



**Village of Cassopolis, Michigan
December 2018**

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I. Overview

I. OVERVIEW

The Village of Cassopolis is a part of LaGrange Township and is the county seat of Cass County in the southwest portion of the lower peninsula of Michigan. While officially a part of the South Bend - Mishawaka Indiana Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), Cassopolis is also part of the greater Southwest Michigan region. Kalamazoo is accessible via US 131 to the east and Benton Harbor is the County's gateway to Lake Michigan. The communities of Dowagiac, Edwardsburg, and Three Rivers also provide substantial amenities for the Village's residents. The village has a historic downtown with Stone Lake as the most prominent natural feature of the area which also offers recreational opportunities.

Summary of Key Information

Population

According to 2017 census estimates, the village had a population of 1,703 with a median age of 29.7 years old. The average household size is 2.36 people.

Household Income

The median household income for the village in 2017 was estimated at \$29,976.

Labor Force

The total labor force within the village limits is diverse with 30.7% White Collar workers, 39.9% Blue Collar Workers and 29.4% working in the Service Industry with 73.5% having a high school diploma or higher.

Housing

The total number of housing units in Cassopolis for 2017 was 710 with an average of 392 families in the Village. 344 (48.4%) of those being owner-occupied and 255 (35.9) were rental units while 111 (15.7%) remained vacant. The median home value for the village is \$121,017 and median residential rent is \$547/month.



II. Economic Development Strategy Process

II. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY PROCESS

Over the course of 2018, a team comprised of the employees of the Village of Cassopolis, Wightman Architecture and Engineering and Michigan State University held extensive meetings to determine what possible opportunities could be seized in the future. Throughout the year, the Village held multiple stakeholder sessions where a list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were formed.

Strengths

The community identified the following areas of strength for Cassopolis:

- Stone Lake
- County Seat Historic Buildings Parks
- Medical Clinic/Senior Services
- Local weekly paper
- Festivals
- County Jail
- Police/Fire
- Fiber Optics
- Highway Accessibility
- Cass County Transit
- Historic Courthouse
- Location - Proximity to DET, CHI and S. Bend
- Quaint downtown w/ lots of potential
- Good Schools
- Village residents get along



Weaknesses

The community also identified the following weaknesses in the village:

- High water/sewer rates
- High taxes - feeling of double taxation
- Sidewalks
- Empty vacant buildings
- Perceived Water quality of Stone Lake
- Lack of housing diversity
- Tax base not growing
- Lack of restaurants
- Semi traffic/M-60 traffic downtown
- Housing quality
- Tough to cross M-60
- High rental rate
- High renovation costs of historic buildings
- Lack of retail diversity
- Wide main street with lots of traffic
- Lack of youth activities/opportunities
- Lack of growth in industrial park
- No trails or boardwalk by Stone Lake
- Unengaged downtown property owner's
- Unattractive village gateways
- No bike paths in village
- No Coffee Shop or Bakery
- Schools



Opportunities

The community also identified the following opportunities:

- Promote redevelopment sites
- Road Diet
- Brewery/Restaurants
- Proactive public relations
- Improve image of and development around Stone Lake
- Improve gateways
- Engage property owners/residents
- Public Wi-Fi
- Farmer's Market
- Downtown nightlife - activities/entertainment/dining
- Good PR for village
- Disbrow Beach site redevelopment
- Stone Lake Park redevelopment
- Boardwalk/Trail from Lakeshore Drive to downtown
- Better utilize Stone Lake
- Splash park
- Improve downtown Streetscaping
- Expand village limits
- Bury utilities
- More residential/2nd & 3rd story housing/mixed-use

Threats

The following threats were identified by attendees:

- Lack of funding
- Lack of youth involvement
- Apathy by property owners/residents
- Aging infrastructure
- Internet sales impact on local businesses
- Backward focus - Don't want change
- CAVE (Citizens Against Virtually Everything)
Competition from other communities

III. Local & Regional Economic Development Goals

III. LOCAL & REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

For an economic development strategy to follow best practices put forth by the Redevelopment Ready Communities program, the individual objectives must tie back to one or more of the local goals identified in the regional context. Each of the goals put forth in this strategy meets this criterion.

