

Master Land Use Plan

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Section A: Transportation & Mobility

Introduction

Enabling residents and visitors to get to and from their destinations on a daily basis is one of the most important undertakings in the City of Muskegon's operations. The way people choose to travel has changed considerably through time, but when looking at Muskegon's past and its future, the transportation network plays a critical role in land use decisions, just as land use strongly influences the city's transportation network.

Travel in the city takes place primarily on the network of approximately 187 miles of public streets maintained by the City of Muskegon. In its simplest form, this network can be broken down into classifications of State of Michigan Trunklines, major streets, and local streets, though the zoning ordinance further defines a variety of other street types that do not directly correlate with these three classifications. As has been common practice in transportation planning, Muskegon's street classifications tend to be hierarchical in nature, with local streets feeding into major streets, which then connect to state trunklines – Apple Avenue (M-46), Seaway/Shoreline Drive/Moses J. Jones Parkway (US-31 business route), and US-31 – that extend into the greater region.

In addition to the streets themselves, the public rights-of-way typically include sidewalks, terraces, and alleys. The City of Muskegon is also responsible for the citywide non-motorized trail system, as well as the collection of bridges spanning Muskegon's various creeks and ravines. Altogether, Muskegon's rights-of-way are its most abundant public resource, accounting for over 700 acres of land – nearly 200 more than the combined acreage of all the City's parks.

Even with such a large amount of land dedicated to rights-of-way, allocation of that space – and who is meant to use it – can be a topic of much debate. Reflective of broader societal trends, the majority of the space within Muskegon's rights-of-way is allocated to automobiles. Beginning in earnest in the mid-20th century, streets developed alongside the burgeoning popularity of the personal vehicle, often being rebuilt to add more or wider travel lanes, new turning lanes, additional parking lanes, and sweeping turns. The city is still operating with a transportation network that was largely established in this era of mid-century growth and prosperity.

Today, changing values and expectations of what constitutes a successful transportation network are increasingly called into question. A growing awareness of the pitfalls of automobile-oriented design has sparked community conversations centered on the best means of addressing safety, comfort, community vitality, and overall quality of life in Muskegon.

Advancements in technology point to a wide variety of possible futures, ranging from shared micro-mobility to autonomous vehicles. Shared micro-mobility, while yet to take hold in Muskegon, could benefit greatly from infrastructure that better supports it. Without knowing the true impact of autonomous vehicles on the future of transportation, this plan is cautious to avoid recommendations that increase the traffic-carrying capacity of the city's current transportation network. After all, vehicles constitute just one of the diverse users of the city's streets.

This plan focuses on the safety, comfort, and convenience of all street users. It also considers the demands placed on Muskegon's transportation system – and how to best address that demand – both now and into the future. Traffic congestion is minimal in Muskegon today, and planning for a future of diverse mobility *options* is meant to ensure that travel in Muskegon remains safe, comfortable, and convenient for all, and supportive of an excellent quality of life.

Goals & Recommendations

1. Design streets to safely balance the needs of all users of the street, putting people first.
 - T1.1 Develop a consistent approach to evaluating the conditions of city streets to ensure that they are sized appropriately and designed to serve all users.
 - T1.2 Create and maintain a detailed inventory of existing, typical street design components used throughout the city.
 - T1.3 Establish and adopt street design standards that consider existing, typical street design components and incorporate best practices in urban street design and construction.
2. Strengthen walkability, accessibility, and connectivity at major corridors and community nodes.
 - T2.1 Incorporate pedestrian and other active transportation amenities into the design of streets at commercial corridors and community nodes that improve access and mobility for all users.
 - T2.2 Maintain the existing street grid and, where appropriate for development, reestablish it where it's been lost.
3. Establish a local funding source for street right-of-way improvements.
 - T3.1 Launch a citizen education campaign to increase the general understanding of the means of financing public right-of-way projects and ongoing maintenance needs.
 - T3.2 Consider methods of establishing local funding for right-of-way projects and maintenance.
4. Improve access to public transportation.
 - T4.1 Partner with MATS to complete improvements to the public realm surrounding bus stops throughout the city.
 - T4.2 Within 1/4-mile of existing bus stops in residential areas, enable transit-supportive housing densities.
 - T4.3 Partner with MATS to ensure public transportation options that service new or planned housing, employment, and commercial centers.
5. Utilize less land for vehicle parking throughout the city.
 - T5.1 As parking demand fluctuates, travel habits change, and new development occurs, follow the strategies outlined in the City of Muskegon Parking Strategy, expanding the area of focus.
 - T5.2 Make better use of on-street parking where it exists and/or where it can be accommodated.
6. Promote and improve active transportation through maintenance and expansion of the network of sidewalks and non-motorized trails.
 - T6.1 Establish an active transportation plan.
 - T6.2 Using the plan as a guide, expand the city's active transportation network.
7. Require new developments to incorporate strong connections to the existing transportation network.
 - T7.1 Update the City's subdivision standards to encourage expansion of the existing street grid into newly-platted areas, creation of small blocks, and to restrict construction of new disconnected streets.
 - T7.2 When reviewing new developments, involve public transportation entities to incorporate connections that serve new residents.

