

Mayor's Institute on City Design
Final Report – Investing Equitably in Jackson Hill
Spring 2021

Project Overview

The City of Muskegon is seeking greater investment parity citywide by targeting commercial development opportunities in the historically underinvested and racially diverse Jackson Hill neighborhood, where almost half of residents live below the poverty line. The city is currently updating its Master Plan and would like assistance with using 2020 Census data to support and inform land use and transportation decisions that create equitable outcomes for residents of this neighborhood.

About the Mayors' Institute on City Design Resource Team

The MICD is a leadership initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Since 1986, MICD has helped transform communities through design by preparing mayors to be the chief urban designers of their cities. In 2015, Mayor Stephen Gawron participated in a professional development program the MICD convened for mayors across the country.

In January 2021, the MICD offered the city two leading experts to work with staff and community stakeholders by providing design and development assistance on important issues facing the Jackson Hill Neighborhood. Specifically, the city asked for their assistance in seeking greater investment equity to identify new commercial development opportunities in this neighborhood. Our focus areas included partnering with the community to define a vision for the future, assisting the neighbors and businesses to find success through development which fits the neighborhood, and bridging the physical and social barriers to economic success.

- Ted Landsmark; Director, Dukakis Center; Distinguished Professor, School of Public Policy & Urban Affairs; Northeastern University, Boston
- Drusilla van Hengel, Principal, Nelson\Nygaard; Portland, OR

Synopsis of Executive Summary –

Muskegon can invest in Jackson Hill by helping the neighborhood celebrate its sense of meaning and identity that still exists but can be built on. This investment will look very different from downtown, as residents expressed little interest in accessing the new development there. The city can invest equitably in Jackson Hill by ensuring the residents feel recognized, and that their concerns are heard. To help the city achieve this, the MICD Resource Team makes recommendations in three phases: phase one proposals are meant to be immediately actionable, phase two are meant to be actionable within one year, and phase three are meant to be actionable in one to five years. The proposals are a reflection of the team's independent research, conversations with residents of Jackson Hill, and regular meetings with members of Muskegon's economic development and planning teams.

The MICD Resource Team's research and conversations illustrated that Jackson Hill is a cohesive community with residents who have a commitment to each other, their neighborhood, and their city. The residents interviewed spoke of sharing resources, helping one another, and a dedication to education and social service. The recommendations build on these strengths, as well as the

neighborhood's physical spaces like its parks and churches. One resident explained that Jackson Hill is a hollowed out version of what it used to be. Muskegon can change this with the right kind of investment in Jackson Hill: making the residents feel heard and responded to, while building on the neighborhood's proud identity.

Research Questions & Resident Feedback

This research project is generated by the question of what to do with many city-owned parcels in Jackson Hill. City staff requested assistance in answering the following questions:

ENGAGEMENT

- **What do residents of Jackson Hill want/need to be different in their neighborhood?**
 - They would like the dumping of furniture and tires to be prevented
 - They would like to see more activities for young people, such as marching band programs or after-school programs at local churches

- **What do they want to stay the same?**
 - Residents love and are proud of the positive connections among neighbors
 - They value their Smith Ryerson park and would like to see it constantly updated

- **What is their desired future?**
 - Current residents would welcome more young families settling there long-term and being able to maintain their living situations
 - They would like to see Jackson Hill residents enjoy and benefit from the nice amenities once found in the neighborhood and now located elsewhere, such as after-school educational resources and the relocated farmer's market
 - Housing opportunities that are not densely crowded and have a variety of features that fit residents' needs, such as a basements

- **How can they be involved in making the neighborhood's future come to fruition?**
 - They are very eager to be part of any plan-making process and would like to be consulted about planning decisions regarding their neighborhood

- **What goods and services are out of reach?**
 - Stores such as a community supermarket, dollar store and laundromat are essential needs
 - They also desire leisure services such as movie theaters and beauty salons

- **What is the vision for life in Jackson Hill?**
 - They want to change the perception that they are an unsafe and decrepit neighborhood as they are a very close-knit, neighborly and safe area

MASTER PLANNING

- **What regulatory and land use decisions in the updated Master Plan will help residents and businesses in Jackson Hill find success?**
 - Using New Urbanist Principles - For the past three decades, and long after 1960s urban renewal devastated many of America's diverse communities of color, New Urbanist

principles have been applied toward building and reconfiguring cities and neighborhoods.

- These principles emphasize restructuring public policies, urban design principles, and development practices to support demographic diversity, pedestrian priority and public transit, universally accessible public spaces and community institutions, and designs that celebrate local history, climate adaptation, urban ecology, and inclusive building practices.

- **How can the city identify and encourage the “right kind” of development here?**

CONNECTION

- **What physical and social barriers to economic success exist?**
- **How can we bridge those barriers through design and engagement?**

Recommendations

Phase 1 – Celebrating Identity (immediately)

- Murals/banners and events to celebrate historic locations
- Implement measures to prevent dumping in Green Acres Park
- Hold community events in Smith Ryerson park, such as movies
- Utilize events to highlight Jackson Hill strengths
- Organize project to build on Jackson Hill history book

Phase 2 – Strengthening Identity (within one year)

- Improve infrastructure at Smith Ryerson Park
- Engage neighborhood kids in activities such as after school programs in churches and marching bands
- Expand temporary commercial options
- Add in a warm weather one-day market
- Farmers Market outside
- Froebel School
- Intersection Repair

Phase 3 – Investing in Identity – Economic Development (1-5 years)

- Extend form based code zoning change
- Develop missing middle housing
- Turn Froebel School into unique community learning & health hub
- Expand permanent commercial options
- Connect to Lakeshore Trail
- Road Diet Business Hwy 31

Synopsis of Conclusion -

This report studied the existing conditions, community assets and hopes for the future of the Jackson Hill neighborhood. The vision of this MICD project is to celebrate, strengthen and invest equitably in the Jackson Hill community and ensure that residents’ desires for their neighborhood are heard. Using qualitative and quantitative research methods, the MICD Resource Team gathered evidence from American Community Survey data, interviews, and comparable revitalization case studies to support

three phases of recommendations. This report cites tax incentives and funding opportunities that could be utilized to support achievement of these goals. It is important to keep the residents' views at the heart of the implementation process and utilize a feedback mechanism to periodically reevaluate the alignment of implementation with the needs of the residents. Anti-displacement measures should be considered to maximize the positive benefits of revitalization for the residents of Jackson Hill.