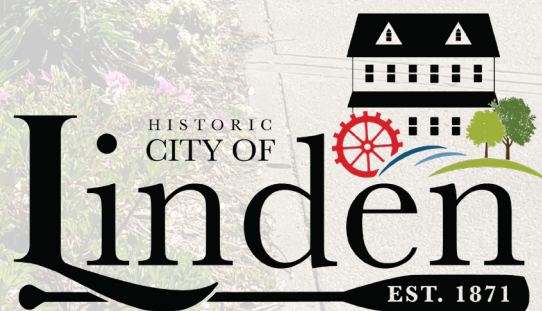


CITY OF LINDEN

Economic Development & Marketing Strategy

September 2023



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CITY OF LINDEN:
Economic Development & Marketing Strategy

September 2023

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Economic Development Strategy

Planning Process

This Economic Development & Marketing Strategy for the City of Linden was developed and led by City officials, the City of Linden Downtown Development Authority (DDA), a dedicated Steering Committee, and a technical consultant team. The result of this project is an economic roadmap to assist with business retention and attraction, capital improvements throughout the community, as well as redevelopment and investment strategies for the community. These actions will both strengthen and diversify the local economy.

When creating an economic development strategy, it is important to answer several questions.

1. Who are the largest employers in the community?
2. What drives the local economy?
3. What is the City's role in the larger region?
4. What are the strengths of the community and how can they contribute to growth?
5. What could be potential challenges to growth?
6. What overall image is the City working to create?
7. What strategies can be implemented to execute the end vision?

As part of the planning process, which was done in conjunction with a City-wide Master Plan Update, a Steering Committee was assembled comprised of local leaders, businesses, and other key stakeholders with a direct interest in the economic success of the City of Linden.

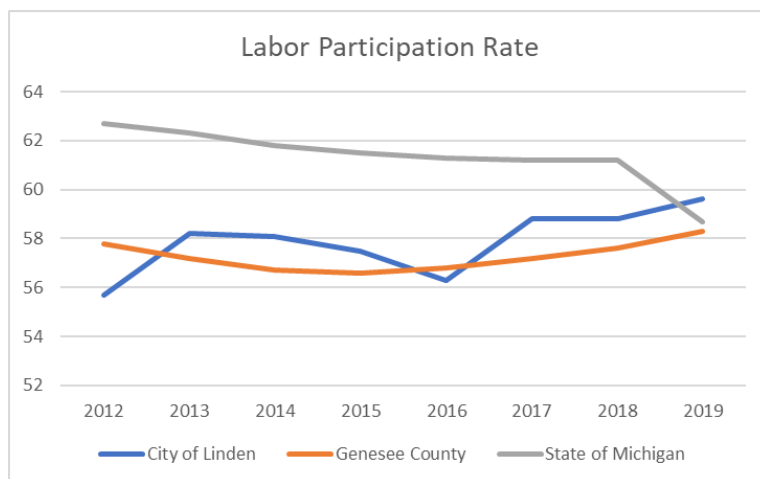
Current Economic Conditions

Data in this session comes from several sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau decennial census reports, the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey Estimates, and the Esri Demographic and Income Profile for the City of Linden. The current population of the City of Linden is 4,142 according to the 2020 U.S. Census figures, with approximately 58% of the population within the work age group between 16 and 65 years of age.

According to 2019 U.S. Census estimates, 59.6% of citizens between 16 and 65 years of age are active in the labor force. Genesee County has a 58.3% labor participation rate, and the State of Michigan's labor participation rate is 58.7%. Linden's labor participation rate is slightly outperforming the county and state's rate by roughly one percent. Currently, the US labor participation rate is 62.3%, which Linden is slightly lower. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: Labor Participation Rate

Source: 2019 U.S. Census Estimates

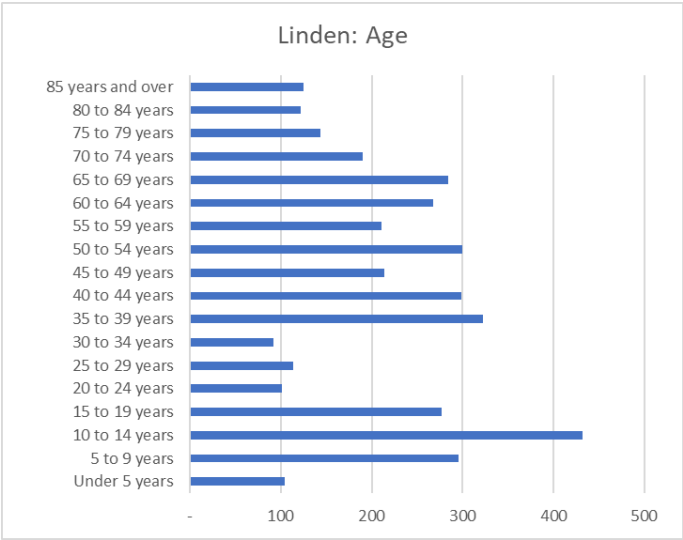


Historically, labor participation rate has been a good indicator of the strength or weakness within a local labor market. The higher the rate, the greater the availability of quality employment opportunities.

Since the last recession, labor participation rates have generally been in decline, locally, regionally, and nationally, but not because of reduced employment opportunities. To better understand the decline in labor participation, we need to look at the age distribution within the City of Linden.

The City of Linden’s population is maturing in age, with the median age increasing from 39.4 years in 2010 (per the U.S. Census) to an estimated 41.5 years by 2026 (per the Esri Demographic and Income Profile). With this maturing population, Linden would be considered a retirement or bedroom community. However, it is important to note that 17.1% of Linden’s population is aged 0-14 (per the 2010 U.S. Census), which demonstrates a healthy future labor force in the City, and a solid number of young families living in the City. Altogether, 23.9% of the City’s population is in the 25-44 age group (per the 2020 U.S. Census). (See Figure 2)

Figure 2: Persons by Age
Source: 2020 U.S. Census

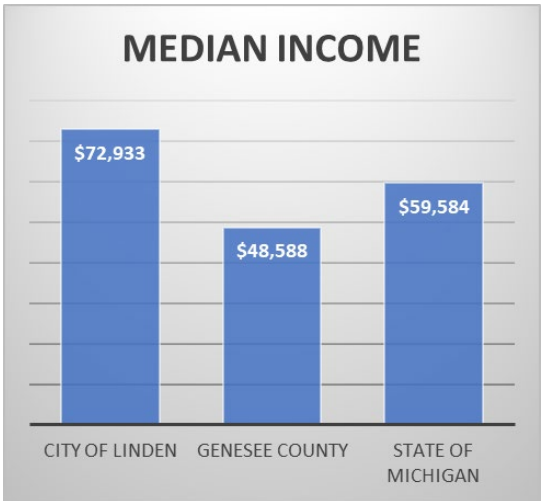


Based on the labor participation rate and the population’s age rank, the City of Linden could be considered a community where employers can draw talent from. Put another way, Linden is where talent pool chooses to reside.

Income, Employment and Education

The median household income of the City of Linden is \$72,933 as of 2019 (per the U.S. Census). This is significantly higher than Genesee County (\$48,588) and the State of Michigan (\$59,584). (See Figure 3) Esri estimates that the median household income in Linden will increase to \$79,787 by 2026.

Figure 3: Median Household Income
Source: 2019 U.S. Census Estimates



When you look at the population figures in the breakdown of major employment industries, the largest segments of the population work in health care, educational services, manufacturing, professional, scientific, and technological services, which correlates with higher income levels. It makes sense that the median income within the City is higher in general compared to the county and state.

Looking at the industry of the City of Linden, the single largest employer within the City is the school system. Other industries with high employment numbers for residents of the City include production, health care and social services, retail, sales and office related industries.

Much of the working population of Linden commute out of the City for daily work. The average commute time for workers living in the City of Linden is 23.1 minutes, indicating that many workers are traveling to larger metro areas for employment including Flint, Metro-Detroit, or other communities within a 30-minute drive where there are more options for employment opportunities.

The average income levels for the population over age 25 are displayed in figure 5, with

Earnings for Linden residents who are employed increase with their level of education. Those who have obtained their graduate degree or higher earn \$70,536 annually on average, while bachelor's degree holders earn an average of \$63,333 annually, those with some college or associates degree earn \$40,588 annually, and those with less than a high school diploma earn \$16,836 annually. Figure 5 shows the distribution of educational attainment levels for employed Linden residents.

