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Downtown



Opportunities

- » Perception of downtown
- » Investment in local retail, services, & entertainment
- » 2nd-story residential
- » Business recruitment
- » Food trucks
- » Partnerships
- » Technology
- » Redevelopment parcels



Challenges

- » Deteriorating facades with lack of design standards
- » Limited streetscaping options with MDOT highway in downtown
- » Lacking streetscape tree canopy
- » Parking



Connection to Major Land Use Implications

- » The deterioration and lack of architectural cohesion of downtown facades will make it more difficult to sell buildings and/or attract new businesses
- » Commercial vacancy should be actively monitored to avoid hitting an unfavorable tipping point; market the potential redevelopment properties
- » Streetscaping improvements, which entice residents and visitors downtown have to follow MDOT's schedule, which can delayed desired upgrades
- » Increased second floor occupancy can help secure building owner's cash flow and keep them invested in downtown
- » Providing a dedicated space and consistent regulations for food trucks (or other mobile vending) is a tool for piloting new ideas with the ultimate goal of converting them into downtown brick and mortar businesses
- » Parking is a challenging land use that should be used in place of a higher and better use.

Downtown is the geographic and figurative heart of Reading. Like many small cities in the Midwest, the downtown has suffered from the global shifts to online shopping, competition with big box stores, and stagnating wages for workers. These changes do not preclude a downtown from thriving but necessitate new, multi-faceted strategies and creative partnerships and programming to build a positive perception. This section will describe how the downtown is managed, its challenges, and potential solutions.

HOW IS THE DOWNTOWN MANAGED?

Tax Increment Finance Authority

The downtown's importance to the city requires that it be managed by a separate governing organization. The Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA) is a volunteer authority, formed in 1981 under the auspices of the Public Act 450 of 1980 (which has since been codified to PA 57 of 2018) with the mission to:

“re-establish and maintain the vitality of the city of Reading by increasing the tax base and fostering industrial and commercial development and redevelopment.”

The TIFA's boundaries encompasses the majority of the city's eastern half. Within these boundaries, the TIFA can capture property tax revenue from the incremental increase in value (compared to its base value) and use that additional revenue to fund projects. Known as “tax increment finance” it is an economic development tool often employed for making wide scale improvements within a designated area. Under the state act, the TIFA is enabled:

- » To correct and prevent deterioration in residential, commercial, and industrial areas

- » To authorize the acquisition and disposal of interests in real and personal property
- » To authorize the creation and implementation of development plans and development areas
- » To promote residential and economic growth
- » To authorize the issuance of bonds and other evidences of indebtedness
- » To levy certain taxes
- » To authorize the use of tax increment financing

DOWNTOWN CHALLENGES

Façades

The downtown core is one block long on M-49, known locally as Main Street. The core follows a traditional development pattern of two story, brick buildings that are strung together with an uninterrupted façade, punctuated with architectural features of the era it was built: arches, parapets, and cornices. The parking is in the rear of these buildings so that the emphasis remains on the building's beauty and the wide decorated sidewalks. The right of way is dotted with planter boxes, historic lighting posts, benches, and

In the last few years, TIFA has used the funds to:

- » Remove a blighted structure
- » Maintain parking lots
- » Sell land in the industrial park for development
- » Purchase properties
- » Engage in the state program, Redevelopment Ready Communities



Downtown facades have a mix of building materials.

waste receptacles. Over time however, the condition of some facades has deteriorated, and equally consequential to the corridor's aesthetic, exterior building materials from different eras have been incorporated, chipping away the facades' visual cohesion and historic theme. Typically, lax enforcement of design standards is a sign that the market is too weak to demand that property owners comply with the more expensive, more impactful requirements. Public boards are faced with a difficult tradeoff: increase commercial occupancy and dilute the historic character of the downtown or hold the design standards high and risk higher vacancy rates.

