

# MUSKEGON HEIGHTS BLIGHT ELIMINATION AND COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

**Prepared For:**

The City of Muskegon Heights

Muskegon County

The Muskegon County Land Bank Authority

**In Partnership With:**

Michigan State University School of Planning, Design & Construction



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is in support of the City of Muskegon Heights' efforts to efficiently use recently allocated Hardest Hit dollars, granted to the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority (MCLBA) for residential demolition and to provide assistance for blight remediation strategies for a long-term reduction in structural and non-structural blight in the City. The City of Muskegon Heights is home to some of the most concentrated blight within Muskegon County and through a partnership with the City of Muskegon Heights, the MCLBA, and Muskegon County, this plan aims to provide a coherent and organized strategy to be followed by local agencies to reduce blight in the City, increase activity in the downtown and improve the quality of life of Muskegon Heights residents.

The methods used to complete this scope of work includes a detailed socioeconomic profile, a cursory analysis of the conditions of all parcels within the project's study area, a rating of the conditions of each face block within the study area, a detailed analysis of the structural conditions of each structure on nine focus blocks (selected based on face-block ratings), a commercial corridor study, a parcel vacancy analysis of structures in the downtown, extensive community input via a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) exercise and a general community preferences survey. The socioeconomic profile of the area includes data which compares conditions in Muskegon Heights with Muskegon County and the State of Michigan in most cases. The parcel condition assessments were completed by the Practicum team and local partners in two separate visits to Muskegon Heights, these windshield surveys assessed all parcels in the study area first in a cursory fashion and then in a more detailed fashion on given blocks using the tool laid out in the Methodology section of this report. Commercial vacancy information was collected from a thorough walking survey, phone calls to businesses and online research. Collected data was mapped in the figures laid out throughout this report. Community input was collected in several ways, mainly via a SWOT session conducted on January 27th, 2015 and via online input for those who could not attend. The input received in these sessions is located in the Appendix of this report. Feedback received in these sessions, in addition to the goals and strategies of the 2012 Muskegon Heights Master Plan guided the recommendations made in this report.

Through the methods conducted above, the Practicum team was able to analyze the study area and determine the existing conditions. In this research the planning team gained a deeper understanding of socioeconomic data for the City of Muskegon Heights including trends within categories such as racial composition, median income, and residential vacancy among others. Since the Great Recession, Muskegon Heights has struggled with each of these issues with median incomes not following statewide trends of a slight rise, and residential vacancy growing. The City has sought the development of a coordinated strategy to confront these challenges.

The research compiled created a foundation for the recommendations, with a focus on blighted residential properties and vacant or abandoned commercial properties. Face block ratings were used to analyze the concentration of blight throughout the study area and when mapped, provided a visual representation of overall block health within the study

area limits. The practicum team found that few areas have a severe concentration of blight and that it seems rather to be dispersed throughout the city. The practicum team also discovered that not all of the current preliminary demolition locations for Hardest Hit funding match with current practices and the “tipping point” model of neighborhood blight elimination deemed in this plan to be the most effective way of undertaking residential blight elimination. In addition, the team discovered potential opportunities for current funding to be used in a more innovative and effective manner.

The practicum team found that 3% of the allocated Community Development Block Grant funding, or \$12,000 is dedicated to code enforcement within the city, and \$20,000 is dedicated to the demolition of blighted homes. The information collected from downtown analyses indicated that the majority of the structures in Downtown, while in good condition, are vacant or underutilized. Of the 58 parcels in the downtown focus area, 27 of them contain vacant buildings, 12 are vacant lots, and 17 have operating businesses. Research indicated that there is a lack of funding for commercial activity within the downtown, an inactive DDA and no known incentives for potential investors.

Based on the analysis, recommendations were made addressing ways to improve residential conditions and improve the downtown commercial area. For residential blight, the recommendations include prioritizing demolition, exploring the feasibility of deconstruction, increasing code enforcement efforts through multiple strategies, and creating a plan for post-demolition activity. Recommendations to revitalize the downtown include conducting a study to examine the potential influence of a façade improvement program, the redevelopment of the Strand Theater, prioritization of downtown (re)development via phasing, and participation in the Redevelopment Ready Communities program. These recommendations together provide a roadmap to reducing structural and non-structural blight in the community, revitalizing existing business districts and attracting new businesses to the Downtown, and most importantly, engaging residents in the improvement of their community.

# INTRODUCTION

## Client Introduction

The clients for this project are the City of Muskegon Heights, Muskegon County and the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority. Direction has been provided by; Consuelo Maxim-Sparrow, Muskegon County Grants Coordinator, Tim Burgess, Muskegon County Land Bank Authority Coordinator, Christopher Dean, Muskegon Heights Fire Chief, Julie Aaron-Shyne, Muskegon Heights Housing and Rehab Specialist, Commissioner Rillastine Wilkins, Muskegon County District Representative, and Kimberly Sims, Muskegon Heights City Councilwoman.

The City of Muskegon Heights applied for funding in the second round of the federal Hardest Hit program and received \$1.8 million for residential demolition in a partnership with the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority (Sidorowicz, 2014). These federal funds in addition to existing funding from the Community Development Block Grant program and other grant making sources provide an opportunity to revitalize distressed communities across the country.

The Clients request a planning document to organize a comprehensive strategy around decreasing blight in the Muskegon Heights community using existing and potential funding sources by capitalizing on new methods to enhance cross-municipal partnerships and funding opportunities.

In all, this plan aims to assist in achieving Goal 1 of the 2012 Muskegon Heights Master Plan, which states, “Make neighborhoods in the City of Muskegon Heights high quality, desirable places to live.”

## Practicum

Practicum is a capstone course in the Urban & Regional Planning Program of Michigan State University. Through this program, MSU partners with planning organizations across the state to produce comprehensive planning documents and solutions to existing community problems. The Practicum program allows graduating planning students to receive real-world experience as planning consultants for a client while simultaneously producing a final document to be used by the partner organization as a living document.

## Project Overview

This project focuses on blight elimination in residential neighborhoods and downtown commercial revitalization. The focus area was chosen through conversations between the practicum team and the client, and is bounded by Sixth Street, Summit Avenue, Wood Street and Hovey Avenue. The purpose of choosing this focus area is to enable the practicum team to compile a realistic amount of data within the given timeframe and use the information as a representation of the city as a whole. This portion of Muskegon

Heights includes the city's entire Downtown, Muskegon Heights High School, Muskegon Heights Middle School, and several residential neighborhoods in addition to city assets, allowing it to be a diverse representation of the City as a whole. This plan will discuss methods for addressing residential and commercial blight in addition to a comprehensive review of current practices, funding opportunities, and applicable methods that could be applied in the City of Muskegon Heights, specifically the study area, in order to maximize blight elimination and community revitalization opportunities.

# SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE

Data for the socioeconomic profile was collected from several sources including multiple US Censuses, the 2009-2013 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Survey and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. The data collected includes the City of Muskegon Heights, Muskegon County and the State of Michigan, and in many cases all three data sets were compared to show differences and similarities in trends. The data was organized into charts, graphs and tables to provide a visual representation of trends, and was then analyzed to provide an understanding of the current conditions of the city of Muskegon Heights and how the community has evolved over the years.

## History

Born in the second industrial revolution, the history of Muskegon Heights dates back to the 1890s. Muskegon Heights was created as a hub for manufacturing in what was at the time, the City of Muskegon. Muskegon Heights' initial land use came about from the sale of almost 1,000 acres of land, divided into 2800 lots, each purchase leading to the pavement of roads and sidewalks, the construction of a belt line railroad, a freight depot and factories. In June of 1891, Muskegon Heights became a Village consisting of 300 residents, followed by designation as a city. The City struggled to maintain business throughout the Great Depression but it picked back up in the post-World War II era and the population grew substantially to about 18,000 residents. The majority of housing available was single-family detached homes, with about 70% owner occupancy (City of Muskegon Heights, 1957).

In 1950 the population of Muskegon Heights climbed to just over 20,000 residents. The City had 8 operating public schools, a fully functioning water sewage treatment plant, and Mona Lake Park available to the public along the north shore of Mona Lake (City of Muskegon Heights, 1957). Beginning in the 1960s, Muskegon Heights began a downward population trend. In the 1990s, the population of Muskegon Heights had dropped to about 13,000 residents (2000 US Census), resulting in school closures, a lack of funding for municipal services, and a significant amount of blighted properties.

Muskegon Heights is considered a minority community in that the bulk of the population is non-white. Between 1990 and 2000, the African American population grew from 70% to 78%. Nationally, African Americans represent 12.4% of the population. Its elements of relaxed and friendly hospitality are apparent throughout the community. Additionally, several immensely talented singers and musicians have come from Muskegon Heights, and ties to soul, rhythm and blues, jazz and a larger urban circuit of entertainers are strong (City of Muskegon Heights Master Plan, 2012). The city is also home to the historic Strand Theater, a structure built in the 1920's that has been utilized for multiple functions over the years as not only a theater, but a mixed-use building including retail and apartments. The City of Muskegon Heights bought the Strand in 2001 in the hopes they would be able to restore the empty building to its original mixed-use set up. As of 2015 the building is still empty but has made recent investments to prevent further structural deterioration of the historic theater (City of Muskegon Heights, 2015).

Today, the City of Muskegon Heights is home to just over 10,000 residents (2010 US Census). As discussed in this socioeconomic profile and as prioritized by city residents and visitors, the issues continue to revolve around blight and abandonment, drug related crime and very low median household incomes.

Figure 2.01 Muskegon Heights Strand Theater



## Location

The City of Muskegon Heights is located in Muskegon County, which is on the western side of Michigan's lower-peninsula. It is located in between 3 major tourism-based cities; the City is about 40 miles west of Grand Rapids, 30 miles north of Holland, and 60 miles south of Ludington (See Figure 2.02).

Figure 2.03 highlights Muskegon County and the cities of Muskegon Heights, Ludington, Grand Rapids and Holland.

## Muskegon County



Figure 2.02: Muskegon County, Michigan

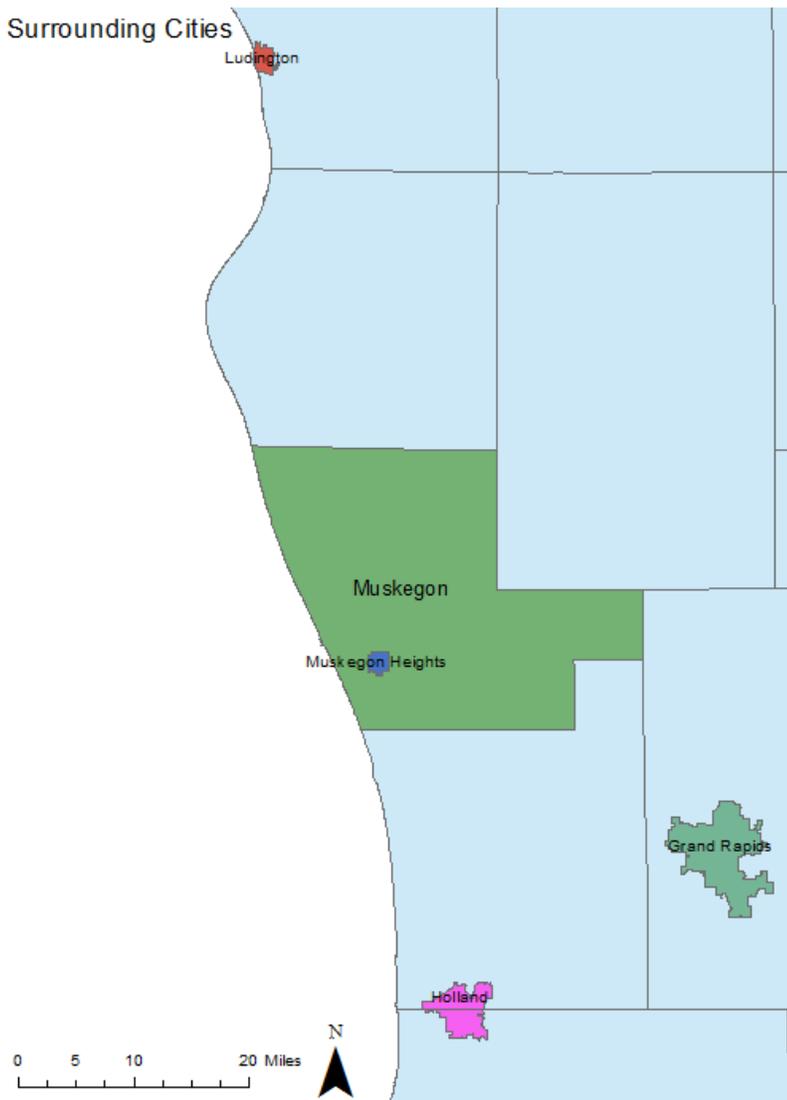


FIGURE 2.03: MUSKEGON HEIGHTS

# Demographics

## Population

Falling from nearly 20,000 residents in 1960, Muskegon Heights is home to 10,856 residents, according to the 2010 US Census (Figure 2.04). This loss of nearly half of the city's population over the last fifty years has resulted in a high number of abandoned structures within the community. In the meantime, the population in Muskegon County and the State of Michigan witnessed a growing trend during the 50 years.

Figure 2.04: Muskegon Heights Population Change over Time

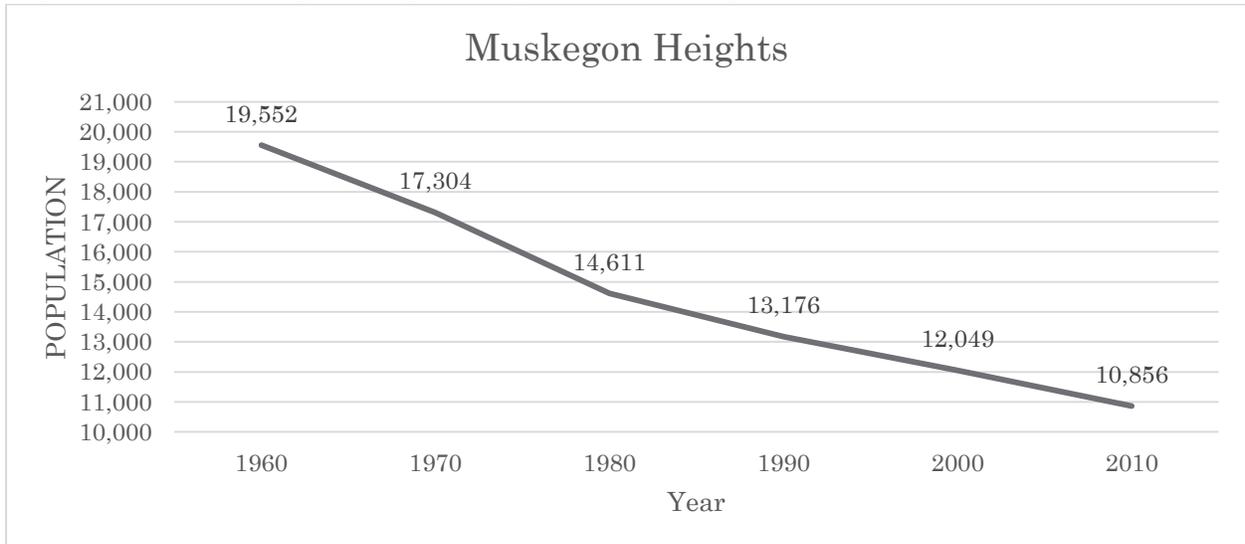


Figure 2.05: Muskegon County Population Change over Time

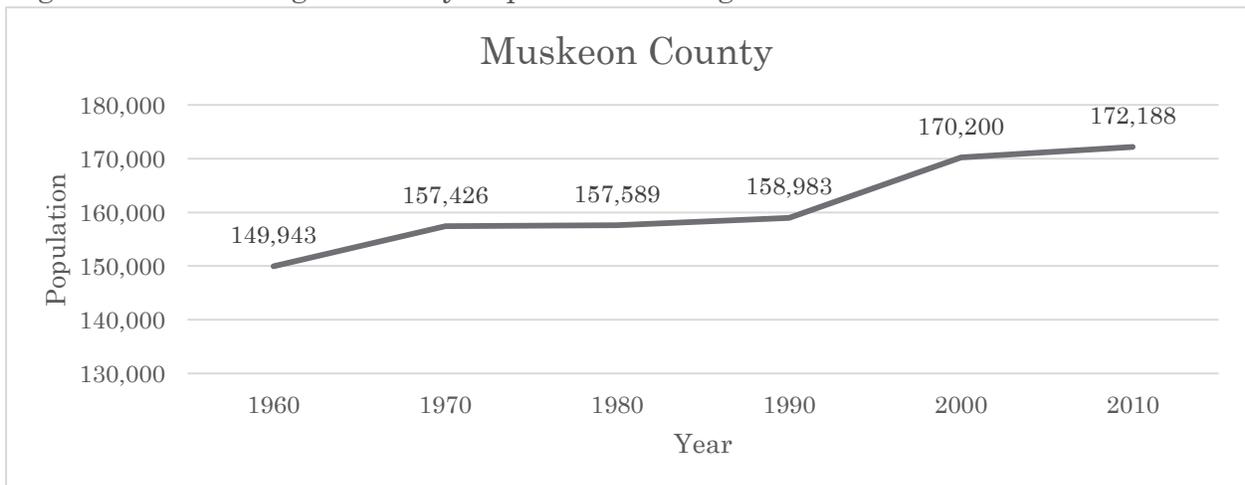
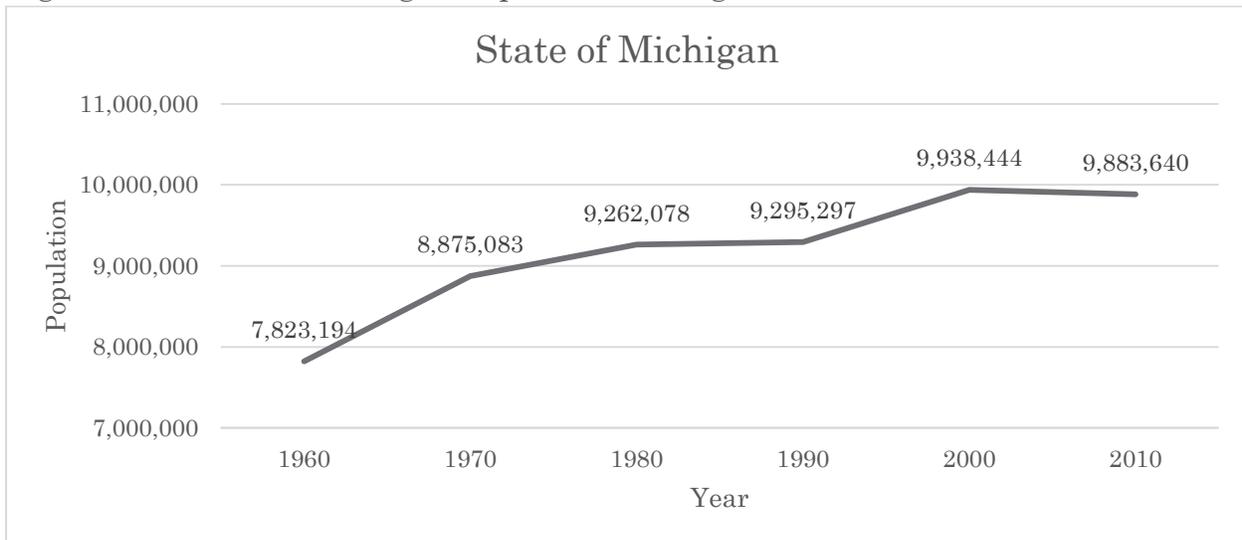


Figure 2.06: State of Michigan Population Change over Time



SOURCE: 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000 AND 2010 US CENSUSES

### Racial Composition

The City of Muskegon Heights is a predominantly African American community. Figure 2.07 displays the community’s demographics in comparison with Muskegon County (see Figure 2.08) and the State of Michigan (see Figure 2.09). With a racial composition that is 78% African American, 16% White and 6% other, the city is almost exactly opposite that of Muskegon County in its majority-minority composition and very close to opposite that of the State of Michigan which has a composition of 14% African American, 79% White and 7% other in 2010.

Figure 2.07: Muskegon Heights Population by Race 1980 - 2010

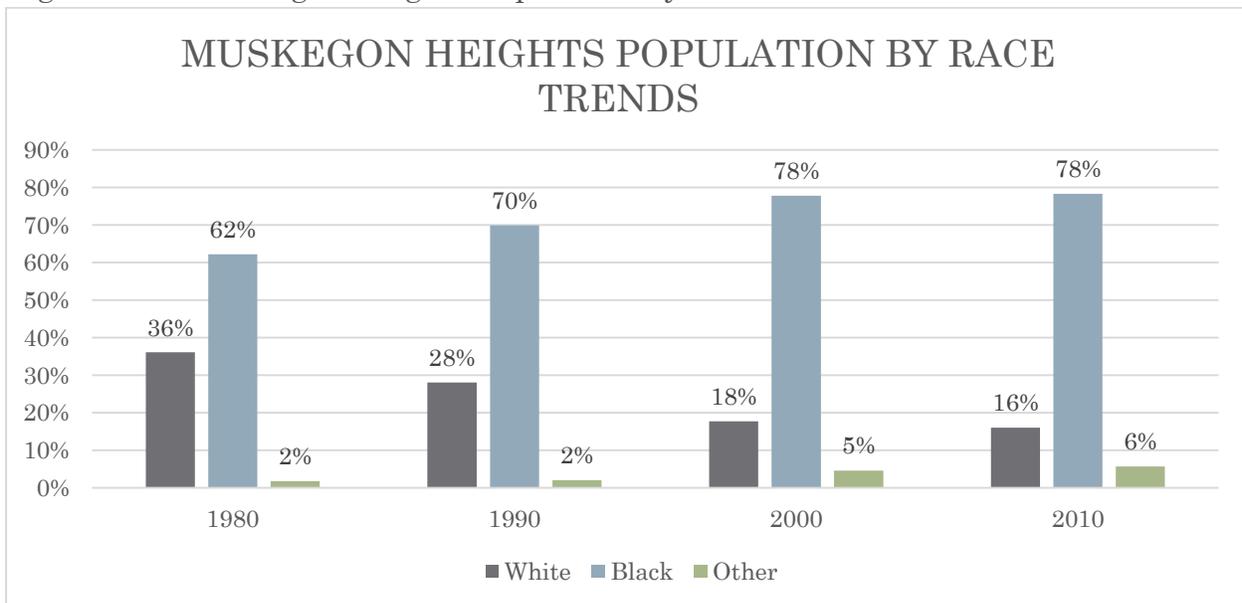


Figure 2.08: Muskegon County Population by Race 1980 - 2010

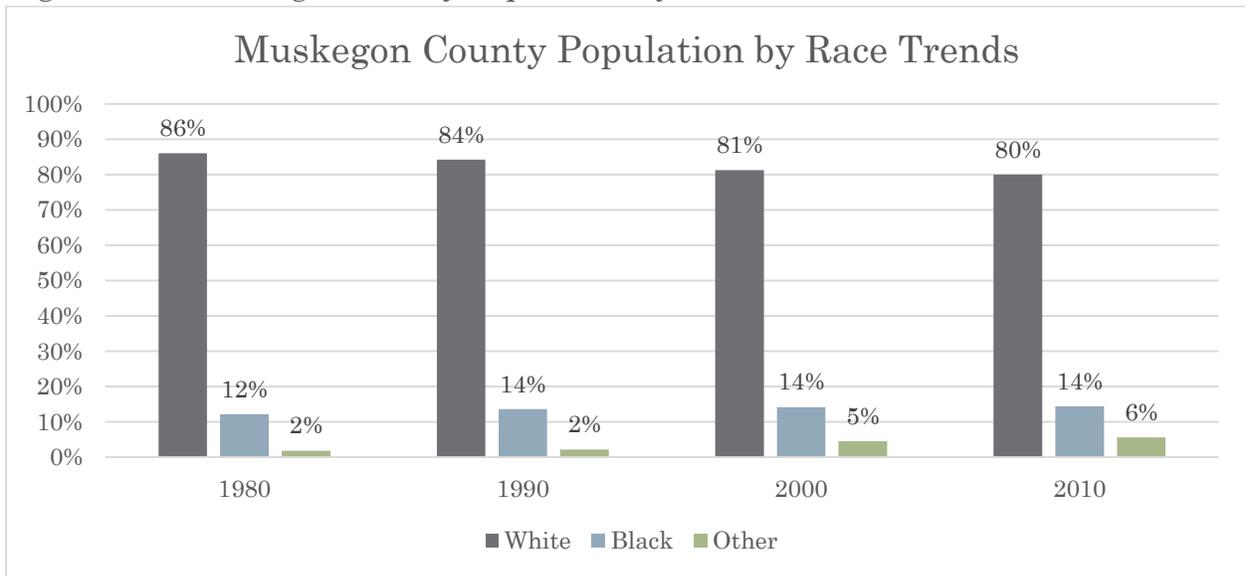
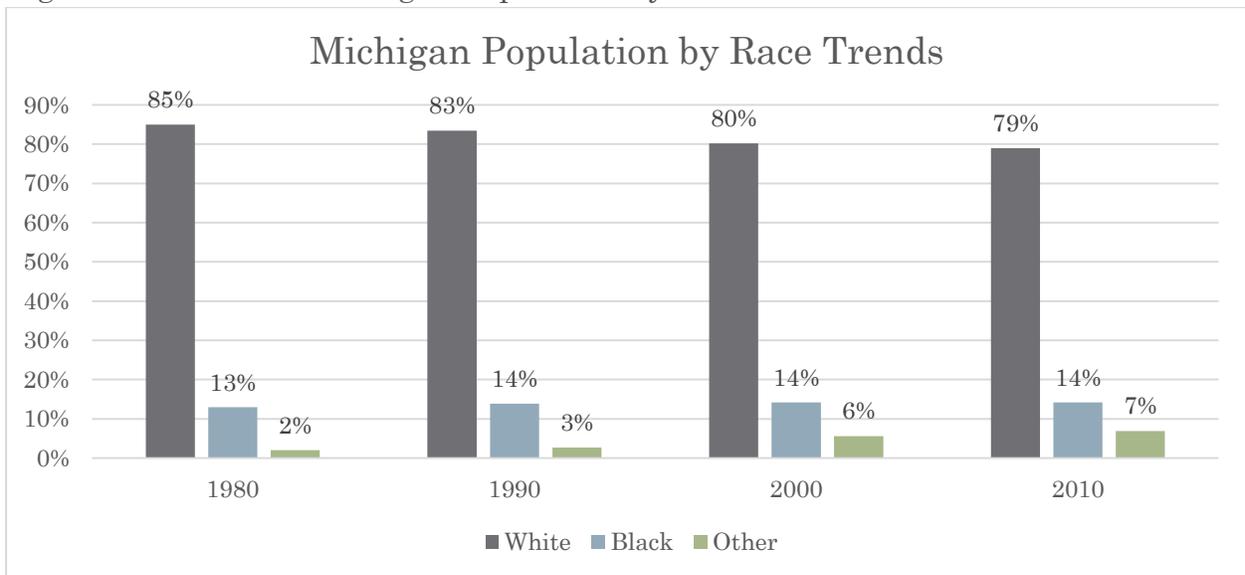


