

Main Street

The seven Chesaning businesses interviewed represented successful, large and small, independent and franchise businesses. Although they had a variety of individual and community issues, their concerns focused on **Downtown Organizational Direction, Infrastructure/ Service Needs, Downtown Promotion, and Market Economics.**

Downtown Organizational Direction

The vast majority of these businesses voiced a lack of advocacy from the village government or the Chamber of Commerce for individual businesses or the business community. They expressed an absence of (1) recognition for individual accomplishments, (2) assistance to help businesses address economic and operational concerns, and (3) support for new businesses coming into the community. Those interviewed stressed that some businesses are included in community activities while many are excluded.

These businesses also voiced a lack of general direction for the downtown business sector. A function of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is to fine-tune the community's vision and development plans as they relate to the business area. Without that community vision, the DDA and individual businesses are left to their own interpretations of what to do, resulting in a variety of individual; often counter productive, activities or no activities at all.

Recommendations

- A united community vision and a subsequent **Downtown Development Authority “Goals and Objectives”** strategic plan are essential. A Downtown Development Authority is created to correct and prevent deterioration of the business district, create and implement development plans, promote economic growth and provide financial incentives. It is critical that actions by the DDA be the result of a strategic plan created through community wide input, be comprehensive, address the concerns of all

community businesses and residents, and be designed to address short and long term accomplishments.

One of the most successful approaches to downtown revitalization throughout the nation and in the State of Michigan is what is known as the Main Street Four Point Approach. This approach places all activities necessary for downtown revitalization into four categories; Organization, Design, Promotion and Economic Restructuring. A successful downtown program must have business government, residents and organizations working together; the business area must look clean, inviting, functional and informative; the downtown must promote itself, the community, the businesses and activities to stimulate interaction; and the downtown business area must be profitable.

Organization activities should include:

- Resource Allocation – budget, monitoring monies, a yearly work schedule, committee structures and a selection process.
- Public Awareness – presentations, media contact, brochures with the mission, goals and objectives.
- Data Collection and Coordination – data gathering, building/business profiles, list of resource people.

Design activities should include:

- Public Space Management – pedestrian linkages, parking, public spaces, better public signage, cleanup and maintenance, entryway delineation.
- Develop Design Policies, Plans and Ordinances – plans for façade, signage, and streetscape, create a public awareness program.
- Develop a Cooperative, Graphic Identity



Promotion activities should include:

- Develop and Coordinate Promotions/ Events – coordinate joint promotions, develop and implement a promotion calendar.
- Improve the Downtown Image – promote businesses and qualities of the community, profile existing businesses, encourage police presence, create a safer image, encourage appropriate lighting.
- Develop an Identity – establish theme/logo and use it throughout.

Economic Restructuring activities should include:

- Analyzing Existing Business Mix – inventory building space, work with businesses on location needs.
- Analyzing the Existing Market and Target Position – begin market analysis, begin a business recruitment program, work with realtors, business brokers and property owners to attract and place tenants.
- Design a Business Education Program – develop design assistance, business assistance and business networking programs.
- Gain a Greater Understanding of Real Estate and Adaptive Reuse.

The second step for the Chesaning DDA is to establish its own Goals and Objectives for the downtown/business area, and detailed steps and appropriate time schedules to implement each objective. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) Community Assistance Team can assist with a draft Goals and Objectives document.

- The Chesaning DDA should be representative of the community at large and should continually pursue new individuals and businesses for its advisory board and



operating committees. It should include representation from the east and west sides of the river, the boulevard area and the businesses west of the boulevard area. Of course, the Chesaning Downtown Development Authority cannot include property outside of the village limits but it certainly

should look for and accept input and participation from individuals in the downtown, the remainder of the village and residents and businesses in the surrounding area.

The first step towards downtown revitalization should be an evaluation of the representation and participation in the Chesaning DDA.