Regional Economic Development

The City of Linden is located in southern Genesee County and is part of a broader economic region that encompasses parts of Genesee County, Livingston County, Oakland County and Shiawassee County. To a further extent, Lansing and Detroit are also accessible options for residents of Linden traveling for employment opportunities.

Generally, the greatest employment opportunities lie in neighboring Fenton, the nearby Howell, Milford and Brighton areas and the rest of Oakland County.

Recognizing this, there are areas for growth in the service and retail sectors within downtown Linden as well as the North Bridge and West Broad business districts, where there is additional space available for smaller commercial and industrial development.

As a whole, with Linden being a bedroom community, it is generally anticipated that its residents will continue to do their primary retail shopping outside of the City, but new dining options are in high demand and would probably be supported in the community.

Figure 4: Unemployment
Source: 2019 U.S. Census Estimates

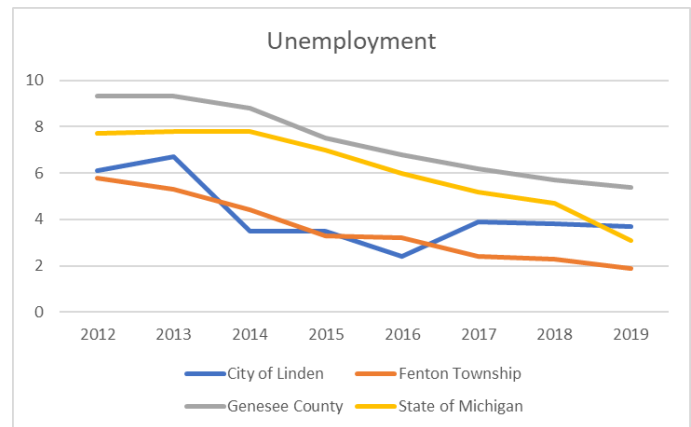
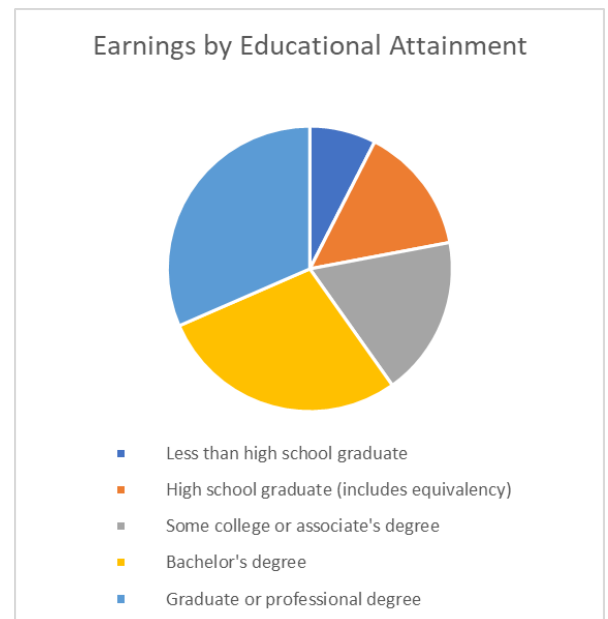


Figure 5: Population 25 years and over with earnings by Educational Attainment
Source: 2019 U.S. Census Estimates



Community Focus Group Session on Economic Development

On April 14, 2022, a focus group/visioning session was held in Linden to solicit feedback from stakeholders in the community. Attendees included business owners, real estate agents, SLPR employees, representatives from Linden schools, a local engineering firm representative, residents, the chief of police, and the DPW Director. Below is a summary of the discussion about the local economy.

What are the most valued features of Linden's neighborhoods/why do people live here?

- Nice to have access to the city, sidewalks, parks, opportunities for getting close to nature, walking trails
- Not as busy as Fenton
- Small feel—river, outdoors
- Further away from highway so less hustle/bustle
- Safety, cozy, small town feel, everyone is your friend
- It's own little Mayberry—easy to meet people, so many friendly people, calming effect here

Areas for improvement

- Need a restaurant/brewery
- Infrastructure is lacking—roads need help—both dirt and paved but mainly paved
- Need to be more aggressive with code enforcement to clean up properties—junk, parking cars, aesthetics

Housing

- Biggest demand is affordable housing—\$150-250K
- In historical district—want their historic properties reserved
- Challenge—overall lack of inventory—3 houses in Linden are available right now
- Could apartments be the wave of the future?—nice for rent maybe 55+
- There's a demand catering to older community (references Fenton's new senior living facility)—but an older population doesn't grow and downtown business will suffer if catering to mature individuals
- What is Linden—it doesn't have to be everything to everybody
- A town amenable to young families is a vision for Linden

Business districts/Downtown

1. There has been momentum and investment downtown—some people
2. DDA's efforts and new city manager's efforts to get feedback from owners have been successful
3. Grow Linden has been positive—not hearing as many negative voices as much as they used to—the city has been changing and when everything is always a no, it's not like that anymore
4. "We don't want to be Fenton": Some think Fenton compliments Linden, some see it as a positive complement—figure out a different way to say we're not Fenton—they offer something different and vice versa—afraid they'll get swallowed up by Fenton—old school frame of mind—Fenton is compared to Clarkston and the fear of the old crew will be taken over. The school rivalry also exists but can be fun. We need to change how we communicate here—talk about partnerships

Downtown Areas of Improvement

1. The void is eateries
2. Seen significant growth downtown—documenting the momentum to showcase to potential dev/investors
3. Rent is fairly cheap and when they don't make money in the first few months, it's shut down—
4. Question on what city can tangibly offer to get more restaurants—incentives
5. Interview business owners with series of questions on what's working
6. Signage—prior business owners have been upset in past b/c the size of signs are too small
7. Business recruitment packet with demos, traffic counts, testimonials
8. Kinkaid Group helped get a grant for Dr. Wax—if there are grants available to help family biz
 - a. Dream to have toddler play space

What targeted types of businesses should be here?

1. Kids play area
2. Gym
3. Restaurants
4. Experience-based
5. Market as “Come and relax and visit”
6. Targeted discussion on Evans Hall—conversations with the owners are happening—zoning issues are being cleaned up b/c half of the bldg. is residential

Is Parking an Issue?

1. It's only an issue when you can't walk a block or two, generally it's been fine
2. Breweries are coupled with a wedding venue, so that needs to be considered

Lease rates

- \$23/square foot, Fenton is at \$25/square foot

Mill Building

- Visualization of how it will deteriorate over time if maintenance stays status quo vs what it could be if...
- Look at Impressions 5 in Lansing on the river to maintain historic building but be able to invest the money it needs
- Maker's space
- Community Center (some are funded by DDA)
- Need to build confidence that investors who will invest millions will make that money back (ROI)

SWOT Analysis

On August 31, 2021, the City of Linden convened a committee, consisting of local business owners, the DDA, members of City Council and members of the community to complete a SWOT Analysis as a way of obtaining perceptions of the City's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The intent of the sessions was to gain insight, but more importantly, to establish a community identity and understand how the City fits into the larger region.

The SWOT analysis results aided the consultant team in determining that Linden should focus on three primary areas for growth throughout the community:

- Retail
- Housing
- Redevelopment Sites

Strengths

Businesses and residents alike share a high level of pride for the City of Linden. A primary strength repeated throughout the session was a high quality of life. The City has relatively low vacancy rates for both businesses and housing, it's a walkable community with a small but thriving downtown and an active DDA with a healthy volunteer base and the infrastructure throughout the community is in fair condition. The small-town charm of the City and historical appeal of the downtown was brought up on many occasions. The community is very safe and neighborly, with many recreational and accessible areas, including the river, downtown and the State Bank/LAFF Pathway based in Linden. The LAFF pathway will be entering into phase 2 in summer 2023, adding a paved trail from the City of Linden to Fenton Township and then to the City of Fenton, which can also be posed as an opportunity. The City has been progressing from an economic development perspective, with forward-thinking leadership focused on community improvement while balancing the demand from residents to keep its small town, high-pride, low-traffic, quaint identity that has been Linden's appeal for decades.