Figure 2.09: State of Michigan Population by Race 1980 - 2010

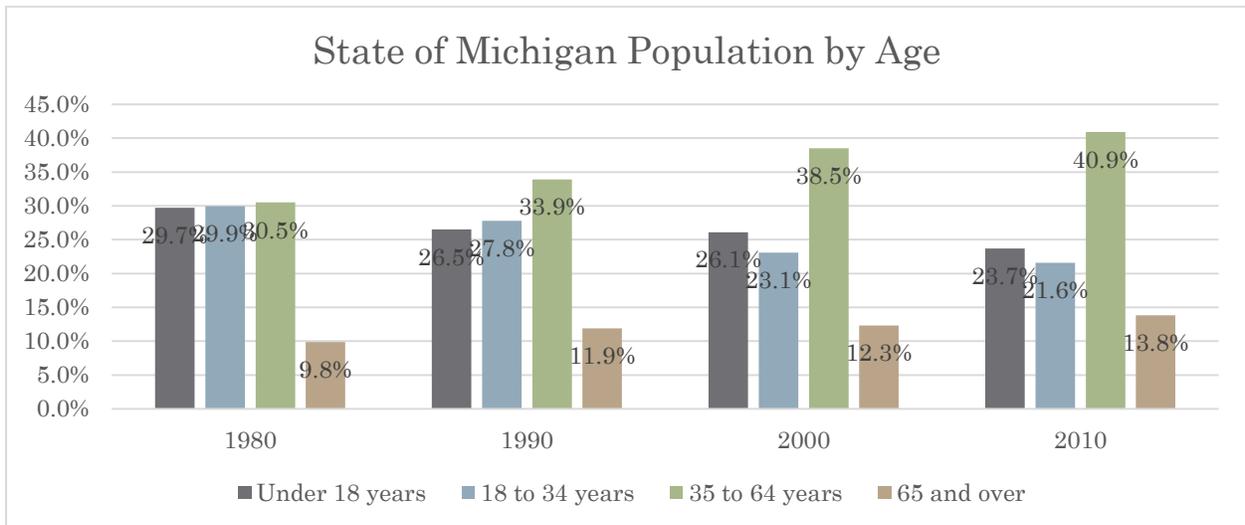
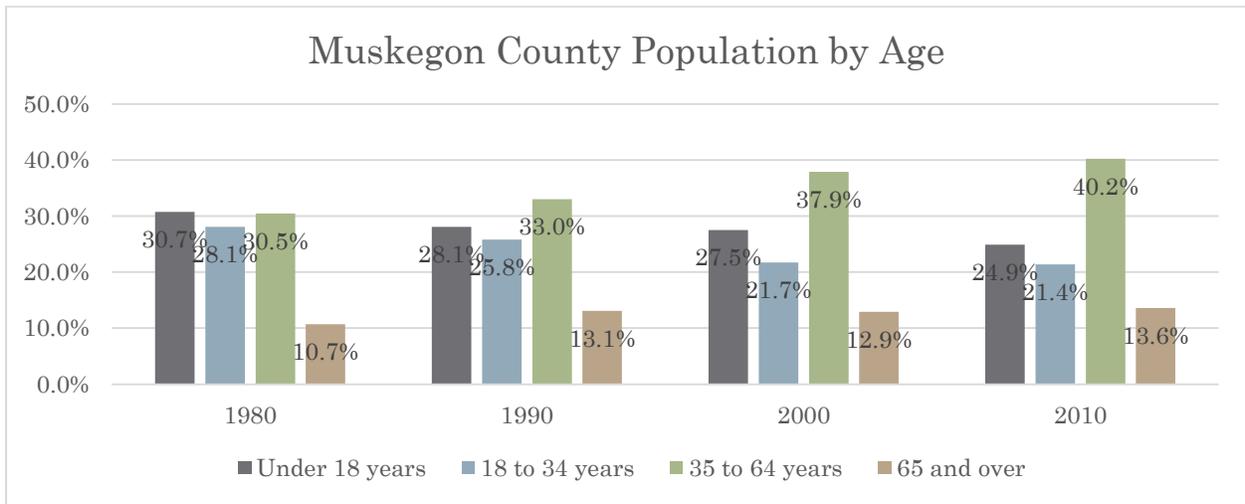
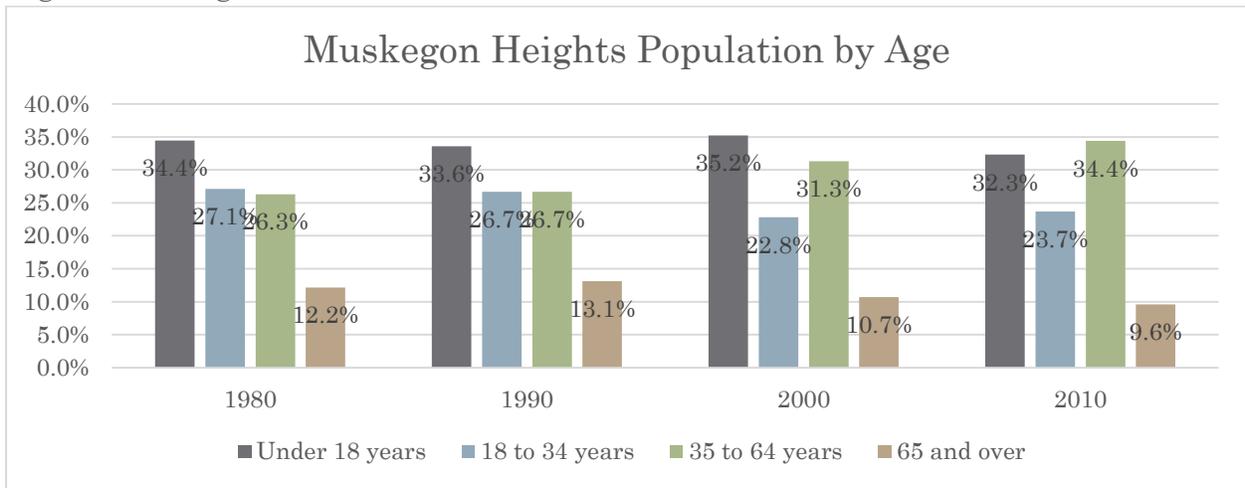


**1980, 1990, 2000 & 2010 US CENSUSES**

**Age**

Figure 2.10 displays the current age breakdown for Muskegon Heights. Over a third of the population is under the age of 19, and exactly one third of the population is between the ages of 20 and 44. Less than a third of the population is over the age of 45. Muskegon Heights leads the county and state in percentage of persons under the age of 35, and was also the only one to grow in that population between 2000 and 2010.

Figure 2.10: Age Distribution 2013



SOURCE: 1980, 1990, 2000, AND 2010 US CENSUSES

# Economy

Muskegon Heights’ history as an industrial community still defines much of the City’s economy today. Figure 2.11 shows the top 3 employment industries in Muskegon Heights in comparison with Muskegon County and the State of Michigan. The high percentage of residents employed in educational services, health care and social assistance. Major companies like Quality Tool and Stamping, Anderson Global, GH Printing and Webb Chemical provide the city with many manufacturing jobs, the city’s second largest occupation category.

Figure 2.11: Top 3 Employment Industries 2013

	<b>Muskegon Heights</b>	<b>Muskegon County</b>	<b>State of Michigan</b>
<b>Industry</b>	Percent of Population Employed	Percent of Population Employed	Percent of Population Employed
<b>Educational services, health care and social assistance</b>	28.3	23.3	24.2
<b>Manufacturing</b>	26.2	24.2	16.9
<b>Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services</b>	10.7	9.1	14.2

SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU, 2009-2013 5-YEAR AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY.

# Educational Attainment

As of 2010, 4% of the city’s residents had a Bachelor’s degree or higher. The community also had 20% of its residents lacking a high school diploma. In comparison to the County and the State, Figure 2.13 and Figure 2.14 show 17% of the county’s citizens and 25% of the state’s had a Bachelor’s degree or higher. The percentage of the population which lacks a high school diploma was 12% in both the County and the State, almost halved the city average as shown in Figures 2.12. However, the community has seen a dramatic decrease in residents without a high school diploma, falling from 44% of residents in 1990 to 20% in 2010 (Figure 2.12).

Figure 2.12: Educational Attainment 2013 Graph

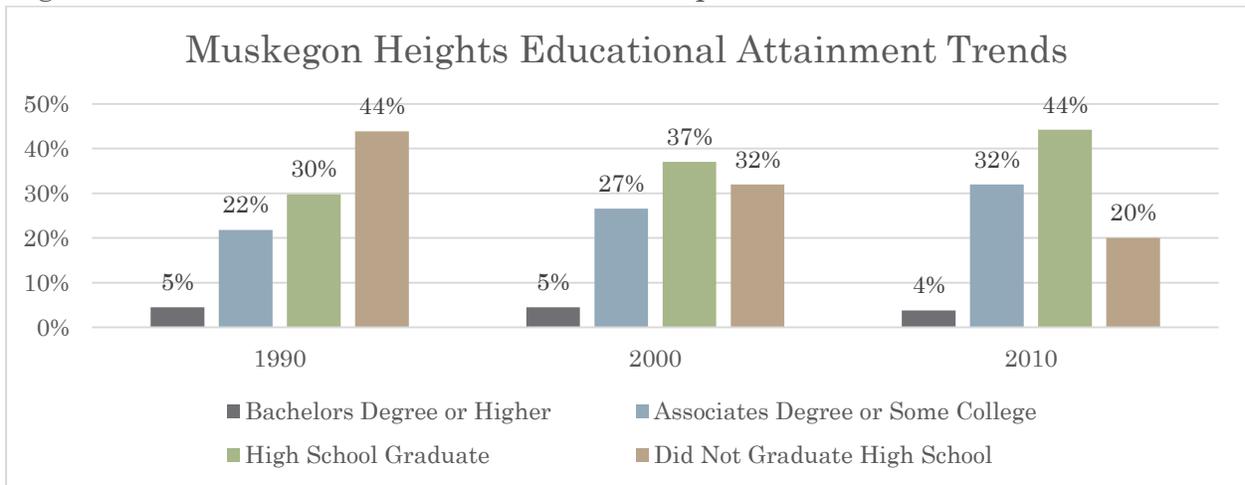


Figure 2.13: Educational Attainment 2013 Graph

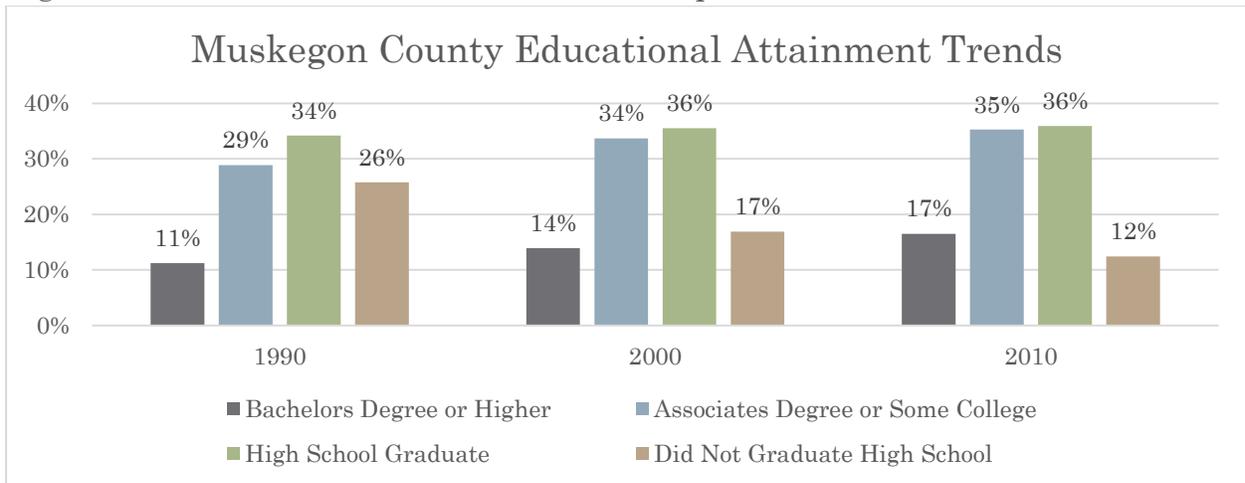
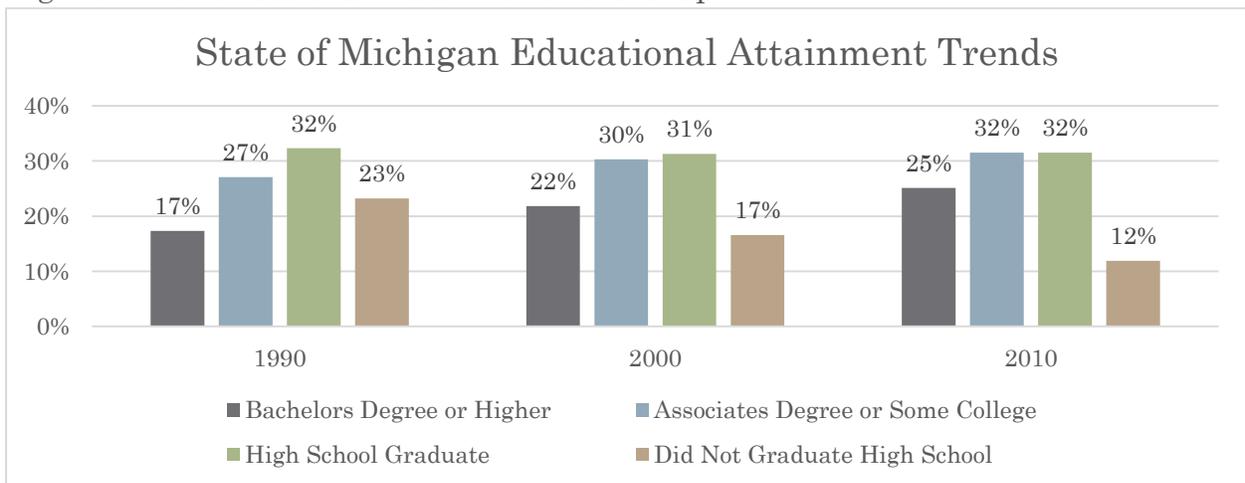


Figure 2.14: Educational Attainment 2013 Graph



SOURCE: 1990, 2000 & 2010 US CENSUS BUREAU

## School enrollment

The enrollment makeup for Muskegon Heights is fairly consistent with state and county averages, as shown in Figure 2.15, with the largest group of students located in K-8 grade levels. As mentioned previously, the city has a smaller percentage of residents enrolled in College and Graduate School when compared to the County and State averages.

Figure 2.15: School Enrollment 2013

	Muskegon Heights	Muskegon County	Michigan
<b>Nursery and Preschool</b>	6%	6%	5%
<b>Kindergarten - 8th</b>	56%	50%	43%
<b>9th - 12th</b>	21%	23%	21%
<b>College and Grad School</b>	17%	22%	30%

2009-2013 ACS 5-YEAR SURVEY

## Housing

Muskegon Heights is made up predominantly of detached single family homes (City of Muskegon Heights, 2012). While some multi-family housing exists, the vast majority of the structures are small, single family detached residences.

As of 2013, there were 5,300 housing units in the City of Muskegon Heights, with 80.6% occupied and 19.4% vacant. This stands as a vacancy rate approximately 4% higher than the State of Michigan average and 8% higher than the Muskegon County average as can be seen in Figure 2.16.

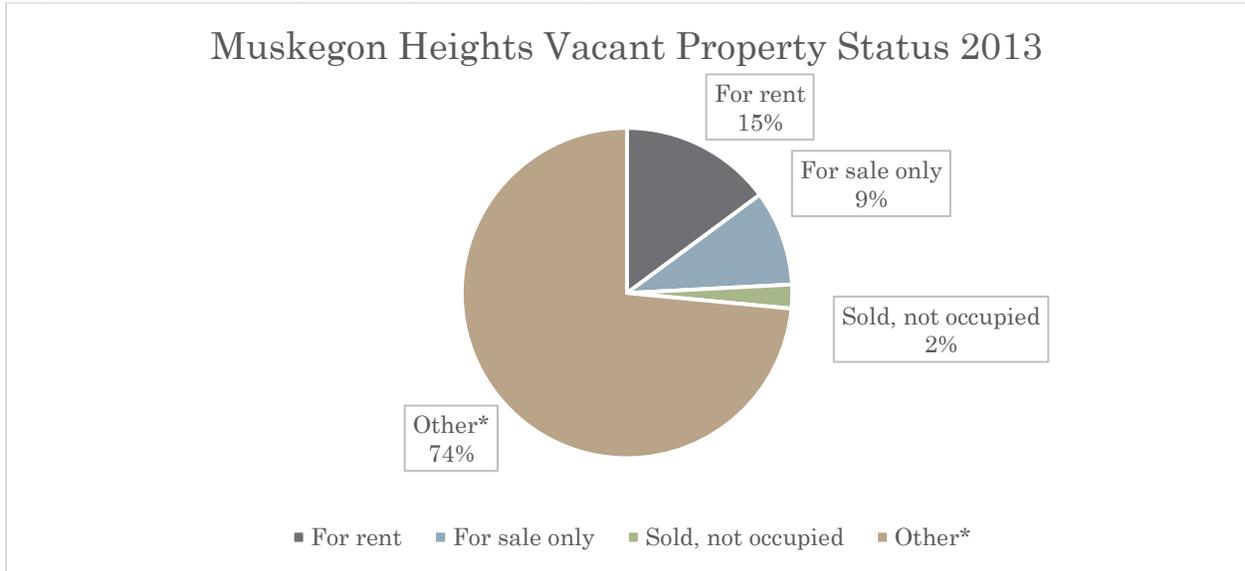
Figure 2.16: Housing Status 2013

Subject	Muskegon Heights, Michigan		Muskegon County, Michigan		Michigan	
	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
<b>Total housing units</b>	5,300		73,345		4,529,311	
<b>Occupied housing units</b>	4,270	81%	65,008	88.6%	3,823,280	84.4%
<b>Owner-occupied</b>	2,061	48.3%	48,390	74.4%	2,757,062	72.1%
<b>Renter-occupied</b>	2,209	51.7%	16,618	25.6%	1,066,218	27.9%
<b>Vacant housing units</b>	1,030	19.4%	8,337	11.4%	706,031	15.6%

SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU

The unique nature of Muskegon Heights' vacancy however is that many of these units are not simply vacant due to the normal turnover in the housing market, but rather they have been abandoned by their previous owners and often end up in the hands of the City or the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority. As can be seen in Figure 2.17, 74% of the City's vacant units do not fall into traditional vacancy categories as determined by the US Census Bureau.

Figure 2.17: Muskegon Heights Vacancy Status 2013

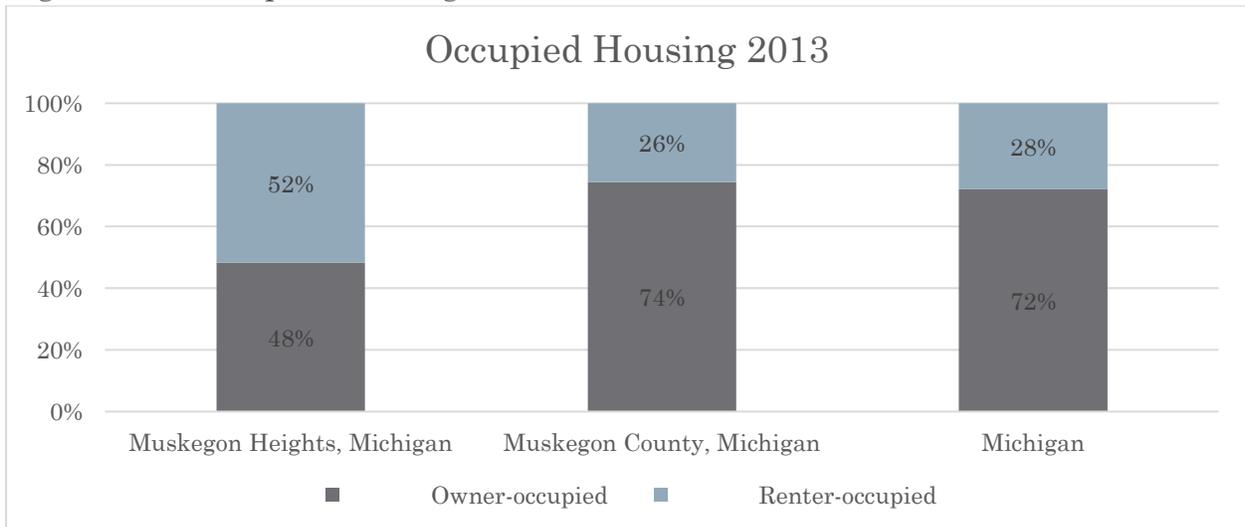


**SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU**

\*Other as categorized by the US Census Bureau. Other means not in the traditional vacancy market (for sale or lease, etc.).

Muskegon Heights also has a slightly higher share of renter-occupied residences as compared to owner-occupied residences (see Figure 2.18).

Figure 2.18: Occupied Housing 2013

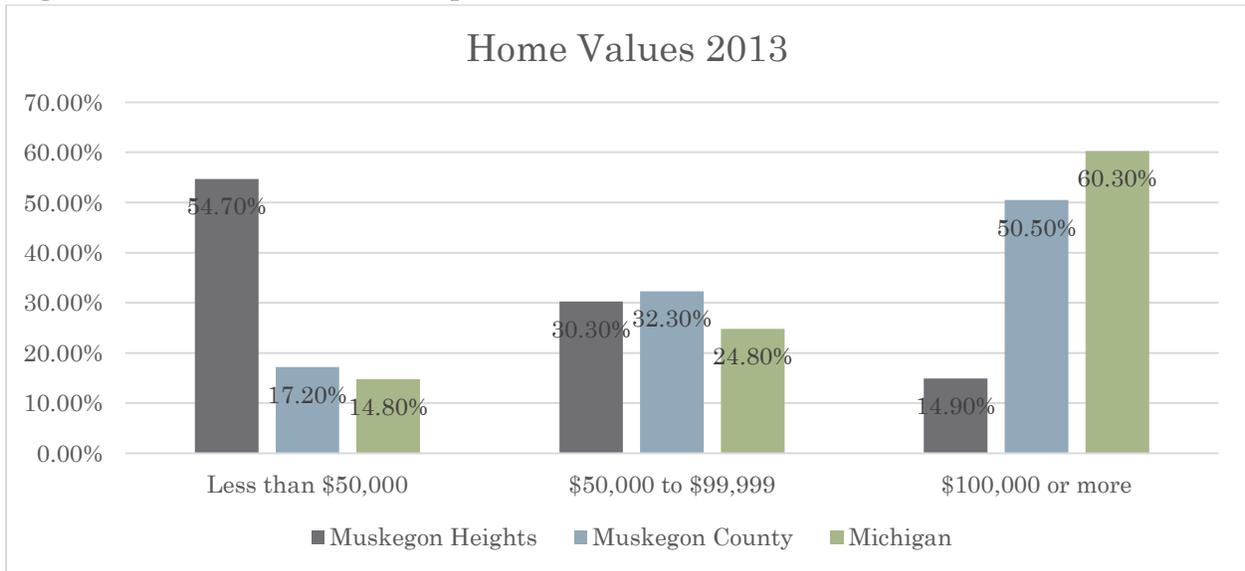


**SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU**

## Housing Values

Figure 2.19 displays the distribution of home values in Muskegon Heights compared to Muskegon County and the State. Muskegon Heights has a significantly higher proportion of homes that are worth less than \$50,000 and a significantly lower proportion of homes worth over \$100,000 than the County or the State.

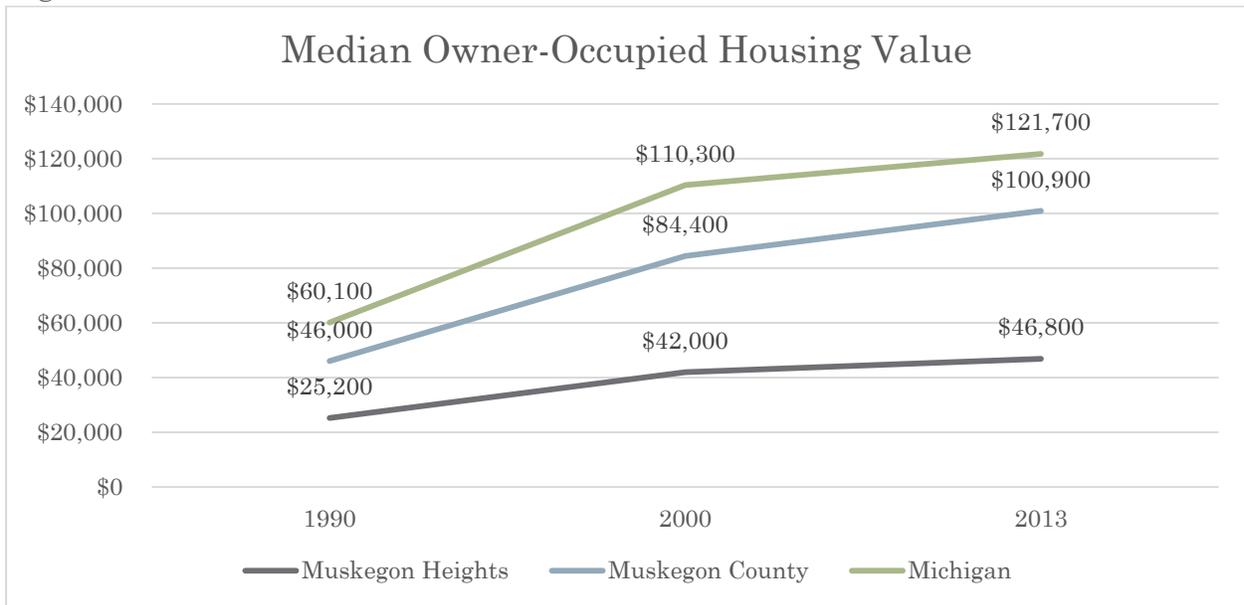
Figure 2.19: Home Value Comparisons 2013



**SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU**

Muskegon Heights, as of 2013, had a median home value of \$46,800 while the median home value for Muskegon County was \$100,900 and the State of Michigan even higher, at \$121,700 (see Figure 2.20). The median home value for the city of Muskegon Heights is 61.5% less than the median in the State of Michigan, and just over 50% less than Muskegon County.

Figure 2.20: Median Home Values



SOURCE: 1990 AND 2000 US CENSUSES, 2009-2013 ACS 5-YEAR SURVEY

## Household Size

Muskegon Heights has an average household size almost exactly the same as Muskegon County and the exact same as the State of Michigan with 2.53 residents per household. Renter occupied units tend to have a slightly higher average occupancy at 2.67 residents per household. This is actually the inverse of what happens at the State and County level, where renter occupied households appear to have smaller averages as shown in Figure 2.21.

Figure 2.21: Average Household Size by Occupancy Status 2013

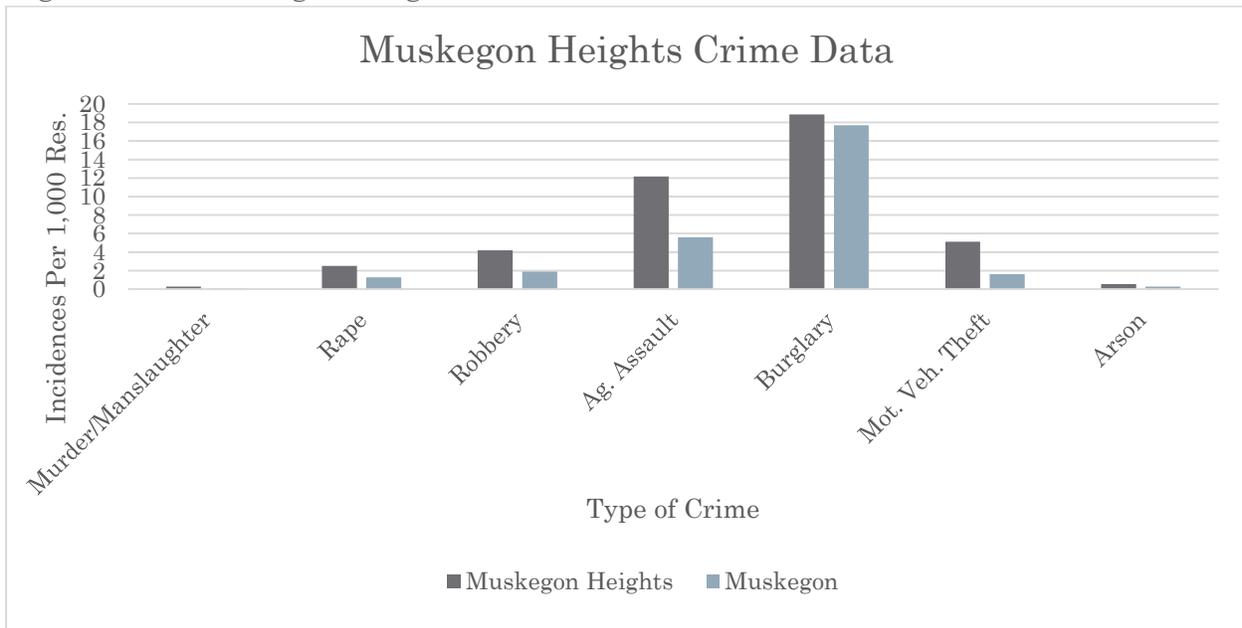
	Muskegon Heights	Muskegon County	Michigan
<b>Total</b>	2.53	2.54	2.53
<b>Owner Occupied</b>	2.37	2.59	2.60
<b>Renter Occupied</b>	2.67	2.40	2.34

2009-2013 ACS 5-YEAR SURVEY

## Crime

Muskegon Heights has a per capita crime rate higher than its larger neighbor, the City of Muskegon in all reported categories. As displayed in Figure 2.22, the City has a higher count of reported incidents per 1,000 residents than Muskegon.

