

City of Muskegon

Waterfront Redevelopment Plan - 1999

Prepared by:

City of Muskegon Department of Planning and Economic Development in
Collaboration with MEGA's Lakefront Development Task Force,

... and with the gracious assistance of "citizen planner", Colette Klukos.

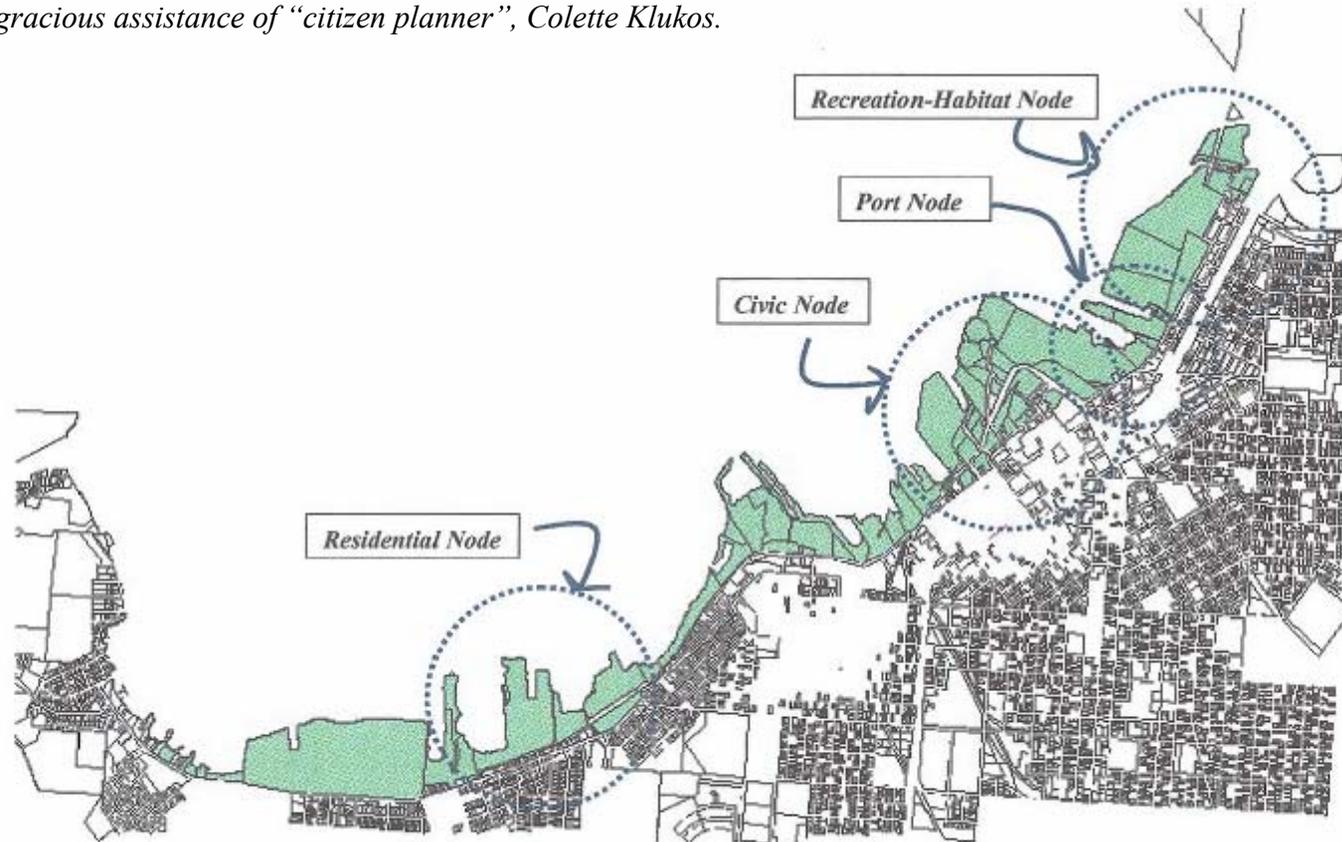


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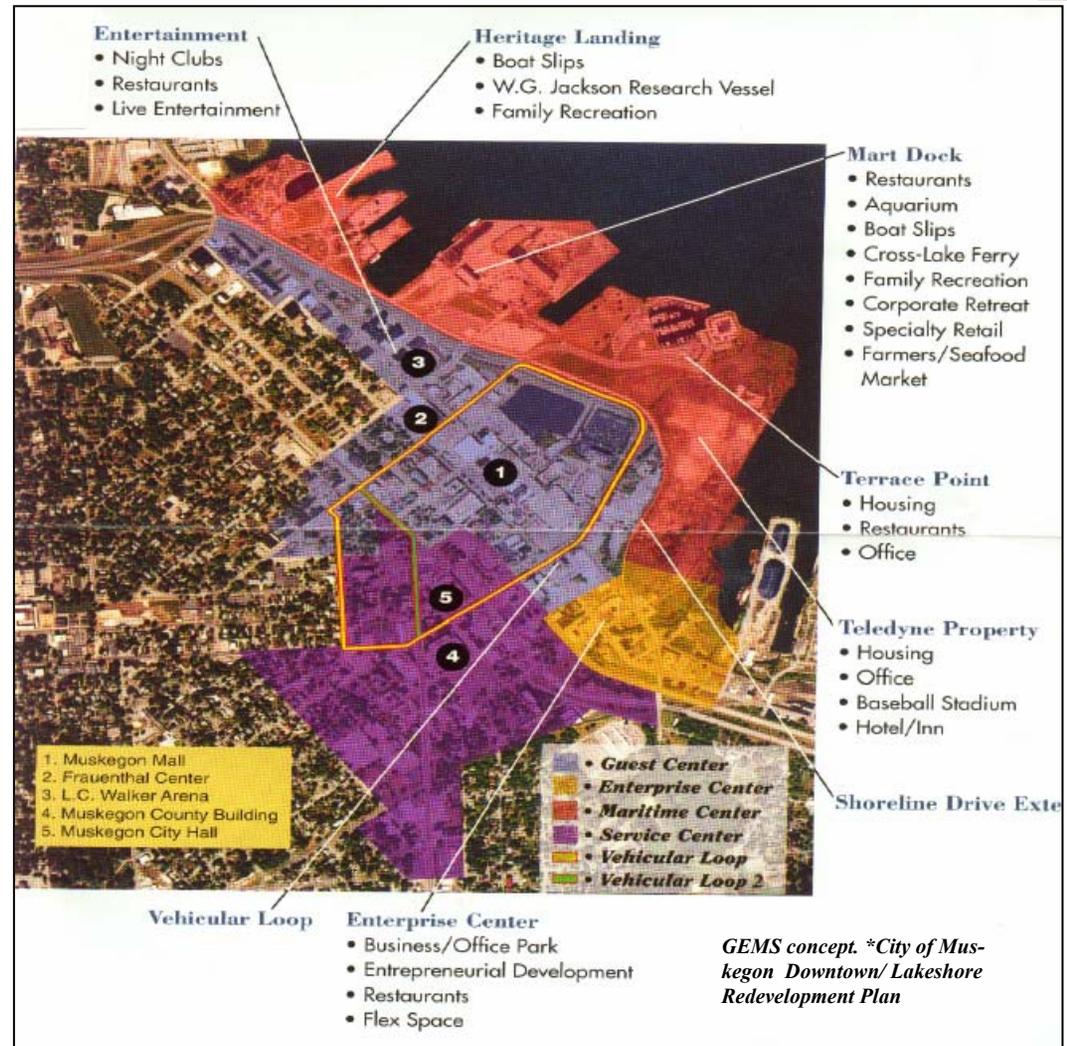
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Introduction

The Muskegon Waterfront Redevelopment Sub-Plan has been drafted as an addendum to the City of Muskegon *Downtown Lakeshore Redevelopment Plan* adopted in 1997. It is a procedural step in a planning sequence designed to refine - and give physical shape to - many of the conceptual recommendations of that plan with regard to both generalized land use, and specific projects. The plan also expounds upon many of the principles put forth in the Muskegon *Lakeshore Trail Master Plan*, and attempts to enhance and augment that project's impact along the lake.