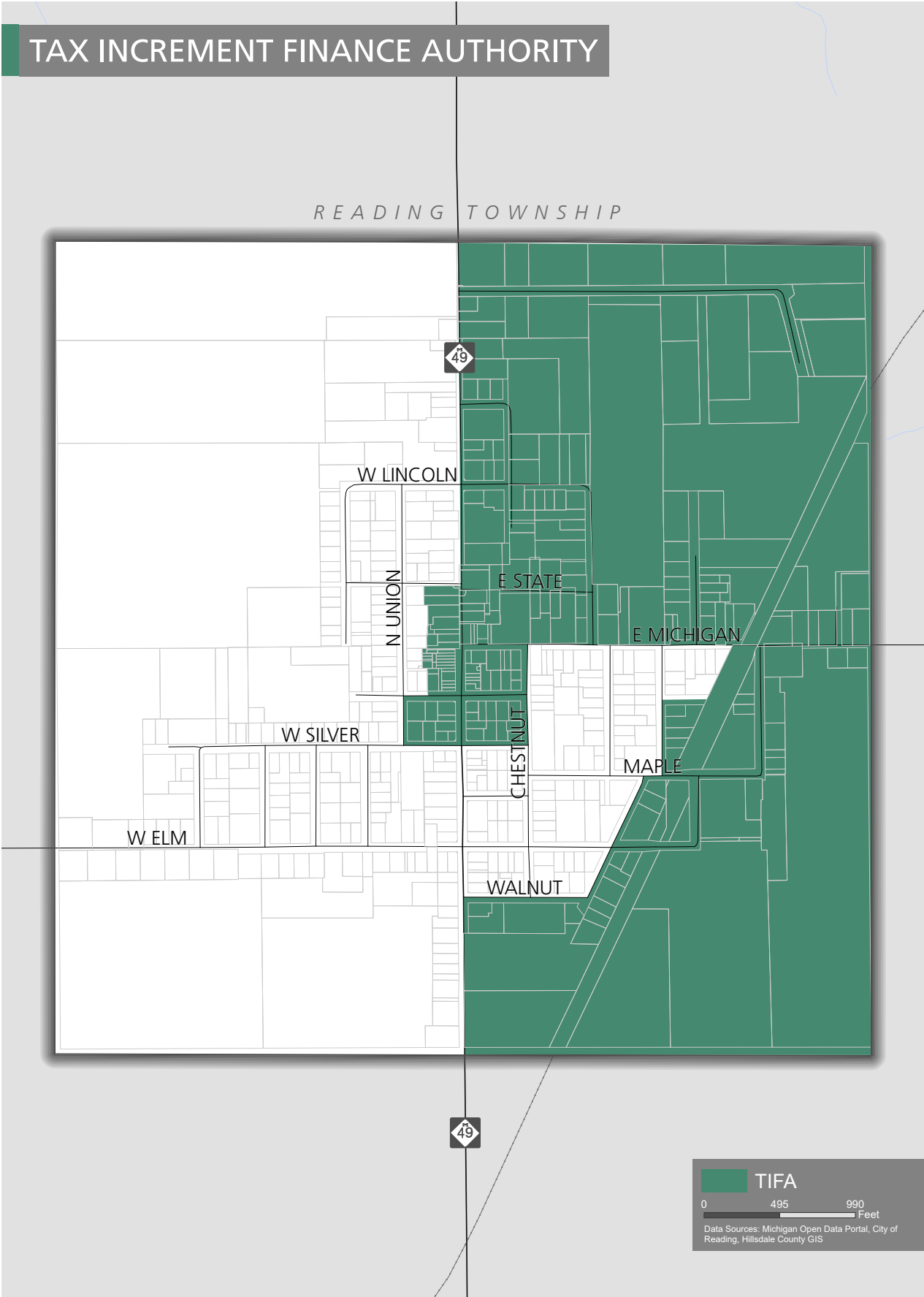
The TIFA acknowledges the importance of its heritage and offers façade improvement grants with a 75/25 ratio to applicants that make historically accurate improvements visible from the right-of-way. The projects are limited to two per twelve-month period and are capped at \$7,500 (although there is room to grant more). Leveraging public funds to spark private investment is a common approach to upgrading a downtown, however, this program has had limited effect. Despite this program being marketed to numerous property owners, in the last eight years, only the library has successfully received and used the grant. Improvements to the program are necessary to distribute more funds; granting a larger sum of money to make it financially worthwhile for applicants, helping with cost estimates, streamlining the application process, and/or changing promotion strategies could make the program more appealing to building owners.