Linden's school system is strong and young families choose to live in Linden due to the quality of education and smaller class size in relation to neighboring community schools. The housing is more affordable than the homes in the City of Fenton, although housing stock is low. The City has strong relationships with the Fenton & Linden Chamber of Commerce, the Southern Lakes Parks and Recreation (SLPR), and the school district, providing benefits, support, and resources for local businesses.

The City hosts community events throughout the year, with the summer festival "Happenings in Linden" most well-known and well-attended. This event and others drive awareness of the downtown businesses, provide an opportunity to positively impact Linden's place branding, and promote a sense of community for residents and non-residents.

According to the 624 people who completed the Master Plan opinion survey, with 78.9% stating they were residents of the City, the following *most favorable* aspects of Linden were noted:

- Small-town atmosphere (74%)
- Safe neighborhoods and community (65%)
- Friendly people or atmosphere (44%)
- Historic character of the community (44%)
- No or limited congestion (31%)
- Quality of the school district (30%)
- Proximity to family or friends (29%)
- Community spirit or civic mindedness (28%)
- Access to non-motorized transportation (bike paths, sidewalks, etc.) (27%)
- Recreation options (23%)

Weaknesses

Some weaknesses for the City include an overall lack of buildable area. The City is only approximately 2.4 square miles, is nearly built out, and is bound on all sides by Fenton Township, so new development will be limited on greenfield sites. There are several buildings in need of updates/facelifts near the core of downtown. Investments in water and sewer infrastructure will need to be made to attract and support new development, both residential and commercial in the community. There is a high percentage of professionally-oriented businesses (health care, insurance, financial planning, property management) which decreases the amount of pedestrian traffic in some places downtown.

There is a need for larger capital improvements, specifically the roads, which particularly present a challenge because the road millage didn't pass in 2018. The Beacon & Bridge remediation systems are currently being implemented, but it is important to note that the contamination has been a deterrent to new business in the past. The future vision for the City faces challenges due to the fact that Linden's residents and business owners do not want to become too much like Fenton, and it's easy to categorize any change as being too close to becoming "another Fenton."

There is a lack of engagement with the youth in the community, and more focus should be on after-school and summer activities for Linden's youth.

The following *least favorable* aspects of Linden were stated from the Master Plan opinion survey respondents:

- Lack of dining options (60%)
- Lack of shopping, retail and service options (41%)
- Lack of entertainment options (37%)
- Downtown district is not vibrant enough (35%)
- Other (please specify) (18%)
- Congestion (17%)
- Lack of youth activities (16%)
- Housing costs (12%)
- Lack of recreation options (12%)
- Loss of small-town atmosphere (12%)

Opportunities

With the right perspective, weaknesses are also opportunities for improvement. There are number of opportunities for potential growth and redevelopment within the City of Linden. At a high level, there is ample opportunity for infill development throughout the City. There are also prime properties available on the water within downtown district. Opportunities exist to further activate the waterfront from a business, residential, and recreational perspective. Additionally, there is some potential for more residential growth in the City, including potentially more senior living facility space. The City is actively seeking incentive opportunities, and brownfield development may be a possibility in some instances.

Additional proactive business retention and attraction efforts could lead to further economic development. Opportunities to move civic buildings out of downtown and improve current conditions to be more conducive to downtown exist. Leveraging the trend of experiential opportunities that maker spaces afford would benefit the community, and additional programming for youth and youth activities would enhance

the community. The State Bank/LAFF Pathway extension also provides opportunities for additional recreational opportunities, leading to an increase in foot traffic, benefitting local businesses.

Threats

The threats or challenges that a community faces are typically defined and shaped by neighboring communities that can, in some instances, be considered competitors for businesses and residents. In Linden's case, challenges arise with infill retail in the downtown area, with the competitive factor being Fenton. However, business and retail lease cost per square foot is lower, on average, than neighboring City of Fenton.

Another challenge for Linden is that the City needs to clearly articulate its own vision for the future so that residents, visitors and business owners understand that Linden is progressing, but it is intentionally not becoming another Fenton. There is a fair amount of internal pressure from residents not to grow, but to focus on how Linden can improve, with the understanding that if little is done to achieve the right kind of development and growth, the City could lose tax base and younger families to neighboring communities.

Another threat to the community is the aging population and the reputation of Linden as a retirement community. Coupled with the statewide population decrease and lower birth rates as compared to prior decades, the long-term vision for Linden must take this into consideration.

The City's infrastructure faces threats which need to be addressed, as these are major factors for prospective businesses when selecting a site.

Finally, the weeds by the mill pond are a nuisance, and at the time of this writing, the City is taking steps to implement nuisance control options.

Economic Development Goal and Objectives

The economic development goals and objectives of the City of Linden Master Plan (adopted February 13, 2023) establish the desired character, quality, and development for the economic vitality of the City. They also embody the strategic direction the City will take to promote a strong economy with vibrant business districts. The goals and objectives contained in this section direct future decisions and actions that will further implement the intent and purpose of the plan.

In terms relevant to community planning, goals and objectives provide the economic development strategy with guidance to address the current issues and advance plans into the future. In general, goals and objectives can be defined as follows:

- Goals are overall broad statements that provide a focus for future discussions. Goals are supported by the more specific objectives.
- Objectives are very specific, measurable, action-oriented statements that help achieve the goals.

Economic Development Goal:

Retain and expand existing businesses and promote the development of new businesses that provide needed employment, goods, and services for residents, visitors, and workers.

Objectives:

- Develop a business development and retention program to keep the pulse of the local business community by instituting regular retention visits and benchmarking local business development
- Focus efforts on enhancing retail and commercial growth in the downtown and surrounding area to fulfill the needs and wants of existing and future residents
- Encourage new residential development and eliminating hurdles that make housing development challenging
- Continue to work cooperatively with state, regional, and local collaborators to support and help fund local redevelopment efforts.

Business Development/Retention Program

Based on the feedback received during the planning process, the results of the SWOT analysis, and in line with the Economic Development Goal and Objectives, a key recommendation of this plan is for the City to establish a Business Development/Retention Program to take and keep the pulse of the local business community. Regular touches, or retention visits, will begin to engage the business community beyond traditional networking opportunities. Typical discussions during retention visits include business growth plans, marketing, employment and obstacles that can hinder growth. There are many resources available to the business community for finding, hiring and retaining employees, obtaining financial support, learning about import and export programs and government contracting opportunities. Having a strong business retention program can be one of the most successful tools for supporting the local business community. The Genesee Regional Economic Consortium can be a resource to the City of Linden since it brings collaborative partnerships together around development, business growth and support, entrepreneurialism, workforce development, infrastructure, and beyond.

Housing

A common theme from the SWOT analysis was that there is not enough housing in the marketplace for new residents coming to Linden, and that the existing housing stock is not supporting the existing residents of the City. Specifically, the housing market for middle income individuals is virtually nonexistent. Adding new housing stock is a very important piece of the economic development puzzle.

Opportunities to accommodate new housing marketed to middle income individuals are found throughout the City, as designated on the Future Land Use Map of the Master Plan. Specifically, these include the Mixed Residential, Multiple Family Residential and Mixed-Use future land use classifications. Below are a few strategies the City can employ to attract potential home builders.

Understand the Market

The first step in moving projects forward in smaller communities across the region is to identify areas in the community that would be appropriate for new housing construction, both renter- and owner-occupied. For many builders, cost is the driving factor for determining when and where to build. Specific market information needs to be gathered indicating what the potential sales price or rent structure would be for

new units. It would also be helpful to identify where potential buyers and renters will come from. A focus group meeting with area realtors and lenders would help with this.

Further, a survey of existing residents (mailed and/or Survey Monkey) in the community would also help asking the following questions, at a minimum, for example:

- If newly constructed, for-sale houses were available in the community would you consider selling your existing house and moving?
- Are you currently renting and if newly constructed, for-sale houses were available would you consider buying?
- If you did move to a different house, what are some of the key things you would be looking for (less maintenance, more bedrooms, etc.)?
- Do you know of, or is anyone in your household, currently looking for alternate housing but have been unable to find any?

