

## MUSKEGON AREA-WIDE PLAN

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### STEERING COMMITTEE SWOT ANALYSIS: ASSESSING YOUR CURRENT SITUATION

August 21, 2002

#### **Purpose of the SWOT Analysis:**

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis is a highly effective way of identifying Strengths and Weaknesses (existing conditions) and also your Opportunities and Threats (possible future conditions). Carrying out this type of analysis will assist an entity to focus on the areas where it is strong and where the greatest opportunities lie.

To identify various areas in each of these categories, often a series of questions ought to be answered. For example, for the Muskegon Area-wide Plan, some of the following questions were examined:

#### **Strengths:**

- What are this project's advantages?
- What are Muskegon's best attributes?
- How do other's view the Muskegon area and its existing condition?

#### **Weaknesses:**

- What are areas for improvement for the Muskegon area?
- What types of things/attitudes should be avoided?

#### **Opportunities:**

- In which areas are the good opportunities facing this project?
- What are the interesting trends that you are aware of?

#### **Threats:**

- What obstacles does this project face?
- Down the road, who or what will be a force for detriment?

When this analysis is done in a realistic and candid way, it can be very informative – both in terms of pointing out what needs to be done, and in putting various issues into proper perspective.

#### **The Muskegon Area-wide Plan SWOT Analysis:**

On July 30, 2002, the consultant team and the steering committee convened to assess the existing and future conditions of Muskegon County. Leslie Kettren and Tom Coleman from HNTB facilitated a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis exercise. The Steering Committee was divided into four groups and each group was asked to list at least five Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing Muskegon County. The strengths and weaknesses represented current conditions and opportunities and threats represented future conditions.

Within the four groups, each person was given three stickers to place next to the most important issues that were listed on the SWOT sheets. After each person ranked their top choices, each

group selected a spokesperson that reported out the top rated issues. These were recorded on four separate summary sheets with SWOT headings. The group as a whole was then asked to rate the top issues by placing a sticker on the most important of these items. Two graphics representing these findings are attached: (1) All Issues Mentioned, and (2) Top Rated Issues.

### **SWOT Results:**

All of the Issues Mentions were:

#### Strengths

- Wild land areas
- Lake fronts
- Skilled labor force
- Rural atmosphere
- Good road system
- Retail opportunities
- Shoreline
- Diverse population
- Recreational opportunities
- Quality of life
- Sense of community/pride
- Economic diversity
- Non-profit organizations
- Abundant natural resources
- Strong agricultural community
- New industrial parks
- High level and amount of service agencies
- Community events and activities/fun times/tourism
- Low cost of living
- Less traffic congestion
- Slower paced lifestyle/laid back/friendly
- Available open land
- People willing to work together
- Recent growth/development
- County wastewater system
- Active environmental groups/awareness
- Local parks/park systems

#### Weaknesses

- County-wide participation in recreational activities
- Lack of downtown/lakefront planning
- Lack of inter-governmental cooperation
- Small airport
- Failure to develop existing manufacturing base
- Too many governments

- Inner city dilapidation
- No County-wide Master Plan
- Lack of long term vision
- Strong apathy towards the whole
- Lack of public transportation
- Community potential not recognized
- "Health of City" problems
- Declining industrial base
- "Old foundry town" image
- Limited financial resources (lack of philanthropists/low mean income)
- Environmental issues/problems
- Multiple local governmental entities
- Lack of planning coordination
- Lack of connection of infrastructure
- Poor community image
- Public apathy/lack of involvement and communication
- Lack of integration - racial and economic

#### Opportunities

- Provide access from across the lake (ferry)
- More bike trails/paths
- Strengthen image as a tourist destination
- Inter-governmental teams
- New County leadership
- Recreational development
- Utilize existing resources (organizations such as MAF, WMSRDC)
- Airport expansion
- Wastewater management
- We still have time to plan
- Strong infrastructure in core communities (sewer, water, roads, etc.)
- Growing education investments (higher education)
- Shoreline development (Smart Zone)
- Agricultural preservation
- MAP - Cooperation of entities involved
- Smart Zone development
- Muskegon waterfront development
- Education system
- Expansion of recreational opportunities
- Redevelopment of the downtowns - Muskegon & Muskegon Heights

#### Threats

- Loss of rural land/farms/access to local markets
- Over development of the waterfront areas (lakes & rivers)

- High cost of needed infrastructure
- Air & water quality deterioration
- Contamination of wastewater site
- Fractionalization of land uses
- Concentration of poverty in central cities
- Historical image (high crime rates/smelly foundry town)
- Apathy
- Urban sprawl
- Breakdown in community cooperation
- Governor Engler
- Globalism - local industries owned by outsiders
- Lack of cohesive vision
- Health care/Elderly care
- Out migration of jobs (good paying ones)
- Deterioration of inner cities/downtowns
- Lack of public transportation opportunities
- Lack of public communication tools
- Lack of strong County leadership
- Parochialism (narrow-minded thinking)

The Steering Committee voted the following as the Top Rated Issues:

#### Strengths

- Abundant Natural Resources
- Recreation Opportunities
- Waterfront/Recreation
- Lakefronts (inland also)

#### Weaknesses

- Lack of Long Term Vision
- Too Many Governments
- Apathy
- Lack of Downtown/Lakefront Planning
- Image (outside perceptions)

#### Opportunities

- Downtown Redevelopment
- There is Still Time to Plan
- Shoreline Development/Smart Zone
- Cooperation for MAP

#### Threats

- Air/Water Deterioration/Environmental Concerns
- Degeneration of Downtown/Inner City

- Breakdown in Community Cooperation

**Next Steps:**

The issues gathered from the SWOT Analysis will lead into the formulation of a questionnaire for a general population telephone survey. The survey is a statistically valid, quantitative method to measure public opinion. Surveys provide attitudinal, preference, opinion and demographic information. Achieving consensus among all affected constituencies becomes easier when using this type of survey instrument. From the results of this survey, the consultant team will be able to identify critical issues, points of conflict and further refine and focus the material for the first set of community forums.

As the project moves through these various stages of analyses, the vision, goals, objectives and policies of the Muskegon Area-wide Plan will become more obvious.