In addition to “fleshing out” some of the concepts included in the Master Plan’s “menu” of projects, the intent of the Sub-Plan is to incorporate and synthesize ideas which have recently entered the public debate. Perhaps more importantly, the Sub-Plan helps fill in some of the gaps in the City’s current lakefront planning efforts which heretofore have been concentrated primarily on the downtown waterfront. Accordingly, the plan boundary areas include a fairly narrow swath of land between Lakeshore/ Shoreline Drive and the water’s edge, from Bluffton on the west, to the Causeway on the east. This stretch of land is over 8 miles in length, and contains nearly every





conceivable type of land use imaginable. Although geographically limited in scope, the analysis is not circumscribed by physical boundaries. This is due to the knowledge that the ensuing discussion centers on what is arguably the City's most valued asset, and that all developments within its vicinity are likely to have wide-ranging repercussions throughout the City and region. Therefore, the recommendations herein, seek to better integrate or link the proposed activities along the shore to existing inland land uses, in spite of the fact that the mechanics of such linkages are not always spelled out in precise detail.

Organization

The plan is composed of two principle sections. Part I briefly discusses current land use, historical development and recommended land use policies, and helps provide the rationale for the site-specific recommendations of the plan which are covered in section II.

Section II contains specific recommendations for major changes and relocations of land uses. These recommendations are discussed in terms of four

primary lakefront nodes: Civic/ Cultural, Resort/ Residential, Habitat/ Recreation, and Commercial Port.

Although the nodes appear to be geographically isolated, in actuality, they are conceived as overlapping, integrated and non-mutually exclusive. That is, each is expected to contain a mixture of (often similar) land uses which support, and are most compatible with, the primary proposed use such as "residential", "port facilities" etc. In no instance should these "nodes" be construed as a traditional, *segregated* zoning scheme.

Finally discussion of each node concludes with a brief discussion of planning and design considerations and standards appropriate to each. The intent is to form the basis for future Planned Unit Development (PUD) design and development guidelines applicable to all waterfront properties.

