from property owners, and more, which leads pedestrians and cyclists to face safety concerns and challenges navigating the city's roadways, as well as gaps in connectivity throughout the City. These investment and physical infrastructure gaps pose a significant challenge to Portage's goal of achieving safety and comfort for pedestrians and cyclists alike. Without adequate infrastructure for these transportation and recreation modes, the City cannot ensure safe and comfortable mobility options for all residents. This hinders efforts to promote active transportation, reduce traffic congestion, and foster community connectivity. These challenges can be addressed by continuing to analyze and update the City-wide sidewalk inventory, overlayed with the Future Land Use plan to guide future capital improvement planning. In addition, promoting improvements and additions to non-motorized infrastructure will help establish and connect multimodal networks to reach these amenities.



Recommendations

- ▶ Create an inventory and ranking of sidewalk conditions to ensure safe and comfortable access.
- ▶ Develop a Non-Motorized Plan that identifies neighborhood-level routes and nearby amenities, overall city-wide route network, gaps in network for future connections, and overall non-motorized users' needs.
- ▶ Emphasize equity in both public expenditure and project type for public access and connectivity improvements between neighborhoods and other amenities.
- ▶ Host stakeholder engagement and discussion sessions to phase and prioritize improvements.



Pedestrian Access Infrastructure



- Points of Interest
- Grocery Stores
- Sidewalks
- ▨ Access Infrastructure Needed (New)
- ▨ Access Infrastructure Improvement (Existing)

Safe Routes to School

Without adequate infrastructure for walking and biking, school-age children face risks navigating busy streets and are discouraged from active transportation. This leads to exacerbating traffic congestion during peak hours. To address this issue, the City must prioritize safe walking and biking routes for students by implementing traffic calming techniques such as road balancing, curb bump-outs, multiuse pathways, and protected bike lanes. Adequate signage and accommodating sidewalks are also crucial components to ensure the safety of young pedestrians and cyclists. By investing in these measures, Portage can create a safer environment for children to commute to school actively, promoting physical activity, reducing traffic-related hazards, and fostering a culture of sustainable transportation from a young age.

Recommendations

- ▶ Use potential funding sources, to identify possible and appropriate improvements for each route throughout the neighborhoods, while equitably distributing project construction funds based on use and need.
- ▶ Engage the community and schools on the benefits of safe routes to school, to better understand and address residents' concerns, and to support neighborhood needs with these strategies.

MULTIMODAL ACCESS

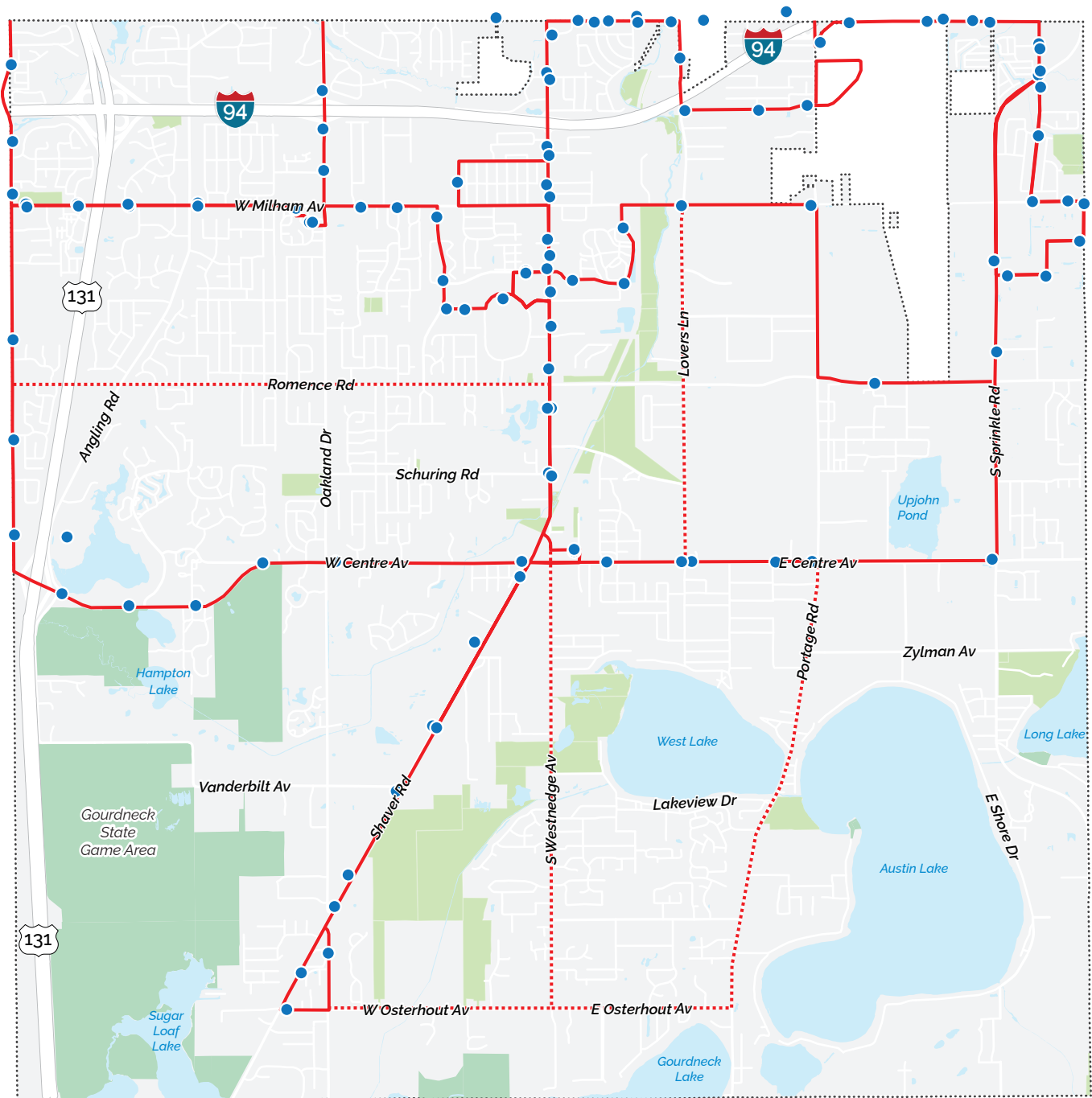
Understanding the benefits of transit by more people is leading to a shift in street design, better allocating space to modes that accommodate increases in ridership. Because streets represent a significant amount of Portage's use, finding ways to increase transportation system utilization will better allocate limited resources. This also increases the value of the amenities connected.

Opportunities for Connection

The issue of disconnected bike trails in Portage presents a significant challenge, particularly in the context of public transit integration. Without seamless connections between existing city and regional bike trails, commuters face barriers when transitioning between cycling and public transit modes. These gaps in connectivity not only inconvenience cyclists but also contribute to lower ridership for public transit systems, as potential users may opt for alternative transportation methods due to the lack of convenient bike access to transit hubs. Ensuring new bike trails join existing city and regional trails, Portage can create a more integrated and accessible bike network. This approach would facilitate smoother transitions for cyclists between trails and public transit stations, encouraging greater usage of both cycling and public transit options, and promoting sustainable, multimodal transportation throughout the City.

Recommendations

- ▶ Maintain existing and support proposed local/ regional trails identified by Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study (KATS) or other local agencies that equitably address the needs of all non-motorized commuters, recreational riders, and families.
- ▶ Identify routes for ease of access to City amenities, public infrastructure, and between neighborhoods.
- ▶ Support local and regional trails by implementing crossings and closing other connection gaps between existing and/or planned trails with existing pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure.



Transit Infrastructure

- Metro Bus Stops
- Metro Bus Existing Routes
- Metro Route Opportunities

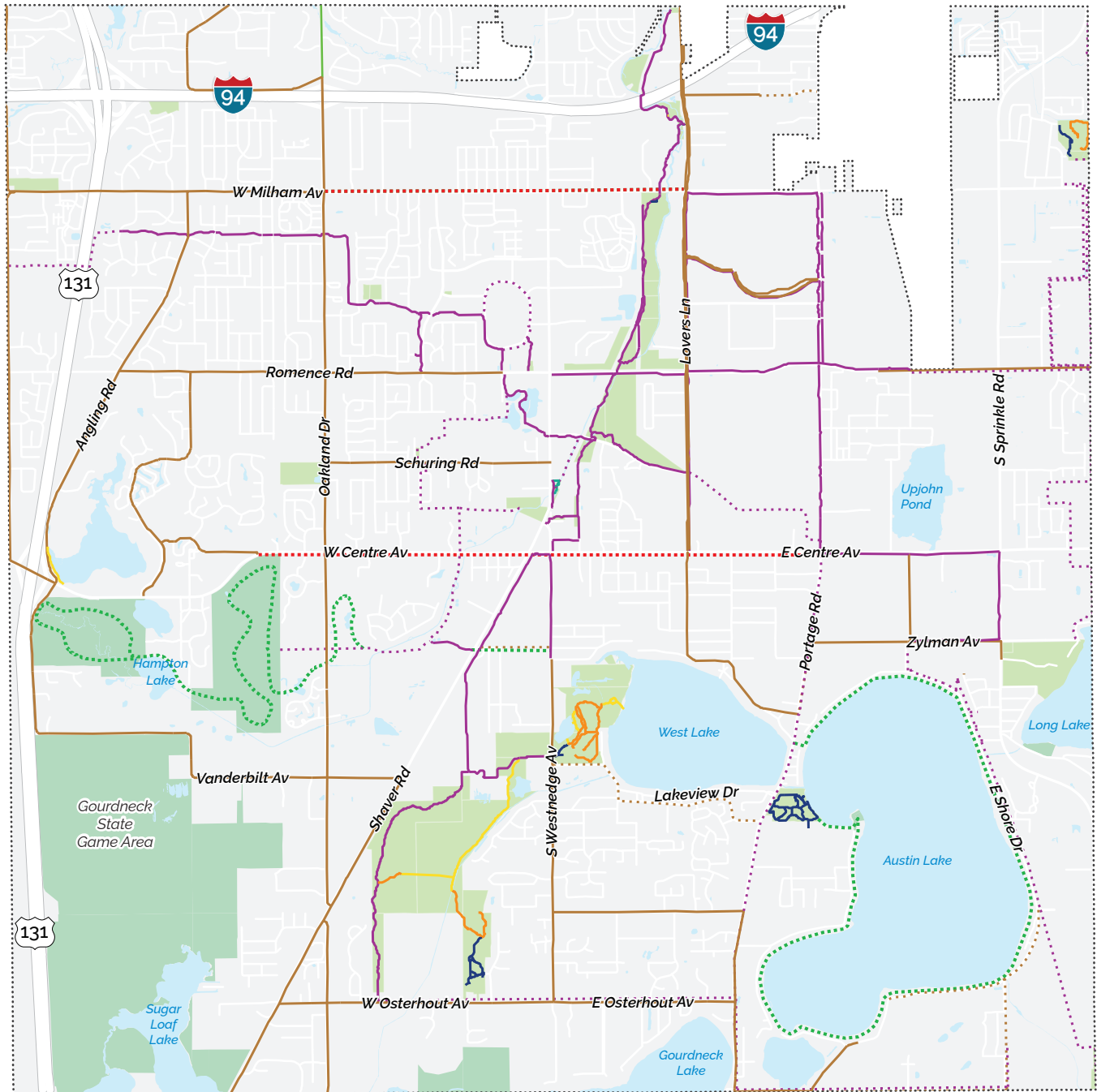


Cycling

Portage has an extensive non-motorized transportation system that has historically been an example in Michigan, being one of the first urban areas to include bike lanes in their road reconstruction projects which began over 20 years ago. By continuing to invest in cycling infrastructure, such as dedicated bike lanes, protected bike paths, and bike parking facilities, the City can create a safer and more inviting environment for cyclists. Additionally, promoting and expanding the city's bike share program would provide residents and visitors with convenient access to bicycles for short-distance trips, further encouraging cycling as a practical transportation option. Collaboration with regional agencies such as Kalamazoo Metro, Share the Road Portage, MovePortage, KATS, and other key stakeholders is essential to ensure seamless integration between cycling and public transit systems, allowing commuters to combine bike rides with bus transit for longer distances. By prioritizing these initiatives and fostering a culture of cycling, Portage promotes healthy lifestyles, and attracts new residents looking for these amenities and opportunities for connection.

Recommendations

- ▶ Engage with various bicycle stakeholders and community, to identify and determine desired improvements.
- ▶ Evaluate the success of the Bike Portage bike share service and utilize ongoing monitoring to determine the program's success and consider expansion.
- ▶ Support existing public outreach and engagement sessions to understand the community perspective and opportunities for cycling improvements.



Commuter and Recreational Trail System



- Recreational Trail Opportunities
- Commuter Trail Opportunities
- Sharrow
- Bikeway Trail
- Proposed Bikeway Trail
- Shoulder Bikeway
- Proposed Bikeway Shoulder
- Walking Asphalt
- Walking Woodchip
- Walking Wetland Deck
- Sidewalk in Parks

Disconnected Commutes

During outreach, participants highlighted that there are commuting challenges. Disconnected commuting routes exacerbate higher traffic congestion, creating unsafe conditions for pedestrians and cyclists while also highlighting deficiencies in bus routes. The lack of convenient and accessible public transit options throughout the City leads to inadequate connectivity between residential areas and key destinations, discouraging the use of alternative modes of transportation for day-to-day commutes to work or occasional needs like retail and entertainment. As a result, pedestrians and cyclists face unsafe conditions due to limited infrastructure and -pedestrian unfriendly designed roadways, intensifying concerns about road safety and accessibility. By addressing these challenges and implementing strategies to improve public transit, enhance cycling infrastructure, and promote last-mile solutions, Portage can work towards creating a more integrated and sustainable transportation network that prioritizes safety, accessibility, and efficiency for all residents. Working with the Kalamazoo Metro bus service to evaluate current routes and determine where additional service could be provided to accommodate the workforce or individuals without access to a car. This could include additional or alternate routes, stops, or expanded service hours as well as more frequent intervals during peak traffic times. In addition, collaboration with the Kalamazoo Metro bus service to determine levels of usage and feasibility regarding its new micro transit pilot program, and promoting similar “last mile” strategies to fill gaps in the transportation network would help fill gaps in connectivity for all of Portage.

Recommendations

- ▶ Support Metro Transit in their outreach efforts to understand the needs of existing and prospective users.
- ▶ Review and better understand inflow versus outflow support based on Portage resident and worker needs.
- ▶ Compare usage and feasibility of program to its initial goals and understand the qualitative metrics of success for the program to determine overlaps of City priorities, such as proposed land use changes and alternative transportation coverage.
- ▶ Consider strategies such as offset transit-only lanes and offloading bus stops to help mitigate increased vehicle traffic, pedestrian safety, and bus route efficiency as these opportunities support other transportation initiatives.
- ▶ Work with Metro Transit to understand the feasibility and potential sites for a Portage Transit Center to anchor and encourage new mixed-use development.
- ▶ Support Metro Transit in exploring additional opportunities for micro-transit, that combines various transportation modes to better address transit challenges and increase ridership.
- ▶ Review existing First Mile Last Mile (FMLM) issues currently present for existing and prospective users and identify where specific strategies may be more helpful than others. Some strategies could include bike sharing, or introduction of digital apps such as Bird, Jump, Ofo and Lime for ease of planning and paying for multimodal transportation for the FMLM.
- ▶ Prioritize Transit-Oriented-Development design guidelines and standards for new development to proactively address FMLM challenges as the City continues to grow.



CHAPTER 9

CITY PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

Parks and open space are highly valued assets for the City. From the extensive trail network, to the State Game Area, to the several lakes, the City is rich in parks, open space, and natural areas. By supporting the 2023 Recreation and Open Space plan, this chapter offers recommendations that support parks, natural resources, and overall unique environments.

GOAL

Continue to expand and enhance recreational facility options for residents of all ages and abilities. Preserve and improve ecologically sensitive areas.

