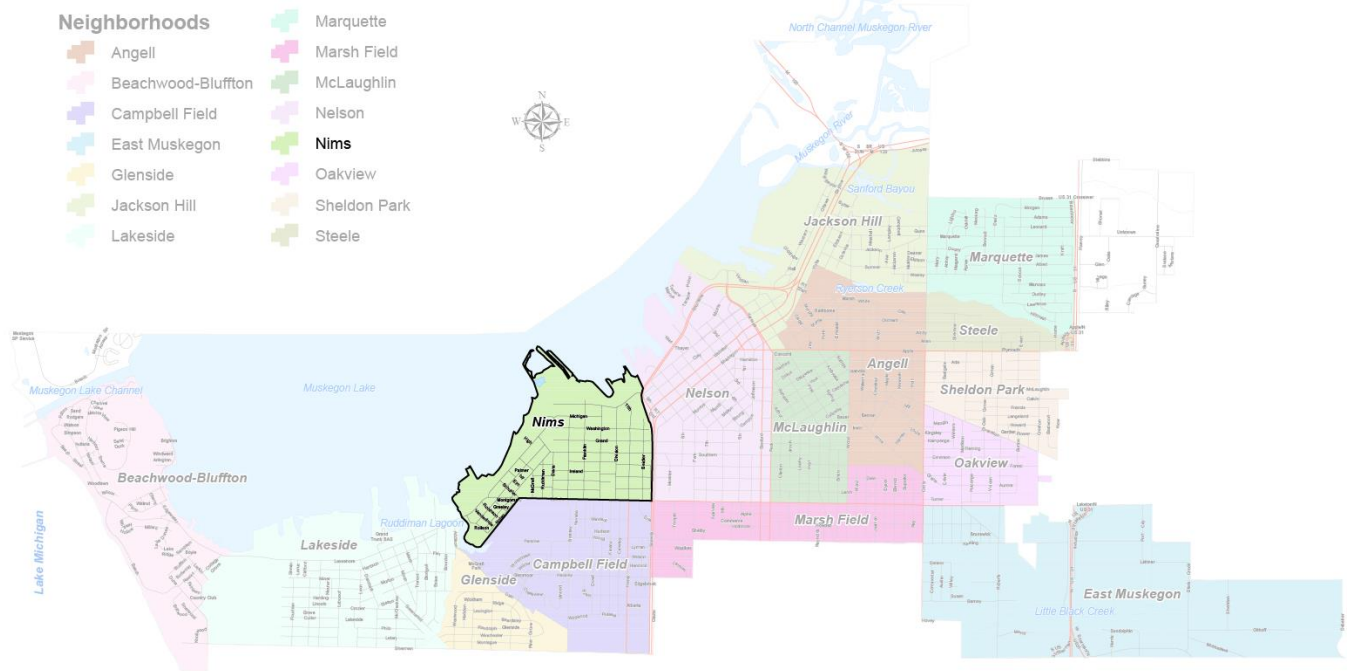


Nims

City of Muskegon
Neighborhood Association Map



Neighborhood Description

The Nims neighborhood is sited at the far west end of downtown Muskegon and bridges between Nelson neighborhood, to its east, and Lakeside neighborhood, to its west. Nims contains significant Muskegon Lake shoreline, as well as frontage along Ruddiman Lagoon/Creek. As a result of its abundant public waterfront, a number lakefront recreational opportunities exist in the neighborhood including Hartshorn Marina, Rotary Park, and the Lakeshore Trail.

The waterfront in Nims has historically been used for manufacturing, but industry has completely left the waterfront, opening up opportunities for residential, commercial and recreational uses. A few industrial buildings and uses remain in the northern portion of the neighborhood, located just off the waterfront. Flexible land use regulations allow these buildings to continue as legal conforming uses, while also allowing for the redevelopment to less-intensive uses.

The neighborhood's northernmost point is known as downtown's Western Waterfront, and consists of substantial acreage constituting one of the largest tracts of redeveloping waterfront property in the city. This area is comprised of major development projects like Adelaide Point, the Watermark Building, Hartshorn Village, and the headquarters for the Boys and Girls Club of the Muskegon Lakeshore.

