City of Hart
2020 Downtown
Planning Summary Report

January 16, 2020

THE DOWNTOWN PLAN

The City of Hart's Downtown Plan Summary is a compilation of relevant goals, principles, and strategies established during recent planning efforts that relate to Hart's downtown core. This report summarizes a community-driven vision and plan for the future of downtown Hart. In 2017, the City of Hart Master Plan set an ambitious path for downtown revitalization and prosperity. The primary objective of Hart's downtown planning efforts is to build on the success of the past and serve to guide decisions over the next ten years to benefit and improve the historic downtown area and adjoining neighborhoods.

Hart's downtown planning efforts have established priorities for public action and serve as a guide for private sector decisions. These guidelines and recommendations serve as tools to evaluate new development proposals, attract and retain new businesses, create a tourist destination, direct capital improvements, and guide public policy in a manner that ensures Hart continues to be the community that its residents desire. This report contains maps, pictures, and summary information to outline the downtown planning efforts in a consolidated executive summary.

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CITY HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Hart is the only city in Oceana County and is the county seat. The City was established around the fruit farming industry and is the home to several large fruit storage and processing facilities. Just east of US-31, Hart is only seven miles from Lake Michigan and close to Silver Lake State Park.

The City is an employment and service center to the greater Hart community and is the home of businesses that are vital to everyday living, including grocery stores, restaurants, retail stores, financial services, packaging, processing, and industrial uses. A Michigan State Police Post and the County Road Commission facilities are also located in the City along with Oceana County offices. The Oceana Medical care facility is in the northeast portion of the City. Most of the community is walkable, with easy access to parks and the downtown area by foot or bicycle.

