

# LANSING RIVERFRONT ACTIVATION PLAN

MSU Planning Practicum | Spring 2025

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Lansing Economic  
Development Corporation



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# Executive Summary

The Lansing Riverfront Activation Project is an implementation-focused plan developed by the MSU Urban and Regional Planning Practicum Team in partnership with the Lansing Economic Development Corporation (EDC). The goal of this report is to outline strategies to transform Lansing's riverfront into a more vibrant, accessible, and economically productive space, with a focus on implementing immediate, actionable interventions. By prioritizing practical, high-impact strategies grounded in data and research, this plan aims to build momentum for sustained long-term redevelopment. The recommendations provided in this report focus on three key sites – **Dietrich Park**, **Adado Riverfront Park**, and the proposed **pedestrian walkway site** – chosen for their potential to catalyze broader riverfront revitalization.

The key findings of this study are the result of thorough analysis of past planning initiatives, zoning and land use conditions, Lansing's socioeconomic characteristics, a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, and a case study analysis. The team also conducted multiple site visits and community engagement efforts to gauge how residents interact with the riverfront. This report highlights the results of community interviews, survey, and meetings with key stakeholders, including the REO Town community visioning session, the Capital Region Community Foundation, and the Gillespie Group. The findings from this comprehensive research informed the recommendations made in this report.

## Key Findings

### *Limited accessibility and connectivity along the entire river trail*

- Inadequate signage and wayfinding and a lack of direct pedestrian and bicycle connections and access points limit usability and discourage engagement.
- Gaps and obstacles along the river trail hinder connectivity between major districts (such as REO town and Downtown), reducing economic spillover and visitor activity.
- Safety concerns contribute to underutilization, with poor lighting, aging infrastructure, and poorly maintained landscaping deterring use.

### *Underutilized public spaces along the river front*

- Adado Riverfront Park, previously a hub for large events, has seen decreased activity post-pandemic and lacks consistent programming.
- Dietrich Park has limited amenities and lacks clear access to the river, making it an underwhelming community asset.
- The pedestrian walkway site needs more attractions and activation strategies to draw steady foot traffic and ensure consistent use of the pedway.

# Recommendations

## *Dietrich Park*

- **Action 1:** Improve signage and wayfinding for accessibility and visibility
- **Action 2:** Enhance access through trail maintenance and infrastructure improvements
- **Action 3:** Create a more inviting space through landscaping and seating enhancements as well as restore plant and animal biodiversity to enhance ecological health and “naturalize” the riverfront

## *Adado Riverfront Park*

- **Action 1:** Activate the park with year-round programming
- **Action 2:** Improve connectivity, safety, and access
- **Action 3:** Introduce seasonal boat and pontoon tours

## *Pedestrian Walkway Site*

- **Action 1:** Implement an outdoor classroom
- **Action 2:** Increase green space and beautification efforts
- **Action 3:** Casual outdoor dining development

## *Riverfront Corridor*

- **Action 1:** Improving lighting, public restrooms, and sanitation along the river trail.
- **Action 2:** Improve signage and wayfinding for accessibility and visibility
- **Action 3:** *Enhance pedestrian pathways, bike lanes, and street crossings*

These recommendations focus on practical, high-impact actions that lay the groundwork for sustained riverfront revitalization. By enhancing public access, improving infrastructure, and fostering economic activity, this plan provides a clear framework for future investment and long-term growth. The proposed interventions at Dietrich Park, Adado Riverfront Park, and the pedestrian walkway site offer immediate, tangible improvements that will serve as catalysts for continued redevelopment. By taking strategic, incremental steps, Lansing can transform its riverfront into a dynamic, accessible, and economically thriving destination that reflects the community’s vision and priorities.

# 1. Introduction

Planning Practicum is the capstone course undergraduate and graduate students take in the Urban and Regional Planning (URP) Program at Michigan State University's (MSU) School of Planning, Design, and Construction. The course allows students to engage in real-world projects, allowing them to apply the skills and knowledge they have obtained throughout their academic careers. Students are paired with community partners and are tasked with developing a professional planning project to meet the client's needs. Practicum is structured as a student-led, faculty-guided course, advised by URP faculty.

The practicum team was paired with the Lansing Economic Development Corporation (EDC) to develop a riverfront activation and implementation plan incorporating community engagement, identifying best uses along the riverfront and ideas for public spaces. The Lansing EDC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening Lansing's economy and fostering community development. This collaboration focuses on creating a long-term vision for the riverfront, guiding future investments, and ensuring the Grand River corridor becomes a more engaging, sustainable, and connected space.

The practicum team and the Lansing EDC collaborated to assess the current state of the riverfront and develop actionable strategies for its revitalization.

## 1.1. Goals

The overarching goal of this project is to develop a strategic framework for riverfront activation that enhances actionable strategies for the Riverfront, positioning it as a valuable community asset. The project aims to provide a straightforward implementation "road map" to guide future development and ensure the Riverfront becomes a vibrant, accessible destination for residents and visitors alike.

## 1.2. Objectives

To achieve the overarching goal of developing a strategic framework for riverfront activation, this project focuses on three areas along the river: Dietrich Park, Adado Riverfront Park, and the site for a proposed pedestrian walkway in Downtown Lansing. These areas will serve as models for continued riverfront development. The following objectives outline the critical components necessary for achieving this vision:

### *Trail Improvement*

Enhance neighborhood connections and accessibility by improving signage, lighting, and safety along the Riverwalk. Establish the three focus areas as attractive and pedestrian-friendly access points to the River Trail, encouraging increased usage.



### *Public Space Activation*

Improve gathering spaces, recreational amenities, and green areas to increase activity along the riverfront. Encourage the design of spaces that support year-round events and community use.

### *Community Engagement*

Engage with residents, businesses, and stakeholders during the planning process to align development with community needs. Facilitate public meetings and outreach efforts to ensure inclusive decision-making.

### *Private Development*

Identify the best uses for city-owned parcels along the riverfront that are suitable for private investment. Make recommendations for these sites to complement public spaces and support mixed-use development.

These objectives provide a structured approach to revitalizing the Riverfront, balancing accessibility, environmental sustainability, and economic development to create a long-term community asset.

## 2. Lansing Michigan

Lansing, Michigan, is the capital of the state and is located in Ingham County. The Grand River and the Red Cedar River run through the city. This city originally grew industrially in 1877 with the establishment of numerous vehicle manufacturers and is now a major automobile production center (The City of Lansing, 2025). Lansing is also home to several major districts that have their own unique history and distinct characteristics: Old Town, REO Town, and Downtown.

### *Old Town*

Originally known as North Lansing, Old Town was established in the mid-19th century and is one of the oldest historic districts in the city. This district was a thriving commercial and industrial hub in its past. Today, this area is an urban neighborhood with a small-town feel. One historic aspect that is prominent in Old Town is Brenke Fish Ladder. The Fish Ladder was built in 1981 to help fish navigate the Grand River and pass the dam. Today, various festivals and events are held here, including Dam Jam, as shown in Figure 3. This arts district hosts festivals, gallery walks, and farmers markets throughout the year (Lansing Annual Events and Festivals, n.d). In recent years, the district has experienced and undergone significant revitalization. The main streets that make up Old Town are Cesar E Chavez Avenue (Current name of Grand River Avenue), Turner Road, Center Street, and Washington Avenue.



*Figure 1. Photo of residents spending time on the patio at Saddleback BBQ in REO Town. Source: Alex Alusheff Wochit*

## REO Town

Located just south of downtown Lansing, REO Town is historically significant as the birthplace of the American automobile industry and is named after Ransom Eli Olds (R.E. Olds), the founder of the REO Motor Car Company. In the 1900s, the district was a bustling industrial area and home to many working-class families, playing a crucial role in shaping Lansing's early economy. The REO Town Commercial Association (RTCA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that overlooks and facilitates community success (REO Town, n.d). Today, several different breweries and restaurants make this area a popular destination. REO Town is also starting to be known for arts and culture.



*Figure 2. Photo of annual concert series, Dam Jam, at the Brenke Fish Ladder in Old Town, Lansing. Dam Jam is a two-night festival celebrating Michigan artists. Source: Lansing 5:01*



## *Downtown*

The Downtown district blends sports, entertainment, and urban development together. Jackson Field has made this district a key location for sports and entertainment. It is home to the Lansing Lugnuts, concerts, firework shows, and other community events. New residential developments have also made the district more vibrant. The mixed-use development has made Stadium District more pedestrian friendly, offering residents a place where they can live, work, and have fun all within walking distance (Stadium District, n.d). New dining options have also made the area more popular with visitors.



*Figure 3. Photo of Jackson Field and Outfields Ball Park Lofts during a Lansing Lugnuts game. Source: John D'Angelo Photography*



## 2.1. Economic Decline

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, Lansing relied on its automobile industry bringing economic expansion to the city. However, this also made Lansing vulnerable to economic downturns within the sector. Competing companies like Ford and Chrysler began to dominate the industry, leaving smaller companies like Oldsmobile and REO Motor Car Company with challenges. During the Great Depression, these companies began to struggle and left Lansing with the effects of unemployment, factory closures, and economic uncertainty. After the Depression, the city needed to rebuild, but it faced challenges in doing so. Many factories that Lansing relied on for its economy never recovered and left the city vulnerable (Hinkley, 2014). The industrial base in Lansing began to decrease and this created the loss of jobs in manufacturing. Urban decline quickly came to the city because of these factors.

## 2.2. Revitalization Efforts

Many different revitalization efforts have occurred within the city, focusing on key neighborhoods, public infrastructure, attracting new businesses, and improving the quality of life for its residents. One major redevelopment project in Lansing has been the Capital City Market, a mixed-use grocery store, apartments, and a hotel built in Downtown. The Capital City Market was selected to receive two gold Economic Excellence Awards by the International Economic Development Council. The first award for best Public/Private Partnership and the second for best Real Estate Reuse, as the site was a brownfield (Lansing Economic Development Corporation, n.d). The Stadium District has had more significant growth as well. New residential apartment complexes have brought people to live in the area. Another large effort is rebranding REO Town. Adding attractions like Sleepwalker Spirits, Ales, and The Robin Theatre has made the area more appealing for individuals who are looking for a different experience (Alusheff, 2017). This district also is chosen for people to spend their time in because of its historic charm and preservation. The Temple Lofts project in Old Town Lansing is another great example of successful revitalization. Transforming the historic Bethlehem Temple Building into a vibrant mixed-use development. This \$10.5 million rehabilitation effort resulted in the creation of 31 residential units, along with 4,000 square feet of commercial and office space on the first floor, significantly contributing to the area's revitalization.

## 2.3. Lansing River Trail

Another important aspect of Lansing is its river trail. This multi-use trail runs along the Grand River and Red Cedar River providing a route for walking and biking. This trail runs for approximately 13 miles, running through downtown Lansing, Old Town, and REO Town. Recent revitalization efforts have made different areas along the riverfront more valuable to Lansing visitors and residents. Rotary Park, completed in 2019, has been successful at activating the river front. Located behind the Lansing Shuffle, in between the Lansing Center and Shiawassee Street Bridge, Rotary Park has plenty of amenities. The park features an ADA Kayak Launch, a beach, steps leading to the river, a large fireplace, a lighted forest, and a small concert venue under the bridge called The Hub (Community Foundation, 2023). Another successful project along the river front is the new playground in Adado Park named Play Michigan. This playground has accessibility components for children with special needs. It also includes a picnic deck on the river, a pavilion, and barrier-free parking (Nurse, 2023). Another park that had been important to Lansing is Adado Park, however, during and after Covid-19, this park's activation has decreased. This is one of the largest parks in downtown Lansing and used to host large festivals including Prime Music Festival, Rock Lansing, Common Ground Music Festival, and different food truck events



*Figure 4. Photo of Lansing riverfront south of Rotary Park. This image includes the Lansing Center to the right. Source: Choose Lansing*

### 3. History of Lansing's Riverfront Development Planning

Lansing's riverfront has been the focus of multiple planning efforts to improve public access, economic development, and environmental sustainability. Each plan has contributed to the city's vision for a connected and active riverfront, though challenges like funding, land use conflicts, and infrastructure barriers have persisted. The following plans provide critical context for the Lansing Riverwalk revitalization project by outlining past goals, limitations, and implementation strategies.

<i>Plan</i>	<i>Key Goals</i>	<i>Relevance to Riverfront Activation Project</i>
<b>The 1974 Plan for Development of Lansing's Waterfront</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created the Continuous Waterfront Circulation System, shaping the River Trail.</li> <li>• Integrated riverfront with downtown.</li> <li>• Improved public access and environmental restoration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified ongoing challenges like industrial land use and accessibility.</li> <li>• Set the foundation for future improvements.</li> </ul>
<b>1999 Central Lansing Comprehensive Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oriented businesses toward the river.</li> <li>• Expanded parks and trails.</li> <li>• Improved waterfront-neighborhood connections.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasized economic activity and public space.</li> <li>• Prioritized pedestrian access and placemaking.</li> </ul>
<b>2009 Grand Vision River Front Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced non-motorized transportation.</li> <li>• Added seating, lighting, and boat landings.</li> <li>• Used zoning incentives for private investment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided specific project priorities and site plans.</li> <li>• Proposed infrastructure upgrades for Riverwalk.</li> </ul>
<b>2012 Design Lansing Comprehensive Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanded riparian buffers and green infrastructure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported sustainable design and mobility.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved pedestrian and bike connections.</li> <li>• Encouraged mixed-use development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforced environmental and transportation goals.</li> </ul>
<b>2020-2025 Parks and Recreation Master Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanded the River Trail.</li> <li>• Proposed new river recreation.</li> <li>• Identified funding sources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided a framework for funding and maintenance.</li> <li>• Ensured alignment with recreation and mobility goals.</li> </ul>

*Table 1. Lansing Riverfront Plans through 1974 - current*

Lansing's riverfront planning has remained focused on improving access, encouraging economic development, and integrating the riverfront into the city's identity. However, past efforts have been limited by funding challenges, land use conflicts, and infrastructure gaps. The Riverwalk revitalization project builds on these historical efforts, applying lessons learned to create a more accessible, connected, and functional riverfront space for the community.



## 4. Community Engagement

### 4.1. Qualitative Analysis

Individual interviews were conducted in an informal manner to understand why citizens engage with or avoid the riverfront, as well as to gather specific experiences that have informed their opinions. Testimony from seven individuals has been collected, including four MSU students living in East Lansing and three Lansing residents. The Lansing responses noted a desire for beautification and more activities along the riverfront. In REO Town, one interviewee suggested that businesses could engage better with the riverfront by strategically clearing trees and building patios to draw consumers to the area. They pointed out that dense tree cover largely hides the riverfront from view, and engagement with the riverfront could improve if greenspace was more intentional. Additionally, the other two interviewees emphasized the importance of temporary activations that could be moved around as seasons change, thus ensuring there is always some form of activity for citizens to participate in on the riverfront. All three interviewees identified the General Motors (GM) plant as a problem area for the river trail, as trails run directly next to the smokestacks belonging to the factory. Suggestions for improving the aesthetics of the area included investing in murals by local artists and creating a buffer of greenery between the trail and the GM plant to obscure it from view.

Out of the four interviewees from East Lansing, all reported that they enjoyed the local trail system for its beautiful scenery and upkeep. In particular, Old Town and the Brenke Fish Ladder were identified as areas that were most pleasurable to cycle through. Conversely, Adado Park and REO town were both identified as less enjoyable areas; the provided reasoning targeted the presence of heavy industrial development in REO Town, and the lack of activities, scenery, or a sense of safety for Adado Park. One of these interviewees mentioned that they stopped visiting the riverfront due to multiple instances in which they felt unsafe and expressed concern that they would have put themselves in danger by continuing to visit the riverfront. Additionally, all student interviewees noted debris and trash along the riverfront that hampered an otherwise positive experience.

### 4.2. Meetings with Local Stakeholders

#### *REO Town Community Visioning Session*

The team participated in a community visioning session on Wednesday, March 12. This allowed collaboration between stakeholders, partners, and residents in the Lansing area, more specifically in REO Town. This session focused on envisioning what people want to see happen in REO Town. The goal throughout this opportunity was to find a shared vision for the area, focusing on talent, public spaces, and business ownership opportunities. This session, run by the National Charrette Institute, engaged participants with three different brainstorming activities. These activities helped each member find a common goal for REO Town and Lansing in general. Each group was able to generate and prioritize the needs and solutions for revitalization. Through this public engagement, the team was able to find common themes

amongst each group that attended the visioning session. The main findings were that individuals want to see changes in walkability and connectivity between REO Town, Downtown Lansing, and the riverfront. Improving way finding and signage within Lansing was also a large theme throughout the session. Maintaining the character and prioritizing community within REO Town was another large theme. Lastly, safety concerns were brought up throughout the session.

### *Capital Region Community Foundation*

The team met with the Capital Region Community Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting community projects through grant funding and philanthropic initiatives, to discuss potential funding opportunities for improvements along the Lansing riverfront. The conversation focused on the foundation's role in supporting public space enhancements and how their grant programs could align with planned upgrades at Dietrich Park, Adado Riverfront Park, and a proposed pedestrian walkway over the river. Foundation staff provided insight into previously funded projects, the application process, and the types of improvements that would be most likely to receive financial support. We also reviewed all existing and future parcels along the riverfront, discussing how different sites could be activated and improved through potential funding opportunities.

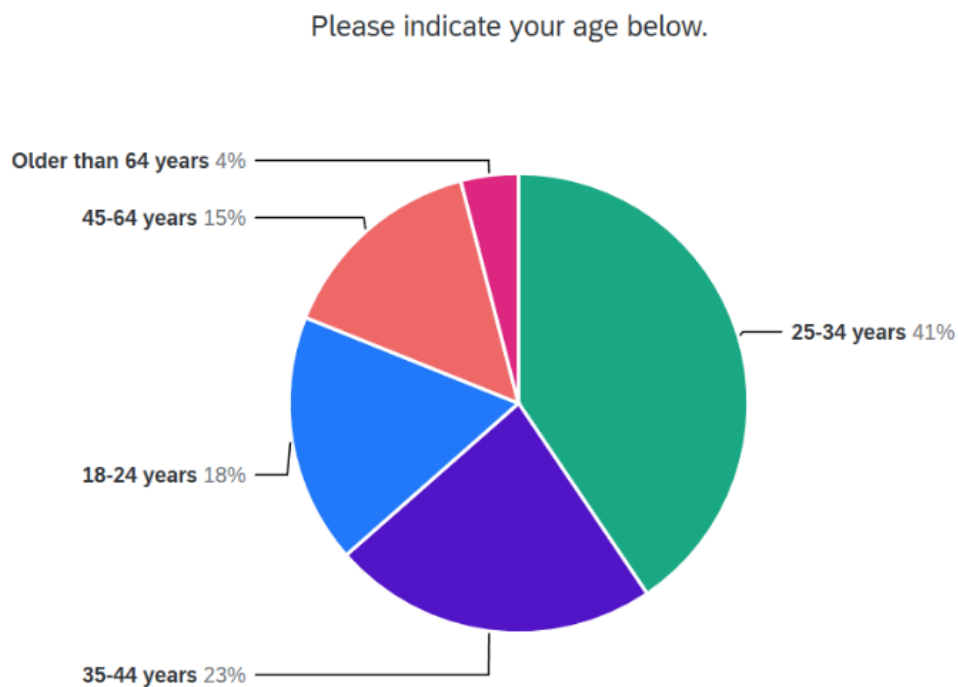
### *Gillespie Group*

The team also sat down with the Gillespie Group, a real estate development firm specializing in urban redevelopment and mixed-use projects, to discuss potential collaboration on riverfront development. Topics included their experience in urban redevelopment, strategies for activating underutilized spaces, and how private investment could complement public improvements. The conversation also touched on best practices for creating vibrant, accessible public areas and ways partnerships between developers and the city could contribute to long-term sustainability. Their perspective on market-driven development and community engagement provided valuable context for considering future enhancements along the riverfront.