The Current Context

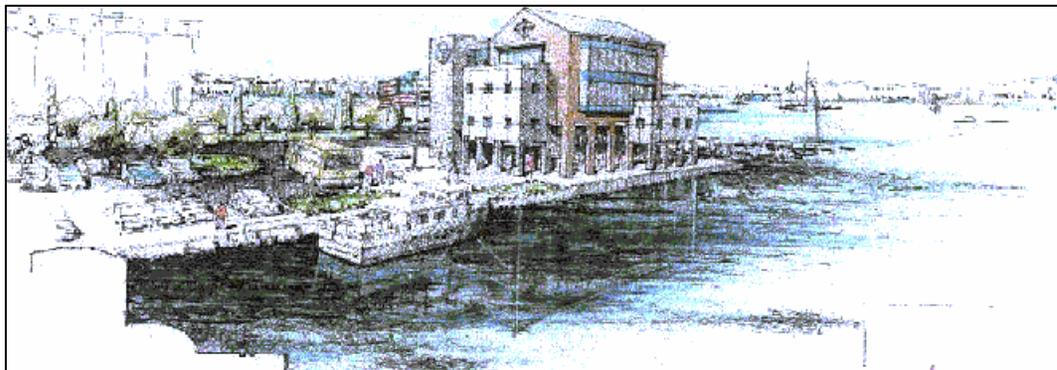
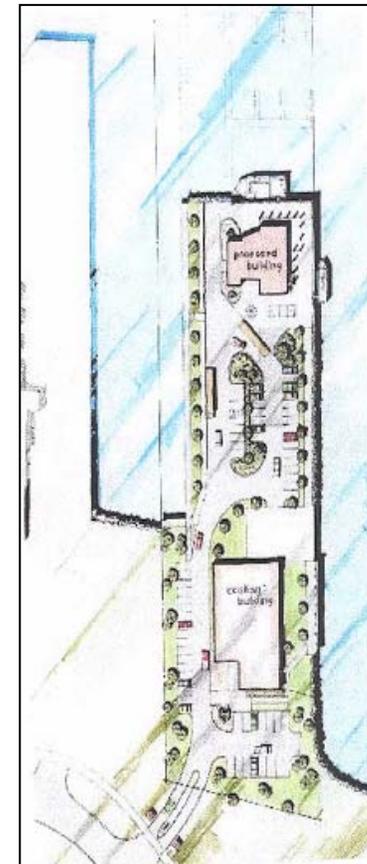
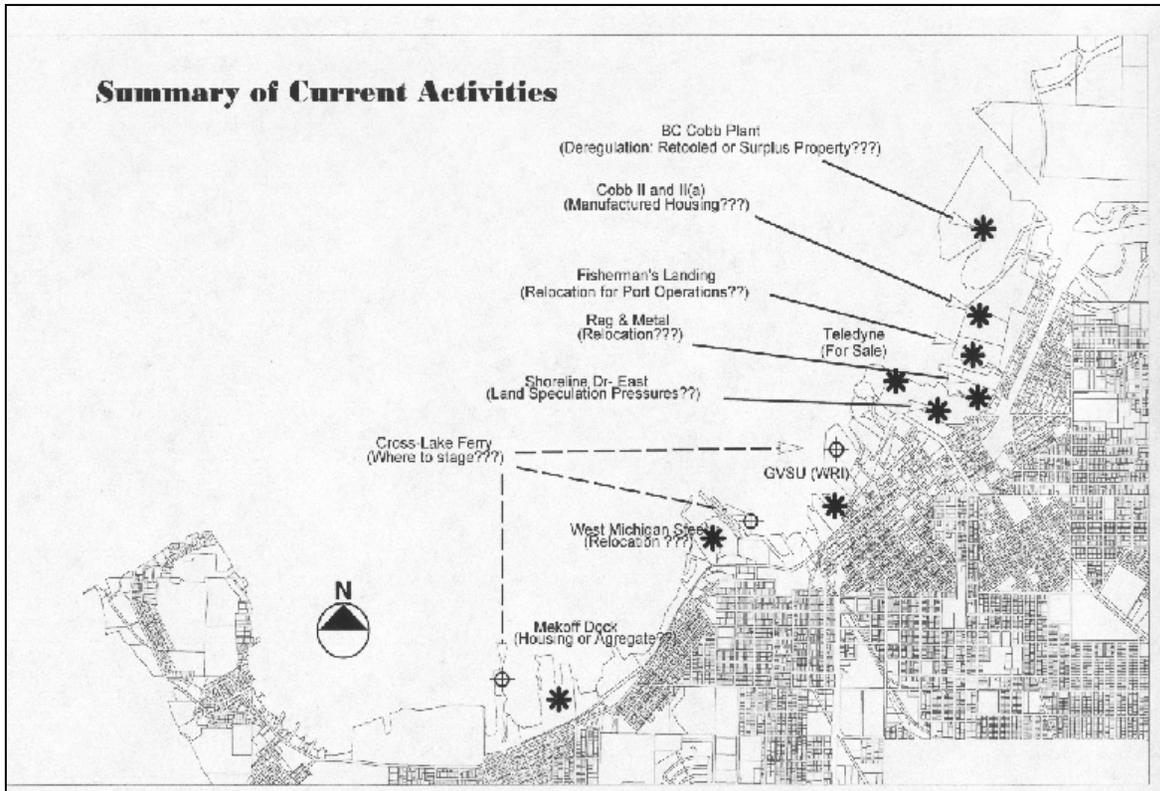
The need for a comprehensive and specific lakeshore plan has arisen due to a number of projects either in-progress, planned or still in the discussion phases which, if realized, will have a lasting influence on both the profile of the lake-

front and City as a whole. Chief among the former are the previously mentioned Lakeshore Trail bicycle/ pedestrian path, the second phase of Shoreline Drive (Shoreline Drive- East), the much anticipated Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Water Resources Institute, the possible reincarnation of cross-lake passenger ferry service, and the Clean Michigan Initiative (CMI) which has earmarked \$50 million for waterfront environmental site remediation and redevelopment.