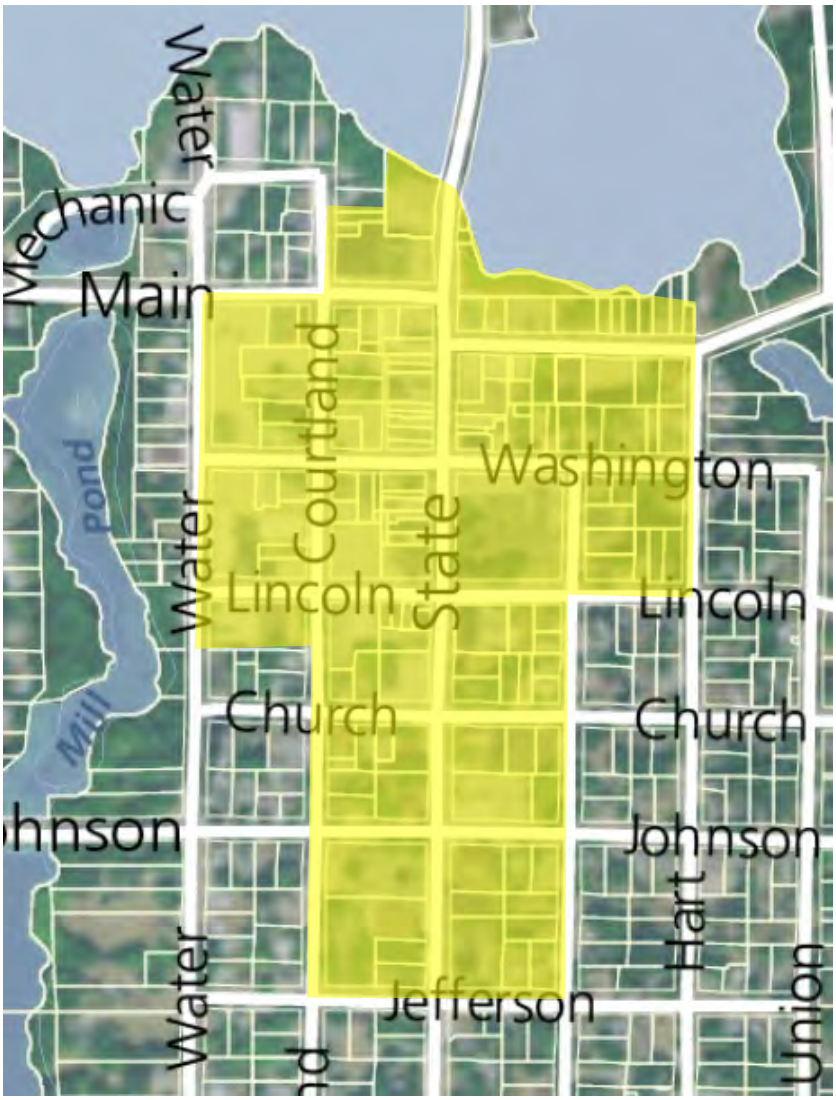

Figure 1 Downtown Hart Boundary

DOWNTOWN CHARACTER & LAND USE

Downtown Hart is distinctive mainly due to the unique characteristics that set it apart from other commercial districts in the city. To better understand downtown's unique aspects, an analysis was conducted to evaluate various character areas within the city. Studying these characteristics allowed distinct character areas in the City to be grouped based on common characteristics, including land use, the orientation of buildings, height/bulk of buildings, and provision of parking.

The downtown area includes a mix of land uses and is compact, vibrant, and walkable. The downtown area is very active with commercial uses, public space, and recreational opportunities. The downtown is pedestrian-oriented, although individuals may arrive by other modes of transportation, including bicycles and cars.

Downtown Hart contains many elements that reflect a strong sense of history. Some brick storefronts in the downtown core date back to the 1800s. Others reflect architecture from the early 1900s. City Hall is located downtown, in addition to the post office, library, county buildings, and parks. These facilities are centrally located and generate activity which contributes to downtown vitality.

Hart's compact traditional downtown layout lends itself well to pedestrian traffic. Residents and visitors can comfortably navigate the downtown area to shop, dine, and interact.



Figure 2 Downtown Building Character

Downtown Character Analysis Summary

- Buildings- Drawn to the street.
- Uses- Retail, services, accommodations, restaurants, arts & entertainment, and attached dwellings and apartments.
- Scale- Compact, walkable urban scale.
- Blocks and Streets- Smaller blocks on an urban grid and compact scale.
- Streetscape- Sidewalks, crosswalks, planters, streetlights, street trees, and benches.
- Public Space- Small parks and common areas.
- Parking- On-street parallel parking and behind buildings.

Existing Character Areas



Figure 3 Character Area Map- Downtown Focus

COMPLETE STREETS

Planning downtown Hart's transportation system involves more than just moving vehicles efficiently and safely. A transportation system needs to meet the needs of all types of users – motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and disabled residents and visitors. This approach is often referred to as planning for "complete streets," harmonizing streets with their surroundings while interconnecting transportation networks to meet the mobility needs of all users. Whenever possible, the City of Hart implements context-sensitive street design solutions to accommodate all users and ability levels by installing ADA compliant curbs and ramps, pedestrian-friendly crosswalks, sidewalks of appropriate width and distance from the roadway, and on-street bicycle facilities where feasible and appropriate.



Figure 4 Painted "Sharrow"

While much of the downtown contains sidewalks, there can be stronger connections made to and from adjacent neighborhoods as well as connections to facilities such as the Hart-Montague Trail, the fairgrounds, local schools, and employment centers. Generally, existing sidewalks are concentrated in established neighborhoods. However, some areas of the City are void of sidewalks or trails, and priority areas should be addressed in capital improvement planning.

The Master Plan recommends that all residential neighborhoods contain sidewalks or trail links to critical facilities. In addition to a comprehensive sidewalk and trail system, signs and trail markings are essential to guide cyclists and pedestrians downtown. Plans for street trees and street furniture will also help make travel more accessible, comfortable, and enjoyable.

Concerning parking and traffic calming, there are several curb extensions on State Street in downtown Hart, north of Church Street. Curb extensions narrow the travel width and create a visual indicator that naturally slows traffic by design. Further, the extensions shorten the distance pedestrians must travel across a street, lessening the time exposed to traffic. Curb extensions can also provide additional open space for bike racks, planters, benches, trees, and other downtown amenities. Along with curb extensions north of Church Street, on-street parking has eliminated the two outside lanes of the four-lane cross-section. The City owns State Street for another block south of Church Street as well. Similar traffic calming, on-street parking, and pedestrian accommodations could be extended further south from Church Street, especially as downtown businesses grow.