Local Economic Goals

The Village of Cassopolis has set forth the following goals for its local economic development efforts:

- 1) Preserve and promote downtown Cassopolis
- 2) Promote that we have safe and efficient transportation within and through the community
- 3) Retain the elements that make Cassopolis unique
- 4) Recognize and promote Stone Lake as a community asset
- 5) Protect the water quality in Stone Lake
- 6) Provide recreational opportunities that take advantage of the natural environment
- 7) Promote Broadway Corridor
- 8) Promote Business/Industrial Park
- 9) Diversify the economic base of the village

Regional Economic Goals

Prosperity Region 8, which encompasses the entire southwest portion of the lower peninsula and the Village of Cassopolis, has identified the following goals for the region's economic development goals:

- 1) Create a more diversified transportation system
 - Create walkable neighborhoods
 - Encourage new transportation patterns that support efficient multi-modal transportation options
 - Support community development that is transit-oriented
- 2) Encourage development of additional recreational opportunities and amenities
 - Encourage an environment where social interactions can occur
 - Promote existing and support development of new trails and natural areas (e.g., parks, recreation areas, rivers, and lakes)
- 3) Encourage increased access to housing options regarding density, cost, style and location
- 4) Support sustainable development
 - Develop infrastructure that can be sustained financially and environmentally over the long term
 - Maintain or improve environmental quality

IV. Economic Development Strategy

IV. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Economic Development Strategy is a direct reflection of the input of stakeholders and professional redevelopment staff. It balances the desires of the community with market feasibility and the village's capacity for this strategy's execution.

Strategic Objectives

Redevelop the Broadway/Disbrow block– The Village has already taken steps to redesign and develop this area as part of its Master Plan and Imagine Cass project with Michigan State University, however needs to formalize this with the approval of Council.

Develop Acreage for Single Family Residential with Lake Access- According to recent data, there is a continuing demand for lake front or lake access detached single family housing. There is also a fair amount of buildable acreage in the village that could be developed for this type of housing. As part of the site evaluation process, a thirty-year cost-benefit analysis should be conducted to evaluate the long-term infrastructure costs of new development versus the anticipated increase in tax base as a result of the development.

Fully Utilize Social Media to Market Cassopolis- Social media is one of the most cost-effective ways to advertise the community's benefits, accomplishments and offerings on a continual basis to people around the world. The village should also more actively use their Facebook page to promote good news stories about the village, its residents and businesses as well as make people aware of various business and employment opportunities. The village should strongly consider adding Instagram and Twitter accounts as a way to visually promote the natural beauty and unique businesses of Cassopolis.

Façade Improvement Program- The Village has already taken the remarkable step of providing renderings for the downtown area. This is a tremendous asset that building owners can use to implement façade improvements. The village should pursue Façade Improvement Grants through the MEDC to help make these projects occur.



Reevaluate Marketing Efforts-The Village has employed multiple channels and efforts to market itself. However, over time most of these efforts have either faded or become inconsistent with an overall plan. The village needs to look for a marketing firm to help them identify a logo and marketing plan to move forward effectively and this should be evaluated on a cost-benefit basis.

Create More Upper Floor Housing- The analysis also shows a significant need for upper floor and “missing middle” housing types in the village. Additionally, many of the upper floors of buildings downtown are either empty or severely underused. Adding units to the downtown will both increase density for the village as well as provide downtown businesses with more potential customers. Grants to help with this may be available through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC.)

Real Estate Redevelopment- A review of the community shows the need to prioritize the redevelopment of three sites. While not the only sites that should be redeveloped, the following three sites should be prioritized in the following order:



Disbrow Beach- This parcel can be used to create a viable community amenity and gathering place, while taking advantage of one of the Village’s best natural assets.

