ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

City of Mt. Pleasant, Michigan

Abstract

As a component of the six best practice strategies required for state certification as a Redevelopment Ready Community, this update to the City's 2008 Economic Development Action Plan includes a brief description of the City's history; demographic information; regional context; relationship to other plans and studies; and finally, priority economic development-related goals and strategies for achieving them.

Introduction

Historical Context

Mt. Pleasant is in the geographic center of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. In 1855, David Ward, a timber cruiser, surveyor, teacher, and physician, purchased pine forest land from the United States Government. After logging off a site along the Chippewa River, he surveyed the area into lots and named the resulting village Mount Pleasant. The plat was sold to investors in New York and in 1889 the village was incorporated as the City of Mt. Pleasant.

During this same period, the United States Government was negotiating a treaty with the Swan Creek, Black River, and Saginaw Bands of Chippewa Indians, later to be combined to form the modern day Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan. Through the treaties of 1855 and 1864, all or a portion of seven townships were set aside as the Isabella Reservation and forty acre parcels allotted to qualified individuals belonging to the Tribe. As a result, the area north of High Street in the City of Mt. Pleasant is located within the Isabella Reservation.

As the City became more settled, services and amenities began to be established. The Mt. Pleasant Business College began in 1890 and became the Mt. Pleasant Business College and Normal School in 1891. By 1892 the name had changed to the Central Michigan Normal School and Business Institute. Finally, in 1895 Central Michigan became a state school.

In the early 20th century, Mt. Pleasant began to evolve away from agricultural industries to oil and gas. The first oil well was discovered in Isabella County in 1928 and continued growth saw Mt. Pleasant become the oil capital of Michigan. While the prominence of the oil and gas industry is now part of the area's history, the continued growth of Central Michigan University and the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe's Soaring Eagle Casino have continued to shape Mt. Pleasant's importance as a regional destination and economic importance. A diversified industrial base has also helped to insulate the area from state and national fluctuations in the economy.

Regional Context

Mt. Pleasant is located near the center of Isabella County in the middle of Michigan's Lower Peninsula and serves as the County Seat. The Chippewa River runs through the community, which also sits at the crossroads of US-127 and M-20. The City is home to Central Michigan University (CMU) and consists of traditional neighborhoods, student residential areas, and an historic downtown. The City and Isabella County governments enjoy a strong and supportive relationship across a broad spectrum of areas, including projects which contribute to and strengthen the tax base of all jurisdictions. The communities of Midland, Big Rapids, Clare, Ithaca, Alma, and St. Johns are all within 40 miles. Mt. Pleasant is less than two and a half hours of driving time from all major Michigan market areas such as Detroit, Traverse City, Grand Rapids, Saginaw, and Lansing. Other major metropolitan areas such as Chicago, Cleveland, and Indianapolis are within 350 miles. Other important regional partners include the 14 county Eastern Michigan Council of Governments (EMCOG) and Middle Michigan Development Corporation (MMDC), which is the only two county economic development organization in the state, covering Isabella and Clare counties. In addition, the City works closely with the Charter Township of Union on a number of jointly beneficial initiatives. The Township boundaries completely surround the City and as a result, a close working relationship helps to avoid duplication of effort in many instances by both units of government.

Key Demographics

Key demographics specific to the City of Mt. Pleasant and compared with the County and State are provided below. Most are taken from the 2016 update to the 2010 U.S. Census, which counts both full time residents of Mt. Pleasant as well as a portion of the CMU student population, depending on where they declare their residency.

Population: 26,016

Median Age:

Mt. Pleasant	Isabella County	State of Michigan
22 years	27 years	39.5 years

Household Income:

Characteristics	Mt. Pleasant	Isabella County	State of Michigan
Average Income	\$48,973	\$57,637	\$68,928
Median Income	\$31,710	\$40,706	\$50,803
Per Capita Income	\$17,196	\$21,387	\$44,347
% Persons in Poverty	41% *	23%	15%

^{*} Mt. Pleasant's CMU student population contributes to this number

Civilian Labor Force:

Characteristics (2016)	Mt. Pleasant	Isabella County	State of Michigan
Total	14,100	37,276	4,862,651
# Employed	12,499	33,574	4,449,717
# Unemployed	1,601	3,702	412,934
% Unemployed (Updated to reflect 2018 estimate)	4.0%	4.0%	4.7%