Figure 2.22: Muskegon Heights 2013 Crime Data

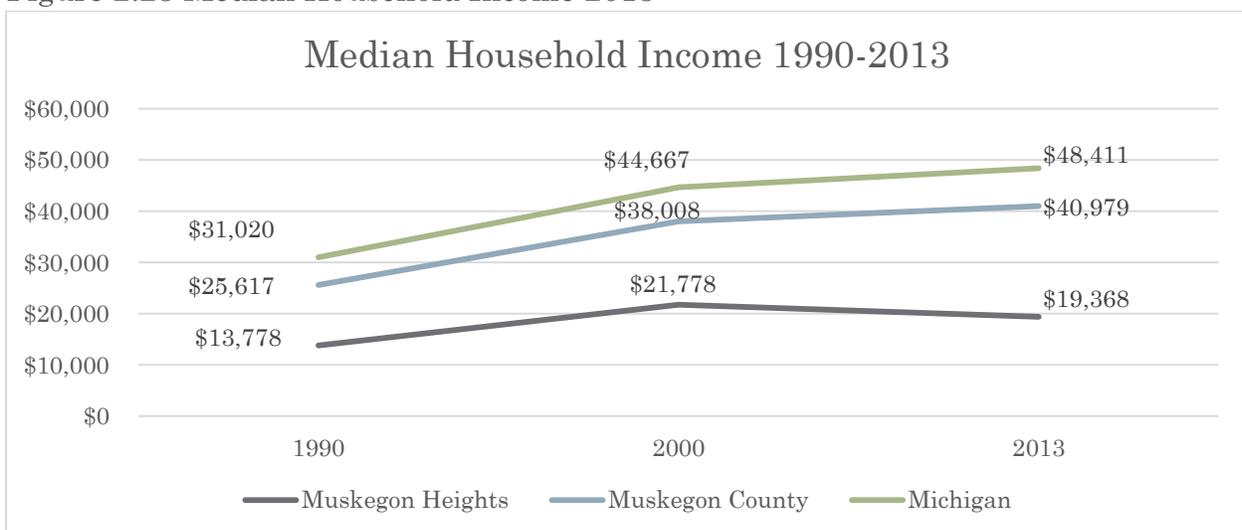


SOURCE: 2013 FBI UNIFORM CRIME REPORT

## Household Income

Muskegon Heights has a median household income of \$19,368. As can be seen in Figure 2.23, this median income is far below that of both Muskegon County at \$40,979 and the State of Michigan at \$48,411. In addition, while the latter two jurisdictions' median incomes rose from 2000-2013, Muskegon Heights actually saw its median income decline in real dollar terms.

Figure 2.23 Median Household Income 2013



SOURCE: 1990, 2000 US CENSUS, 2009-2013 ACS 5-YEAR SURVEY

# Employment

Muskegon Heights currently has a labor force participation rate for citizens over age 16 of 50.8%, below the County average of 59.8% and also below the Michigan average of 61.8% (Figure 2.25). Within the context of citizens active in the labor force, the City’s unemployment rate stands at 13.5%, well above the County average and almost double the state average (Figure 2.25).

Figure 2.24: Employment Statistics for 2009

	Muskegon Heights		Muskegon County		Michigan	
	Total Count	%	Total Count	%	Total Count	%
<b>Employment Status For Total Population 16 Years And Over</b>						
<b>Population 16 Years and over:</b>	8,429		135,627		7,901,716	
<b>In labor force:</b>	4,915	58.3	83,854	61.8	5,007,456	63.4
<b>In Armed Forces</b>	0	0.0	91	0.1	5,953	0.1
<b>Civilian:</b>	4,915	58.3	83,763	61.8	5,001,503	63.3
<b>Employed</b>	3,505	41.6	72,391	53.4	4,479,502	56.7
<b>Unemployed</b>	1,410	16.7	11,372	8.4	522,001	6.6
<b>Not in labor force</b>	3,514	41.7	51,773	38.2	2,894,260	36.6

SOURCE: 2005-2009 ACS 5-YEAR SURVEY

Figure 2.25 Employment Statistics for 2013

	Muskegon Heights		Muskegon County		Michigan	
	Total Count	%	Total Count	%	Total Count	%
<b>Employment Status For Total Population 16 Years And Over</b>						
<b>Population 16 Years and over:</b>	7,630		134,178		7,865,350	
<b>In labor force:</b>	3,874	50.8	80,262	59.8	4,864,014	61.8
<b>In Armed Forces</b>	0	0.0	110	0.1	4,597	0.1
<b>Civilian:</b>	3,874	50.8	80,152	59.7	4,859,417	61.8
<b>Employed</b>	2,844	37.3	67,639	50.4	4,242,948	53.9
<b>Unemployed</b>	1,030	13.5	12,513	9.3	616,469	7.8
<b>Not in labor force</b>	3,756	49.2	53,916	40.2	3,001,336	38.2

SOURCE: 2009-2013 ACS 5-YEAR SURVEY

\*Occupation category titles have changed between formal census years, leading to the altered titles here

## Occupations

Despite past deindustrialization, in Muskegon Heights production occupations remain the largest single category of occupations for residents (Figure 2.26).

Figure 2.26: Muskegon Heights Top 5 Occupations by Year

<b>2011*</b>		
Occupation	Number of People	Percentage
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	2,844	
Production Occupations	641	23%
Professional and Related Occupations	404	14%
Transportation and material moving occupations	314	11%
Healthcare support occupations	260	9%
Food preparation and serving related occupations	258	9%
<b>2000</b>		
Occupation	Number of People	Percentage
Employed civilian population 16 years and over:	3,980	
Production occupations	1,185	30%
Office and administrative support occupations	457	11%
Sales and related occupations	368	9%
Professional and related occupations	349	9%
Transportation and material moving occupations:	304	8%
Food preparation and serving related occupations	277	7%
<b>1990**</b>		
Occupation	Number of People	Percentage
Employed persons 16 years and over:	3,855	
Operators, fabricators, and laborers:	1,210	31%
Service occupations	1,092	28%
Technical, sales, and administrative support occupations:	750	19%
Managerial and professional specialty occupations:	419	11%
Precision production, craft, and repair occupations	259	7%

SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU

\*DATA FROM 2009-2013 ACS 5-YEAR SURVEY

\*\* OCCUPATION TITLES CHANGE FROM THE 1990 TO 2000 US CENSUSES

## Summary

The City of Muskegon Heights has different socioeconomic characteristics compared with the Muskegon County and the State of Michigan in the form of population, racial composition, education attainment, housing, etc. Major points of notice are:

- Declining total population at the rate of nearly 50% from 1960 to 2010
- Majority population is African American, almost exact opposite the majority-minority composition of Muskegon County
- Lower education attainment for residents
- Lower household income with an average of \$19,368
- Lower median house value, over 50% less than the median house value in the State of Michigan
- Nearly double the unemployment rate compared to the State of Michigan

These factors will contribute the development of recommendations as a goal to make neighborhoods in the City of Muskegon Heights high quality, desirable places to live.

# METHODOLOGY

The methodology includes a detailed socioeconomic profile, a cursory analysis of the conditions of all parcels within the project's study area, a rating of the conditions of each face block within the study area, a detailed analysis of the structural conditions of each structure on nine focus blocks (selected based on face-block ratings), a downtown analysis, extensive community input via a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) exercise and a general community preferences survey. The methods were chosen based on the goals of the project, and provide the information needed for the practicum team to make well-informed and feasible recommendations for the city of Muskegon Heights.

## Parcel Windshield Survey/Inventory

For the windshield parcel survey of the study area within this document, parcels were assessed on February 4th and 5th, 2015 by the practicum team with assistance from clients at the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority, Muskegon County, and the City of Muskegon Heights. Parcels were assessed on a 1-5 scale with each property being given an overall ranking as follows:

- 1= Good – Building appears structurally sound and well maintained.
- 2= Fair – The building appears structurally sound with minor repairs needed.
- 3= Poor - The structure may not be structurally sound and may need major repairs.
- 4= Sub-Standard – The structure is unsafe, unsound and repair is not feasible.
- 5 = Vacant lot – The parcel does not have a standing structure on it.

After this parcel assessment was completed, ratings were then calculated to give face blocks an overall rating to assist in providing targeted code enforcement and blight removal efforts. A “face block” is a street view of houses on a block street. The face block is the most fundamental element of a neighborhood environment. Rating averages were determined as follows:

- 1<Average Rating≤1.5 = Excellent
- 1.5<Average Rating≤2 = Good
- 2<Average Rating≤2.5 = Fair
- 2.5<Average Rating≤3 = Poor
- 3<Average Rating≤3.5 = Distressed

For example, if a block had 4 structures rated as a 1, 2 structures rated as a 2, 1 structure rated as a 3 and 1 structure rated as a 4, the block average score would be a 1.875 and it would therefore be rated Good overall.

## Detailed Structural Analysis

The practicum team returned to Muskegon Heights on February 22nd, 2015 and completed a more detailed structural condition analysis of specific focus blocks based on the face block rating. Two blocks from each of the above rating categories were selected for a closer analysis of structural conditions and this map is located later in this document. The rating used for this review is displayed in Figure 3.01:

Figure 3.01: Structural Condition Analysis

Roof	3	No major damages. Roofing materials appear largely intact.
	2	Minor damages. Lack of maintenance is apparent but partial. Existing damages do not appear to act as a risk to public health.
	1	Severe damages from fire and/or water damage, other damage (e.g. termite), and possible acts of God. Roof conditions are further characterized by possible cave-ins and are likely to pose a risk to public health.
Door	3	Present, with no to very minor damages (e.g. paint damage).
	2	Boarded up or present but in poor condition. Damages do not appear to need complete door replacement.
	1	Not present. When existent, damage repair may only include complete door replacement.
Window	3	Present, with no to very minor damages. (e.g paint damage) No glass damage.
	2	Boarded up or present but in poor conditions. Damages do not appear to need complete window replacement.
	1	Not present. When existent, damage repairs may only include complete window replacement.
Siding	3	No major damages. Siding materials appear largely intact.
	2	Partially present or need some maintenance. Existing damage do not appear to act as a risk to public health.
	1	Severe damages from fire and/or water damage, other damages (e.g termite), and possible acts of God. Siding repairs are likely to require full replacement and may pose a risk to public health.
Raw Score	4-12	All four categories' scores are summed to create the parcel's raw score. Possible points are from 4 to 12.
Final Score	Good Condition	Houses with a final score of Good Condition have a raw score between 10 and 12. Houses appear in good condition with a probability of little to no structural damage. No major noticeable

maintenance problems.

**Fair Condition** Houses with a final score of Fair Condition have a raw score between 7 and 9. Houses appear in need of repairs, however existing damages can be replaceable and are not likely to pose a risk to public health.

**Poor Condition** Houses with a final score of Poor Condition have a raw score between 4 and 6. Structural foundation damages are likely existent and replacement of exterior features and materials are likely not a viable solution. Houses further pose a risk to public health and are recommended for demolition.

SOURCE: BEECHER, MICHIGAN NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION PLAN

## Downtown Analysis

The focus area is located within the borders of the Muskegon Heights Downtown Development Authority (DDA), an organization designed to capture tax revenue in order to make investments within the boundaries of the district. The north and south borders of Center Street and the fork of Peck Street & Airline Highway, and east and west borders of Sanford and Hoyt Streets designate the focus area for commercial properties in this project. In total, the area consists of 58 parcels.

Figure 3.02: Focus Area Downtown Parcel Status Map

### Muskegon Heights Downtown Focus Area Parcel Status Map



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM SURVEY

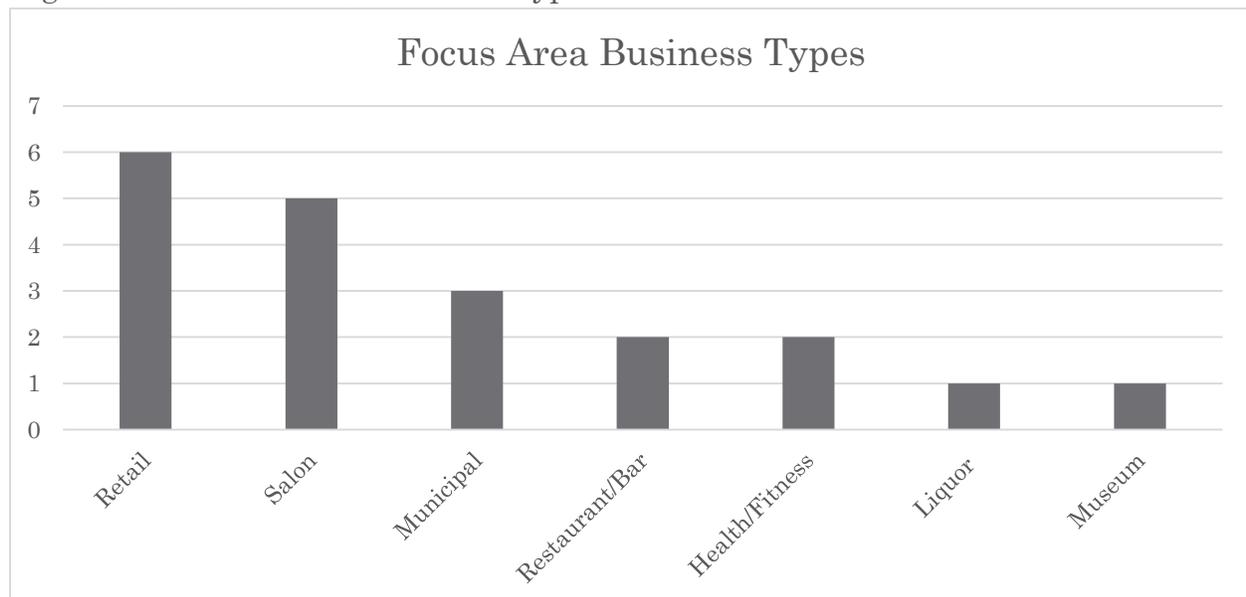
## Status of Focus Areas

The Practicum team completed a walking survey of the Downtown to determine which structures were occupied or vacant. Based on an outside assessment of the structure and discussions with municipal officials, commercial occupancy was determined and mapped. Figure 3.02 shows the status of each individual parcel in the focus area. Dark green indicates that the building is occupied; yellow indicates that the building on that parcel of land is vacant, bright blue represents a vacant lot and light green represents either a park or a green space. Of the 58 total parcels, 17 are occupied, 27 are vacant buildings, 12 are vacant lots, and 2 are parks and green space.

## Parcel Inventory

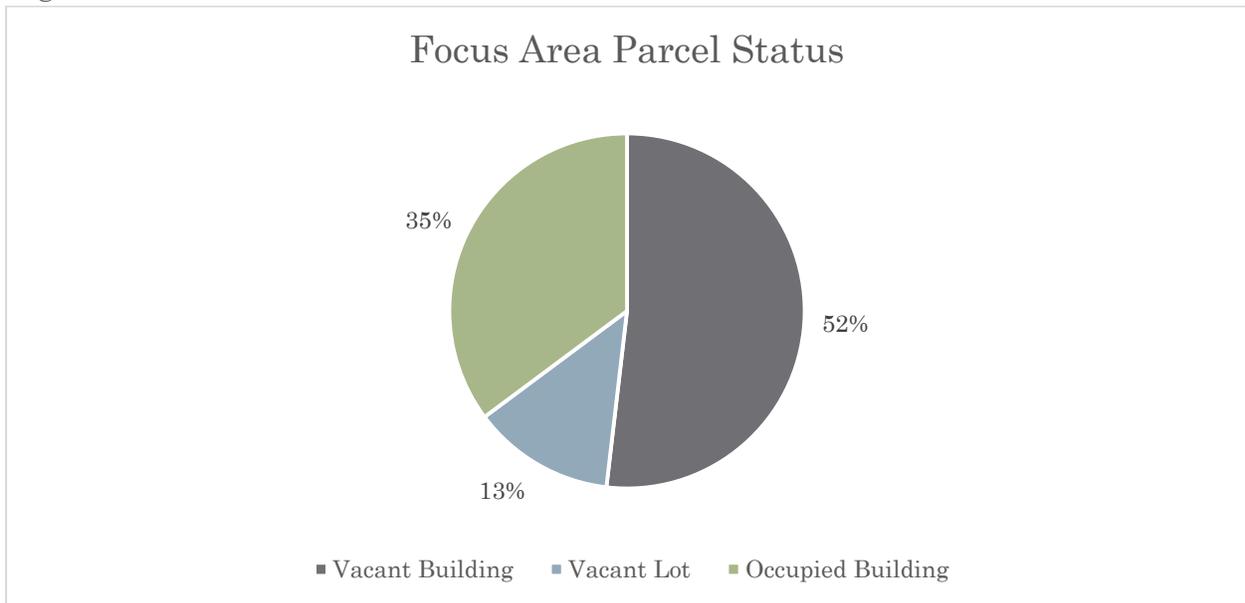
While there are 17 occupied structures, there are 20 businesses currently in operation due to multiple storefronts within some of the structures. Of the 20 businesses, 5 are salons, 6 are retail, 3 are municipal buildings or services, 2 are bars, 2 are health related such as optometry and other professions, one is a museum, and one is a liquor store (see Figure 3.03). Combining vacant buildings and vacant lots, the focus area is 65% vacant in terms of parcel numbers, leaving only 35% of the focus area operating and generating economic activity (see Figure 3.04). The City of Muskegon Heights currently owns two properties, the Strand Theater and a small storefront on Broadway, while the Downtown Development Authority owns four properties. Out of the six properties owned by the city and DDA, only one has a taxable value (City of Muskegon Heights, 2015). There are more salons and discount retail stores than any other type of business, and both of the restaurant/bars had for sale signs on the doors at the time of the Practicum Team’s walking assessment.

Figure 3.03: Focus Area Business Types



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM SURVEY

Figure 3.04: Parcel Status Chart



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM SURVEY

## Downtown Blueprint

A document reviewed in developing this plan was the Muskegon Heights Downtown Blueprint. Muskegon Heights was selected as a recipient of Downtown Blueprint funding in 2007, a partnership between the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), Michigan Municipal League (MML), HyettPalma and individual communities to define their Downtown Blueprint (HyettPalma, 2007). The Blueprint conducted resident and business owner surveys, a downtown market analysis, a vision for the future of Muskegon Heights, a course of action and implementation steps to get to the desired vision. While the Downtown has more vacancy than it did in 2007, the vision from this process matches up with the data received from opinions expressed from the Public Input session held in February of 2015, and the 2012 master plan. The Blueprint calls for, “a clean, safe, and thriving downtown with a variety of businesses and activities that attract residents of the Heights, residents of the surrounding communities; and area visitors” (HyettPalma, 2007).

The downtown blueprint provided the city with a “Course of Action to help the city attain their community vision, take advantage of economic opportunities revealed through the market analysis and become economically successful and self-sustaining.” The report provided a set of general recommendations for the city to follow to successfully complete the goals of the course of action. Recommendations included the local government setting high expectations and standards, the DDA adhering to those high standards, the phasing of target area priorities, immediate action taken by locals to begin enhancing the downtown and collaboration with entities outside of Muskegon Heights, such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Community Foundation, Muskegon Area First and others.

The report included prioritized catalyst projects to grab the attention of the community as well as the private investment community with the intent of changing the perception of Downtown Muskegon Heights. The first priority was increasing public safety, and the second was redevelopment of the Strand Theater. The report included a specific plan for the city to follow to get the project started. In addition to the redevelopment, the report contains maintenance of the downtown as a priority for infrastructure improvements.

## Infrastructure and Street Scape

In addition to the above plans and measures, the condition of the Downtown streetscape was considered in determining appropriate recommendations. The Downtown area contains many elements generally deemed necessary to creating a quality main street along Broadway Avenue, yet Center Street is lacking other design elements of a complete street such as bike lanes, low-hanging street lamps and wide sidewalks. According to the Congress for New Urbanism in partnership with the Institute of Transportation Engineers, a quality main street should be designed to be “the traveled way” which considers three important factors; speed, width and parking (Creating Quality Main Streets). The speed of Broadway Avenue is 25mph, allowing for pedestrians to feel safe when near the street. The sidewalks are wide enough that two people can travel in each direction next to each other and there is on street parking available as well as parking lots behind some of the businesses. In addition, the sidewalks have trash bins, are lined with trees and have low hanging street lamps, all of which are components of creating a walkable street. In the winter months, there are snow removal issues that make it difficult for pedestrians to walk downtown (see Figure 3.05).

Figure 3.05: Broadway Avenue Streetscape



## Public Input

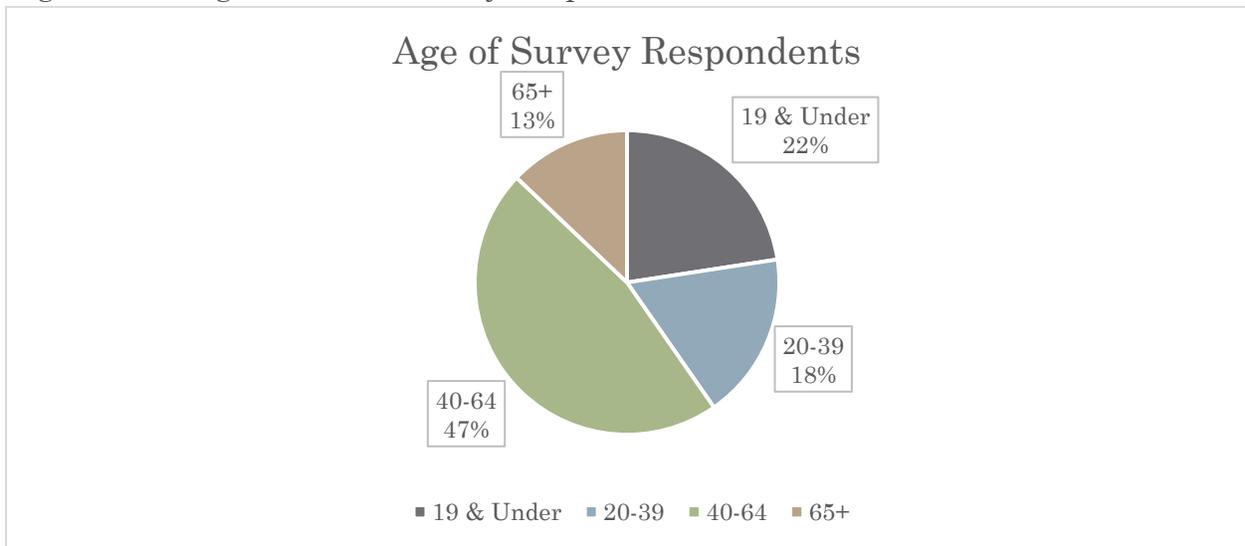
Feedback was gathered through interviews with local residents participating in a “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats” (SWOT) discussion group, a short survey that was handed out to attendees at a local high school basketball game on January 27th, 2015. Groups of residents and engaged stakeholders came to group consensus and submitted response sheets to the practicum team that helped to guide the development of detailed recommendations. For those who could not attend this event, a Survey Monkey online survey was made available for residents to respond to the same questions asked at the community input session. The Survey Monkey link was put on a flier that was passed around at the school, shared on the local fire department Facebook page in addition to the general City Facebook page.

In addition to this SWOT analysis, a short survey was distributed at the January 27th basketball game and shared across the community through the above means. The short survey consisted of demographic questions and a list of 11 amenities, prompting the respondent to choose the top three they would like to see in Muskegon Heights. The demographic questions were developed in order to understand development preferences by group, the status of residency of the respondent and how long they have lived in the City of

Muskegon Heights or the area. The list of amenities was developed through feedback gained via discussions with municipal officials.

Between the SWOT analysis group discussions, survey responses at the basketball game and online Survey Monkey data, the Practicum group collected 65 responses. Forty-seven percent of the respondents were between the ages of 40 and 64, followed by 22% under 19. The diversity in the age of survey respondents is important to highlight because despite the difference in ages, the preferred amenities were relatively the same. While there is a slightly larger percentage of 40-64 year olds and slightly less residents under 20 than the city as a whole, the respondents are a reasonable representation of the ages of residents in the community. Figure 3.06 shows a breakdown of the survey respondent's age categories. Specific data on the responses is located in the Appendix of this report.

Figure 3.06: Age of SWOT Survey Respondents

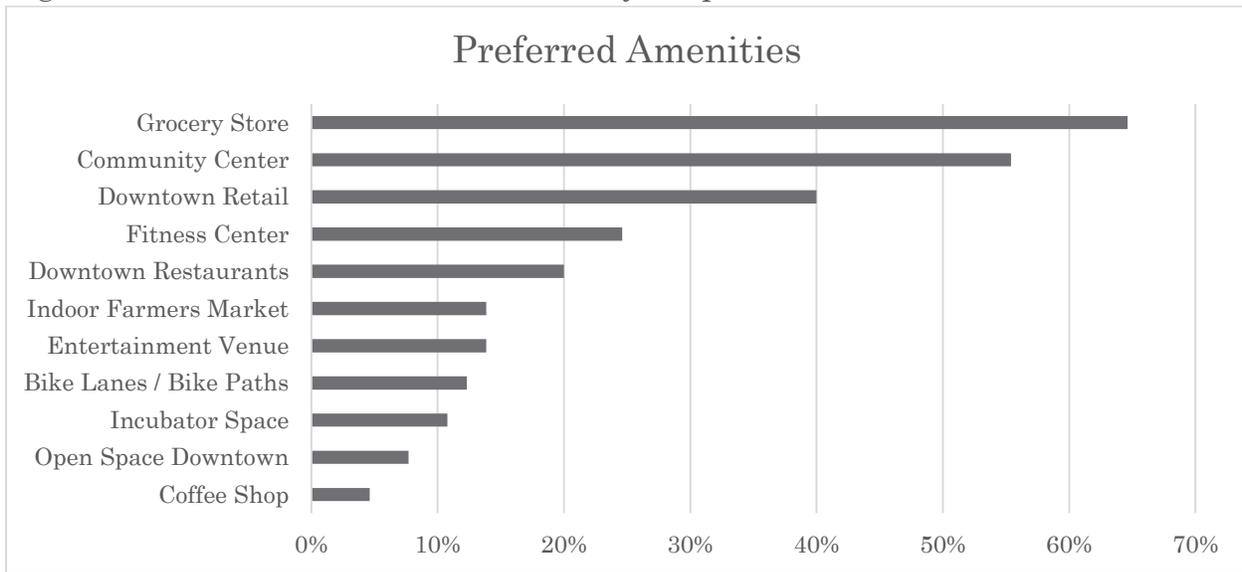


**SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM SURVEY**

Participants were provided with a list of 11 amenities determined by the Practicum Team. The list consisted of the following; Grocery Store, Community Center, Entertainment Venue, Fitness Center, Indoor Farmers Market, Coffee Shop, Incubator Space, Open Space Downtown, Bike Lanes / Bike Paths, Downtown Retail and Downtown Restaurants. Respondents were also given the option of “other” to fill in if there were any amenities not on the list. A summary of the responses can be found in Figure 3.07.

Figure 3.07 shows that the top preferred amenities for Muskegon Heights among the 65 respondents to this survey are a grocery store, a community center, downtown retail and a fitness center.

Figure 3.07: Preferred Amenities of Survey Respondents



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM SURVEY

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis Findings

In addition to the short survey completed, participants in the focus groups performed a SWOT analysis of Muskegon Heights. Participants were guided first with a presentation from the students explaining the purpose of collecting input and the overall goals of the Blight Elimination Plan. The following information was compiled from all of the participants in the SWOT analysis, with a focus on the responses related to commercial properties.

### Strengths

Several pieces of information were repeated in survey responses. Some of the strengths included were the diverse mix of commercial and residential properties; the existing physical infrastructure, longstanding business owners and the unique and well maintained historical architecture in the downtown. Examples of community assets mentioned include the older population, vacant properties and the downtown as a “blank slate”. In addition, participants highlighted again the strong existing infrastructure, and well-designed streets, and the incorporation of parks within the downtown.

### Weaknesses

Many listed weaknesses centered on issues surrounding high unemployment. Jobs, capital, businesses that create jobs, grocery stores, local investment and walkability were all listed as things that the city is either managing poorly, or a shortcoming or weakness of the overall community.

### Opportunities

The responses regarding opportunities put a strong emphasis on the need of support from the local government. The opportunities for the community listed by residents were things

such as outdoor café seating in the downtown, business attraction and relocation, a vibrant downtown, redevelopment of the Strand Theater and sustainable job growth in the future.

## Threats

Participants in the analysis declared one of the threats to be a lack of collaboration between departments in the city and the county. It was made clear that one of the biggest hurdles for the community is bringing assets together and doing things with no regard for who gets credit.

Overall the participants in this analysis seemed hopeful. Responses focused on commercial development repeated themes of reactivating space in the downtown, business attraction and retention, creating jobs and relying on the local government to initiate these efforts.