### 4.3. Survey Results

The initial survey received 74 responses, with 52 answers to the concluding open-response question. The survey closed to further responses on March 25th.

Age data was collected to determine the engagement of different cohorts with the riverfront. The largest group of respondents fell into the 25-34 years cohort, while the smallest cohort was those older than 64 years. No respondents reported being younger than 18 years; since Lansing has a significant population of children and teenagers, further efforts to connect with these younger groups are necessary, as they often have different needs and desires for public space compared to those over 18 years. In terms of transportation, most respondents walk to access

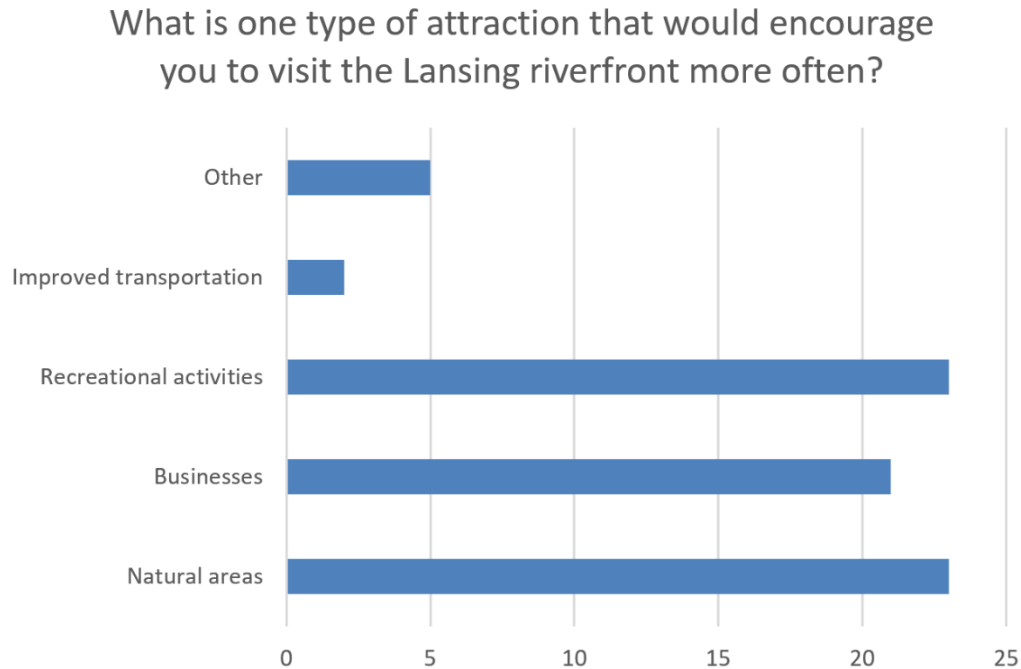


*Figure 5. Age cohorts of survey respondents.*

the riverfront. The second most common transportation method was driving, but several respondents reported that they do not visit the riverfront at all. Few respondents reported that they most often biked to access the riverfront, and no respondents used public transit most frequently to access the riverfront.

Respondents most often reported visiting the riverfront a few times a year. There was a fairly even spread of visit frequencies across the other categories, though the second most common visit frequency was multiple times a week, and the least common frequency was once a month. This indicates that many people are using the riverfront casually but may lack a strong interest in consistently engaging with the riverfront. A focus on development that can provide diverse

activities for residents of all backgrounds throughout the year is imperative to encourage more frequent usage of the riverfront.



*Figure 6. Types of attractions that would encourage survey respondents to visit the riverfront more often.*

When asked about one type of attraction that would encourage respondents to visit the riverfront more often, “recreational activities” and “natural areas” were tied in number of votes, followed closely by businesses. Out of 5 “other” choices, 2 responses identified safety as a determinant in visiting the riverfront more, while the other 3 responses expressed desire for more lighting, recreation, and fewer homeless encampments respectively. Improved transportation was chosen by only 2 respondents; this indicates that the riverfront is in an easily accessible location, but the lack of responses from people that primarily use public transit means more inquiry is necessary to gauge how practical public transit is when used to access the riverfront.



## What, if anything, prevents you from visiting the Lansing Riverfront?

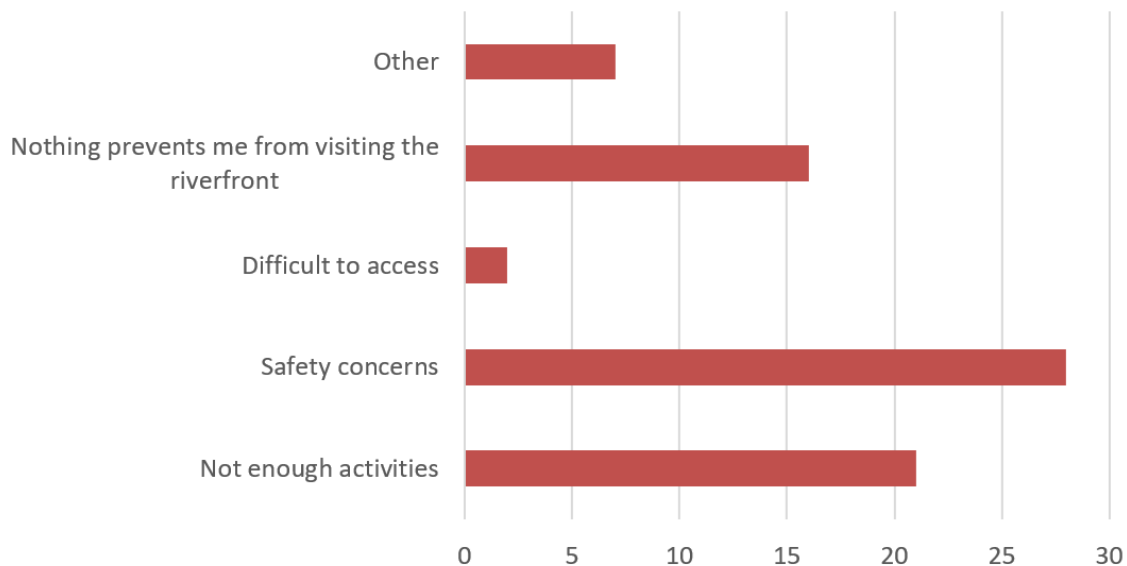


Figure 6. Things that prevent survey respondents from visiting the riverfront.

Safety concerns were the most common reason for not visiting the riverfront, which is consistent with reasoning for avoiding the riverfront mentioned in interviews as well. The second most common reason was a lack of activities along the riverfront, although 21% of respondents reported that nothing was preventing them from visiting the riverfront. There were 7 open responses to this question, 4 of which mentioned the presence of unhoused people as a deterrent for visits. The other 3 responses noted ice during winter, drug paraphernalia, and far distance as deterrents, respectively.

Although safety on the river trail has been mentioned frequently in both individual interviews and survey responses, 60% of respondents reported feeling somewhat or very safe on the riverfront with a safety score of 6 or above. This incongruence, alongside the overall decrease in crime rates in Lansing, presents a complex problem where individual perceptions of safety on the riverfront vary widely. However, improvements to infrastructure such as more lighting and ample waste receptacles may alleviate some of the perceived safety issues along the trail.

The open response results were organized into 6 categories based on common topics of discussion. These topics consisted of safety, recreation, aesthetics and infrastructure, unhoused population, business, and greenery. Out of 52 open responses, recreation was identified most often as a desirable change on the riverfront, mentioned in 21 responses. Considering that more recreation was also identified by respondents as helpful to encourage visiting the riverfront, future development should bring a variety of activities for visitors to engage in. Some respondents provided activities that they would prefer to see in the future, such as kayaking, live music, and putting up hammocks. These activities can expand the ways residents interact with the water, build upon Lansing's history with festivals and music, and provide spaces for people

to enjoy the nature surrounding the riverfront. Aesthetics and infrastructure were mentioned in 18 responses, particularly regarding the maintenance of boardwalks alongside improved cleanliness and lighting along the river trail. 16 responses called for increased safety along the riverfront; emergency callboxes were proposed as a helpful measure, and some speculated that more people using riverfront facilities could improve the overall sense of safety. There were 6 mentions of more businesses along the riverfront, although examples of preferred types of businesses were not given. A further 3 responses asked for more greenery, specifically flowers and increased biodiversity. Notably, unhoused people were singled out in 8 open responses, seen in a negative light as affecting the beauty and cleanliness of the riverfront.

#### 4.4. Unhoused Residents

Considering the number of responses that expressed displeasure with the riverfront due to unhoused residents, it became clear that more direct engagement with unhoused people and those who work with them was necessary. To that end, the team spoke with two organizers in Lansing that coordinated with an encampment set up next to the river. The interviewees stated that for residents living near the riverfront, it was far easier to dispose of trash and human waste in the river than trying to find a dumpster that they could use without confrontation. As such, they recommended that waste receptacles and temporary or permanent bathrooms could be installed along the riverfront to provide spaces for unhoused residents to dispose of trash and take care of bodily functions in a dignified manner. Additionally, the interviewees mentioned the creation of a sanctioned encampment site, which they believe would assist in centralizing waste in one area for easier pick up alongside providing unhoused residents with a stable place to stay.

## 5. Key Sites

The Lansing Riverfront District follows the Grand River and Red Cedar River, spanning from Moores Park on the west side to Potter Park Zoo on the east side, passing through downtown Lansing. The Lansing River Trail, a 13-mile paved multi-use path, connects residential neighborhoods, parks, and major civic, commercial, and institutional areas. The riverfront offers

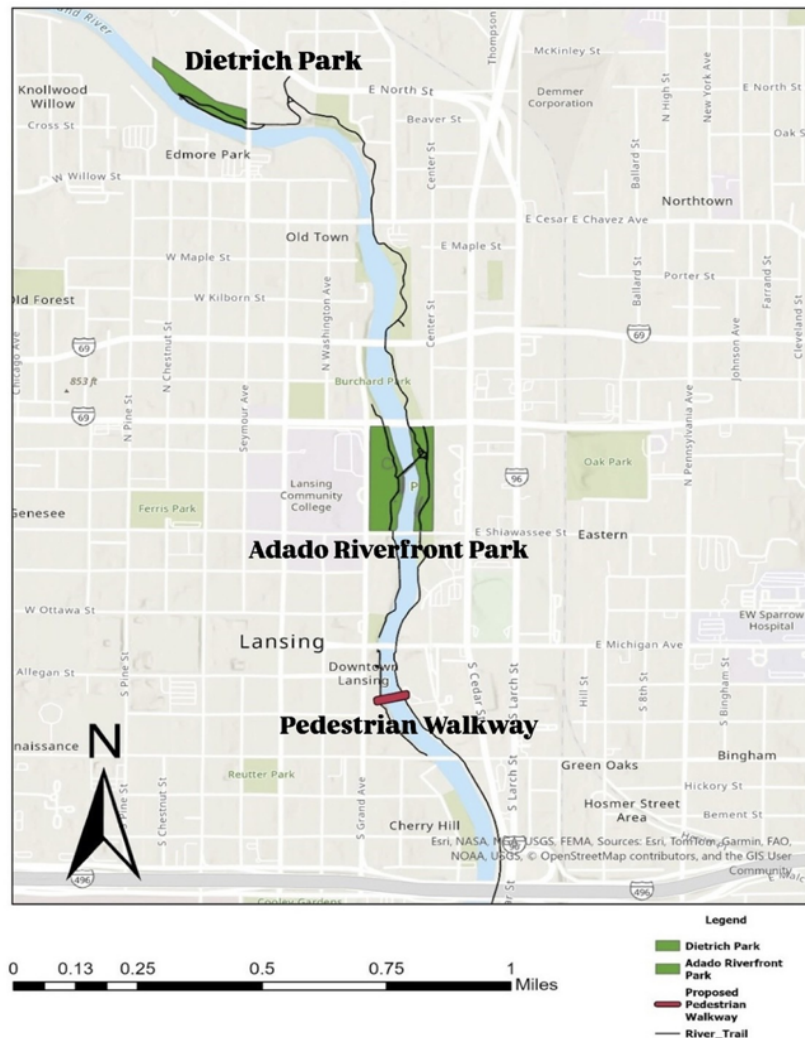


Figure 8. Lansing Riverfront Activation Project Site Map displaying the three sites that are being focused on. Created by the MSU Practicum team using ArcGIS

recreational and transportation benefits, however, connectivity gaps, infrastructure deterioration, and safety concerns remain challenges for future development. This study focuses on the revitalization of the following three key sites along the Grand River Corridor (see Figure 8).

**Dietrich Park, Adado Riverfront Park, and the Pedestrian Walkway Site** were selected by our team and the team at the Lansing Economic Development Corporation (LEDC) because we both believe that these three sites have priority over other sites in the city. The practicum team

has confidence that if this implementation process is completed at these sites, activation along the riverfront will increase.

## 5.1. Dietrich Park

Dietrich Park (1501 N Grand River Ave.) is a 4.7-acre green space along the Grand River. The park is characterized by grassy open spaces, mature trees, and paved walking paths that provide access to the river. While the park offers limited pedestrian infrastructure, such as picnic tables, benches, and playground equipment, there is an evident lack of public amenities on this site. The park's terrain makes it difficult to get a good view or close access to the river. Additionally, insufficient signage poses another obstacle to the accessibility of this space. Maintenance of existing facilities is also a concern, as some seating areas and pathways show signs of wear. Despite these challenges, Dietrich Park has the potential to serve as a recreational hub and popular access point for residents to engage with the Riverfront. Adjacent to mixed-use developments and residential neighborhoods, there is an opportunity for enhanced connectivity to surrounding urban areas.

The park's proximity to key transportation routes, such as Michigan Avenue and Grand River Avenue, makes it an ideal candidate for future improvements, such as expanded walking trails, upgraded recreational facilities, and riverfront activations. Within walking distance of Dietrich Park, there are several restaurants, including Hank's Cuisines, Piazzano's, Olympic Broil, Ozone's Brewhouse, and Meat BBQ. Figure 13 displays the location of Dietrich Park and a ½ mile buffer zone around the park. This buffer zone notes the length an average person will walk to get to a location. Within this buffer zone, lies residential buildings, a food market, and the Olympic Broil restaurant. According to the Lansing Economic Development Corporation, this park is underutilized by the community.



*Figure 9. Photo of the Dietrich Park road sign on North Grand River Avenue. The sign is small and difficult to see from the street. Source: MSU Practicum Team*



*Figure 10. Photo of riverfront access point at Dietrich Park. In this area, a fence and overgrown vegetation block visitors from the river and dock. Source: MSU Practicum Team*





Figure 11. Map of Dietrich Park Map displaying surrounding amenities, neighborhoods, and places of business in a 0.5 Mile radius. Source: MSU Practicum Team



## 5.2. Adado Riverfront Park

Adado Riverfront Park (201 E Shiawassee St.) is one of Lansing's largest urban green spaces, covering over 30 acres along both sides of the Grand River. To the west, the park connects to the heart of downtown Lansing, sitting directly next to Lansing Community College (LCC) and various office buildings. To the east, a strip mall with restaurants like Happy's Pizza and Bangkok House lines the area, alongside hundreds of affordable housing units, all positioned right next to the thriving Stadium District. The park includes large open lawns, an amphitheater, paved walking and biking trails, and a recently constructed playground. Historically, it hosted large-scale events, such as the Common Ground Music Festival, which drew tens of thousands of visitors annually.

Recent site visits indicate a lack of adequate lighting throughout the park, creating safety concerns during evening hours. Seating options are limited and poorly maintained, and several areas suffer from broken infrastructure, including damaged pathways and deteriorating recreational equipment. However, the park's position within the downtown corridor makes it a key site for fostering economic development and cultural engagement. Future development opportunities include improved pedestrian connectivity and safety, enhanced river access points, and the integration of public art installations. Figure 18 displays the location of Adado Park and a ½ mile buffer zone around the park. Within this buffer zone lies mostly commercial buildings including Lansing Community College, Lansing Shuffle, and the Lansing Center. These three buildings are visited frequently by students, residents, and visitors, the LEDC believes this park is still underutilized by the community.



Figure 12. Photo of signage in Adado Riverfront Park. Like much of the park's infrastructure this sign is deteriorating. Source: MSU Practicum Team



Figure 13. Photo of the west side of Adado Riverfront Park. This image displays the open space that can host large events and festivals. Outside of events, this space lacks amenities and is largely unused, especially during colder seasons. Source: MSU Practicum Team



## Legend

0 0.07 0.15 0.3 0.45 0.6 Miles

- Adado Riverfront Park  
0.5 Mile Buffer
- Adado Riverfront Park
- River\_Trail

Figure 14. Map of Adado Riverfront Park displaying surrounding amenities, neighborhoods, and places of business in a 0.5 Mile Buffer. Source: MSU Practicum Team



### 5.3. Pedestrian Walkway Site

The proposed pedestrian walkway would span the Grand River, connecting Impression 5 Science Center (200 Museum Dr.) to the apartment building next to the Grand Tower (235 S Grand Ave.). Currently, the nearest crossings are several blocks away, limiting pedestrian access between the commercial spaces and residential developments in Downtown Lansing. The site for the walkway is situated near major attractions including museums, galleries, educational institutions, restaurants, nightlife activities, and shopping ventures like the Capital City Market. The surrounding environment includes mixed-use developments, green spaces, and historical landmarks, creating opportunities for the walkway to serve both functional and aesthetic purposes. New Vision Lansing is also a project that is being developed near the pedestrian walkway that will create around 570 apartment units, approximately 60,000 square feet of retail space, and is expected to bring 1,000 residents to the area (Gentilozzi Real Estate). Structural considerations include minimizing environmental impact on the river ecosystem and integrating the walkway seamlessly into the existing urban area. The vision for this project emphasizes connectivity, sustainability, and enhancing the overall riverfront experience. Figure 22 displays a 0.5-mile buffer zone where mostly commercial buildings including Impression 5, Lansing Center, Lansing Shuffle, Capital City Market, MSU Federal Credit Union, Lansing City Hall, and Midtown Brewing company are found. Since this pedestrian walkway has only been proposed, it would be the hope that members of these companies and people who visit these companies would also use the walkway when near the river walk.