As much of that time spanned the Great Recession, facade grants were not available during that time. However, as TIFA's financial capacity grows, so should funding for façade improvements. The timing for proactive improvements is opportune; as more visitors frequent the downtown, its simultaneous revamping could build on the momentum of increased foot traffic.

Streets and Streetscaping

Aside from façades, the public realm – made up of the right-of-way and publicly owned parcels – is where a community can add appeal, attraction, and convenience to its downtown. The success of such streetscaping features, like benches, artwork, landscaping, and wayfinding signage requires consistent monitoring to determine if it is achieving its function. If you have benches on the sidewalk, are they being used? Would they provide a better respite if located in the shade or in a quieter location? In 2009, the TIFA invested in several

Map 10: Tax Increment Finance Authority





Downtown bench

elements of streetscaping using MDOT grants: replaced the streetlights with decorative lighting, converted storefront entrances to be ADA compliant, installed stamped concrete on the sidewalks, and repainted the crosswalks.

There are limits to dimensional changes that can be implemented on Main Street. Having a MDOT highway run through your downtown comes with the benefit of increased exposure to your businesses but also with a loss of control in modifications to the right of way. For example, on average 2,950 vehicles pass through the downtown daily bringing visibility to the community's local businesses, but if the city wanted to widen the sidewalk or add a stoplight or pave the road, it would first have to go through MDOT who works on a predetermined project schedule.

Tree Canopy

The most noticeable missing feature from the streetscape is a tree canopy. Trees help to soften a hard landscape

and provide a buffer between pedestrians and fast-moving vehicles; the tree canopy offers a sense of enclosure and security from traffic. The investment in trees has shown to pay off when properly cared for: businesses on tree-lined streets show 12% higher income streams.¹ Trees are a placemaking feature that can help convert a pass-through downtown into a destination. Beauty of a downtown matters, and it will require public and private investment and enforcement of design high standards. Trees do come with certain challenges that are discussed in the table "Common Tree Concerns."

Parking

Insufficient parking in the downtown was mentioned several times in the community survey. Supplying the "correct" number of parking spaces is always a challenge because demand varies by day of the week, time of day, and the changing popularity of the business and events. The common



Downtown planter boxes.

Table 9: Common Tree Concerns

Common Concern	Solution
Trees block commercial signs and storefronts	Co-design trees and signs.
Trees cost money	There is an initial investment, but the benefits grow as the tree grows in property value, air and water quality, and stormwater management.
Trees get into power lines and underground pipes	Careful choices of tree species suited to the root and canopy space available.
Tree roots crack the sidewalk	Provide enough space to the tree to grow so that it doesn't have to push through the pavement
Trees are messy	Careful plant selection can reduce problems of falling flowers, fruit, and leave.
Tree upkeep and maintenance is expensive	Yearly tree care and maintenance prevent major tree failures. The cost can be shared by all merchants in the district.

Source: *Main Street News No. 263 August 2009*

complaint from survey respondents was that visitors now exceed the number of parking spaces available, largely due to the city's new adult use marijuana businesses, and visitors overflow parking goes to the neighborhoods.

Municipalities have much to consider when expanding parking capacity.

While they serve their purpose in peak demand, most of the time, unoccupied parking lots create other challenges – the cost of maintenance, ponding and becoming sources of contaminated runoff, detracting from the walkability of downtown, and the loss of potential tax revenue if another use could locate

on site. There are 104 parking spots; enough for nearly 10% of the population and 20% of households; these numbers would signify that there is sufficient parking, given that most households are within walking distance from the downtown.

Fortunately, Reading has a historic building pattern with parking in the rear. This is where it should remain; side and corner parking lots remove façade continuity and make it less likely that patrons will want to stroll through the downtown. Second, all attempts to screen parking lots should be employed. Fencing, bollards, trees, and vegetation remove the immediate sight of parking from the streetscape. A distinct color sign for parking can indicate to patrons where to park.