Encouraging New Housing Construction

Developers are not likely to be interested in small, outlying communities because the incomes and housing values are lower. Instead, they will tend to focus on larger markets with higher values and the potential for greater profit margins. Small communities will have to find creative ways to generate new housing development, on both the construction and land development ends of the market.

This can come in the form of building capacity with local investors/builders (“home grown”) and eliminating some of the hurdles that make housing development challenging. This can also be accomplished by creating Public/Private Partnerships (P3’s) with local municipalities or non-profit entities. Either the community, the P3 or a regional consortium, must look for ways to encourage new housing construction including but not limited to:

1. **Acquiring land.** Since both lenders and developers are shying away from new developments, the community can acquire land for that purpose and eliminate one of the required steps. This land can be sold raw or if possible, with the necessary infrastructure indicated below. If land can be obtained at a reduced price through tax foreclosure, the savings can be passed on to the developer as an added incentive. If the community is acting as the developer, this will help lower development costs and the savings can be passed on to the individual builders.
2. **Obtaining zoning approvals.** The community can rezone and even site plan the project, so a developer only has to install the infrastructure and then obtain building permits for the construction. Prior zoning approval would also help with alternate housing types, like townhouses, condominiums, apartments, etc., where residents in some communities oppose any type of housing that is not large lot, single-family.
3. **Extending infrastructure to the site.** This is one of the costliest parts of development, so if the community can install utilities to the property already purchased, typically at a lower financing rate, this will greatly improve the ability to attract builders. With roads, sewer and water already installed, the community will then have the ability to sell individual lots to builders and eliminate the risk that comes with developing an entire subdivision. This also gives the community flexibility with the builder and ability to ensure high-quality construction; and

4. **Establish a risk loan guarantee that will encourage banks to lend for speculative housing development, like subdivisions.** The builders we spoke to said that even if they wanted to develop a subdivision, the risk would be too great, and the lenders would be hesitant to participate. It would therefore be beneficial to create some form of loan risk guarantee pool that would protect the lenders from loss if the project failed. As a loan guarantee, funding would not have to be committed to each project; only for those projects that fail and the bank has to foreclose on the property. In those cases, the loan fund would cover an agreed upon percentage of the loan and then have the ability to sell the property to a new developer. Such a fund could be undertaken at the community level but would most likely be more effective at the regional level as part of a consortium of communities or economic development agencies.

With many of the successful projects noted above, builders have stated that they were able to offer lower-priced options because they could get higher densities creating an economy of scale. Others were able to acquire the land for development at a very low cost, generally purchasing the land from a municipal entity that obtained the land through the foreclosure process during the last recession. As noted earlier in this strategy, nearly 30% of the costs of new construction projects are regulatory, so finding ways to reduce those costs is critical.

Additional Housing Strategies

- The community should develop an “elevator speech” that promotes the assets of the community and why someone would want to invest there.
- An inventory of available land should be prepared including ownership, tax and zoning information. The availability and location of public utilities should also be included.
- It is critical that the community obtain ownership of tax foreclosure properties that have development/redevelopment potential for mixed-use or housing.
- Where needed, properties that are targeted for development can be re-zoned in advance by the community, making it easier for prospective developers/builders to move forward.
- Make sure that the zoning and building review process is quick and efficient to avoid unnecessary delays.
- A strategy should be prepared for the development of residential properties, falling into four categories:
 - Land suitable for subdivision into multiple lots;
 - Individual, developable lots for sale to builders;
 - Land suitable for multiple-family development; and
 - Mixed-use and urban housing types, like townhouses, flats, etc.
- Local companies and banks should be recruited as partners in housing and mixed-use development, including financially, since they depend upon the ability to attract quality employees and customers.
- Consider allowing Accessory Dwelling Units and smaller housing unit types to increase density in downtown and adjacent areas

Strategy Implementation

The City's Master Plan and this Economic Development Strategy serves as the policy guides for moving Linden forward, guiding decisions about future physical and economic development. Transforming the plan's goals into reality will require a long-term commitment and political consensus. The plan is designed to be a road map for action, incorporating strategies, specific projects, and programs that will achieve the desired results.

This section synthesizes the many plan recommendations and identifies the actions and timing needed to transform the plan's vision into reality.

Tenets of Successful Implementation

The input received through the master plan process provided a foundation to help achieve the City's vision. Community support, commitment, and involvement must continue.

Commitment

Successful plan implementation will be directly related to a committed City leadership. While elected and appointed officials will have a strong leadership role, many others - City department directors, staff, and leaders from the community's many institutions and organizations - will also be instrumental in supporting the plan.

However, commitment reaches beyond just these individuals and includes the array of stakeholders. Citizens, landowners, developers, and business owners interested in how Linden develops must unite toward the plan's common vision.

Integrate with Project Design

City officials and departments must embrace the plan, applying its recommendations to help shape annual budgets, work programs, and the design of capital improvements. For example, the City's engineering practices can support implementation through infrastructure improvements, streets, and storm systems designed consistent with plan policies and recommendations. Each department, staff person, and elected official should find it a benefit, if not an obligation, to reference the plan when making decisions and setting priorities.

Guidance for Development Decisions

This plan is designed for routine use and should be consistently employed during any process affecting the community's future. Private investment decisions by developers, corporations, and landowners should consider the plan's direction as it is the guide for economic growth and stability of the community and supports the goals and objectives of the overall Master Plan and this Economic Development Strategy.

Evaluation and Monitoring

This plan has been developed with a degree of flexibility, allowing nimble responses to emerging conditions, challenges, and opportunities. To help ensure the plan stays fresh and useful, periodic reviews and amendments may be required. This will ensure plan goals, objectives, and recommendations reflect changing community needs, expectations, and financial realities.

Redevelopment Strategies

How to Attract Developers?

Developers typically look for project locations where the potential for success is fairly certain and risks are limited. This means that they are attracted to communities with strong markets where the infrastructure is in place, reasonably-priced, quality development sites are available, and the development review process is quick. They also look for opportunities to enter a market right before it “takes off” and capture the heavy demand and associated real estate price or rent increases.

Good developers are usually inundated with requests from municipalities and DDA’s to develop in their community, citing the advantages they can offer. Yet only a small percentage of communities provide the information necessary to interest developers. There is specific information they look for that will minimize the amount of time it takes to make a go- no-go decision. For example, is there a market for the type of development being sought by the community? What is the role of the community within the region (i.e. bedroom community, employment destination, transportation hub, etc.)? Are reasonably priced sites available for development of redevelopment? Is necessary infrastructure in place or will this be needed and add to the cost of the project? How accessible is the development location and how large a market area can they draw from?

These are all vital questions that can be partly answered by the community, making it easier to pique the interest of a developer. Time is money and the less time developers have to commit to looking at a project/community, the more likely they are to dig deeper and hopefully show interest in moving forward. Some of this information might already be available while additional work is needed to gather the remaining data. It is up to the City, DDA, business leaders, and civic associations to work together to assemble developer information and then actively recruit developers and businesses.

Why Linden?

Since developers look for strong or emerging markets, Linden must prove that it fits into this classification and may have just been overlooked. What are the positives with Linden that have created unmet demand for housing, commercial, office or industrial uses? This is information that must be gathered and uncovered to create the “elevator speech” for developers: meaning why invest in Linden as opposed to all the other communities that contact you? (*See page 33 of this plan*) Also, what has changed in recent years causing the private sector to overlook the City as a place to develop? A one-page handout summarizing this key information will be a good start. After that, a separate sheet can be created for each marketing item like housing, retail, office, hospitality, etc.

Understand the Market

Developers may not take the time to fully understand the dynamics of the local market and especially not unmet demand. The City can prepare a fact sheet for different market segments, working with local real estate professionals and companies. For example, some compelling information might be increased housing prices and vacancy rates; potential demand for certain types of housing using a Target Market Analysis; and, voids in the retail market that could be served by local businesses.

Developer Matchmaking

Once the above information is collected and organized, invite developers to come in and learn about available sites and why they should consider Linden for their next project. It would be best to invite them individually and be concise, enthusiastic, and to the point with what you would like them to consider. Be sure to share success stories from other companies and developments so they can see that others have already tested the market. It is equally important to have as much information available regarding property availability, price, rental rates, recent purchase prices, traffic volumes, etc. This will provide a positive impression regarding the recruitment effort and limit the number of items that need follow-up.