CITY PARKS

Portage offers a variety of recreational opportunities and green space, which contribute to the City's quality of life. These provide passive and active green spaces cater to both passive and active forms of recreation, connecting people with nature while fostering an active and healthy living environment. The City has 20 parks and approximately 872.5 acres of parkland, made up of three large urban parks, six community parks, three neighborhood parks, one mini park, and three special-use parks. Parks serve a different purpose than preserves, trails, and natural areas. Most parks provide different athletic and recreational facilities while some have designated areas for community gatherings and contain historical resources.

Existing Parks Distribution

Large Urban Park

Urban parks typically span between 50 and 120 acres, serving diverse recreational needs within the community. Many of these parks aim to preserve unique landscapes and open spaces while catering to a broad array of recreational activities. These facilities include:

- ▶ Celery Flats Historical Area - 86 acres
- ▶ Portage Creek Bicentennial Park - 114 acres
- ▶ Ramona Park - 67 acres

Community Park

Portage has six community parks, ranging from 10-50 acres. They meet broad community recreation needs and may contain specialized recreation facilities. These facilities include:

- ▶ Central Park - 12 acres
- ▶ Lakeview Park - 26 acres
- ▶ Oakland Drive Park - 19.2 acres
- ▶ Schrier Park - 42 acres
- ▶ South Westnedge Park - 27 acres
- ▶ Westfield Park - 12 acres

Neighborhood Park

The City has three neighborhood parks, ranging from 1-25 acres. They are traditionally located in neighborhoods with family activities, providing walkability for nearby residents. These facilities include:

- ▶ Harbors West Park - 7 acres
- ▶ Haverhill Park - 5.7 acres
- ▶ Lexington Green Park - 23 acres

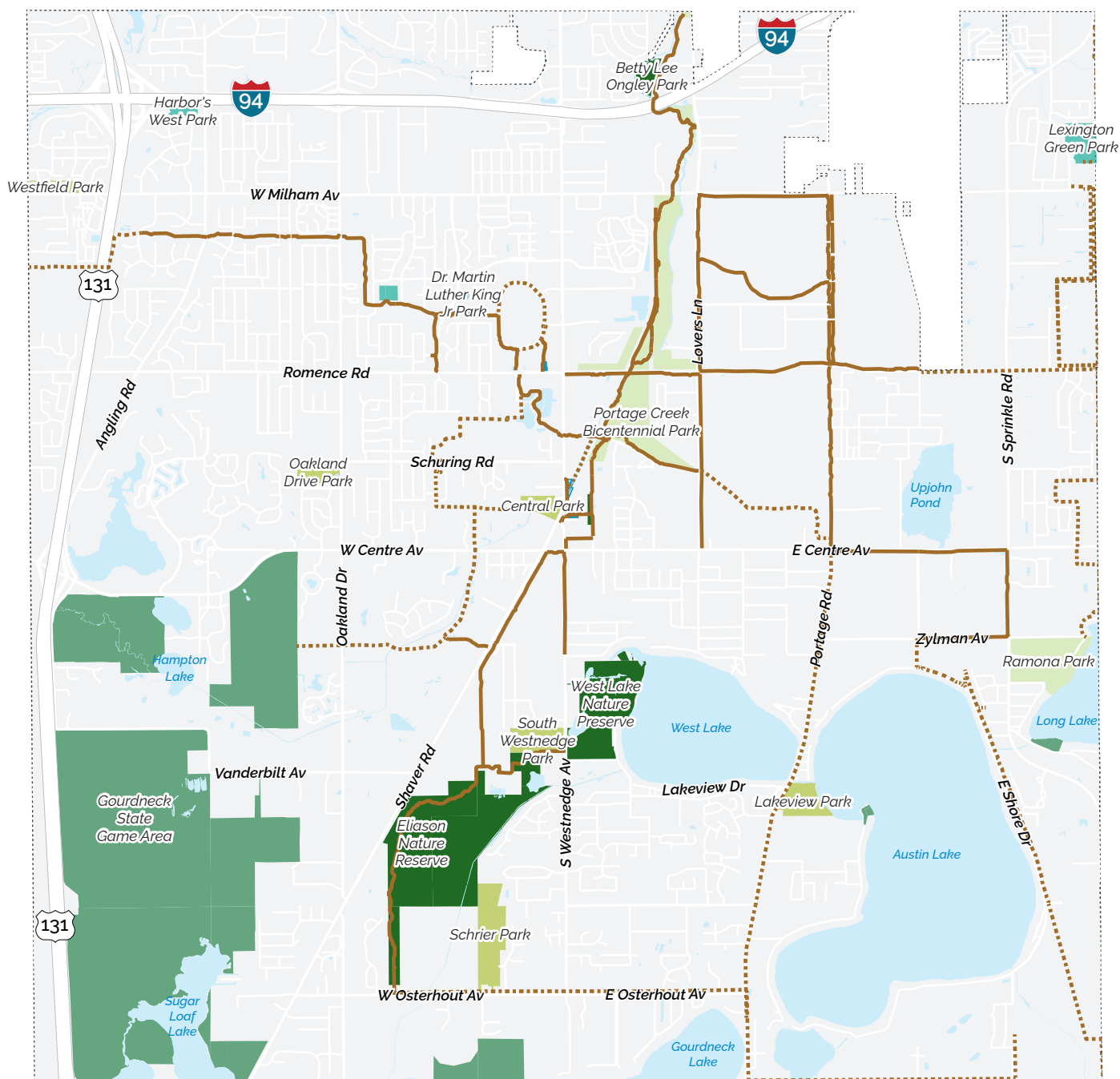
Mini Park

Martin Luther King Jr. Park is the only mini park in Portage. One of the City's newer developments, which celebrates the life and contributions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is located at the intersection of Constitution Blvd and Martin Luther King Drive.

Special Use Park

Portage features three special use parks, each with varying acreage determined by its specific use and location, which may include historic or cultural significance. These facilities include:

- ▶ Liberty Park - 3 acres
- ▶ Millennium Park - 1.3 acres
- ▶ Veterans Memorial Park - 1.1 acres



Parks and Trails

- Existing Trail
- - - Proposed Trail
- Large Urban Park
- Community Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Special Use Park
- Mini Park
- Natural Resource Park



Analysis on Parks Need and Supply

An assessment was conducted to gauge the percentage of residential areas within a park's service area, defined as the area within a 10-minute walk from a park entrance. Results indicate that 70 percent of residential areas, covering over 980 acres, lie beyond this 10-minute walking distance from a park. This analysis considers the existing transportation infrastructure, including connected sidewalks, which influence park accessibility. It's important to note that even if some areas fall within a park's service area, the presence of sidewalks or trails doesn't always ensure safe and accessible routes for residents. Despite Portage's renowned parks and trails, this analysis underscores opportunities to enhance and reconfigure existing park and trail networks to create more efficient connections and address gaps in the current system.

Recommendations

- ▶ Utilize the 2023 Recreation and Open Space Plan to determine specific upgrades to existing parks and recreation facilities throughout the City. Continue to implement the Action Plan and the Capital Improvement Program with respect to the priority level.
- ▶ Strategically seek opportunities to acquire land for recreational purposes in areas lacking park access, to ensure all neighborhoods have equitable access to parks and recreational amenities throughout the City, prioritizing areas with the greatest need. Fostering a more balanced park system.
- ▶ Update the zoning code and subdivision regulations to prioritize the inclusion of parks and green spaces in new residential and mixed-use development. This will enhance level of supply in the City and ensure that new developments contribute to the availability of parks for residents.
- ▶ Enhance connectivity between existing parks and pedestrian networks by investing in infrastructure improvements such as sidewalks, pedestrian-friendly pathways and bike paths. Maintain existing sidewalks and other pathways to ensure safe and accessible connections to city parks and trails.

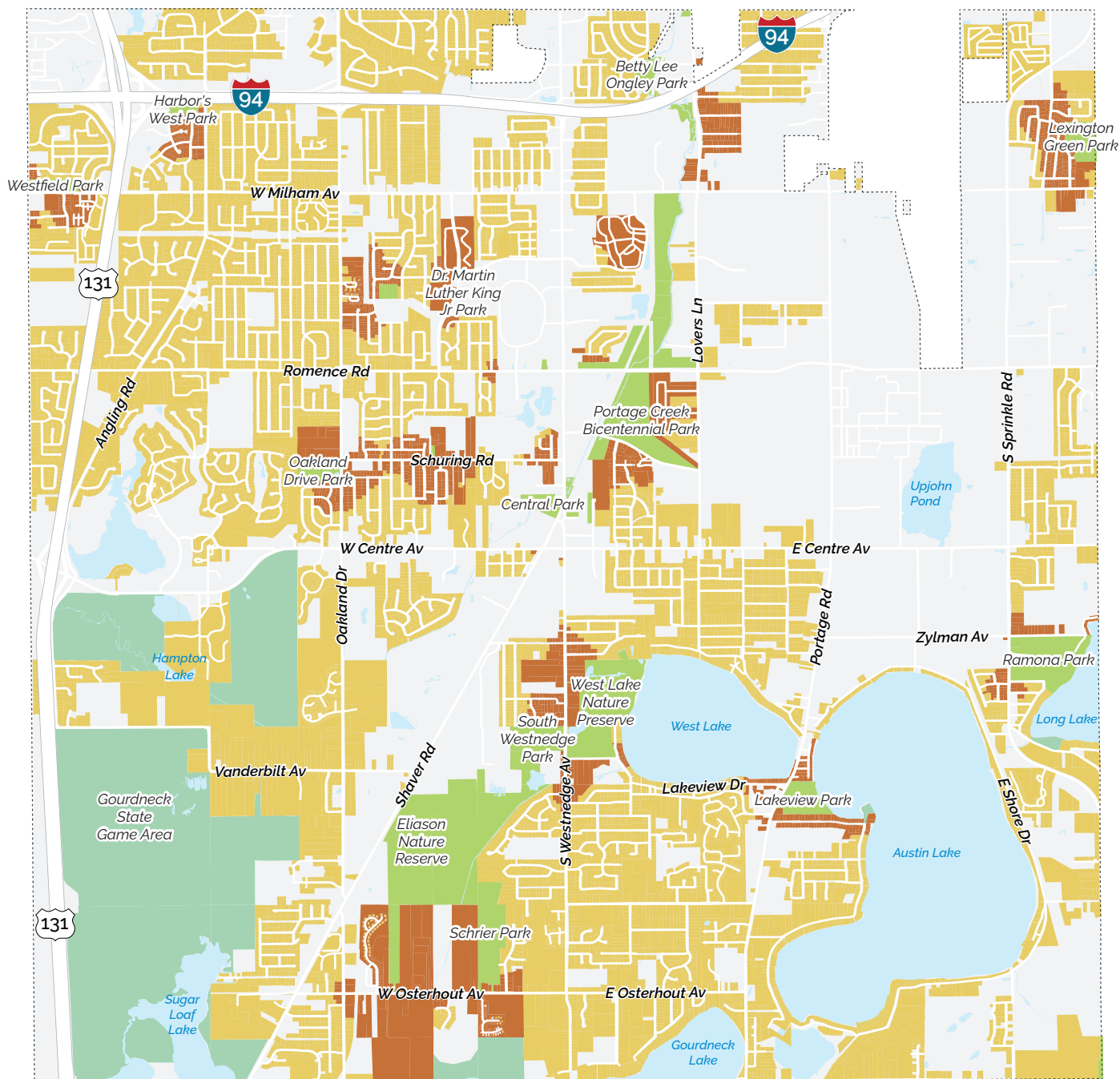
Trails and Greenways

Portage has a well-established trails network of approximately 25 miles and continues to invest in this community asset. The centerpiece is the Bicentennial Trail following the railroad, with the longest segments stretching 3.5 miles from the trailhead at Lovers Lane to the Portage District Library. Shaver Road Bikeway connects with the Eliason Preserve Trail extending 3 miles starting from West Centre Avenue and finishing at West Osterhout Road. Portage also features other bikeways and multi-use trails dispersed throughout the City.

In 2021 Portage launched the Bike Portage bike share rental program. This allows users to rent a bicycle from the bike station at the Portage Creek Bicentennial Park Trail via a mobile app. This seasonal service allows users to explore the Portage trail system. Opportunities exist to expand and while preserving the overall natural ecosystem. Trail connections on this map exclude bike lanes and bike sharrows on the street shoulder, which will be further discussed in the Transportation and Mobility Chapter.

Recommendations

- ▶ Incentivize new residential developments to connect to existing trails where feasible and the best opportunities are identified.
- ▶ Enhance east-west trail connections in south Portage, especially around the Lake Center District, to provide residents with easier access to the lakes and existing natural areas.
- ▶ Continue to explore purchasing/partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) to develop passive trails on limited areas within State Game areas.



Parks and Open Space Service Area



- Outside 10-minute walk to a Park
- Within 10-minute walk to a Park
- State Game and Wildlife Areas
- City Parks

OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL AREAS

As Portage's population expands, demands for new housing will put pressure on open space and forested areas. New developments will expand into undeveloped land permanently altering existing environmental conditions. Community input has shown that a majority of residents recognize the importance of preserving tree canopy, habitats, particularly in wooded areas. This awareness highlighted a shared commitment to safeguarding the City's natural heritage and underscores the need for proactive measures to protect these invaluable resources to maintain the community's identity. The section will include recommendations about open space, invasive species, and water resources.

Open Spaces

Portage boasts four natural resource parks: West Lake Nature Preserve, Bishops Bog Preserve, Eliason Nature Reserve, and Betty Lee Ongley Nature Preserve. These parks, predominantly located in the City's southern region, aim to preserve unique natural features. West Lake Nature Preserve and Bishops Bog Preserve are notable for their wetland bogs, which harbor rare plant and animal species. Bishops Bog, in particular, is considered a "relic" bog, maintaining conditions dating back to the area's post-glacial period. Visitors can enjoy various recreational activities such as nature viewing, traversing a floating boardwalk, and exploring multi-use recreational trails while also observing protected plant and animal species. Additionally, the Gourdneck State Game Area (SGA), established in 1941, spans 2,293 acres in southwest Portage, providing a habitat for diverse wildlife and primarily managed for hunting under special firearm regulations.

Recommendations

- ▶ Work to develop public/private partnerships to preserve wetlands and undeveloped spaces, and implement programs and facilities supporting the conservation, protection, and preservation of the natural environment.
- ▶ Identify land acquisition opportunities to preserve environmentally sensitive areas including land along Portage Creek.
- ▶ Facilitate preservation of sensitive environmental lands where appropriate and possible. Plan for long-range needs to develop existing city-owned land, expansion of existing park facilities, and acquire new park property.
- ▶ Increase access to parks and recreation within neighborhoods, especially in the areas north of the Moors Golf Club and south of West Lake. Update development regulations to support this open space goal.
- ▶ If the MDNR were to begin to release some of its property, the City should consider acquiring it as future parks, open space, or natural areas

Invasive Species

Portage acknowledges the significance of safeguarding its natural ecosystems and habitats through effective management of invasive species. In 2018, a collaborative effort with the Kalamazoo Nature Center resulted in the establishment of an Invasive Species Management Plan covering all City parks. Looking ahead, Portage should prioritize the plan's findings to eliminate, mitigate, and control invasive species throughout the City. To accomplish this goal, Portage must concentrate on preserving healthy natural features and parks. This entails maintaining quality habitat conditions, ensuring balanced soil chemistry, preserving natural hydrological patterns, and fostering the growth of native ecosystems.

Recommendations

- ▶ Implement proactive invasive species program for natural areas including eradication of invasive species especially in Eliason Nature Reserve, Liberty Park, Schrier Park, and West Lake Preserve.
- ▶ Collaborate with local organizations, educational institutions and community groups to encourage nature education regarding invasive species and biodiversity conservation.
- ▶ Continue to publicize park events, facilities, and programs through social media, newsletters, press releases, web site, promotional events, and other media outlets.

WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Portage is fortunate to have rich water resources, providing a thriving environment for wildlife and enhancing the overall quality of life for the City's residents. Among these resources are the expansive stream network, encompassing Portage Creek, the West Fork of Portage Creek, and Davis Creek. Furthermore, the variety of lakes serve as valuable asset to the community. Over the past several years, the City has been actively involved in preserving the quality of these water resources. The following map illustrates the locations of these water resources along with designated flood zones within the City, providing valuable information for residents and planners alike.

Portage Lakes

Portage boasts a multitude of lakes, including Austin, West, and Hampton, as well as parts of Long, Gourdneck, Sugarloaf, and Little Sugarloaf. These lakes have long been cherished natural assets within the City, offering significant recreational opportunities. Covering 1,602 acres of land surrounding or between these lakes, Portage holds immense potential for leisure activities.

However, collaboration with property owners is crucial due to flood risks and development constraints, ensuring the implementation of necessary improvements. Additionally, the Plan integrates recommendations from the Lake Center District Corridor and Placemaking Study, aiming to activate the Lake Center District and further enhance recreational offerings in the area.

Recommendations

- ▶ Identify coordination opportunities with the MDNR, Kalamazoo River Watershed Council, Kalamazoo Conservation District, and others.
- ▶ Support programs and encourage recreation in and around the various lakes within the City to ensure residents and visitors feel a connection to the uniqueness of the Portage community's lakes.
- ▶ Promote collaboration among environmental organizations, utility providers, governmental entities, and community stakeholders to conserve wetlands and other natural areas, protect flood-prone areas, manage stormwater, and improve water quality in the community's waterways.



CHAPTER 10

LIVABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

INTRODUCTION

The Livability and Sustainability chapter will look at best practices that support livability in the community and provide direction regarding placemaking, public realm improvements, arts, and culture. It will also include recommendations regarding infrastructure improvements to ensure development is well-served and Portage residents and businesses continue to be supported by high-quality services. This chapter also reviews best practices and policies to help make Portage a more environmentally sustainable and economically resilient community.

GOAL

- ▶ Establish a unique community identity using placemaking and public realm improvements and highlighting Portage's arts and culture, prioritizing sustainable strategies and solutions (cost/effort).
- ▶ Improve, modernize, and expand City infrastructure to support existing residents and businesses and prepare for future growth.
- ▶ Promote the use of sustainable development best practices that prioritize environmental responsibility, social equity, and economic viability.

BUILDING VIBRANCY

By creating attractive and vibrant public spaces that reflect the town's character and values, Portage can foster civic pride, attract residents and visitors, promote social interaction and inclusion, support economic development, enhance quality of life, and showcase its commitment to sustainability, ultimately contributing to a thriving and resilient community.

Strengthen Identity

Portage, like many other cities in the region, may lack a strong identity and sense of place due to historically rapid suburbanization that occurred during the post World War II era, and commercial development prioritizing convenience over community character. This may result in a disjointed urban fabric and a lack of cohesive public spaces that reflect the city's unique heritage and cultural diversity. Strengthening Portage's identity through placemaking and public realm improvements is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and pride among residents while attracting visitors and businesses. Prioritizing sustainable strategies and solutions not only minimizes environmental impact but also maximizes long-term cost-effectiveness and community resilience. By integrating arts and culture into urban design, promoting walkability and green spaces, and engaging residents in the planning process, Portage can create vibrant and sustainable neighborhoods that reflect its rich history and values, establishing a distinctive community identity for generations to come. Incorporating branding and other identifiers, such as character improvements at Portage's gateways, help create a lasting impression and sense of arrival for residents and visitors. By leveraging existing investments and emphasizing Sub-Area treatments, these gateways can showcase the unique identity and personality of Portage, reinforcing community pride and enhancing the overall experience of entering the city. This not only strengthens Portage's sense of identity but also helps to differentiate it from neighboring areas, further establishing its distinctiveness and attractiveness.

Recommendations

- ▶ Incorporate City of Portage brand and identity widely into monuments, sculptures, signage, site furniture, banners, and other amenities.
- ▶ Smart kiosks could be used in the City Center and/or parks for displaying events and wayfinding.
- ▶ Paint water towers and other landmarks using identified brand guidelines, such as appropriate colors, logos, and slogans.
- ▶ Work with MDOT to implement Portage signage along major highways like I-94 and US-131 for increased visibility by regional drivers.

Complete Streetscapes

To encourage complete streets in Portage that are safe and comfortable for residents and guests traveling in both vehicular and non-motorized modes, implement elements such as planter boxes, street trees, street furniture, improved lighting, bioswales, and decorative permeable pavement. This will transform Portage's streets into vibrant and welcoming spaces that reflect the city's character and values. This not only enhances the visual appeal and functionality in the city's public realm, but also encourages active transportation, fosters social interaction, promotes environmental sustainability, and contributes to a sense of place and community identity.

Recommendations

- ▶ Work with businesses and landowners to establish streetscape improvements for enhanced pedestrian experience, and placemaking, and encourage retail and dining activity.
- ▶ Pursue funding to establish public realm improvements especially in and around the City Centre and Crossroads subareas.
- ▶ Preserve and enhance existing tree canopy with planting guidelines recommending biodiverse tree species and plants for new developments and improvement projects.

Placemaking in Progress

To establish a long-term location for Portage's farmers market that provides a center for activity to complement future mixed-use development in accordance with the Land Use Plan. By providing a designated center for activity, the farmers market becomes more than just a marketplace—it becomes a focal point for social interaction, cultural exchange, and local commerce. This supports the agricultural community and local businesses, fosters a sense of place, and strengthens community pride. Integrating the farmers market into the future mixed-use development ensures it can become an integral part of Portage's evolving urban fabric, contributing to a vibrant and sustainable built environment that reflects the city's values and aspirations for the future.

Recommendations

- ▶ Allocate funding to construct a dynamic food vendor space with kiosks and farm vehicle access to stalls in the farmers market.
- ▶ Develop a year-round festival space that could accommodate a number of events including a farmers' market.
- ▶ Support the City's Parks and Recreation Department for programming of seasonal activities, annual festivals, and permanent income opportunities for a multi-faceted community space.
- ▶ Work with the Portage Cultural Arts Committee to evaluate the need for and identify potential locations for a cultural art center.
- ▶ Explore seasonal or temporary event-specific closing of appropriate streets, such as Brown Avenue, and other shared street opportunities to provide more space for cultural events or seasonal arts programming.

Advancing Art

To enhance Portage's art culture, it's important to expand and develop public art initiatives throughout the City. The City is encouraged to collaborate with the Portage Cultural Arts Committee to identify new locations for exhibits or installations, enhancing Portage's visual landscape and promoting community engagement. Showcasing the talents of local artists and offering opportunities for residents and visitors to connect with art in unexpected ways will further enhance the cultural scene. Embracing public art as a central element of community development efforts will create memorable experiences, enriching the City's identity and enhancing overall livability. This commitment to artistic expression contributes to Portage's uniqueness and establishes it as a destination for creativity and cultural enrichment.

Recommendations

- ▶ Continue and support the seasonal rotating public art exhibit in City Hall.
- ▶ Encourage local schools to showcase student art throughout the community to support youth creativity.
- ▶ Work with the local schools to showcase student art.
- ▶ Install art, such as sculptures, into strategic locations such as parks and medians to highlight Portage's artists and create a dynamic and engaging art scene.
- ▶ Use art to educate people on the pre-history, settlement, and establishment of the City of Portage as well as the indigenous people who initially inhabited this land and whose descendants live among the community today.
- ▶ Better utilize light pole banners along major streets to reflect City branding, honor Veterans, and celebrate holidays.
- ▶ Develop local artist partnerships to create rotating murals and other public facing art, such as on water towers, that highlight the City's history, present, and future.

RESILIENT GROWTH

By prioritizing sustainable development practices and strategically incorporating green infrastructure, Portage can accommodate growing density while minimizing environmental impacts, and promote long-term resilience for new and existing residents and businesses. This ensures that essential services meet the needs of the community, fostering economic growth and enhancing overall quality of life.

Meeting Growing Needs

Ensure that the City's infrastructure meets the needs of current and future residents and businesses, including broadband internet, water, wastewater, and energy, particularly in areas where density and activity may increase in the coming decades. Work with utility providers to proactively improve and expand infrastructure in alignment with the Land Use Plan. By coordinating infrastructure upgrades with planned development areas, we ensure that essential services keep pace with growth, minimizing disruptions and maximizing efficiency. This will not only support the sustainable development of Portage but also enhance the town's resilience, ensuring that infrastructure investments meet both current and future needs while promoting a thriving and resilient community.

Recommendations

- ▶ Create a shared resources plan to better understand the staffing and equipment needs that comes with added infrastructure.
- ▶ Develop a maintenance plan that identifies the short- and long-term costs of existing and new community infrastructure.
- ▶ Identify opportunities for land to expand the parks system and reflects priorities established in the 2023 Portage Recreation and Open Space Master Plan.
- ▶ Engage with Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)/ Fish & Wildlife organizations to develop a use agreement that better addresses residents' desires beyond hunting.
- ▶ Model utility infrastructure capacity using the Land Use Plan to help determine where to prioritize infrastructure expansion, opportunities, and efficiencies, as well as overall investment.

Greening Gray Infrastructure

Improve stormwater management and water quality through sustainable development practices with the inclusion of green infrastructure low-impact design to reduce environmental impacts of development. Implementing green infrastructure and sustainable development practices in stormwater management is critical for Portage's environmental health. By integrating permeable pavements and bioswales into development plans, we can mitigate runoff, improve water quality, and foster a more resilient community, which safeguards natural resources and enhances the overall livability and sustainability of Portage.

Recommendations

- ▶ Update development regulations to encourage and provide guidance on green infrastructure and renewable energy.
- ▶ Evaluate 2005 City of Portage Specifications booklet, and provide new guidance and complementary engineering details, design guidelines and specifications to encourage green infrastructure inclusion.
- ▶ Identify funding strategies and priorities to modernize outdated facilities and incorporate green infrastructure.

HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

By embracing sustainable development practices, Portage aims to minimize its ecological footprint, reduce resource consumption, and mitigate the impacts of natural disasters. Additionally, sustainable development fosters healthier and more resilient communities by promoting walkable neighborhoods, enhancing access to natural open spaces, and encouraging land development that conserves natural features and green infrastructure. Ultimately, this goal not only ensures the long-term health and well-being of Portage's residents but also positions the city as a leader in sustainable development, attracting investment, fostering innovation, and contributing to a more prosperous future for all.

Nature in Peril

To safeguard the natural beauty of Portage, the City should consider adopting conservation design policies for new development to preserve the natural features of a site and promote density neutral design. By doing so, Portage can preserve critical habitats, protect biodiversity, and maintain the ecological integrity of its natural landscapes. Additionally, promoting density-neutral design – in which the overall housing density remains the same – ensures that development is compatible with the surrounding environment, fostering sustainable growth while minimizing environmental degradation. This environmental design approach not only enhances the resilience of Portage's ecosystems but also promotes a healthier and more harmonious relationship between development and nature.

Recommendations

- ▶ Update zoning code to adopt conservation design standards for new developments.
- ▶ Incentivize new residential developments to connect to existing trails where feasible and the best opportunities are identified.
- ▶ Develop Livability standards/ guidelines for new development to encourage these design policies.
- ▶ Develop a Tree Canopy Plan to increase the City's canopy coverage while protecting existing trees, adding maintenance strategies for ailing trees, and mitigation guidance, like standard replacement ratios, for the removal of trees during construction of new developments.
- ▶ Create an engagement strategy to communicate/ educate the public on the benefits of these design practices.

Lead by Example

Strive to be a leader in municipal sustainability by prioritizing the installation of green and renewable energy infrastructure on public land, including parks, public rights-of-way, and the sites of public buildings while also transitioning existing energy consuming operations.

Recommendations

- ▶ Consider installing permeable pavement, bioswales, rain gardens, etc. on City-owned property.
- ▶ Lead by example transitioning to clean energy in transportation (vehicles) and municipal facilities.
- ▶ Evaluate the potential of electrifying the municipal fleet of vehicles; prioritizing the highest use and balancing upfront investment, which includes indirect efficiency analysis.
- ▶ Continue to prioritize decarbonization by using alternative energy, upgrading building envelope and equipment, and optimizing occupant behaviors in municipal facilities.
- ▶ Ensure that maintenance and long-term replacement of any new equipment and infrastructure is considered.
- ▶ Evaluate existing building envelope and equipment opportunities, such as insulation, windows, and pumps.

Higher Standards for Development

Prioritize green infrastructure projects that are slated for commercial and residential development in accordance with the Land Use Plan. By focusing on green infrastructure in areas of ongoing development, Portage can effectively manage stormwater runoff, improve water quality, and enhance urban biodiversity while accommodating growth. Additionally, this approach aligns with the City's long-term development goals, ensuring that sustainability is integrated into future development plans and promoting a resilient and environmentally responsible built environment for Portage. Promote policies that encourage environmentally responsible and energy-efficient construction techniques, such as those promoted through the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building system, the Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES), or Energy Star, to reduce the environmental impact of future development. Consider incentives such as reduced fees, reduction in development standards, etc. to encourage sustainable building practices.

Recommendations

- ▶ Prioritize approvals for projects that utilize green infrastructure such as, native plantings, on-street rain gardens, permeable pavement, geothermal renewable energy, etc.
- ▶ Develop private-public partnerships and incentives for commercial development to redesign their parking lots into green infrastructure or public open space (like trails, parks, etc.)
- ▶ Create design guidelines with sustainable design practices for new public development to lead the way.
- ▶ Encourage LEED or SITES "green" design standards for new development.
- ▶ Incentivize added density and open-space area maximization.
- ▶ Incentivize usage of alternative fuels/ renewable energy for construction, and sustainable/local materials procurement.

Hazard Mitigation

There are several residential, commercial, and industrial developments planned in Portage, within the 100-year flood hazard area. This emphasizes the importance of hazard mitigation and building community resilience. To address these risks, the City should conduct risk assessments for hazards such as flooding, wildfires, and severe storms, and then develop comprehensive emergency preparedness plans. Implementing conservation design strategies can lessen flood risks, which is essential in these vulnerable zones. Investing in infrastructure upgrades and meeting stormwater and rainwater management standards are also essential as a means of further mitigating these risks. By engaging the community and educating residents about resilience, Portage can strengthen its ability to withstand and recover from adverse events, ultimately ensuring the safety, well-being, and long-term sustainability of the community.

Recommendations

- ▶ Implement more stringent stormwater guidelines.
- ▶ Expand water/sewer utilities into residential areas using private wells or septic systems by offering incentives.
- ▶ Utilize the Federal Emergency Management Agency Hazard Mitigation Guide to identify opportunities for a variety of mitigation projects, such as floodproofing, secondary power sources, warning systems, etc.



CHAPTER 11 SUBAREA

INTRODUCTION

The Subarea chapter addresses land use and development, urban design, and access and mobility issues within three specific areas of the City. The City Centre, Crossroads, and the Lake Center Subareas all contain unique challenges as well as opportunities and this chapter provides establishes the guiding considerations, objectives, and priorities for each area, firmly establishing character and future intent.

CROSSROADS SUBAREA

Since 1980, the Crossroads Subarea has been an economic driver for Portage and the surrounding regions. However, due to a changing retail market, large malls do not draw the same number of customers that they once did, and the effects of COVID-19 have exacerbated department store closings. As retail trends continue to threaten the viability of enclosed malls, community input indicated a desire for proactive planning on the mall site to establish a new vision for the area before vacancies become problematic.

Throughout the community engagement process the area surrounding and including the Crossroads Subarea has repeatedly been identified as a crucial economic development asset. The mall area was also identified as a significant opportunity for strengthening community identity and Portage's sense of place. Given the uncertain future of mall-based retail within the U.S., alternative futures should be weighed for the Crossroads Subarea including evaluating the mall as a mixed-use development opportunity and fostering the creation of a pedestrian-friendly district with a complementary mix of housing, retail, parks, and open space.