Educational Attainment:

Characteristics	Mt. Pleasant	Isabella County	State of Michigan
H.S. Degree or Higher	92.4%	91.5%	89.9%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	43.8%	28.2%	27.4%

Housing:

Characteristics	Mt. Pleasant	Isabella County	State of Michigan
Owner Occupied	3,104 (38.3%)	60.9%	70.8%
Renter Occupied	5,001 (61.7%)	39.1%	29.2%
Median Home Value	\$128,800	\$127,100	\$127,800
Median Monthly Rent	\$714	\$705	\$799

Other:

• Number of acres per 1,000 persons: 15 acres (NRPA park land standard = 7 acres)

Total retail sales per capita (2012): \$21,234
Mean travel time to work: 14.9 minutes

Opportunities, Strategies, and Challenges

The City of Mt. Pleasant adopted its last Economic Development Action Plan in April, 2008. At that time, Michigan, along with the rest of the country, was just entering what later became known as The Great Recession. In response, the City adopted a strategy of investing, rather than cutting, its way out of the downturn in the economy and based its plan on being more proactive to the needs of business. In addition the City Commission subsequently set aside approximately \$1.3 million in an Economic Development Fund (now the Economic Initiative Fund) for the purpose of investing in projects that bring an economic return to the City. The 2008 Economic Development Action Plan contained eight areas of focus:

- A short term focus on economic development efforts along the Mission Street commercial corridor
- Become opportunistic across the City regarding economic development
- Communicate the City is open for business in regard to good development projects
- Be flexible and nimble to address economic development opportunities
- Encourage redevelopment and rehabilitation of existing sites served by existing infrastructure
- Continue to support the City's role as the region's commerce and population center
- Increase the tax base with new positive growth and redevelopment
- Enhance the City's image as a good place to live and work

Much has changed in the intervening years but Michigan has continued to lag behind the rest of the country in its efforts to recover from the Great Recession. While Mt. Pleasant has fared better than many communities its size, it still faces challenges in a number of areas. These include attracting investment in new development; attracting new and retaining existing retailers; encouraging affordable housing options, including addressing the market for "Missing Middle" housing types; reducing the number of rental housing units in favor of increasing owner-occupied housing types; and other challenges that will be addressed in the identified Opportunities and Strategies which follow.

Mt. Pleasant will be rewriting its community Master Plan in 2019. This will result in a community-wide effort to help shape and define the vision and direction of future development, including the City's economic development efforts. This Economic Development Action Plan will act as a catalyst for additional discussions on the topic during the Master Plan development process. As a result, components of this plan will be incorporated into the economic development discussion in the new Master Plan and will then become the revised economic development priorities identified by the community during that process.

Building off of the 2008 Economic Development Action Plan, this 2018 Economic Development plan identifies three broad areas of Opportunity as outlined below. Each Opportunity includes a number of Strategies which support its accomplishment. Following this discussion, local and regional plans are identified which are related to and also support the identified Opportunities and their related Strategies. Finally, a matrix outlines responsibilities for implementing the strategies outlined in this plan.

Following the identification of Opportunities and Strategies, the plan includes a number of Challenges Mt. Pleasant faces, as identified by stakeholders and staff. Many of these are addressed by the strategies identifies in the sections below. Most of the identified Challenges do not lend themselves to quick fixes and therefore require a longer term commitment to the strategies which are identified to address them.

OPPORTUNITY: Emphasize and Encourage Redevelopment and Rehabilitation of Existing Spaces and Structures

Strategies:

- Continue to invest in capital infrastructure projects:
 - ✓ Mission Street connector streets
 - ✓ Commercial district alley maintenance
 - ✓ Downtown parking lots
 - ✓ Broadway Street reconstruction west of Main
 - ✓ Streetscape improvements
- Focus efforts to reduce the 7% vacant and under-utilized properties in downtown
- Invest in downtown:
 - ✓ Façade improvement assistance including façade rendering grants and no-interest improvement loans
 - √ Fire safety program to encourage investment in more upper story residential units
 - ✓ Address downtown infrastructure issues
 - ✓ Address parking allocation issues
 - ✓ Promote the use of Redevelopment Liquor Licenses where appropriate
- Recognize the importance of CMU to the economy of Mt. Pleasant and continue to explore opportunities to work together on challenges and opportunities for both
 - ✓ Engage with faculty, staff, and students to increase the awareness of opportunities to participate in community activities and invest in the success of the community
 - ✓ Emphasize student engagement in the 2020 Census in order to include as many students in Mt. Pleasant's Census count
- Recognize challenges facing the retail sector and explore resources to assist business owners with addressing these challenges
 - Partner with property owners to cost share with infrastructure costs, parking, etc.
 - ✓ Work with developers to explore available alternatives which help control development costs in order to keep lease rates competitive for the Mt. Pleasant market
- Prioritize in-fill over greenfield development opportunities and address potential barriers that might exist
- Promote the City's identified priority development sites on a national, state, and local level in conjunction with Middle Michigan Development Corporation (MMDC)
 - ✓ Create a development plan for the Mt. Pleasant Center property and market it for potential development as appropriate
- In conjunction with the new Master Plan, prepare a Mission Street corridor study which will guide future design considerations that prioritizes the corridor's importance as a business corridor and not just a transportation corridor
- Engage all stakeholders when planning development strategies
- Continue to offer assistance when appropriate to close gaps in project financing, including the use of Brownfield TIF for qualified projects
- Promote walkability and bikeability in new project designs

OPPORTUNITY: Focus Efforts to Promote Job Opportunities and Attract and Retain Talent Strategies:

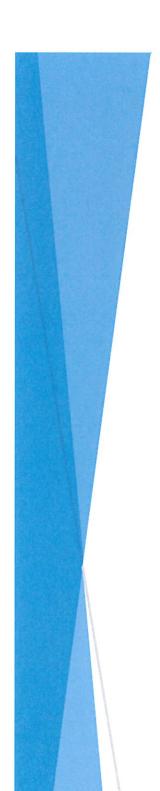
- Partner with CMU-RC to promote entrepreneurship opportunities
- Partner with MMDC and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) on commercial and manufacturing retention calls
 - ✓ Focus efforts to assist existing businesses with expansion plans or to retain them in the City
- Partner with MMDC to promote the City's industrial parks to site selectors and developers to encourage development in the parks
- Encourage development projects that contribute to a diversified housing stock
- Work with MMDC and MichiganWorks! staff to attract and train qualified candidates for available positions
 - ✓ Use available programs to help employers with their existing staff training needs
 - ✓ Identify the types of businesses that would be the best fit for the community and would have market support; target these opportunities for attractions strategies
- Pursue opportunities for additional beautification efforts which enhance quality of life experiences in the community
 - ✓ Events in the parks
 - ✓ Encourage public transportation options
 - ✓ Pursue opportunities to activate public spaces
- Promote the opportunities available for continuing education
 - ✓ CMU
 - ✓ Mid-Michigan College
 - √ High school vocational education
 - ✓ Advanced certificate training institutions
 - ✓ Trade schools
 - √ Job fairs
 - Provide student internship opportunities
- Engage with service groups
- Promote community attributes important to those seeking employment opportunities
 - ✓ Mt. Pleasant as a safe community
 - ✓ Quality school system
 - ✓ Recreational opportunities
 - ✓ Cultural diversity
 - ✓ Lifelong learning opportunities
- Highlight the advantages of the City opting in to allow medical marihuana opportunities under state and local laws and licensing requirements

OPPORTUNITY: Market and Promote the City as a Regional Commerce Center

Strategies:

- Partner with the Public Relations Coordinator to communicate the City's story
 - Use the variety of the City's social media accounts to promote the City to internal and external stakeholders and visitors
 - ✓ Implement an area branding strategy with partner stakeholder participation that will identify Mt.