- T7.3** Ensure that all new development located adjacent to existing or proposed non-motorized transportation facilities provides intentional public connections to those facilities.
- 8.** Establish a process to complete quick-build street projects to improve safety within the city's neighborhoods.
 - T8.1** Create a series of steps for neighborhood associations and business improvement districts to follow when requesting alterations to streets.
 - T8.2** Establish a means of measuring the success of projects undertaken through the quick-build program, consistently building on successful projects and evaluating failures.
- 9.** Inventory and establish a policy for alley vacations and establishment of new alleys.
 - T9.1** Encourage increased and continued use of public alleys through an improved maintenance plan, a more rigid access management policy, and education on and, when necessary, enforcement of parking regulations.
 - T9.2** Adopt standards for approving future requests for alley vacations.
- 10.** Ensure transportation connections to the greater region and other population centers.
 - T10.1** Seek partnerships with public transportation services in neighboring Ottawa and Kent Counties to establish connections to their population centers and associated transportation options.
 - T10.2** Establish more frequent, state-wide bus service to and from Muskegon.
 - T10.3** Lobby for extension of passenger rail service to Muskegon. Study the feasibility of passenger rail connections to Muskegon.

Goal 1: Design streets to safely balance the needs of all users of the street, putting people first.

Discussion

More critical than any other factor in the design of the city’s streets is how safe they are for all the people that use them. This includes anyone who interacts with a particular street – a group of neighborhood kids crossing it to get to school, a commuter driving to work, a person using a motorized scooter to go to the store, or a jogger incorporating it into their route. Any given street has a wide range of possible users.

Differentiating between streets and highways is also important. By design, highways discourage diverse mobility options and provide safety through limiting access and incorporating design features that enable high-speed travel. Dangerous conditions for all users result when mixing the conditions and design features of streets and highways. In such situations, streets can no longer balance the diverse needs of all users and highways can no longer provide safe, high-speed travel for drivers. It is critical to be intentional when designing streets to fit the surrounding context and support the vision of the community. While it is not expected that every street will be highly walkable, their design must be intentional in reflecting their role, and alternative transportation options must be provided elsewhere so as not to reduce accessibility to parts of the city.

As the majority of Muskegon’s transportation network consists of streets, not highways, it is critical to design and build them to prioritize the safety of their most vulnerable users first, and that is almost always those outside a vehicle. While it is clear that private vehicles presently account for the majority of travel in Muskegon, striving to balance the needs of all types of traffic will maximize mobility for all users regardless of how they choose to travel.

Keeping Muskegon’s streets safe for all users and putting people first in their design can be achieved through a variety of design features, all with the same basic goal – ensuring that vehicle traffic moves at lower speeds. Driving slower lessens the risk of crashes and, when crashes do occur, lessens the chance that they are deadly or cause serious injury to those involved.



In a crash involving a car and a pedestrian, the likelihood that the pedestrian is killed increases exponentially when hit by a car moving at a higher speed (Image Credit: San Francisco MTA Vision Zero Action Plan. Data Source: US DOT, Literature Reviewed on Vehicle Travel Speeds and Pedestrian Injuries. March 2000.).