DDA/City Property Acquisition

Property acquisition will be a necessary part of implementing the development projects contained herein, particularly for site development and redevelopment. By purchasing property in an area identified for new development, the DDA or the City will have an added tool to attract developers and build the desired project. For example, to develop new housing, the DDA or City can acquire several of the vacant lots and can contribute them to the project. This will provide an incentive to lower the cost, and minimize the risk, for the developer. Should the first phase be successful, the developer will more than likely undertake construction of additional units without any form of subsidy. The goal is to use tax increment financing to attract developers by minimizing risk, leverage private investment and eventually eliminate the need for financial assistance.

Gap Funding

Some projects may need financial assistance to kick-start the development. The City may, at its own discretion, commit project-specific future tax increment capture back to private projects for a specified period of time. The goal is to provide funding to close the “gap” that prevents the project from becoming a reality due to financial feasibility. There are many additional incentives that can also be utilized to support “gap” funding.

Implementation Matrix

The following matrix summarizes key recommended actions, along with an assignment of relative priority. The parties with primary responsibility for implementation of each action are also outlined.

Table 1: Economic Development Implementation Matrix

Action	Priority	Responsibility
Infrastructure & Community		
Upgrade water infrastructure systems	3-5 years	City administration
Update roads, especially in neighborhoods as funding allows	Ongoing	City administration, DPW
Update and improve Mill Site as funds allow (RFP issued)	1-2 years	City administration
Consider creation of Local Development Finance Authority (north end w/ industrial and commercial) or Neighborhood Improvement Authority to support reinvestment in infrastructure and neighborhoods (along Stan Eaton across from Hyatt Elementary and the neighborhood on the north side of Mill Pond)	1-2 years	City administration, additional taxing jurisdictions

Action	Priority	Responsibility
Fully review and possibly amend residential zoning districts and uses to determine if any housing districts can be combined or allow for more flexible housing options in existing areas	Ongoing review as needed	City administration, City Planner
Fully review and possibly amend commercial zoning districts and uses to determine if they can be expanded or allow for more flexible uses in existing buildings and spaces	Ongoing review as needed	City administration, City Planner
Identify and market the opportunities for recreation through partners like SLPR, the school system, Loose Center, and explore ways to expand programs to diversify and appeal to youth	Ongoing	City administration
Explore what similar communities are doing in regard to expanding broadband service city-wide for all or installing a hotspot in downtown	Ongoing	City administration, DDA
Investigate the process to build Electrical Vehicle (EV) charging stations, possibly requiring a zoning ordinance for apartment complexes to have a certain number of EV charging stations in the parking lot	Ongoing	City administration
Industry Activities		
Develop a section on the website to direct entrepreneurs to resources for small businesses such as SBA, PTAC, MISBDC, MEDC and others, and provide a space within the community to direct individuals to proper entrepreneurial support structures	1-2 years	City administration, DDA, Flint and Genesee Group
Position city to work with developers and property owners by showing them the numbers and tools—i.e. proforma that shows brownfield TIF, incentive policy to redevelop key sites in town such as the Evans Building site or the City municipal site	1-2 years	City administration
Utilize state and locally authorized incentive programs, PA 198 abatements, Tax Increment Finance (DDA, CIA, Brownfield), MEDC Business Development Program and Community Revitalization Program.	Ongoing	City Administration
Develop an incentive implementation policy	1 year	City Council
Create a process for economic gardening and growing existing business in the community	1 year	City administration, Flint and Genesee Group
Consider allowing pop-up sites to promote new retail development within the city	1 year	DDA
Focus commercial attraction efforts on experiential/boutique retail, dining, sporting goods (kayak, boating, golf) and potential a fitness center	Ongoing	City administration, DDA
Prepare a business recruitment kit to identify successful business testimonials, potential investment sites and projects and potential incentives	Ongoing	City administration, DDA
Celebrate business expansion and investments in the community through use of multiple platforms	Ongoing	City administration

Action	Priority	Responsibility
Identify redevelopment opportunities and reinvestment opportunities in the northern commercial district between West and East Rolston Roads	Ongoing	City administration
DDA		
Create promotional materials for unique areas of the City to welcome new visitors, residents and businesses to highlight existing businesses and services throughout Linden	1 year	DDA
Amend DDA Development Plan to allow for “Gap financing” of impactful investment projects through the use of “project-specific” Tax Increment Finance	1 year	DDA, City Council
Expand events and special occasion opportunities within the downtown area to continue to drive traffic to the Downtown area	Ongoing	DDA, City administration
Allow for and encourage new housing development opportunities on infill sites downtown	Ongoing	DDA, City administration
Consider, as opportunities arise, potential properties for DDA acquisition for future redevelopment within the DDA Development District	Ongoing	DDA, City administration
Community Marketing and Branding		
Work with a professional analyst to perform a Retail/Commercial Analysis Study to identify retail leakages, market opportunities, and gain a foundation of expert-generated data and analysis for investors, developers, entrepreneurs. This data can then be communicated in various marketing channels to support the case that Linden is the best choice for properly aligned members of the investment and development community.	1 year	City administration, Market Analyst
Identify and market redevelopment ready sites through the following tactics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated webpage on the city’s website • A Business Information Packet (containing successful business testimonials, redevelopment sites, demographics, incentives) • Site-specific one-sheets or brochures • Request for Qualifications (RFQs) • Partnering with MEDC 	1 year	City administration, MEDC
Work with DDA and leverage healthy base of volunteers to create a structured Linden Ambassadors program to spread the word of Linden	Ongoing	City administration, DDA
Develop a social media policy to support vision and provide structure Linden’s message using the key message chart as a foundational component	1-2 years	City administration, DDA, marketing professional

Action	Priority	Responsibility
Plan social media content using a content planning tool (spreadsheet or similar) and create pre-built headers, hashtags, and post images for regular and seasonal content	1-2 years	City administration, DDA
Engage in content marketing through paid, earned, shared and owned media (example: celebrate and post about new business expansion and investment in shared or social media accounts on Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube)	1-2 years	City administration, DDA
Explore a cooperative advertising program with Fenton & Linden Chamber of Commerce	1-2 years	City administration, DDA, Chamber of Commerce
Track and benchmark economic development	Ongoing	City administration

Incentives Available to Assist Development

The following programs are a sampling of incentives and tools that could potentially be utilized or have been used by the City and developers that are undertaking redevelopment projects in the City.

Local Specific Incentive Opportunities

Linden DDA Façade Improvement Grants

The Linden DDA offers a Façade Improvement Grant Program which is a 50% matching grant and has funding between \$1,000 and \$5,000 available for qualified physical improvement projects to commercial buildings within the DDA.

Housing Development Assistance Program

The City may consider creation of a housing development assistance program (HDAP) in partnership with the local Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (MCL Act 381) and the Land Bank for the State of Michigan.

The purpose and intent of the HDAP is to provide financing assistance to developers who are interested in building new housing (attached or detached formats) within the City for buyers that are within the HUD defined range of 80% to 110% of local Area Median Income. This would translate to a sales price range of \$150,000 - \$225,000.

It is known that in order for a builder to build a new housing structure in this sales price range, that a gap in finance may exist between the final sales cost and the final construction cost. The HDAP program will utilize Tax Increment Finance established by a TIF district to assist with closing the financial gap noted above.

Project Specific Tax Capture (DDA)

Recognizing that the cost of mixed-use, traditional development is higher than it is for undeveloped sites, the City may, at its own discretion, commit project-specific future tax increment capture back to private projects for a specified period of time. The goal is to provide funding to close the “gap” that prevents the project from becoming a reality due to financial feasibility.

For example, if the pro-forma for a project indicates that it cannot generate enough income to cover the cost of construction and a reasonable rate of return for a developer/investor, future tax increment can be committed to that development to make it feasible. It can also be used as a tool to attract companies and businesses to the City to create new employment opportunities within the DDA District.

For the City to use this option, it will need to amend its existing DDA Development Plan to include “Gap Funding” as an eligible expense and utilization of captured funds from the DDA. This tool could be very useful for “game changer” projects located within the Downtown Development area and could potentially serve as a definitive financial tool for getting major projects across the financial finish line and into the implementation success column.