Key Policies and Initiatives

- ▶ Maintain the Crossroads Subarea as a key node and establish a new "Town Centre" for the city. It is important to introduce a greater mix of uses, including high-density residential, healthcare facilities, hospitality and entertainment venues, entrepreneur incubators, higher education, recreational/competitive sports facilities, and landscaped plazas. These elements will work together to create a pedestrian-friendly shopping and dining environment with a well-defined and desirable sense of place.
- ▶ Vacant and surplus parking lots represent opportunities for redevelopment and reinvestment. Reducing parking requirements and providing greater flexibility in the range of permitted uses will help capture that potential. In exchange for expanded development potential, future projects should adhere to design standards and the overall Master Plan of the Mall property, ensuring development makes a positive contribution to the area's broader sense of place.
- ▶ Maintain a transit hub within the Crossroads Subarea, helping tie the district to the broader region. Transit should be complemented with investments in pedestrian infrastructure to foster a "park once" environment wherein visitors can explore the district's many shops and businesses on foot once they arrive.
- ▶ The area presents numerous opportunities to improve bike and pedestrian connectivity and better connect commercial areas with surrounding residential neighborhoods. By prioritizing these connections, such as trail or right-of-way improvements, the City can create more complete neighborhoods where existing homes are complemented by access to key community facilities, parks, retail, and services.
- ▶ As a regional destination, the Crossroads Subarea should have a welcoming gateway environment with signage, landscaping, and pedestrian amenities located along key routes, at key intersections, and integrated within future development. Public art installations in high-traffic pedestrian areas, public plazas and parklets, pedestrian scale lighting, planters, and seating, are improvements which create a distinctive sense of place unique from its surroundings.

Crossroads Subarea

PRELIMINARY FRAMEWORK

Intersection Improvements: Curb extensions or bulb-outs, ADA signaling, and smaller turn radii to reduce turn speeds should be considered for four primary intersections.

Rail Crossing: Two rail crossings should be constructed to connect the new and existing trails to the Bicentennial Trail on the east side of the train tracks.

Gateway: A gateway into the subarea should create a sense of identity and offer a clear delineation from the rest of the City.

Public Art: Public art exhibitions should be commissioned throughout the subarea to further create a sense of place.

Wayfinding: Wayfinding should include light pole banners, an electronic sign to highlight relevant City information, and enhanced signage to give directions to parks, municipal buildings, landmarks, and other amenities.




Infill Development: Infill opportunities include vacant outlets within existing shopping malls and space within underutilized parking lots.

Cross Access: Cross access between adjoining areas should be constructed to eliminate excess curb cuts.









Pedestrian Improvements: Pedestrian improvements should consist of constructing sidewalks where gaps currently exist, widening and creating landscaped buffers, planting street trees, utilizing uniform lighting, adding street furniture, and constructing pedestrian islands.

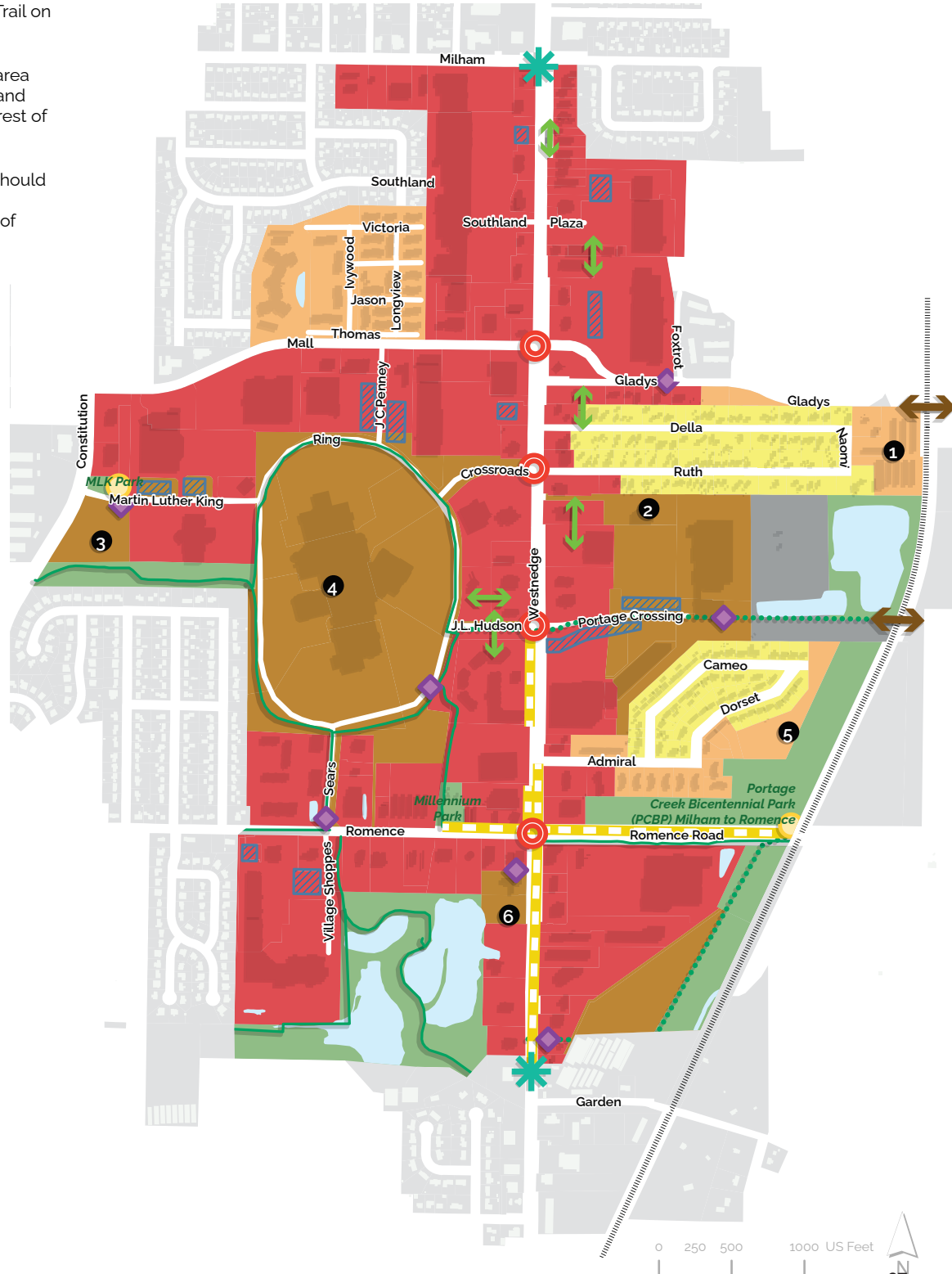
New Trails: New trails should be prioritized on the western side of the train tracks to create a network that connects the Bicentennial Trail to the commercial corridor along South Westnedge Avenue.

Map Features

-  Railroads
-  Existing Trails
-  Opportunity Sites

Future Land Use

-  Single-Family Detached
-  Mixed Residential
-  Community Commercial
-  Local Commercial
-  Mixed-Use
-  Light Industrial
-  Parks / Open Space
-  Public / Institutional
-  Transportation / Utilities





Opportunity Sites

These sites were chosen based on their underutilization and potential to better contribute to the fabric and character of the Crossroads area. If redeveloped, these opportunity sites would positively impact the subarea.

01 Cross Creek Self Storage

This site sits east of a small, single-family subdivision and south of the Walnut Trail apartment complex. This opportunity site should redevelop into a mixed-residential development to complement the apartments to the north and the single-family homes to the west. Townhomes or duplexes would fit within this context and, with a new rail crossing, could be attractive to those wanting to be near the commercial center and nearby natural features.

02 Mixed Use Infill

This nearly three-acre site sits behind Red Lobster and north of World Market. The site's proximity to both single-family homes to the north along Ruth Street and commercial along South Westnedge Avenue offers the opportunity to add mixed-use development into the subarea. This site should include a dense mixed-use development with apartments or office on the upper stories and retail on the ground floor.

03 Trail Oriented Mixed-Use

This four-acre site sits on the western edge of the subarea, in between Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park to the north and the Northwest Bikeway to the south. The site should be redeveloped as mixed-use with local retail on the ground floor and residential on the upper floors. This site could introduce mixed-use development to Constitution Boulevard and offer local retail options to the residents surrounding the site. In addition, the site could offer amenities to those using the trail, such as bike rentals, bike tire pumps, outdoor furniture, a water station, and bike parking.

04 Crossroads Mall

Redeveloping the Crossroads Mall could transform the identity of the Westnedge corridor. This site should be redeveloped as a cohesive, master planned mixed-use district with connections from residential neighborhoods on the west to trails and open spaces to the south and east. It should support and expand the existing commercial areas along South Westnedge Avenue and include a complementary mix of housing. Additional discussion of this site is included in the Zoning Implications section of this memo.

05 Complementary Mixed-Residential

This nearly four-acre site should build on the existing mixed-residential subdivision along Dorset Street and Cameo Avenue to the west. This site should offer a mix of densities, including duplexes, triplexes, or quadplexes and interact with the potential trail connection and rail crossing on Romence Road to give residents direct access to the Bicentennial Trail.

06 Westnedge Mixed-Use

This site includes a vacant lot, which abuts a financial advisor's office and a former commercial building. It should be considered for mixed-use redevelopment. The building should directly front South Westnedge Avenue and parking should be in the rear of the building.



CITY CENTRE SUBAREA

The City Centre Subarea is centrally located in Portage and hosts many of the City's civic institutions and facilities. The area was identified as a desired location for a neighborhood-serving district where civic uses are complemented by improved commercial development and new mixed-use development and multifamily housing. Several underutilized sites within the subarea possess the potential for redevelopment and the subarea plan will help ensure that new investment contributes to the creation of a cohesive, unified district.









Efforts to transform the City Centre Subarea have been ongoing since the 1980s. The 1981 Comprehensive Plan and 1982 City Center Plan established the City Centre Subarea as the civic and community center of Portage. This initial effort also determined the geographic boundaries of the site, Garden Lane to the north, Currier Drive to the east, just south of Centre Avenue to the south, and just west of Oak Street to the west. These boundaries exist today but may be liable to change in the future. The vision for City Centre persisted into the 1990s and 2000s with the subarea being targeted in the Portage 2000 Report, Portage 2020 Plan, 1996 and 2002 Comprehensive Plans, the 2008 Comprehensive Plan Update, the 2014 Comprehensive Plan, and the Portage 2025 visioning project. The vision for City Centre has a long history and community members are determined to see the proposals for the subarea become a reality.

Key Policies and Initiatives




- ▶ The City Centre should continue to evolve into a mixed-use, civic center that is walkable, bikeable, and provides multiple spaces for community events, arts and entertainment, and services.
- ▶ To encourage the location of local-serving businesses, the City Centre should be an area targeted for additional townhomes, midrise, and multifamily housing.
- ▶ Zoning changes should be encouraged for increased densities, building proportions, and a diversity of land uses to support and establish a mixed-use civic center.
- ▶ Connections to existing trails and the pedestrian networks in surrounding neighborhoods should also be enhanced to improve access to businesses and destinations.
- ▶ City-owned sites such as the Public Works facility and the vacant site west of the Portage Zhang can be used to facilitate future development and host public amenities.

City Centre Subarea









PRELIMINARY FRAMEWORK

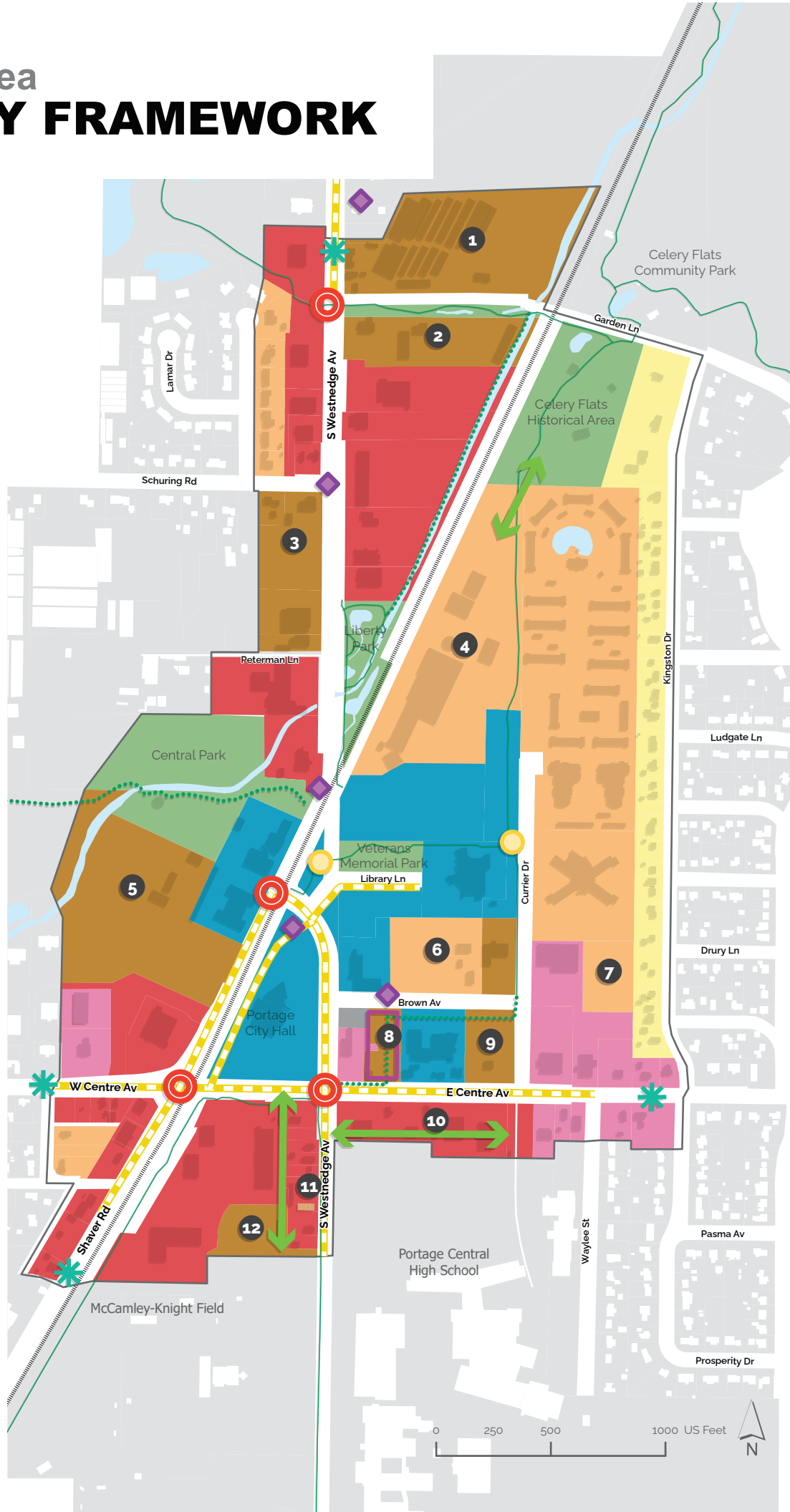
-  **Intersection Improvements:** The three primary intersections surrounding City Hall should be improved with curb extensions or bulb-outs, ADA signaling improvements, and smaller turn radii to reduce speeds at which drivers turn.
-  **Pedestrian Improvements:** Pedestrian improvements should consist of constructing sidewalks where gaps currently exist, widening and creating landscaped buffers, planting street trees, utilizing uniform lighting, adding street furniture, and constructing pedestrian islands.
-  **Trail Improvements:** Trail improvements should be used to connect the existing system. These improvements include more visible signage, striping across intersections and driveways, and 10-ft wide paths.
-  **Gateways:** Gateways into the subarea should create a sense of identity and offer a clear delineation from the rest of the City.
-  **Public Art:** Public art exhibitions should be commissioned throughout the subarea to further create a sense of place.
-  **Wayfinding:** Wayfinding should include light pole banners to create a sense of place, an electronic sign which could be used to highlight relevant City information, and enhanced signage to give direction to parks, municipal buildings, relevant landmarks, and other amenities.
-  **Programmed Space:** Opportunities to program and activate spaces should be prioritized to help draw more people into the district.
-  **Connection Improvements:** Cross access between adjoining areas should be constructed to eliminate excess curb cuts. Additionally, a new road should be built to access Opportunity Site 4.