*Figure 15. Photo of the River trail at the pedestrian walkway site. The trail in this area is underutilized and poorly maintained. Source: MSU Practicum Team*



*Figure 16. Photo of the parking lot outside of Impression 5. This underutilized lot offers expansive space and opportunity for activation projects. Source: MSU Practicum Team*



Figure 17. Map of pedestrian walkway site displaying surrounding amenities, neighborhoods, State of Michigan offices, and place of business in a 0.5 Mile Buffer. Source: MSU Practicum Team

## 6. Zoning and Land Use Conditions

### 6.1. Riverfront Zoning

Zoning along the Lansing Riverfront defines where public space activation can occur and what limitations exist under current regulations. As shown in Figure 23, the area within walking distance of the riverfront includes a mix of Downtown (DT), Mixed-Use (MX), Residential (R), and Industrial (IND) zones, each shaping how Adado Riverfront Park, Dietrich Park, and pedestrian connections can be enhanced.

Adado Riverfront Park and the pedestrian walkway site are situated within the Downtown (DT) zoning district of Lansing. Adado contains both DT-1 Urban Edge zoning and DT-2 Urban Flex zoning. These districts are intended to support a low-to-medium intensity mixture of uses to complement the Downtown Core (Form Based Code, Pg. 46, 48). This zoning designation aligns with the park's role as a central hub for community events and activities. The zoning on this site allows for flexible placemaking initiatives and event programming at Adado Riverfront Park without significant regulatory obstacles.

The pedway site is zoned as DT-3 Downtown Core. The Form Based Code states this district accommodates the City's highest intensity and density development and that the purpose of this district is to provide a primarily vertical mix of uses with higher density residential housing and office buildings (pg 50). This district aims to spur pedestrian activity, making this site ideal for revitalization efforts that will enhance walkability and connectivity along the river trail.

Dietrich Park is zoned as an IND-1 Suburban Industrial district. According to Lansing's Form-Based Code, this district is intended for light-to-medium intensity industrial uses and is distinct from other industrial districts in that the setting is of a more suburban style industrial park with low rise buildings, with relatively larger lots with expansive lawns (Form-Based Code pg. 82). This zoning designation allows for a variety of uses that align with riverfront revitalization goals, however this zoning could pose a small barrier as it permits industrial parcels that may threaten the ecological health of the site.

Zoning considerations for this project are less about changing regulations and more about navigating existing ones to ensure public space activation, safety improvements, and accessibility enhancements are feasible within current land use policies.



## River Trail Adjacent Zoning

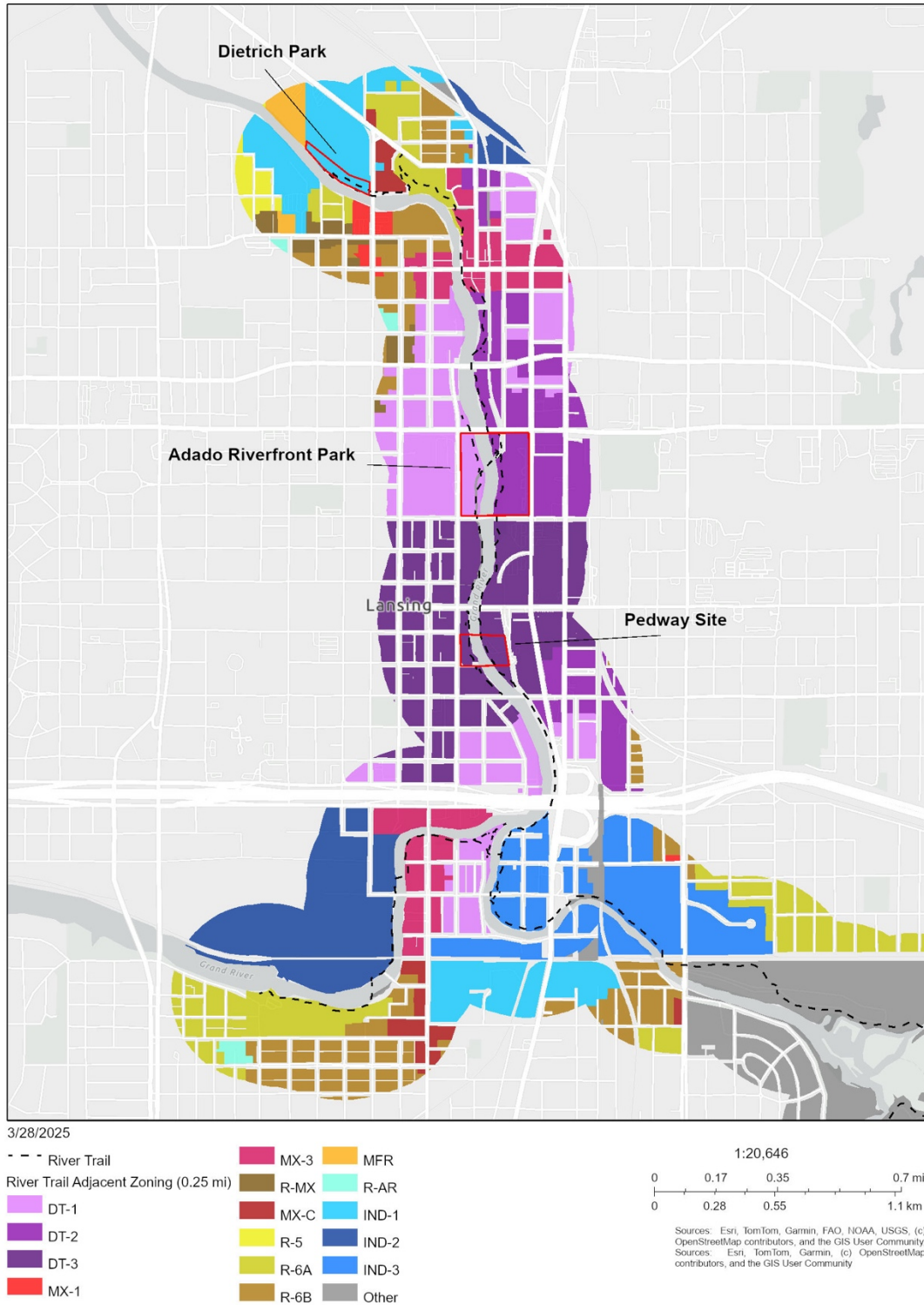


Figure 18. River Trail Adjacent Zoning (within 0.25 miles). Map created by Practicum team; data retrieved from <https://www.lansingmi.gov/374/Zoning>

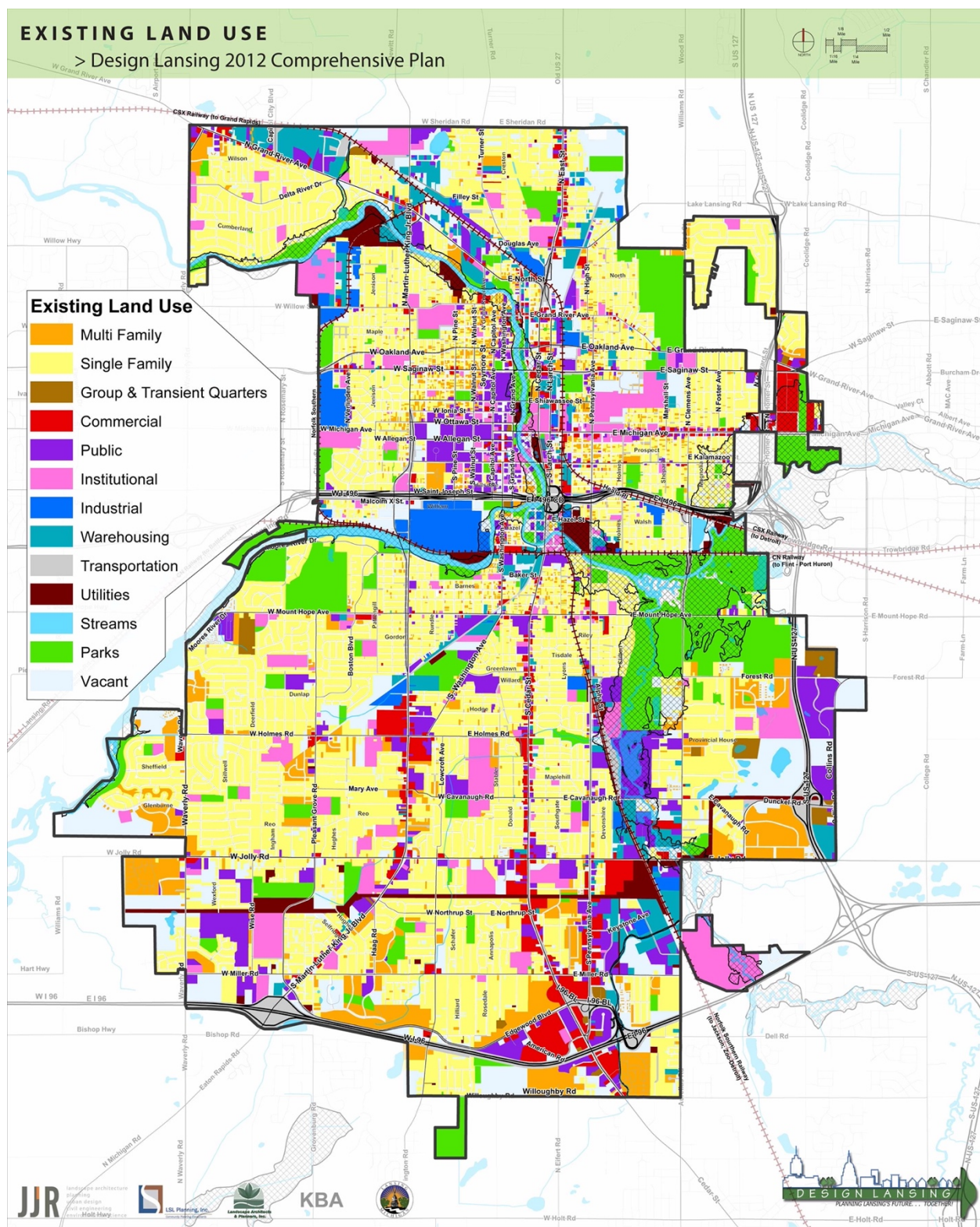
## 6.2. Riverfront Land Use

The Lansing riverfront consists of a wide variety of land uses, all of which are important to consider in riverfront activation efforts. A detailed breakdown of the permissible, conditional, and special land uses in the Downtown and Suburban Industrial districts can be found in Appendix section 12.2. Figure 24 displays a map of the city's current land use conditions as documented in the Design Lansing 2012 Comprehensive Plan. Currently, both Dietrich and Adado Riverfront Park are permitted for Parks land use. Dietrich Park is directly next to warehousing usage, which creates a visual and functional disconnect between the park and nearby residential areas. This adjacency limits pedestrian connectivity and discourages recreational use, emphasizing the need for improved wayfinding, enhanced landscaping, and screening buffers to mitigate the industrial presence. Surrounding Dietrich Park are single and multi-family residential and public land uses, which present opportunities to better connect the park to the adjacent neighborhoods, fostering more frequent use by residents. Strengthening these connections through improved access points, signage, and pedestrian pathways could increase neighborhood engagement and encourage community stewardship of the park.

Adado Riverfront Park is bordered by a more diverse mix of land uses, including public land, single and multi-family residential, commercial, institutional, and some group and transient quarters. This diversity presents opportunities for multi-purpose programming that caters to a broad demographic, including nearby residents, office workers, and tourists. Leveraging these adjacent uses to introduce mixed-use developments or public amenities could activate the park and extend foot traffic in the area. Moreover, enhancing safety features, lighting, and connectivity between Adado and surrounding neighborhoods could transform it into a more vibrant, well-integrated community space.

The pedestrian walkway site is currently permitted for public use and is surrounded by a mixture of downtown uses, including commercial, institutional, and parks. While this site benefits from its central location and proximity to key downtown destinations, its potential as a vibrant connection point is currently underutilized. The Design Lansing 2012 Comprehensive Plan future land use goals map designates this area for future downtown mixed-use core, which aligns with the project's vision for enhancing pedestrian connectivity. By capitalizing on this designation, the pedestrian walkway can serve as a critical linkage that integrates the riverfront with downtown amenities, creating a seamless connection for residents and visitors. This shift toward mixed-use development also presents an opportunity to introduce complementary uses such as retail, dining, and cultural amenities, further activating the space and strengthening its role as a dynamic connector between the riverfront and downtown Lansing.

Design Lansing's comprehensive plan also outlines future land use goals that the city hopes to achieve by 2030 (shown in Figure 25), in which both Dietrich and Adado Riverfront Park are designated for open space-dedicated park usage. Ensuring that current and future land use decisions align with these goals will be essential to maintaining the ecological integrity of these parks while supporting efforts to increase public engagement, environmental stewardship, and sustainable economic growth along the riverfront.





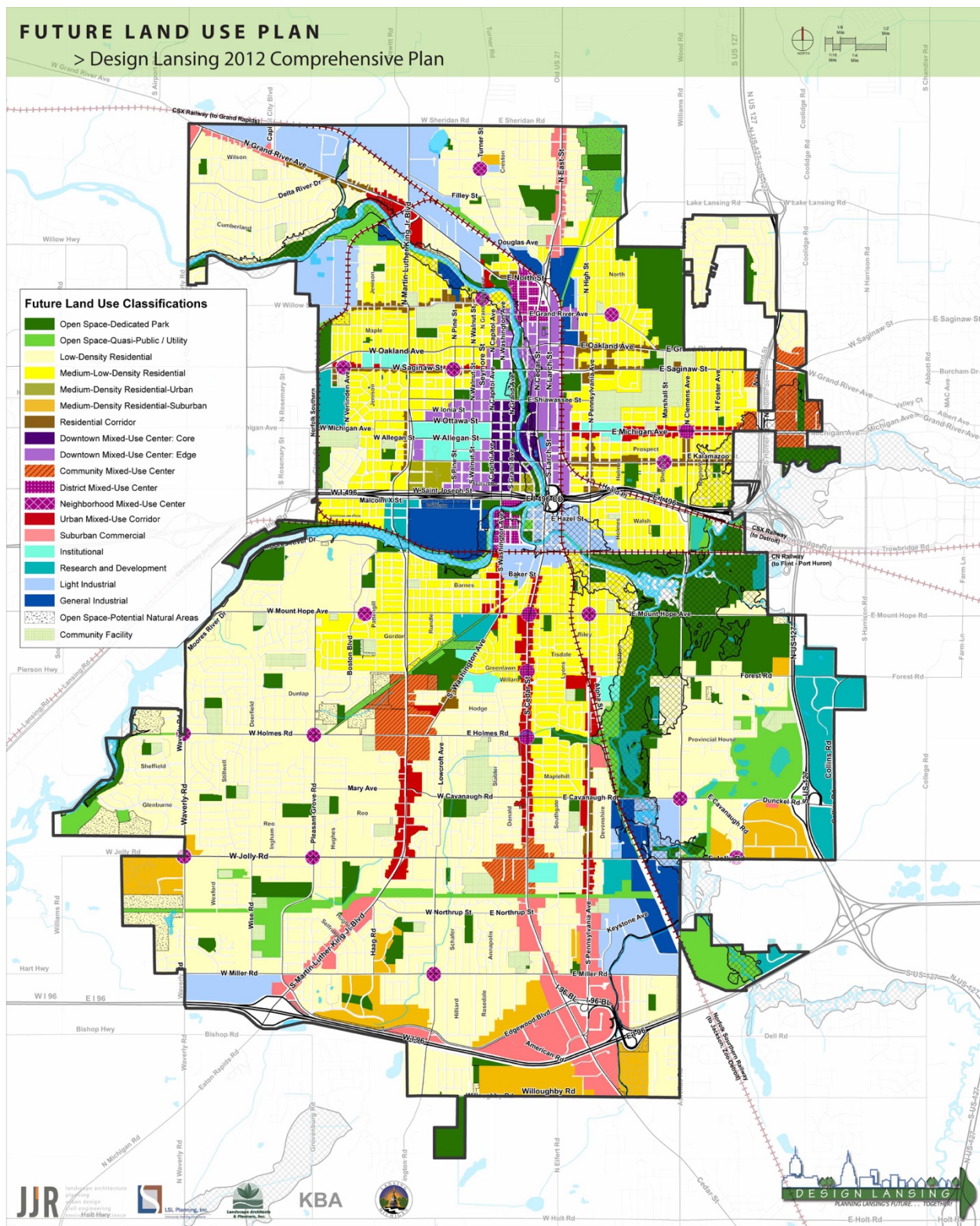


Figure 20. Map of Lansing's future land use goals. Source: Design Lansing 2012 Comprehensive Plan

## 7. Socioeconomic Profile

Understanding Lansing's demographic, economic, and housing characteristics is essential for guiding riverfront development and ensuring that public spaces serve the community's needs. Lansing's population has gradually declined since 2000, shaping the city's housing demand, workforce trends, and economic conditions. The city's diverse demographics, employment patterns, and income distribution influence how residents engage with public spaces, including the riverfront. Housing stock composition and transportation trends also provide insight into accessibility and infrastructure needs. This section examines key socioeconomic factors, including population trends, racial and age demographics, income and employment data, housing characteristics, transportation patterns, crime rates, education levels, and tourism impacts, all of which inform strategic planning for Lansing's riverfront revitalization.