Lastly, a reversal of parking minimums to parking maximums can help right size parking lots and/or provide flexibility to businesses to provide parking without crossing a threshold. Parking formulas are often out of date and not monitored for efficiency. At the very least, parking formulas determined by land use should be reviewed and adjusted where necessary.

Commercial Vacancy

Vacancy begets vacancy. The domino effect of closed businesses is real, and should be tracked to avoid hitting a threshold that makes a recovery even harder. Currently, the commercial vacancy rate is close to 50% (11 out of 24 ground floor buildings are vacant), but should remain below 10% to be a healthy hub of commerce.

Land Use Implications for Downtown Challenges

- » The deterioration and lack of architectural cohesion of downtown facades will make it more difficult to sell buildings in the future/attract new businesses

- » Commercial vacancy should be actively monitored to avoid hitting an unfavorable tipping point
- » Streetscaping improvements, which entice residents and visitors downtown have to follow MDOT's schedule, which can delay desired upgrades

DOWNTOWN OPPORTUNITY

Perception

In the community survey, the respondents were split over how downtown has changed in the last five years. Excluding the recent effects of COVID-19, 40% think the downtown has improved, 40% think it has declined, and 20% think it has stayed largely the same. During this time of inactivity due to ever-changing orders from the state, it is time to plan for design, promotion, and business starts to hit the ground running when the world opens up again. The community's current perception of the downtown can serve as a baseline, an opportunity, to build momentum over the next five years so that the majority of residents can confidently state the downtown's ascent when surveyed again.

Market Data

Esri Business Analyst, a proprietary software program, compiles demographic and consumer data that provides a richer level of detail when analyzing residents' social and economic behavior. Esri groups retail into 13 categories and estimates the retail gap based on the supply and demand of each retail category. Where money leaves the community, it is called a leakage, and where money is being drawn into the community from outside is called a surplus. Surpluses in Reading's market are found in four categories; two are related to automotive uses through the sale of automobiles and automobile

Table 10: Retail Surplus and Leakage

Retail Type	Number of Establishments	Leakage/Surplus	Amount of Retail Gap
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	1	Surplus	\$4,840,504
Furniture & Home Furnishings	0	Leakage	\$256,460
Electronics & Appliance	0	Leakage	\$252,683
Building Materials, Garden Equipment, & Supply	0	Leakage	\$663,306
Food and Beverage	0	Leakage	\$1,559,925
Health & Personal Care	0	Leakage	\$658,693
Gasoline	2	Surplus	\$11,622,876
Clothing and Accessories	0	Leakage	\$383,833
Sporting goods, hobby book & Music	0	Leakage	\$215,655
General merchandise	1	Leakage	\$693,342
Miscellaneous	3	Surplus	\$1,557,325
Nonstore Retailers	1	Surplus	\$1,903,786
Food Services & Drinking	3	Leakage	\$55,425
Total surplus	7	--	\$19,924,491
Total leakage	1	--	\$4,739,592

Source: ESRI Business Analyst, 2017

parts and accessories, the other two are nonstore retailers (online purchases), and miscellaneous (florist, office supplies, stationary, gift shop, use merchandise). Even though the surpluses generated far exceed the leakage, the wealth is not well distributed as almost 60% of the surplus goes to two gas stations. The leakages appear in nine of the retail categories as shown in the table "Retail Surpluses and Leakages."

In Reading, the leakages correspond to retail categories where no establishments provide such goods. The retail gap represents an opportunity for capturing at least a portion of the money that is being spent elsewhere. The survey results reflect the cause of the \$4.7 million in annual leakage; 50% of survey-takers reported that what prevents them from going downtown more often is "there is little/nothing I want to do" and "there is little/nothing that I want to buy." Also noted in the survey by nearly a dozen respondents was that existing businesses prevent them from going downtown,

namely the aggressive soliciting of the marihuana dispensaries to people on the sidewalk is unpleasant.

When asked what type of retail and services residents would like to see come downtown and how often they would frequent such places, it becomes clearer where the demands lies. The majority of residents recorded that they would visit the following retail categories monthly or more frequently:

- » Food and beverage (96.3%)
- » General merchandise (81.4%)
- » Building material, garden equipment and supply (81.4%)
- » Health, beauty, and personal care (75.9%)
- » Sporting goods, hobby, books, and music (66.7%)
- » Clothing and accessories (65.5%)

If only 20% of that money spent on retail was kept in the community,



Ray's Tavern window all decked out for Christmas received a BEST BURGER IN USA TODAY!