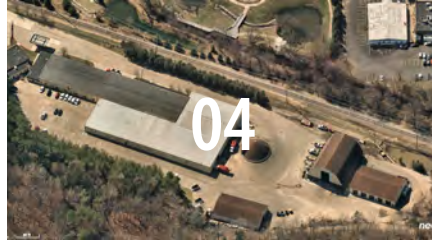
Map Features

-  Railroads
-  Existing Trails
-  Opportunity Sites

Future Land Use

-  Single-Family Residential
-  Mixed Residential
-  Corridor Commercial
-  Local Commercial
-  Mixed-Use
-  Parks / Open Space
-  Public / Institution
-  Transportation / Utilities





Opportunity Sites

These sites were chosen based on their underutilization and potential to better contribute to the fabric and character of the City Centre. If redeveloped, these opportunity sites would positively impact the subarea.

01 Schram's Greenhouses

Much of this nine-acre site is occupied by greenhouses with limited improvements. The site's size, and location between heavily traveled South Westnedge Avenue, and the popular Celery Flats historical area (and Portage Creek Bicentennial Bike Trail) make it an attractive potential redevelopment opportunity for both commercial and mixed residential development. This key site should be evaluated for its mixed-use redevelopment potential.

02 Mixed-Use Redevelopment

This site consists of several vacant or limited scale commercial buildings. Parcel assembly and comprehensive redevelopment should be encouraged to accommodate more intense development. Dense, mixed-use and commercial buildings should be considered for the area fronting South Westnedge Avenue while multifamily or single-family attached housing could be located on the eastern end of the site to take advantage of connections with the Millenium Trail and the Celery Flats historical area. The wetland area adjacent to Portage Creek could also be integrated into the site design to serve as an added amenity.

03 South Westnedge Avenue Mixed-Use

This site is mostly vacant with two small commercial buildings on the north and south. Parcel assembly and comprehensive redevelopment should be encouraged to accommodate more intense commercial development along South Westnedge Avenue with residential development behind to tie into the existing residential.

04 Public Works

This large 11-acre site presents the opportunity for mixed-residential development to complement the multifamily development to the east and increase the number of housing units in the area to support local commercial uses. The site has only one access point and an additional vehicular connection would likely need to be provided to alleviate future potential congestion at Library Lane and South Westnedge Avenue intersection. There is potential for a vehicular and pedestrian connection between the Department of Public Works site and the Celery Flats Historical Park.

05 Multifamily and Mixed-use Redevelopment

This 10-acre site presents opportunities for a mix of multi-family housing and mixed-use units. Such a development is consistent with the goals for the City Centre subarea of providing additional housing while also leveraging access to South Westnedge Avenue.

06 Residential Redevelopment

This site consists of a large rural lot with a single-family home, and a City-owned facility that is currently the location of the Parks and Recreation Department. This site should be considered for multifamily development complementing commercial and mixed-use development along nearby Centre Avenue.



07 Parking Lot Redevelopment

This site is currently a parking lot adjacent to a medical facility. This site should be considered for commercial or residential development that contributes activity to the subarea.

08 Programmed Space

This site has the potential to transform and anchor the City Centre as a plaza space and outdoor venue for public programming. This space could feature placemaking elements such as a fountain, street furniture, rotating art exhibits, and landscaping. This new plaza could be integrated with the Senior Center to create a more cohesive civic center. The Bicentennial Trail should be configured to run through the site bringing pedestrian and bicycle traffic through the subarea. Features such as temporary bollards and permeable pavers could also be used to provide the flexibility to host a variety of events. A popular example is a farmers market, which could be incorporated in the Plaza or in other spaces around the senior center area.

09 Mixed-Use Redevelopment

This site includes an existing fast-casual restaurant and a vacant site to the north. This site should be considered for mixed-use development with more intense uses on the Centre Avenue frontage. The restaurant use could remain as a use within the future potential mixed-use project.

10 Centre Avenue Commercial

This site consists of several limited intensity commercial uses that should be considered for parcel assembly and comprehensive redevelopment. As part of redevelopment, opportunities to remove curb cuts and provide shared access should be identified. This could include providing a common access drive to the rear of the site. Mixed-use or corridor commercial development would be appropriate for this site.

11 South Westnedge Avenue Multi-family

This site consists of several limited intensity commercial and residential uses that should be considered for parcel assembly and comprehensive redevelopment. As part of redevelopment, opportunities to remove curb cuts and provide shared access should be identified. This could include providing a common access drive to the rear of the site. Commercial and multifamily development should be considered for this site.

12 Mixed-Use Infill

This site is an existing vacant lot located within the Portage Center Plaza. This site presents an opportunity to construct a mixed-use building with ground floor retail and residential on the upper floors. This site can accommodate a taller building as it is surrounded by commercial uses with a large Portage Central High School athletic complex to the south.



LAKE CENTER SUBAREA

The Lake Center subarea covers an approximately 2.5-mile length of Portage Road from the East Centre Avenue intersection to East Osterhout Avenue and includes a range of commercial and residential developments. The Lake Center subarea was identified as a commercial revitalization corridor in the 2014 Comprehensive Plan to help identify a vision for the area with guidance for improvements in the corridor. Based on the goals of the 2014 Comprehensive Plan, the City of Portage undertook a planning and land use study for the entire Lake Center Corridor. A variety of stakeholders were engaged to help shape the plan recommendations. A Lake Center District Steering Committee comprised of area business owners, developers and residents was engaged by the city and consultants through the planning process. The Lake Center Corridor & Placemaking Plan (Lake Center Plan) was adopted on July 13, 2021. The key findings of the 2021 Lake Center Plan are incorporated into this Master Plan. The Lake Center subarea's character is different from other commercial corridors in Portage, marked by many locally-owned businesses and two lakefronts which present unique opportunities and challenges. The isthmus between Austin Lake and West Lake features important anchors for the district and provides a center focal area for the identity of the Lake Center District. However, the inadequate pedestrian or bike infrastructure and automobile-oriented development hinder the district's potential. A pedestrian conditions analysis shows that 70% of the corridor is perceived to be unsafe and unrewarding. The pattern of development throughout the Lake Center district is inconsistent but offers the opportunity for reinvestment with a coordinated approach.

Key Policies and Initiatives

- ▶ Establish a walkable mixed-use lakefront center between Forest Drive and Lakeview Park.
- ▶ Promote redesign of Portage Road and key intersections to improve overall safety and connectivity, pedestrian and bicycle access, and sense of place.
- ▶ Incorporate place-making features such as banners, landscaping, wayfinding signage, art, and other characteristics of lakefront environment.
- ▶ Update land use standard.
- ▶ Encourage lakefront visibility by preserving key view sheds, utilizing contextual building and design, and maintaining public water access.

Lake Center Subarea

PRELIMINARY FRAMEWORK








-  **Intersection Improvements:** Roundabout improvements, signalized pedestrian crossing, and traffic signal installation and replacement should be considered for four primary intersections to enhance safety, operations, and functionality.
-  **Pedestrian Improvements:** Pedestrian improvements should consist of filling sidewalk gap, improving pedestrian conditions, widening sidewalks, creating pedestrian and bike route alternatives, and improving pedestrian connectivity by installing crosswalks with refuge islands.
-  **Trail Improvements:** Trail improvements should be used to connect new bike paths to existing and planned trails. These improvements include a new 3' wide bike lane/shoulder and a new 10' wide paved multi-use path.
-  **Gateways:** Identifying gateway features should be coordinated and created for the Lake Center District corridor, including decorative lighting with banners holders, gateway treatments, sidewalk benches, and façade improvements.
-  **Wayfinding:** Wayfinding should include light pole banners to create a sense of place and enhanced signage to give direction to parks, municipal buildings, relevant landmarks, and other amenities. Wayfinding should indicate route distances on foot or by bike. For example, "It's a 10-minute walk to Lakeview Park".
-  **Relocation and Underground Utilities:** Utilities should be relocated underground from East Centre Avenue to Lakeview Drive.

Map Features

-  Opportunity Sites

-  Flood Zone

Future Land Use

-  Single Family Residential
-  Mixed Residential
-  Local Commercial
-  Mixed-Use
-  Parks / Open Space
-  Public / Institutional
-  Transportation / Utilities





Opportunity Sites

These sites were chosen based on their underutilization and potential to better contribute to the fabric and character of the Lake Center District. If redeveloped, these opportunity sites would positively impact the subarea.

01 Stormwater basin at McDonald's

8050 Portage Road for improving the aesthetics of the stormwater basin at McDonald's property.

02 Gateway Mixed-Use

Southeast corner of Portage Road and East Centre Avenue for a potential mixed-use development at the gateway location to the Lake Center district.

03 Mixed-Use Development

8509 Portage Road for potential mixed-use development.

04 Waterfront Overlook

9138 Portage Road for waterfront overlook opportunity space: Opportunities for passive recreation such as picnic tables and benches should be prioritized to help draw more people into the district could accommodate a social gathering place for public to enjoy waterfront view. The former drive-in property provides a panoramic viewshed of West Lake from Portage Road. This lakefront area has the potential to become a social gathering place, a destination along Portage Road with safe and accessible pedestrian connections.

05 Mixed-Use Development

9125 Portage Road for potential mixed-use development.



CHAPTER 12

IMPLEMENTATION

INTRODUCTION

Implementation of the Forward Together 2045 Portage Master Plan is crucial to realizing the community's work to affect positive change over the next 20 years. This process will require the cooperative and dedicated efforts of City staff, public officials, partner agencies, developers, the local businesses community, property owners, and residents. This chapter outlines the tools and strategies needed to help drive the implementation of the Master Plan.

USE OF THE MASTER PLAN

The Master Plan is the City's official plan for land use, growth, and reinvestment for future development and improvement. It is important that the Master Plan is used regularly by City staff, boards, and commissions when reviewing all proposals for new development and planning-related initiatives. This includes directing agencies and service providers to use the Master Plan when planning for new facilities, infrastructure, and programming. Additionally, the City's Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals should ensure that any future regulations or policy changes that affect development are consistent with the Master Plan.

Understanding the Master Plan

To ensure City staff, key stakeholders, department heads, and elected and appointed officials understand the purpose and benefits of the Master Plan, the City should host plan orientations to introduce the Master Plan and its core concepts. The City should also work closely with the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, City Council, and other boards and commission in the day-to-day administration, interpretation, and application of the Plan. Copies of the Plan should be made available to publicly download from the City's website and as hard copies for purchase at City Hall.

Cooperation and Partnerships

Successful implementation of the Master Plan will require a collaborative effort between the City and its numerous partner agencies and organizations. These include local and regional agencies, educational institutions, community groups and organizations, the local business community, and the private sector – all of which have a strong impact on Portage's quality of life. The City should take a lead in building partnerships and instigating collaboration when taking on projects recommended by the Master Plan. Establishing strong partnerships and maintaining open, clear communication will ensure a more efficient implementation process.

Partners in the Master Plan implementation include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ Portage Public Schools
- ▶ Portage District Library
- ▶ Economic Development Corporation
- ▶ Tax Increment Finance Authority
- ▶ Business Owners
- ▶ Non-profit Organizations
- ▶ BikePortage
- ▶ Southwest Michigan First
- ▶ City of Kalamazoo
- ▶ Kalamazoo Valley Community College
- ▶ Western Michigan University
- ▶ Kalamazoo Metro
- ▶ Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport
- ▶ Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency
- ▶ Discover Kalamazoo
- ▶ Southwestern Michigan Planning Commission
- ▶ Kalamazoo College

State & Federal Partners

- ▶ Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy
- ▶ Michigan Department of Natural Resources
- ▶ Michigan Department of Transportation
- ▶ Michigan State Housing Development Authority
- ▶ Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
- ▶ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- ▶ Federal Highway Administration
- ▶ National Park Service

MEDC Redevelopment Ready Communities

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation is a key potential partner for plan implementation through its Redevelopment Ready Communities®(RRC) program. RRC is a voluntary technical assistance initiative that encourages communities throughout the state to build a strong foundation in planning, zoning, and economic development. Through the program, communities adhere to a set of best practices in planning and zoning to ensure they are ready for new development and reinvestment. The RRC best practices were developed through engagement with public and private entities. The best practices ensure that the community has a supported vision for its future, easily navigable regulations that support redevelopment, and streamlined procedures that create predictability in the development process. The six RRC best practices include the following topics:

- ▶ Plans and public engagement
- ▶ Zoning
- ▶ Development review
- ▶ Boards and commissions
- ▶ Economic development strategy
- ▶ Redevelopment ready sites®

Upon receiving RRC certification, the community gains access to a series of additional benefits including support from the Redevelopment Services Team, which supports development opportunities for priority sites through site packaging and marketing efforts. Portage is actively engaged in the RRC but has yet to achieve full certification as an RRC community. Following adoption of this plan, the City should continue to work toward RRC certification through zoning, development review, and other best practices.

Maintain Public Communication

The Master Plan was built on a foundation of input, ideas, and feedback gathered from residents, business owners, and other key stakeholders during the planning process. Outreach is essential to educating the community about the relevance of planning and the city's role in defining its future. Building on efforts completed through the planning process, the City should work to convey the major recommendations and overall vision of the Plan to the entire community. This can be done through regular updates, coverage of major milestones and projects, and by providing further opportunities for residents to voice their opinions. In addition, the City should provide easy-to-understand and graphically attractive pamphlets that simplify and explain typical civic processes. This could include informational materials that provide guidance on applying for zoning, building, subdivision, home expansion, or other development-related permits and approvals.

Align Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) With the Master Plan

It is important that the implementation of the Master Plan is coordinated with the City's financial resources and capital planning. This will help ensure future capital investments successfully address both short- and long-term objectives of the Plan and are strategically budgeted and prioritized. CIP projects include streets and non-motorized transportation infrastructure (sidewalks, bike lanes, and multi-use trails, water, wastewater, and storm water facilities, public facilities such as City Hall, the Portage Zhang Senior Center, public works and public safety, and city equipment and vehicles, as well as preventative maintenance of infrastructure.

The City should review and integrate the Master Plan into the capital improvement planning process, including the City's annual budgeting process and during updates to the CIP. This will help assess funding needs and plan for potential sources, ensuring completion of desired improvements in a prioritized manner over the life of the Master Plan.

Regular Updates

The Master Plan is not intended to be a static document. The Master Plan should adapt and evolve to the changing needs and trends the City faces over time. It will require regularly updating the Master Plan to ensure it remains relevant to new issues and community interests. The City should regularly undertake a systematic review of the Plan at least every three to five years. Ideally, this review should coincide with the preparation of the City's budget and CIP, which was most recently updated in early 2024 and included projects to be carried out for the next six years. Timing updates to the Master Plan with updates to the CIP recommendations or changes relating to capital improvements or other programs to be considered as part of the City's commitments for the upcoming fiscal year. The City should also consider reviewing the Master Plan following the completion of major projects or after significant events that may directly impact the community. Further, throughout the year, the City should maintain a list of possible amendments or issues to be considered for change, addition, or deletion from the Master Plan.

Potential Funding Sources

The following is a description of potential funding mechanisms and sources currently available to the City and its partners for Plan implementation. Though the City is already using some of these mechanisms, it is important to highlight them to determine their relevance to the Plan's recommendations. As the funding sources are subject to change over time, it is important to continue to research and monitor grants, funding agencies, and programs to identify new opportunities as they become available.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

The purpose of TIF funding is to incentivize and attract desired development within key commercial areas. TIF dollars can typically be used for infrastructure, streetscaping, public improvements, land assemblage, and offsetting the cost of development. It can also be used for brownfield redevelopment, water resource improvement, economic growth, and promoting residential growth through different State of Michigan TIF statutes. Michigan municipalities are granted the power by the State to create TIF districts and their respective authorities.