### 7.1. Population

Lansing has a total population of 112,546, according to the 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates. The population is nearly evenly split by gender, with 49.19% male and 50.81% female. The largest age cohort in Lansing is 25-29, followed by 20-24 and 30-34. The population pyramid (Figure 25) illustrates that Lansing has a significant young adult population, likely influenced by the presence of local Lansing colleges and career opportunities. However, the decline in population after these age groups suggests that many individuals leave the city after completing their education. This trend has implications for long-term population retention and the need for amenities that appeal to younger and working-age residents. Lansing's population peaked in

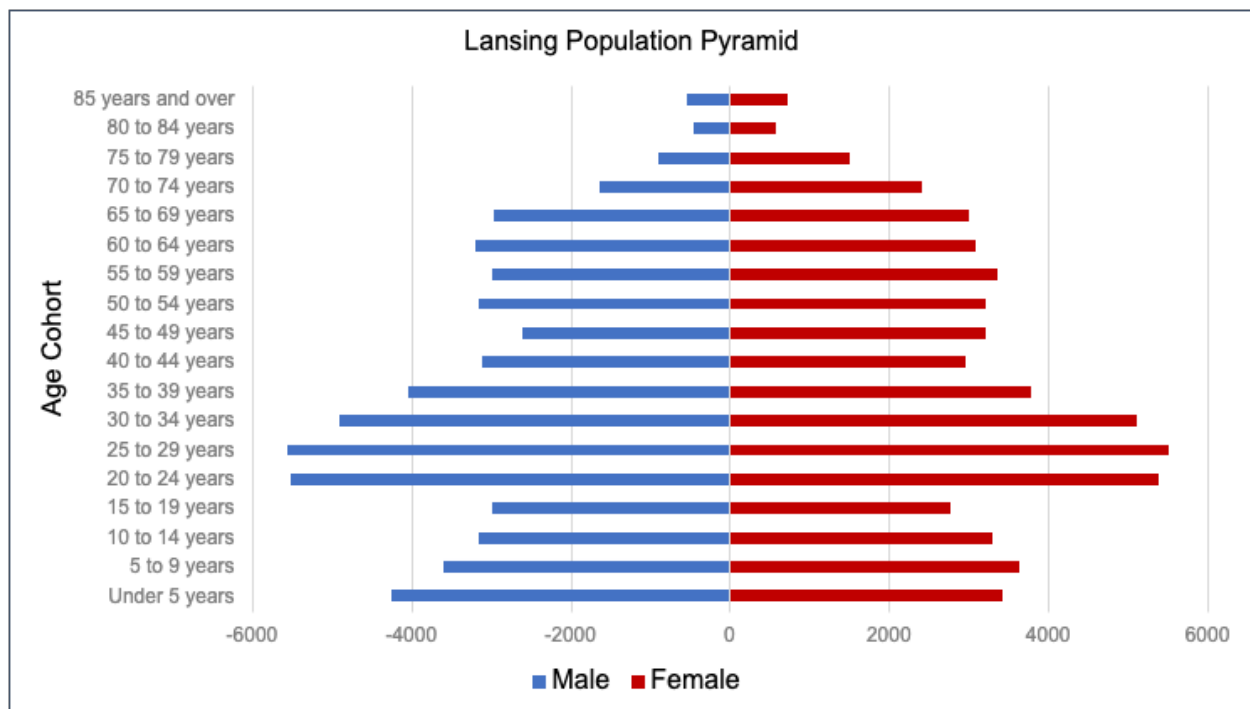


Figure 21. Lansing, MI Population Pyramid. Source: American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates.



1970 at 131,546. As of 2023, the population has fallen to just above 112,000 (Figure 26). The population of Ingham County in 2023 was 282,015 which been falling steadily each year (U.S. Census Bureau). In 2020, the population of Ingham County was 290,923. During the years 2019-2020, Covid-19 influenced population counts for concerning health reasons. State of Michigan jobs have moved to remote work since the pandemic, allowing S.O.M. employees to move out of Lansing. Understanding population trends is essential for planning public spaces that support long-term community engagement, economic development, and residential growth along the riverfront.

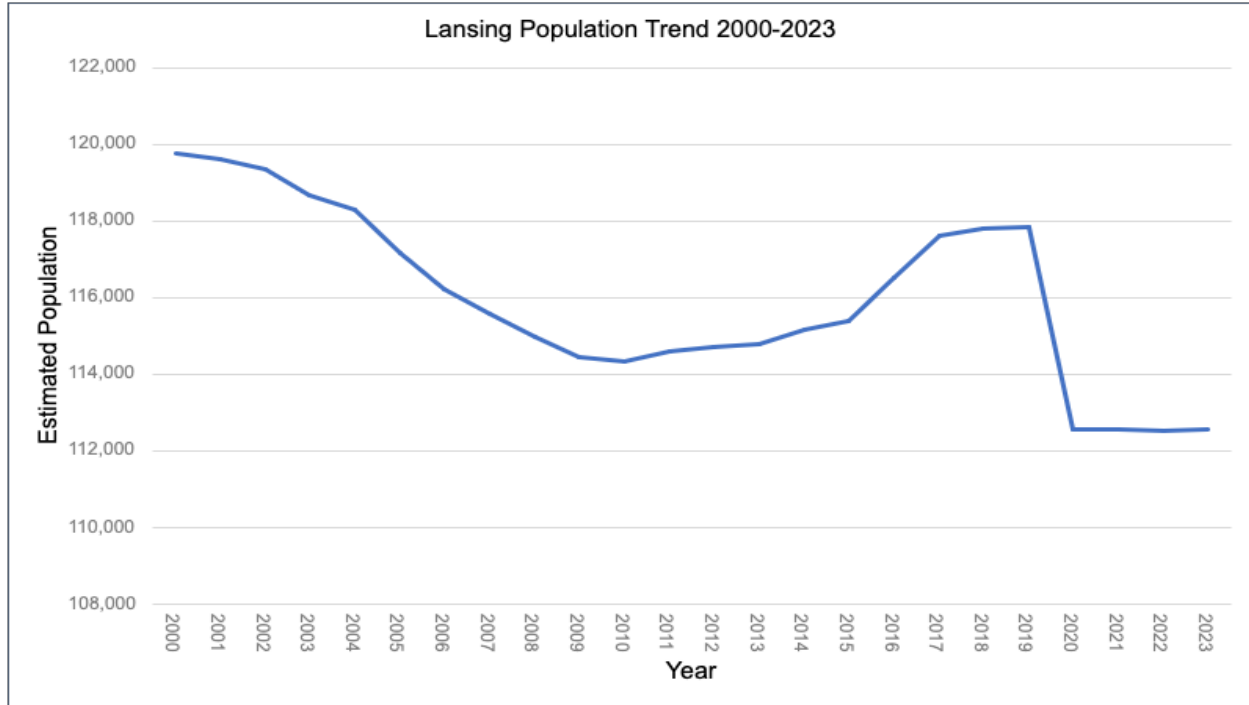


Figure 22. Lansing, MI Population Trend 2000-2023. Source: <https://www.neilsberg.com/research/datasets/6ec13d1c-3d85-11ee-9abe-0aa64bf2eeb2/>

## 7.2. Demographics

Lansing has a more racially and ethnically diverse population than Ingham County. According to the 2020 Decennial Census, Lansing demographics are 55% White, compared to 67.7% in Ingham County, and Lansing has a significantly higher percentage of Black (23.37%) and Multiracial (11.58%) residents. In Ingham County 12.5% of citizens are Black, and 8.5% are Multiracial (U.S. Census Bureau). The city also has a growing multiracial population, reflecting broader demographic shifts. Figure 27 provides a visual breakdown of Lansing's racial composition.

This diversity is an important factor in riverfront development. As a public space meant to serve the entire community, the Riverwalk must be designed inclusively, ensuring accessibility and cultural relevance for all residents. Lansing's demographic composition highlights the need for meaningful community engagement to ensure that riverfront improvements reflect the needs and preferences of those who live in the city. Public space programming, design elements, and amenities should align with the city's population to maximize use and engagement. By considering Lansing's unique racial and ethnic makeup, the riverfront can be developed into a more welcoming and representative space that strengthens community connections and supports long-term revitalization efforts.

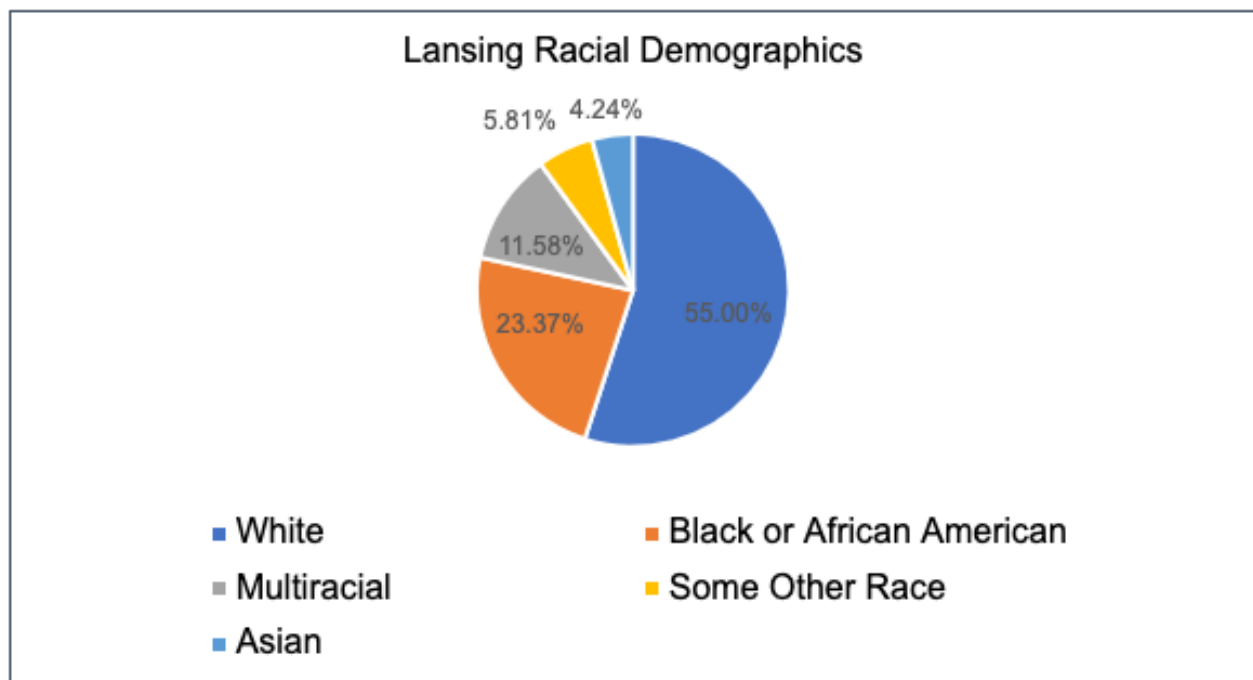


Figure 23. Lansing, MI Racial Demographics. Source: 2020 Decennial Census.

### 7.3. Income and Employment

According to the 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Lansing has a median household income of \$55,197 – lower than the Ingham County median household income of \$64,534 (U.S. Census Bureau). Nearly 48% of households earn less than \$50,000 annually, while 30.2% earn more than \$75,000, and 22% fall between \$50,000 and \$74,999. Figure 28 provides a visual breakdown of income distribution in the city. Lansing’s income levels indicate a relatively moderate economic profile, with a significant portion of residents in lower-income brackets compared to state and national averages. Employment data shows that 62.3% of Lansing’s working-age population is employed, while the unemployment rate is 8.1%. The city’s employment rate is comparable but slightly lower than that of Ingham County where 64.4% of the working-age population is employed (U.S. Census Bureau). These figures highlight the economic conditions that influence household spending, leisure time, and access to recreational amenities. Understanding income and employment trends is essential for riverfront development, as economic factors shape how residents engage with public spaces. Ensuring that the Riverwalk remains an accessible, low-cost destination for recreation and community activities is critical to serving Lansing’s diverse population. Well-designed public spaces can also contribute to economic development by attracting visitors, supporting local businesses, and enhancing quality of life.

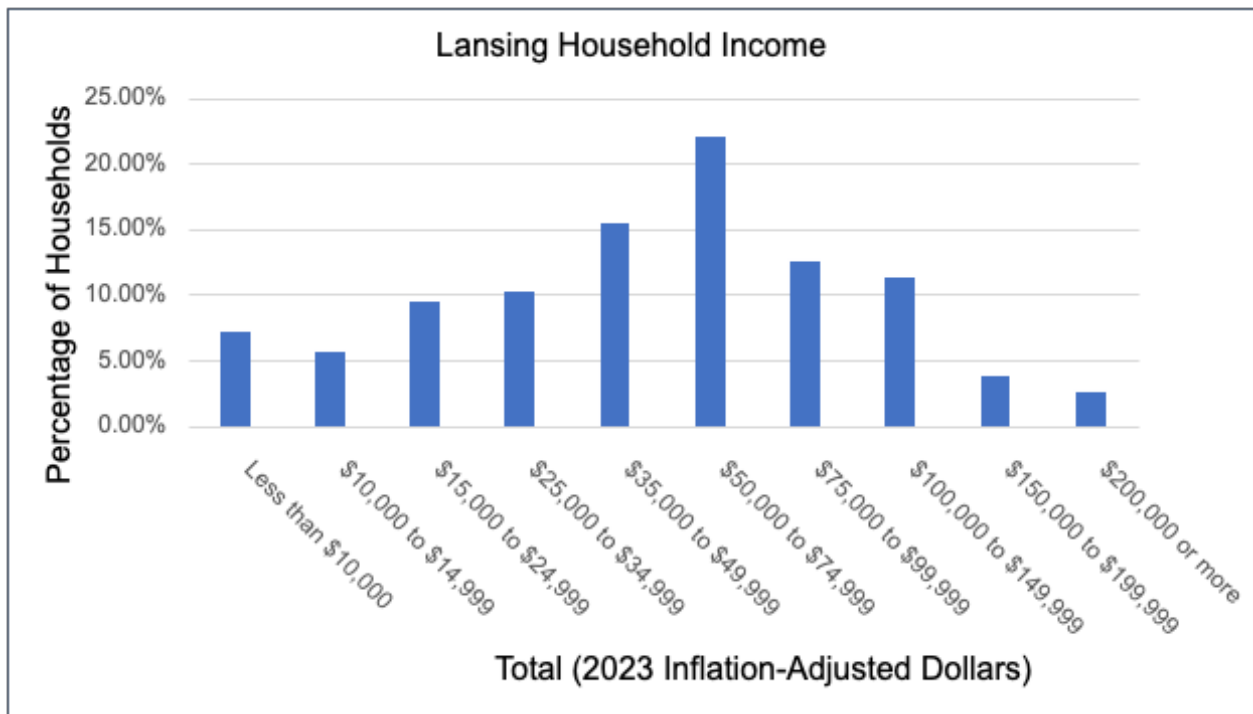


Figure 24. Lansing, MI Household Income in Past 12 Months. Source: American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimate.

## 7.4. Housing

Lansing's housing stock is predominantly single-family homes, which comprise nearly 64% of all housing units, including detached and attached homes. This trend is similar and slightly higher than Ingham County's housing stock where 62% of houses are single family, detached homes (U.S. Census Bureau). The percentage of 5-9 apartments, 10 or more apartments, and other types of housing in Ingham County are a very similar percentage to Lansing with a .5% difference. This does not tell us much about the differences between the two areas. Large apartment complexes with 10 or more units account for nearly 19% of the housing market, meaning that these two housing types combined make up 82.47% of Lansing's total housing supply. Figure 29 provides a visual breakdown of the city's housing composition. Lansing also

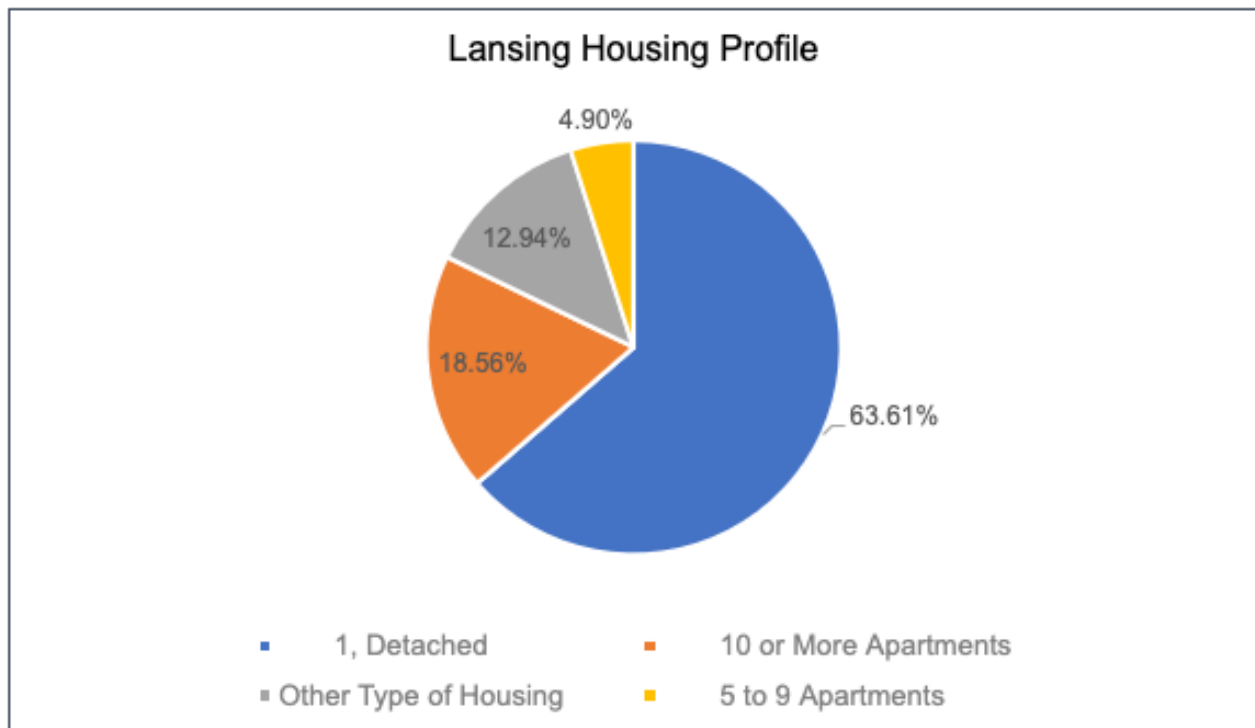


Figure 25. Lansing, MI Housing Profile. Source: American Community Survey, 2023, 5 Year-Estimate.

has a significant number of older homes – depicted in Figure 30 – with 30% of housing units built between 1960 and 1979, 26.6% constructed between 1940 and 1959, and 23.6% dating back to 1939 or earlier. The age of Lansing's housing stock reflects long-established residential neighborhoods, many of which have seen limited new construction in recent decades.

Understanding the city's housing profile is important for riverfront development, as housing trends influence who is most likely to engage with public spaces along the river. The prevalence of older single-family homes suggests that many long-term residents may have stable housing situations, while the presence of large apartment complexes near the riverfront indicates a concentration of younger renters in the area. Recent housing developments along the Riverwalk have primarily been new apartment complexes, which could increase engagement with riverfront amenities, particularly among younger populations. Ensuring that the Riverwalk offers a range of recreational and social opportunities that appeal to both renters and homeowners will

help maximize its use and accessibility. Additionally, the age of Lansing's housing stock suggests that redevelopment and infrastructure improvements near the riverfront may be necessary to support continued residential growth.