Figure 5 Curb Extension and Bike Rack

High visibility crossings are recommended for critical intersections in the City. Many crossings in the City have parallel stripes that have faded over time. Other eye-catching types of crosswalks have been shown to improve driver-yielding behavior. Further, accessible curb ramps are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) at all crosswalks.

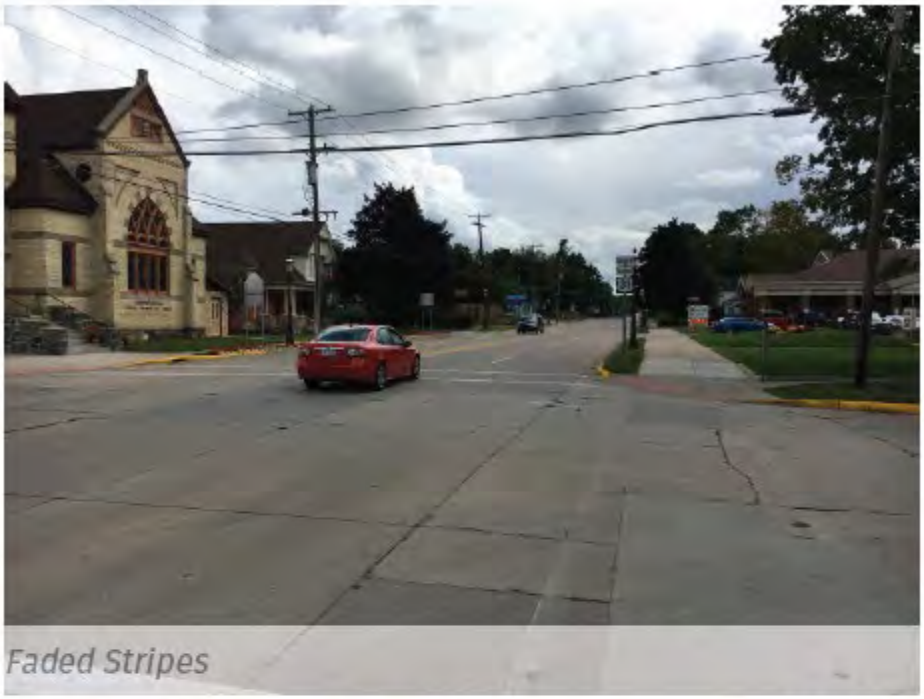



Figure 6 Potential Crosswalk Improvements

DOWNTOWN PARKS

Downtown Hart boasts some of the region's most attractive parks and recreation facilities. These facilities are discussed below and within the City of Hart Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Hart Commons Park

Hart Commons is located in the center of the downtown business district and is the location for all community events, such as concerts, parades, sale days, and holiday celebrations. Hart Commons park is the primary gathering place in the community.



Figure 7 Hart Commons Park

Veteran's Memorial Park

Veterans Park is located just across the bridge dividing Hart Lake. The Park provides parking for users, boardwalk for fishing, and a substantial maintained lawn area. The Park is foremost a memorial for veterans with a granite memorial, flag poles, commemorative bricks, and a historic US Air Force jet. The park is also used for fishing access to Hart Lake and the bridge. The parking area also serves as a boat launch for kayaks and canoes. The boat launch area has experienced erosion problems, and currently, fabric and gravel are being used to retain the soil.

Downtown Pocket Park

The Downtown Pocket Park is a green strip between S. State Street and the parking area which accesses an alley and S. Courtland Street. Through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and City funding, the park will be a family-oriented area that will include a fountain, hard-scaping, play areas, seating, and landscaping. The park will be within a unique space tucked between two existing main street buildings, and it is currently under design after significant public input.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

The City's 6-year Capital Improvement Program includes nine main categories: public works, parks, police, hydroelectric, water pumping and distribution, sewer collection, BioPure treatment, City buildings, and the historic district. As a part of the CIP process, projects are developed by the City Manager and department heads on an annual basis to meet the goals of City Council, to improve upon the delivery of service, to upgrade aging facilities and infrastructure, and to expand public facilities and parks. Capital projects are based on the needs and goals outlined in the Master Plan.