Public-Private Partnerships

Public-Private Partnerships can exist in a number of different formats but may present one of the best opportunities for redevelopment of both residential and retail spaces within the City. This opportunity would allow a municipality or non-profit agency the ability to partner with a for-profit builder to develop new housing, mixed-use or campus options within the City. By partnering, it is possible for the developers/builders to get land at a lower cost, thereby reducing total construction costs.

In theory, the municipality/non-profit could hold the land, reducing holding costs and taxes while the project is under construction. The P3 could also be instrumental with infrastructure development on the property and eventually recuperate initial costs upon final sale or redevelopment of property.

State and Federal Incentives

Brownfield Act 381

The Brownfield Program uses tax increment financing (TIF) to reimburse brownfield related costs incurred while redeveloping contaminated, functionally obsolete, blighted or historic properties. It is also responsible for managing the Single Business Tax and Michigan Business Tax Brownfield Credit legacy programs (SBT/MBT Brownfield Credits).

The Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF) with assistance from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), administers the reimbursement of costs using state school taxes (School Operating and State Education Tax) for nonenvironmental eligible activities that support redevelopment, revitalization and reuse of eligible property. The MEDC also manages amendments to SBT/MBT Brownfield Credit projects approved by MSF. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) administers the reimbursement of environmental response costs using state school taxes for environmental activities, and local units of government sometimes use only local taxes to reimburse for eligible activities (i.e., “local-only” plans).

Business Development Program (MiBDP)

The MiBDP is an incentive program available from the Michigan Strategic Fund, in cooperation with the MEDC. The program is designed to provide grants, loans or other economic assistance to businesses for highly competitive projects in Michigan that create jobs and/or provide investment.

The City would utilize this program in partnership with the Flint and Genesee Group and the MEDC through their business retention/attraction strategy. This tool can work great for companies looking to expand or relocate within the City and are adding new and retaining existing jobs.

Commercial Rehabilitation Abatement (CRA)

A commercial rehabilitation abatement program encourages the rehabilitation of commercial property by abating the property taxes generated from new investment for a period up to 10 years. Commercial property is a qualified facility that includes a building or group of contiguous building of commercial property that is 15 years or older, of which the primary purpose is the operation of a commercial business enterprise or multi-family residential. The CRA freezes the taxable value of the building and exempts the new investment from local taxes.

The CRA requires multiple levels of approval including the creation of the CRA District which is established by the City Council and approved by the Council and the County. Upon creation and approval of the district, the abatement itself is approved or denied on a project specific application basis.

Corridor Improvement Authorities (CIA)

A Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA) allows the use of tax increment financing to make capital improvements within an established commercial district. It allows communities that already have Downtown Development Authorities (DDAs) to extend similar benefits to aging commercial corridors outside the DDA district or that extend through more than one municipality.

Michigan Transportation Economic Development Fund (TEDF)

The mission of the Transportation Economic Development Fund (TEDF) is to enhance the ability of the state to compete in an international economy, to serve as a catalyst for economic growth of the state, and to improve the quality of life in the state.

The funds are available to state, county, and City road agencies for immediate highway needs relating to a variety of economic development issues. Similar to the Business Development Program identified above, this a great tool to help communities improve transportation routes supported by large economic development projects.

PA 198 Industrial Facilities Exemption

Industrial property tax abatements provide incentives for eligible businesses to make new investments in Michigan. These abatements encourage Michigan manufacturers to build new plants, expand existing plants, renovate aging plants, or add new machinery and equipment. High technology operations are also available for the abatement. Depending on the scope and type of project, real property taxes can be abated up to 50% for a period not to exceed 12 years for new construction. Further, the 6-mil SET may be abated up to 100% with approval from the MEDC.

In the case of a rehabilitation, the current assessed value of the property prior to improvement is frozen. This results in a 100% exemption from property tax on the value of the improvements.

A PA 198 Exemption can be initiated by eligible applicants and require approval from the City Council and the State of Michigan.

Community Revitalization Program (MCRP)

The Michigan Community Revitalization Program is an incentive program available from the Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF), in cooperation with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, designed to promote community revitalization that will accelerate private investment in areas of historical disinvestment; contribute to Michigan's reinvention as a vital, job generating state; foster redevelopment of functionally obsolete or historic properties; reduce blight; and protect the natural resources of this state. The program is designed to provide grants, loans, or other economic assistance for eligible investment projects in Michigan.

Marketing Strategy

Overview

A marketing strategy outlines deliberate steps to promote a community and communicate its economic assets and positive community attributes. It shows how the community intends to take control over its perception and leaves less to chance. Rather than hoping that word gets out, or that somehow the community will be discovered, a marketing strategy identifies steps to highlight opportunity and community assets. Without a strategy, communities would be at a competitive disadvantage because:

- Other municipalities who understand the power of marketing are fine tuning efforts to draw distinction between their community and others. This can further widen the gap in perceptions about desirable communities.
- Positive attention to development opportunities, progress toward economic development goals, or other image-enhancing tactics would be more happenstance than intentional and deliberate.
- The community would continue to be defined by past experiences and inaccurate stereotypes.
- Without an understood position in the wider region, the area struggles to be defined or stand out.

The emphasis of this marketing strategy is about rethinking how the City of Linden can use its new economic development and planning strategies to express its identity, uniqueness, and brand values more deliberately. It also draws attention to how Linden can take steps to manage and develop its brand to add strength. It is also worth noting that these goals are not intended to be met in a few weeks, a month, or even a year. Commitment to the goals and objectives and intentionally communicating the key messages across all community stakeholders is imperative to reap maximum rewards in the community's development.

Community Background

Linden's downtown is situated in southwestern Genesee County, and is approximately 22 miles southwest of the City of Flint. Linden is a 2.4 square mile municipality with a population of just under 4,000 residents. Included among Linden's many desirable characteristics are its small-town charm, historic business district, stable residential neighborhoods, close proximity to major transportation corridors, and an ideal location along the Shiawassee River. Downtown Linden provides a range of commerce, dining, recreation, and living, as well as many civic and employment opportunities. Downtown is a place where people congregate and is a conduit for social interactions. Downtown Linden truly reflects the personal nature and overall spirit of a small-town community.

Community Marketing Goal and Objectives

Goals are general guidelines that explain what you want to achieve in your community. They are usually long-term and represent global visions such as "protect public health and safety." Objectives define strategies or implementation steps to attain the identified goals. They are more specific and outline the "who, what, when, where, and how" of reaching the goals. During the SWOT analysis, the following community marketing goal was identified. The objectives support the goal and will help guide and focus the actions of the City to be proactive and intentional in the effort to achieve the goal.

Community Marketing Goal

To attract prospective residents, entrepreneurs, developers, investors, and visitors, by actively promoting the City of Linden's unique assets and features through various marketing channels.

Objectives:

- Clearly articulate the vision for the future of Linden
- Prioritize marketing the Downtown area as a place for community events, as a business collective, and as public spaces
- Promote the City of Linden as a destination
- Better utilize the City's official website and social media channels to communicate with the public, provide resources to businesses, and promote Linden to developers and investors. This includes the implementation of digital tracking systems for evaluation
- Continue to partner with the DDA and the Chamber of Commerce to promote a business recruitment and development program to support local business owners and entrepreneurs looking to start or expand operations in Linden.

