

Beachwood-Bluffton

City of Muskegon
Neighborhood Association Map



Neighborhood Description

Beachwood-Bluffton is the city's westernmost neighborhood and exists on a peninsula bound on the east by Muskegon Lake, Lake Michigan to the west, and bridging the two, the Muskegon channel on the north.

Due to its location, the neighborhood contains many sand dunes, beaches, and open space. In fact, the majority of land area in Beachwood-Bluffton is zoned for open space and parks. The City of Muskegon made a concerted effort in past years to gain public ownership of the majority of the land lining the Lake Michigan shoreline, resulting in what amounts to over 200 acres of parks, dunes, and natural areas in the neighborhood. Chief among these is Muskegon's very popular Pere Marquette Park.

Prior to the significant housing development that followed the extension of Beach Street south to Sherman Boulevard in the 1940s, most of the housing in the neighborhood existed in a few small pockets along Beach Street near Lake Michigan, and in a compact area at the base of Pigeon Hill, the iconic sand dune that formerly anchored the area.

By the 1960s, the neighborhood was built out in much the same state as it can be found today. In terms of housing, two planned developments (Bluffton Bay Estates and Harbour Towne) and one condominium tower (Balcom's Cove) make up the primary changes that have occurred in the neighborhood in the last half-century. With new private development projects underway, Beachwood-Bluffton is positioned to see an influx of new residents in the coming years.

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Zoned Land Use

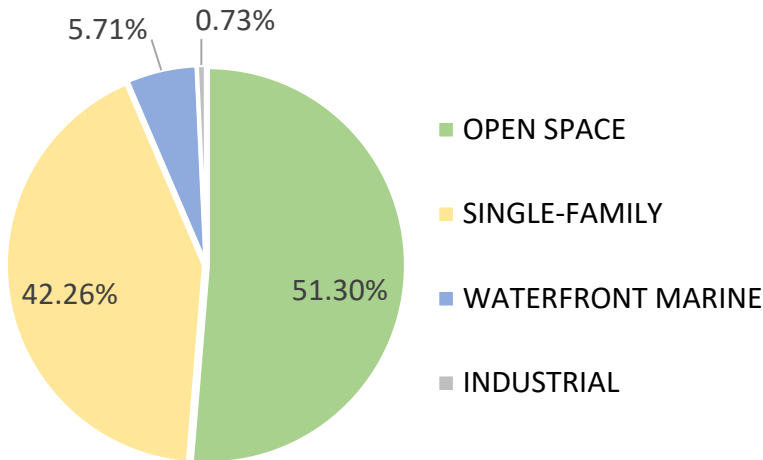


Chart 1: Beachwood-Bluffton zoned land use as a percentage of the neighborhood's total land area

Over half of the land in the neighborhood is zoned for parks and open space, much of it containing natural areas and the Lake Michigan beaches.

The majority of the remaining land in Beachwood-Bluffton allows for single-family detached housing and none of Beachwood-Bluffton's land is zoned to allow for multi-family housing or missing middle housing types but some non-conforming examples still exist. Planned Unit Developments also constitute a large portion of the neighborhood.

Several properties on Lakeshore Drive in the eastern part of the neighborhood are zoned to allow for land uses like marinas/seasonal boat storage facilities and retail businesses supplying commodities for those using such facilities, hotels/motels, and restaurants. Scattered among these properties are a few non-conforming residential land uses.

A very small portion of land – only two parcels – is zoned for industrial uses but remains largely undeveloped. While no property is zoned for businesses, some existing businesses are permitted in the waterfront marine zoning district, part of a larger planned unit development, have received special use permits, or are non-conforming land uses.

Housing Choice

The neighborhood consists mainly of single-family detached houses on a variety of lot sizes. Despite zoning regulations only allowing for single-family detached housing, the neighborhood does contain missing middle housing types. Largely concentrated in the oldest developed portions of the neighborhood, the majority of existing missing middle housing units are non-conforming uses that predate present zoning regulations, or are part of a larger planned unit development.

One of the many benefits offered by housing choice comes in the ability of residents to continue living in their neighborhood as they age. As housing circumstances change, it is important to provide an array of housing situations that cater to people in various stages of life. With a median age of over 60, the limited housing options in the neighborhood are problematic when it comes to residents' ability to age in place.