When projects are developed, they are prioritized into high and moderate classifications. High priority projects are critical to the delivery of public services. Moderate priority projects are important for long-term community sustainability.

1. Public Works. Projects under public works include the design, planning, and construction of streets, sidewalks, and general infrastructure for community facilities.

2. Parks. The City sets aside funds for improvement projects for all five City parks (Veteran's Memorial Park, Downtown Pocket Park, Hart Commons, John Gurney, and Pointe Park) including design, planning, and construction of parking areas, walking paths, bridges, and structures. These capital projects are based on the recommendations of the Parks & Recreation Plan.

3. Police. Capital expenditures for the police department primarily include vehicles and equipment. These items are replaced on a rolling schedule (at least one new vehicle every two years).

4. Hydro Electric. Improvements to the City's hydroelectric system are necessary to ensure long-term provision of electrical power to area residents and businesses. Expenditures for the hydro-electric system typically include electric improvements, meter reading technology, new vehicles, and the reuse and refurbishment of decommissioned infrastructure.

5. Water Pumping and Distribution. In order to ensure the long-term provision of water service to existing and future residents and businesses, expenditures such as meter reading technology, repairs and maintenance, rehabilitation and repairs of wells, construction of water transmission mains, and the design, planning, and construction of boost stations are needed. These projects are commonly identified in Water System Reliability Studies conducted by the City.

6. Sewer Collection. Similar to the water pumping and distribution system, the City depends on a well-functioning sewer collection system to ensure the health and safety of its residents and businesses. Common expenditure items under this category include the design, planning, and construction of sewer transmission mains, purchase of new equipment, and the construction or repair to lift stations.

7. BioPure Treatment. The BioPure system treats wastewater at the City's sewage treatment facility. Aeration of wastewater at and irrigation are key components of the system process, and expenditures will commonly be earmarked for the maintenance and repair to these systems.

8. City Buildings. Intermittent improvements are required to keep City buildings in well-functioning and safe conditions. Expenditures commonly include efficiency improvements such as energy-efficient windows, roof and siding maintenance, and the design, planning, and construction of new City buildings.

9. Historic District. The Hart Historic District is listed on both the National and State registries and includes structures dating back to as early as the 1880s. The district includes the areas of

State Street (from Lincoln to Main), Washington Street (from Water to Dryden), Main Street (from 222 Main St. to Water), and Courtland Street (from Main to Washington). Due to this area's character and age, infrastructure investments such as sidewalks, curbs, and lighting are the greatest need.

The City has developed an annual CIP planning process to promote transparency and public involvement. The process ensures that the public is consulted to better understand how capital improvements such as roads, emergency service vehicles, and other major items are planned for, procured, and financed by the City. With a more informed public, there can be greater public involvement in the CIP planning process.

The CIP plays a significant role in the implementation of the Master Plan by providing the link between planning and budgeting for capital projects. The CIP process precedes the budget process and is used to develop the capital project portion of the annual budget. The model process includes a kick-off meeting, project development, ranking, Planning Commission advisory review, and City Council approval.

Downtown CIP Projects include the following in the six-year program:

1. Veteran's Memorial Park Improvements
    - $60,000 (engineering): 2019
    - $800,000 (construction): 2020-2021
2. Pocket Park- $100,000 (stormwater, electrical, lighting, irrigation, pavers, sidewalk, landscaping, seat walls): 2019
3. Street Light Update Program- $30,000 (30 downtown light poles): 2019-2022
4. Street Resurfacing- $500,000: 2021-2024

PLACEMAKING

The City of Hart has taken proactive steps to foster redevelopment within its downtown. The City has prepared for new investment and redevelopment through its improvements and upgrades to utilities, infrastructure, streets, sidewalks, street trees, benches, banners, light fixtures, and parks, as well as providing clear guidance on development processes and procedures (see development review guidebook). The City strives to be business-friendly to encourage private investment.