## Summary

The research done for this project was compiled with the end result in mind. The practicum team collected information from the city, conducted additional surveys of blighted and abandoned properties in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, and collected public input. The methodology provided the practicum team with a comprehensive understanding of the current status of the city, the events and actions that led the city to that status and the desired future of the community. The research compiled was used to provide a foundation for the recommendations provided in this report.

# EXISTING CONDITIONS

The information presented in this section represents the current status of parcels located in the study area. Research began with an initial windshield survey of each parcel located in the study area boundaries, in which the practicum team worked with the client to rate parcels based on physical characteristics. The results were then averaged out to provide face block ratings of each block within the boundaries. From there, the practicum team chose specific blocks to re-assess based on face block ratings, and re-evaluated the parcels on those blocks with a more specific set of criteria. The maps in this section are presented in a chronological way to represent the steps taken by the team. Residential evaluations were based solely on physical characteristics, while commercial evaluations were based on vacancy status.

## Study Area Block Conditions

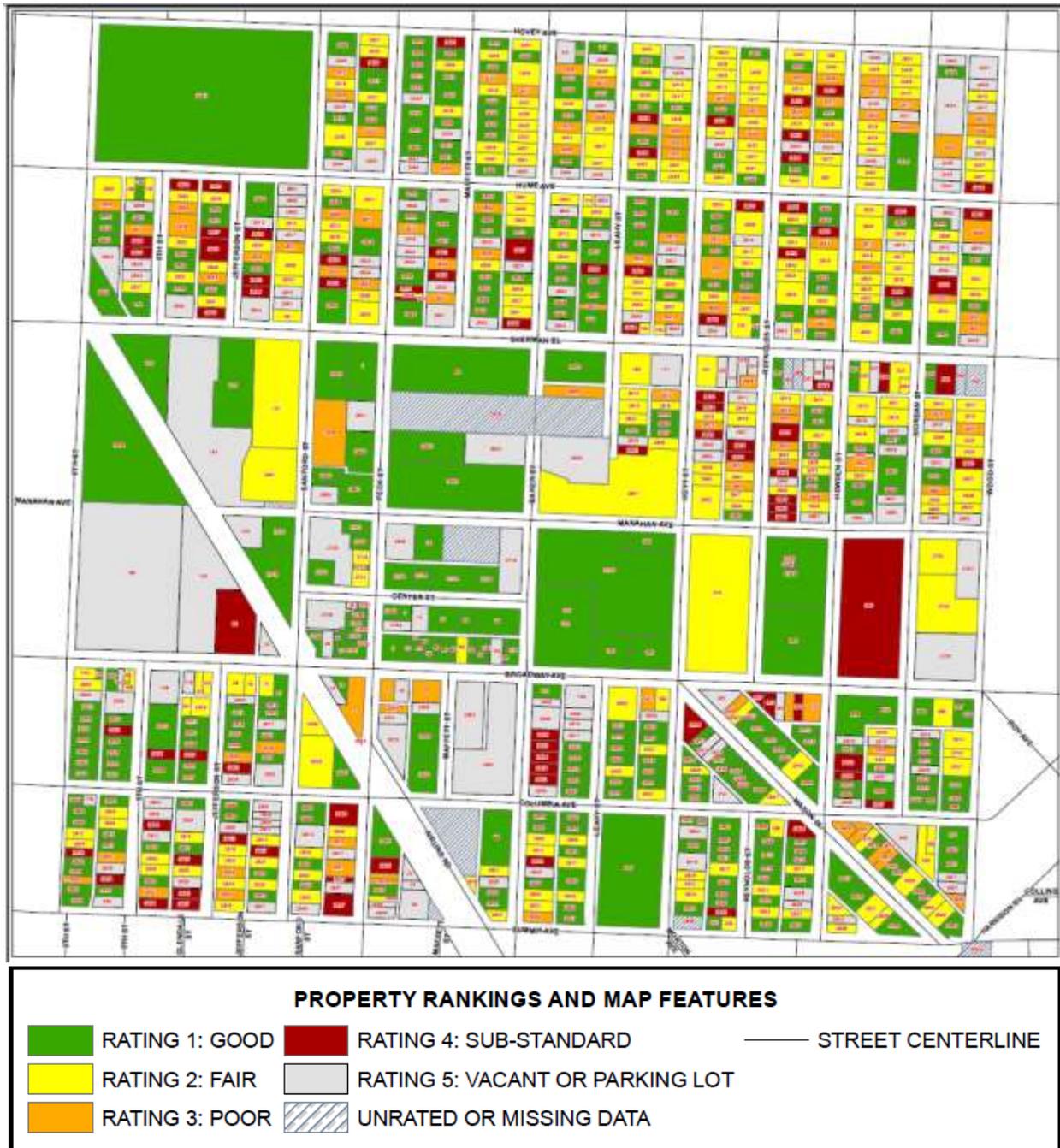
### Parcel Survey/Inventory

For the windshield parcel survey of the study area within this document, parcels were assessed on February 4th and 5th, 2015 by the practicum team with assistance from clients at the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority, Muskegon County, and the City of Muskegon Heights. A windshield survey involved all members walking or driving through the target area bounded by 6th Street, Hovey Avenue, Wood Street and Summit Avenue. Each building was assessed in this preliminary survey. The team combined the information with the parcel map for the target area.

Parcels were assessed on a 1-5 scale with each property being given an overall ranking as follows and mapped results appear in Figure 4.01. “1” represents the best condition, while “4” represents the poorest condition. “5” refers to vacant lot. To determine what is “good” or “bad” condition, the team included assessment categories such as roof, door, foundation windows as well as siding. Each rating had a detailed list of criteria included and can be found in Appendix C.

It should be noted that the survey done in Figure 4.02 using these statistics should not be seen as an exhaustive and complete analysis of the conditions of residential structures. Rather, this should be seen as an initial and brief overview of the conditions of individual structures. For a more detailed review of the conditions of each parcel, the focus block analysis is a more complete and comprehensive review of structural integrity (See the detailed individual structures assessment section).

Figure 4.01: Preliminary Windshield Survey Rating Map



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

### Face Block Assessment

Below is the analysis of face block conditions for the detailed study area.

Since the first preliminary parcel assessment did not have detailed scores in every category of structural health laid out in the Methodology, the individual structure condition assessment was expected to be conducted in the next step. In order to determine which

streets and avenues the project needed to focus on, the practicum team developed the “face block” system. A “face block” is a street view of houses on a block street. The face block is the most fundamental element of a neighborhood environment. Since the preliminary ratings were completed, the team had the general understanding of building conditions in each face block. Given the information in ratings map (Figure 4.01), each street was given a score by calculating the average scores of all houses in the block street (excluded “5”: vacant parcel). Then a map was created showing the face block rating. The results are shown in Figure 4.02. Rating categories were determined as follows:

1<Average Rating<1.5 = Excellent

1.5<Average Rating<2 = Good

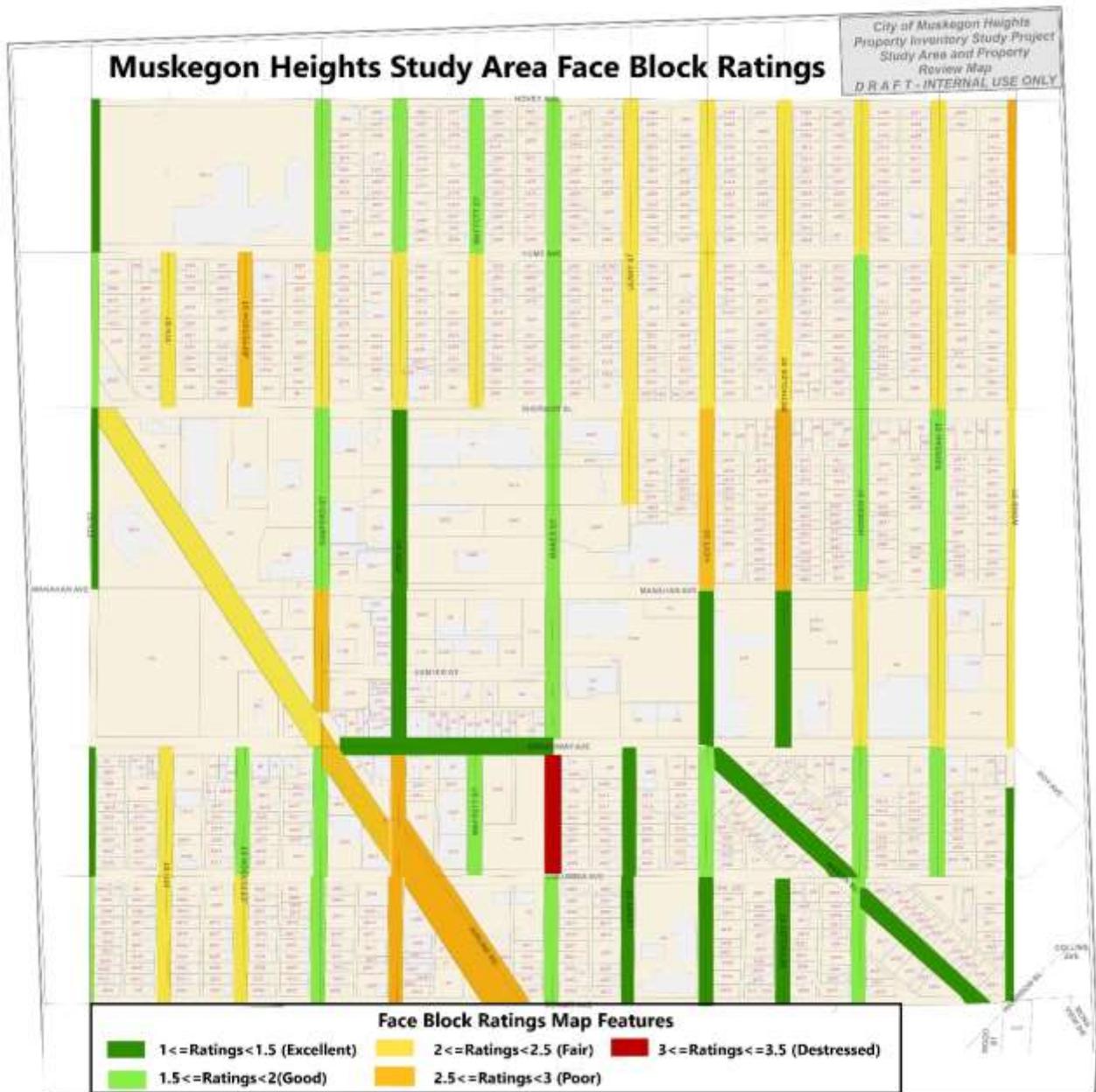
2<Average Rating<2.5 = Fair

2.5<Average Rating<3 = Poor

3<Average Rating<3.5 = Distressed

The team used “green” refers to good condition while “red” represents poor condition. The main face block map has been broken down into 4 subareas here for better display. Figures 4.02 – 4.07 display the mapped results of this survey.

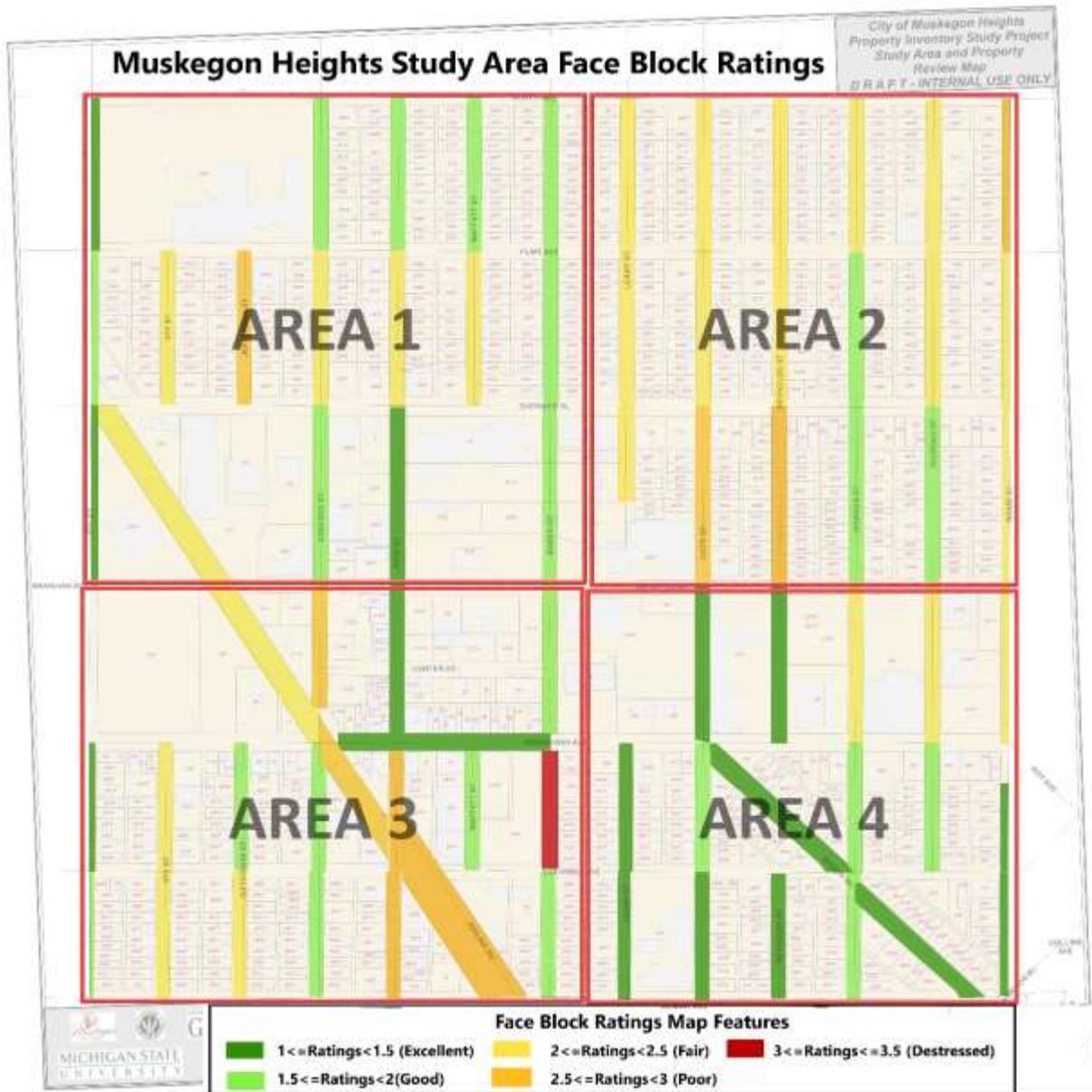
Figure 4.02: Face Block Ratings



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

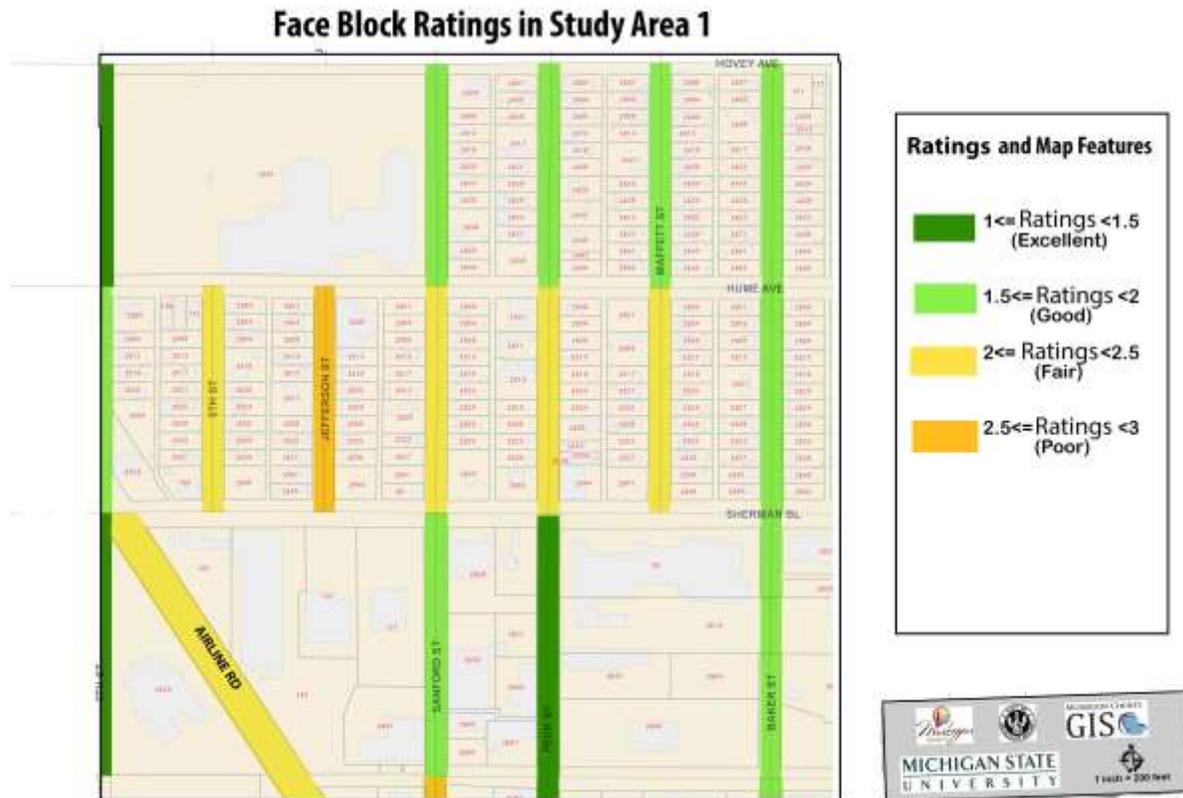
In figure 4.02 there is not a concentration of Poor or Good face blocks, but rather block health is scattered throughout the study area.

Figure 4.03: Face Block Study Areas



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

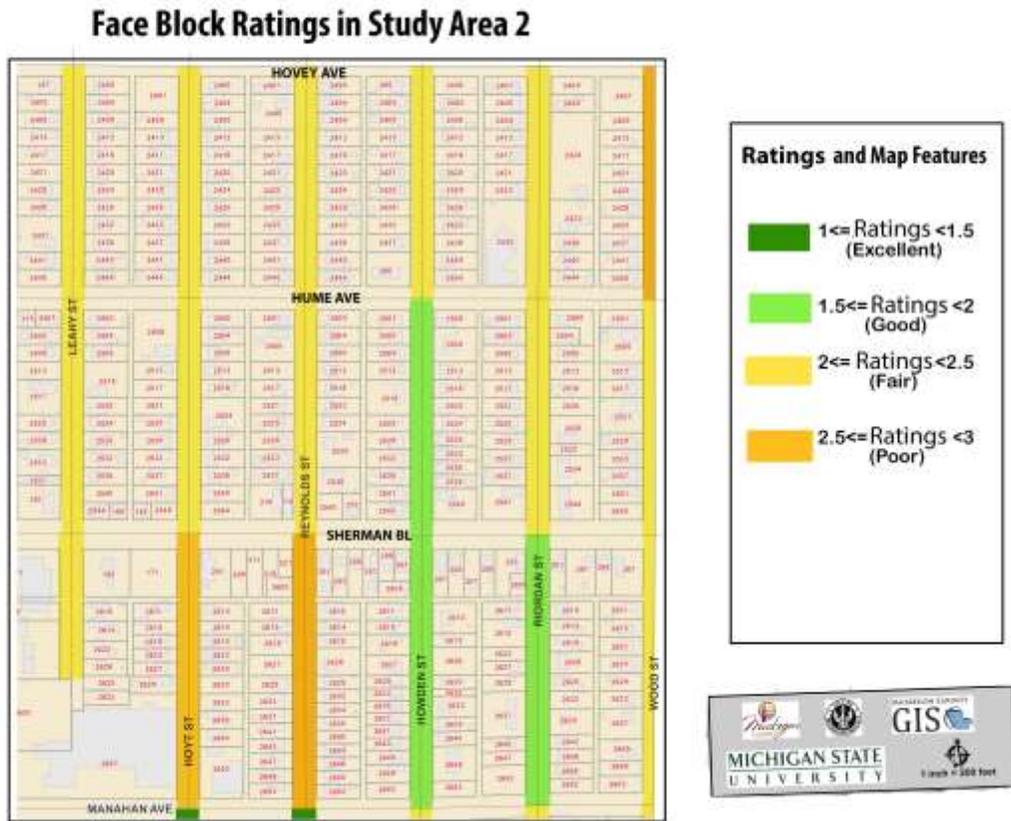
Figure 4.04: Face Block Rating Study Area 1



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

Area 1 is bounded by 6th Street, Hovey Avenue, Baker Street and Manahan Avenue. Here we see 1 block in Poor condition, 5 blocks in Fair condition, 8 blocks in Good condition and 3 blocks in Excellent condition.

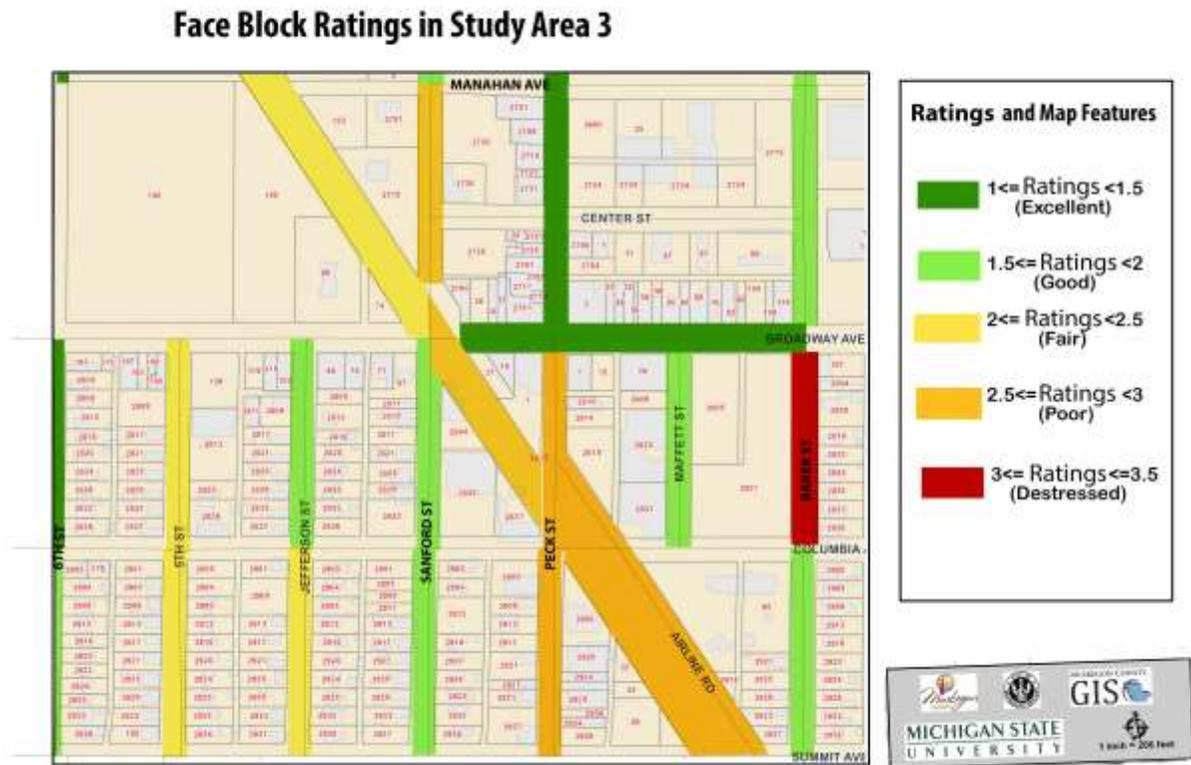
Figure 4.05: Face Block Rating Study Area 2



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

Area 2 is bounded by Baker Street, Hovey Avenue, Wood Street and Manahan Avenue. Here we see 3 blocks in Poor condition, 12 blocks in Fair condition, and 3 blocks in Good condition.

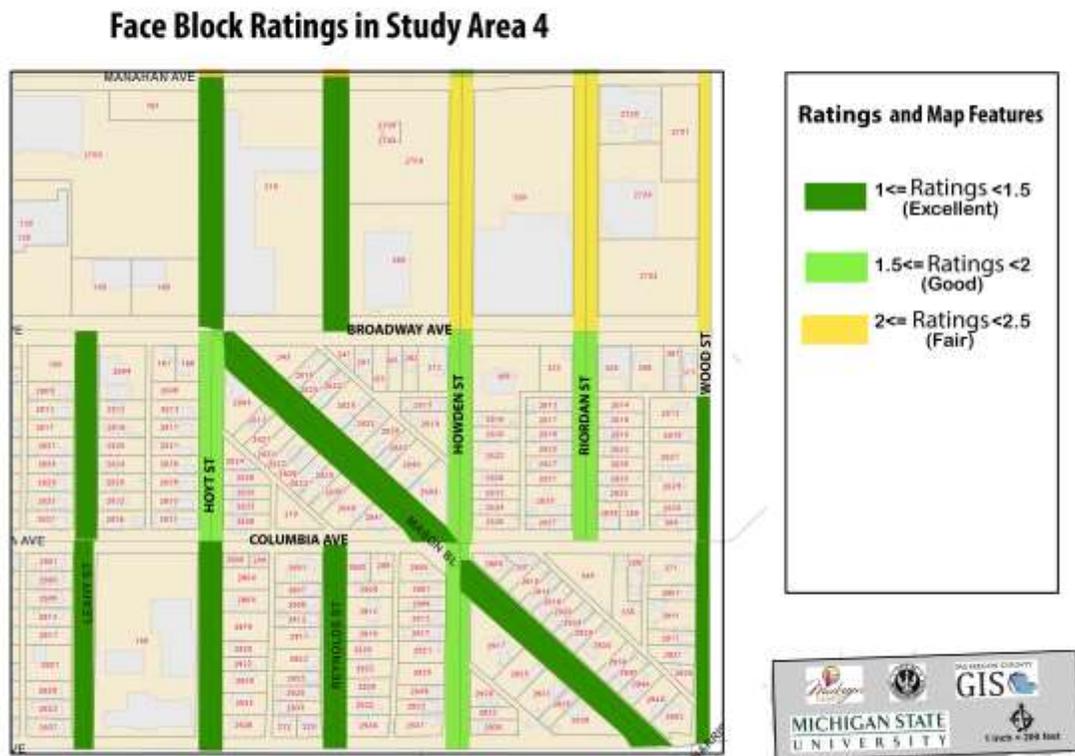
Figure 4.06: Face Block Rating Study Area 3



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

Area 3 is bounded by 6th Street, Manahan Avenue, Baker Street and Summit Avenue. Here we see 1 block in Distressed condition, 5 blocks in Poor condition, 6 blocks in Good condition, and 3 blocks in Excellent condition.

Figure 4.07: Face Block Rating Study Area 4



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

Area 4 is bounded by Wood Street, Manahan Avenue, Baker Street and Summit Avenue. Here we see 3 blocks in Fair condition, 4 blocks in Good condition, and 10 blocks in excellent condition.

## Detailed Individual Structures Assessment

After the completion of face block ratings in study area, the practicum team chose any two streets in each rating category. The two streets chosen from 1-1.5 rating category are Broadway Ave between Peck Street and Baker Street and Manson Boulevard between Broadway Avenue and Columbia Avenue. The two streets chosen from 1.5-2 rating category are Peck Street between Hovey Avenue and Hume Avenue and Baker Street between Hume Avenue and Sherman Boulevard. The two streets chosen from 2-2.5 rating category are Peck Street between Hume Avenue and Sherman Boulevard and Leahy Street between Hume Avenue and Sherman Boulevard. The two streets chosen from 2.5-3 rating category are Hoyt Street between Sherman Boulevard and Manahan Avenue and Reynolds Street between Sherman Boulevard and Manahan Avenue. There is only one street face block rating falls into the 3-3.5 category: Baker Street between Broadway Avenue and Columbia Avenue. These 9 streets were selected in total.

After determining the 9 focused streets, the practicum team returned to Muskegon Heights on February 22nd, 2015 and completed a more detailed structural condition analysis of specific focus blocks based on the face block rating, as shown in Figure 4.08.

The detailed structural condition analysis used the criteria displayed in Figure 3.01 in the Methodology. The practicum team assessed all structures on the 9 streets based on the following elements: roof, door window and siding (driveway was excluded because the heavy snow made it hard to evaluate). Each element was given a ranking of 1 to 3, respectively. "1" represents the poorest condition with several damages while "3" stands for the best condition with minor damages. Once individual assessment categories were ranked and scored through an un-weighted scale, then a final score was produced through adding four categories' scores. This score is represented in the final score of every building. Individual structures were assessed and given a score between 4 and 12.

