

E. Historic Resources Inventory

Existing Conditions

Few of the City's impressive collection of historic buildings are actually located directly on the lakefront. Most are located in the heart of downtown, or in the several designated historic districts contiguous with it. However, contained within the City's premier historic district (Clay-Western) are the waterfront buildings which comprise the historic Mart Dock.

The importance of these buildings goes well beyond their aesthetic qualities. These are Works Progress Administration (WPA) era structures which serve as a lasting reminder of the New Deal's impact in Muskegon. They are also emblematic of the City's seafaring tradition and perhaps best define an industrial iconography of Muskegon in the early 20th Century. One (the former Mart Auditorium), served as the City's first public auditorium and ice rink. The other was both a warehouse and passenger terminal for thousands of people who visited the City by ferry

from places such as Chicago, Milwaukee and Sheboygan, WI.

Both buildings add a distinctive historic character to the downtown waterfront, and once restored, could compare favorably to similar waterfront reuse projects in such places as Baltimore (the Powerhouse), San Francisco (Ghiradelli Chocolate Factory, Cannery and Embarcadero), Monterey, CA (Cannery Row), Boston (Fanueil Hall, Quincy Market), Chicago (Navy Pier), Alexandria VA (the Torpedo Factory)

Other waterfront historic resources include the former Waterfront Center and nearby buildings, and the intimately scaled Bluffton "Actor's Colony" with its significant supply of Midwest vernacular beach cottages and bungalows.

A number of non-fixed historic resources also have the potential to provide historic reference points along Muskegon Lake. These include the USS Silversides currently berthed in the Muskegon channel, the Milwaukee Clipper car ferry berthed at the end of the McCracken Street wharf, and the Muskegon Trolley cars which make regular summer runs along Lakeshore Drive.

Recommendations:

Adaptive Re-Use

- Work with property owners to preserve and/ or adaptively reuse historic properties (Mart Dock, Waterfront Center, Shaw-Walker).
- Increase awareness of historic preservation tax credits, facade improvement grants and other incentives for historically sensitive renovations.
- Dedicate the Bluffton "Actors Colony" as the City's 9th historic district, and/ or nominate it to the National Register of Historic Places.
- Work to locate a downtown location for the Silversides and Milwaukee Clipper, and help secure grants and in-kind services for same.



The Mart Dock was one of the few additions to the City's building stock during the Depression (above). It served as a combination wharf, auditorium and outdoor market.



Although the buildings have suffered from poor maintenance over the years, they retain much of their historic character (below). Center: Parapet detail. Inset: Navy Pier, Chicago.