Potential open space downtown that can be used for programming.

nearly \$1 million would flow through the city annually. In a study conducted by the American Independent Business Alliance, an estimated 48% of each purchase at local independent businesses recirculated locally, compared to 14% of purchases at chain stores.² This means that local business owners are more likely to buy inventory and equipment locally and spend and donate their discretionary income locally. On top of that, local businesses generate more jobs and wealth for the community. Knowing the multiplier effect of local business, the TIFA should concentrate its resources on the expansion of existing business and on the creation of new business with local investors.

Similarly, survey-takers were asked what types of services/spaces they would want to see in the downtown; respondents reported that they would visit the following monthly or more frequently:

- » Restaurants/cafes (93.2%)
- » Bars/entertainment venues (71.9%)
- » Recreation/public spaces (69.6%)

When residents were asked what draws them downtown, the most common answer selected by more than half of the survey-takers, was dining (51.7%), followed by services (48.3%), and then events (31.7%). Services and entertainment ranked higher than retail which reflects the trend towards experience over convenience. Because people can buy what they need online and have it delivered to their homes, the downtown has to offer an experience to attract patrons. For example, in addition to a craft store selling product, it can host classes, feature students' work in the store, and/or throw an event to showcase local projects. A clothing store can host fashion shows and exclusive peeks at new inventory. Downtown businesses can no longer only rely on local clientele if they are to compete in a globalized economy, yet to make that transition to a multi-channel, technology-based marketing plan, they will likely need the support of the TIFA to make these changes.

Connection to Housing

Another way to build demand for local business is to increase density and

foot traffic on Main Street. Bringing potential clients in closer proximity to businesses is a tried and true method for business retention, and a selling point to attract new businesses to town. Because of the age of downtown's building stock, many are outfitted with residential potential on the second floor. To date, there are 11 occupied rentals downtown, but the potential for how many could be converted is unknown. It is recommended that an inventory of potential second stories units is conducted and that the city works with business owners to convert or rehab these units as an economic development strategy for revitalizing the downtown.

Business Recruitment

Active business recruitment is a full-time job. And when there is no dedicated staff to handle this part of a downtown revitalization, it often gets pushed to the back burner. Survey respondents recorded business recruitment as their top priority for downtown; 61% of respondents selected this answer as a way to fill the missing retail and services in the downtown. The survey also asked if residents wanted to start or expand a business, nearly one in five of the respondents answered affirmatively but were unaware of resources to help them get started. A staff person could reach out to interested investors, share resources with them, and connect them to the correct building to start their business.

Food Trucks (Mobile Vending)

Food trucks are a modern example of how to recruit new business to a city. By providing a space, reasonable regulations, and consistent exposure, cities can benefit from "testing" new businesses with lower stakes. Not only does this flexibility behoove the entrepreneur, but it can also benefit the city as the food truck experiments with its products and gains popularity before investing in building stock. With already

established patronage, food truck operators can convert more confidently to a building, likely with greater longevity than an unknown newcomer. A food truck ordinance should clearly outline where the trucks are permitted, hours of operation, access management, and a collaboration with existing restaurants to mitigate any conflict. Weekly food trucks are already a part of Reading's landscape, the next step is to guide them to a vacant building to retain all of their hard work and customer following.

Partnerships

Reading has a working history with the Hillsdale Economic Development Partnership (HEDP), a non-profit, investor-governed organization focused on increasing employment opportunities, private sector capital investment, and tax base.³ Reading has connected interested business owners to the HEDP for their services in teaching how to write a business plan, explaining financing options, and showing available properties for businesses. Reading also works closely with the Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce, a membership-based organization that offers marketing, networking, and business resources.

In addition to the focusing on placemaking, the TIFA can actively seek out and connect current and potential business owners to resources that will cultivate talent and keep investment in the community. In the same vein, the TIFA can work with business owners nearing retirement to develop a transition plan, as another common way that commercial vacancy grows over time is when business owners retire, they close shop instead of grooming someone to take over.