A common misconception is that greater enforcement – typically through routine traffic stops by police officers or signage indicating laws like speed limits – is the most effective means of achieving compliance with traffic laws. Contrary to this assumption, the design of streets has an outsized effect in ensuring that drivers are traveling safely at appropriate speeds. Drivers choose their speed based on the design of the street, not the posted speed limit; adding police patrol to every street is simply not feasible for an already strained budget and limited staff and only has a temporary effect.

While the design of Muskegon’s streets must appropriately balance the needs of all users, the design of each street can vary considerably based on its surroundings, current and former adjacent land uses, history of improvements, and intended use. The end result of efforts to make Muskegon’s streets safer is an approach to transportation and mobility that puts people first.

Recommendations

T1.1 Develop a consistent approach to evaluating the conditions of city streets to ensure that they are sized appropriately and designed to serve all users. Prioritize traffic studies and design interventions on streets identified as those which impede safe, comfortable, and convenient travel for all users.

On streets, slow cars.

- 20mph can save lives
- Decide which streets are not safe
- Make changes to make them safe

On highways, fast speeds through limiting access and prioritizing traffic movement.

- Decide which streets should, but no longer serve the purpose discussed above
- Make changes to make them safe
- Limit access to vulnerable users

T1.2 Create and maintain a detailed inventory of existing, typical street design components used throughout the city including, but not limited to, right-of-way width, pavement width, travel and parking lane configuration, intersection treatments, design speeds, and posted speed limits.

T1.3 Establish and adopt street design standards that consider existing, typical street design components and incorporate best practices in urban street design and construction. Complete all new street design projects in a way that exemplifies a safe streets approach and promotes safe, comfortable, and convenient use of the street by all.

Design features that encourage higher travel speeds include wide travel lanes, sweeping turns or excessively large curb radii, and “recovery zones” on the sides of streets devoid of fixed objects such as trees and utility poles. Alternatively, narrow travel lanes, more fixed objects such as cars parked on the street or trees and buildings sited closer to the street, and tighter curb radii at intersections, have been proven to effectively slow traffic speeds.

Goal 2: Strengthen walkability, accessibility, and connectivity along commercial corridors and at community nodes.

Discussion

While streets should be safe for all users, priority for design changes to achieve this should be assigned to commercial corridors and community nodes where people are expected to gather in greater numbers, but where the features necessary for safe, comfortable, and convenient access by all may currently be lacking. Such concentrations of businesses and services or civic buildings like faith-based institutions and schools cater to an array of people that arrive via a range of mobility options.

Muskegon was largely developed in a way that supported a variety of other modes of transportation that, at one time, allowed for residents to reach many of their daily needs without a vehicle. The past stands in sharp contrast to today, when car ownership is widely considered a necessity for living in Muskegon. Goal 3 of the Housing and Neighborhoods section seeks to build on Muskegon's still-present framework of traditional development patterns through the creation of community nodes within a short distance of all residents; in many cases, these places already exist, albeit in an incompatible format.

Many commercial corridors and even some community nodes have transitioned over the past half-century or more into primarily automobile-oriented businesses and building types (drive-thru restaurants, automobile repair and sales, strip malls, etc.). Many of these places now serve the greater region rather than – and sometimes at the expense of – adjacent neighborhood residents.

Likewise, the major streets that these businesses parallel have expanded to carry high levels of regional and local traffic, often becoming barriers to accessibility themselves. Unfortunately, though not inevitably, streets like Sherman Boulevard, Laketon Avenue, and Getty Street prove to be dangerous for all users, and in the worst scenarios, deadly. High speeds, complicated intersections with multi-phase traffic signals, and numerous distractions including everything from busy signage to cars constantly pulling in and out of parking lots all create an environment that is not conducive to neighborhood-serving businesses where patrons can arrive via a variety of mobility options.

Appropriate planning, community involvement, and subsequent design interventions can redefine the city's commercial corridors and community nodes as places welcoming to all, and better linking adjacent neighbors to these destinations can improve the likelihood that those visiting can safely, comfortably, and conveniently arrive via all means of transportation.