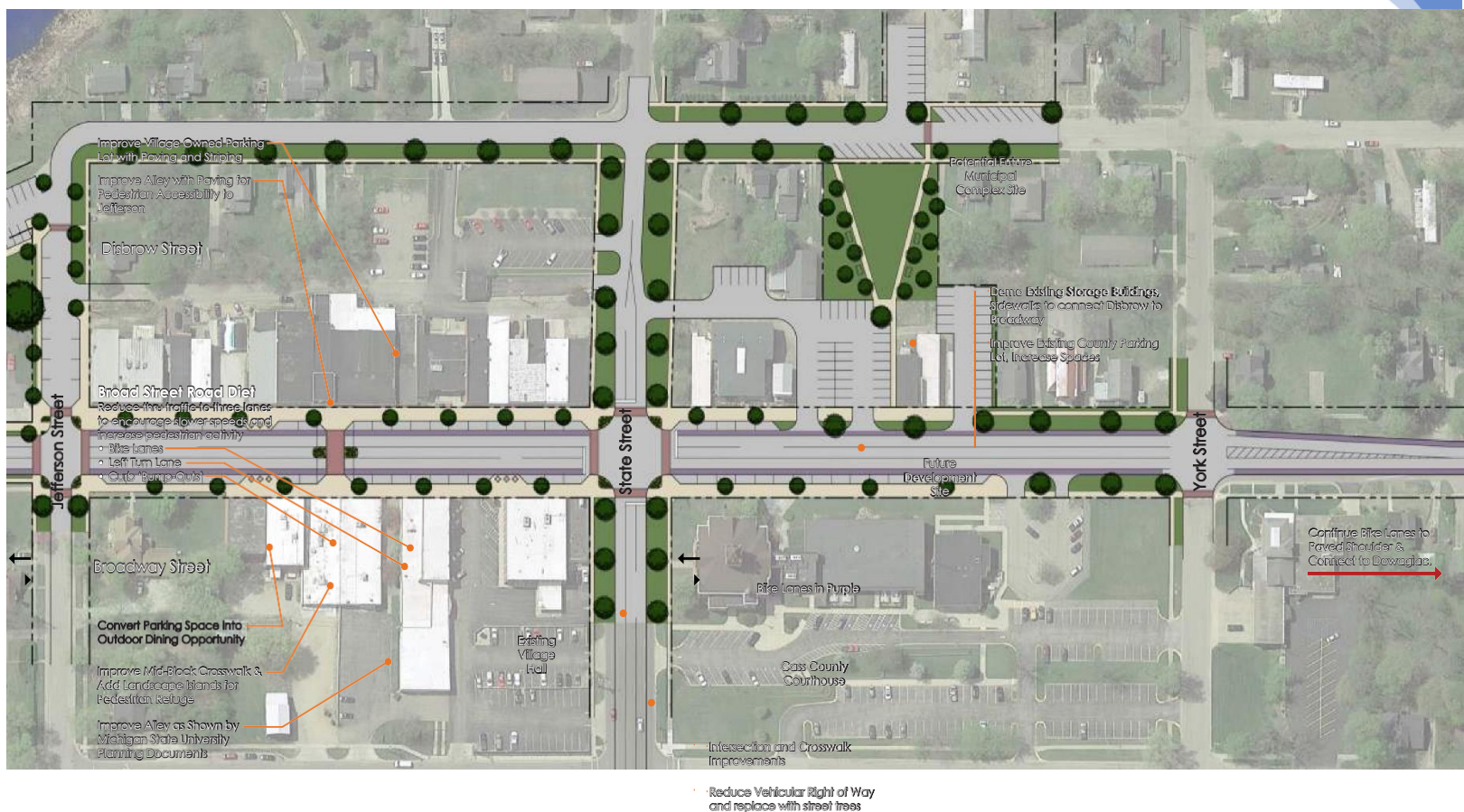


Village-Owned Property at Stone Lake Park-The village currently owns a parcel adjacent to the lake that could be used to support further development in the area. Creating a unique neighborhood to address the missing middle housing in the village while providing an affordable development with lake views and lake access.