 Pleasant's unique characteristics and set the community apart from others
 - Explore other opportunities to engage the public to make them more aware of the community and what the City has to offer
- Encourage staff involvement in state and regional boards and organizations to "tell our story" to others
- Create a new City Master Plan that reflects the philosophy of the newly adopted form-based code and advances the vision of the community as articulated during the public engagement process associated with the creation of the plan
- City staff to promote the City when engagement opportunities present themselves
 - ✓ Includes residents and non-residents alike



CHALLENGES: Facing Mt. Pleasant

- The retail sector is changing and facing competition from online sales, changing consumer spending habits and preferences, etc., creating a challenge to retain existing establishments or attract new retail tenants as properties are built or become vacant
- The CMU student population is present in the community for only 9 months out of the year placing a strain on businesses that rely on this market segment to remain open for the full year
- Graduating CMU students are a potential untapped resource; efforts should be made to provide appropriate job opportunities and a supportive entrepreneurial environment to retain them in the community
- Annual fluctuations in on-campus CMU student enrollment affect planning for sales and inventory estimates for area businesses, which in turn impact on profitability
 - ✓ Trend of declining enrollment numbers impact many facets of the local economy
 - ✓ The decline in the college-age demographic cohort results in more competition for incoming freshman enrollments at CMU, placing more pressure to market and attract students on all stakeholders, including the community
- Adequate, consistent marketing efforts of Mt. Pleasant in general, and downtown specifically is lacking
- There is a disconnect between MDOT's objectives and the City's and businesses vision for the Mission Street corridor
 - ✓ MDOT views Mission primarily as a transportation corridor
 - ✓ City/business community views Mission as a business corridor which greatly impacts the taxable value of the City
- Adequate parking downtown is perceived to be a problem
- There currently is no clear vision or a commitment to create a plan for downtown
- Mt. Pleasant contains a high percentage of renter-occupied housing units compared with other similarly sized communities (62%)
 - Rental rates in the Mt. Pleasant market area are depressed compared with other communities, limiting the amount of investment developers can make in a project and still remain profitable
 - ✓ Desire to increase the number of owner-occupied housing units
 - ✓ Desire for more diversified and affordable housing choices
 - ✓ There is a demonstrated unmet demand for "Missing Middle" or "professional-oriented" housing
- Differential which exists between the City and township tax rates (the township is substantially lower)

Consistency with Local and Regional Plans

It is important to be sensitive to the goals and objectives of other local and regional plans in order to not duplicate activities and to coordinate efforts. There are a number of such documents related to this Economic Development Action Plan which are summarized below.

City of Mt. Pleasant Master Plan

Related Elements:

- Focus on making downtown a more accessible destination for businesses, events and visitors
- Make the City's neighborhoods more livable, including providing for a mix of housing and ownership types
- Increase marketing of the City to attract more downtown visitors
- Encourage economic diversity to strengthen the City's tax base
- Focus on business attraction and retention activities

PA 33 of 2008 gives Michigan communities the authority to prepare and officially adopt a Master Plan and requires the Master Plan to be maintained and reviewed at least every five years. The Master Plan is a statement of the City's goals and policies. The last update the City's plan was 2014; creation of a new plan is proposed for 2019 with anticipated adoption in 2020.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Related Elements:

- Grow the regional economy through business retention, recruitment, and marketing efforts that support long term economic resiliency and sustainability
- Leverage the Region's institutions of higher education, major corporations, medical complexes, and innovation assets
- Create a strong pipeline of talent to support the region's current and future employers
- Make strategic infrastructure investments that improve the Region's economic competitiveness and resiliency
- Strengthen the quality of place and reduce the vulnerabilities to create an attractive environment for existing and future residents

The regional CEDS document is designed to provide baseline information, development strategies, and projects for stakeholder throughout the 14 county federally designated economic development region. Requirements of the CEDS document are proscribed by the US Dept. of Commerce, Economic Development Administration. The current plan was adopted in 2016.

Capital Improvement Plan

Related Elements:

- Industrial Park South retention pond improvements
- Mission Street re-investment capital support
- Mission Street traffic and pedestrian safety
- Downtown fire safety program
- Downtown streetscape improvements
- Downtown parking lot maintenance and reconstruction

City Commission Goals

Related Elements:

- Stable funding from a diverse tax base
- Where shopping, dining, and entertainment options thrive
- Economic opportunities for businesses offering competitive wages are readily available
- Well maintained, livable, and desirable neighborhoods
- Focus on downtown success and growth by increasing the number of people living and visiting downtown
- Offer diversified owneroccupied housing options

By its Charter, the City is required to prepare a five year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) each year. Projects must appear in the CIP in order to be budgeted for in the current and subsequent years. To be included in the CIP, a project must have a useful life of at least ten years, and cost in excess of \$5,000. Information from the strategies and priorities in the approved Master Plan, the City Commission-approved vision statement, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the TIFA districts' development plans, and input from various other Boards and Commissions is used to create the CIP.