Scoring broke down as follows:

Score between 4 and 6 = Poor

Score between 7 and 9 = Fair

Score between 10 and 12 = Good



## Face Block Assessment Summary

As can be seen in Figures 4.04 – 4.07, healthy and less healthy blocks are scattered throughout the study area. However, Study Areas 2 (Figure 4.05) and 3 (Figure 4.06) have the largest amount of blocks in Poor or Distressed condition while Study area 4 (Figure 4.07) has a majority of blocks listed in excellent condition. In Study Area 1 (Figure 4.04) only one block is rated Poor with most being rated Good or Fair.

## Commercial

To determine occupancy within the downtown focus area, the practicum team performed a walking study, referenced a list of operating businesses provided by the city as well as the 2012 DDA business listing, and consulted with city and county staff. As mapped in the Downtown analysis map, all of the commercial parcels were designated as either an occupied structure, a vacant structure, a vacant lot or a park/green space.

As can be seen in Figure 4.07, the intersection of Peck and Broadway has its blocks rated in excellent condition. While the structures themselves are in good condition, many of them are currently vacant. The Practicum Team survey indicated a total of 39 vacant or partially vacant parcels. These parcels were then categorized as vacant parcels and vacant structures. Overall, there were 12 completely vacant parcels and 27 vacant structures.

# CURRENT BLIGHT ELIMINATION EFFORTS

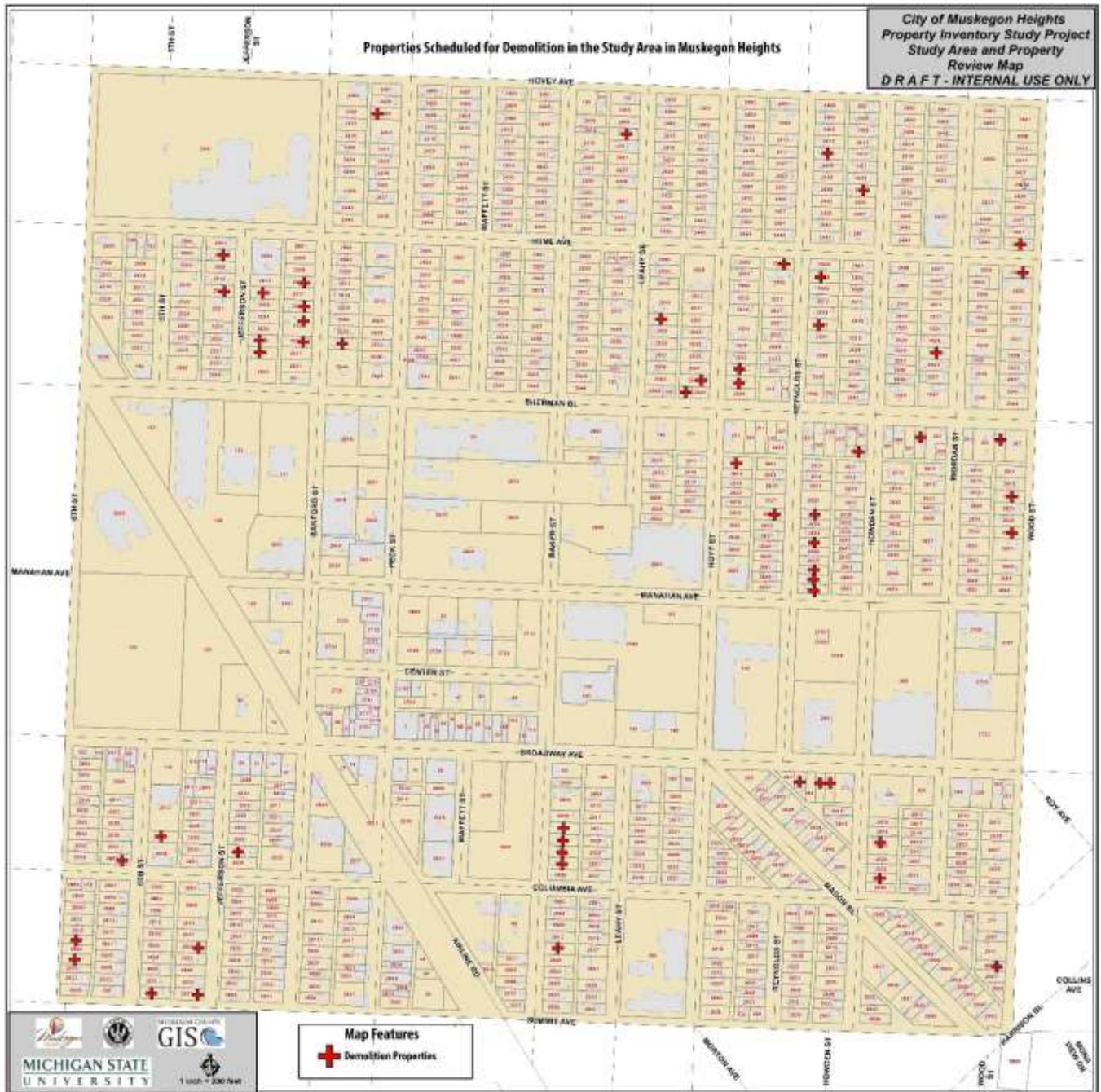
## Residential

### Hardest Hit Demolition Funding

In the fall of 2014, the City of Muskegon Heights was awarded \$1.8 million in funding for residential blight elimination from the Hardest Hit program of the United States Treasury Department. This money, which is funding from the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) passed in 2008 as a tool to reduce the impact of mortgage foreclosures, has been re-categorized and allowed for use strictly in the demolition of vacant and blighted residential structures. It's important to note that this funding may not be used for commercial purposes (Sidorowicz, 2014).

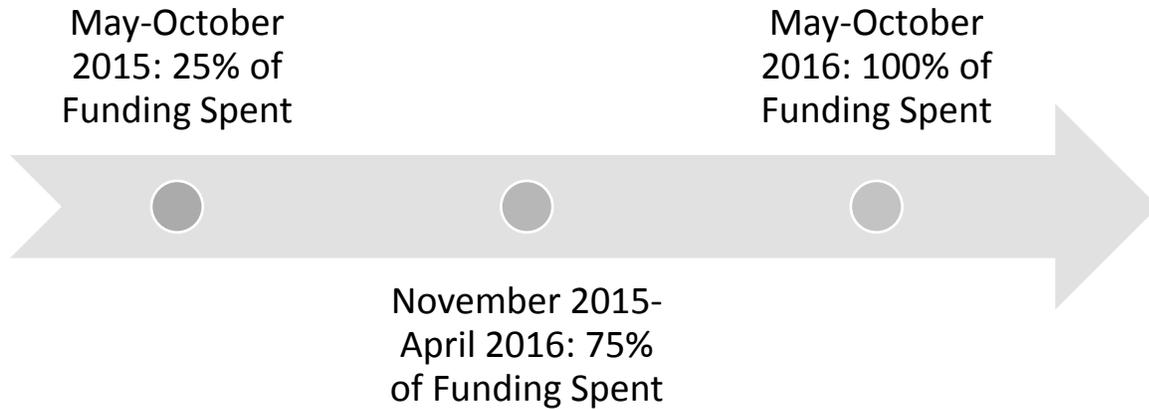
The City of Muskegon Heights, while not yet complete in its pre-demolition process, plans to begin demolishing structures in the spring of 2015 in partnership with the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority. This partnership should lead to the demolition of roughly 200 blighted vacant homes in the City, a large chunk considering that there are only approximately 300 vacant and blighted residential properties in Muskegon Heights that require demolition to begin with. Figure 5.01 displays the locations of these planned demolitions within this project's target study area. The demolition of these proposed properties are scheduled to be completed by fall 2016, assuming a start to demolition in May of 2015. (Figure 5.02)

Figure 5.01: Proposed Hardest Hit Demolition Locations



SOURCE: MUSKEGON COUNTY LAND BANK AUTHORITY

Figure 5.02 Hardest Hit Funding Allocation Usage

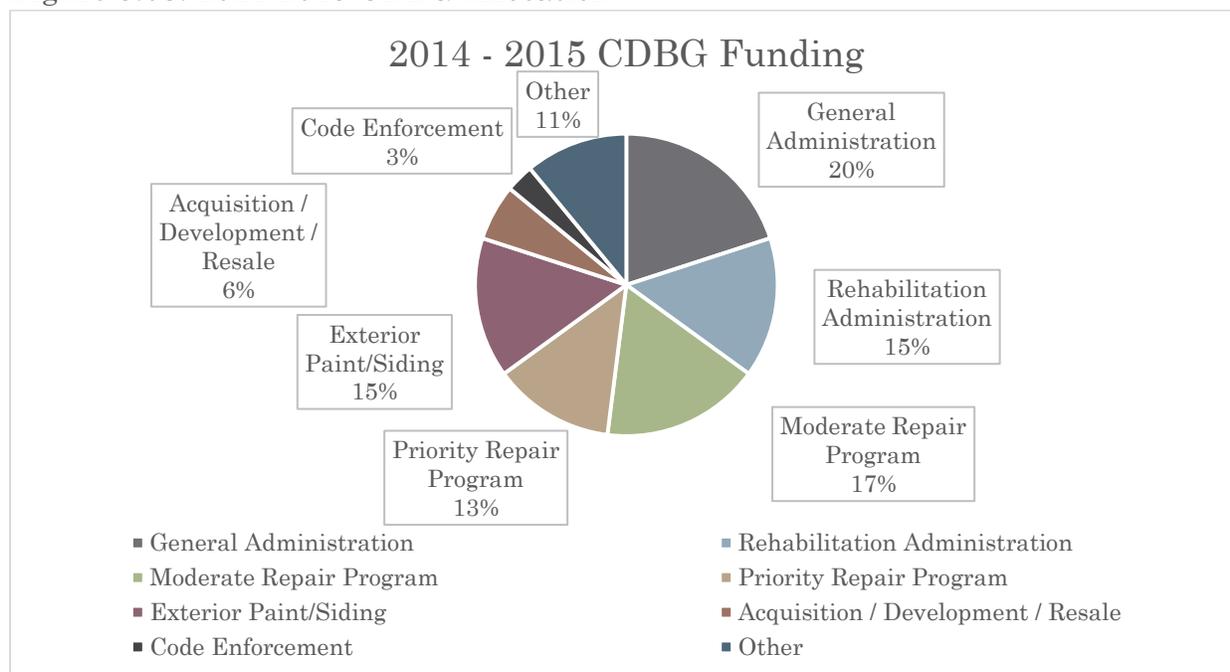


SOURCE: MUSKEGON COUNTY LAND BANK AUTHORITY

### CDBG Funding

Muskegon Heights, as an entitlement community, received \$391,690 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding this fiscal year. Muskegon Heights' FY 2014-2015 CDBG allocation breakdown can be seen in Figure 5.03.

Figure 5.03: 2014-2015 CDBG Allocation



SOURCE: CITY OF MUSKEGON HEIGHTS 2014 CDBG REQUEST RELEASE OF FUNDS

### Additional Demolition/Code Enforcement

Currently, between the categories titled Rehabilitation Administration, Moderate Repair Program, Priority Repair Program, Exterior Citywide Paint/Siding, and Acquisition/Development/Resale, the city is allocating \$260,544, or 66% of its CDBG funding, to financing improvements to the homes of low-income Muskegon Heights residents. This sizeable allocation of grant funding to these purposes leaves 3%, or just over \$12,000, of available CDBG funding to code enforcement efforts in the fiscal year displayed in Figure 5.03.

In addition to the Hardest Hit funding, the city has designated \$20,000 in Community Development Block Grant monies to be allocated in the 2014-2015 fiscal year to the demolition of up to 10 single family housing units (City of Muskegon Heights, 2014). This currently constitutes 5% of the City’s CDBG funding dollars. Should this be continued in the 2015-2016 fiscal year, the community could see the removal of approximately 220 out of 300 blighted and vacant residential structures when this funding is combined with the up to 200 structures that could be demolished with Hardest Hit funding, an initial reduction of approximately 73% of the city’s vacant and blighted housing structures when compared to today (MCLBA, 2015).

### Deconstruction Funding (Alternative to Demolition)

Deconstruction, defined as a process of selective dismantlement of building components in order to recover the maximum amount of materials for reuse, is not currently present in blight removal efforts. Currently, Muskegon Heights and the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority are considering a partnership with Michigan State University to begin a

deconstruction pilot program with homes demolished using Hardest Hit funding. However, the growing waste from structure demolition will continue to be a major issue for the area as the region's landfill approaches capacity. Any increase in deconstruction activities for vacant homes rather than strict demolition with waste going to the landfill could improve the precarious situation of the region's landfill.

# Commercial

## Current Revitalization Strategy

Currently the City of Muskegon Heights and County partners are considering pursuing several grant opportunities relating to commercial redevelopment, specifically within the Downtown area. One such opportunity discussed has been the redevelopment of the vacant Strand Theater by attaining a historic preservation designation and capitalizing on funding available to historic structures. However, this has not been formally pursued yet.

Within the City's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, fiscal year 2014-2015 included an allocation of \$10,000 for redevelopment of the Muskegon Heights Farmer's Market in order to attract new food-based entrepreneurs to the City's Downtown (City of Muskegon Heights, 2014). This budget allocation has already been made although continued investments in the Market have not been formally spelled out for future CDBG allocations.

The city has a designated boundary for the Downtown Development Authority that was last adjusted in 1992, but is not currently active (City of Muskegon Heights, 2015). Although the DDA website was updated in 2012, it has not since had activity, and the city has not maximized on the economic potential of having an established DDA.

Besides these discussed funding sources and explicit CDBG allocations, the City of Muskegon Heights does not currently have much funding specifically for commercial redevelopment within the Downtown or anywhere within the target area. Potential sources for future funding will be discussed in Proposed Strategic Planning.

# PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLANNING

## Residential

### Demolition Prioritization/Need/Methods:

#### Current Practice: Brookings Institute Demolition Prioritization

\$1.8 million in Hardest Hit demolition funding has the potential to impact the city's blight struggles dramatically, given the total amount of abandoned properties the community could benefit from a strategic demolition strategy.

Using the Hardest Hit dollars, the practicum team suggests priority should be placed on what can be called "tipping point neighborhoods" first. Understanding that not all of the City's vacant and blighted structures can be removed with this grant, the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority should consider prioritizing specific properties, specifically those rated Poor in the focus block assessment that are surrounded by properties mostly rated Good in said assessment.

Allan Mallatch of the Brookings Institute has chronicled extensively the toll that a vacant structure can take on an otherwise stable residential block. In a 2012 paper, Mallatch wrote:

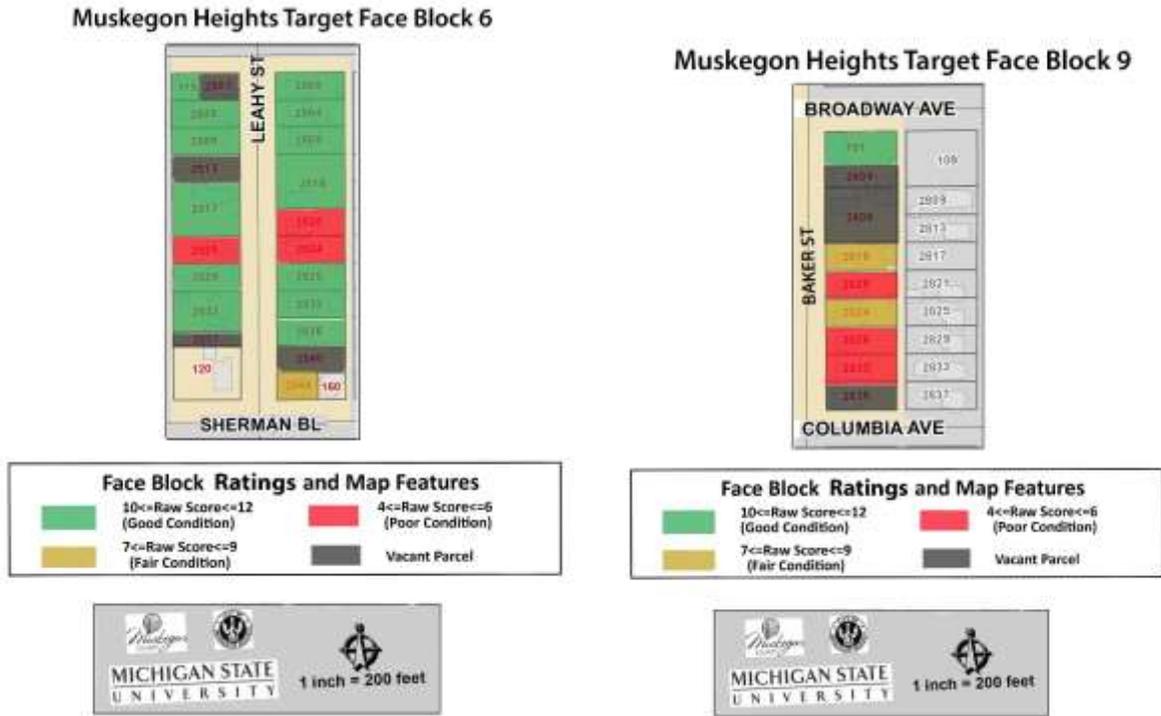
*"Priority setting should first and foremost be based on market and other neighborhood conditions. While each city must determine its own priorities based on its conditions and goals, this means that in most cases priority should not be given to demolition in the most heavily abandoned and disinvested areas, but to areas where removal of buildings is likely to help stabilize neighborhood conditions and property values and create potential reuse opportunities"* (Mallatch, 2012, pp. 26).

Muskegon Heights should follow this model. Rather than demolishing houses on blocks where the majority of the homes are already vacant, Muskegon Heights should work to stabilize blocks with only a few vacant residential parcels. This strategy also will allow Muskegon Heights to have a larger percentage of city blocks with structures that are 100% occupied. Rather than simply reducing the severity of blight in some areas of the city, Muskegon Heights should seek to rid as much of the city of vacant and particularly non-salvageable structures as possible.

In Figure 6.01, Blocks 6 and 9 give an example of blocks where this strategy could be effective. In Block 6, most homes are listed as Good with the block overall being relatively stable. However, this block also contains several homes labeled Poor which could have a destabilizing effect on the block. In Block 9, there is a large concentration of either vacant lots or Fair to Poor housing. While there is an equivalent number of homes rated Poor as in Block 6, these houses are not having a detrimental effect on as many houses due to adjacent residential vacancy and the deteriorated condition of the homes that remain. In this

instance, following the recommendations of Mallatch, Muskegon Heights should remove the homes in Block 6 to preserve as many stable properties as possible. Figure 6.02 displays locations of proposed demolitions following these recommendations overlaid with the current plan for residential demolitions using Hardest Hit funding in the focus block areas.

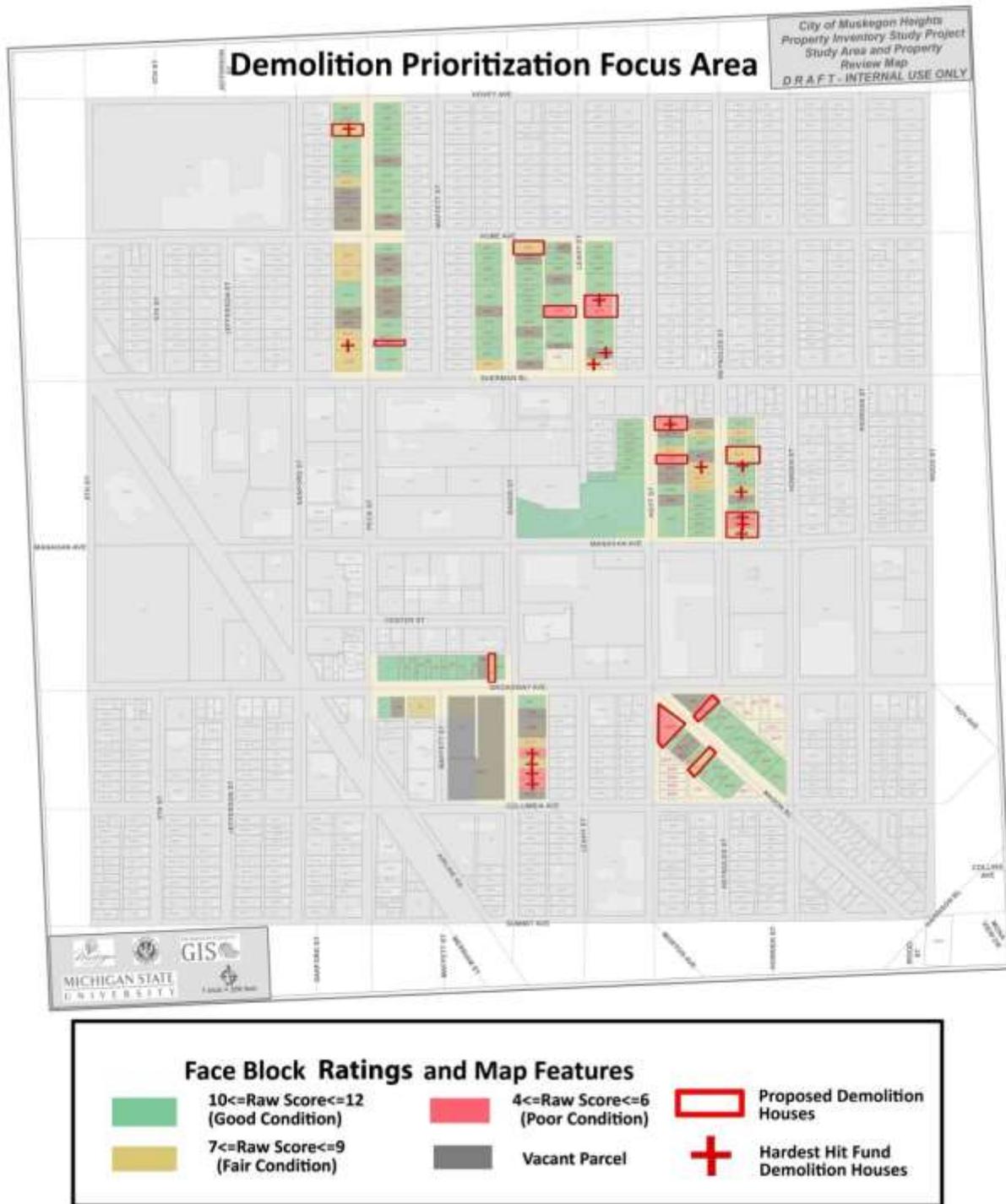
Figure 6.01: Example Blocks for Demolition Prioritization



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

Block 6, in figure 6.01 displays the ideal block for demolition prioritization due to structures in poor condition immediately adjacent to structures in good condition.

6.02: Ideal Locations for Demolition Prioritization in All Focus Blocks



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

The blocks in figure 6.02 display proposed demolitions across the focus blocks.

## Deconstruction Program

Deconstruction is the process of the selective dismantling or removal of building components in order to make the maximum use of recycled materials (U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, 2000). In short, it is the disassembly of a building and the recovery of its materials, often considered as construction in reverse.

Usually, in a deconstruction project, a group of trained workers disassembles building components by hand or special equipment and salvages useful materials from the site. Taking apart building for reuse and recycling purposes is different than the traditional demolition process, which involves demolishing buildings with large and heavy equipment and dumping all debris into a landfill.

Deconstruction has become somewhat more common across the United States in recent years. Brad Guy, the president of the Building Materials Reuse Association pointed out that as of 2008, there were more than 250 deconstruction programs occurring across the United States (EPA, 2008). The social, economic and environmental benefits discussed here have been identified from those programs.

First, deconstruction results in the reduction of waste generation as building wastes are recycled and reused rather than dumped into the landfill directly. This also leads to the conservation of local landfill space and helps to extend the life span of existing landfills. Secondly, deconstruction can reduce natural resource and energy consumption as it minimizes the need to produce new materials, thus reducing production impacts such as greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, deconstruction is a labor-intensive procedure that requires skilled and trained workers to disassemble structures, recover and sort materials, and salvage useful materials. These jobs provide workers not only employment opportunities but trained skills. Deconstruction also provides salvageable materials, which can be used for building construction and repairing existing structures (U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, 2000).

With over 700 properties currently owned and identified as blighted homes in Muskegon County as well as 11 other local municipalities in the State of Michigan focusing on blight elimination through the Hardest Hit program, there is a very large ongoing effort statewide to eliminate blight (Muskegon County Land Bank Authority, 2015). Materials from deconstructed buildings resulting from these efforts may easily be repurposed into other products as well as sold on the overseas commodities market for potential revenue. A study should be undertaken to determine whether Muskegon County could benefit, through its deep water port, from establishing itself as a deconstruction hub and whether or not such a development would be feasible.

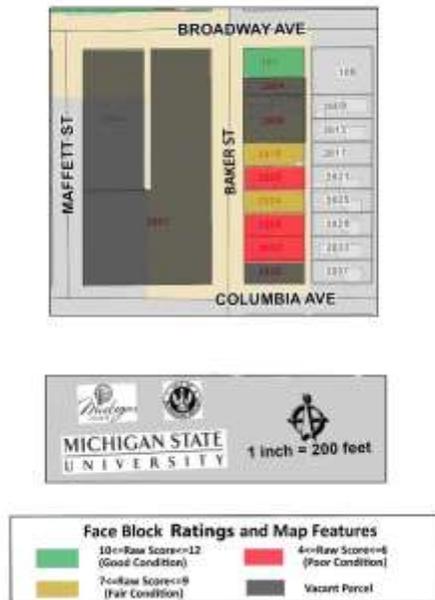
Recognizing the benefits of deconstruction, Muskegon Heights should formally explore whether or not deconstruction could be both a cost effective and environmentally beneficial avenue for Muskegon Heights and the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority to pursue.

Figure 6.04 is one of the target face block that has been identified as a distressed block with several vacant parcels and three abandoned structures in poor condition. This target block could be a location at which to conduct a deconstruction pilot program. The block has a

concentration of less-desired parcels and is close to a main road (Broadway Avenue) that makes transporting recycled materials from the site easier. While vacant structures on this block do not fit with this plan’s overall demolition prioritization recommendations in Figure 6.02 due to their distance from structures in Good condition, the site’s access to major roadways could be beneficial to a pilot project.

Figure 6.04 Example Blocks for Deconstruction Practice

**Muskegon Heights Target Face Block 9**



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

In figure 6.04, the block’s poor structures and proximity to major roadways make it a potential block for a pilot deconstruction program.

**Recommendations for Demolition Prioritization/Needs/Methods**

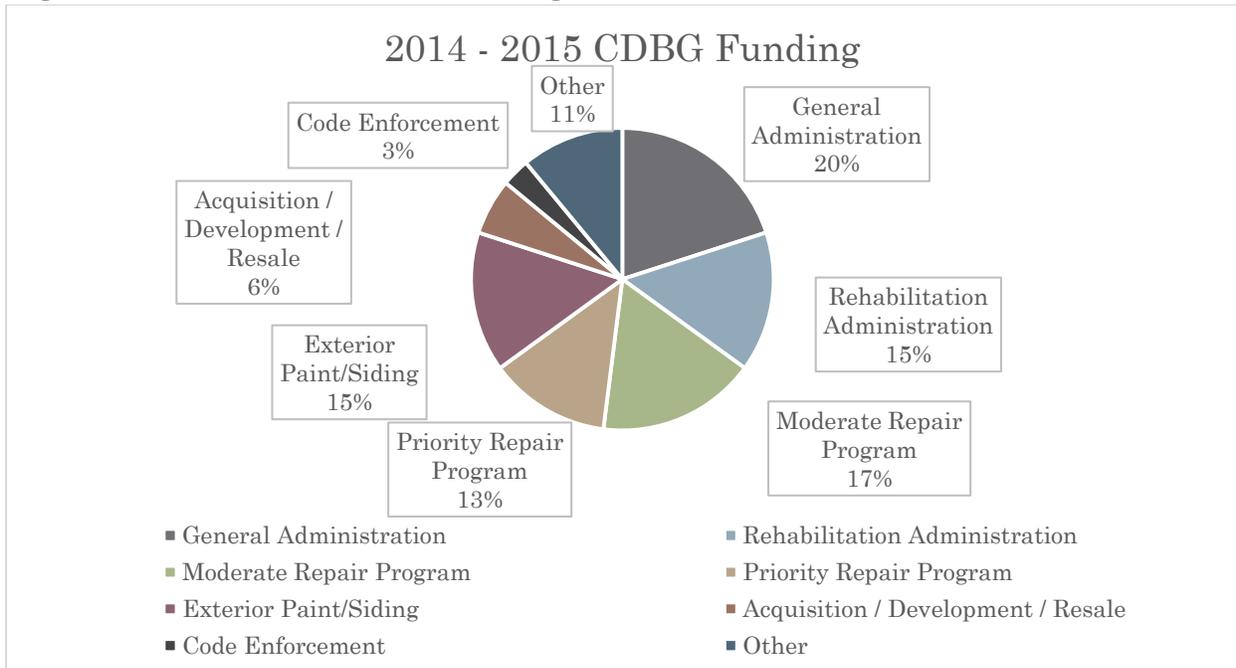
- Prioritize demolition funding to homes on blocks with few vacant structures in order to preserve and increase housing values and maximize effectiveness of funding.
- Explore the feasibility of creating a region wide deconstruction infrastructure to allow Muskegon Heights and Muskegon County to capitalize on the economic potential of residential deconstruction and to reduce overall costs for blight removal.