However, this goal is balanced with the preservation of natural resources, environmentally sensitive areas, neighborhoods, and its historic downtown area. Together, this balance will preserve what makes the City of Hart unique while opening the doors for economic opportunities. Collectively, these investments seek to create quality places where people want to live, work, play, and learn. Downtown form-based elements are incorporated within the Zoning Ordinance, B-1 Central Business District, and both public places and private commercial buildings collectively create special and unique places in the City of Hart.

TRAIL TOWN- DOWNTOWN CONNECTION

The City of Hart is bisected by the US Bicycle Route 35, a 500-mile route that runs from Indiana through Michigan to Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, generally following the Lake Michigan shoreline and through the eastern Upper Peninsula. Within the City limits, the southern portion is an off-road multi-use trail, known as the Hart-Montague Trail. North of Wood Street, Route 35 continues north with an on-road bicycle route designation.



Figure 8 Trail Signage

"Trail Towns" are communities that capitalize on long-distance trail planning opportunities for tourists, distance travelers, athletes, and local recreational users. The City of Hart's effort to support the Hart-Montague trail and build from the benefits of the facility is consistent with many national and state-wide Trail Town planning efforts. Not only are trails a recreational benefit to residents, but they can serve as an economic driver. Some of the benefits of embracing the Trail Town best practices are:

- The City's status as a tourist destination increases.
- There are additional opportunities for residents.
- Local businesses, services, and accommodations benefit from use, promotion, and marketing.
- New business opportunities are created.
- Alternative forms of transportation are supported.

Capitalizing on the trail as an economic asset can significantly benefit the downtown business community. Trail users should be directed to downtown through attractive and descriptive wayfinding signage which illustrates and advertises local downtown businesses, services, and destinations (see trail connection and business map).

As a trail-oriented community, the City of Hart should continue to embrace Trail Town recommendations and projects.

1. Increase the use of the informational kiosk with local City mapping and business information.
2. Increase wayfinding through the use of signage, logos, common graphics, street paint, sharrows, and bike lanes. A combination of these elements will improve connections from the Wood Street terminus to downtown, community facilities, and John Gurney Park.
3. Cooperatively work with neighboring communities to promote the entire trail corridor as a tourist destination.
4. Continue to improve upon trailhead amenities.



Figure 9 Trail Information Kiosk

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The future land use plan for the downtown serves as a guide to assist local officials with decisions regarding day-to-day planning, zoning, and public improvement issues. The future land use plan is a long-term vision, and certain land use decisions will depend on site-specific conditions at the time an application is received. Additionally, downtown zoning requirements are based on the future land use category descriptions and intent.

The key to this section is that there is an important relationship between land use planning and zoning. Planning is guiding land uses from a policy standpoint, while zoning is the act of regulating the use of these lands by law or ordinance. The following paragraphs address future land use categories as found in the downtown.

Downtown Commercial/Mixed Use

This land use designation encompasses the older, traditional commercial core of the City. Retail, service, and residential land uses are appropriate in this area. However, some additional land uses may be acceptable if they complement the downtown core and provide an activity that is not readily available. In traditional downtown fashion, non-residential land uses (primarily retail and services) should occupy storefronts, while residential and office land uses should be located on upper floors.

Mixed use and commercial buildings should fit within the historic context of the downtown area, with facades extending along most of the lot width and established up to the right-of-way, higher levels of window transparency, brick construction, projecting architectural elements and building articulation, and signs that balance the need for advertising with the historic nature of the downtown area. These design elements can be observed in the City of Hart and many other successful communities.

Recreational

This designation includes areas planned for or currently utilized as public parks and other recreational or public lands. These areas are to be utilized for both active and passive recreational purposes and can be located in any area of the City. Large scale active recreational areas should be located in close proximity to the major arterial transportation routes in the City.