This page intentionally blank

Zoned Land Use

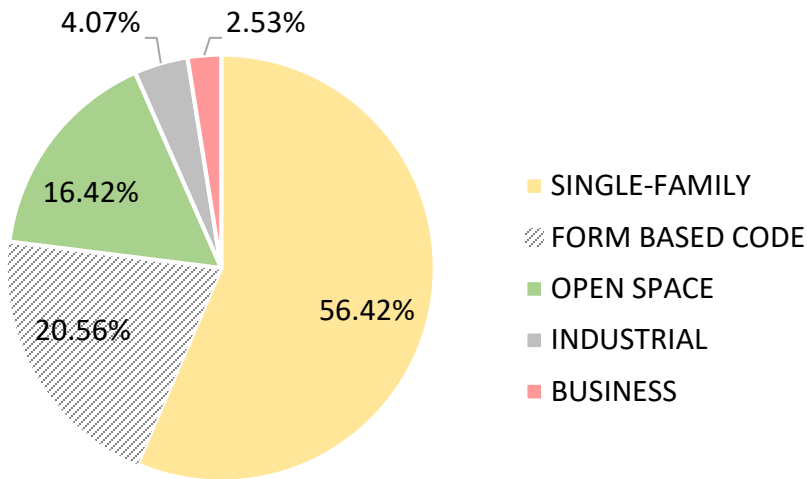


Chart 1: Nims zoned land use as a percentage of the neighborhood's total land area

The neighborhood is primarily zoned to allow for single-family detached housing. Closer to the downtown waterfront and along Lakeshore Drive near Laketon, Form Based Code zoning is used to encourage mixed-use development allowing for a variety of housing options and commercial uses. The vast majority of natural shoreline in Nims is zoned to preserve the open space, though legacy industrial zoning classifications also line the neighborhood's waterfront, north of Western Avenue. Conventional business zones are limited to the Laketon Avenue Commercial Corridor, though such land uses tend to be poorly buffered from adjacent residential zones.

Housing Choice

Although over half of Nims' land area is reserved exclusively for development of single-family detached housing, there are a wide variety of housing types found throughout the neighborhood. A considerable amount of the neighborhood consists of conforming, single-family detached housing, though just over 10% of the housing stock can be considered legally non-conforming missing middle housing types. This could make redevelopment options difficult and potentially displace residents in the case of demolitions.

A considerable amount of the neighborhood's land is zoned form based code to allow for missing middle housing types, specifically in the residential and industrial areas closest to downtown and the lakeshore.

About one-third of the neighborhood's housing stock is rented.

Commercial Inventory

Businesses are another common non-conforming use in the Nims neighborhood. As one of the older neighborhoods in the city, a small number of neighborhood-based businesses still exist. There is a significant amount of neighborhood-based commercial development despite there being few areas zoned for commercial use. Existing businesses have generally located along Beidler Street, Laketon Avenue, Washington Avenue, and Lakeshore Drive, but new businesses often need to apply for special use permits or request to rezone their property to operate in these areas.

Laketon Avenue and Henry Street Commercial Corridor – This area provides a variety of restaurants and convenience stores. The corridor is dominated by vehicular traffic, but many businesses are easily accessible on foot. This commercial area lacks a cohesive identity.

Pinchtown offers a handful of small commercial buildings, some of which are still actively used today. These mainly consist of service industries and small commercial outlets.

Western Waterfront – The redevelopment of this area will create ample commercial opportunities and community gathering spaces. Public access to the waterfront must remain a critical focal point in redevelopment efforts.

Interior commercial buildings – Several vacant/underutilized buildings are located in the neighborhood. Some of them stand alone while others are clustered together. These once popular destinations have become less attractive to businesses over time; however, some of the stagnation can be attributed to zoning codes that limit successful reuse.



Non-conforming commercial buildings can be found throughout the neighborhood. These include active businesses and buildings that have historically housed commercial uses.

Industrial Inventory

While almost all historical industrial uses have been removed from the waterfront, limited properties in Nims still retain their industrial zoning. These include Cole’s Bakery as well as a portion of the Adelaide Point development, which will include marina operations and boat storage. The remaining industrial user at the Watermark Center is not zoned exclusively for such uses.