**Code Enforcement: Current Practices and Recommendations**

Currently, the city allocates just over \$12,000 to Code Enforcement in the 2014-2015 Fiscal Year. This amount may not be sufficient for the high amount of vacant structures in the community. Oftentimes these structures present a nuisance to their neighbors, a direct violation of the city’s nuisance law. Repeated examples of community feedback referenced

the lack of code enforcement that allowed both homeowners and renters to fail to meet city ordinances. City officials discussed a recent heightened focus on code enforcement for structural compliance issues when/where the Building Inspections department focuses mostly on certifying rental units with limited manpower available to enforce codes generally (City of Muskegon Heights, 2015).

Figure 6.05: 2014-215 CDBG Funding Allocation



SOURCE: CITY OF MUSKEGON HEIGHTS 2014 REQUEST FOR RELEASE OF FUNDING

Improved code enforcement could lead to reduced nuisance as suggested in the following case.

### Center for Community Progress Model Code Enforcement Process

The Center for Community Progress, a nationally renowned think tank focusing on vacancy and residential abandonment in urban areas, has developed a ten-step process designed to maximize the efficiency of code enforcement procedures in financially constrained communities. These ten steps proposed are as follows (Lind, 2012):

- *Be Strategic*
- *Treat code enforcement as an organic system, not separate sets of programs.*
  - o These sorts of efforts take the coordination of several partners, not simply a more robust set of actions by the main municipal agency.
  - o The city should consider cross training various municipal staff members, especially those in positions like firefighting, who have knowledge of building codes. A focus on code enforcement by firefighters when not on an active call could improve efficiency and services for the code enforcement division. A

desire for such a program has been expressed by municipal officials (City of Muskegon Heights, 2015).

- *Focus on neighborhoods more than individual houses.*
  - o The face block analysis within this plan provides a tool with which to focus on neighborhoods and blocks rather than individual structures.
- *Use code enforcement in a coordinated way to improve entire neighborhoods rather than simply targeting houses scattershot.*
- *Establish sustainable collaborations.*
  - o Muskegon Heights and Muskegon County are limited in resources, so partnerships with neighborhood organizations and other groups to keep track of the conditions of residential parcels will be a necessity.
- *Develop a comprehensive, reliable and accessible, real property database.*
  - o A reliable database keeping track of information on a parcel-by-parcel basis. A good example of such a program in action is the Motor City Mapping program (Motor City Mapping, 2014).
- *Enact ordinances that fit the community.*
- *Deploy scarce resources for maximum results.*
- *Prosecute for Compliance*
- *Adjudicate for compliance*
  - o A key point in this is preferring timely compliance to punishment in criminal sentencing and civil judgments.
- *Engage neighborhood residents to help promote a culture of compliance.*
- *Ensure that neighborhood residents can participate in blight remediation and code enforcement activities.* Example: “Blexting” (Blight Texting) in Detroit wherein residents take images of blighted structures via a mobile application and send it to an established online database, automatically updating structure condition data (Loveland Technologies, 2014).

Image 6.01: Citizen Blexting<sup>1</sup> in Detroit



**SOURCE: DETROIT FREE PRESS**

The final point here is essential. An important partner in reducing blight in the city is neighborhood residents, and this was a theme repeated again and again in public input responses (Appendix A) and is discussed in the City’s 2012 Master Plan. Creating a Muskegon Heights version of digital mapping technology could allow for both a much more updated municipal structure-condition database and a more engaged and empowered citizenry.

An example of this technology, “Blexting” has already been developed and used in the City of Detroit. Blexting can be set up by the local municipality, land bank, code enforcement agency or other responsible parties and is usually in the form of a smartphone application. Ultimately, the goal is for community members to support efforts in the elimination of blight in their neighborhoods by taking pictures of blighted properties and sending the pictures to the responsible party. Similar technologies could stand to enhance avenues through which community members could engage in blight elimination and code enforcement procedures. Development of such technology would need to follow a review of the condition of all parcels using the tool laid out for the focus block analysis in this report.

In addition to these methods, the City should be sure to follow HUD Notice CPD-14-016 when allocating all funds for any code enforcement. This notice spells out clearly how CDBG dollars can and should be used in concert with HUD’s National Objectives for Code Enforcement (Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). Following these guidelines in addition to Center for Community Progress model discussed above will give

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<sup>1</sup> Blexting is the act of taking a picture of a blighted property and sending it to the local municipality or land bank.

Muskegon Heights a code enforcement program on par with models set forth by major national agencies and funding bodies.

This also would allow the city to fulfill a point in the 2012 Master Plan which states, “Complaint/enforcement data should be systematically maintained on a computer network so all departments can obtain property history or check the status of a property” (City of Muskegon Heights, 2012). This method both follows the practices of the Center for Community Progress’ code enforcement procedure and engages the community.

### Nuisance Abatement Lawsuits

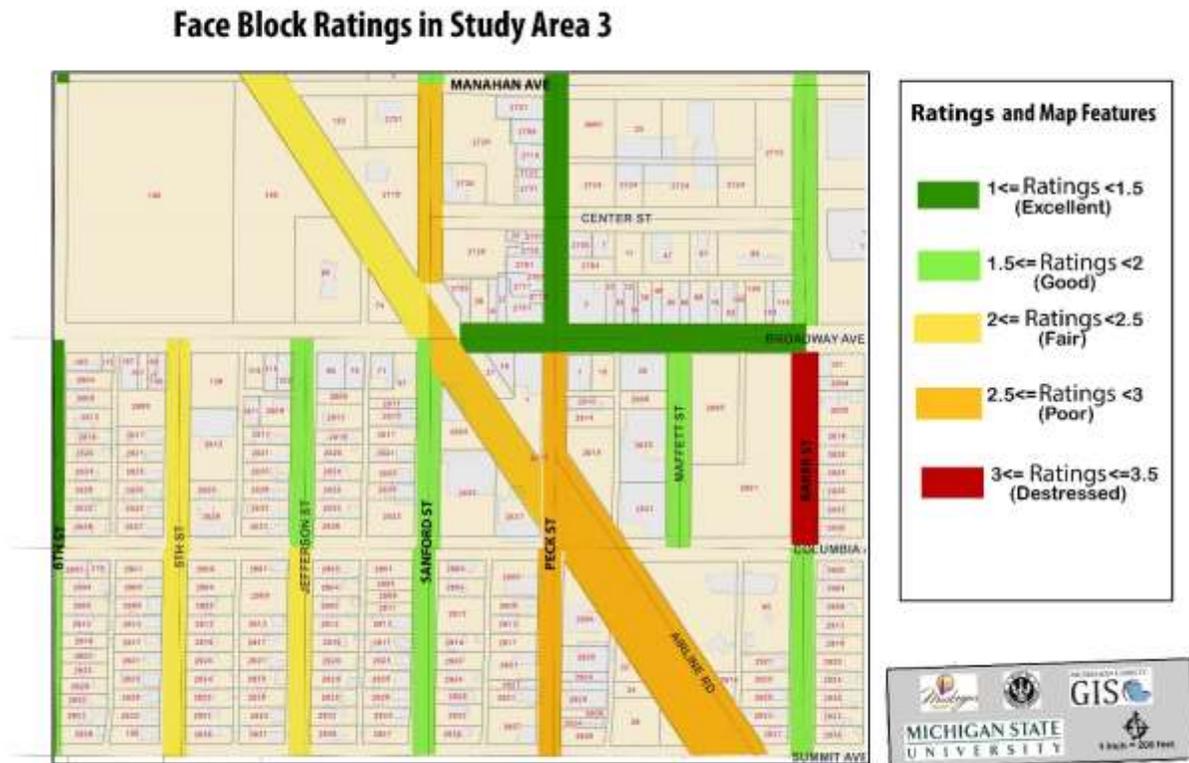
Beginning in 2014, the Detroit Land Bank Authority added legal staff to its core functions. Using principles of Nuisance Law, the City has begun to file lawsuits against the owners of vacant or blighted properties claiming that to maintain a property in a manner that is a nuisance is illegal. The City then seeks title to the property and adds it to the Land Bank’s inventory, with the end goal of auctioning the property to willing buyers with strict rules requiring full renovation of the home to code within six months of a purchase, 9 months for properties in historic districts (Sinclair, 2014).

Through this program, the city seeks to reach settlements with the property owners rather than take title to the home. Between May and August 2014, the City targeted 964 properties, with residential rehabilitation agreements signed by 127 property owners and 31 properties taken by the city due to failure to reach a settlement. The remaining cases were outstanding as of October 2014 (Sinclair, 2014). This sort of program, while it adds legal cost to the local land bank, privatizes the cost of improving residential structure conditions by seeking legal settlements wherein the property owner commits to improving the quality of the structure with private financing. Muskegon Heights should work to maintain properties that can be maintained, and a program like this can often shift those costs onto a private landowner rather than wait for the parcel to go through the tax foreclosure proceedings with the property deteriorating further before reaching municipal hands (Sinclair, 2014).

This program should be approached with caution however. Property owners do hold due process rights under legal proceedings. Any legal proceedings via this program will need to ensure that due process rights of property owners are respected and that the City is bringing charges to parcels where the elimination of blighted structures can have the most beneficial impact on the surrounding neighborhood.

Nuisance abatement procedures should be focused on blocks that still have an overall face block rating of fair or better. Such blocks, considered “tipping point” blocks, often need this intervention before they deteriorate further. Using the same rationale used in selective demolition focuses discussed by the Brookings Institute, Figure 6.06 displays an example of blocks to be focused on with code enforcement procedures. The City would be advised to focus on blocks rated Fair or better (light yellow, light green, and dark green) in order to maximize the impact of nuisance abatement lawsuits.

Figure 6.06: Face Block Ratings in Nuisance Abatement Context



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

This type of program would rely less on the City of Muskegon Heights, as a code enforcement program might, and rather would the rely on a collaboration between the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority and the City, the latter of which would need to file the lawsuits initially.

### Recommendations for Code Enforcement/Nuisance Abatement

- Create a robust code enforcement division using an increased CDBG allocation and processes following the Center for Community Progress’s model methods and HUD guidelines for CDBG funded code enforcement in order to privatize the cost of property maintenance and ensure code compliance.
- Create an electronic blight-reporting database based on the Motor City Mapping model to allow for neighborhood engagement in reducing residential blight.
- Seek out grant funded sources to add legal staff to the City and Land Bank to pursue nuisance abatement lawsuits to either require property improvements or take title to property from absentee and negligent landowners.

### Post Demolition Activities/Vacant Lot Reuse

Currently, Muskegon Heights has hundreds of vacant lots with approximately 189 just in the study area alone. This presents a considerable problem for the City, reducing property

values and therefore property tax revenue for the community. To maintain those vacant lots in a satisfactory fashion would require a dramatic commitment of revenues that the Land Bank currently does not have (Muskegon County Land Bank Authority, 2015). Community partnerships will be essential for Muskegon Heights to maintain these parcels and several current practices are laid out below.

Of the current homes proposed to be demolished using Hardest Hit funding, all 166 are either currently owned by the Land Bank or will be deeded to the Land Bank in order to demolish them with 56 of these located within our study area (Figure 5.01). Following demolition, these lots will be vacant and after seeding by the Muskegon County Land Bank, the properties will have to be mowed regularly unless they are sold to a private owner or developer. This continuous and added cost on the Land Bank stands as a major issue and could replace vacant and blighted homes with vacant blighted lots without proper maintenance.

At a cost of approximately \$20 per lot to mow (MCLBA, 2015), assuming the Land Bank mows an industry standard twice per month, just the Hardest Hit parcels alone will add \$46,480 per year onto the costs of the Land Bank, assuming that each property is mowed from April-October. This large cost cannot be supported by the Land Bank, and only a small portion of existing Hardest Hit funding can be devoted to property maintenance. This outstanding need to adequately maintain parcels pushes programs such as side-lot transfers or other uses ahead in potential solutions for Land Bank and other municipally owned properties. In total, to mow each municipally owned vacant lot in the City of Muskegon Heights, the cost would be several thousand dollars, a sum that is not feasible in the City or the County's current budget allocation.

Going forward, it will be essential for the City and the MCLBA to seek out alternative funding structures and property maintenance systems to ensure that these vacant parcels are maintained in a fashion that does not continue the deterioration of property values.

### Genesee County Land Bank, Clean & Green

For several years the Genesee County Land Bank Authority has engaged in a program titled "Clean and Green." The program, built on the understanding that the Land Bank cannot maintain each and every parcel currently under its ownership, partners with community organizations to adopt parcels. The program is financed through grants and in 2014 partnered with 46 neighborhood groups maintaining 1,360 lots. To participate organizations must adopt a minimum of 25 vacant lots and maintain them every three weeks (Genesee County Land Bank Authority, 2014). In order to assist community organizations, each group receives a stipend with most program financing coming through grants from both the Community Foundation of Greater Flint and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Figure 6.07: Genesee County Land Bank Authority “Clean & Green” Program Model



SOURCE: (GENESEE COUNTY LAND BANK AUTHORITY, 2014).

Replicating such a program in Muskegon Heights could be possible by pursuing grant opportunities with various foundations and should be pursued by the City and the MCLBA. This could reduce the cost burden on the Land Bank to maintain so many properties. In addition, should post-demolition lots be seeded with white clover rather than grass, as this plan recommends, the lot maintenance program could be shifted from a mowing-centered program to one which focuses on removing dumping and keeping lots clear of trash and debris.

This proposal relates directly to the City’s 2012 Master Plan. Regarding blight, the plan states,

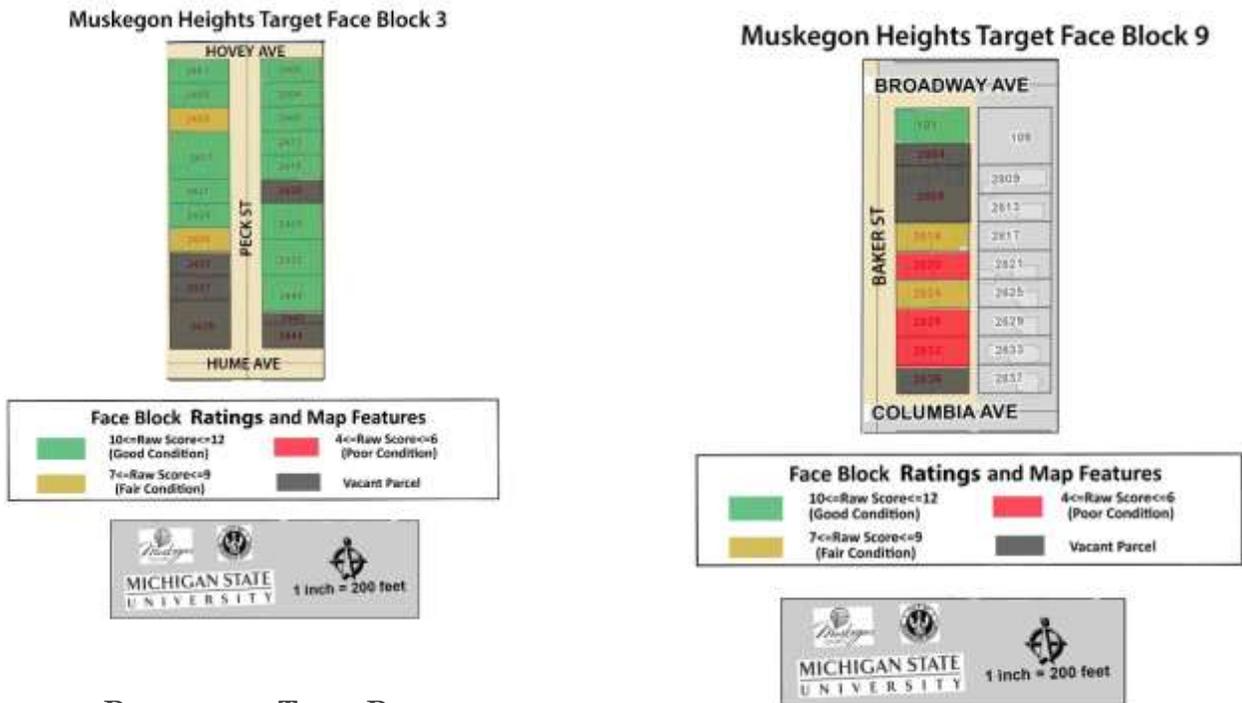
*“Even if the City had a large contingency of public employees to address blight, the fight against it cannot be won without community commitment and active participation. While the City needs to set a standard, and an example, successful neighborhood revitalization requires the efforts of individual citizens, institutions, and community groups”* (City of Muskegon Heights, 2012, pp. 30).

This type of program could give the community the opportunity to be the active participants that they have expressed a desire to be. By making vacant lot maintenance a community concern rather than a job to be done only by City Hall or the Land Bank, an engaged citizenry can make sure that these successful policies carry themselves forward in perpetuity.

This program is often most affective where there are several vacant parcels adjoining each other unlikely to be adopted by a neighboring occupied residence. Figure 6.08 displays two example blocks that would be amenable to this approach. Block 3 has several vacant

parcels next to a structure in Fair condition, and one vacant area is considerably larger than similar parcels on the block. Block 9 also has several vacant parcels and with several structures listed in Poor condition, demolition may be likely at some point in the future after prioritized demolitions occur. This block would then also have a large landmass vacant and unlikely to be completely adopted by a neighbor. These sorts of parcels are ideal for a model Clean & Green program and could reduce blight in Muskegon Heights considerably.

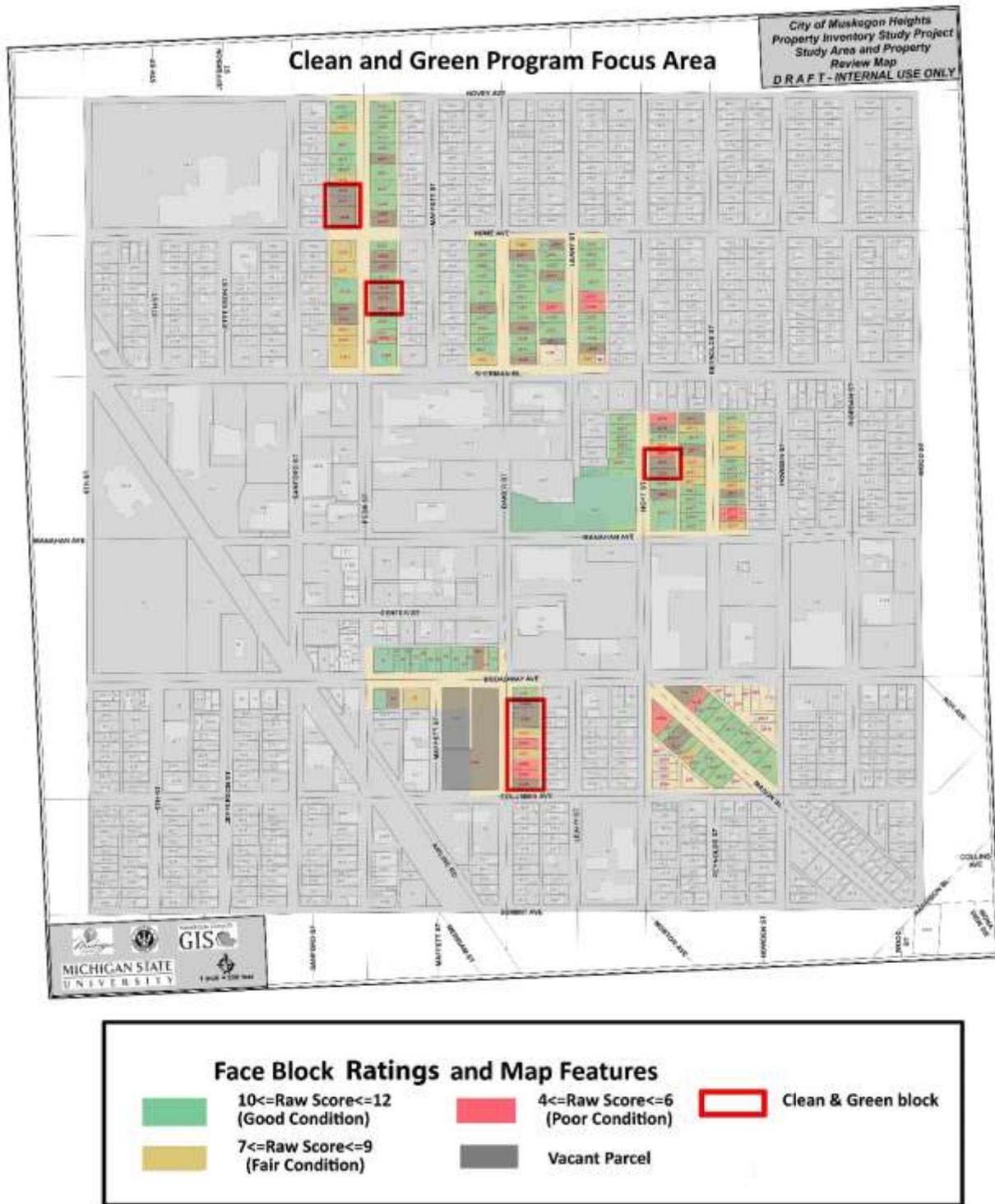
Figure 6.08: Clean and Green Example Blocks



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

Figure 6.08 displays blocks with a potential for clean and green activity. The concentration of large amounts of vacant lots and potentially soon-to-be vacant lots makes these two focus blocks stand out as ideal candidates.

Figure 6.09: Citywide Clean & Green Examples



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

Figure 6.09 shows potential Clean and Green blocks across the studied focus blocks.

## HUD Side Lot Disposition Policies and Procedures/Detroit Land Bank Authority

As a means to reduce the need for city maintenance, the Muskegon County Land Bank Authority should create a model side-lot program. During the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) crafted a model ordinance for Side-Lot Transfers. This model ordinance is provided below:

### ***Side Lot Disposition Policies and Procedures***

*Individual parcels of property may be acquired by the Land Bank Authority, and transferred to individuals in accordance with the following policies. The transfer of any given parcel of property in the Side Lot Disposition Program is subject to override by higher priorities as established by the Land Bank.*

### ***Side Lot Disposition Policies***

*Qualified Properties - Parcels of property eligible for inclusion in the Side Lot Disposition Program shall meet the following minimum criteria:*

- The property shall be vacant unimproved real property.*
- The property shall be physically contiguous to adjacent owner-occupied residential property, with not less than a 75% common boundary line at the side.*
- The property shall consist of no more than one lot capable of development. Initial priority shall be given to the disposition of properties of insufficient size to permit independent development.*
- No more than one lot may be transferred per contiguous lot.*
- Transferees*
- All transferees must own the contiguous property, and priority is given to transferees who personally occupy the contiguous property.*
- The transferee must not own any real property (including both the contiguous lot and all other property) that is subject to any un-remediated citation of violation of the state and local codes and ordinances.*
- The transferee must not own any real property (including both the contiguous lot and all other property) that is tax delinquent.*
- The transferee must not have been the prior owner of any real property in the County that was transferred to the Treasurer or to a local government as a result of tax foreclosure proceedings unless the Land Bank approves the anticipated disposition prior to the effective date of completion of such tax foreclosure proceedings.*
- The transferee must meet the NSP income limitations, if applicable, as determined by the Land Bank. (Note: This procedure may not be necessary anymore as the NSP program has since concluded).*

### ***Pricing***

*Parcels of property that are not capable of independent development may be transferred for nominal consideration.*

*Parcels of property that are capable of independent development shall be transferred for consideration in an amount not less than the amount of the costs incurred in acquisition, demolition and maintenance of the lot.*

### ***Additional Requirements***

*As a condition of transfer of a lot, the transfer must enter into an agreement that the lot transferred will be consolidated with the legal description of the contiguous lot, and not subject to subdivision or partition within a five year period following the date of the transfer.*

*In the event that multiple adjacent property owners desire to acquire the same side lot, the lot shall either be transferred to the highest bidder for the property, or divided and transferred among the interested contiguous property owners.*

*In the event that a contiguous property needs land for a driveway or other local code compliance issues this subsection will rule.*

### ***Side Lot Disposition Procedures***

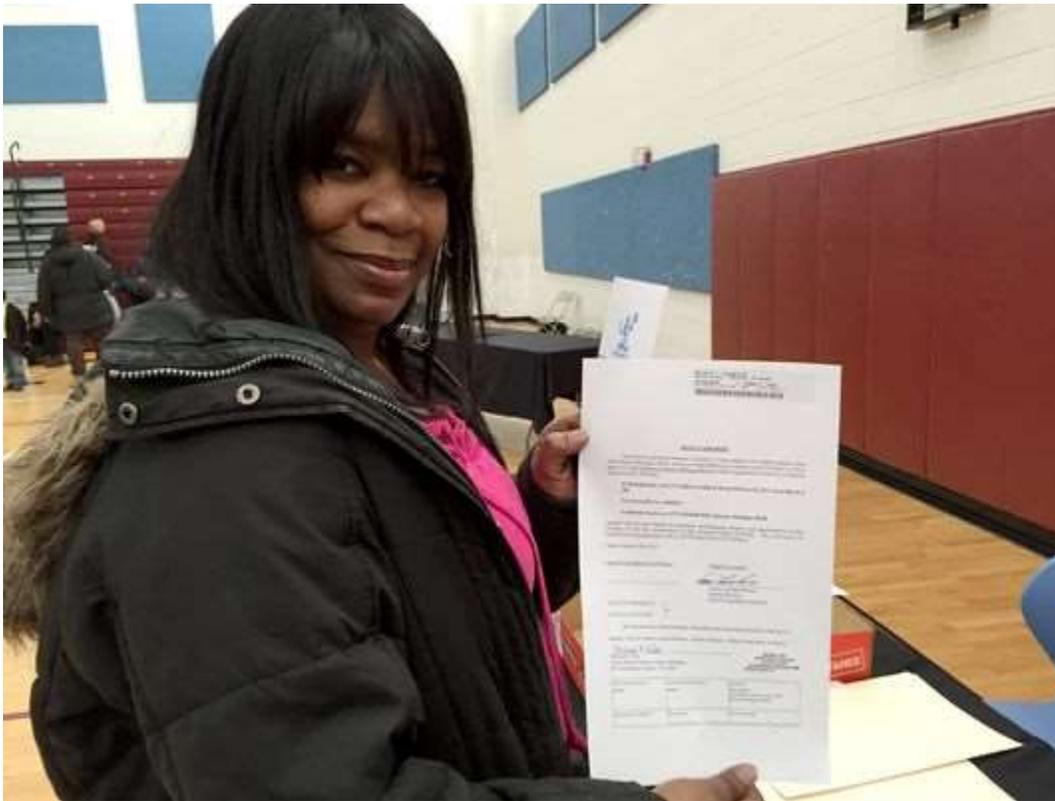
*The prospective buyer must submit the following documents to the Land Bank Transaction Specialist:*

- List of property address(es)*
- Project Description — property use must be consistent with current zoning requirements*
- A Picture Identification*
- Evidence of compliance with all Land Bank Side Lot Disposition Policies*
- Within a 30-day period of receiving a complete request packet, a basic analysis is completed and presented to the Land Bank Director or such other persons as designated by the Chairperson for approval.*
- Once the project has been approved, the closing documents for property transfer will be compiled to complete the transaction with the buyer. Title insurance is not included.*

*(Department of Housing and Urban Development, Neighborhood Stabilization Program)*

Currently, side lots can be adopted by residents of Muskegon Heights (Muskegon County Land Bank Authority, 2015). However, it should be noted that this program often goes unnoticed by residents and that clear and advertised community outreach should be a core tenant of any such program. A model for this outreach has been recently provided by the “Side Lot Fairs” held in the city of Detroit by the DLBA beginning in 2014 (Gallagher, 2015).

Image 6.02: Side Lot Fairs in Detroit



SOURCE: DETROIT FREE PRESS

These fairs have given residents an easy, one-stop shop to purchase a side lot adjacent to their property. While the HUD document above discusses a 30-day response window, the DLBA program has allowed for side lot transfers to occur within a few hours at these pre-planned fairs. So long as owners fit the requirements listed (no code violations on owned property, no tax delinquencies, etc.) then they may purchase the parcel (Gallagher, 2015). Several months into the program, Detroit had sold several hundred parcels previously on municipal rolls. Such a program would be easiest to begin with parcels owned by the MCLBA and could be expanded should the MCLBA receive properties going forward.