Technology

Three quarters of survey respondents were unsure of whether the businesses

they visit downtown have a website. When asked if purchasing products or services online would mean they'd shop locally more often, the results were mixed. The responses for "true" and "not sure" were split around 42%. When the responses are filtered for the younger age group, 25-34, two-thirds of respondents agree they'd shop more locally if they could make purchases online. Even if business owners are not convinced by the local clientele's willingness to shop online, embracing technology means they can expand their platform to the entire globe through popular third-party websites. In smaller cities, where density is low and wages are strapped, the cost of maintaining a local brick and mortar can be alleviated by expanding its base on the internet.

REDEVELOPMENT PROPERTIES

In addition to understanding what types of commerce is missing from the local market, and what the community would like to see, the TIFA should focus on matching appropriate building stock

to desired new business. For example, if the community wants to see a new restaurant come to town, then the priority would be to find a building with a commercial kitchen to market for that purpose. There are three major sites that the TIFA would like to redevelop and through the survey asked residents what they'd like to see there. That information is summarized per property on the following pages.

In addition to these three properties, it is best practice for the city to keep a list of other vacant, underutilized, or abandoned properties that can be redeveloped. The data would contain the sites' basic characteristics and uses that could feasibly occupy the space, for example, some data points to collect include square footage, parking availability, utility connection, contamination, compliance with building code, building features, among others. The database should be regularly updated so that it can be marketed to appropriate businesses. Moreover, the city can put together packets that share useful data for a potential investor.



MEDC grant money used to rehabilitate rental units on the second floor.

The Opera House (116 Michigan Street)



Property Description

The TIFA purchased this property in June 2020. Known locally as the “opera house,” its second floor features a domed roof and staged used previously for performances. The ground floors have featured several different types of businesses: a hardware store, a funeral home, a movie rental store. Once occupied, it can repeat its history with retail on the ground floor and entertainment above. The TIFA is actively working to seal it up by installing new windows to prevent further deterioration. Due to the year it was built and its vacancy, the building has not been brought up to building code.

Basic Site Information

Zone	B-2, Central Business District
Square footage	11,696 (both floors)
Utilities	Connected to municipal water/sewer
Building features	Historic, freight elevator, new windows
Owner	TIFA
Sales price (\$62K)	Requires renovation

Top Desired Uses from the Community

Desired Use	% of Mentions	Survey Comments
Retail	25.5%	Antiques, boutique, food co-op, bookstore, hardware, flower shop
Cafe	20%	Coffee shop/bakery
Teens/kids	10.9%	Somewhere for kids to go
Not a marihuana shop	9.1%	Something other than marihuana paraphernalia
Housing	7.3%	Apartments
Entertainment	7.3%	Movies, arcade, venue for local performances

Source: Master Plan Survey, 2020

The Corner Lot (150 S. Main Street)



Property Description

This corner property was once occupied by the city's only three-story historic building. However, due to limited maintenance, the building was deemed dangerous by a structural engineer that was too costly to repair. In the beginning of 2018, the TIFA demolished the building and now the vacant parcel is ready for redevelopment. Its corner exposure, and adjacency to a vacant lot and another business make it a good candidate for land combination to host larger outdoor dining areas, food truck rallies, or shared and programmed open space.

Basic Site Information

Zone	B-2, Central Business District
Square footage	6,098
Utilities	Connected to municipal water/sewer
Site features	Vacant, corner parcel
Owner	TIFA
Sales price	Negotiable; willing to give property to applicant with business plan

Top Desired Uses from the Community

Desired Use	% of Mentions	Survey Comments
Parking lot	28.3%	Nice paved parking lot, not a structure, provide overflow for patrons so they don't have to park in the neighborhoods
Public space	22.6%	Green space, community garden, small park with trees and benches
Retail	13.2%	Grocery store, general store, small local business
Café/bakery	9.4%	Coffee shop

Source: Master Plan Survey, 2020

The Vacant Lots (209, 213, 229 S. Main Street, 100 E. Silver)



Property Description

The four adjoining parcels are vacant (structures have been removed) and form an L-shape around the corner of Main and Silver to sit at the gateway to downtown. Formerly, the corner lot was a gas station and therefore should be reviewed for environmental contamination. The parcels are serviced by a sidewalk.