Recommendations

- T2.1** Following the recommendations of the multimodal transportation plan outlined in Goal 6, incorporate pedestrian and other active transportation amenities into the design of streets at commercial corridors and community nodes that improve access and mobility for all users.

Complete an audit of vehicle access to private property within identified commercial corridors and community nodes to address issues of access management. Maintain an inventory of the locations of all unneeded curb cuts and prioritize their removal based on their level of interference. Proactive removal of presently inactive curb cuts will ensure that they are not made active again in the future.

- T2.2** Maintain the existing street grid and, when appropriate for development, reestablish it where it has been lost.

Street vacations will be avoided where possible, and a consistent process for street vacation requests will be implemented. Consider establishing new street connections where feasible to improve connectivity in areas with large block sizes, dead-end streets, and limited routes between destinations. Subdivide large, vacant parcels of land to reflect adjacent areas' smaller block and lot sizes.

Goal 3: Establish a local funding source for street right-of-way improvements.

Discussion

Muskegon has no dedicated local funding source for projects taking place within the public rights-of-way. Streets classified as major streets receive state and federal funding from the fuel tax and via grants. Typically, local street projects are funded via contributions from the general fund.

Preventative maintenance such as drainage work, crack sealing, and dura-patching prolongs the life of streets, but current maintenance funding does not cover these costs. Additionally, the many remaining local streets, sidewalks, and non-motorized trails not addressed, often require creative, though inconsistent funding sources.

Failed millage proposals for street construction, repair, and maintenance in 2014 and 2015 were the last attempts to establish a reliable means of funding projects within local rights-of-way – a critical step to achieving the goals outlined in this plan.

Recommendations

- T3.1** Launch a citizen education campaign to increase the general understanding of the means of financing public right-of-way projects and ongoing maintenance needs. Such a campaign could include public workshops or webinars, information shared online and with various neighborhood groups, and informational mailers sent to residents explaining the scale, costs, and need to address the issue, as well as the various aspects of financing projects taking place within the public rights-of-way.
- T3.2** Consider methods of establishing local funding for right-of-way projects and maintenance, including but not limited to, CDBG, millage proposals, or tax increment financing. Evaluate the feasibility of successful approaches used in other communities. With strong City Commission involvement and support, initiate public conversations regarding the appropriate means of establishing local funding sources for projects taking place within public rights-of-way.

Goal 4: Improve access to public transportation.

Discussion

This plan follows a significant route study and subsequent changes to Muskegon County's main form of public transportation. The Muskegon Area Transit System (MATS) 2019 route study and 2020 implementation of that study's findings saw a shift from circuitous routes with an emphasis on coverage, to more predictable, bi-directional routes that serve a smaller and denser geographical area. The fixed-route system operates with seven lines running on a one-hour timetable from roughly 7:00am to 5:00pm, offering service to the City of Muskegon, City of Muskegon Heights, City of Norton Shores, and Muskegon Township. Also provided is a microtransit service that utilizes smaller vehicles to provide shared-ride, on-demand service to the general public in participating municipalities.

As a participating municipality, the City of Muskegon benefits from these transportation services, but does not manage their operations. That considered, this goal focuses on the design of the public realm near fixed-route bus stops. Making accessibility improvements to these surroundings will improve the experience for those that currently utilize public transportation, and make the service more attractive to those that do not.

The frequency of public transportation service is affected by many factors internal to MATS operations, though it is possible that the City of Muskegon can aid in small part by the configuration of streets that host fixed-route service. In concert with Action Step T2.2, above, all public-right-of way projects should consider the range of functions that the city's streets play in accommodating people who use public transportation.

Recommendations

- T4.1** Partner with MATS to complete improvements to the public realm surrounding bus stops throughout the city.
- Prioritize improvements at the highest-ridership routes and/or stops serving the greatest number of routes. Such improvements should, at a minimum, include accessibility upgrades to the public right-of-way immediately surrounding each stop (ADA ramps, high-visibility crosswalks, pedestrian crossing signals, etc.), seating (ideally sheltered from the elements), trash receptacles, and bicycle parking. Reviewing the specific locations of bus stops – specifically the preferable side of an intersection – is also critical to ensuring improved access.
- T4.2** Within 1/4-mile of existing bus stops in residential areas, enable transit-supportive housing densities/a housing supply that can support transit.
- T4.3** Partner with MATS to ensure public transportation options that service new or planned housing, employment, and commercial centers.