Existing Community Assets and Brand

A community's brand is both an overarching image and an underlying force that determines the direction of marketing or communications efforts. In its simplest sense, it is "who you are" as a region or organization and what sets you apart from your competitors. You don't control the position your brand occupies—your "customers" do. That's why it's important to first determine how your target audience (investors, visitors, community members, etc.) perceives your region in order to help determine your brand strengths and areas for improvement. During the SWOT, and through the Master Plan opinion survey results, key attributes and assets were identified. They include the following:

Physical and Geographical Assets

- Historic downtown
 - Linden Mills, Mill Pond, gazebo, historic buildings, retail, commerce
- LAFF pathway
- Schools
- Shiawassee River

Positive Community Attributes

- Small-town atmosphere
- Safe neighborhoods and community
- Friendly and caring people
- Historic character of the community
- No or limited congestion
- Quality of the school district
- Reasonably affordable
- Proximity to family or friends
- Community spirit or civic mindedness
- Access to non-motorized transportation (bike paths, sidewalks, etc.)
- Recreation options

- A large base of volunteers (DDA)
- Progressing from an economic development perspective

Community Brand Attributes

- Small town/small town feel
- Quaint
- Quiet
- Historic
- Friendly
- Home/hometown
- Community
- Charming
- Sweet
- Safe
- Cozy
- Family
- Beautiful
- Peaceful
- Good People
- Clean
- Growing

Existing Visual Brand

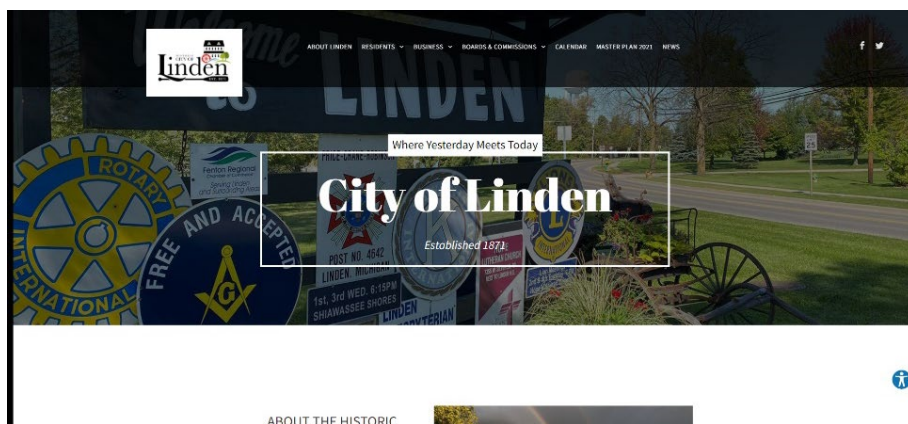
The City and DDA recently updated their visual brand logo, which accurately reflects the brand attributes of the community. The iconic Linden Mill building is featured behind the red water wheel, which is the only logo element displayed in red, emphasizing it to underscore its importance in the community. The hills and trees demonstrate the nature surrounding the downtown, providing the charm and appeal that exists throughout the community and at the Mill Pond downtown. The serif font selection in the words “Historic City of Linden, est. 1871” accurately reflects the community’s personality and provides the right kind of tone that says traditional, established, elegant, confident, and trustworthy. The use of the paddle under “Linden” with the established year is a creative way to show the recreational and waterway assets that exist throughout the community. The logo overall is well-balanced, it accurately reflects the community through the graphic elements and font, and effectively tells the viewer the brand assets and attributes of Linden.



Existing Marketing Tactics and Channels

City of Linden Official Website

Linden recently updated its website in alignment with present day best practices. The homepage prominently displays the City's name and tagline of "Where Yesterday Meets Today," which is an accurate and concise representation of the community's spirit. The historic charm of the downtown is one of the City's strongest assets and leading brand attribute. The community description on the homepage and the [About](#) page are well-written and capture the history, location, charm, and character of Linden.



Website Recommendation: The [DDA page](#) references the key points that describe the "Linden Advantage" which is a good way to thematically organize the key points of why businesses should choose Linden, but the key bullet points will need to be updated based on more recent statistics.

Existing Social Media

The City maintains a Facebook page where residents and visitors can get information about events, updates, City maintenance, home improvement, etc.

The page has 6.4k followers at the time of this writing, which, compared to other cities of similar size, demonstrates Linden's successful use of this type of social media. It shows high interest from residents, visitors, and other key audience members who want to stay in touch with the community.

<https://www.facebook.com/Linden.MI>



Grow Linden is a sub-committee of the DDA, and is composed of active and motivated Linden groups either in business or in people interested in growing the community of Linden, and have monthly meetings that are open to the public. This group organically evolved from a small group within the DDA into a business networking and support group. At the time of this writing, there are over 2.2k followers of the Grow Linden Facebook community page: <https://www.facebook.com/GrowLinden>

Linden also maintains a TikTok account with 210 followers at the time of this writing, and three videos. The account can be found here: <https://www.tiktok.com/@cityoflindenmi?lang=en>

Social Media Recommendation: The City should develop a Social media policy to support vision and provide structure Linden’s message, using the key message chart as a foundational component. Additionally, the City should plan social media content using a content planning tool (spreadsheet or similar) and create pre-built headers, hashtags, and post images for regular and seasonal content.

Existing Media Relations

On the City website, a My City Magazine article about Linden is featured on the “About” page and summarizes the history of Linden, along with a list of businesses in the area. This demonstrates that Linden has a positive connection with the magazine writing staff that could be nurtured for additional positive future coverage about the events and other news happening in Linden. Third-party, unbiased content about the community will help to amplify reach and gain credibility with target audiences, as discussed later in this strategy.

Existing Communications

The DDA publishes an email newsletter called the *Strong Business Bulletin* to keep readers informed of all the current happenings and provide resources to help build stronger, more resilient businesses. (Sign-up page: <https://mailchi.mp/864060bc7986/strongbusinessbulletinsignup>)

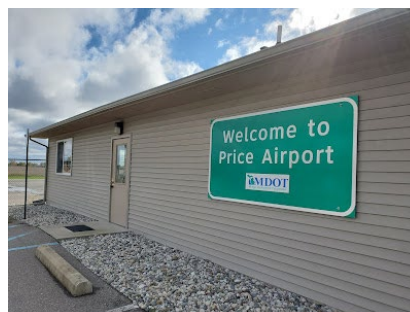
Existing Events

Local events are an excellent way to build community pride, showcase the area, and invite visitors in to experience the welcoming and warmth of the residents. The DDA and Happening in Linden (<https://happeninginlinden.com/>), a non-profit events company in Linden, has a series of events that occur in and around the City of Linden. These events not only promote the community from an economic enhancement perspective, but to also show support of the local business community. Live, in-person events offer an opportunity to build awareness of the services available through the community to support businesses, and present possible networking opportunities with potential target audiences. Additional benefits also include reinforcement of the community brand, improving face-to-face communications, and creating opportunities to make new connections with residents and businesses. If Linden were to add additional events to their calendar, a recommendation would be to focus on increasing youth indoor and outdoor events, possibly by partnering with the Flint Cultural Center or Detroit Institute of Arts as programming partners to host art and music programming for youth and families.

Images of Community Assets



Gateway Sign at Silver Lake Road



Price Airport



Linden Mills downtown



Museum and Library at Linden Mills



Bridge next to Mill over Mill Pond



View of Linden Mill from
Shiawassee River



Terrace and Gazebo



Downtown businesses



Downtown businesses



Downtown businesses



Downtown businesses



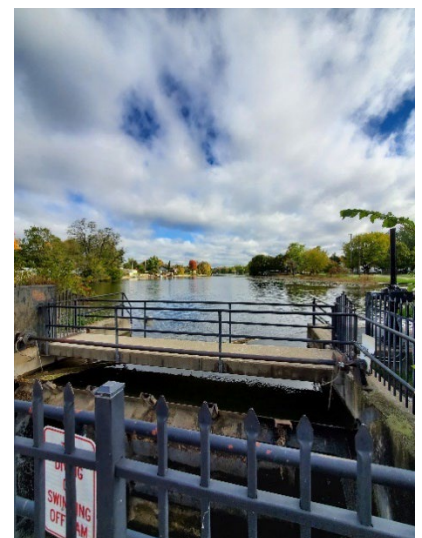
Downtown businesses



City Hall & Fire Station



City Hall



Mill Pond Dam



Linden County Park



Symphony Linden



Businesses on W. Broad Street

Target Audiences

Who needs to hear Linden’s story? Target Audiences for Economic Development

Identifying the marketing opportunities starts with first defining the target market segments with differentiated needs. There are many diverse individuals and groups who may be considered “customers” of the City, from residents to the City Council, community leaders, local businesses, and potential businesses. To ensure adequate focus on moving the City closer to its economic development vision of attracting the right types of new businesses, we identified primary audiences and secondary audiences.

Primary Audiences

1. Developers, Investors, Entrepreneurs
2. Visitors/Potential Residents
3. Regional Organizations & Public-Private Partnerships

1. Developers, Investors & Entrepreneurs

Developers, investors, and entrepreneurs play a highly active role in economic development. The retail, industrial, and commercial businesses that chose to invest here are successful in part due to the location, services, access, and proximity to customers that Linden offers. Continuing to communicate, connect, and partner with developers in those fields will aid in attracting new businesses, maintaining, and retaining industry growth.