117 S. Broadway Ave- This building currently is being discussed for a number of redevelopment projects. Once completed, this site would be an excellent mixed-use opportunity with upper floors converted to residential and commercial on the first floor.

V. Additional Considerations



In addition to the Economic Development Strategy, the community needs to keep several items in mind regarding economic development moving forward:

M-60 Pedestrian Improvements- The Village should continue working with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) at making pedestrian improvements along M-60 including mid-block pedestrian crossings and a road diet to slow current traffic through the downtown area. This will create a safe passageway for pedestrians throughout the downtown as well as to the outlying business district, thus enhancing the economic opportunity for the village.

Partnerships with School/Businesses and Community Groups- The Village should continue to consistently seek to partner with our schools, local businesses and community groups to leverage their advertising and general tourism drawing ability to create greater impact, and overall more, tourism dollars into the community.

VI. Implementation Partners

VI. Implementation Partners

The completion of this Economic Development Strategy will not be easy. The Village of Cassopolis will require partners. Thankfully, several local entities have committed time, energy and funding to help projects like those suggested here.

The professionals and organizations listed below should be considered to provide valuable expertise, time, effort and assistance with executing this strategy.

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Ted Gogol
Jon Biek
Mike Schwindaman
Chad Perrin
Adam Dalghren
Tony Myrthill
Julie Hartman
Mary McFarland

David Johnson
Kim Parsons
Katherine Yoder
Eugene Wagner
Cynthia Jackson-Ash
Geraldine Sims
Frank Williams
Christian Jackson
Mitchell Conner

VI. Implementation Matrix

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VISION/MISSION

The Village of Cassopolis strives to be a place of economic opportunity. From traditional employment options to entrepreneurial endeavors and development opportunities, the Village of Cassopolis, Michigan is a fully supportive partner in private efforts to create local prosperity. Where necessary, the Village of Cassopolis will take steps to help create the physical and social environment conducive to economic success and wealth creation.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VISION/MISSION

Downtown is the single strongest expression of community identity. The public sector will lead the effort to invest in downtown with steps that will create an appealing public realm. Public investments in physical improvements and other programmatic commitments are intended to add to compelling reasons for a new private investment in vacant lots and underutilized buildings.



PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

Four blocks of the downtown including three infrastructure projects will be completed over the next two years. The new municipal complex will be built. The new beach and connector path will be constructed within the next two years. The bike lanes and traffic calming will be implemented within the next two years



PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

Sustained participation in the Redevelopment Ready Communities program with the goal of reaching the "Certified" level.



Estimated completion date: 2021

Responsible Party: Village Manager, Village Clerk, Wightman

REDEVELOPMENT AREA STRATEGY

The Village of Cassopolis has identified areas in the Village with unique redevelopment needs. These areas include property situated on the lake and functionally obsolete buildings. Focused attention to these areas is warranted to encourage redevelopment.



PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

A planning effort will be launched to consider new redevelopment options in the Stone Lake neighborhood. This work will include a market study, neighborhood plan and new zoning recommendations.



PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

The Corridor leading into town shows signs of disinvestment and disconnection. Loose zoning standards and commercial turnover is evident and non-motorized transportation options are non-existent. Planned initiatives going forward include lane reductions and additions of lanes for non-motorized transport. Plans also include engaging property owners to consider options such as a corridor improvement authority.



Estimated completion date: 2022

Responsible Party: Village Manager, Village Clerk, Wightman, Business Owners

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

The Village of Cassopolis has identified the need to better communicate with residents what is happening and the progress being made in the community in order to encourage public engagement and involvement.



PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

An effort to work with a marketing team to stream line the marketing and social media efforts in order to present unified material to residents will be undertaken.



Estimated completion date: 2022

Responsible Party: Village Manager, Village Clerk, Alchemy