Parks/Recreational Opportunities

Nims neighborhood parks, community gardens, public/private parks and open spaces, etc.:

- Lakeshore Trail
- Rotary Park
- Hartshorn Marina
- Nims Pocket Park and Garden (at former school property)
- Robert L. Fischer Memorial Park
- PetSafe Bark Park

Community Nodes

Laketon Avenue and Palmer Avenue Intersection – The portion of the neighborhood between Laketon Avenue and Ruddiman Creek hosts a small concentration of commercial and civic buildings at this intersection, and has the potential to grow as a node of neighborhood-serving activity. The form based code zoning district in the Lakeside Business District extends up Laketon to Palmer, but could extend farther east to incorporate businesses and missing middle housing types found along the north side of Laketon.

Washington Avenue and Hudson Street Intersection – Local food establishments and a small, private park provide space for neighbors to meet up at this intersection. Future phases of the Watermark Center should create even more commercial demand in this area. Allowing accessory commercial units at nearby residences could increase the vibrancy of this district.

Western Waterfront – The redevelopment of the Western Waterfront will create commercial opportunities and community gathering spaces along the Muskegon Lake shoreline. Public access to the waterfront is critical to redevelopment efforts.

Transportation

The Transportation and Mobility section of the Master Plan contains further discussion and recommendations. Major Streets in the Nims Neighborhood include:

- Lakeshore Drive
- W. Laketon Avenue
- W. Western Avenue
- Division Street
- Washington Avenue (Lakeshore to Beidler)
- Hudson Street (Western to Washington)
- Beidler Street
- Franklin Street (Western to Southern)
- W. Southern Avenue
- Michigan Avenue
- Montgomery Avenue (Laketon to Southern)
- Addison Street

Possible road diets could occur on Laketon, Western, Lakeshore, and Division.

Active transportation options include a fairly complete sidewalk network throughout the Nims neighborhood. The Lakeshore Trail runs along the perimeter of the neighborhood along the shoreline, and is accessible via a public access point at the entrance drive to Hartshorn Marina along with various unofficial access points to the Trail. Few designated bike routes exist through the neighborhood, though most interior streets are serve as safe biking routes.

Public transportation serving the neighborhood includes MATS Routes 1, 22, and go2 Service. Nims is well connected to the city-wide street network via Laketon Avenue, W. Western Avenue, Southern Avenue, Division Street, and Lakeshore Drive. The regional highway system is easily accessed via Seaway/Shoreline Drive (BR-31) with intersections at Laketon, Western, and Southern. A complete network of streets within the neighborhood allows for easy navigation to and from residences, although the presence of a limited access highway severely limits connectivity to the east.

Blight/Beautification

The homes east of Division Street and many of the neighborhood’s old mixed-use buildings are beginning to show signs of physical deterioration.

The deteriorating north side of the Watermark building is visually prominent and may hamper the redevelopment of other properties in the area. The existing industrial use on the west side of the facility also does not seem compatible to adjacent redevelopment efforts. A recent change in ownership at the property could allow for completion of the stalled redevelopment.

Historic Preservation

While the neighborhood does not presently contain any designated historic districts nor sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places, a State of Michigan Historic Marker acknowledges the area known as Pinchtown. Some of Muskegon's earliest lumber mills were located in this area, and Nims contains some architecturally significant structures and historically significant sites.

Significant Redevelopment Properties

1000 and 1204 W. Western Avenue – 48 acres of former industrial waterfront land is now under single ownership and has an approved Planned Unit Development that includes residential, recreation, commercial, marina, storage, and light industrial operations.

965 W. Western Avenue/920 and 930 Washington Avenue/1330 Division Street (Watermark) – New ownership has proposed to complete the redevelopment of the former factory site adding hundreds of new residential units.

921 W. Western Avenue – Nearly three acres of vacant land with just under 300' of Western Avenue frontage. Future uses could compliment other redevelopment efforts happening in the Western Waterfront district.

1490 Lakeshore Drive – 25 acres formerly containing oil storage tanks. Redevelopment plans that include residential and marina have been explored, but building restrictions from groundwater contamination limit development options.

Future Land Use

See future land use map in Appendix

Project 1: Increase public access points to the Lakeshore Trail.

