

A. General Land Use

Existing Conditions

Although much industry has left the shores of Muskegon Lake over the past several decades the physical remnants of its industrial past still remain in the form of the numerous jetties, wharves and docks which dot the shoreline. Because of its history, the southern shoreline of Muskegon Lake has a pronounced “jagged”, or uneven profile which stands in marked contrast to the northern shore which saw much less cutting, filling and dredging.

Although pockets of industrial “scar tissue” can be found along the entire length of shoreline, from Bluffton (sand mining) to the Causeway (power plant), the most intensive industrial uses were generally concentrated between what is today the Great Lakes Marina on the west, to what *was* the Teledyne - Continental Motors property on the east. Along this approximately 3 mile stretch are a number of sites which have been deemed (contaminated) “facilities” pursuant to recent site assessment activities. Many others have been identified as having underground storage tanks (UST sites).

Recent improvements in this area include the SPX development and Heritage Landing, both in the immediate vicinity of downtown. The most pristine sections of shoreline are generally at the extreme east and west. Bluffton/Harbourtown and Richards Park/ Veteran’s Park respectively.

General Recommendations:

Greater Mixture of Land Uses

As a visible reminder of the lakefront’s utilitarian history, large tracts of waterfront land remain in a semi-industrial or *de-industrialized* state. Much of this property, although rezoned for more waterfront compatible use, remains in the hands of a relatively small number of landowners who have not sought to redevelop their properties to their “highest and best” use..

The reasons for the present inertia may include: residual commercial/ industrial activity, environmental cleanup concerns, land speculation and/or a lack of recent development pressure. Although greatly improved over recent years by projects such as Heritage Landing and the Great Lakes and Hartshorn marinas, these facilities have generally failed to



spur significant private investment along the water.

By increasing the mixture of land uses along the lake to include more housing, public recreation and other waterfront compatible uses, the city will become physically oriented to the water instead of turning its back to it. With a wider variety of uses, the lakeshore will be animated with a variety of year-round, 24 hour activities, and more fully integrated into the larger city.



Bird's eye view of the southern shore of Muskegon Lake, circa 1940. Much of the industry that fueled the City's booming wartime economy, was located directly along the shore.



The shoreline in the 1990s. Sections of waterfront have been reclaimed for public use such as Heritage Landing (foreground).

Relocation of Industry

Increasing the mixture of land uses along the lake requires opening up large sections of shoreline for uses such as recreation and housing. In many instances this may involve the movement of existing land intensive activities such as industry and bulk handling in order to effectuate the necessary changes.

Although certain “benign” industries should be allowed to remain on the lake, the relocation of several non-water dependent industries inland would have to be facilitated. Those industries that are dependent on water frontage should be allowed to remain on the lake, or relocated to a “central port” location.

Key objectives in relocation are mitigating existing visual and traffic impacts, the utilization of existing deep water berths and the availability of nearby transportation linkages.

Unify the Lakefront and Improve Public Access.

As alluded to in the introduction, existing public access points along the lake

are rather disjointed and poorly linked. The City has already undertaken remedial efforts in this regard through the construction of Shoreline Drive



A “step down” development pattern would help accentuate Muskegon’s modest topography and protect views. The lakeward end of Third Street should terminate with a strong visual element.

and the pending construction of the Lakeshore Trail; a project designed to serve as the recreational spine of the waterfront.

Expanding on the success of projects such as the aforementioned Lakeshore Trail as well as Heritage Landing should be a top priority of the City’s lakefront redevelopment efforts. New

recreational nodes should be created which tie into the bike trail. Active recreational spaces for sports activities, are particularly needed.

Downtown - Waterfront Focal Point

An equally critical land use goal, and one directly related to the above, is to “wed” downtown to the lakefront. The *downtown* waterfront should be used to accommodate a variety of public and quasi-public facilities that will both feed, and be fed, by downtown.

(Aquarium, cross-lake ferry, Maritime Museum, public pier, housing, outdoor markets, shops, planetarium-observatory, arboretum, botanical gardens, amphitheater, public sports complex etc.)

It is critical that these facilities be located in a fairly dense pattern so that pedestrian cross-traffic and spill-over into downtown is fostered. The dedication of a waterfront site primarily for public cultural and recreational use, in direct proximity to downtown, will help catalyze the “synergy” currently lacking in both.