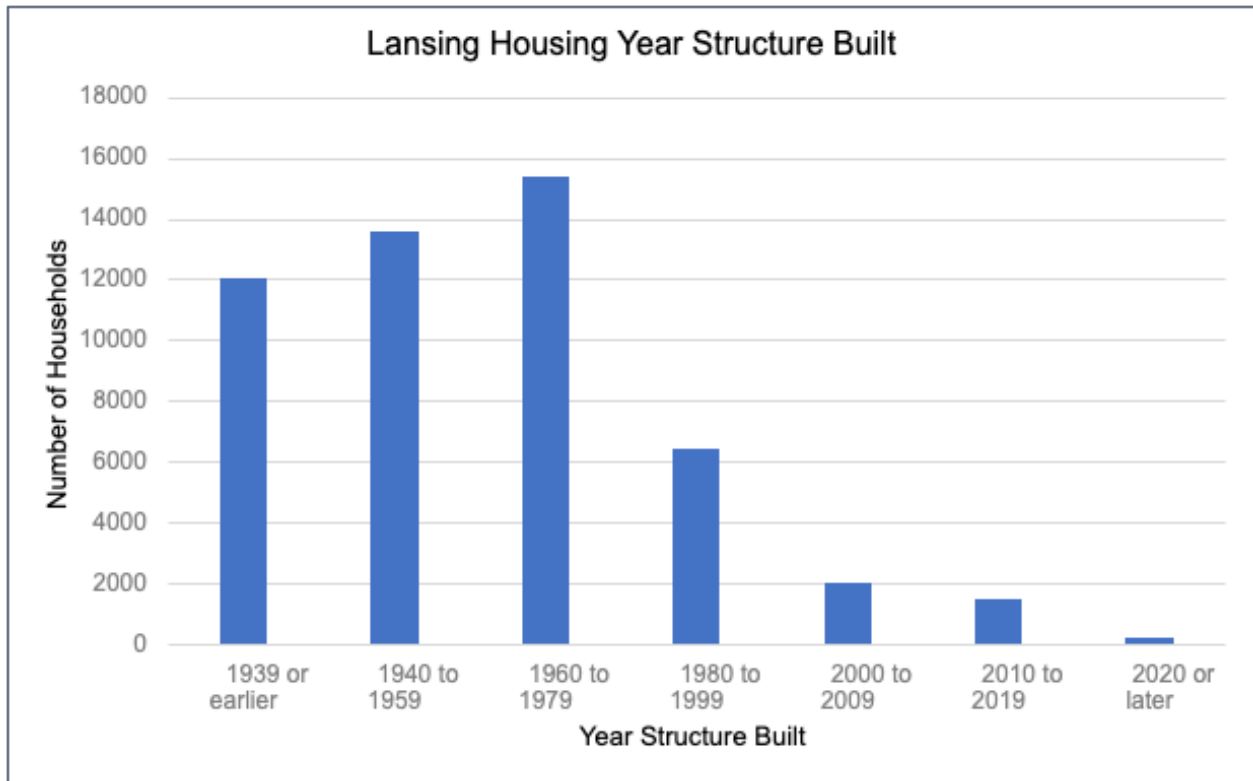


Figure 26. Lansing, MI Housing Years of Construction. Source: American Community Survey, 2023, 5 Year-Estimate.



## 7.5. Transportation

According to the 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates, 79% of Lansing residents commute to work by driving their personal vehicles, while 3.3% rely on public transportation, and 13.2% work from home. These figures, shown in Figure 31, indicate a heavy reliance on personal vehicles, with relatively low use of public transit and alternative transportation modes. Lansing's Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA) provides bus service throughout the city, with routes that connect directly to key riverfront destinations. In 2019, CATA introduced 23 new Nova buses, 10 low-floor minivans, and four administrative vehicles (2019 Community Report). Thirty-three routes span the Greater Lansing area, with more than 1,300 bus stops. According to the CATA System Map, which has been effective since March 2019, eight different routes can connect individuals to the riverfront. The CATA routes running throughout Lansing allow for better connectivity to different areas in the city, including neighborhoods, Old Town, Downtown, REO Town, and the riverfront. CATA is also becoming more popular among Greater Lansing residents. In 2023, the number of rides was 7.63 million; in 2024, the number of rides increased to 8.50 million, demonstrating that public transit usage is growing each year amongst Lansing residents (2024 Community Report). Since the use of public transportation is increasing each year, it is likely that the use of personal vehicles will decline in the future.

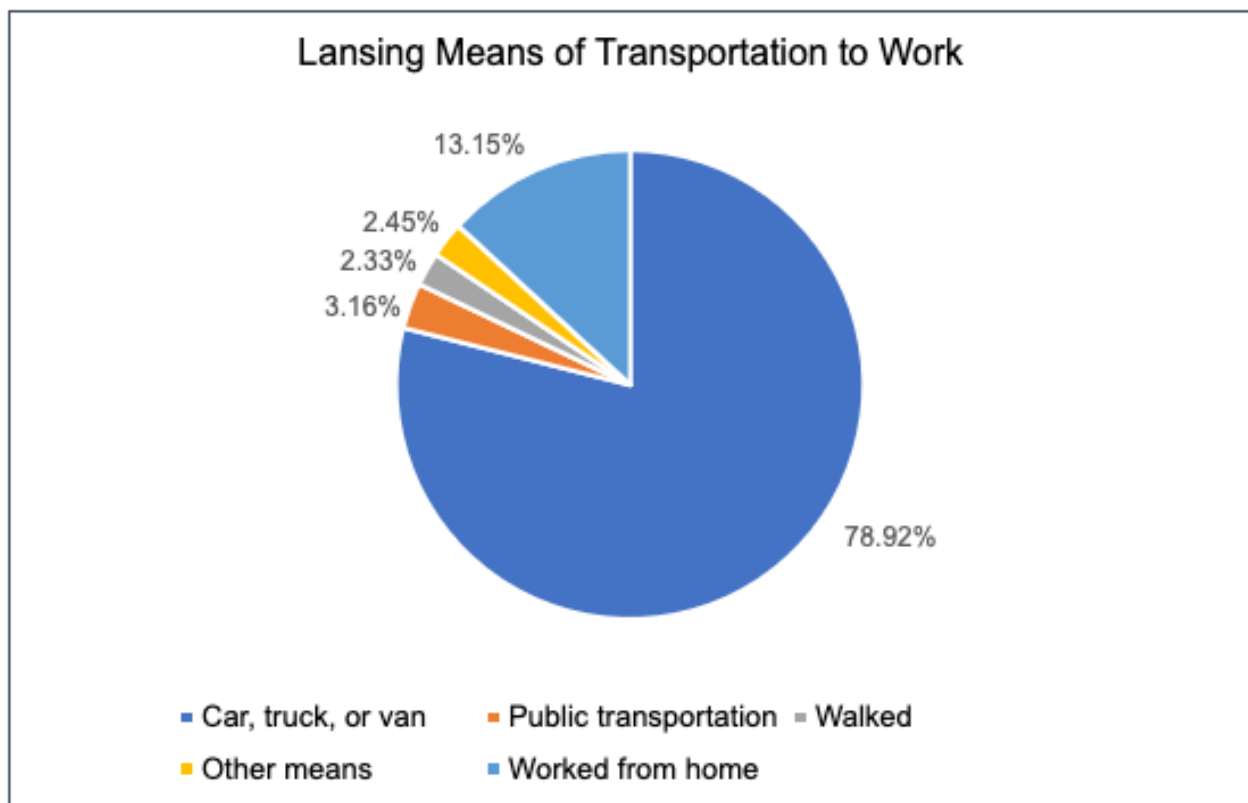


Figure 27. Lansing, MI Types of Transportation to Work. Source: American Community Survey, 2023, 5 Year-Estimate.

## 7.6. Crime

Crime is a significant factor influencing outdoor recreation and public space usage in Lansing, particularly along the riverfront. According to Lansing Police Department data, crime rates in the city have fluctuated over the past decade but have generally declined in recent years. Crime peaked in 2013 at approximately 4,550 incidents per 100,000 people, followed by another high in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, nearing 4,500 per 100,000. Since 2020, crime rates have shown a steady decline, suggesting improvements in overall public safety. Figure 32 illustrates these trends over the past ten years. While crime has decreased, perceptions of safety remain a major concern for riverfront activation. Site visits have revealed a lack of lighting, limited visibility, and minimal safety infrastructure along the Riverwalk, which may discourage use, particularly in the evenings or by more vulnerable populations.

Addressing these concerns through improved lighting, emergency call stations, regular maintenance, and increased security presence can make the river trail feel safer and encourage greater usage. Ensuring a safe, accessible, and well-maintained riverfront is essential for increasing walkability and recreation, as well as attracting private and public investment. Perceptions of crime can be as influential as actual crime rates in shaping public space usage, meaning proactive safety measures are necessary to build trust and engagement. By implementing targeted improvements, Lansing can further reduce barriers to Riverwalk usage and support long-term revitalization efforts.

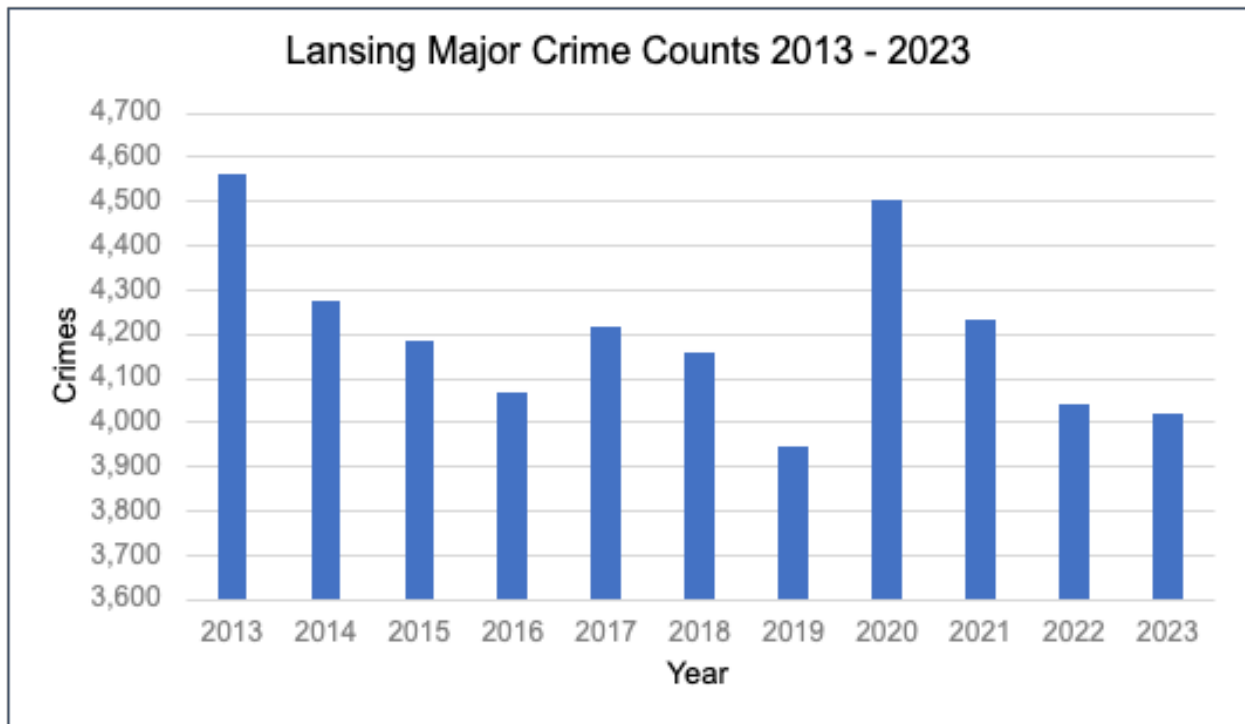


Figure 28. Lansing, MI Crime Rate 2013-2023. Source: Lansing Police Department

## 7.7. Education

According to the ACS 2023 5-Year Estimates, 89.8% of Lansing residents aged 25 and older have a high school diploma, and nearly 30% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Twenty-one percent of Ingham County residents 25 and older have a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau). Figure 33 illustrates the distribution of educational attainment in Lansing. Additionally, Lansing Public Schools are K-12, ages 5-17 that serve majority of Lansing's population. Thus, highlighting the importance of education-focused public spaces.

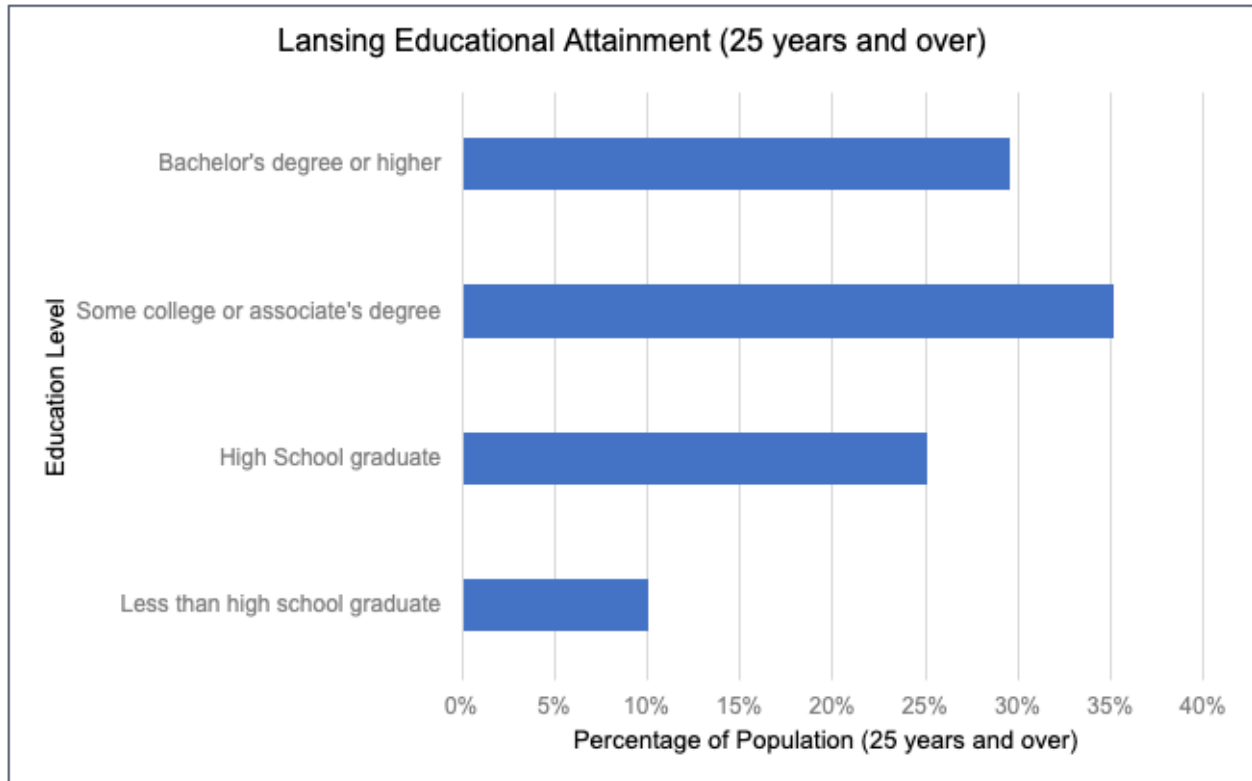


Figure 29. Lansing Education Attainment Ages 25 and Older. Source, US Census Bureau, 2023, 5 Year-Estimate.

Education is directly relevant to this project, as two of the selected sites for riverfront revitalization — Adado Riverfront Park and the pedestrian walkway site — are located near key educational institutions. Lansing Community College (LCC) sits directly across from Adado Riverfront Park, making the park a potential extension of campus life for students. The Pedestrian Walkway site is next to Impression 5 Science Center, a hands-on learning facility, providing opportunities for interactive education, field trips, and youth engagement. Ensuring safe pedestrian access to these sites is essential for maximizing their educational value and integrating them into daily student activity.

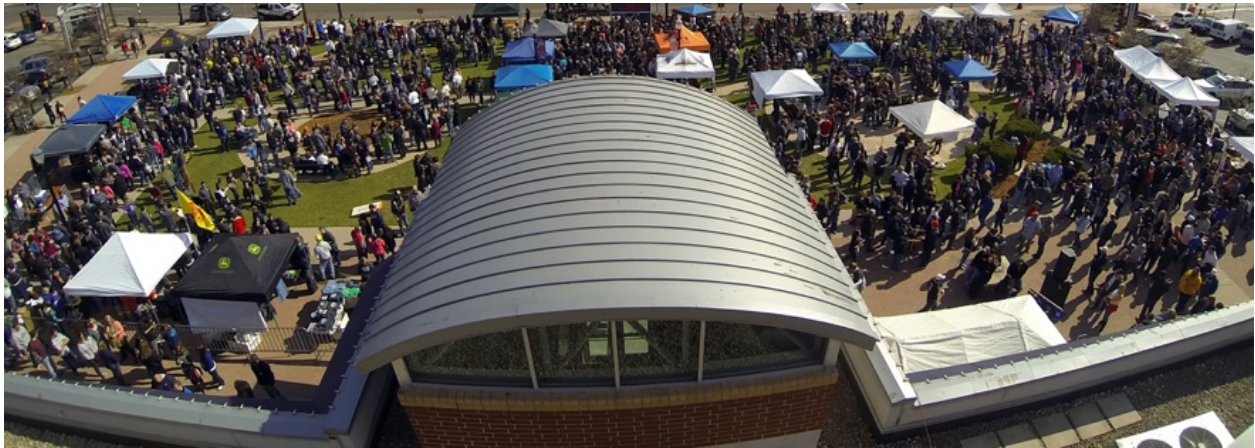
Additionally, Michigan State University (MSU), located just down the road, has the potential to use the riverfront as a research and outdoor learning space. Understanding Lansing's educational profile helps inform how the Riverwalk can serve as an educational and recreational asset. Whether through student engagement, research initiatives, or improved connections to

learning institutions, the riverfront has the potential to enhance educational experiences and increase community engagement with public spaces.

## 7.8. Tourism

Tourism significantly contributes to Lansing's economy, with the riverfront serving as a key attraction. In 2024, the Lansing region (Ingham County, Eaton County, and Clinton County) welcomed 6.7 million visitors, generating approximately \$732 million to the area. The Lansing Center held 190 events for the year with an estimated overall attendance of 126,200 people. Jackson Field, home to the Lansing Lugnuts had an attendance of 266,389 for the season and other special events like Beerfest in the Ballpark and GLIAC Baseball Championship (Choose Lansing).

Positioning the riverfront as a premier tourist destination offers significant opportunities for economic development. Enhancing amenities, improving safety measures, and promoting events along the riverfront can attract more visitors, stimulate local businesses, and enrich the community's cultural fabric. Revitalizing areas like Adado Riverfront Park builds upon its legacy of hosting successful events and reinforces the Lansing Riverfront as a vibrant center for tourism and public engagement.