Each year the City Commission and management staff hold a retreat to discuss upcoming goals for the coming year, as well as to review, reaffirm, and/or modify previously identified goals. The above goals are those most recently identified by the City Commission related to economic development strategies.



Departmental Strategic Initiatives

Related Elements:

- Coordinate planning with a new Master Plan to incorporate the City's Economic Development Strategies and also include a corridor study for Mission Street, and a Parks and Recreation Plan
- Explore development opportunities for the 300 acre Mt. Pleasant Center site
- Update the Economic Development Action Plan
- Expand the City's tax base and increase the number of residents downtown
- Maximize in-fill development opportunities
- Continue to disseminate the results of the Target Market Analysis for housing to developers
- Engage in a downtown parking allocation analysis
- Analyze the cost/benefits of downtown events
- Create and fund a downtown fire safety program to allow more conversions of upper story spaces to residential units
- Adopt and administer a new city-wide form-based zoning ordinance
- Complete certification as a Redevelopment Ready Community

As part of the annual budget process, each City department must prepare a document detailing their major goals, over and above the normal expectations of the job, for the coming year. Each goal must detail implementation strategies, partners necessary for accomplishing the goal, stakeholders which need to be consulted, and expected completion dates. Progress on each goal is reported on twice during the year. Above are representative economic development-related goals from across several City departments.

Implementation Strategy Matrix

Strategy Completion Date	Annually in February	December, 2019	Annually in June	Quarterly	December, 2019	July, 2018	On-Going	July, 2020	On-Going	Measured annually	On-Going
Responsible Party	City Department Heads	Downtown Development Director, Community Services Director	Downtown Development Director	City Manager	Community Services Director, Downtown Development Director	Community Services Director, City Planner	Community Services Director	Community Services Director, City Planner	City Planner	Community Services Director, City Commission	City Planner, City Engineer
Action Items	Budget for appropriate infrastructure maintenance during the Capital Improvement Planning process	s and programs that result in 6 in vacant and under-utilized 70	Work with the PSD and TIFA Boards to prioritize downtown funding for projects which contribute to increases in taxable value	Hold periodic meetings with City and CMU management staff to discuss projects and issues of joint concern in order to address opportunities to work together on common solutions	Research how other communities assist the private sector in this regard and adapt select strategies appropriate to Mt. Pleasant	Meet with the City Commission to identify barriers to in-fill development and develop strategies to address those that are within the control of the community	Prepare detailed property sheets on priority sites and post on City and MMDC web site for submission to site selectors; compile master list Community Services Director of other priority development sites	Incorporate the Mission Street corridor study with the Master Plan RFP and incorporate the corridor study as part of the new Master Plan	Consult the adopted RRC best practice public engagement plan for obtaining stakeholder input on all potential development projects	Evaluate the merits of at least 3 projects based on the benefit to the community, its relationship to community goals, and the actual Commission need to close financing gaps	Consult the adopted Non-Motorized plan for recommendations as well as other best practices for transportation design when considering at least 3 new transportation infrastructure projects
Strategies	Continue to invest in capital infrastructure projects	Focus efforts to reduce the 7% vacant and under-utilized properties in downtown	Invest in downtown	Recognize the importance of CMU to the economy of Mt. Pleasant and continue to explore opportunities to work together on challenges and opportunities for both	Recognize challenges facing the retail sector and explore resources to assist business owners with addressing these challenges	Prioritize in-fill over greenfield development opportunities and address potential barriers that might exist	Promote the City's identified priority development sites	In conjunction with the new Master Plan, prepare a Mission Street corridor study which will guide future design considerations that prioritizes the corridor's importance as a business corridor and not just a transportation corridor	Engage all stakeholders when planning development strategies	Continue to offer assistance when appropriate to close gaps in project financing, including the use of Brownfield TIF for qualified projects	Promote walkability and bikeability in new project designs
Opportunity	Emphasize and Encourage Redevelopment and Rehabilitation of Existing Spaces and Structures										