Goal 5: Utilize less land for vehicle parking throughout the city.

Discussion

Muskegon's parking supply plays a significant role in the transportation network as it influences the way in which residents and visitors get around the city. The City of Muskegon is primarily responsible for on-street parking facilities, and despite owning very little of the off-street parking supply, the City retains great influence over that supply in the form of minimum parking requirements.

The City's Zoning Ordinance has required a minimum number of off-street parking spaces for nearly every type of land use for the last 75 years. These required parking minimums were typically determined by national consultants observing maximum parking demand at peak demand times in non-local, suburban locations with no transportation alternatives to driving. As a result, Muskegon's current minimum parking requirements have led to an off-street parking supply that far exceeds demand.

While it is conceivable that too much parking is not a bad thing, the many negative aspects brought about by an oversupply of parking must be recognized. Too much parking damages the quality of the built environment, dilutes the tax base, makes alternatives to driving more difficult, worsens a multitude of environmental factors, and adds to the cost of housing, goods, services, and almost anything else.

The question of how much the City of Muskegon should control the supply of off-street parking is one that warrants further study. One potential strategy would be to reduce or eliminate the City's minimum parking requirements, with each property instead determining its own parking needs. Presently, areas of the city that are zoned Form Based Code have no minimum parking requirements and have instead enacted parking maximums.



A large parking supply encourages visitors to arrive by car, even in the presence of alternative transportation options.

On-street parking – all of which is publicly-owned – serves surrounding residents and businesses, and demand for such spaces is reflective of surrounding land uses. In some locations, spaces are in such high demand that charging a price for their use is warranted; this typically occurs in the core downtown or other popular destinations, as well as at locations hosting special events or festivals. At the other end of the spectrum, on-street parking is provided but lightly used; such is the case throughout Muskegon's low-density residential areas. Aside from arterial streets and state trunklines, nearly every street in the city allows for on-street parking along the curb on one or both sides of the street.

The City of Muskegon Parking Strategy, which was adopted in October 2015, was written concurrently with the Downtown Muskegon Form Based Code, and its recommendations apply mainly to downtown, where the FBC was first implemented. The Strategy approaches downtown parking challenges with management, demand, supply, place, time, and price-based recommendations. The Strategy remains as a component of the City of Muskegon Master Land Use Plan, and it is now suggested that its recommendations be taken a step further to address parking policies throughout the entire city, building on and adapting to local conditions, but with an eye toward right-sizing the parking supply, city-wide.

Recommendations

T5.1 As parking demand fluctuates, travel habits change, and new development occurs, follow the strategies outlined in the City of Muskegon Parking Strategy. Expand the area of Strategy's area of focus to include more of the city and extend the strategies' timelines as they relate to both downtown and other areas of the city.

Action Steps

- Complete annual (or more frequent) assessments for achievement of the Strategy's goals.

T5.2 Make better use of on-street parking where it exists and/or where existing street width can accommodate it.

The City of Muskegon does not presently have a clear policy for when to include on-street parking in a street project. Such a policy would be difficult to create as the decision to include on-street parking happens early in the design process, sometimes without knowing exactly what development will one day surround a specific street. Regardless, the relation between land use and transportation planning becomes strong when considering the role of parking as a land use...

Action Steps

- Evaluate present parking restrictions on all streets to determine whether they are still suitable.
- Complete audits of street parking usage with each street (re)construction project and consider a policy for determining the need for on-street parking lanes on city streets.

Goal 6: Promote and improve active transportation through maintenance and expansion of the network of sidewalks and non-motorized trails.

Discussion

Active transportation can take many forms in an urbanized area like Muskegon, and can be defined simply as any type of human-powered transportation. Among other forms of active transportation, walking, biking, using a wheelchair, skating or skateboarding, and kayaking are accommodated by the city's range of transportation infrastructure.