Basic Site Information

Zone	B-2, Central Business District
Acres	0.69
Utilities	Connected to municipal water/sewer
Site features	Vacant lot; corner exposure
Owner	TIFA

Top Desired Uses from the Community

Desired Use	% of Mentions	Survey Comments
Public space	23.4%	Green space, kid's recreation area, small park
Restaurant	19.2%	A small new restaurant, fast food
Services	12.8%	Gym, pharmacy, medical offices
Grocery	10.6%	Small grocery store for fresh food; with a pharmacy
Parking lot	10.6%	Expand parking for nearby businesses
Retail	10.6%	Butcher shop, snack shack, candy store

Source: Master Plan Survey, 2020

These property information packages could share the survey results for the what community wants, the number of visitors that enter the city on a monthly basis, exposure on major thoroughfare, and other relevant market data to entice them to the city.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The TIFA manages a much larger territory than just the downtown, and economic development has a much larger scope than the central corridor. This section talks about the larger regional economy and how Reading can position itself for greater growth within it.

Employment Sectors

The employment figures and the survey results tell a larger story of the regional economy over time. When the results to the question “why did you move to Reading” are filtered by decade, survey-takers selected “job availability” as the second most common reason prior to 2000. After 2000, “job availability”

slips towards the bottom of the list and “housing affordability” rises to the top. The change in what draws residents to the city over time reflects economic instability in the region as jobs become less readily available, and as a result wages have to be stretched further for lower-cost housing.

Summary of Employment Changes

Losses

Construction suffered a loss between 2010 and 2018 due to the effects of the Great Recession. Even as the economy rebounded, shortages in skilled labor and materials delayed a full recovery. A loss in agricultural-related jobs is likely due to the continued loss of farmland in the area, but this number could change with the popularity of marihuana grow facilities.⁴ Because adult use marihuana is not recognized by the federal government, it is not officially classified under any employment sector, but if it were classified as agriculture, this sector would have seen growth during this period.

Table 11: Employment Sectors for Reading’s Labor Force

Sector	2010	2018	% Change
Ag/forestry/fishing/hunting/mining	4.9%	1.1%	-77.6%
Construction	7.0%	4.8%	-31.4%
Manufacturing	24.2%	26.8%	10.7%
Wholesale trade	3.4%	1.1%	-67.6%
Retail trade	13.9%	15.8%	13.7%
Transportation and warehousing, utilities	1.8%	3.7%	105.6%
Information	0.0%	2.9%	290.0%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	9.5%	3.1%	-67.4%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	3.1%	4.8%	54.8%
Educational services, and health care, and social assistance	21.4%	25.9%	21.0%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	4.1%	6.1%	48.8%
Other services, except public administration	6.2%	3.3%	-46.8%
Public administration	0.5%	0.7%	40.0%

Source: ACS 2018 and 2010 5-Year Estimates - The figures refer to the employment sectors that Reading residents work in – not necessarily located within the city of Reading.



A property in the industrial park.

Gains

Manufacturing and educational and healthcare services remain dominant employment sectors; over half of the city's labor force works in those two sectors. The city's labor force is firmly rooted in "old economy" jobs (commodity-based, manual production) and "new economy" jobs (knowledge-based services and communication). This strikes a good balance as a diversified economy and labor force are more resilient to potential shocks and stressors to the system.

PROJECTED AREAS OF GROWTH THROUGH 2026

Competitive Advantage

Using 2010 data, the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy found that Hillsdale County had a strong competitive advantage in the following:

- » advanced materials
- » agribusiness

- » food processing, and technology
- » fabricated metal product and manufacturing
- » machinery and manufacturing
- » transportation equipment manufacturing
- » primary metal manufacturing
- » electrical equipment, appliances, and components.