- The DDA should be the voice of the businesses for the entire community. The DDA should coordinate a **regularly published newsletter/ flyer** which talks about such topics as the success/history of a business; new additions to the district (business, infrastructure, staff); fond farewells; guidance for shoppers during repairs, construction, events; the problems with, need for and value of changes in infrastructure; changes in hours of operation; events; etc. “Something is always happening in Downtown Chesaning” is a good perception for people to have and a good marketing tool. A regular publication, which talks about issues and activities, creates that perception of “happening”. This could fall under the “Showboat Community” theme.

Infrastructure/Service Needs

Successful businesses require adequate and economical systems for water, sewer, storm water, fire, police, and ambulance service. Businesses also require other infrastructure/

service needs like parking, street improvements and trash pick up be provided. Most of those businesses interviewed said that street maintenance and repair were adequate considering limited funds and trash pick up needed to be coordinated. Parking for customers was inadequate because of limited street parking, no rear building entrance, no rear parking, no additional parking space for events, and limited coordination of parking in peripheral and neighborhood areas.

Recommendations

- Street maintenance and repair should be in the community's **capital improvement program** and can be supplemented by tax increment financing for the DDA district.
- Trash pick up coordination should be one of the many objectives in the Chesaning DDA Goals and Objectives.
- Adequate parking is another DDA objective. The Chesaning DDA should coordinate a **parking assessment study** that should address employee and customer needs, coordination of peak demand needs, available immediate and alternative space, and funding or compensation.
- Maintenance of the downtown area is critical to healthy development of the business community. Every detail from flowers to painting of alleys is critical.

Downtown Promotion

Downtown events are one of the many ways to promote a community, its special features and its enjoyable setting. Chesaning's status as a Showboat Community creates interest, curiosity, and excitement in individuals visiting it for the first time. And, in order to capitalize on that enthusiasm, the implementation of that event is more critical than the event itself. As the saying goes, "You don't get a second chance to make a good first impression". If the event is negatively impacted by -- parking problems, lack of enthusiasm by community businesses, repetition of the same old activities, poor

coordination, etc., the memory of the event will include the good and the bad. Chesaning businesses have been negatively impacted by events; parking lost to visitors, exclusion from the event like the Christmas Lights, maintenance that only happens for the event, daily delivery delayed, limited opportunities for participation, no immediate or subsequent increase in business.

Promotion of the community through various media is also an important objective of the DDA in coordination with the community and the Chamber of Commerce. It is important to tell people about Chesaning, its people, educational system, natural features, geographic proximity, activities, progress, history, architecture, opportunities, etc.

Recommendations

- As was mentioned previously, the Chesaning Downtown Development Authority, in coordination with businesses and the Chamber of Commerce, should design its **promotional objectives** to be all-inclusive, creating a compatible, positive impression for the entire community. The promotion should consider features often taken for granted like the campground.
- It should also be the mission of the DDA and Chamber of Commerce to make each event a total success. This may result in the reduction of events or activities in events to assure effective implementation.

Market Economics

The businesses interviewed presented a broad variety of additional operations that they would like to see in the Village of Chesaning. The choices ranged from bigger stores, children's clothing, and women's clothing to "just fill the voids of departing businesses", campground, senior housing and upscale housing adjacent to the golf course. There was also a consensus that job opportunities for youth are essential.

Many of the businesses interviewed also said that building rents were very high in the village causing some businesses to relocate elsewhere.

Recommendations

- The Village of Chesaning should request the Chesaning DDA to implement a comprehensive **economic market analysis** of the Chesaning business sector. This analysis should determine the real business market in the community, business space requirements, location priorities, and hours of operation.
- The community should prepare a subsequent **economic development strategy** to address the market recommendations provided by the analysis.
- The Chesaning DDA should serve as a facilitator to assist businesses in this changing economy.
- The Chesaning DDA should facilitate a workshop to address the “Basics Behind a Successful Downtown Business District.” The Michigan Economic Development Corporation’s Community Assistance Team can assist with such a workshop.