*Figure 30. Beerfest at the Ballpark at Jackson Field in Lansing, Michigan. This festival has over 300 craft beers from more than 65 Michigan breweries. Source: Beerfest.com*



## 8. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>Strategic location:</u></b> The riverfront connects key economic and cultural districts—Downtown Lansing, Old Town, REO Town, and the Stadium District—creating a strong foundation for future development.</li> <li>• <b><u>Existing infrastructure:</u></b> Assets like the Lansing River Trail, Adado Riverfront Park, and Dietrich Park provide a solid recreational framework that can be enhanced.</li> <li>• <b><u>Investment potential:</u></b> Projects like Rotary Park and Capital City Market show the area’s ability to attract public and private investment.</li> <li>• <b><u>Cultural significance:</u></b> The history and identity of Old Town and REO Town enrich the riverfront’s character and support placemaking and tourism.</li> <li>• <b><u>Dietrich Park:</u></b> Offers river access for recreational water activities and contains large open space with redevelopment potential.</li> <li>• <b><u>Adado Park:</u></b> Features expansive event space, river views, trail access, and a new accessible playground that enhance its public value.</li> <li>• <b><u>Proposed Pedestrian Walkway:</u></b> Has the potential to improve connectivity between major attractions and districts across the river.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>Underutilization of Space:</u></b> Parks like Adado have seen decreased activity post-COVID, with limited programming or attraction.</li> <li>• <b><u>Connectivity Gaps:</u></b> A lack of pedestrian crossings and infrastructure gaps makes navigating the riverfront difficult.</li> <li>• <b><u>Safety Concerns:</u></b> Insufficient lighting, aging infrastructure, and perceptions of crime discourage activity in certain areas.</li> <li>• <b><u>Zoning &amp; Land Use:</u></b> Industrial parcels along the riverfront limit development potential and create regulatory hurdles.</li> <li>• <b><u>Infrastructure Deterioration:</u></b> Trails, seating, and recreational facilities are aging and in need of repair or replacement.</li> <li>• <b><u>Dietrich Park:</u></b> Lacks visibility of the river, has steep terrain, outdated infrastructure, and is bordered by an uninviting supply store.</li> <li>• <b><u>Adado Park:</u></b> Offers minimal amenities and lacks features that promote consistent use or a sense of safety.</li> <li>• <b><u>Proposed Pedestrian Walkway:</u></b> May suffer from unclear design, low activation, and safety concerns if not thoughtfully implemented and maintained.</li> </ul>

<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>Activate Public Spaces:</u></b> Introduce consistent, year-round programming—like festivals, pop-up markets, art installations, and recreation—to attract diverse users and build a vibrant atmosphere.</li> <li>• <b><u>Encourage Mixed-Use Development:</u></b> Leverage city-owned and underutilized parcels for new housing, retail, and dining that complement public spaces and boost economic activity.</li> <li>• <b><u>Strengthen Pedestrian Connectivity:</u></b> Use the proposed walkway and other interventions to create seamless, safe routes between key destinations and improve walkability across the riverfront.</li> <li>• <b><u>Expand Tourism and Local Business Growth:</u></b> Position the riverfront as a signature destination with unique experiences that increase visitation and stimulate spending at nearby businesses.</li> <li>• <b><u>Prioritize Public Safety Improvements:</u></b> Invest in better lighting, surveillance, and emergency features to create a welcoming, secure environment that encourages use at all times of day.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>Funding Constraints:</u></b> Difficulty in securing reliable, long-term funding for maintenance, infrastructure upgrades, and programming may limit progress.</li> <li>• <b><u>Economic Uncertainty:</u></b> Regional competition and broader economic downturns could reduce investment, event attendance, and foot traffic.</li> <li>• <b><u>Regulatory and Bureaucratic Delays:</u></b> Complicated zoning laws, permitting, and environmental regulations can slow or halt redevelopment efforts.</li> <li>• <b><u>Stakeholder Misalignment:</u></b> Conflicting goals between residents, developers, government agencies, and nonprofits can impede collaboration and stall implementation.</li> <li>• <b><u>Community Disengagement:</u></b> Lack of outreach or inclusive planning could lead to public disinterest or resistance to proposed changes, especially if key voices feel left out.</li> </ul>

## 9. Recommendations

Our recommendations for riverfront activation present a strategic, phased approach to revitalizing the Riverfront over the next 1-7 years. These targeted interventions aim to transform Dietrich Park, Adado Riverfront Park, and the Pedestrian Walkway site into vibrant and sustainable public spaces that will initiate continued usage and improvements to the rest of the riverfront. The following sections outline specific recommendations, timelines, case study examples, and resources that create a course of action for enhancing the usability and community value of the Lansing Riverfront.



*Figure 31. Photo of the Common Ground Festival held at the Adado Riverfront Park in 2016. This festival brought in many residents and visitors to utilize the riverfront space and spurred economic activity in the area. Source: Matthew Dae Smith for The Lansing State Journal*



*Figure 32. Residents enjoying the river by walking along the river trail and kayaking. Source: Choose Lansing*

## 9.1. Dietrich Park

<i>Action</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Funding/Resources</i>
<p><b><u>Action 1:</u></b></p> <p>Improve signage and wayfinding for accessibility and visibility</p>	1-2 years	Install clear, consistent wayfinding signage at key entry points (along North Grand River Avenue) and near the riverfront to enhance accessibility and visibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)</li> <li>• Lansing Parks and Recreation Department</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Action 2:</u></b></p> <p>Enhance accessibility through trail maintenance and infrastructure improvements</p>	2 - 5 years	Improve existing trails and clear an accessible path to the river by removing overgrown vegetation and installing wooden stairs or a sloped pathway. Additionally, upgrade the existing fishing dock with safety improvements and seating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) Grants</li> <li>• Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (MISGP)</li> <li>• MSU Fisheries and Wildlife Department</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Action 3:</u></b></p> <p>Create a more inviting space through landscaping enhancements as well as restore plant and animal biodiversity to “naturalize” the riverfront</p>	2 - 7 years	Enhance the park’s aesthetics and comfort by strategically planting trees and landscaping buffers to separate the park from the nearby industrial areas. Implement native plant restoration and habitat enhancement initiatives to increase biodiversity within the park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNTRF) Grants</li> <li>• Public Spaces Community Places (PSCP) Grant</li> <li>• MSU Fisheries and Wildlife Department</li> <li>• Lansing Parks and Recreation Department</li> </ul>



## Action 1: Improve signage and wayfinding for accessibility and visibility

### Examples

- Midtown Greenway, Detroit is the cultural and educational center of the city, home to historic homes, a university, a museum, and many restaurants. Midtown Greenway also has a pedestrian path. The main challenge and objective for the area was to keep people on their path for longer. To help combat this issue, Midtown Greenway created new signs with different aspects. The Greenway path directions are prominently displayed at the top of the sign, ensuring they can be seen from a distance. Directional information and other information about amenities are enclosed on a panel closer to eye level. Including the number of miles, it would take to get to an amenity was also important to ensure walkers were aware of the time commitment they were making (Nicolson Associates, n.d).



Figure 33. Photo of Midtown Greenways signage to help pedestrian stay on their path for longer. Source: Nicolson Associates

- West Michigan Trails developed a comprehensive wayfinding guide to establish uniform signage across the trails. They were created with a user-friendly design, ensuring the signs are easily understandable. They also improve connectivity along the trail (West Michigan Trails, 2023). These signs encourage people to use the trails in any way they see fit and guide them through the confusing transition along the trail. They also promote key destinations along the trail.

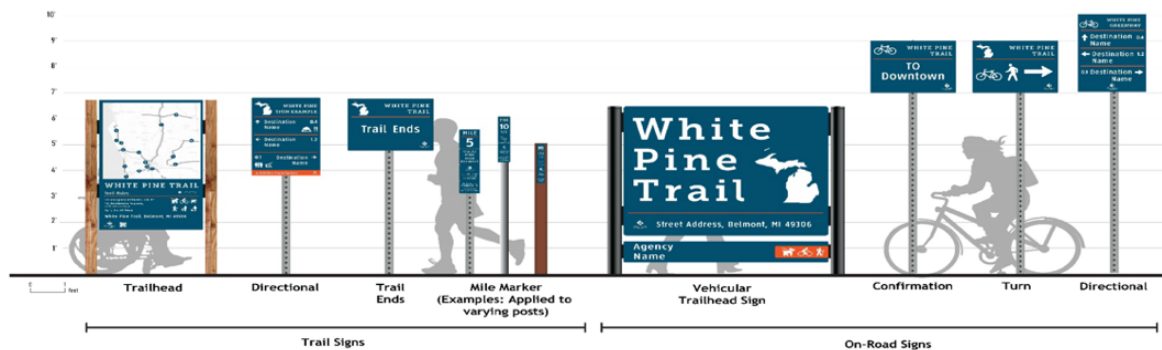


Figure 34. Photo of West Michigan Trail signs and on-road signs. Source: West Michigan Trails



## **Wayfinding Signage Model**

The below sign was created by the practicum team to demonstrate how Lansing can implement more wayfinding throughout the river walk. This model incorporates Lansing's colors and includes a map of the river walk and area, as well as places to visit along the river.



*Figure 35. Photo of wayfinding signage created by the MSU Practicum Team. This sign includes a map of the river walk and different places to visit along the trail.*

## **Implementation**

To successfully implement the wayfinding system along Lansing's Riverfront, it's essential to engage a variety of stakeholders and local partners. Collaboration with city agencies such as the Parks and Recreation Department, as well as neighborhood associations and the Lansing Chamber of Commerce, will ensure the system aligns with local goals and community needs. Partnering with local businesses, universities, and cultural centers will further strengthen the network and promote key destinations along the Riverfront. To secure funding, a combination of public grants, corporate sponsorships, and community fundraising efforts can be pursued, with local corporations potentially sponsoring signage in exchange for visibility.

The **Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)** is currently open for the fiscal year 2026 through 2029 projects and can fund wayfinding signage for communities. This grant requires a 20% match. Once the system is in place, promoting it through a community launch event, social media campaigns, and media outreach will raise awareness and drive engagement. Maintenance of the signage will require a regular check-up schedule, managed by the city or through volunteer groups, and continuous user feedback via surveys to ensure ongoing relevance. Finally, after the system is in use, evaluating its success through metrics like foot traffic and user feedback will allow for adjustments as needed, ensuring that the signage remains clear, functional, and connected to the evolving needs of the Riverfront.

## *Action 2: Enhance accessibility through trail maintenance and infrastructure improvements*

### **Examples**

- The Trail Riders Snowmobile Club in Baldwin, Michigan, is a community-driven trail maintenance program. This volunteer-run organization grooms and maintains over 160 miles of trails. This club is in partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to ensure safe and enjoyable activities (Hernandez, 2025).
- The Village of Plainfield, Illinois, completed several projects in 2022 that enhanced riverfront accessibility and amenities. They restored natural habitats along the river by reestablishing native plant species and removing invasive trees and shrubs (Village of Plainfield, n.d). They created a pollinator garden in 2023 that enhances natural habitat and also offers educational opportunities. They also completed the first section of trail improvements, which is enhancing connectivity and access to the river.



*Figure 36. Photo of the Village of Plainfield's riverfront and its maintenance and restored habitats. Source: Village of Plainfield*

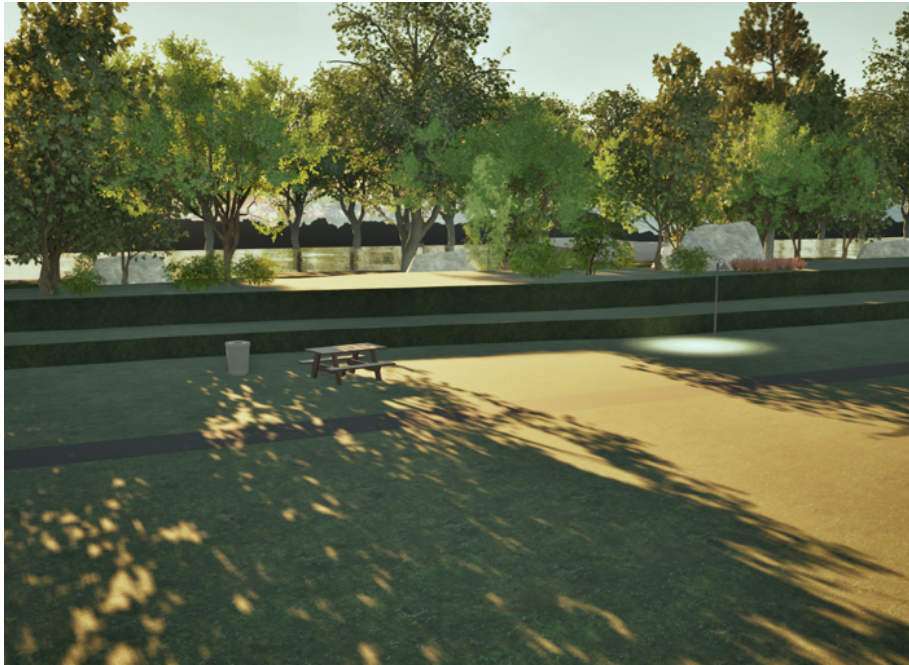
### **Implementation**

To successfully implement the project, Lansing should first focus on establishing a volunteer-run trail maintenance program, like Baldwin's Trail Riders Snowmobile Club, engaging residents, schools, and environmental groups in regular upkeep of the Riverfront trails. This program can be supported by securing grants, public funding, and corporate sponsorships to finance the improvements, with local businesses also encouraged to sponsor specific trail sections or restoration areas.

The **Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) Grants** and **Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (MISGP)** are both grants that provide funding to restore habitats. Once the project is underway, promoting the initiative through a launch event, publicizing it on social media, and hosting educational programming will raise awareness and foster community involvement. Regular volunteer days can ensure ongoing maintenance and ecological improvements, while working with local schools and environmental groups will help sustain the project long term. Finally, tracking progress through measurable goals and soliciting feedback from volunteers and visitors will allow Lansing to evaluate the success of the program and adjust for continued improvement.

## **Action 2 Models**

The below models were created by the practicum team to demonstrate how Lansing can implement maintenance and infrastructure improvements that will enhance accessibility to the riverfront in Dietrich Park. These models feature the installation of new stairs, a new dock, and various seating options throughout the park.



*Figure 37. Photo of Dietrich Park model displaying installation of new stairs to have access to the riverfront. This image also shows additional seating, lighting, and trash cans to help with safety and cleanliness. Created by MSU Practicum Team using Sketch Up and Twinmotion*



*Figure 38. Photo of Dietrich Park model displaying a new dock with seating areas around it. Created by MSU Practicum Team using Sketch Up and Twinmotion*



*Figure 39. Photo of Dietrich Park model displaying shaded seating areas at the park.  
Created by MSU Practicum Team using Sketch Up and Twinmotion*



### *Action 3: Create a more inviting space through landscaping enhancements as well as restore plant and animal biodiversity to “naturalize” the riverfront*

#### **Examples**

- The William G. Milliken State Park and Harbor in Detroit, Michigan has undergone improvements to its greenery. The first phase of the project included providing several shaded picnic areas to the public, shoreline fishing, and a harbor. The second phase includes strategically places wetlands and signage. New trees, shrubs, and grass were added to the park for aesthetic reasons (Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, n.d).



*Figure 40. Before and after photo of the William G. Milliken State Park and Harbor that displays the extensive landscape that was added. Source: Landscape Architecture Foundation*

- The Hawk Island County Park Restoration Project in Lansing involved reintroducing native plants, constructing wetland buffers, and installing bird habitats, leading to a 40% increase in native wildlife sightings within five years. (Source: Ingham County Parks, 2019). The park also includes two new shade structures, increased accessibility to the riverfront, and several new fishing docks.



*Figure 41. Photo of Hawk Island Park’s new shade structures and docks along the riverfront. Source: Ingham County Parks*

## **Implementation**

To implement enhancements on Lansing's Riverfront, the city should begin by conducting an environmental assessment to identify areas for strategic tree planting and landscaping buffers that separate the park from nearby industrial areas. This can be done in collaboration with landscape architects and environmental consultants. Additional seating should be installed along pathways and near the riverfront, focusing on shaded and scenic areas to provide comfort for visitors. A native plant restoration program should be initiated by removing invasive species and planting native wildflowers, trees, and pollinator-friendly plants to enhance biodiversity. Restoring aquatic vegetation along the riverbank will enhance water quality and improve fish habitats, thereby supporting recreational fishing. Wetland buffers and bird habitats should also be established to provide additional support for wildlife, similar to other successful projects.

Funding for these projects can be secured through government grants, corporate sponsorships, and community fundraising efforts. Volunteers can assist with planting, maintenance, and restoration. The **Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNTRF) Grants** and **Public Spaces Community Places (PSCP) Grant** can help fund these improvements. To engage the public, educational signage and programs should be introduced to raise awareness of the ecological benefits of these efforts. Finally, a long-term maintenance plan, along with periodic evaluations, will ensure that the park's enhancements are sustained and continue to meet the community's needs.

### **Action 3 Models**

The below models were created by the practicum team to demonstrate how Lansing use landscaping to make Dietrich Park a more inviting space as well as restore plant and animal biodiversity to “naturalize” the river front. These models feature the removal of the overgrowth the blocks the view of the river as well as strategically placed trees and shrubbery that showcase the view of the river while also blocking nearby industrial sites.

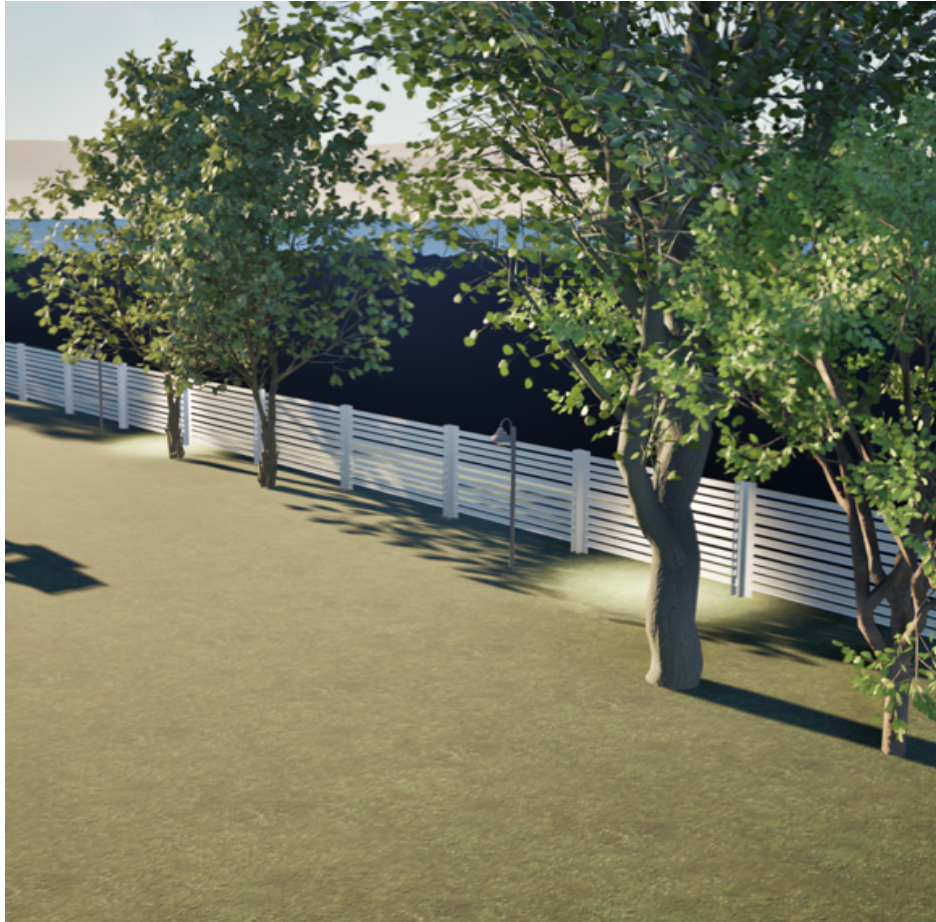


*Figure 42. Photo of Dietrich Park model displaying views of the river by strategically planting landscape and removing overgrown trees. Created by MSU Practicum Team using Sketch Up and Twinmotion*



*Figure 43. Photo of Dietrich Park model displaying the majority of the park from the parking lot. Created by MSU Practicum Team using Sketch Up and Twinmotion*





*Figure 44. Photo of Dietrich Park model displaying a fence and landscaping to separate and create a buffer between the park and nearby industrial site. Created by MSU Practicum Team using Sketch Up and Twinmotion*

## 9.2. Adado Riverfront Park

<i>Action</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Funding/Resources</i>
<p><b><u>Action 1:</u></b></p> <p>Activate the park with year-round programming</p>	1-3 years	To increase public use, a structured year-round programming schedule should be implemented. Seasonal pop-up events, such as winter markets, outdoor fitness classes, art fairs, weekly food truck gatherings, live music, and wellness programs would bring in consistent visitors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Space Community Places (PSCP) Grant</li> <li>• Michigan Festivals and Events Association (MFEA)</li> <li>• Lansing Art Gallery and Education Center</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Action 2:</u></b></p> <p>Improve connectivity, safety, and access throughout the park</p>	2-5 years	Implementing golf cart transportation along the river trail could offer a convenient way for visitors – especially seniors and those with mobility challenges – to navigate the area. A security presence using golf carts patrolling the trail and park during peak hours would also enhance safety, deter vandalism, and aid visitors as needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lansing Police Department</li> <li>• Lansing Parks and Recreation Department</li> <li>• Volunteer Lansing</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Action 3:</u></b></p> <p>Introduce seasonal boat and pontoon tours</p>	3-6 years	Introducing seasonal boat and pontoon tours would activate the waterfront and provide visitors with a unique way to experience Lansing from the water. These tours could highlight Lansing's history, local businesses, and natural beauty through a fun recreational experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)</li> </ul>



## Action 1: Activate the park with year-round programming

### Examples

- Bay City, Michigan hosts a “Wednesday in the Park” series. This is a free, weekly concert that features different genres of music including country, pop, and classic rock. These concerts attract residents and visitors throughout the summer months (Midland Daily News, 2025).
- In Des Plaines, Illinois, the city organizes a food truck gathering every Tuesday in the summer months. Live music comes to the area, pop-up shops, and food trucks activate the people and space. Activities are also brought to the area for children to enjoy (Des Plaines Illinois, n.d).