To ensure that a competitive advantage is not wasted, the city of Reading should work with the County to strategize how to fill the industrial park with said industries. One way to determine competitive advantage is to calculate the location quotient (LQ), which is a simple estimate of an industry's concentration of jobs in comparison to the region, state, or nation. For example, if the share of workers in food processing is divided by the share of food processing workers in the state, and the total is greater than one, food processing would be considered a

concentrated industry that is likely to be export-oriented and have a competitive advantage.

Another key indicator to the success of these established industries is a trained workforce. Should the emerging workforce not be adequately trained to replace retiring workers in this field, then the city should prioritize growing industries with an ample supply of workers, or develop programs to help fill those gaps. Working with the school district to determine how training can be incorporated into the curriculum or as an extracurricular activity to restore a shrinking workforce pipeline may be necessary to keep a competitive advantage. Some regions have even offered to pay for half of a trainee's wage during the training period, if the industrial business agrees to hire local residents.

Adult Use Marihuana

As of January 2020, the Cannabis Jobs Report estimated 243,700 full-time jobs in legal cannabis, a 15% year over year increase, making it the fastest-growing industry in the U.S.⁵ Michigan's market contributes to the national job growth. As one of the relatively few cities opting in for adult use marihuana, Reading's TIFA district has seen increased interest since its legalization (at the state level) in its northern industrial park. Recently, TIFA has sold 16 acres of land in the industrial park to marihuana grower facilities. From the sale of the land to the new revenue capture, the TIFA's funds are expected to grow significantly and therefore requires an updated TIFA Plan for responsibly and strategically investing captured funds.

In the downtown, cannabis businesses have tracked an average of 400-600 visitors per day in the summer of 2020. This is a major boon for complementary businesses that can take advantage of Michigan and out of state visitors that might otherwise not visit a small town

in such great numbers. Now is the time to market the city's building stock when the values are low enough to not bar independent businesses from entering the Reading market.

High Demand Jobs

Educational attainment and training are key to economic growth. Because over one-third of residents have "some college" and "associates degrees" it is important to find employment sectors that do not require a bachelor's degree to move to Reading. The state agency, Department of Technology, Management, and Budget determined which jobs are in high demand regionally based on levels of education and training. Based on annual openings, growth rates, and wage range, a higher education does correlate to more opportunity and a higher salary, but the table "High Demand Employment by Education/ Training" shows that moderate training outside of a four university can provide in demand jobs with decent wages. With this information, the TIFA can align strategies to invest in or dispose of its land or property to growing employment sectors. Matching available land and infrastructure to uses that can provide good jobs in the city falls precisely in the TIFA's mission.

NEXT STEPS

Revitalization of the downtown will only come with greater professional or community capacity to track data, follow up and improve existing programs, initiate and manage projects, and coordinate with the business owners. Reading could expand capacity by applying for Michigan Main Street, an organization that provides staff and a framework for implementation. If Reading is not accepted into the competitive program, it should consider hiring a TIFA Director to carry out the recommended projects.

Table 12: High Demand Employment by Education/Training

Postsecondary Certificate	Growth	Associates Degree	Growth	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	Growth
Commercial Pilots	24.4%	Physical therapist assistants	37.0%	Software Developers	33.4%
Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians	22.5%	Respiratory therapists	22.5%	Market Research Analysis	32.5%
Massage Therapists	22.1%	Dental hygienists	21.5%	Health Specialties Teachers	27.2%
Dental Assistants	20.9%	Environmental science technicians	20.9%	Industrial Engineers	23.2%
Billing and Posting Clerks	17.3%	Telecommunications Line Installers and Repairers	19.2%	Financial Managers	20.1%
Operating Engineers	16.6%	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	18.8%	Management Analysts	16.5%
Medical Records and Health Information Technicians	13.8%	Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers	15.5%	Mechanical Engineers	14.3%
Computer User Support Specialists	12.8%	Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	14.8%	Sales Manager	14.1%
Roofers	12.4%	HVAC and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	14.3%	Child, Family, and School Social Workers	13.3%
Production, Planning, and Expediting Clerks	11.9%	Industrial Machinery Mechanics	13.1%	Computer and Information Systems Managers	13.1%

Source: Department of Technology, Management, and Budget

Sources

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