Public access points to the Lakeshore Trail from the neighborhood are limited and somewhat difficult to find where they do exist. Increasing the frequency of formal access points to and from the Nims' residential areas will bring many residents within reach of open space and the waterfront. The Imagine Muskegon Lake Plan offers examples of these improvements.



One possible access point to the Lakeshore Trail at the intersection of Laketon Avenue and Lakeshore Drive.

Action Steps

- Formalize informal access points to the trail through physical improvements to trailheads including but not limited to signage, maps, and improved landscaping. Review possible connections on publicly-owned land adjacent to the trail and explore the creation of public easements, at private, informal access points.
- Implement suggested trail connection points from the Imagine Muskegon Lake Plan.

Project 2: Reutilize the numerous vacant commercial buildings scattered throughout the residential sections of the neighborhood.

Reuse of such buildings has proven to be difficult as current zoning regulations restrict business uses to those that are least likely to be a nuisance to neighbors. Some restaurant and retail operations have seen success, but as non-conforming uses, building expansions are limited. Allowing such buildings to convert to residential uses may also aid in redevelopment.

Current land use regulations limit building expansions to 30% of their existing footprint

Action Steps

- Amend land use regulations to allow interior neighborhood businesses to expand their buildings. Some buildings near identified community nodes should be considered for rezoning to commercial while standalone commercial buildings may be better addressed by residential zoning amendments that simplify the process of expanding non-conforming uses. Allow residential uses in existing commercial buildings.
- Commercial operations are allowed to expand more than 30% of their existing space.

Project 3: Calm traffic and improve the crossing experience near the Laketon Avenue and Palmer Avenue intersection.

A considerable amount of vehicle traffic uses Laketon Avenue to get from BR-31 to the Lakeside Business District and to other points west. In 2019, the Lakeshore Drive reconstruction project made many needed improvements to pedestrian access across Laketon Avenue at Lakeshore Drive, but those improvements did not extend east. Calming traffic on Laketon near Palmer would better connect the neighborhood to the north with the businesses to the south.

Action Steps

- Review traffic patterns and street design geometries at this intersection to determine potential changes that encourage slower speeds and shorter crossing distances.
- Consider temporary changes to the street to test the effectiveness of potential improvements, short of making permanent changes.
- If effective, make permanent the temporary changes or plan for permanent improvements with future construction work.

Project 4: Create more useful public space by connecting unnecessary traffic islands to their adjacent blocks.

The neighborhood’s unique street grid contains a handful of small, triangular traffic islands within the public right-of-way. These islands are bound by streets on three sides, though not all three are always necessary. With park space largely concentrated along the perimeter of the neighborhood, near downtown, and along the waterfront, these traffic islands could instead be linked to blocks to serve as small parks or playgrounds closer to residents.



A section of Ruddiman Street north of W. Forest Avenue that could potentially be repurposed.

Action Steps

- Identify locations where traffic islands exist and could be removed.
- If necessary, collect traffic count and movement data to determine the least-used leg of each intersection.
- Consult with adjacent residents to determine potential designs and uses for reclaimed space in the public right-of-way.

Project 5: Preserve and enhance the neighborhood’s unique physical features including historic buildings, and views created by the street grid.

While most of the neighborhood consists of a regular street grid, unique angled streets create highly-visible sites for significant civic buildings (like the churches at 1296 Montgomery and 1617 Palmer, and the former factory building at 920 Washington). Views of Muskegon Lake are also present thanks to the neighborhood’s location on a bluff overlooking the lake, though some are overgrown and require regular maintenance.

Aside from the Pinchtown State Historical Marker, little exists in the form of recognition of the historic sites in the neighborhood. Early historic surveys evaluated a handful of properties in the neighborhood, primarily along Lakeshore Drive, and updated research could lead to individual or district recognition.



The church building terminates the view down McGraft Street, creating a memorable site unique to the Nims neighborhood.

Action Steps

- The Historic District Commission will explore the possibility of establishing historic designations for individual buildings and conduct a study of potential areas in the neighborhood that could be deemed a local historic district.
- Establish a vegetation maintenance plan for sites with scenic views of Muskegon Lake.
- Site new civic buildings at key locations throughout the neighborhood and encourage preservation of existing buildings that serve this purpose.