TIF utilizes future property tax revenues generated within a designated area or district, to pay for improvements and further incentivize continued reinvestment. As the Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) of properties within a TIF District increases, the incremental growth in property tax over the base year that the TIF was established, is reinvested into that area. The revenue generated may be used to pay for development projects in the districts or used to secure bond issues for large public expenses. Over the life of a TIF district, existing taxing bodies receive the same level of tax revenue as in the base year. The City currently leverages TIF to fund brownfield redevelopment.

Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is authorized by Michigan statute and consists of nine members appointed by the City Manager with the approval of City Council. DDAs provide various funding options, including TIF, that can be used to finance downtown public improvement and grants the authority the ability to levy a limited millage to address administrative costs. Other financing options include special assessments, revenue bonds, revenues from properties owned or leased by the DDA, public donations and grants, and contributions from the local government. The Downtown Authority District Map in Portage includes business properties generally along South Westnedge Avenue, extending between Kilgore Road and I-94.

Business Improvement District (BID)

A Business Improvement District (BID) is a defined area where businesses collaborate to invest in improvements, maintenance, and promotion of their commercial district. Typically, property owners and/or businesses within the district agree to pay an additional tax or fee, which is then used to fund projects and services aimed at enhancing the area's economic vitality and attractiveness. These projects may include beautification efforts, increased security measures, marketing campaigns, events, and infrastructure upgrades. BIDs are often governed by a board of directors composed of local business owners and stakeholders who oversee the allocation of funds and implementation of projects. The primary goal of a BID is to create a more vibrant, safe, and prosperous business environment that benefits both businesses and the surrounding community.

Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA)

Established by Michigan Public Act 57 of 2018, CIAs are designed to help communities fund commercial corridor improvements outside their primary downtown or commercial area. Specifically, they allow TIF to be used for commercial and economic growth. All Michigan municipalities have the power to establish CIAs, including appointing a director, creating a TIF plan, levying special assessments, and issuing revenue bonds. A CIA may contain multiple municipalities and more than one CIA is permitted within a municipality.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is a federally funded program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This program, authorized under Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, provides funding to states, cities, and counties to support efforts to develop, stabilize, and assist urban communities with promoting suitable living environments, infrastructure enhancements, housing affordability and accessibility, and by expanding economic opportunities primarily for low- and moderate-income persons and areas. Funding is allocated annually by Congress and distributed by HUD on a formula basis.

Community Development Financial Institutions Fund

The Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund allocates New Market Tax Credits to Community Development Entities (CDEs) to attract private investment to low-income communities. The CDFI Fund is administered by the U.S. Department of Treasury. Investments made by CDEs may be for residential, commercial, industrial, and retail real estate development projects.

Public Spaces Community Places (PSCP)

Public Spaces Community Places is a grant match program administered by MEDC that utilizes donation-based crowdfunding to generate public interest and raise funding to revitalize or create public spaces. By utilizing web-based donations, projects are accessible to anyone willing to contribute in real time. This crowdfunding model engages the public as each person plays a part in achieving community improvements and instills community pride as residents become invested in their surroundings.

Brownfield Redevelopment Incentive Policy

This policy establishes guidelines for the administration of the City of Portage Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA) program, which aims to promote the reuse and revitalization of properties in the city. It outlines the utilization of tax increment financing tools, brownfield loan and grant administration, and other economic development opportunities available under the relevant statute (Public Act 381, MCL 125.265 et seq.). The program utilizes certain tax increment revenues to fund or reimburse the costs of Eligible Activities defined in the Act. The City of Portage established the Authority in 2001, and this policy serves as a framework for the administration of the Program in accordance with the Act.

Local Brownfield Revolving Fund

PA 381 of 1996 allows for the creation of a Local Brownfield Revolving Fund (LBRF) to support various eligible activities such as environmental studies, redevelopment planning, cleanup, and demolition. The LBRF finances upfront due diligence or redevelopment costs related to brownfield projects, which may not be economically feasible otherwise. Funding for the LBRF typically comes from tax increment revenue from specific projects but can also be from appropriations or grants. In the case of the Portage Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, the LBRF will initially be funded from tax increment revenue from approved plans, capturing excess revenue for up to five years within a maximum 30-year capture period, and any remaining funds from the annual BRA Administrative Fee, as applicable per PA 381.

Local Development Finance Authority

The City of Portage establishes the Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA), which conducts economic and community development activities permitted by Michigan statutes. This authority consists of seven members appointed by the City's Chief Executive, one member appointed by the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners, one member appointed by Kalamazoo Valley Community College, and two members appointed by Portage Public Schools. The LDFA formulates and executes a Development and Tax Increment Financing Plan to foster the expansion of the LDFA District. It endeavors to implement these plans extensively to generate employment opportunities and stimulate economic development.

PA 198 – Industrial Development District

Michigan's PA 198 refers to the Industrial Facilities Tax (IFT) Act, specifically Public Act 198 of 1974. This act allows local governments in Michigan to establish Industrial Development Districts (IDDs). These districts are designed to encourage industrial development by providing certain tax incentives to qualifying businesses. The incentives typically include exemptions or abatements on certain property taxes for eligible industrial properties within the district. The goal is to attract and retain industrial businesses, promote economic growth, and create job opportunities within the state.

Incentives

The following is a list of incentives and related programs which can be used to encourage investment in the City from the private sector. While sharing the same goal as those funding sources previously identified, incentives provide a means to support projects that further the vision of the Master Plan in collaboration with businesses, investors, property owners, and other community stakeholders.

Façade Improvement Grants

Façade Improvement Grants provide funding for commercial and mixed-use building facade rehabilitation and reconstruction. The goals of these programs are to reduce the deterioration of traditional downtowns and older business corridors, , to stimulate additional investment in the area, and attract additional customers as a result. In Michigan, façade improvement programs are often administered by DDAs or similar entities. Portage can consider establishing façade improvement grants to encourage rehabilitation of buildings if it establishes a DDA or CIA.

Signature Building Acquisition Grants

The Signature Building Acquisition Program, offered by MEDC, funds the acquisition and rehabilitation of vacant and underutilized buildings in downtown districts. Municipalities may also contribute funding to acquisition, allowing developers to lower overall project costs. It is expected that the developer will invest an amount at least equal to the acquisition cost to improve the building's interior.

Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT)

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) is a mechanism that allows the City to reduce the property tax burden of a qualified residential development for a predetermined period. In this instance, a local taxing body and a property owner will agree to the annual payment of a set fee in place of the property taxes. Payments are typically made in the form of a fixed sum, but they may also be paid as a percentage of the lease payment generated by a property. PILOT can be a means of reducing the fiscal impact on the City of a nonprofit, institutional use, or other non-taxpaying entity locating to a key site. Provisions can be made to offset negative fiscal impacts by allowing the City to be compensated for at least a portion of the revenue that would otherwise be collected in the form of property tax via a Municipal Services Agreement (MSA) along with the PILOT.

Tax Exemptions

There are a number of exemptions allowed by the Michigan Department of the Treasury to assist businesses in the state wishing to facilitate improvements of their physical assets. Examples include New Personal Property Exemptions (affords a 100 percent property tax exemption for specific businesses located within eligible distressed communities) or Industrial Facilities Exemptions (provides a tax incentive to manufacturers to enable renovation and expansion of aging facilities, assist in the building of new facilities, and to promote the establishment of high-tech facilities). The City should review and consider exemptions that may be applicable as part of development opportunities in Portage.

Economic Development Planning Grants

Under the Planning and Local Technical Assistance program, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) assists municipalities in drafting economic development plans. The plans should be regional in scope, targeted to guide the economic development efforts of a community or region. The EDA also supports Partnership Planning investments that fund the development, implementation, revision, or replacement of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDs), which describe and prioritize regional strategic economic goals.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS)

The Safe Routes to School program has provided funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation for various infrastructure-related projects including the planning, design, and construction of infrastructure-related projects that will substantially improve the ability of students to walk and bike to school, including:

- ▶ Sidewalk improvements
- ▶ Traffic calming and speed reduction improvement
- ▶ Pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements
- ▶ On-street bicycle facilities
- ▶ Off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- ▶ Secure bicycle parking facilities
- ▶ Traffic diversion improvements in the vicinity of schools
- ▶ Portage could consider the Safe Routes to School program to implement projects to encourage pedestrian travel to local schools as recommended in the Master Plan.
- ▶ Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)
- ▶ Administered by the FHWA, the CMAQ program focuses on projects that provide solutions to regional congestion and air quality problems. Eligible project types have included transit improvements, commuter parking lots, traffic flow improvements, bicycle/pedestrian projects and projects that result in emissions reductions. In the past, these projects have been federally funded at 80 percent of project costs.

Michigan Department of Transportation Category A

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), tasked with maintaining the state's transportation network, administers the Economic Development Fund - Category A, designed to promote increased economic potential and improve the quality of life through support of job creation and retention in Michigan. County road commissions and municipal street agencies can receive up to 80 percent of the cost for transportation projects that will lead to private sector job creation. The project must be related to agriculture or food processing, tourism, forestry, high technology research, manufacturing, mining, or office centers of 50,000 square feet or more.

Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) administers a variety of grant programs to help municipalities and other local agencies provide public outdoor recreational areas and facilities. The following are specific grant programs which the City could utilize to implement parks, trails, and open space related recommendations of the Master Plan. It should be noted that this list does not include all grant programs offered by MDNR, but only those deemed most relevant.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grants are available to municipalities, counties, and school districts to be used for outdoor recreation projects. Projects require a 50 percent match. All funded projects are taken under perpetuity by the National Park Service and must only be used for outdoor recreational purposes.

Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF)

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund provides funding for the purchase of land for resource protection and public outdoor recreation as well as the development of outdoor recreation facilities. Development projects can range from \$15,000 to \$300,000 but there is no limit to grants for land acquisition.

Recreation Passport Grants (RPG)

Recreation Passport Grants are supported by the sales of the state Recreation Passport, which is required for entrance into state parks, recreation areas, and boating access sites. Grants are available to local units of government for development of public recreation facilities. The program is primarily focused on renovation and improvement to existing parks; however, projects for the development of new parks are eligible.

Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

The FHWA's Recreational Trails Program provides funding for maintenance and development of recreational trails and related facilities. This program is an internal process, and local governments must partner with a state division to receive funding for a project.

IMPLEMENTING THE LAND USE PLAN THROUGH ZONING

It is essential the City's Zoning Ordinance aligns with the Land Use Plan within the Master Plan to ensure future development occurs as the community envisions. The Land Use Plan serves as the formal policy guide for desired development types and land uses, though it is not a regulatory document or a legally binding obligation of what must be done. The Zoning Ordinance, on the other hand, includes the legally binding regulations that dictate how properties can be used and establishes the permitted character of development to implement the land use policies of the Master Plan. The adoption of the Portage Master Plan and its Land Use Plan establishes this land use policy for the City of Portage. The Master Plan should serve as a guide for updating of the City's zoning regulations.

Zoning Ordinance Update

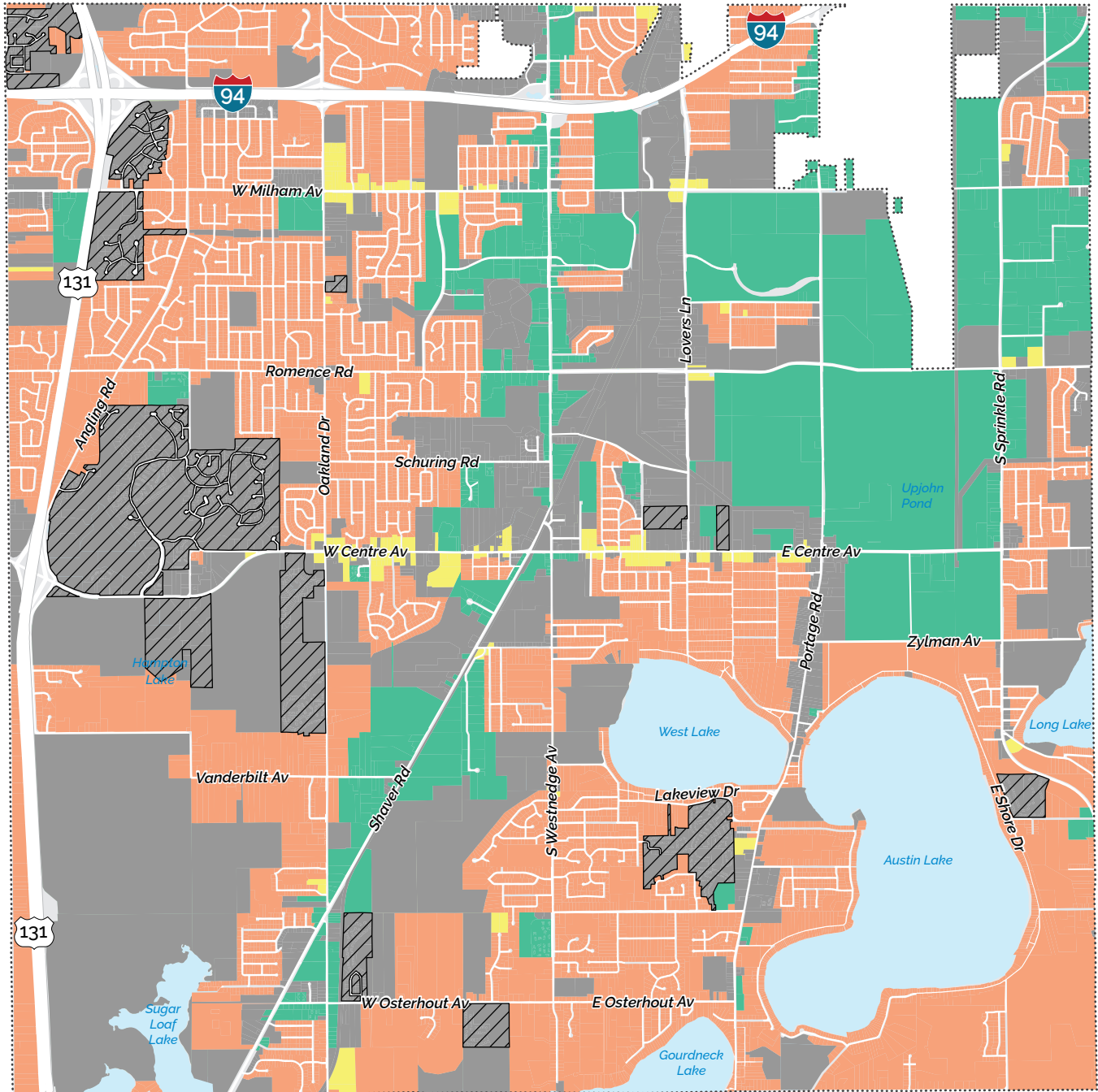
Adoption of the Master Plan should be followed by an immediate review and update of the City's various development controls, including the zoning ordinance. The Land Use Plan, including the Residential Areas Framework Plan and the Commercial Areas Framework Plan outline the desired type, location, and character of future development. It should be used to inform zoning regulations regarding appropriate uses, as well as building height, bulk, orientation, and intensity standards. Further, as the Master Plan is updated to address changes in community issues and priorities over time, the zoning ordinance should also be revisited to ensure it continues to work in unison with the Land Use Plan. This could involve adjustments to the zoning map to allow mixed-use development, changes to the types of residential formats or densities allowed, or alterations to building setbacks.

Land Use and Zoning Alignment






To establish an understanding of anticipated steps necessary in amending the City's zoning regulations, and in accordance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act; Act 33 of 2008, 125.3833 (2) (d), the land use and zoning alignment was completed. It should be noted that this represents only a preliminary analysis of general uses permitted within each zoning district. A comprehensive, thorough analysis should be undertaken before amending the City's zoning regulations and district boundaries, including standards related to the uses allowed by district, bulk and dimensional standards, scale and design of development, buffering, and other elements. This alignment compares the proposed land uses to the existing zoning districts to determine which areas of the City are misaligned, necessitating a zoning code update. Each land use category contained in the Future Land Use Plan was compared to the zoning districts using a weighted scoring method based on three criteria, the description/purpose statement, allowed uses, and the development pattern.