Aside from the health benefits, supporting the various modes of active transportation offer mobility freedom to residents and visitors. Muskegon's sidewalk network is substantial, and this plan's recommendations are simply to maintain the network, bridge existing gaps, and ensure that it is accessible to all. The City of Muskegon also benefits greatly from its two primary non-motorized trails – the Laketon Trail and the Lakeshore Trail. With nearly 12 miles of off-street, multi-use trails and over two miles of bike lanes and paved shoulders, residents and visitors are offered the opportunity to explore the city via a variety of transportation modes.

For some of Muskegon's neighborhoods, getting to and from the two major, non-motorized trails is easy, with many public access points for residents. For other neighborhoods few safe, comfortable, and convenient connections exist to bring residents to these facilities. An expanded network of off-street trail spurs and protected bike lanes will improve access to the existing trail network for residents of all neighborhoods, and will present reasonable alternatives to driving for trips that could otherwise be taken via active transportation options.



Muskegon's non-motorized trail system is primarily used for recreation, rather than transportation. Improving bike facilities that connect to all city neighborhoods can make active transportation options more commonplace.

Perhaps the highest benchmark for providing these connections would be expanding the off-street trail network. However, space limitations inherent to a developed city severely restrict this option as a continuous path of publicly-owned land, or merely open space with the possibility for a public trail easement, is hard to come by in Muskegon's urban environment. While off-street paths are certainly not out of the question, a more immediate alternative exists on underutilized space found on many of Muskegon's streets.

Safe streets that are comfortable for all users are also capable of expanding the non-motorized network throughout the city, and increasing mobility options for everyone.

Recommendations

T6.1 Establish an active transportation plan that identifies opportunities for expansion and maintenance of the city's network as well as funding sources in the form of an annual budget, grant opportunities, public-private partnerships, and private donations.

T6.2 Using the plan as a guide, expand the city's active transportation network.

Identification of oversized streets that contain underutilized pavement could allow for on-street facilities, and new off-street facilities should be incorporated, where feasible. When selecting facility types, pay special attention to the design speed of a street to ensure that the chosen facility type is compatible.

Goal 7: Require new developments to incorporate strong connections to the existing transportation network.

Discussion

The industrial land uses common in Muskegon's past often required the creation of large parcels to serve the needs of growing industries. With former industrial buildings now cleared from many of these sites, left behind are large, often waterfront, properties that are poorly integrated into their typically non-industrial surroundings. The question of how to appropriately redevelop these sites is among the top facing Muskegon today.

As with most redevelopment projects taking place on large parcels, the City of Muskegon's zoning regulations and subdivision standards govern the way in which land can be divided. This includes the size, shape, and orientation of lots, the length of blocks, and the number of intersections permitted along a street. When land is developed, its streets should be connected to the existing transportation network in a way that accommodates all modes of transportation, adequately disperses traffic, and allows for flexibility in handling different development intensities.

A lack of street connectivity results in increased travel distances which, in turn, induce more driving and increase traffic generated by new development. Such long travel distances unnecessarily strain public resources with higher infrastructure costs and longer emergency response times (due to longer distances and increased traffic). Further, concentrating traffic on a limited number of streets leads to reduced safety and comfort for people choosing not to travel by car which may further discourage alternative means of transportation.