Figure 45. Photo of the concert series, “Wednesday in the Park” held in the summer months at Wenonah Park in Bay City. Source: Midland Daily News

### Implementation

To implement a year-round programming schedule at Lansing's Riverfront, the city should develop a calendar of events that include weekly food truck gatherings, live music performances, art fairs, seasonal markets, outdoor fitness classes, and movie nights. Partnerships with local businesses, food vendors, artists, and fitness instructors will be essential to sustain and enrich the programming. Infrastructure such as stages, seating, and designated food truck areas should be created



Figure 46. Photo of residents enjoying the weekly food truck pop-up in the summer in Des Plaines Illinois. Source: Des Plaines, Illinois

to support these events, ensuring they run smoothly. A strong marketing campaign, including social media promotion and collaboration with local businesses, will help draw in visitors.

Funding can be secured through sponsorships from local companies and grants from community organizations. The **Public Spaces Community Places (PSCP) Grant** supports public space activation. Volunteers and event coordinators will be needed to manage logistics and provide support during events. Regular feedback from participants and vendors will guide the ongoing improvement of the programming, allowing for adjustments to meet community demand. This approach will transform Lansing's Riverfront into a vibrant, year-round community hub that supports local businesses, enhances public engagement, and attracts visitors.

## *Action 2: Improve connectivity, safety, and access throughout the park*

### **Examples:**

- The Miami Police Department has effectively utilized golf carts in their patrolling efforts at popular beachfront areas, providing officers with enhanced mobility and accessibility in congested areas. By utilizing golf carts, law enforcement agencies are able to promote a visible and friendly presence to the area (Akin, 2024).
- The Seattle Police Department has deployed golf carts in park patrols, allowing officers to monitor recreational areas more effectively and engage with community members. This initiative has been well-received, further enhancing trust and collaboration between officers and residents. Police golf carts are cost-effective in terms of fuel consumption and maintenance, making them a more sustainable option for law enforcement agencies (Akin, 2024).

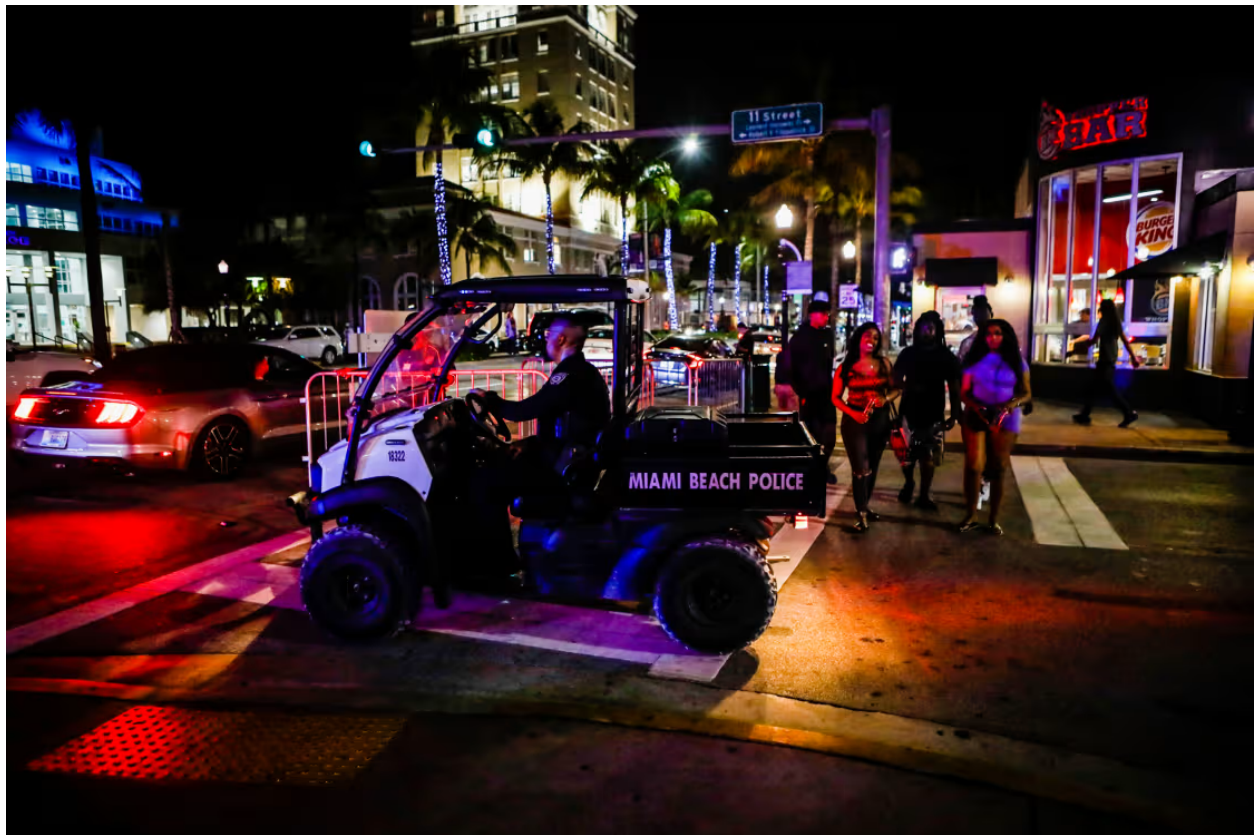


Figure 47. Miami Police Department patrols downtown on a golf cart. Source: Eva Marie Uzcategui, NBC News

## **Implementation**

To implement these improvements at Lansing's Riverfront, the city should start by assessing the current pedestrian and bike paths to identify areas needing upgrades, including lighting, signage, and path conditions. Collaboration with urban planners and transportation experts will be essential to design efficient, safe, and aesthetically pleasing improvements. The next step would involve upgrading lighting along pedestrian and bike paths to ensure visibility at night and installing clear signage to help visitors navigate the park more easily, including markers at key access points. Designating bike lanes along the paths will improve safety by clearly separating cyclists and pedestrians. Additionally, the introduction of golf cart transportation along the Lansing River Trail will provide a convenient option for seniors and people with mobility challenges, while golf cart patrols by park security or local police will enhance safety, deter crime, and assist visitors.

To fund these initiatives, the city can seek corporate sponsorships from local businesses. Public engagement will also be critical, with efforts to promote these improvements through social media and local events to raise awareness. Once implemented, ongoing maintenance and monitoring will be required to ensure the paths, lighting, and golf cart services remain functional and effective, with feedback from visitors used to make necessary adjustments over time.



### *Action 3: Introduce seasonal boat and pontoon tours*

#### **Examples**

- The Fort Wayne Riverfront has participated in “river cruises” for its citizens to take a boast ride along three rivers in the summer. Their boat is a replica of the 1840s canal boats. The tour showcases the city’s history and beauty. This offers the community a unique perspective of their city (Fort Wayne Indiana, n.d).



*Figure 48. Photo of the river cruise on Fort Wayne’s Riverfront. The boat is a replica of an 1840s canal boat. Source: Fort Wayne Indiana*

- Richmond, Virginia’s Riverfront Canal Cruises provides a 40-minute historically narrated tour. This tour operates from April to November, highlighting Richmond's rich history, architecture, and scenic views, enhancing the city's waterfront appeal (Venture Richmond, n.d).



*Figure 49. Photo of the Riverfront Canal Cruises in Richmond, Virginia. This is a 40-minute historical tour along the James River and Kanawha Canal. Source: Venture Richmond*



## **Implementation**

To implement seasonal boat and pontoon tours along Lansing's Grand River, the city should first designate a dock within Adado Riverfront Park as the departure point, ensuring it is equipped with necessary amenities like ticketing and waiting areas. A small fleet of pontoons should be acquired, offering different tours such as historical, wildlife, and sunset cruises. Local guides, historians, and naturalists can provide engaging narratives, enriching the experience for visitors. Partnering with local businesses will allow for food and drink packages on board, enhancing the tour experience. The city should also explore the feasibility of a water taxi system connecting key areas like downtown Lansing and Old Town to the river. Operational procedures should be developed, including ticketing, scheduling, and safety protocols, while ensuring the boats comply with all safety regulations. To promote the tours, the city can create a marketing campaign targeting both residents and tourists, utilizing social media, local partnerships, and community events.

Funding can be secured through possible **Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)**, as they support growth in communities, sponsorships from local businesses, and ticket and food sales. Finally, regular monitoring and feedback from participants will help adjust and improve the tours, ensuring their long-term success and sustainability. This initiative would activate the riverfront, attract more visitors, and enhance Lansing's connection to the Grand River as a tourism asset.

### 9.3. Pedestrian Walkway Site

<i>Action</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Funding/Resources</i>
<p><b><u>Action 1:</u></b></p> <p>Create an outdoor classroom at the site, partnering with Impression 5 Science Center</p>	1-3 years	An outdoor classroom is a learning environment set outside traditional indoor classrooms, where students engage with nature and the surrounding environment as part of their education. It often involves hands-on activities like gardening, observing wildlife, conducting experiments, or exploring natural ecosystems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impression 5 Science Center</li> <li>• Lansing Art Gallery and Education Center</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Action 2:</u></b></p> <p>Maximize green space and increase beautification efforts at the site</p>	1-1.5 years	Enhance the river trail's aesthetics and comfort by strategically planting trees and landscaping to improve the beautification along the path.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Spaces Community Places (PSCP) Grant</li> <li>• Lansing Parks and Recreation Department</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Action 3:</u></b></p> <p>Implement a casual outdoor dining development</p>	6-12 months	For small-scale outdoor dining involves transforming parking spaces along streets into temporary dining areas for restaurants or cafes. These spaces are typically set up with tables, chairs, and umbrellas, allowing customers to enjoy their meals in an open-air setting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lansing Area Economic Partnership (LEAP)</li> <li>• Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)</li> </ul>

## *Action 1: Create an outdoor classroom at the site, partnering with Impression 5 Science Center*

### **Examples**

- The University of Michigan Dearborn provides a range of educational opportunities for students of all ages. Age ranges from K-12, university students, or local community residents. U of M – Dearborn offers K-12 students: pond explorations, maple syrup science, seasonal nature explorations, and a year-long program designed to engage students with hands on learning offering unique experiences. University opportunities involve a living lab for various courses such as biology, environmental science, and geology. Public programs consist of children's gardens, Birding, etc. for the local community looking to explore nature and science.



*Figure 50. Photo of youth engaging with outdoor classroom.  
Source: UofM Dearborn*

### **Implementation**

To implement an outdoor classroom in Downtown Lansing, Michigan, the city should begin by conducting a needs assessment to identify key stakeholders, such as local schools, universities, community organizations, and potential partners like Impression 5 Science Center. This assessment would also include evaluating potential sites for the outdoor classroom, considering factors like accessibility, space, and environmental conditions. Once the site is determined, a detailed budget should be developed, followed by fundraising efforts to secure financial support from sponsorships, crowdfunding, and community donations. This phase could take several months to a year. The next step is designing the space with input from educators and environmental experts, ensuring the design accommodates a variety of age groups and activities, from K-12 education to public programs. Construction would follow the design phase, which could take up to two years, depending on the complexity of the project. Impression 5 could expand its educational offerings by incorporating outdoor nature programs into their curriculum, like initiatives like those at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, which engages students of all ages in hands-on nature exploration, such as pond studies, seasonal nature programs, and outdoor science labs. These programs could be integrated into Lansing's new outdoor classroom, offering local schools, university students, and community members the opportunity to engage in interactive, nature-based learning.

## Action 2: Maximize green space and increase beautification efforts at the site

### Examples

- Capital Park in Detroit, Michigan is a pocket park that used to be the State Capital until 1847 when the government seat moved to Lansing. The building was then a high school until it was destroyed by a fire in 1893 (Bondono, 2024). After the fire, the land was converted into a park and remained a public space. This space was renovated to become more vibrant including landscape, seating, and event space. This area is now a hub for downtown activities as it has restaurants, retail, and residential buildings surrounding it.



Figure 51. Image of Capital Park, a pocket park that was the site of the old State Capital. This space is now used for relaxation, entertainment, and retail activities. Source: Capital Park Local Historic District

- Erie Street Plaza, located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, used to be a parking lot. Now it is a public park located at the confluence of the Milwaukee River and the Federal Channel. The park is a part of their pedestrian corridor and connects downtown and the riverfront. The use of wood decking, pavers, and lawn surfaces provide flexible spaces for recreation, and luminous benches for seating and lighting when dark (Ackerman, 2013).



Figure 52. Photo of Erie Street Plaza showcasing wood deck pavers and luminous yellow benches. Source: Arch Daily

### Implementation

To implement a transformation like Capital Park in Detroit or Erie Street Plaza in Milwaukee, Lansing should begin by identifying underutilized spaces along the riverfront, such as

parking lots or vacant lots, and assess their potential for revitalization. Community and stakeholder engagement should follow, gathering input from residents, businesses, and organizations to ensure the park meets the needs of the community. Landscape architects and urban planners can then develop a master plan that incorporates flexible recreational spaces, seating, pedestrian corridors, and event areas, drawing inspiration from successful projects.

Funding for this action should be secured through grants, private sponsorships, and partnerships with local businesses, and once the budget is in place, construction can begin. The **Public Spaces Community Places (PSCP) Grant** can help fund these projects. The design should focus on accessibility and sustainability, using materials like wood decking, pavers, and native plants. After completion, the park should be activated with events such as outdoor concerts and farmers' markets, while ongoing marketing and public engagement will raise awareness and encourage usage. Finally, a maintenance plan and regular evaluations will ensure the space remains vibrant and functional, adapting as necessary to meet the needs of the community. This approach will create a dynamic, multi-use riverfront park that enhances downtown Lansing and offers a welcoming space for all.



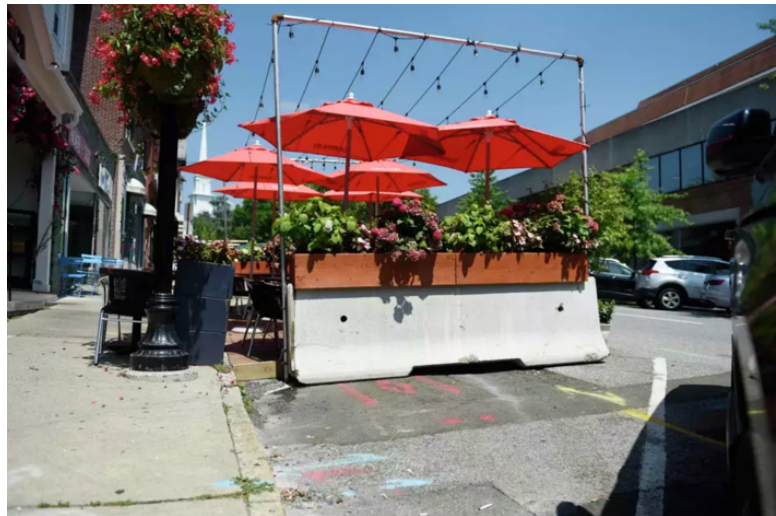
### *Action 3: Implement a casual outdoor dining development*

#### **Examples**

- In Greenwich, Connecticut a program was implemented to allow restaurants to rent parking stalls for outdoor dining in the summer. This program aimed to balance the needs of restaurants, retailers, and shoppers. The program also included fees to cover the costs of necessary infrastructure, such as protective barriers to keep customers safe from vehicles (Blye, 2025).
- The Village of Milford, Michigan has implemented initiatives to enhance outdoor dining by converting parking spaces into dining platforms. The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) facilitated this process by providing a master plan, construction design, procurement, and installation of the decks. These dining platforms have enhanced the village's vibrant dining scene and contributing to the community's charm (Meet Me in Milford, n.d).

#### **Implementation**

To implement an outdoor dining program along Lansing's riverfront, the city should begin by identifying high-traffic areas near popular parks, restaurants, and event spaces where outdoor dining could thrive. Engaging local restaurant



*Figure 53. Outdoor dining takes up parking spaces outside Bianca Restaurant & Bar along Greenwich Avenue. Source: Tyler Sizemore*



*Figure 54. Photo of Smoke Street offering outdoor seating along Milford's historic Main Street, providing patrons with the opportunity to enjoy barbecue while observing the small-town ambiance. Source: Meet Me in Milford*

owners, the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), and other stakeholders in the planning process will ensure the program meets both business and community needs. The city would work with architects to design temporary dining platforms with protective barriers and pedestrian pathways, ensuring safety and accessibility. A clear permitting process would be established, with rental fees covering the cost of infrastructure and maintenance. Funding could be secured through local government funds, or business partnerships. Once in place, safety measures like barriers and clear signage would be implemented, and the outdoor spaces would be made accessible to all. Marketing campaigns would promote the new dining options, while regular maintenance and evaluation would ensure the program's long-term success. This initiative would activate Lansing's riverfront, support local businesses, and enhance the downtown experience for residents and visitors alike.