Land Use and Zoning Alignment Map

Scores were tallied for each of the zoning districts within each land use category and brought into the map below. The four categories indicate how well the future land use of a parcel is aligned with the existing zoning code. The map identifies areas where zoning amendments should be considered to support the desired types of residential, commercial, or industrial development described in the Master Plan. The four categories are "Not Aligned", "Slight Alignment", "Some Alignment", and "Closely Aligned". The City should utilize this analysis to help identify necessary amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to ensure it works in concert with the policies and vision of the Master Plan. The following recommendations should be considered resulting from this analysis.



Land Use and Zoning Alignment

-  Planned Development Districts
-  Not aligned
-  Slight alignment - but major adjustments needed
-  Some alignment - but adjustments needed
-  Closely Aligned - only minor adjustments needed



IMPLEMENTATION ACTION MATRIX

The Implementation Action Matrix offers a comprehensive list of all implementation strategies, policies, and recommendations contained within the Master Plan. The matrix provides City staff with a tool to prioritize implementation activities and projects over the life of the plan. In addition, the matrix allows the City to approve specific, actionable items on an annual basis and evaluate progress based upon completed implementation strategies. The Implementation Action Matrix offers a brief description of each project and indicates the following:

Responsible Entities & Partner Organizations

Responsibility includes government bodies, civic organizations, private entities, and other associations that may be able to provide assistance with the identification strategy through coordination and cooperation. As applicable, lead responsibility groups should coordinate with potential partners to explore opportunities for collaboration to complete the identified recommendation.

Time Frame

- 'S' = Short-Term (1-2 years)
- 'M' = Mid-Term (3-5 years)
- 'L' = Long-Term (5+ years)
- 'O' = Ongoing (Requires immediate action and continued attention throughout the life of the plan)

Priority Level

- 1 = High-priority
- 2 = Moderate Priority
- 3 = Lower Priority

Zoning and Development Regulations

Recommendations for revisions to zoning and development regulation amendments are highlighted in orange in the implementation matrix.

The Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, City Council, and other boards and commissions should collaborate in the day-to-day administration, interpretation, and application of the Master Plan. Ensuring interagency collaboration will make certain that the changes proposed in the Master Plan are implemented effectively.

Chapter 6

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Goal. Foster reinvestment and rehabilitation in the City's established neighborhoods, provide for a range of housing options, and support a high-quality neighborhood for all residents, regardless of age or background.

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Housing Mismatch				
Undertake a zoning analysis to create a pilot program targeting specific areas for a mix of housing types.	2	M	Community Development - Planning & Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Amend the zoning code to allow a wider variety of housing as-of-right to minimize the reliance on Planned Developments.	1	S	Community Development -Planning & Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Streamline the permitting process by expanding administrative approvals in lieu of planning commission review.	1	S	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	
Host regular meetings with real estate experts familiar with the community to identify emerging trends, issues, and potential projects related to housing.	3	O	Community Development - Economic Development/Housing, City Administration, Developers, Real Estate Professionals	
Promote areas for new mixed residential and mixed-use developments per the Land Use Plan.	2	M	Community Development-Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	
Missing Middle Housing				
Reduce minimum house size, lot size, setbacks, and frontage requirements to allow for more diverse housing options.	1	S	Community Development-Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Permit duplex housing in some designated single-family zoning districts.	1	S	Community Development-Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Reassess parking requirements for multifamily housing projects to reflect decreasing auto dependency and overly restrictive historical standards.	1	S	Community Development-Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Reassess setbacks for multifamily housing projects to facilitate better site efficiency design.	1	S	Community Development-Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Utilize "Planned Development" (PD) opportunities where amenities exist for providing neighborhood/community benefits.	1	S	Community Development-Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Aging in Place				
Enhance marketing and encouragement of property owners to construct permitted Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).	3	O	Community Development	
Encourage a variety of housing types that anticipates future market demand and seniors to age in place. The variety of housing types should not be isolated, but rather integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood.	2	M	Community Development, Developers	
Collaborate with healthcare providers to offer preventive care, wellness programs, and chronic disease management services tailored to older adults' needs.	3	O	Senior Center	
Facilitate intergenerational programs and volunteer opportunities to foster connections between older adults and younger residents.	3	L	Senior Center	
Improve sidewalk infrastructure, crosswalks, and traffic signals to enhance pedestrian safety, particularly near senior living facilities, parks, and community centers.	2	O	Transportation and Utilities, Public Works, Parks and Recreation	
Encourage the development of universally designed housing options that accommodate varying mobility needs, such as single-story homes, zero-step entrances, wider doorways, and accessible bathrooms.	3	L	Community Development - Building	
Consider a senior home repair program to ensure the City's elderly residents can continue to maintain safe homes.	2	M	Community Development - Housing, Senior Center	
Support the development of age-targeted residential and other residential products that are accessible and attractive to seniors, offered at attainable price points.	2	M	Community Development-Housing, Senior Center	

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Housing Attainability				
Incentivize developers to include rent-stabilized or below market-rate units in new housing developments.	1	S	Community Development-Housing	
Establish a down-payment assistance program to reduce the barriers of entry into Portage's residential market.	2	M	Community Development -Housing	
Work with developers to encourage new housing based on findings from the 2024 Housing Market Study.	1	M	Community Development	
Advertise grants, low-interest loans, or tax credits to property owners to help fund private property improvements.	2	M	Community Development -Economic Development	
Consider density bonuses, fee waivers, and waivers for parking minimums for opportunity sites identified in the Crossroads, City Centre, and Lake Center subareas.	2	M	Community Development - Economic Development	
Strengthening Neighborhoods				
Work with HOA's and residents to create distinct neighborhood groups to provide connection and community within the City.	3	L	Community Development	
Support neighborhood beautification that encourages gateway and landscaping improvements to preserve and promote neighborhood character.	2	M	Community Development	
Work with neighborhood and non-profit organizations to promote the awareness of housing rehabilitation programs.	2	O	Community Development -Housing, Public Information	
Encourage rehabilitation of older homes rather than demolition to ensure that existing entry-level homes remain available.	3	L	Community Development -Housing	
Utilize subdivision regulations and design review to provide developers with the flexibility to cluster residential development in certain portions of a site, thereby leaving larger contiguous areas of wetlands, streams, tree stand, and other assets undisturbed.	2	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Identify areas within the City that have chronic code enforcement issues and create a city-wide assistance program to work with property owners to aid in upkeep.	2	S	Community Development -Code Enforcement	
Establish housing inspection program including inspections for both single and multifamily buildings.	2	S	Community Development	
Explore partnerships between the City and health providers to ensure high quality of living environments through home safety inspections and wellness checks.	3	L	Community Development	
Utilize programs such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to help fund home rehabilitations.	1	S	Community Development -Housing, CDBG	
Allow for in-fill housing within established neighborhoods with context-sensitive designs.	1	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning	Y
Consider updating subdivision regulations to include standards for materials, siting, and architectural styles to provide a more consistent aesthetic for infill development.	2	M	Community Development- Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y

Chapter 7

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal 1. Maximize the potential of commercial corridors throughout the City by encouraging more dense, focused development along previously established commercial corridors.

Goal 2. Attract and support local businesses and major employers to strengthen the local tax base and provide well-paying, high-quality employment opportunities.

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Transforming to Mixed-Use				
Work to consolidate and reposition commercial corridors to create mixed-use nodes throughout the City to increase economic activity at a neighborhood level.	2	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Economic Development	Y
Update zoning code to allow for areas of mixed-use development as-of-right to support neighborhood commercial and residential development.	1	M	Community Development- Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Encourage residential uses, including multifamily development, in underperforming commercial areas and key corridors such as Lake Center Business District on Portage Road.	2	M	Community Development - Planning Zoning, Economic Development	
Identify vacant or underutilized parcels or buildings suitable for infill commercial development and redevelopment.	2	M	Community Development -Economic Development	
Evaluate the use of creative zoning solutions such as overlays to incentivize developers to reimagine commercial areas throughout the City.	2	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Reposition Office Parks				
Support redevelopment of underutilized office parks to more local commercial or mixed-uses to reflect shifting trends while continuing to support small businesses looking for space within the City.	2	M	Community Development -Economic Development	
Encourage flex-office uses and coworking spaces.	2	M	Community Development -Economic Development	Y
Accommodate non-traditional office park users in office space to allow for a mix of uses.	2	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Economic Development	Y
Consider expanding the definition of office uses within the zoning code or eliminate the designation in order to accommodate flexibility of uses.	2	S	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Promote adaptive reuse to encourage sustainable building practices and offer creative opportunities for retrofitting existing buildings.	2	M	Community Development, Public Works	
Prioritizing Mixed-Use Development				
Evaluate the success and challenges of the proposed River Caddis mixed-use development at 412 W. Centre Ave., once completed, to improve future mixed-use projects.	2	L	Community Development	
Prioritize redevelopment of established places, such as the Crossroads Subarea, Lake Center Subarea, and City Centre Subarea, with a mix of commercial and residential uses in strategic, mixed-use nodes and areas.	1	M	City Administration, Community Development	
Reevaluate the City's density requirements to allow more dense mixed-use developments.	2	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Implement the recommendations of the Lake Center District Corridor and Placemaking Study to introduce attractive and walkable mixed-use business district areas.	2	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	
Market and promote sites identified as mixed-use in the Land Use Plan to developers to encourage this type of development.	2	M	Community Development	
Consider providing tax incentives, density bonuses, or reduced fees for projects that include mixed-use components.	2	M	Community Development - Economic Development	
Consider creating Mixed-Use districts to include the new boundaries of the Crossroads, City Centre, and Lake Center Subareas.	1	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	y
Consider allowing mixed-use development within the Complete Neighborhood areas identified in the Economic Development Framework.	1	M	Community Development	

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Rethinking Parking Lots				
Adjust parking requirements to maximize development potential while allowing market forces to dictate needed parking.	2	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Encourage redevelopment of existing parking lots to make space for additional outlot development.	2	M	Property Owners	
Redevelop existing parking lots to create a more pedestrian environment within key areas such as the Crossroads, City Centre, and Lake Center Subareas with amenities such as plaza spaces and other gathering spaces.	2	L	Property Owners	
Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport				
Support redevelopment of the Portage Road corridor as a cohesive district to complement the functions of the Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport.	2	L	Community Development, Transportation & Utilities	
Work with the airport and City of Kalamazoo to support complementary development and coordinate long-term planning efforts to enhance the corridor.	3	L	Community Development, Transportation & Utilities, Kalamazoo/Battle Creek Airport	
Install new placemaking elements and gateways outside of the airport to announce entrance into Portage.	2	M	Community Development, Developers, Transportation & Utilities, Public Works	
Supporting the Existing Workforce				
Advertise existing workforce development programs such as those established by the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Southwest Michigan First, and Michigan Economic Development Corporation.	2	S	W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Southwest Michigan First, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and the Kalamazoo Chamber of Commerce.	
Partner with Portage Northern and Portage Central High Schools and major employers to facilitate internship opportunities, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities.	2	S	City Administration, Community Development -Economic Development	
Partner with and promote existing and new training programs operated by Kalamazoo County, KRESA, and Career Connect, and other area workforce development groups.	2	S	Community Development-Economic Development, Kalamazoo County, KRESA, Career Connect	
Utilize the internship program with the City to market public sectors jobs to students in school.	2	M	City Administration, Human Resource	
Support post-secondary and trade school programs within the City and work with higher education institutions such as Western Michigan University or Kalamazoo Community College to maintain and increase program offerings.	2	M	Community Development-Economic Development, Western Michigan, Kalamazoo College	
Examine the City's economic assets and competitive disadvantages to determine achievable target industries for business recruitment and necessary infrastructure updates.	2	L	Community Development -Economic Development, Transportation and Utilities	

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Supporting Working Families				
Work with childcare providers to seek funding opportunities to expand operations and reduce costs for working families.	3	M	City Administration	
Allow childcare services as accessory uses for office or industrial districts.	2	S	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Ensuring that workforce housing is available in the City in locations within close proximity to employment opportunities.	2	O	City Administration, Community Development-Housing	
Work with the public schools to promote after school programs are effective, engaging, and reliable to allow for working parents to take advantage of the services provided.	2	M		
Work with large employers to consider offering childcare services on-site to give working parents the flexibility and convenience of being able to pick up and drop off their children within close proximity to their work.	2	M	City Administration?	
Attract New Businesses				
Provide clear regulatory and permitting processes, giving business owners and entrepreneurs fair certainty for new ventures in the City.	2	M	Community Development	
Consider providing incentives to attract new businesses such as reduced permit fees, expedited review processes, grants, and low interest loans.	3	M	Community Development	
Promote Local Businesses				
Continue to work with the Southwest Michigan First Chamber as well as the business community to promote businesses, professionals, and organizations within the City.	1	S	Southwest Michigan First, Community Development -Economic Development	
Evaluate the potential of a business retention and expansion program.	2	M	Community Development -Economic Development	
Create a business registry to showcase restaurants, retail, and other businesses within the City.	3	S	City Administration, City Council, Community Development, Public Information	
Encourage local businesses to engage with the chamber to stay involved.	2	M	Southwest Michigan First	
Continue to promote local business events such as farmers markets, artisan markets, and community events where the community is able to interact with local businesses.	2	O	Parks and Recreation	
Encourage local business participation at City meetings to foster a culture of collaboration.	2	M	Southwest Michigan First	

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Commercial and Industrial Character				
Enhance beautification improvements of commercial corridors, particularly at main entry points into the City.	2	M	Community Development and Transportation & Utilities	
Consider utilizing conservation design strategies in the City's zoning ordinance to promote preserving and enhancing the natural areas of the City.	2	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Gradually phase out pole signs along the commercial corridors to create a more connected and uniform streetscape.	2	L	Community Development -Planning and Zoning/ Code Enforcement	
Reevaluate the sign ordinance to create uniform regulations around sign materials, sizes, locations, and design elements.	2	M	Community Development -Planning and Zoning/ Code Enforcement	Y
Consider offering incentives to businesses that want to update their signs but need financial assistance to do so.	2	M	Community Development	
Review and enhance property maintenance requirements as necessary to ensure that parking lots, building facades, landscaping, and other elements remain attractive.	2	M	Community Development -Code Enforcement	Y
Require high-quality architecture on all sides of the building – known as “360-degree architecture,” and include well-designed or screened service areas.	2	O	Community Development -Planning and Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Promote streetscaping and public improvements are unified in design and promote a distinctive image that emphasizes pedestrian-friendly character.	2	O	Community Development, Transportation and Utilities, Public Works	
Work with businesses to upgrade facades, internal and perimeter parking lot landscaping, and screening of utility areas.	2	O	Community Development	
Ensure underground placement of utilities in all new or reconstructed projects, particularly along Centre Avenue, and Portage Road.	1	O	Transportation & Utilities, Community Development, Consumers Energy	

Chapter 8

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Goal 1. Provide adequate infrastructure that is safe and comfortable for pedestrians and cyclists.

Goal 2. Promote excellent transportation systems and supporting infrastructure that align with community needs and foster economic growth.

Goal 3. Ensure multimodal transportation connections to and between neighborhoods, schools, parks, public transportation, employment centers, dining, and shopping destinations.

