



MIDLAND DOWNTOWN PLAN

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FINAL REPORT

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Midland, Michigan

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I. PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Over the decades Midland has grown and flourished as early pioneers, the lumbering industry, and the expansion of the Dow Chemical Company shaped its physical character and demographic makeup. It has been described as an early 20th Century "Company Town" which reaped the employment, development, and community amenity benefits of major corporate sponsorship. The diversity of industry, commerce, and educational facilities will continue to shape its future development.

Today, Midland's population of 38,250 persons enjoy a community boasting well-kept neighborhoods; outstanding schools and recreational facilities; cultural amenities unequaled in the region or state for a city of its size; and an enviable economic base anchored by the Dow Chemical Company Michigan Division, Research/Production Facilities, the Dow Chemical Company Headquarters, Dow Corning Corporate Headquarters, and Dow Corning Production and Research facilities. The quality of life and environment provided by and for Midland's well-educated, affluent residents plays a significant role in the city's future growth potential. Why then, does this very special community have an undersized downtown district with a perceived lack of desired commercial and entertainment opportunities and a physical character which fails to reflect the overall community image?

GOALS

This plan was commissioned to help answer these questions by studying (1) issues related to downtown's physical character and (2) strategies for accommodating the significant new development envisioned for downtown Midland in both the near and long terms. This is a crossroads period in the history of downtown Midland, when the community has chosen to actively shape an improved future for downtown as a vital, identifiable core rather than accepting the slow decline of an unexciting shopping area and government/services district. Therefore, the project goals are:

- . To improve the visibility and identity of the downtown for the community.
- . To provide clearer, more direct access to downtown from major community thoroughfares.
- . To clarify and simplify circulation within the downtown district through a "see, arrive, and park" sequence.
- . To maintain, strengthen, and expand existing land use districts.
- . To improve the character and vitality of the retail core.
- . To optimize pedestrian and vehicular linkages within downtown district and between downtown and community.

PROJECT SUMMARY

To achieve the stated goals, the consultant and the Committee for the Downtown Plan participated in a series of interactive, planning workshops to define a concept for the future of downtown Midland which is both logical and visionary. During this process, the regional and community context were evaluated and a more detailed inventory of the downtown study area (bounded by Jerome, Indian, and Poseyville Roads, and the Tittabawassee River) was prepared. A physical analysis of circulation systems, land use patterns, and study area relationships and images provided the basis from which a planning framework could be developed.

This framework embodies a design concept that emphasizes an attractive, compact specialty retail/commercial district, linked to an enhanced, recreation-oriented waterfront. Adjacent to the retail core, an enlarged institutional district provides City and County services in a consolidated campus setting. In addition, significant growth capacities are identified for offices and housing to complement the downtown by augmenting its current level of activity. Surrounding the entire district, a greenbelt of landscaping and boulevards creates clear edges to downtown, highlighting this area's potential to also become a focal point for entertainment/leisure time activity for the Midland community.

In summary, this study proposes to:

- . Improve the visibility and identity of downtown Midland at Business Route 10 by implementing boulevard, landscape, and signage improvements.
- . Improve downtown access and internal circulation, utilizing existing streets with improvements in intersection, signage, and entry treatments.
- . Extend the Business Route 10 "Greenbelt" from State Street to Eastman Road.
- . Organize parking and service within the interior of each downtown's four subareas. The addition of parking decks in these areas is also recommended in the future, as growth warrants.
- . Improvement of the Main Street streetscape to provide a series of unifying elements that define a downtown image within the core retail blocks to create an attractive and more vital retail environment.
- . Further study of facade treatments in the retail core to improve the appearance of the Main Street retail district and to create a second business frontage on the waterfront side of existing retail buildings.
- . Removal of the waterfront rail line and development of an improved pedestrian system linking (1) the retail core to the downtown waterfront and (2) downtown to adjacent parks.

- . Enhancement of the waterfront area to "capture" additional leisure time space and draw residents and visitors to the retail core and the water's edge.
- . Accommodation of a downtown hotel/conference center (incorporating a mix of retail, restaurant, and entertainment uses) as an activity anchor linking the retail core and the waterfront.
- . Creation of a City/County campus which fronts on the community greenbelt and has pedestrian linkages to the Main Street retail district.

This study provides a planning and design framework for future development in Midland's downtown district. It will serve for many years to come in guiding the overall organization of land use patterns, addressing access and circulation issues, and establishing an attractive downtown setting within its various areas. This study does not serve as a market analysis that identifies specific commercial enterprises to make downtown more "successful," or detailed strategies for encouraging such businesses to locate in downtown Midland. Nevertheless, the improvements recommended in this study will help to create a context which is attractive to commerce and consumers.

The comprehensive revitalization of downtown Midland will require both (1) self-promotion and the targeting/attracting of desired additions to the downtown use mix and (2) the physical improvements needed to create the desired ambience and atmosphere for residents and visitors. This plan provides the physical framework that will guide other initiatives in achieving the goals of improving both downtown Midland's physical environment and economic vitality.

The remainder of this document provides a detailed explanation of the process and products leading to the above-described summary proposals. It contains an Inventory and Analysis section; a Framework for Development, including an illustrative downtown Master Plan; a series of Design Guidelines, and an Implementation Schedule for improvements with preliminary costs based on conceptual design. All of this information contributes to an understanding of what will be required to increase the prominence of downtown Midland through a series of physical improvements.

II. ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Planners and designers analyze tangible things (e.g., traffic circulation; building patterns) in order to determine how those elements work together, functionally and aesthetically, to create an attractive and vital downtown. Beyond the physical attributes of the area, it is also the planners' task to discover the (often intangible) values a community holds. At workshops and public meetings, planners ask questions and pose situations to elicit public response; questions such as "How do you feel about your downtown?" or "Would you be willing to demolish this block for development or parking?"

In the Inventory and Analysis Phase the design team developed an understanding of the tangible and intangible qualities of downtown Midland. This understanding provides a base of information and a guide for developing a logical and creative Framework Plan.

THE REGION

Midland is part of a tri-city region which also includes Saginaw and Bay City. Overall, the region contains a broad diversity of industry, commerce, housing opportunities, and recreation/leisure time activities. However, interdependent relationships within the region have limited certain types of growth in the component cities. While Midland is well known for its industrial strength and cultural/recreational facilities, its retail commercial base is overshadowed by complexes like the Fashion Square Mall in the Saginaw area. This relatively weak local retail sector contributes to a perception of deficiency by the community in serving the needs of its residents and in attracting tourism.

Circulation links between the tri-cities are excellent, with limited-access freeways providing high speed inter-city travel along US-10 to Bay City (20 minutes) and Interstate 75 to Saginaw (30 minutes). This easy access promotes the "leakage" of local disposable income dollars to those commercial facilities in the region with the best combination of quality, services, and price for available goods.

Midland's role in the regional economy is primarily one of providing jobs at the various Dow Chemical and Dow Corning facilities, plus the marvelous cultural attraction of Discovery Square. This complex includes the famed Dow Gardens, Midland Center for the Arts, the Macromolecular Institute, and the City of Midland Grace A. Dow Memorial Library. These facilities attract some 500,000 visitors (200,000 out of county) annually.

The Midland community believes it can capitalize on this cultural base more effectively by providing complementary commercial and visitor attractions in nearby downtown Midland to retain tourist and resident dollars that are currently flowing to other parts of the region. Desirable downtown uses include specialty retail shops, hotel and conference facilities, and additional restaurant/entertainment and leisure time activities.