Most multiple-family housing options are limited to the Harbour Towne development. The southern portion of the neighborhood, which was developed more recently, contains primarily ranch houses on wide lots. The planned "Docks" development will introduce new attached housing options.

Rental options in the neighborhood include just under 15% of the total housing stock and many are used as short-term rentals because of the proximity to the beach.

Commercial Inventory

With no land zoned exclusively for business in the Beachwood-Bluffton neighborhood, all existing businesses are either permitted in the waterfront marine zoning classification, non-conforming land uses, part of a larger planned unit development, or have received special use permits. None of these existing businesses provide daily goods and services for residents, and the nearest option to fulfill those needs is to the east on Sherman Boulevard.

With few locations for new commercial development available, accessory commercial units may be able to provide retail options to residents and tourists.

Industrial Inventory

The last remaining parcels in the neighborhood that are zoned for industrial use are found along Larkin Street. This property remains largely undeveloped, and that portion that is developed does not serve an industrial purpose. This property may be better utilized for expanded marina operations.

Parks/Recreational Opportunities

Beachwood-Bluffton neighborhood parks, community gardens, public/private park and open spaces, etc.:

- Pere Marquette/Lake Michigan Park
- Beachwood Park
- Kruse/Bronson Park
- Harbour Towne Beach
- Margaret Drake Elliott Park
- Lakeshore Trail and Beach Extension (through the dunes)
- Wilcox Avenue, Thompson Avenue, and Edgewater Street rights-of-way (at Muskegon Lake shoreline)

Community Nodes

Edgewater Street and Lakeshore Drive – This intersection hosts a retail building in the heart of the marine district. It is centrally located within the neighborhood and is easily accessible by vehicle or on foot. Allowing accessory commercial units in the surrounding residential areas could provide options for commercial expansion.

Community center within “The Docks” – The new mixed-use development will include a new community center and retail options that front a publicly accessible boardwalk.

Transportation

The Transportation and Mobility section of the Master Plan contains further discussion and recommendations. Major Streets in the Beachwood-Bluffton neighborhood include:

- Lakeshore Drive (Cottage Grove to Beach)
- Beach Street
- Edgewater Street (Lakeshore to Thompson)
- Thompson Avenue (Edgewater to Walnut)
- Walnut Street (Thompson to Wilcox)
- Wilcox Avenue (Walnut to Waterworks)
- Waterworks Road
- Indiana Avenue
- Fulton Avenue (Beach to Browne)

Possible road diets could occur on sections of Sherman Boulevard and Lakeshore Drive.

Active transportation options include a fairly complete sidewalk network throughout the neighborhood, containing some gaps. The Lakeshore Trail and its Beach Extension are easily accessed in the neighborhood, though they do not extend north into Pere Marquette Park, toward the channel. Bike lanes exist on Beach Street between Sherman Boulevard and Resort Avenue and a northbound bike lane and southbound sharrows exist on Beach north of the roundabout. Most interior, residential streets are low-trafficked and also serve as safe biking routes.

No fixed-route public transportation serves the neighborhood, but Go2 Service is available as well as seasonal shuttle service and additional service tied to major beach events. While many recent changes to the design of streets have been made to ease traffic flow, traffic at the Lake Michigan beaches can be overwhelming during the summer months as is expected with a regional attraction. Not helping the issue is the neighborhood's location on a natural peninsula, which leaves only two primary streets – Sherman Boulevard and Lakeshore Drive – to carry all traffic to and from the beach. With regular public transportation service to the neighborhood having been eliminated, even fewer alternatives to driving are left.

Blight/Beautification

Outdoor boat storage contributes to the blight of any marine district. It is difficult to screen this type of storage from the public right-of-way because most methods of screening are not tall enough and some methods may limit views to the water. Opportunities exist for landscaping to be used as screening in the marina district. Plantings such as arborvitae may work well for screening, but in some locations, trees may cause issues with marina storage operations.



Large, blank walls are common in the marina district and opportunities exist to brighten up these areas with murals and landscaping.

Historic Preservation

The Beachwood-Bluffton neighborhood is home to three sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places – the U.S.S. Silversides, the South Pierhead Light, and the South Breakwater Light.