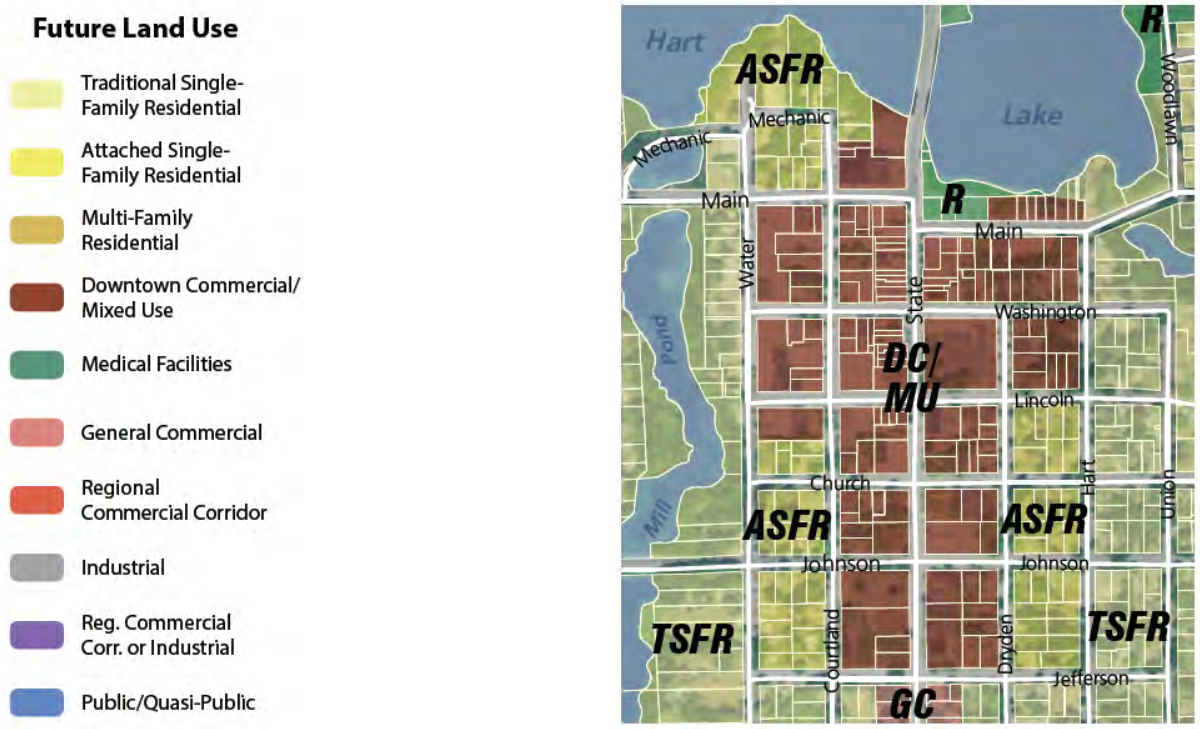

Figure 10 Master Plan Future Land Use Map- Downtown Focus

DOWNTOWN GOALS, PRINCIPLES, AND IMPLEMENTATION

Through public input and deliberation by the Planning Commission and City Council, goals and planning principles were developed to guide decisions concerning growth, preservation, and investment within the City of Hart. Goals and planning principles, along with the conceptual land use vision provided by the Future Land Use Map, will allow Hart to achieve its future vision of the City.

- Goals. The ends toward which the planning effort is directed; the vision of the desired future of the City.
- Principles. Protocol to guide decisions and achieve desired outcomes. Description of the City's intent regarding land use-related issues.

Downtown Goals

- Continue to build a strong downtown that serves as a hub of community activity that provides a unique and beautiful backdrop for area events, social interaction, and commerce, while maintaining its historic nature.
- Develop a cost-effective, consolidated infrastructure system.

Downtown Principles

1. Continue to facilitate the rehabilitation of existing downtown structures and protect historic buildings with incentives, and as necessary, enforcement actions.
2. Promote infill development that matches and complements the existing classic main street design.
3. Work with anchor downtown businesses to strengthen their position in the community and cross-promote with other businesses.
4. Continue to monitor marketing opportunities, as outlined in the 2012 Downtown Marketing study. Recruit uses that complement the rural and recreational nature of the area, such as restaurants and retail.
5. Preserve the historic nature of the downtown business district.
6. Expand on-street parking opportunities and streetscaping.
7. Continue to prepare short and long-term capital improvement programs covering major infrastructure and facility needs. Consider the Master Plan during the annual CIP planning process and capital project development and prioritization.
8. Consider traffic calming measures as opportunities arise, particularly in neighborhoods and downtown.
9. Encourage neighborhood and development connectivity for streets and non-motorized transportation to ensure a more efficient and convenient transportation network.