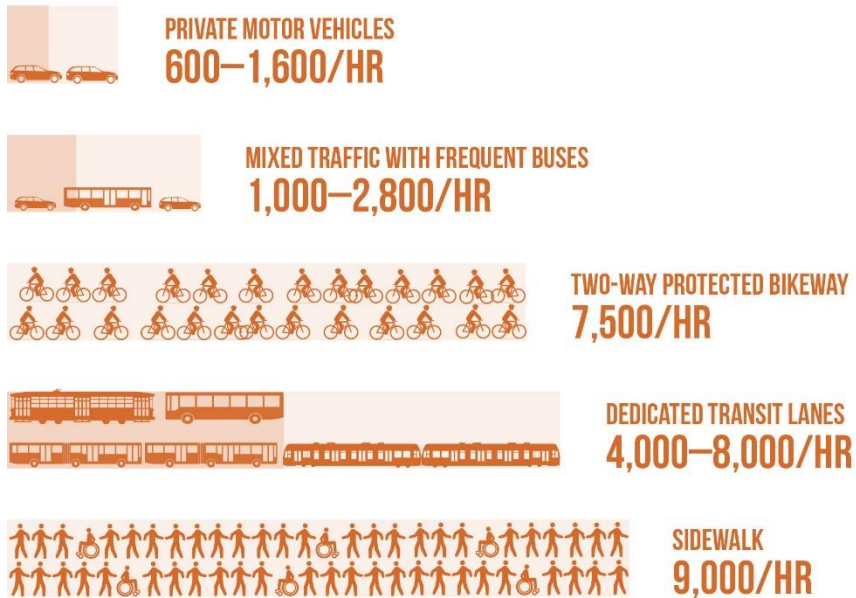


Former industrial parcels are often adjacent to residences, but poorly integrated into the surrounding neighborhood. Improved street and trail connections at this site could better tie it into the Nelson neighborhood.

Development and redevelopment should also consider the transportation network(s) in which it is located. A new neighborhood designed solely for vehicle traffic is all but guaranteed to add more cars to surrounding streets – a frequent concern voiced by neighboring residents – but a neighborhood centered on a transit stop, adjacent to a bike route, or itself containing many residents' daily needs offers people a variety of ways to get around. Strong connections for all modes of transportation will help to avoid overwhelming the network.

Using space efficiently is important in an urbanized area where that space often comes at a premium, and this is especially true with investments in transportation infrastructure. With automobiles having been the primary means of mobility in Muskegon for decades, the demand on the transportation network tends to reflect the population of the city and greater region.

One way to address concerns with future population growth and additional traffic is to reduce the need for trips taken by vehicles. Aside from many of the land use recommendations found in this plan, investments in other modes of transportation can lessen the spatial needs of the transportation network.



The capacity of a single 10-foot lane (or equivalent width) by mode at peak conditions with normal operations (NACTO Transit Street Design Guide).

While it is often assumed that all trips are made via private vehicle and development patterns have come to reflect that, the future is one of mobility options. This plan asserts that it is a worthwhile effort to provide mobility options for new and existing residents that lessen the need for some trips to be made by car.

Such options could come in the form of putting destinations within walking distance of one’s home and vice versa, convenient access to public transportation that connects residents to services, or even new micro-mobility services like scooter- or bike-share programs that expand the number of destinations one is able to reach without requiring a car trip. New development in the city of Muskegon is welcomed and, in many ways, inevitable. Incorporating it into the existing transportation network is an important factor in the future success of that development as well as the city as a whole.

Recommendations

- T7.1** Update the City's subdivision standards to encourage expansion of the existing street grid into newly-platted areas, creation of small blocks, and to restrict construction of new disconnected streets.
- T7.2** When reviewing new developments, involve public transportation entities to incorporate connections that serve new residents.

Evaluate the performance of new development projects that incorporate public transportation connections.
- T7.3** Ensure that all new development located adjacent to existing or proposed non-motorized transportation facilities provides intentional public connections to those facilities.

Goal 8: Establish a process to complete quick-build, iterative street projects to improve safety on the city's streets.

Discussion

Transportation infrastructure is expensive and typically utilitarian in nature, often leaving it inflexible to the changing needs of the city. Neighborhood residents are commonly the most familiar with the conditions of their neighborhood's streets, but do not necessarily have the technical expertise to confront the challenges they may face.

During the global pandemic, prompted by the need for social distancing, cities around the world reevaluated their use of street space, and in Muskegon, changes on W. Western Avenue expanded outdoor dining options to assist restaurants that could not otherwise host customers. These changes stuck, as two blocks of the street were later redesigned to be curbside with movable bollards that could expand the sidewalk space to incorporate outdoor dining areas.



Social distancing measures during the coronavirus pandemic led to temporary street changes that influenced long-term changes.

In recent years, a number of cities have adopted a less conventional approach to street design that focuses on quick implementation, flexibility, community input, and affordability. Commonly known as “quick build” projects, such initiatives utilize low-cost, temporary changes to streets as a means of testing design tweaks prior to committing to permanent changes tied to street reconstruction projects.