## 9.4. Riverfront Corridor

<i>Action</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Funding/Resources</i>
<p><b><u>Action 1:</u></b></p> <p>Add lighting, public restrooms, and sanitation along the river trail</p>	1-3 years	Install more lighting, public restrooms, and trash receptacles along the entire river trail to improve safety and encourage evening and early morning trail use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parks and Recreation Department</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Action 2:</u></b></p> <p>Improve wayfinding signage along the river trail</p>	2-3 years	Install clear, consistent wayfinding signage at key entry points (along North Grand River Avenue) and near the riverfront to enhance accessibility and visibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)</li> <li>• Public Spaces Community Places (PSCP) Grant</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Action 3:</u></b></p> <p>Enhance pedestrian pathways, bike lanes and street crossings</p>	5-7 years	Widen river trail sidewalks, adding designated bike lanes, and ensuring well-marked, safe crossings at intersections. Features like pedestrian signals and curb extensions can make it easier and safer for people to navigate streets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Spaces Community Places (PSCP) Grant</li> <li>• Parks and Recreation Department</li> </ul>

## *Action 1: Add lighting, public restrooms, and sanitation along the river trail*

### **Examples**

- In Tacoma, Washington, the city launched a “Purple Bag Program” that designated areas for waste collection near homeless encampments and provides unhoused residents with purple bags to dispose of waste (City of Tacoma Environmental Services, 2021). Upon reviewing the costs of traditional methods of cleanup against the costs associated with the Purple Bag Program, the city found that the program reduced costs associated with reactive garbage collection and environmental cleanup by almost \$4000. The success of the Purple Bag Program led to the creation of another initiative aimed at providing unhoused residents with mobile toilet kits.

### **Implementation**

As installing public bathrooms can be costly and time-consuming to implement, Lansing could follow a similar path as Tacoma. Beginning with distribution of “purple bags” can jumpstart the process of reducing human waste and trash in the river and along trails, helping to ameliorate water quality alongside aesthetic improvements. Portable toilets could be implemented depending on the success of the previous phase. In Tacoma, portable toilets take the form of individual kits distributed to residents, but the interviewees mentioned that the portable toilets used for events could be employed instead. Since the river trail notably lacks public bathrooms, this would also provide riverfront visitors with a needed facility.

## 10. Conclusion

The Lansing Riverfront Activation Plan represents a comprehensive, community-driven effort to reimagine underutilized public spaces along the Grand River and transform them into vibrant, accessible, and inclusive destinations. Through extensive stakeholder engagement, data analysis, site visits, and case study research, this practicum project identifies both the challenges and opportunities inherent in revitalizing key areas such as Dietrich Park, Adado Riverfront Park, and the proposed pedestrian walkway.

The recommendations put forth in this report prioritize immediate, high-impact actions that lay the groundwork for long-term economic development, environmental restoration, and social engagement. By improving physical connectivity, enhancing public amenities, and creating programming that responds directly to community needs, these interventions aim to build a riverfront that reflects Lansing's diverse identity and fosters year-round use.

This project also underscores the importance of collaboration between public, private, and nonprofit partners. The success of future revitalization efforts will depend not only on funding and implementation but also on sustained community engagement and adaptive planning. As Lansing continues to evolve, the riverfront can become a central thread that weaves together the city's neighborhoods, cultural institutions, and economic assets—serving as both a physical and symbolic connector for generations to come.

Ultimately, this plan offers more than just a vision; it offers a roadmap. It is a call to action for stakeholders across sectors to come together in support of a riverfront that is safe, sustainable, and vibrant—a riverfront that reflects Lansing's history, celebrates its present, and embraces its future.



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## 12. Appendices

### 12.1. Survey Instrument

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Please indicate your age below.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Younger than 18 years</li><li>• 18-24 years</li><li>• 25-34 years</li><li>• 35-44 years</li><li>• 45-64 years</li><li>• Older than 64 years</li></ul>
How often do you use the riverfront facilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Daily</li><li>• Multiple times a week</li><li>• Once a week</li><li>• Once a month</li><li>• A few times a year</li><li>• Never</li></ul>
What transportation method do you use to access the Lansing riverfront? If multiple, select the method used most often.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Walking</li><li>• Biking</li><li>• Public transportation</li><li>• Driving</li><li>• I don't access the riverfront</li></ul>
What, if anything, prevents you from visiting the riverfront?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not enough activities</li><li>• Safety concerns</li><li>• Unable to access</li><li>• Other (specify below)</li></ul>



How safe do you feel on the riverfront on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 meaning “extremely unsafe” and 10 meaning “extremely safe”)?	Sliding scale
What kinds of attractions would encourage you to visit the riverfront more often?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Businesses</li> <li>• Greenspace</li> <li>• Better transportation</li> <li>• More recreational activities</li> </ul>
What is one thing you would like to see on the riverfront?	Open-ended

*This survey was developed by the practicum team to inform recommendations for riverfront activation. This survey was administered to residents and business owners by the Gillespie Group.*

## 12.2.City of Lansing Form-Based Code Master Use Tables

City of Lansing Form-Based Code Master Use Table

Adopted 1/1/22

P = PRINCIPAL PERMITTED C = CONDITIONAL USE S = SPECIAL LAND USE	SC	MX-C	MX-1	MX-2	MX-3	DT-1	DT-2	DT-3	Conditions
<b>Commercial/Office</b>									
Retail sales and Personal Services	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	Permitted on non-local streets. Permitted on local street only within 50' of a non-local street.
Professional/business offices	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Active / Recreational Commercial	P	P	P	P	P	C	P	P	Permitted on non-local streets.
Animal Hospital	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	No kennels
Bank	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Brewpub	C	C	C	C	C		C	C	Permitted on non-local streets. Permitted on local street only within 50' of a non-local street.
Clinic	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	At least one property line abutting and all points of ingress/egress directly to an arterial, suburban or activity corridor.
Funeral Home	C	C		C			C		1. Assembly area for funeral procession shall be provided in addition to off-street parking requirements. 2. At least one property line abutting and all points of ingress/egress directly to an arterial, suburban or activity corridor.
Kennel	C	C	C	C	C		C		1. Structures must be setback at least 50 feet from each adjacent residential lot line. 2. Lot size of at least 3 acres for a kennel having an outside exercise run or treatment area. 3. Outside exercise run or treatment area must be located at least 100 feet from all lots lines and at least 400 feet from an adjacent residential lot line.
Laundromat, dry cleaner	P	P	P	P	P		P	P	
Lodging Facility	P	P	P	P	P		P	P	
Mobile Food Vending (Food trucks and carts)	C	C	C	C	C		C		See Section 1250.02.12
Motor vehicle service station	C	C	C	C	C		C		1 The building shall meet the district placement standards. 2. For a building located on a corner lot, the secondary front facade may occupy no less than 50% of the frontage. The remainder of the frontage not occupied by the building shall be screened per the parking standards of the district. 3. The fueling pumps shall be located a minimum of 20 feet behind the build-to line. 4. The canopy over the fueling pumps shall have a roof with the same slope as the principal building. Canopy clearance should not exceed 14' from the ground to the bottom of the canopy. Maximum canopy height is limited to 20'. 5. One access per street frontage however a second access may be approved by city staff upon a finding that the additional access is essential for convenient access, and that the access is spaced adequately and designed to minimize conflicts per Section 1254.01.12. A secondary access drive is permitted for shared access with adjacent parcels.
Nursery, commercial greenhouse	C	C					C		1. The lot on which the nursery or commercial greenhouse is located contains not less than three (3) acres. 2. The lot on which the nursery or commercial greenhouse is located has not less than one property line which abuts and has primary access to a major or minor arterial. 3. The outdoor storage of landscape materials, other than plants, shall be screened from view of all public right-of-ways and residential parcels of land by a six (6) foot high opaque wood or vinyl fence, decorative screen wall or landscaped berm.

City of Lansing Form-Based Code Master Use Table

Adopted 1/1/22

P = PRINCIPAL PERMITTED C = CONDITIONAL USE S = SPECIAL LAND USE	SC	MX-C	MX-1	MX-2	MX-3	DT-1	DT-2	DT-3	Conditions
Parking facility	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	1. On Activity Corridors, the first floor of the structure shall have a minimum depth of 20 feet to be occupied by commercial uses permitted in the district. 2. Access drives shall be permitted on the ground level, provided they are collectively no more than 25% of the frontage. 3. The facade of the parking structure shall be integrally designed with the architecture of the overall building, utilize the same building materials, provide an architectural treatment at the top of the structure, such as a cornice, and have wall openings with proportions that comply with the fenestration requirements in Section 1246.04 4. New parking structures shall be designed with a upper story minimum clear height of 9'.
Restaurant, bar, tavern	C	C	C	C	C		C	C	Permitted on non-local streets. Permitted on local street only within 50' of a non-local street
Self-Storage Rental	S								
Studio (dance, health, music, etc)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Vehicle sales, vehicle leasing, and other outdoor sales facility	C	C		C			S		1. The area of the lot on which the items described in this subsection are located shall be covered with Portland cement or asphaltic concrete. 2. Each point of vehicular ingress and egress to the lot shall be not less than sixty feet from the intersection of any two streets. 3. Any repair or refinishing which is done on the lot shall be done within the confines of an enclosed structure. 4. Lighting shall be confined within and directed onto the parking area only. 5. The portion of the lot on which the items described in this subsection are located shall have a buffer zone of at least eight (8) feet from all lot lines adjacent to the public right-of-way, excluding approved driveways, and any residentially zoned property. The buffer zone shall be landscaped, screened and buffered in accordance with the requirements of Section 1252.09 6. In DT-2, the storage of vehicles in the front is limited to one (1) single loaded bay.
Drive-thru, as accessory use	C	C	C	C	C	S	S		1. A drive-thru business may have a front setback greater than the build-to-line required in the zoning district only to accommodate a travel lane for safe and efficient interior circulation. 2. No parking is allowed in the front yard 3. The drive-thru window shall be on the side or rear of the building. 4. Methods to minimize the impact of noise from outdoor speakers on adjacent residential are required. 5. The site will be adjacent to a Suburban Corridor, Arterial Corridor, Prime Connector, or Activity Corridor and all points of ingress and egress shall be directly onto one of the aforementioned street types. 6. Adequate waiting or standing areas for vehicles shall be provided on-site so that no vehicle is required to wait, stand, or be stored within a right-of-way, in accordance with the parking requirements of Chapter 1254.
<b>Residential Uses</b>									
Single-Family detached	C	C	C	C	C	P			Permitted only on a local street
Two-Family dwelling						P	P		
Multi-Family dwelling	P	P	P	P	C	P	P	C	Ground floor multiple-family dwelling units not permitted on the frontage of Activity Corridor and Arterial Corridor street types.
Bed and Breakfast					C	C	C		Must be the principal residence of the owner and the owner shall live on the premises when in operation. Must provide one surfaced off-street parking spot per guest room in addition to standard parking for residence. In MX-3 parking requirements are not exempt under Section 1254.01.04(f)

City of Lansing Form-Based Code Master Use Table

Adopted 1/1/22

P = PRINCIPAL PERMITTED C = CONDITIONAL USE S = SPECIAL LAND USE	SC	MX-C	MX-1	MX-2	MX-3	DT-1	DT-2	DT-3	Conditions
<b>Human Care Facilities</b>									
Adult Day Care Facility						P	P		
AFC small group home ( ≤ 12 )						P	P		
AFC large group home (13-20)						S	S		
Child Care centers, preschools, and commercial day care	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	P	At least one property line abutting an arterial, suburban or activity corridor
Group Day Care Home (7-12 children, <24 hours/day)	C	C	C	C	C	C	C		1. The facility provides and maintains on the lot not less than 900 square feet of outdoor play space. 2. The use of the structure as a group day care home shall be clearly incidental to the principal residential use. 3. One person, other than a member of the family residing in the dwelling, may be employed, so long as that person is not the primary caregiver. 4. No change occurs in the outside appearance of the dwelling. 5. No signs are permitted. 6. The outdoor play space shall be fenced. This requirement can be waived by approval of the Planning Office if the specified outdoor area is common open space shared with other dwelling units.
Sheltered Care Facility	S	S					S		
<b>Institutional</b>									
Places of Assembly	C	C	C	C	C	S	C	C	1. At least one property line abutting an arterial, suburban, or activity corridor. 2. Methods to minimize the impact of potential excessive noise on adjacent residential properties are required.
Places of Worship	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	
Hospital	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	At least one property line abutting an arterial, suburban or activity corridor
Library	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Museum						P	P	P	
Schools			C	C	C	C	C	C	All education facilities, except elementary or middle schools, must have at least one property line abutting and all points of ingress/egress directly to an arterial, suburban or activity corridor
Trade school	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	
Park, open space, plaza	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
<b>Industrial</b>									
Cleaning, processing, servicing, or repair of any product	P	P	C	C	C		P	C	
Manufacture of already processed components (bakeries, cosmetics, candies, etc)	P	P		C			P		1. At least one property line abutting an arterial, suburban, or activity corridor. 2. Methods to minimize the impact of potential excessive noise on adjacent residential properties are required.
Manufacture of toys, furniture, appliances, etc							P		
Metal forming							C		1. All activities conducted and materials stored shall be within an enclosed structure. 2. Methods to minimize the impact of potential, excessive noise on adjacent residential are required.
Motor vehicle repair station	C						S		
Production of consumer goods, with 20% GFA retail sales	P	P	C	P	C		P	C	1. At least one property line abutting an arterial, suburban, or activity corridor. 2. Methods to minimize the impact of potential excessive noise on adjacent residential properties are required.
Research laboratory	P	P	S	P	S	S	P	P	
Wholesale and warehouse uses							S		
Adult Business Uses	S	S		S					See 1250.02.11

City of Lansing Form-Based Code Master Use Table

Adopted 1/1/22

P = PRINCIPAL PERMITTED C = CONDITIONAL USE S = SPECIAL LAND USE	IND-1	IND-2	IND-3	INST-1	INST-2	Conditions
Convalescent or Nursing Home				P	P	
Sheltered Care Facility				C	C	1. At least one property line abutting a Major Arterial street type. 2. The proposed Sheltered Care Facility is located more than 1,500 feet from an existing Sheltered Care Facility which provides care for more than six persons.
<b>Institutional</b>						
Places of Assembly	C	C	C	C	C	1. At least one property line abutting an arterial, suburban or activity corridor
Places of Worship	S	S	S	S	S	2. Methods to minimize the impact of potential, excessive noise on adjacent residential are required.
Hospital				P	P	
Museum	C	C	C	P	P	1. Front, rear and side yards are not less than 25 feet, except as provided below. 2. If a front, rear or side yard abuts a Commercial Mixed-Use District, then the yard which abuts such District shall meet the dimensional requirements of the District which abuts such front, rear or side yard.
Library	C	C	C	P	P	3. No parking exists in the front yard. 4. No accessory structure is located in the front yard.
Schools				C	C	All education facilities, except elementary or middle schools, must have at least one property line abutting and all points of ingress/egress directly to an arterial, suburban or activity corridor
Trade school	C	C	C	C	C	
Park, open space, plaza	P	P	P	P	P	
<b>Commercial/Office</b>						
Retail sales and Personal Services	P	P	P			
Professional/business offices	P	P	P	P	P	
Active / Recreational Commercial	P	P	P	P	P	
Animal Hospital	P	P	P	P	P	
Bank	P	P	P	P	P	
Brewpub	P	P	P			
Clinic	P	P	P	C	C	At least one property line abutting and all points of ingress/ egress directly to an arterial, suburban or activity corridor
Funeral Home	P	P	P	P	P	
Kennel	C	C				1. Structures must be setback at least 50 feet from each adjacent residential lot line 2. Lot size of at least 3 acres for a kennel having an outside exercise run or treatment area 3. Outside exercise run or treatment area must be located at least 100 feet from all lots lines and at least 400 feet from an adjacent residential lot line
Laundromat, dry cleaner	P	P	P			
Lodging Facility	P	P	P	C	C	At least one property line abutting and all points of ingress/ egress directly to an arterial, suburban or activity corridor
Mobile Food Vending (Food trucks and carts)	C	C	C			See 1250.02.12



## City of Lansing Form-Based Code Master Use Table

Adopted 1/1/22

P = PRINCIPAL PERMITTED C = CONDITIONAL USE S = SPECIAL LAND USE	IND-1	IND-2	IND-3	INST-1	INST-2	Conditions
Motor vehicle service station	P	P	P			
Nursery, commercial greenhouse	P	P	P			
Parking facility	S	S	S	S	S	<p>1. Parking structures are encouraged to be lined on exterior elevations by non-parking uses.</p> <p>2. On Activity Corridors, the first floor shall have a minimum depth of 20 feet to be occupied by commercial uses permitted in the district.</p> <p>3. Access drives shall be permitted on the ground level, provided they are collectively no more than 25% of the frontage.</p> <p>4. The facade of the parking structure shall be integrally designed with the architecture of the overall building, utilize the same building materials, provide an architectural treatment at the top of the structure, such as a cornice, and have wall openings with proportions that comply with the fenestration requirements in Section 1246.04</p> <p>5. New parking structures shall be designed with a upper story minimum clear height of 9'.</p>
Restaurant, bar, tavern	P	P	P			
Self-storage rental	P	P	P			
Studio (dance, health, music, etc)	P	P	P			
Vehicle sales, vehicle leasing, and other outdoor sales facility	C	C	C			<p>1. The area of the lot on which the items described in this subsection are located shall be covered with Portland cement or asphaltic concrete.</p> <p>2. Each point of vehicular ingress and egress to the lot shall be not less than sixty feet from the intersection of any two streets.</p> <p>3. Any repair or refinishing which is done on the lot shall be done within the confines of an enclosed structure.</p> <p>4. Lighting shall be confined within and directed onto the parking area only.</p> <p>5. The portion of the lot on which the items described in this subsection are located shall have a buffer zone of at least eight (8) feet from all lot lines adjacent to the public right-of-way, excluding approved driveways, and any residentially zoned property. The buffer zone shall be landscaped, screened and buffered in accordance with the requirements of Section 1252.09</p>
Drive-thru, as accessory use	C	C	C			<p>1. A drive-thru business may have a front setback greater than the build-to-line required in the zoning district only to accommodate a travel lane for safe and efficient interior circulation</p> <p>2. No parking is allowed in the front yard.</p> <p>3. The drive-thru window shall be on the side or rear of the building.</p> <p>4. Methods to minimize the impact of noise from outdoor speakers on adjacent residential are required.</p> <p>5. The site must be adjacent to a Suburban Corridor, Arterial Corridor, Prime Connector, or Activity Corridor and all points of ingress and egress will be directly onto said street type.</p> <p>6. Adequate waiting or standing areas for vehicles shall be provided on-site so that no vehicle is required to wait, stand, or be stored within a right-of-way, in accordance with the parking requirements of Chapter 1254.</p>