In addition to the projects cited, a number of alternative development proposals have recently entered the public dialogue (in the aftermath of the failed waterfront gambling referendum). These include potentially controversial projects such as bulk handling operations and manufactured housing. Several of these projects are likely to involve significant changes in property ownership, land use and access.

If viewed in piecemeal isolation, opportunities for infrastructural economies of scale and/or positive spin-off development created by the projects cited above may be lost.

Summary of Current Activities



Top: A flurry of recently proposed projects underscores the need for a balanced, methodical planning effort along Muskegon Lake.

*Above and left: Conceptual site plan and perspective of the proposed GVSU Water Resources Institute. * Hooker/ DeJong Architects.*



Shortsighted decision-making on the part of City leaders may cause misgivings among potential investors, over the viability of Muskegon as a “destination” city, and underscores the need for proactive planning of the lakefront (and not planning in a vacuum). The intent of this plan therefore is to set the stage for a comprehensive, coordinated and proactive planning program for Muskegon’s most cherished asset - its waterfront - and the multitude of opportunities it presents.

The “Post Industrial” Waterfront

A number of general, and site-specific principles have guided the development of the overall plan, and its component projects. Foremost among them is the recognition that the industrial heritage of the City and lakefront is something which should be *celebrated* rather than eradicated. Cities as diverse as Baltimore (the Inner Harbor) Cleveland (The Flats), San Francisco (The Embarcadero/Ghiradelli Square) have all capitalized on their industrial pasts to create interesting, inviting and “animated” waterfronts.

The key to their success, and those of other cities, has been the realization

that most people want to see the “real” working city (or facsimile thereof) and not a sanitized landscape stripped of all historic references.

While dirty “heavy” industry should certainly be kept away from the lake and its most sensitive resources, it is important to remember that the lake - more specifically the bulk shipping it permitted - holds the City’s “*raison d’etre*”. Were it not for the ample natural harbor, it is doubtful that the City would have ever attained its present stature as an important Midwestern industrial center or acquired the proud moniker, “Port City”.

Although bulk shipping on the Great Lakes has been greatly diminished, it is obvious that the lake figures no less importantly in the economic future of Muskegon, as it did in the past. Although tourism should no doubt play an important role in such a future, tourism alone tends to be seasonal, and acutely sensitive to the vagaries of the economy, and the whims of the traveling public. Moreover, it tends *not* to create jobs which pay family-supporting wages.

Greater economic balance would be afforded by investments in lakeside

residential and commercial development, as well as additional Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) designations. Such developments often require substantial public expenditures for infrastructure but can help spur ancillary economic activity resulting in an active, year-round, lakefront.

A major premise of this plan therefore is that all manner of land uses proposed for the lakefront need not be mutually exclusive, and are in fact desirable. Industrial, recreational, commercial and residential land uses can, and do successfully coexist, often with great effect. In fact their coexistence has proven to be the crucial ingredient in the projects cited above and dozens of others both in the U.S. and abroad.

With its sizable lake frontage, and proud industrial past, there is no reason to believe that Muskegon’s prospects for a revitalized lakefront, incorporating such varied uses as residential development to port facilities, cannot also attain the same level of acclaim.

Assets & Areas of Concern

It is a widely held belief that cities with water amenities enjoy a significant advantage in attracting tourism and development. If this is indeed true, Muskegon, with its miles of shoreline has the potential to become a premier Lake Michigan destination city and Great Lakes port-of-call.

The City has been variously described as a sportsman's paradise and a developer's dream. With its miles of shoreline fronting on two lakes, these alternative visions need not be dichotomous.

In western Michigan only Traverse City with its meandering peninsulas and inlets has more water frontage. Because it satisfies the natural human instinct to be near water, the lake, and its rare natural beauty, is a constant source of community pride and visitor interest.

In addition to its aesthetic appeal, the lake also offers abundant recreational activities such as boating and fishing, as well as areas of natural habitat. Its mid-coast location and excellent transportation links also makes it attractive as both a general cargo and passenger service port.



In earlier decades, the lakefront was the nucleus of most commercial, industrial and transportation activity in the City.