Forging a partnership between the City Engineering and Public Works Departments and the city's neighborhood associations would present an opportunity for a more flexible approach to ensuring that the city's streets better meet present needs. With the goal of delivering a phased approach to pedestrian, bicycle, and general traffic calming projects that improve safety on Muskegon's streets, a quick-build program will allow for the relevant departments at the City to evaluate these projects prior to committing to long-term capital improvements and provide more immediate opportunities for residents, businesses, and visitors to experience these projects and provide real-time feedback.

Recommendations

- T8.1** Create a series of steps for neighborhood associations and business improvement districts to follow when requesting alterations to streets. Place a strong emphasis on pilot projects using a kit of parts, public participation, and public notification associated with each project. Establish a process and adopt a policy for implementation of quick-build street projects.
- T8.2** Establish a means of measuring the success of projects undertaken through the quick-build program, consistently building on successful projects and evaluating failures. Set annual benchmarks for projects and means of measuring safety outcomes both before and after project implementation.

Goal 9: Inventory and establish a policy for alley vacations and re-establishment of vacated alleys.

Discussion

A comprehensive network of alleys services many city blocks in Muskegon. In the past, these alleys consolidated and hid from view the less desirable aspects of city life, often serving as the location for trash pick-up, utility corridors, and the primary means of vehicular access to properties. While the use of alleys for these purposes has diminished, with many such uses having since moved to the street, their function is still critical to the operations of the city and there is a strong case to be made for continuing the use of the city's alleys.

Over time, some alleys in the city have been fully or partially vacated, leading to less-functional, dead-end alleys or blocks completely without alleys. Typically, requests for vacating alleys are first reviewed by the relevant City of Muskegon departments for any technical issues that might exist; a public hearing is held by the Planning Commission before making a recommendation to the City Commission, which ultimately issues final approval or denial of the request. Each request is evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and no established requirements exist for requests that are received.

Knowing the functional value that alleys can provide, a more intentional and consistent policy to guide decisions on alley vacation requests is needed. As it is highly unlikely that vacated alleys are re-established, this future policy should not allow for vacation of an alley unless absolutely critical.

Recommendations

T9.1 Encourage increased and continued use of public alleys through an improved maintenance plan, a more rigid access management policy, and education on and, when necessary, enforcement of parking regulations.

Action Steps

- Complete a city-wide audit of alley conditions to gauge the scale of present issues.
- Maintain an inventory of the citywide alley network that tracks the condition of each.
- Review citywide alley usage by evaluating vehicle access to properties, the location of existing overhead and underground utilities, and the potential to serve future land uses. Vacate unused alleys, where appropriate.
- Establish a clear, proactive policy for maintenance of remaining alleys.

T9.2 Adopt standards for approving future requests for alley vacations.

Goal 10: Ensure transportation connections to the greater region and other population centers.

Discussion

The city of Muskegon is the largest city on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan and has historically served as a transportation hub for the surrounding region. Today, the greater Muskegon area is severely limited in terms of transportation options for those looking to travel outside the county, region, or state. Aside from a personal vehicle, or direct, Lake Michigan car ferry service to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the city of Muskegon offers no transportation connections to population centers outside of Muskegon County. In 2019, bus service from Muskegon to Grand Rapids and points east, was eliminated, but was reinstated on 2023 on limited days by a different company.

At the scale of the County, these options expand to include the flights to Chicago, Illinois from the airport.

The cities of Grand Rapids and Holland to the southeast and south have rail connections to a number of southwest Michigan cities and Chicago, Illinois. Grand Rapids' airport also provides airline service to a large number of cities in the United States.

With a considerable portion of the city population leaving the city for employment, car ownership becomes a requirement for many without another option. Carpooling may be an option for some of the workforce, but the vast majority of commuters drive alone.

Recommendations

- T10.1** Seek partnerships with public transportation services in neighboring Ottawa and Kent Counties to establish connections to their population centers and associated transportation options.
- T10.2** Establish more frequent, state-wide bus service to and from Muskegon.
- T10.3** Lobby for extension of passenger rail service to Muskegon. Study the feasibility of passenger rail connections to Muskegon.