Implementation Strategy Matrix

tor At least quarterly	tor, City On-Going	or, birector, On-Going	tor, On-Going	June, 2018; June 2019	On-Going	or On-Going	On-Going as the opportunities arise	or December, 2018	Services December, 2018	services December, 2019
Community Services Director	Community Services Director, City Planner	Community Service Director, Downtown Development Director, Middle Michigan Development Corporation	Community Services Director, MMDC President/CEO	Downtown Development Director	Human Resources Director	Public Relations Coordinator	City Staff	Public Relations Coordinator	City Planner, Community Services Director	City Planner, Community Services Director
Meet with CMU-RC staff to identify space needs for new entrepreneurs in the downtown or elsewhere in the community as appropriate	Promote housing projects to prospective developers that are supported by the recent housing studies for the Mt. Pleasant market	Conduct at least 30 retention visits to maintain a dialog with the business community in order to be aware of potential issues and promote opportunities	Through retention call feedback, make businesses aware of available workforce development training programs and help make connections to access these	Partner with Art Reach to encourage the expansion of the existing Banner Festival and intersection painting projects. Cultivate new venues for public art	Encourage City Staff to keep and expand jobrelated skills through additional training and advanced educational opportunities	Support CMU, MMC, and the various technical training schools to promote continual learning offerings available in the community	Work with various community service groups (Rotary, Kiwanis, others) to integrate their service mission with public space project needs	Create a Mt. Pleasant-specific community brand, logo, and tag line which promotes the community as a unique, engaging location to live, begin a business, invest, etc.	Assist at least 20 new business inquiries in determining allowable locations based on the type of medical marihuana facilities they are interested in.	Review and monitor new licensed medical marihuana businesses in order to determine their economic impact to the City
Partner with CMU-RC to promote entrepreneurship opportunities	Encourage development projects that contribute to a diversified housing stock	Continue to engage in retail/commercial and manufacturing retention calls	Work with Middle Michigan Development Corporation and Michigan Works! staff to attract and train qualified candidates for available positions	Pursue opportunities for additional beautification efforts which enhance quality of life experiences in the community	Promote opportunities available for continuing education		Engage with service groups	Promote community attributes important to those seeking employment opportunities	Highlight the advantages of the City opting in to allow medical marihuana opportunities under state and local laws and licensing requirements	
	Focus Efforts to Promote Job Opportunities and Attract And Retain Talent									

Implementation Strategy Matrix

Monthly	On-Going	On-Going	July, 2020	On-Going			
Public Relations Coordinator	Public Relations Coordinator		City Planner	All City Staff			
Publish internal and external newsletters which highlight City accomplishments and upcoming Public Relations Coordinator activities	Use social media channels to communicate City news features to residents and the general Public Relations Coordinator public	Present innovative aspects of Mt. Pleasant at statewide and national conferences; provide information about the community as appropriate to members of state and regional boards to which City staff belong	Prepare a Master Plan RFP for consultant services, hire a qualified consultant, and work through the process of creating a new City Master Plan	At every opportunity, reframe discussions about the City to focus on positive attributes rather than dwell on issues and deficiencies in order to begin creating positive messages about the community			
Partner with the Public Relations Coordinator to communicate the City's story		Encourage staff involvement in state and regional boards and organizations to "tell our statewide and national conferences; provide information about the community as appropriate to members of state and regional boards to which City staff belong	Create a new City Master Plan that reflects the philosophy of the newly adopted formbased code and advances the vision of the community as articulated during the public engagement process associated with the creation of the plan	City staff to promote the City when about the City to focus on positive attributes engagement opportunities present themselves about the City to focus on positive attributes rather than dwell on issues and deficiencies i order to begin creating positive messages abother community			
Market and Promote the City as a Regional Commerce Center							

NOTES:

The Responsible Parties listed above will be accountable for the implementation of additional related strategies which appeared as part of the earlier Opportunities sections.

The Community Services Director will review the Implementation Strategy Matrix semi-annually in May and December of each year to monitor anticipated progress toward implementing the Action Item. Item (s) against planned completion dates. The Director will coordinate efforts with the identified Responsible Party for each Action Item. Adjustments in expectations will be made according to demonstrated progress as needed. A summary report on the status of the Economic Development Action Plan's Strategies will be provided to the City Commission in the First Quarter of the City's fiscal year.