Such an alteration would be directly in line with the current Muskegon Heights Master Plan. The Master Plan calls for lot disposition in which properties follow the following rules:

1. *Transferred to the best neighboring property to make their living arrangements more desirable.*
2. *If located next to a proposed demolition, transferred to make a larger, more desirable building lot.*
3. *Policy should avoid transforming vacant lots to multi-family structures except in the instance where parking would be improved.*

(City of Muskegon Heights, 2012, pg. 31)

Figure 6.10 displays two blocks where this would be appropriate and in line with the vision outlined in the comprehensive master plan. Block 4 has mostly occupied parcels in Good condition with a few vacant lots visible in a scattered fashion. Block 8 also displays this same pattern of occupied housing in Good or Fair condition with scattered vacancy. These blocks could easily be adopted by adjoining homeowners, increasing the size of their lots.

Figure 6.10: Adopt-a-Lot Example Blocks

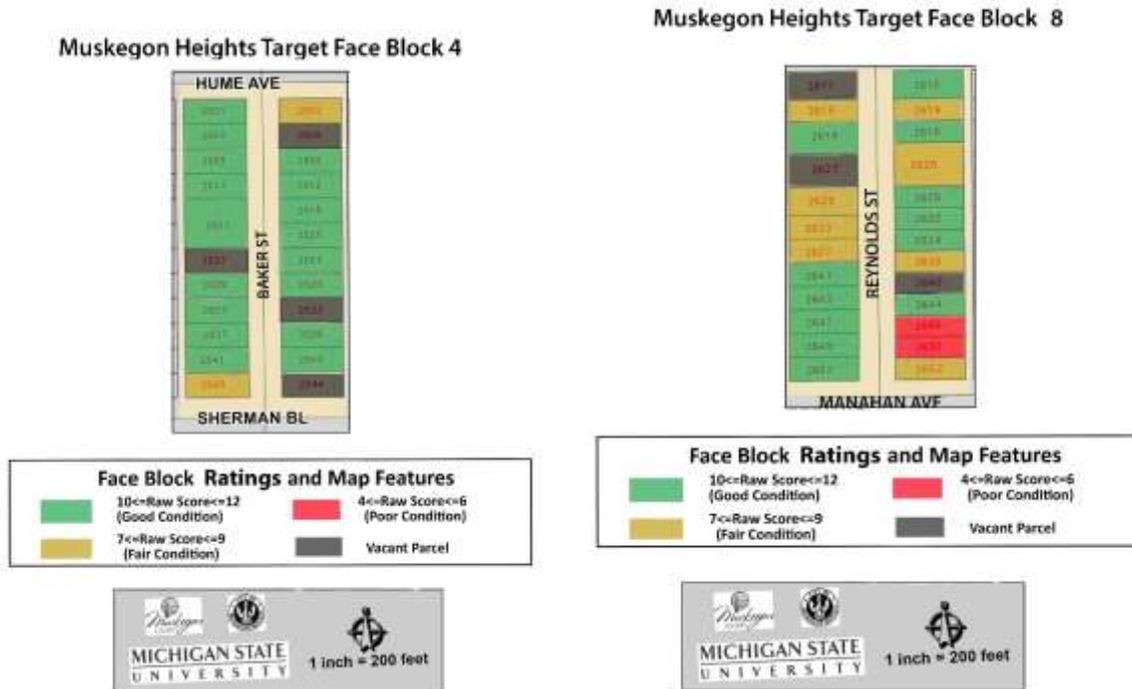
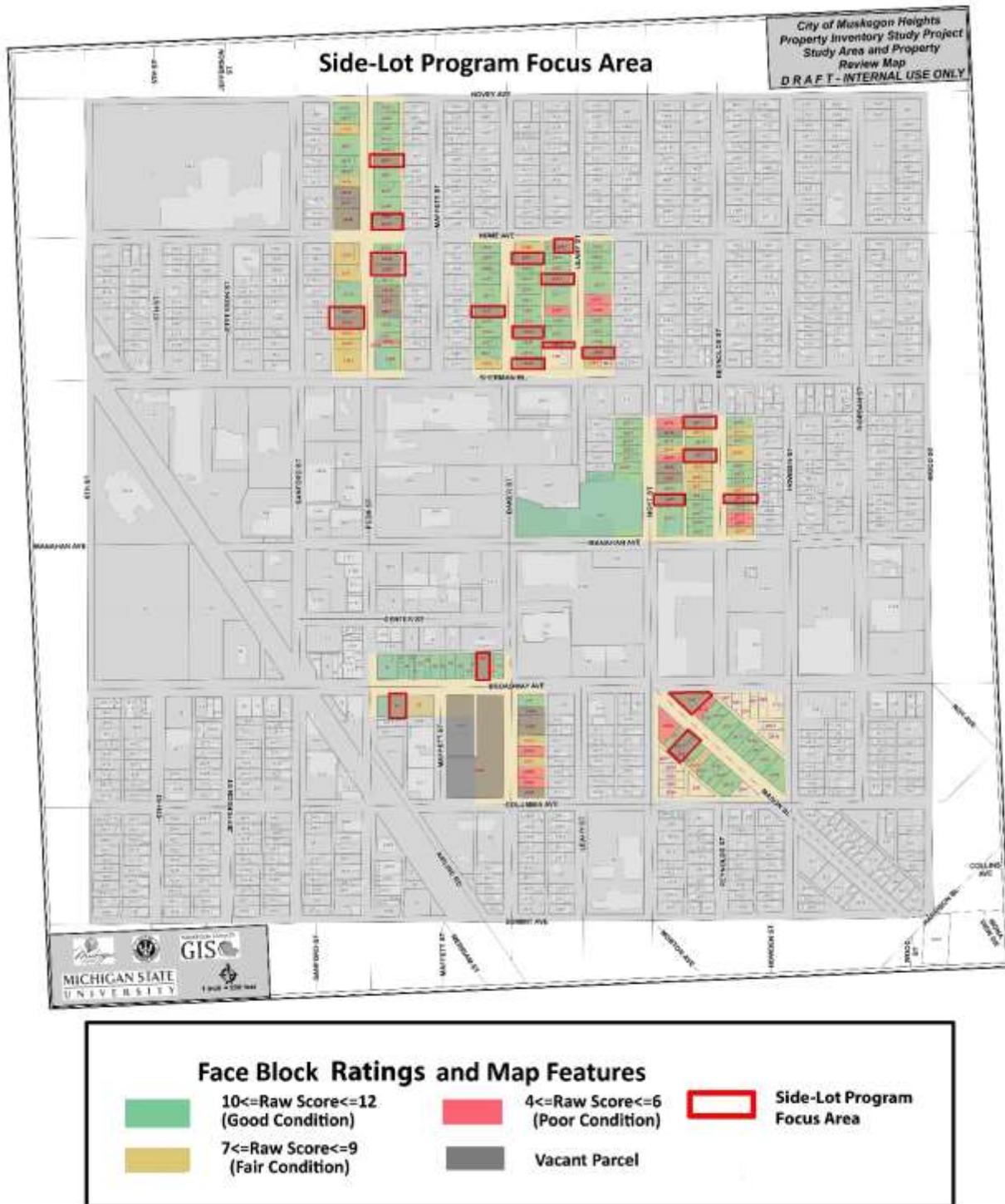


Figure 6.10 contains vacant lots immediately adjacent to lots with a structure in good condition, which makes the blocks ideal for adopt-a-lot programming.

Figure 6.11: Citywide Adopt-a-Lot Blocks



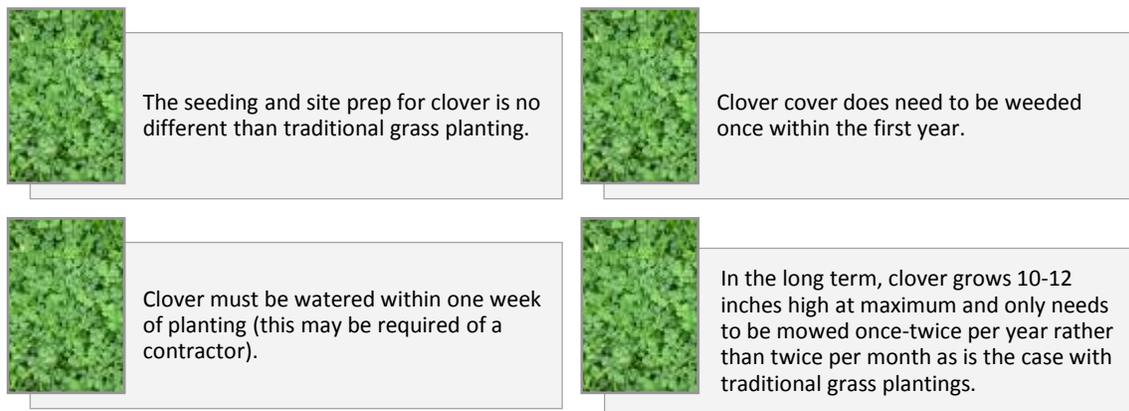
Side-lot program opportunities are outlined in red in figure 6.11.

Clearly there is interest in maintaining these lots as spelled out by residents in the 2012 Master Plan. The City should follow best practices from HUD and other successful models in adopting this program.

### Genesee County Land Bank, Clover Plantings

One consistent problem with vacant parcels is that once a structure is removed, blight is not immediately eliminated. The presence of overgrown vacant lots can lead to increased dumping, a form of blight that replaces what was a vacant structure. Rather than allow for this to occur on weed covered lots, the Genesee County Land Bank has begun planting native white clover on all vacant lots. Below are several important aspects to remember about such a transition.

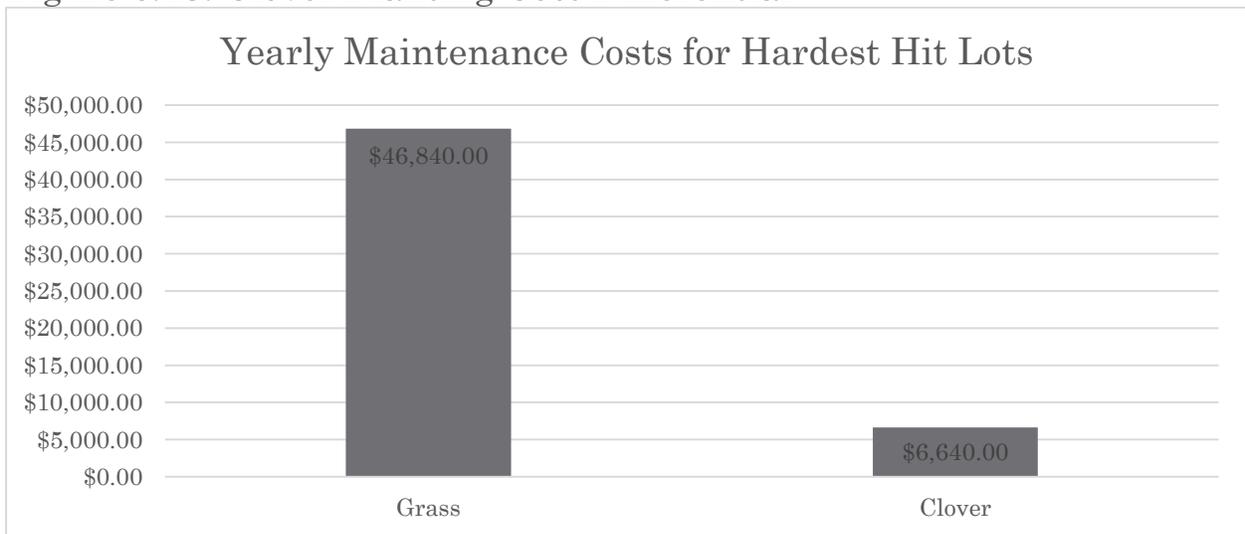
Figure 6.12: Clover Planting Process



**SOURCE: PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE GCLBA**

Should such a model be chosen for Muskegon Heights, the mowing costs for just the Hardest Hit sites could be reduced from \$46,840 per year to \$6,640 per year, an 86% reduction in mowing costs. Such revenue savings could be allocated towards funding other programs suggested in this planning document.

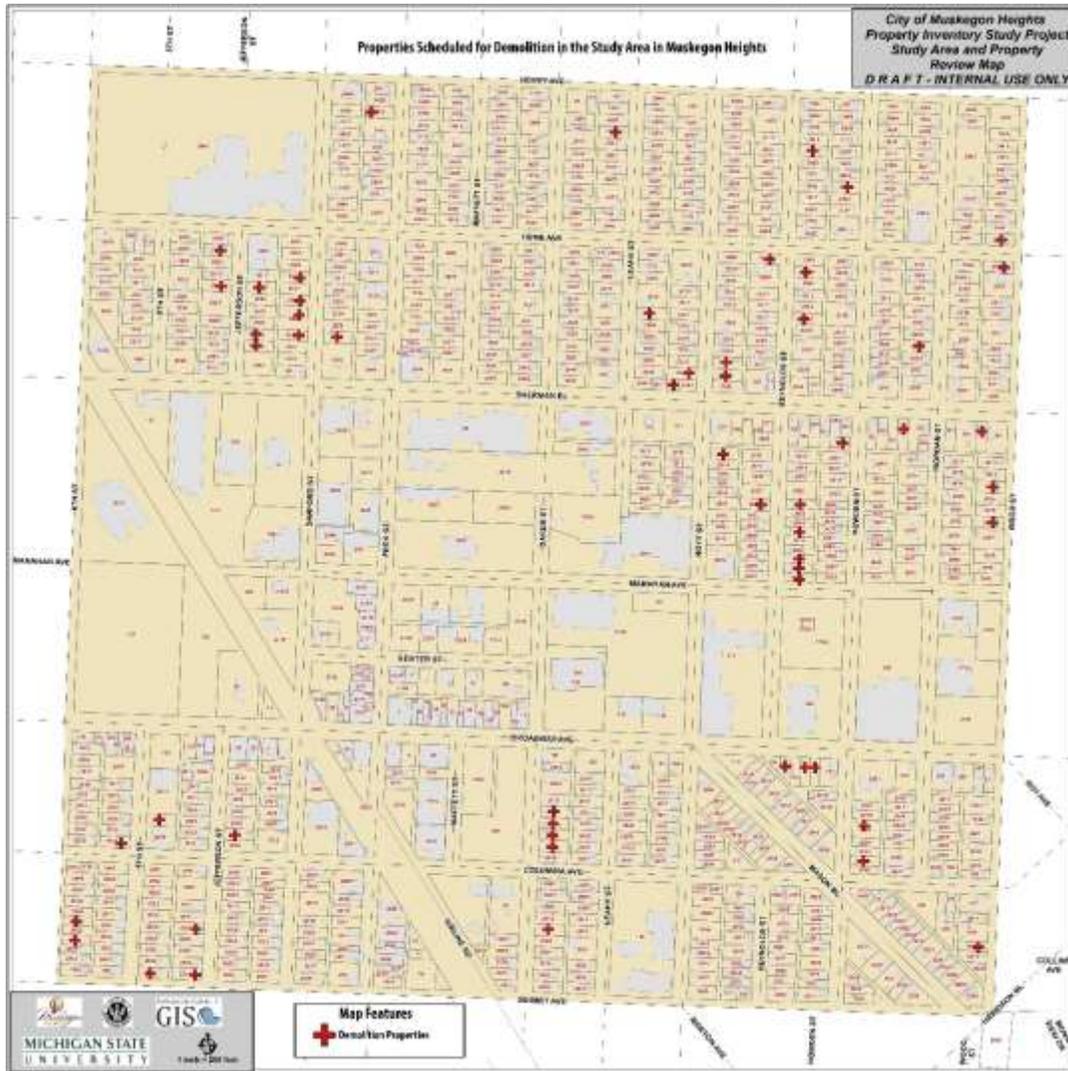
Figure 6.13: Clover Planting Cost Differential



**SOURCE: PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE GCLBA AND MCLBA**

To give context to the magnitude of these lots, those lots which are currently occupied by a dilapidated structure but will be vacant following Hardest Hit demolitions in the project area should the plan proposed currently be followed are displayed in Figure 6.14. These lots will need to be reseeded following demolition, and reseeding with clover could reduce maintenance costs and non-structural blight dramatically.

Figure 6.14: Hardest Hit Demolitions within Project Study Area



SOURCE: MUSKEGON COUNTY LAND BANK AUTHORITY

### Recommendations for Post Demolition Activities/Vacant Lot Reuse

- Create a model “Clean & Green” community engagement program to maintain vacant lots across the city in partnership with neighborhood associations and philanthropic foundations.
- Create a Side-Lot Program in accordance with HUD recommendations for best practices in such programs, easily accessible by Muskegon Heights homeowners through fair-like events.
- Replace grass plantings with clover plantings for all future demolitions to dramatically reduce maintenance cost and blighted vacant lots.

# Commercial

## Potential for a Façade Condition Study

Downtown Muskegon Heights currently has a 69% commercial vacancy rate. Figure 6.15 displays the vacant structures within the Downtown area as spread out across the three target focus areas.

Figure 6.15: Vacancy within Downtown Muskegon Heights

**Muskegon Heights Downtown Focus Area Parcel Status Map**



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

This lack of retail occupancy poses a host of challenges to the structural integrity of these buildings. In many other communities, façade improvement matching grant programs have been a tool used to improve the conditions of structures in targeted commercial areas. This report did not conduct an assessment of the condition of each façade in the downtown, but the vacancy map in Figure 6.15 does display the occupancy currently present in Downtown Muskegon Heights. We recommend that the City perform a façade condition study to determine whether this program could improve the attractiveness of downtown storefronts and attract new businesses to Downtown Muskegon Heights.

## Façade Programs

Recently, a detailed study has been completed by the University of Wisconsin in partnership with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation on the benefits of façade programs. This report compiled research from 24 separate storefront improvement projects to analyze the economic impact of projects on their surrounding properties and areas. The report generated ten general conclusions based on the case studies as well as findings from a previous study;

*“As a result of storefront improvement projects:*

- Business operators generally experience an increase in number of first-time customers*
- Many but not all business operators experience an increase in sales*
- Property landlords generally generate increased rental revenues*
- Properties are often converted to a perceived better use*
- Other building improvements, including interior redesign, are often performed simultaneously*
- Even small investments can generate significant returns*
- Multiple funding sources are often assembled to cover project costs*
- Property owners generally believe that their building value has increased*
- Nearby businesses often enjoy increased sales and initiate their own storefront improvements*
- Community pride, historic appreciation, and civic legacy are celebrated”*

(Ryan et. al., 2014)

A \$130,000 façade project done in the city of Chippewa Falls, WI in 2012 impacted not only the sales of that individual store, but “stimulated community support and motivated other public improvements such as streetscape work”. Chippewa Falls is similar in size to Muskegon Heights with a population of 13,718 and a median income slightly higher, at \$36,777. The project scope could be used as an example for Muskegon Heights to use when researching funding mechanisms and providing support for the benefits of façade programs. The \$130,000 project was funded through public and private grants/loans and resulted in over a 10% increase in first time customers to the store, as well as a 2% increase in sales. (Ryan et. al., 2014) An investment in one building in downtown Chippewa Falls, WI encouraged and motivated neighboring business owners to pursue façade improvements, making a larger impact than expected.

This program is often funded by a small CDBG allocation in other municipalities, and it could be a reasonable method for Muskegon Heights to pursue. The benefit of façade match programs like the ones studied above are that the program matches private dollars, often doubling or tripling the allocation made by the granting agency thanks to said private match dollars. Also, the planned investment in the Muskegon Heights Farmer’s Market, Parcel 99 in Figure 6.15, with \$10,000 in CDBG dollars (City of Muskegon Heights, 2014) could be complimented by an investment in façade improvements in the adjacent Downtown.

Before beginning this program, the city must do a study to determine its potential impact on the Downtown and funding sources that may exist to implement such a program even beyond CDBG dollars. Currently, the city of Muskegon Heights owns 2 buildings located in the study area, while the Downtown Development Authority owns 4. Of the six properties, only one has a taxable value. Due to the multiple vacant structures in the downtown, the city and DDA owned properties, and designation as an entitlement community, the city should work with the county and local partners to find alternative sources of funding at the local level.

Implementing a façade program in Downtown Muskegon Heights could complement historic preservation efforts by the city, posing fewer restrictions on property owners with ultimately the same goal in mind, maintaining the integrity and character of the city by preserving and restoring its existing assets. It is strongly recommended that the city do a façade improvements program study to see if this type of funding mechanism is feasible for local business owners, as well as the municipality itself.

Currently the Muskegon Heights Community Development Block Grant Program devotes no money to a façade improvement matching grant program despite allocating revenues to structural improvement programs in other areas of the city.

### Prioritize Redevelopment of the Strand Theater

Built in the 1920's, the Strand Theater has been used as a theater, a mixed use center with retail and residential, a night club, and at one point an adult entertainment center. The Theater is currently owned by the City of Muskegon Heights (City of Muskegon Heights, 2015). It is located on the corner of Broadway Avenue and Maffett Street, Parcel 25 in Figure 6.15.

Image 6.03: Vacant Strand Theater



Although it is not designated a historic structure, the building remains a high priority improvement for city residents. From multiple discussions with the City and County, the public input session, and most notably as a goal of the Muskegon Heights 2012 Master Plan, it is evident that there is a community desire for the Strand to be redeveloped into a

viable community space once again. The 2012 Master Plan calls for an investment in this property where it states,

*“Consider including the Strand Theater in the Downtown Development Authority to capture tax increments for its rehabilitation....Investigate the establishment of the Strand Theater as a historic building and sell historic tax credits for its rehabilitation”* (City of Muskegon Heights, 2012).

The redevelopment of the Strand Theater could cost an estimated \$9 million in total. Recently, a new roof was placed on the structure in order to preserve it for future development. According to Tom Grimm, president of Muskegon Quality Builders, the structure is “architecturally sound and intact” (Martinez, 2009).

Historic preservation can be used as an economic tool, something that has been expressed as a clear desire in our discussions with municipal officials (City of Muskegon Heights, 2015). According to a report done by the Michigan Historic Preservation Network, “Every \$250,000 of private Rehabilitation Tax Credit investment leverages: an additional \$282,500 in indirect investment, \$179,575 in household income and 6 new jobs”. Positive impacts can be made on “local governments because revenue increases when buildings are sold or reassessed” (Michigan Historic Preservation Network, 2006), as well as “property owners, because values grow at a noticeably higher rate”. The redevelopment of the Temple Theater in Saginaw, MI required \$5 million in total rehabilitation investment, and had an indirect impact of \$5.7 million, a total economic impact of \$10.7million and created 267.5 jobs. Similar to the Strand Theater, the Temple Theater was falling apart on the interior, but the community was not willing to allow it to be demolished. A family chose to purchase and invest in the theater, redeveloping it from the inside out, with only minor façade improvements on the exterior, but complete rehabilitation of the interior. The theater is now fully operational and has won recognition awards (Michigan Historic Preservation Network, 2006).

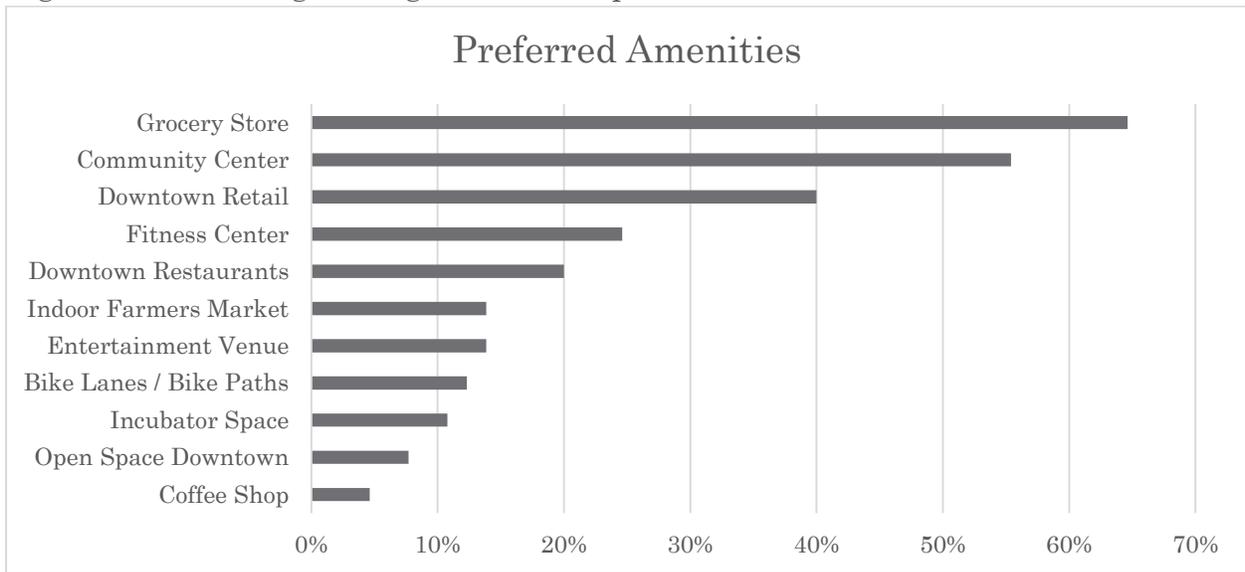
Image 6.04: Temple Theater in Saginaw, MI



Historic preservation comes with disadvantages as well. There is a considerably longer timeframe for development once a structure is determined to be historic and while investment assistance is available in the form of the Federal Historic Tax Credit, the state-level tax credit has been eliminated and additional expenses associated with preserving historic status may not be fully covered by tax credits or government assistance. Muskegon Heights should be aware of this when pursuing development.

Information from the Practicum group's preliminary analysis of the Downtown, as well as the Muskegon Heights 2012 Master Plan, has led to the recommendation that the city consider redevelopment of the site to include a mixed use amenity, with residential units as well as a community center focused on the sale of fresh-produce, or the establishment of food-based retail. Currently the city is undergoing a target market analysis (TMA) from the Michigan State Housing and Development Authority. When the results are returned, the city should use the findings to support the development of mixed-use amenities in downtown Muskegon Heights. Figure 6.16 displays the preferences for assets as spelled out in the public input survey.

Figure 6.16: Muskegon Heights Public Input – Preferred Amenities



**SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH**

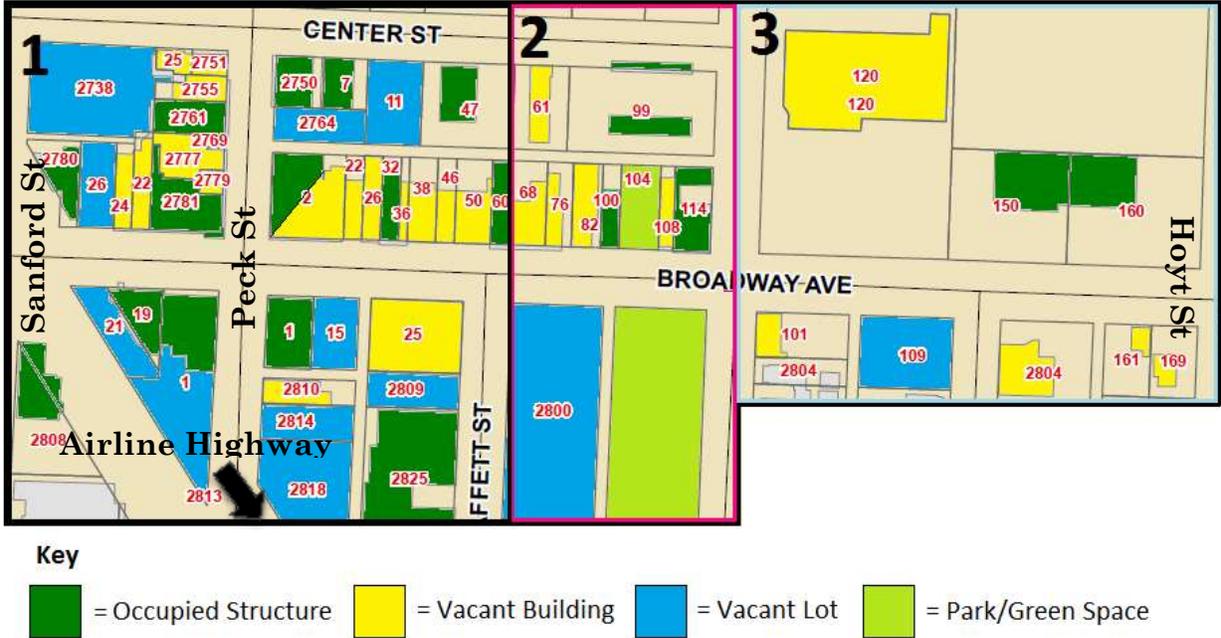
While this is just a preliminary recommendation, it is made based on the feedback from residents of Muskegon Heights and may provide an initial direction for the project.