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
The Future of Vehicular Infrastructure				
Continue to prioritize the development of corresponding vehicular transportation plans that reflect best practices and address anticipated funding needs.	1	O	Transportation & Utilities	
The City should explore near-future technology improvements and incorporate policy and regulatory updates as well as infrastructure improvements and pilot-project opportunities.	2	O	City Administration, Transportation & Utilities, Public Works	
Support high-quality vehicular infrastructure improvements that align with economic development strategies.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities	
Require all future developments interconnected street networks to increase connectivity between areas and multi- modes of transportation.	2	O	Community Development, Transportation & Utilities	Y
Study traffic patterns throughout the city and implement various safety measures to decrease traffic speeds.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities	
Improving Systems thorough Growth				
Utilize appropriate character and capacity of street corridors to support surrounding land use context in both existing corridor improvements and proposed development transportation routes.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities, Community Development	
Update existing street design and engineering standards, details, and specifications to reflect alternative transportation priorities and multimodal opportunities where appropriate.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities, Community Development	
Monitor the existing corridor designations to ensure that adequate capacity is provided.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities	
Continue to improve vehicular infrastructure using best practice Engineering methods, such as Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER), to prioritize street improvement projects throughout Portage.	1	O	Transportation & Utilities, Public Works, Parks and Recreation	
Auto-Oriented Infrastructure				
Utilize National Best Practices and design guides, such as American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to supplement policies and Engineering Standard Details and Specifications.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities	
Create tiered solutions for accessibility throughout the neighborhoods. Utilizing a scale of priorities and potential investments.	3	L	Transportation & Utilities, Community Development	
Continue to prioritize work on local streets as well as major throughways, and efficiently spread investment where it will be the most impactful.	1	O	Transportation & Utilities	
Engage the community to better understand multi-modal use of specific roads, local streets, and trails/greenways.	2	M	Transportation & Utilities, Community Development, Parks & Recreation	
Identify streets that should be kept for moving cars most efficiently, and those that should be for targeted multimodal integration.	1	S	Transportation & Utilities, Community Development	
Continue strategic investment and maintenance along major roads to support existing and future employment, shopping, and tourist needs.	1	O	Transportation & Utilities, Community Development	
Host stakeholder engagement and pursue public-private partnerships to address underutilized commercial parking which could be repurposed for future development or multimodal connections.	2	M	Community Development, Transportation & Utilities	

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Investment and Infrastructure Gaps				
Create an inventory and ranking of sidewalk conditions to ensure safe and comfortable access.	2	M	Transportation & Utilities, Community Development, Public Works	
Develop a Non-Motorized Plan that identifies neighborhood-level routes and nearby amenities, overall city-wide route network, gaps in network for future connections, and overall non-motorized users' needs.	2	M	Community Development, Transportation & Utilities, Parks & Recreation	
Emphasize equity in both public expenditure and project type for public access and connectivity improvements between neighborhoods and other amenities.	2	O	City Administration, Public Works, Transportation & Utilities	
Identify existing deficiencies and prioritize improvements based on the Recreation and Open Space Plan strategies.	2	O	Parks & Recreation	
Host stakeholder engagement and discussion sessions to phase and prioritize improvements.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities	
Safe Routes to School				
Use potential funding sources, such as the Federal Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program resources, to identify possible and appropriate improvements for each route throughout the neighborhoods, while equitably distributing project construction funds based on use and need.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities, Parks & Recreation	
Engage the community and schools on the benefits of safe routes to school, to better understand and address residents' concerns, and to support neighborhood needs with these strategies.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities, Portage Public Schools	
Opportunities for Connection				
Maintain existing and support proposed local/ regional trails identified by Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study (KATS) or other local agencies.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities, Parks & Recreation, Public Works	
Identify routes for ease of access to City amenities, public infrastructure, and between neighborhoods.	3	S	Community Development, Transportation & Utilities, Parks & Recreation	
Support local and regional trails by connecting gaps between existing and/or planned trails with existing pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure.	3	O	Transportation & Utilities, Parks & Recreation, Public Works, Community Development	
Cycling				
Engage with various bicycle stakeholders and community, to identify and determine desired improvements.	2	O	Parks & Recreation, Transportation & Utilities	
Evaluate the success of the Bike Portage bike share service and utilize ongoing monitoring to determine the program's success and consider expansion.	2	O	Parks & Recreation	
Support existing public outreach and engagement sessions to understand the community perspective and opportunities for cycling improvements.	2	O	Parks & Recreation, Transportation & Utilities	

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Disconnected Commutes				
Support Metro Transit in their outreach efforts to understand the needs of existing and prospective users.	2	M	Transportation & Utilities, Community Development, Parks & Recreation	
Review and better understand inflow versus outflow support based on Portage resident and worker needs.	2	L	Metro Transit	
Compare usage and feasibility of the micro transit pilot program to its initial goals and understand the qualitative metrics of success for the program to determine overlaps of City priorities, such as proposed land use changes and alternative transportation coverage.	2	L	Metro Transit	
Consider strategies such as offset transit-only lanes and offloading bus stops to help mitigate increased vehicle traffic, pedestrian safety, and bus route efficiency as these opportunities support other transportation initiatives.	2	O	Metro Transit, Transportation & Utilities	
Support Metro Transit in exploring additional opportunities for micro-transit, that combines various transportation modes to better address transit challenges and increase ridership.	2	O	Metro Transit, City Administration	
Evaluate First Mile Last Mile (FMLM) issues currently present for existing and prospective users and identify where specific strategies may be more helpful than others.	2	L	Metro Transit	
Prioritize Transit-Oriented-Development design guidelines and standards for new development to proactively address FMLM challenges as the City continues to grow.	2	O	Community Development, Metro Transit	
Work with Metro Transit to understand the feasibility and potential sites for a Portage Transit Center to anchor and encourage new mixed-use development.	3	L	Metro Transit, City Administration, Community Development	

Chapter 9

CITY PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Goal. Continue to expand and enhance recreational facility options for residents of all ages and abilities. Preserve and improve ecologically sensitive areas.

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Analysis on Parks Need and Supply				
Utilize the 2023 Recreation and Open Space Plan to determine specific upgrades to existing parks and recreation facilities throughout the City.	2	O	Parks & Recreation	
Continue to implement the Action Plan and the Capital Improvement Program with respect to the priority level.	2	S	City Administration, Park & Recreation	
Strategically seek opportunities to acquire land for recreational purposes in areas lacking park access, to ensure all neighborhoods have equitable access to parks and recreational amenities throughout the City, prioritizing areas with the greatest need. Fostering a more balanced park system.	2	M	Parks & Recreation	
Update the zoning code and subdivision regulations to prioritize the inclusion of parks and green spaces in new residential and mixed-use development. This will enhance level of supply in the City and ensure that new developments contribute to the availability of parks for residents.	2	O	Community Development -Planning & Zoning, Parks & Recreation, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Enhance connectivity between existing parks and pedestrian networks by investing in infrastructure improvements such as sidewalks, pedestrian-friendly pathways and bike paths.	2	O	Parks & Recreation, Transportation & Utilities, Public Works, Community Development	
Maintain existing sidewalks and other pathways to ensure safe and accessible connections to city parks and trails.	2	O	Parks & Recreation, Transportation & Utilities, Public Works	
Trails and Greenways				
Incentivize new residential developments to connect to existing trails where feasible and the best opportunities are identified.	3	O	Community Development, Parks & Recreation	
Enhance east-west trail connections in south Portage, especially around the Lake Center District, to provide residents with easier access to the lakes and existing natural areas.	1	M	Parks & Recreation	
Continue to explore purchasing/partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) to develop passive trails on limited areas within State Game areas.	3	O	Parks & Recreation	
Open Spaces				
Implement programs and facilities supporting the conservation, protection, and preservation of the natural environment.	2	O	Parks & Recreation	
Identify land acquisition opportunities to preserve environmentally sensitive areas including land along Portage Creek.	2	O	Parks & Recreation	
Facilitate preservation of sensitive environmental lands where appropriate and possible. Plan for long-range needs to develop existing city-owned land, expansion of existing park facilities, and acquire new park property.	1	O	Parks & Recreation	
Increase access to parks and recreation within neighborhoods, especially in the areas north of the Moors Golf Club and south of West Lake. Update development regulations to support this open space goal.	3	L	Parks & Recreation, Community Development	
If the MDNR were to begin to release some of its property, the City should consider acquiring it as future parks, open space, or natural areas.	3	L	Parks & Recreation	

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Invasive Species				
Implement proactive invasive species program for natural areas including eradication of invasive species especially in Eliason Nature Reserve, Liberty Park, Schrier Park, and West Lake Preserve.	2	O	Parks & Recreation	
Collaborate with local organizations, educational institutions and community groups to encourage nature education regarding invasive species and biodiversity conservation.	3	O	Parks & Recreation	
Continue to publicize park events, facilities, and programs through social media, newsletters, press releases, web site, promotional events, and other media outlets.	2	O	Parks & Recreation	
Portage Lakes				
Identify coordination opportunities with the MDNR, Kalamazoo River Watershed Council, Kalamazoo Conservation District, and others.	2	O	MDNR, Kalamazoo River Watershed Council, Kalamazoo Conservation District	
Support programs and encourage recreation in and around the various lakes within the City to ensure residents and visitors feel a connection to the uniqueness of the Portage community's lakes.	2	O	Parks & Recreation	
Promote collaboration among environmental organizations, utility providers, governmental entities, and community stakeholders to conserve wetlands and other natural areas, protect flood-prone areas, manage stormwater, and improve water quality in the community's waterways.	2	M	Parks & Recreation, Transportation & Utilities, Community Development	

Chapter 10

LIVABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Goal 1. Establish a unique community identity using placemaking and public realm improvements and highlighting Portage's arts and culture, prioritizing sustainable strategies and solutions (cost/effort).

Goal 2. Improve, modernize, and expand City infrastructure to support existing residents and businesses and prepare for future growth.

Goal 3. Promote the use of sustainable development best practices that prioritize environmental responsibility, social equity, and economic viability.

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Strengthen Identity				
Identify identity/ brand and incorporate widely through into monuments, sculptures, signage, site furniture, banners, and other amenities.	2	M	City Administration, Parks & Recreation, Transportation & Utilities	
Incorporate recommendations from the most recent Wayfinding Plan in the Comprehensive Plan and ensure that implementation strategies in the Comprehensive Plan are complementary of the Wayfinding Plan.	2	M	Community Development, Parks & Recreation	
Smart kiosks could be used in the City Center and/or parks for keeping track of events or finding things.	3	M	Parks & Recreation	
Paint water towers and other landmarks using identified brand guidelines, such as appropriate colors, logos, and slogans.	3	L	Transportation & Utilities	
Work with MDOT to implement Portage signage along major highways like I-94 for increased visibility by regional drivers.	3	L	MDOT	
Complete Streetscapes				
Work with businesses and landowners to introduce streetscape improvements for enhanced pedestrian experience, placemaking, and encourage retail and dining activity.	2	M	Community Development	
Pursue funding to undertake public realm improvements especially in and around the City Centre and Crossroads subareas.	2	L	Transportation & Utilities	
Preserve and enhance existing tree canopy with planting guidelines recommending biodiverse tree species and plants for new developments and improvement projects.	2	M	Community Development, Parks & Recreation	
Placemaking in Progress				
Allocate funding to construct a dynamic food vendor space with kiosks and farm vehicle access to stalls.	2	S	Parks & Recreation	
Develop a year-round festival space that could accommodate a number of events including a farmers' market.	3	S	Parks & Recreation	
Create a Programming Master Plan for seasonal activities, annual festivals, and permanent income opportunities for a multi-faceted community space.	2	O	Parks & Recreation	
Work with Portage Cultural Arts Committee to evaluate the need for and identify potential locations for a cultural art center.	3	L	Parks & Recreation	
Explore closing appropriate streets, such as Brown Avenue, and other shared street opportunities to provide more space for cultural events or seasonal arts programming.	2	M	Parks & Recreation, Transportation & Utilities	
Curating an Art Hub				
Establish a seasonal rotating public art exhibit.	2	S	Parks & Recreation	
Work with the local schools to showcase student art.	3	S	Parks & Recreation	
Install art, such as sculptures, into strategic locations such as parks and medians to highlight Portage's artists and create a dynamic and engaging art scene.	3	M	Parks & Recreation	
Use art to educate people on the pre-history, settlement, and establishment of the City of Portage as well as the indigenous people who initially inhabited this land and whose descendants live among the community today.	3	O	Parks & Recreation, Community Development, Portage Public Library	
Better utilize light pole banners along major streets to reflect City branding, honor Veterans, and celebrate holidays.	3	O	Public Works	
Develop local artist partnerships to create rotating murals and other public facing art, such as on water towers, that highlight the City's history, present, and future.	3	O	Parks & Recreation, Transportation & Utilities	

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Meeting Growing Needs				
Model infrastructure capacity using the Land Use Plan.	2	M	Transportation & Utilities, Community Development	
Create a shared resources plan to better understand the staffing and equipment needs that comes with added infrastructure.	2	M	Public Works	
Develop a maintenance plan that identifies the short- and long-term costs of existing and new community infrastructure.	2	M	Public Works, Transportation & Utilities, Parks & Recreations	
Identify opportunities for land to expand the parks system and reflects priorities established in the Park Master Plan.	3	O	Parks & Recreation	
Engage with Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)/ Fish & Wildlife organizations to develop a use agreement that better addresses residents' desires beyond hunting	3	O	Parks & Recreation	
Model utility infrastructure capacity using the Land Use Plan to help determine where to prioritize infrastructure expansion, opportunities, and efficiencies, as well as overall investment.	2	M	Transportation & Utilities	
Greening Gray Infrastructure				
Update development regulations to encourage and provide guidance on green infrastructure and renewable energy.	2	L	Community Development, Transportation & Utilities, Public Works, Parks & Recreation	Y
Evaluate 2005 City of Portage Specifications booklet, and provide new guidance and complementary engineering details, design guidelines and specifications to encourage green infrastructure inclusion.	2	L	Transportation & Utilities	
Identify funding strategies and priorities to modernize outdated facilities and incorporate green infrastructure.	2	O	Public Works, Transportation & Utilities, Public Works	
Living with Nature				
Update zoning code to adopt conservation design standards for new developments.	2	M	Community Development - Planning & Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y
Incentivize new residential developments to connect to existing trails where feasible and the best opportunities are identified.	2	L	Community Development - Economic Development	
Develop a Tree Canopy Plan to increase the City's canopy coverage while protecting existing trees, adding maintenance strategies for ailing trees, and mitigation guidance, like standard replacement ratios, for the removal of trees during construction of new developments.	3	L	Parks & Recreation, Community Development	
Develop Livability standards/ guidelines for new development to encourage these design policies.	2	M	Community Development - Planning & Zoning, Planning Commission, City Council	Y

Action	Priority	Time Estimate	Responsible Entities and Partner Organizations	Zoning
Nature in Peril				
Create an engagement strategy to communicate/ educate the public on the benefits of livability design practices.	3	O	Community Development	
Lead by Example				
Consider installing permeable pavement, bioswales, rain gardens, etc. on City-owned property.	3	S	Public Works, Parks and Recreation	
Transition to clean energy in transportation (vehicles) and municipal facilities.	3	L	Public Works	
Evaluate potential of electrifying municipal fleet of vehicles; prioritizing the highest use and balancing upfront investment, that includes indirect efficiency analysis.	3	L	Public Works	
Continue to prioritize decarbonization by using alternative energy, upgrading building envelop and equipment, and optimizing occupant behaviors in municipal facilities.	3	L	Public Works	
Ensure that maintenance and long-term replacement of any new equipment and infrastructure is considered.	2	O	Public Works, Transportation & Utilities, Parks & Recreations	
Evaluate existing building envelope and equipment opportunities, such as insulation, windows, pumps.	3	L	Public Works	
Hazard Mitigation				
Investigate stormwater guidelines and revise as warranted.	3	L	Transportation & Utilities	
Expand water/sewer utilities into residential areas that use private wells or septic systems.	2	O	Transportation & Utilities	
Utilize Federal Emergency Management Agency Hazard Mitigation Plan to identify opportunities for a variety of mitigation projects, such as flood proofing, secondary power sources, warning systems, etc.	3	M	City Administration, Public Safety, Public Works, Public Information, Community Development	
New development with the flood zone should consider utilizing conservation design strategies to mitigate risks from floods	2	O	Community Development	