Also found in the neighborhood is the Actors' Colony, a historic area containing structures dating back to a group of vaudevillians that summered in Muskegon, with silent film comedian Buster Keaton being the Colony's most famous resident. The history of the area is acknowledged by the presence of a State of Michigan Historical Marker. While the neighborhood does not presently contain any designated local historic districts, past City plans have recommended protecting homes in the Actors' Colony through the creation of a local historic district.

Significant Redevelopment Properties

1875 Waterworks Road, 3400 and 3460 Wilcox Avenue, and 1490 Edgewater Street – The Planned Unit Development for “The Docks” was approved in 2019 and after a lengthy environmental review process, is now set to commence development. The 80-acre development will include hundreds of residential units, light commercial, marina and the creation of a 12-acre inland lake accessed via a new channel from Muskegon Lake.



Under the same ownership as “the Docks” development, no plans have been proposed yet for the six-acre, former school site that will be divided by the new street.

Future Land Use

See future land use map in Appendix

Project 1: Mitigate flooding from high-water events.

Edgewater Street leads to the lowest point in the area which naturally draws stormwater. During high wind events, water from Muskegon Lake can be thrust back onto the roadway. While temporary fixes were most recently utilized during high-water levels in 2019, more permanent mitigation measures should be explored to reduce the impact of flooding in the future.

Action Steps

- Develop a Hazard Mitigation Plan for Edgewater Street.
- Research funding partnerships with county and state programs to implement the recommendations of the Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Project 2: Extend the Lakeshore Trail north to Channel Drive.

The Lakeshore Trail effectively ends at the Beach Street roundabout, leaving those using the trail with limited options to continue on to Pere Marquette Park, Margaret Drake Elliott Park, the Muskegon channel, and Harbour Towne Beach. The current, temporary bike facilities are inadequate, and were not intended to become the permanent bike route. These facilities should evolve to incorporate a more permanent, safe, and comfortable route.

Action Steps

- Determine the feasibility of a permanent extension north to Channel Drive.

Project 3: Balance access needs while preserving the natural character of the Lake Michigan beaches.

Many beachgoers arrive by car due to the beach's relatively isolated location and substantial draw. Parking spaces range from being in high demand to almost no demand depending on the time of the year, but one thing that is consistent is the difficulty of balancing the parking supply with preservation of the beaches' natural beauty. Development of a strategy that identifies a multi-faceted approach to this issue is needed.

Action Steps

- Continue to monitor parking use and daily and yearly charged rates to ensure a balance between parking supply and demand.
- Develop a strategy to balance parking needs and beach preservation.
- Partner with nearby property owners to provide temporary, dedicated off-site parking options for times of peak parking demand at the beach.

Project 4: Beautify the marina district along Lakeshore Drive between Cottage Grove Avenue and Edgewater Street.

Boat storage is a necessity along the lake, but such a use of land is not always the most visually appealing. The visible boat storage, lack of street trees, and presence of aging buildings with long stretches of blank walls define an unsightly section of Lakeshore Drive. Efforts to beautify the area will make the route to the beach more inviting to resident and visitors.



One possibility for beautification of the public realm and private property along Lakeshore Drive between Cottage Grove and Edgewater.

Action Steps

- Where appropriate, plant vegetation in the right-of-way strategically utilizing species that will assist with screening while maintaining lake views.
- Encourage marinas to screen their properties with decorative fences and landscaping, continuing to allow murals on blank walls.

Project 5: Strengthen non-motorized connections to Muskegon County's Dune Harbor Park.

Although it is located in the city of Norton Shores, phase two of Dune Harbor Park borders the city of Muskegon along Sherman Boulevard, which serves as one of only two primary routes to Muskegon's Lake Michigan beaches and parks, but does not contain adequate non-motorized/active transportation facilities. The County park offers additional recreation opportunities for both municipalities as well as the greater region, making it important to offer safe and convenient facilities for alternative transportation along this busy corridor. Due to the steep grade of Sherman, issues of accessibility will require alternative non-motorized routes to span this distance.

Action Steps

- Partner with Muskegon County to develop a non-motorized connection to Dune Harbor Park.