### Prioritize Redevelopment by Phasing

The City of Muskegon Heights should prioritize redevelopment by creating strategic focus areas to target available funding and put an emphasis on activating space in the Downtown. The City of Muskegon Heights has limited funding for projects and investment. By prioritizing targets into three smaller areas, the community can first target funds to a smaller area with a greater impact and expand as additional funds become available. We recommended the focus begins in Strategic Focus Area 1 and expands east down Broadway Avenue to encourage development in what becomes an increasingly higher concentration of vacant areas.

Figure 6.17: Downtown Focus Area Parcel Map

**Muskegon Heights Downtown Focus Area Parcel Status Map**



SOURCE: PRACTICUM TEAM RESEARCH

Strategic Focus Area 1 was chosen due to its central location in the downtown. It hosts a major intersection, Broadway Avenue and Peck Street, which are two of the main corridors in Downtown Muskegon Heights. In addition to location, the area has the lowest concentration of abandoned structures, and can build off of its existing businesses and assets. Strategic Focus Area 2 has a higher concentration of vacant structures, and could benefit from the dollars generated in Focus Area 1. Strategic Focus Area 3 is almost completely vacant and should be addressed once the more centralized Downtown areas have been improved and funding becomes available.

Not alone in the issue, many cities around the country experience a lack of funding to implement large plans or project studies. The City of Flint recently phased a major redevelopment project based off of initial available funding and the anticipation of future funds to ultimately complete an upwards of \$8 million project. Starting with a \$1.6 million grant from the EPA, the city will transform a formal industrial manufacturing site into a park, and has plans to expand the project across the entire brownfield based on funding availability (AKT Peerless, et. al., 2015). The plan was written with the intent of proceeding to future phases when funding becomes available, and promotes economic development opportunities that will assist in the continuation of the project.

The City of Muskegon Heights can use this model to prioritize redevelopment within target areas to encourage economic development opportunities with the hope that they would build off of one-another to eventually affect the economy of the entire Downtown. The city should consider prioritizing redevelopment based on community needs in order to make a larger and more sustainable impact.

## Redevelopment Ready Communities Program

This plan contains considerable recommendations, specifically as it relates to residential blight elimination and commercial redevelopment of the city's Downtown District. However, not having completed detailed commercial studies, it is recommended that Muskegon Heights enroll in the Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program as a means to update relevant ordinances with the professional assistance provided by the MEDC at no cost to the City.

RRC is a statewide program sponsored by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and is free and voluntary for communities looking to integrate transparency, predictability and efficiency into their daily development practices (Michigan Economic Development Corporation, 2015). Communities are evaluated based on a set of six best practices; Community Plans and Public Outreach, Zoning Regulations, Development Review Process, Recruitment and Education, Redevelopment Ready Sites and Community Prosperity. Within each category are a set of criteria and expectations that the community must meet if they are seeking certification. Certification has been awarded to three communities since the MEDC program launched in 2012; Roseville, Allegan and Eastpointe. While it is a certification program, RRC is a foundation for good planning and zoning practices, and provides the tools necessary for a community to achieve them.

The following is an overview of the practice and what it requires from a community.

### **Best Practice One: Community Plans and Public Outreach**

#### 1.1: The Plans

“Best practice 1.1 evaluates community planning and how a community's redevelopment vision is embedded in the master plan, capital improvements plan, downtown development plan and corridor plan. Comprehensive planning documents are a community's guiding framework for growth and investment. The information and strategies outlined in the plans are intended to serve as policy guidelines for local decisions about the physical, social, economic and environmental development of the community.”

#### 1.2: Public Participation

“Best practice 1.2 assesses how well a community identifies its stakeholders and engages them, not only during the master planning process, but on a continual basis. A public participation plan is essential to formalize those efforts and outline how the public will be engaged throughout the planning and development process”

### **Best Practice Two: Zoning Regulations**

#### 2.1: Zoning Regulations

“This best practice evaluates a community's zoning ordinance and how well the ordinance regulates for the goals of the master plan.”

### **Best Practice Three: Development Review Process**

#### 3.1: Development Review Policy and Procedures

“This best practice evaluates the community’s site plan review policies and procedures, project tracking and internal/external communication.”

### 3.2: Guide to Development

“This best practice evaluates the accessibility of a community’s planning and development information.”

## **Best Practice Four: Recruitment and Education**

### 4.1: Recruitment and Orientation

“This best practice evaluates how a community conducts recruitment and orientation for newly appointed or elected officials and board members.”

### 4.2: Education and Training

“This best practice assesses how a community encourages ongoing education and training and tracks training needs for appointed or elected officials, board members and staff.”

## **Best Practice Five: Redevelopment Ready Sites**

### 5.1: Redevelopment Ready Sites

“This best practice assesses how a community identifies, visions and markets their priority redevelopment sites. A priority redevelopment site is a site targeted by the community for investment.”

## **Best Practice Six: Community Prosperity**

### 6.1: Economic Development Strategy

“This best practice assesses what goals and actions a community has identified to assist in strengthening its overall economic health.”

### 6.2: Marketing and Promotion

“This best practice assesses how a community promotes and markets itself to create community pride and increase investor confidence. It also evaluates the ease of locating pertinent planning, zoning and economic development documents on the community’s website.” (Michigan Economic Development Corporation, 2015)

## **Additional Components of the Program**

Best Practice Training Series: the RRC program offers a training series at a low cost for communities to attend to learn how to implement the best practices. The trainings examine each best practice and materials are presented by subject matter experts in each field. Communities in attendance participate in exercises related to their community, fictional scenarios and have the opportunity to ask questions.

## **Self-Evaluations**

Communities that are not yet engaged in the program may access a set of self-evaluations on the MEDC website, designed to assist in setting goals of completing components of the best practices. In addition, communities choosing to formally participate in the program may fill out (to the best of their ability) and then submit the self-evaluations to their local Community Assistance Team representative and seek assistance in moving forward with the program.

## **Technical Assistance**

Communities formally engaged in the RRC program will undergo a no-cost evaluation by the RRC team including an assessment, report of findings and set of recommended strategies/actions necessary for the community to achieve certification. In addition, communities are eligible to receive technical assistance in any of the six best practices. Technical assistance is offered on a need-basis and is tailored to the community, based off of discussions between the community and the RRC team.

## **Certification**

Certification as a Redevelopment Ready Community “signals that it has effective development practices. These include clear development procedures, a community-supported redevelopment vision, an open and predictable review process and compelling sites for developers to locate their latest projects” (Michigan Economic Development Corporation, 2015). In addition, the MEDC will market up to three of the community’s priority redevelopment ready sites.

## **Application to Muskegon Heights**

With an updated master plan, a zoning ordinance that reflects elements of form-based code, multiple sites available for redevelopment and very collaborative city departments, the city is already on the track to certification. Participating in the program can provide Muskegon Heights with free assistance in areas that might need attention such as; creating a capital improvements plan, prioritizing redevelopment sites, providing training for elected and appointed officials and promoting collaboration with other local entities. Going through the process can also act as a guide to updating and creating important planning documents and it will bring in outside resources that the city may not be able to afford via other avenues.

## **Next Steps**

In order to begin the process of participating in the RRC program, the city will need to do the following:

Reach out to Region 4 [Community Assistance Team](#) representative, Ryan Kilpatrick, and discuss possible routes for engagement.

Download and fill out the self-evaluation forms, to the extent that the community is meeting the criteria. The forms are provided for your use at <http://www.michiganbusiness.org/community/development-assistance/#resources>

Pass a resolution of support to participate in the program, this ensures that the community is on board and that city departments are supportive of participation.

Submit the resolution and self-evaluations to CATeam representative.

### Recommendations for Commercial Revitalization

- Conduct a façade condition study to determine the need for a Façade Improvement Program in Downtown Muskegon Heights.
- Prioritize redevelopment of the Strand Theater to spark the process of downtown revitalization.
- Prioritize all downtown redevelopment by phasing priorities based on funding available in three strategic focus areas.
- Participate in the Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program to use as a guide for implementing strong and efficient planning policies and procedures.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation of the following practices will aim to reduce structural and non-structural blight in the community, revitalize existing businesses and attract new businesses to the existing downtown area. The Practicum team’s compiled research laid the groundwork for the generation of all recommendations. In the section that follows is a more cohesive, concise list. All research, plans for implementation, and additional information on the after mentioned recommendations can be found in the Proposed Strategic Planning section of the report.

## Residential

Category	Recommendations
<b>Demolition Prioritization / Needs / Methods</b>	Prioritize demolition funding to homes on blocks with few vacant structures in order to preserve and increase housing values and maximize effectiveness of funding.
	Explore the feasibility of creating wide deconstruction infrastructure to allow Muskegon Heights and Muskegon County to capitalize on the economic potential of residential deconstruction and to reduce overall costs for blight removal.

Category	Recommendations
<b>Code Enforcement</b>	Create a robust code enforcement division using an increased CDBG allocation and processes following the Center for Community Progress’s model methods and HUD guidelines for CDBG funded code enforcement in order to privatize the cost of property maintenance and ensure code compliance.
	Create an electronic blight-reporting database based on the Motor City Mapping model to allow for neighborhood engagement in reducing residential blight.
	Seek out grant funded sources to add legal staff to the City and Land Bank to pursue nuisance abatement lawsuits to either require property improvements or take title to property from absentee and negligent landowners.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Post Demolition Activities/Vacant Lot Reuse</b>	Create a model “Clean & Green” community engagement program to maintain vacant lots across the city in partnership with neighborhood associations and philanthropic foundations.
	Create a Side-Lot Program in accordance with HUD recommendations for best practices in such programs, easily accessible by Muskegon Heights homeowners through fair-like events.
	Replace grass plantings with clover plantings for all future demolitions to dramatically reduce maintenance cost and blighted vacant lots.

## Commercial

<b>Category</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Downtown Revitalization</b>	Conduct a façade condition study to determine the need for a Façade Improvement Program in Downtown Muskegon Heights
	Prioritize redevelopment of the Strand Theater to spark the process of downtown revitalization.
	Prioritize all Downtown redevelopment by Phasing priorities based on funding available in the three strategic focus areas.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
<b>City Planning</b>	Participate in the Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program to use as a guide for implementing strong and efficient planning policies and procedures.

## Conclusion

The Practicum group's aim in the creation of this plan was to generate a coherent and organized strategy to be followed by local agencies to reduce blight in the city, increase activity in the downtown area, and improve the overall quality of life of Muskegon Heights residents. Implementation of the provided recommendations should serve as a roadmap to reducing structural and non-structural blight in the community, revitalizing existing businesses and attracting new businesses to the Downtown, and most importantly, engaging residents in the improvement of their community.

Recommendations included in this document were formed with an emphasis on Placemaking and asset based community development to leverage funding and attract investment within the city.

Based on the City of Muskegon Heights' current challenges and opportunities– as well as on the desires, concerns, and preferred image defined by the community – The Michigan State University practicum team strongly urges the implementation of the recommendations in this Blight Elimination and Community Revitalization plan.

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# Appendix A: Community Input Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Survey Responses

## Muskegon Heights Blight Elimination Discussion

Group Number: \_\_\_\_\_

### Strengths

What are Muskegon Height's strengths?

- Community commitment to stay, no matter what
- Community bonding
- The ability to repurpose houses
- Community and pride.
- Its citizenry is quite diverse in that you have many who make this place their home out of love and commitment of what it once was and can be.
- Its people, properties and religious activities.
- Relationships with the schools & churches.
- Sense of community
- Home values are inexpensive
- Building diversity
- Water Plant
- On the water location
- Centralized location
- Diversity of commercial and residential properties
- Water Plant
- Mona Lake Park
- Central location
- Water filtration plant
- Strong sense of community
- Home stock is inexpensive
- Centralized location
- Inexpensive transportation
- Physical infrastructure
- Industrial base
- Generational tradition
- Strong character/history/longevity
- Devoted/prideful business owners.

- High school building
- Wisdom/leadership
- Generation tradition
- History
- Pride
- School is the Heart of the City
- Pride- Community has potential for growth
- Family oriented
- Religious
- Community
- historical architecture
- Web/QTS, versatile fabrication
- The residential streets are fairly walkable and there is an abundance of affordable housing
- Small, interconnected community

What existing assets can the community build on?

- “Tiger Pride” and commitment to stay.
- Water filtration plant, Muskegon Heights Public School
- How we work with each other
- Land
- With reference to the current personality, the area should build. Rather than recreating its blueprint. Enhancement, refinement.
- Its older population, its vacant properties.
- More information from local churches.
- Water plant
- Downtown is a current “blank slate”
- Industrial/Residential Base
- Industrial base
- Water
- Downtown is a blank slate.
- Schools/churches
- Infrastructure
- Downtown
- Water/wastewater system
- Location in proximity to the City of Muskegon
- Schools/Churches

- Water and wastewater system
- Available land
- Water filtration plant
- High school building
- Small business strong
- Renovating the old downtown or repurposing the high school
- Existing infrastructure, nice parks, tree lined streets

What would you like to see as a building block in this plan?

- Community involvement and being a part of the process from the bottom up
- Better homes and businesses
- More land occupied
- There ought to be a strategic plan as to what will become of those blighted property lots. Moreover, that plan should include a vision for the area (specific characteristics/footprint).
- Any change in the current status of Muskegon Heights must come from within its inhabitants. Perhaps the state and federal government could offer tax incentives to those wishing to invest and improve properties.
- Employment for youth.
- Break up into identifiable block clubs with neighborhood watch. Groups can clean up the area, prune the trees.
- Block Club Associations
- Accountability
- Enforcement of ordinances
- Waterfront beaches/Mona Lake Park
- Get youth connected
- Dunes/water
- Camps for sports/video games.
- Starting with something small that could have a big impact, like creating complete streets along the major roads
- How to reduce crime and poverty

What is the city doing well?

- A lot of organizes and churches but all doing their own thing. We need to come together as one.
- Building business relationships
- Keeping things together and improving services.

- Everything! Especially with the limited sources they have.
- It has identified most or all of its problems.
- Maintaining what we have (housing stock)
- Surviving against all odds.
- Keeping the city running with limited resources
- Good steward of finances

## Weaknesses

What is Muskegon Heights missing?

- Job opportunities for kids to be productive and mentors to hang with.
- Safe zones for kids and adults.
- Business
- Crime and vacant homes
- Unity and money.
- Commitment/agreement with reference to a standard and character.  
Ownership!
- Businesses that offer employment opportunities.
- Quality streets, occupied houses.
- Direction/vision/creativity
- Capital
- Revised/revisitation to the Master Plan
- Jobs/infrastructure
- New master plan
- Vision, creativity, capital.
- Accountability
- Labor force
- Accountability
- Connection to networking
- Services for youth
- Strong street infrastructure
- Culture
- Family events
- Stores/groceries/jobs
- A positive identity and jobs
- Jobs for low skilled workers

What does the city need to improve your daily life?

- Safety on the streets and neighborhoods.
- More businesses
- A community grocery store.
- Work with citizens and households who will not keep property up to code.
- Help with more jobs if they can.
- Community character and pride. Ownership!
- More road maintenance needed, must make plans for investment opportunities.
- More available resources, especially for seniors.
- Better roads
- Businesses by residents
- More police officers
- Emergency response
- Additional code enforcement officers
- Updated street signs
- More code enforcement
- More police officers.
- Hire more police officers
- Repair roads & street signs
- More code enforcement officers.
- More walkable
- Access to sidewalks
- Instill pride in ownership
- Continued blight initiative
- Increase safety and removal of abandoned buildings
- Reduce crime

What is the city doing poorly?

- Working together, too many egos and history of “I’m not doing this if they are.”
- Blight
- Not enough funding for street improvements.
- Not helping each other.
- Setting forth a framework for progress based upon the conduct and character of the citizens. Inspiring them to buy into a higher standard of living in our neighborhoods.

- Needs to put more resources into changing its negative image. Needs better management of properties.
- Renovating unoccupied, rundown houses.
- Infrastructure
- Image enhancement
- Not recognizing our own success.
- Property maintenance/graffiti
- Infrastructure maintenance
- Image enhancement.
- Collaboration
- Property crime
- “Everything” – High Water bills, streets, high tax rates.
- Informing citizens
- Plowing/salting
- DPW Staffing
- Maintaining the streets (many are turning to gravel) and protecting the people from the growing presence of crime/violence

## OPPORTUNITIES

What opportunities do you see coming out of this plan?

- Safe zone’s job opportunities for kids and adults.
- Moe business relationship
- We will be able to prioritize and address the need.
- A lot
- A plan to redirect
- There is going to be investment opportunities some day in the future.
- More dollars being provided for much needed programs especially for schools/resources for youth.
- Clean up the community, so property values go up.
- Developing/strengthening neighborhood associations.
- Outside ideas
- Increased property values
- Outside direction, ideas
- Strengthening neighborhood associations
- Consolidation of properties
- Set back considerations

- Make them look like larger lots
- Side lot policies
- Outdoor café seating
- Opened roads to connect cities.
- Some economic growth and positive impact for the community
- Business attraction and relocation

What do you want to see in Muskegon Height's future?

- Sustainable jobs, home owners, neighborhood community picnics, relationships with neighbors.
- A vibrant downtown area
- Strand Theatre redeveloped.
- More businesses and more crime prevention.
- People helping each other
- More home ownership
- A safe environment, quality education and good paying jobs.
- More jobs, housing opportunities.
- Stronger government/leadership
- Increase homeownership
- Stronger government/leadership
- Unified theme for Downtown
- Increased homeownership
- Return to viable community
- People downtown
- Shops, stores, grocery store, restaurants
- Access bridges
- Gardens
- Mona Lake Park
- Recreation planning
- A sense of place
- More employment opportunities for low skilled workers

What, specifically related to blight, can be turned from a negative to a positive in Muskegon Heights?

- The houses can be redone and low interest loans to poor credit individuals to own the houses again. Slum landlords no more.
- People getting in abandoned homes.

- Clean alleys and find homeowners who fail to keep property up to code.
- Doing something with the properties.
- Serve to inspire a positive movement.
- Properties need to be maintained until a purchaser can be found.
- Image
- Intelligent recycling
- Blank slate
- Image
- Image/A blank slate for redevelopment
- Nice usable structures
- Connections
- Bike paths, bridges
- Art projects
- Reuse and recycling of demolition materials
- The restructuring of vacant lots into community space
- A deconstruction program that provides jobs as well as training for the reuse of salvage materials

## THREATS

What happens to Muskegon Heights if we do not implement this plan?

- It is slowly dying off and people will be forced to move.
- It will crumble
- It will hurt the growth of the city.
- Same thing that's been happening.
- Decline and blight increase.
- In the current status quo will continue to deteriorate.
- City dies/deteriorates
- Increase crime
- Decrease the tax base
- Increased crime/decreased property values
- City dies
- Nothing changes
- Increased crime & deterioration
- Decreased property values
- Decreased tax base.
- Continue to crumble
- Loss of tax base

- It falls into further disarray
- The Heights stays the same. I don't know if things can get much worse.

What do you risk facing, as residents, if issues around blight are not addressed in a timely manner?

- The garbage and rats and gangs will take over.
- Flight from the City
- More crime
- More abandoned properties and broken homes.
- Decline increase/escalation of blight.
- The demise of the city
- Property value drop
- Loss of services
- Falling property values, increased presence of violent crime and a lower quality of life
- Further decline of property values, unsafe places

In your opinion, what is the current status of Muskegon Heights?

- A lot of good people are doing great things but we need to come together and not care who gets credit for it. Bring our assets together as one.
- Moving forward, progress has been made, need to stick to the redevelopment program.
- Poor, due to crime.
- The city is taking it one step at a time.
- Survival mode, but great potential.
- It is continually portrayed as negative through mass media outlet, but it certainly is fixable.
- Sad state, but opportunities are endless.
- On life support, dead, borderline critical.
- It currently doesn't have the community or monetary support to maintain the proper necessities to run a city (law enforcement, maintenance crews and jobs for residents)
- I feel like Muskegon Heights is a place where no one with any means to live elsewhere would live.

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS / CONCERNS

- Thank you for your commitment and time on this school project. I hope it works into great things for this beloved community and you can say Hey I helped on this.
- Need to engage young people to get them involved. Jobs-businesses: give them ownership
- Have to work on attitudes of county towards the Heights.
- Healthy Heights = Healthy County.
- I have faith in planning to be a catalyst for change in a community, but there needs to be a realistic, long term budget that accompanies any plan in order to maintain these spaces and instill a feeling of safety for residents and visitors to the area.
- Thank you for your interest and concern for Muskegon Height

## Appendix B: Community Input Short Survey Responses

Group	Current Resident	How Long	Age Category	Street	Amenity 1	Amenity 2	Amenity 3	Other
	Yes	5 years	19 & Under	Leary	School			
	Yes	17 years	19 & Under	5th	Basket Court			
	Yes	3 years	19 & Under	Jefferson	Fitness Center			
	Yes	3 years	19 & Under	Manz	Grocery Store	Fitness Center	Downtown Restaurants	Movie Theater
	Yes	8 years	19 & Under	Ovorbrook	Community Center	Open Space Downtown for Leisure	Recreation center	
	Yes	15 years	19 & Under	ovebrook	Grocery Store	Community Center	Fitness Center	
	yes	16 years	19 & Under	Manz St	Community Center			
	Yes	16 years	19 & Under	Maffett	Grocery Store	Community Center	Fitness Center	
	Yes	17 years	19 & Under	Jefferson St	Community Center	Entertainment Venue	Fitness Center	
	Yes	17 years	19 & Under		Community Center	Entertainment Venue	Fitness Center	
	Yes	20 years	20-39	Barney	Entertainment Venue	Coffee Shop	Downtown Restaurants	

Group	Current Resident	How Long	Age Category	Street	Amenity 1	Amenity 2	Amenity 3	Other
	Yes	5 years	19 & Under	7th	Community Center	Indoor Farmers Market	Incubator Space	
	Yes	19 years	19 & Under	Reynolds	Entertainment Venue	Fitness Center	Bike Lanes / Bike Paths	
	Yes	6 years	19 & Under	Peck St.	Community Center	Fitness Center	Open Space Downtown	
2	Yes	1.5 years	20-39		Grocery Store	Community Center	Incubator Space	Bike Lanes / Bike Paths
	Yes	25 years	20-39		Grocery Store	Community Center		
1	Yes	20 years	20-39	Ray St.	Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Retail	
	Yes	2 years	40-64	Riordan St.	Grocery Store	Indoor Farmers Market	Downtown Retail	
2	Yes	30 years	40-64	Peck St.	Grocery Store	Community Center	Entertainment Venue (Family)	Youth Development
2	Yes	20+ years	40-64	Barney	Entertainment Venue	Incubator Space	Bike Lanes / Bike Paths	
3	Yes	59 years	40-64	Waalkes St.	Incubator Space	Open Space Downtown	Downtown Restaurants	
	Yes		40-64	Maplewood	Community Center	Downtown Retail	Entertainment Venue (Family)	
	Yes	55 years	40-64	6th	Community Center	Downtown Retail	Downtown Restaurants	

Group	Current Resident	How Long	Age Category	Street	Amenity 1	Amenity 2	Amenity 3	Other
	Yes	50 years	40-64	6th	Grocery Store	Community Center	Fitness Center	
	Yes	40 years	40-64	6th	Grocery Store	Community Center	Fitness Center	Downtown Retail
	Yes	30 years	40-64	Baker	Community Center	Open Space Downtown	Downtown Retail	
	Yes		40-64	Wesely	Grocery Store	Downtown Retail	Factories	
	Yes	64 years	40-64	Roy Ave.	Grocery Store	Downtown Retail	Downtown Restaurants	
	Yes	47 years	40-64	Lealy	Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Retail	
	Yes	10 years	40-64	Baker	Downtown Retail	Downtown Restaraunts	Youth Center	
	Yes	45 years	40-64	5th	Grocery Store	Entertainment Venue	Downtown Retail	
	Yes	30 years	40-64	Temple	Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Restaurants	
	Yes	53 years	40-64	Howden St	Community Center	Fitness Center	Bike Lanes / Bike Paths	
	Yes	47 years	40-64	Amsterd am	Grocery Store			
	Yes	37 years	40-64	Hume	Grocery Store	Community Center	Fitness Center	
2	Yes	54	65+	5th	Grocery	Indoor Farmers	Downtown	

Group	Current Resident	How Long	Age Category	Street	Amenity 1	Amenity 2	Amenity 3	Other
		years			Store	Market	Restaurants	
	Yes	30 years	65+		Grocery Store	Downtown Restaurants		
	Yes	45 years	65+		Grocery Store	Entertainment Venue	Community Center	Fitness Center, Indoor Farmers Market, Downtown Retail and Restaurants
	Yes	40 years	65+		Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Retail	
	No		19 & Under		Grocery Store	Fitness Center		
	No		20-39		Community Center	Entertainment Venue	Downtown Restaurants	
	No		20-39		Community Center	Fitness Center	Downtown Retail	
	No		40-64		Grocery Store	Bike Lanes / Bike Paths	Downtown Retail	
1	No		40-64		Grocery Store	Incubator Space	Home Ownership	
2	No		40-64		Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Retail	Downtown Restaurants
	No		40-64		Grocery	Community Center	Fitness Center	

Group	Current Resident	How Long	Age Category	Street	Amenity 1	Amenity 2	Amenity 3	Other
					Store			
	No		40-64		Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Retail	
	No		40-64		Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Retail	
	No		40-64		Grocery Store	Community Center	Coffee Shop	
	No		40-64		Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Retail	
2	No		65+		Grocery Store	Bike Lanes / Bike Paths	Downtown Retail	Walkable City / Pride in Community
	No		65+		Grocery Store	Indoor Farmers Market	Bike Lanes / Bike Paths	
	No		65+		Indoor Farmers Market	Coffee Shop	Downtown Retail	
	No		65+		Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Retail	
	No		20-39		Grocery Store	Community Center	Open Space Downtown	Bike Lanes / Bike Paths
	No		20-39		Indoor Farmers Market	Downtown Retail	Downtown Restaurants	
	No		20-39		Indoor Farmers			

Group	Current Resident	How Long	Age Category	Street	Amenity 1	Amenity 2	Amenity 3	Other
					Market			
	Yes	31 years	20-39		Grocery Store	Indoor Farmers Market	Open Space Downtown	
	No		20-39		Grocery Store	Incubator Space	Downtown Restaurants	
	No		40-64		Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Retail	
	No		40-64		Grocery Store	Incubator Space	Downtown Retail	
	Yes	20 years	40-64	Superior St.	Grocery Store	Fitness Center	Indoor Farmers Market	
	Yes	55 years	40-64	Sixth St.	Grocery Store	Entertainment Venue	Downtown Retail	
	Yes	3 years	40-64	7th	Grocery Store	Community Center	Entertainment Venue (Family)	
	Yes	22 years	40-64	Baker	Grocery Store	Community Center	Downtown Retail	

## Appendix C: Parcel Inventory Grading Scale

1= Good – Building appears structurally sound and well maintained.

- Roof is in good shape, no peeling, cracking, or missing shingles and no repairs needed.
- Foundation is in good shape; no cracking or leaning of house.
- Porch and steps are attached and straight.
- No broken or boarded windows.
- Siding, trim, and gutters intact and aligned.
- No or minor peeling of paint.
- No fire damage.

2= Fair – The building appears structurally sound with minor repairs needed.

- Roof may have missing, peeling or cracking shingles and minor sagging.
- Foundation is in good shape, no cracking or leaning of house.
- Porch and steps may be leaning but are attached to house.
- Windows may be boarded.
- No broken windows without boards.
- At least 3 of the 4 walls have siding.
- Siding, trim, and gutters may need repair or replacement.
- Painting may be needed.
- No fire damage.

3= Poor - The structure may not be structurally sound and may need major repairs.

- Roof may have missing, peeling or cracking shingles and sagging. No holes or breaks are visible. Tarp may be visible.
- Foundation may have cracking and the house may be leaning.
- Porch and steps may be leaning and detached from house.
- Windows may be broken with or without boards.
- Siding, trim, and gutters may be missing or in need of repair.
- Painting may be needed.
- Minor exterior fire damage only.

4= Sub-Standard – The structure is unsafe, unsound and repair is not feasible.

- Roof may be in total disrepair with sagging, openings, and may be collapsed.
- Foundation may have cracking and the house may be leaning.
- Holes and openings in the walks may be present.
- Porch and steps may be leaning, detached from house, or collapsed.
- C/P [cut and plug] tags
- Windows may be broken without boards.
- Siding, trim, and gutters may be missing or in need of repair.
- Painting may be needed

- More than minor exterior fire damage.
- Basement only, burned-down house.

5 = Vacant lot – The parcel does not have a standing structure on it.