Downtown Actions

1. Determine a strategy to help existing businesses expand and recruit new businesses to respond to today's market. *Responsibility: Chamber, City Council, City, Manager. Timing: Short-Term, Year 1.*

2. Market the downtown's unique characteristics to residents, visitors, investors, and business owners. Prepare and marketing, branding, and signage plan to promote City businesses and attract visitors to downtown businesses and to attract new residents; include information in regional publications and focus on City events, historic district, and recreational opportunities. *Responsibility: Chamber, City Council. Timing: Mid-Term, Years 2-3.*

3. Identify key structures to protect and renovate and search for State and Federal historic preservation grants for long-term protection. *Responsibility: City Council, Planning Commission, Staff. Timing: Mid-Term, Years 2-3.*

4. Assess downtown zoning districts and the City's ability to allow and incentivize redevelopment of existing vacant or underused structures. Investigate the possibility of amending the zoning ordinance to accommodate redevelopment and revise regulations as necessary. *Responsibility: City Council, Planning Commission, Staff. Timing: Short-Term, Year 1.*

5. Extend on-street parking on State Street south of Church Street. *Responsibility: City Council, Staff. Timing: Mid-Term, Years 2-3.*

6. Review and revise anti-blight regulations and revise as necessary. Initiate an anti-blight code enforcement program with initial focus on the downtown core. Begin with an educational process and follow with notice of violation or non-compliance after sufficient time is given to landowners and occupants. Allow for the ability to clean up blighted areas and recover the cost from landowners. *Responsibility: Staff. Timing: Ongoing.*

7. Mark "neighborhood walk and bike tours" in designated areas to promote physical activity and to provide an interpretive history of the City of Hart. If possible, tie these walks into the Hart/Montague Rail Trail. *Responsibility: Staff. Timing: Mid-Term, Years 2-3.*

8. Identify key areas and opportunities to improve bicycling and pedestrian accommodations to ensure safe travel. Investigate crosswalk striping, signage, signals, bump-outs, and other methods to calm traffic around bike and pedestrian facilities and create awareness of nonmotorized transportation. *Responsibility: City Council, Planning Commission, Staff. Timing: Mid-Term, Years 2-3.*

9. Develop a sidewalk improvement program and ensure connections between developments. *Responsibility: City Council, Planning Commission, Staff. Timing: Mid-Term, Years 2-3.*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Economic Development Strategy was a collaborative planning project between the MEDC's Redevelopment Ready Communities program and the City of Hart. The result of this project is an economic roadmap to assist with job creation, marketing, and branding along with redevelopment and investment strategies for the community. These actions will both strengthen and diversify the local economy.

Downtown Objectives

1. Consider traffic calming measures as opportunities arise, particularly in neighborhoods and downtown.
2. Continue utilizing the Hart Economic and Redevelopment Team (Heart) as an advocate to draw tourism and investment in Downtown Hart
3. Identify additional events to attract tourists and residents from out-side of the area to the City of Hart.
4. Create a targeted marketing campaign to attract businesses, tourists and new potential residents to Hart.

Downtown Actions

1. Enhance streetscaping with landscaping, lighting, signage, wayfinding and sidewalk improvements. *Responsibility: City Council, TIFA Board,* Hart Economic and Redevelopment Team (Heart). *Timing: Mid-Term, Years 2-3.*
2. Continue working with developers and property owners to develop and redevelop downtown buildings and sites into multi-story, mixed-use developments. *Responsibility: Staff, TIFA Board, Planning Commission, City Council. Timing: Ongoing.*
3. Promote the improvement and restoration of facades in the downtown area through utilization of façade improvement programs, micro-loans and SBA lending sources. *Responsibility: Staff, TIFA Board. Timing: Ongoing.*