2. Visitors/Potential Residents

Linden offers a unique experience that many modernized small towns in Michigan cannot offer. The allure of Linden stems from the historical downtown buildings, especially the Mill, and the spaces inviting people to sit down and relax. The calm and peaceful atmosphere encourage visitors to slow down and take it all in. The gazebo, the plantings and landscaping, the pond, the river, parks, and the businesses in the area combine to create a unique charm that few Michigan small cities can claim. That invitation to come and enjoy Linden should be a priority and encouraging visitors will contribute to a successful downtown on a short-term basis, and potentially increase the number of residents on a long-term scale.

3. Regional & Intermediary Organizations and Public-Private Partnerships

Regional and intermediary organizations and public-private partnerships serve as catalysts and neutral meeting grounds to connect universities, the private sector, and the public sector. These organizations are or will be key partners and can provide Linden access to a network on a much larger scale. Some examples of such organizations include, but are not limited to:

- Linden DDA: <https://www.lindenmi.us/dda>
- Fenton & Linden Chamber of Commerce: <https://www.fentonlindenchamber.com/>
- Flint & Genesee Group: <https://www.flintandgenesee.org/>
- Small Business Development Center: <https://sbdcmichigan.org/>
- Michigan Township Association: <https://www.michiganTownships.org/>
- Michigan Municipal League: <http://www.mml.org/home.html>
- Michigan Economic Developers Association: <https://www.medaweb.org/>
- Michigan Chamber of Commerce: <https://www.michamber.com/>
- MEDC: <https://www.michiganbusiness.org/>
- I-69 Thumb Region: <http://i-69thumbregion.org/>
- Kettering University: <https://www.kettering.edu/>
- Mott Community College: <https://www.mcc.edu>
- University of Michigan-Flint: <https://www.umflint.edu/>
- SBDC: <https://michigansbdc.org/>

Creating Personas

Personas are fictional and visual portraits of the city's ideal customers. Personas enable the community to understand those customers better and makes it easier to tailor content to their specific interests, needs, behaviors, and concerns. Understanding personas allow the creation of a customer journey that recognizes different hot buttons and critical touchpoints. They can be developed through observations, formal research, interviews and by analyzing analytics gleaned from actual customers to create fresh insights and periodically to create each persona. They influence the tone, style and delivery strategies for your content and ability to identify content opportunities on specific topics. By creating and using personas, the city will be able to activate communications. For persona information and tools, HubSpot is an excellent resource: <https://www.hubspot.com/make-my-persona>

Understanding Linden's Residents

By having a better understanding of the existing residents in Linden, including their demographics, socioeconomic status, lifestyle preferences and other characteristics, community leaders can take appropriate steps to retain existing residents, attract visitors, and find future residents of similar lifestyle groups. Additionally, the potential community investors should have a clear understanding of the lifestyles that have selected Linden as their home.

Below is a breakdown of the existing households within Linden and their Market Segmentation, which includes socio-economic and lifestyle types using a system by Experian called Mosaic Lifestyle Segmentation. The data is based on credit information and consumer data from a variety of public record sources, self-reported information, information from the United States Census, and commercial entities. Mosaic segments the country into 19 overarching groups and 71 underlying types.

The chart below identifies Linden’s largest segments in comparison to other segments, their key traits, and reach tactics that are successful.

Table 2: Traits and Reach Tactics by Demographic Segments

Demographic Segment	Key Traits	Market Profile/Reach tactics
Suburban Sophisticates (J34) Aged 66–75 <i>12% of households in Linden</i> Household income: \$50,000–\$74,999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retired • Financially secure • AARP members • Established homes • Avid newspaper readers • Republican households • Single-family homeowners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend most of their time around their homes reading, gardening, and watching TV • Like dining out and go to casual restaurants • Have traditional tastes and are a strong market for books and garden supplies • Fans of traditional media, including print, TV, and radio • Reach this consumer group with something shiny in their USPS mailboxes
Sport Utility Families (D15) Aged 36-45 <i>10.9% of households in Linden</i> Household income: \$125,000–\$149,999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suburb living • Comfortable spending • Saving for college • Outdoor leisure • Athletic activities • Parents • Single-family homeowners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upscale, middle-aged couples with school-aged children living active family lifestyles in outlying suburbs • Built up equity in houses that are now considered within reasonable commuting distance of city jobs as well as rural parks. • Families have deep roots and belong to the PTA, church groups and unions. • Busy, child-centered lifestyles • Sports-interested families who join leagues to play softball, basketball, and football; they’re also close enough to lakes and parkland where they can fish, hunt and boat • These consumers often shop e-tailer and discount retailers, but they head to kid-oriented specialty stores for toys, games, and sporting equipment • Spend a lot of time online • To reach these consumers, leverage email campaigns, social media, and direct mail.

<p>Enjoying Retirement (Q62) Aged 76+ 8.1% of households in Linden Household income: \$35,000–\$49,999</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retirees • Established credit • Cruise vacations • Brand-loyal • Traditional engagement • Republican supporter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No longer in the workforce • They live well on decent pensions and investments • Enjoy walking or a round of golf • Indoor activities--watching TV and listening to classical music as well as pursuing hobbies like needlework and playing cards • Brand-loyal traditionalists like to buy tried-and-true styles at stores they've patronized for years • Active in their communities • Reach through newspapers
<p>No Place Like Home (E20) 6.4% of households in Linden Aged 51-65 Household Income: \$75,000–\$99,999</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart shoppers • Conservative values • Social media fans • Large households • Tech apprentices • Multi-generational homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multigenerational households living in exurban comfort • Many households contain 50-something adults and their 20-something children or aging parents sharing the family home • Educated households contain multiple workers earning good salaries in a mix of white-collar, sales jobs, and blue-collar jobs • The baby boomer adults are content with sedentary pursuits like collecting antiques and catching concerts, movies and theatre performances • Their preferred exercise includes jogging and yoga, and they eat healthy and pay attention to nutrition • Their outgoing and active adult kids prefer to hit the night spots, roar around on motorcycles, and enjoy camping and backpacking • Like to purchase products from catalogs and websites • Tend to resonate with brands that portray honesty, loyalty, and pride • They prefer learning about brand messages through direct mail campaigns and their social media channels

The Kind of Growth that Fits

The way to encourage the kind of economic growth that makes the most sense for the City of Linden is to develop and communicate the right types of key messages to the right target audiences at the right time, through the right channels. This may seem like a complex or daunting task, but the City has done a fair amount of the legwork to set a good foundation for appropriate growth. These functions include the work the DDA performs, the new municipal website, social media activity, and direct sales functions. For a City of

Linden's size and character, a targeted approach to place branding and marketing will focus time, money, and energy into the type of growth and development that fits the character of the community.

Leveraging information gained from the Master Plan opinion survey in marketing materials when talking to potential investors and developers would help illustrate the existing demand for services by residents. The following question and answer from the survey demonstrates demand:

What would you like to see in Linden that doesn't currently exist?

Common responses (274 total):

- More/better restaurants
- More grocery options
- Entertainment establishments
- New/more businesses (in general)
- Youth amenities & activities
- Improved roads
- Pedestrian/bicycle connections
- More recreational facilities/recreation center
- Public art
- Keep it the way it is

Marketing Research Recommendation: The City may consider working with a professional analyst to perform a Retail/Commercial Analysis Study to identify retail leakages, market opportunities, and gain a foundation of expert-generated data and analysis for investors, developers, entrepreneurs. This data can then be communicated in various marketing channels to support the case for Linden to be the best choice for members of the investment and development community.

Table 3: Key Audiences / Key Marketing Messages / Outreach Tools Chart

Segment	Primary Interests	Outreach Tools	Established Key Messages to Segment
Investors, Entrepreneurs, Developers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return on investment • Reducing risk • Quality/style of development • Quick tenant placement • Predictable permitting process • Zoning and land use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in community building vision • Trade media and press • Briefings/tours • Website • Social media • Area business reports • Target Market Analyses (residential/retail) • Info sheets/brochures (i.e. Business development packets) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a healthy labor force of 58.9% • Linden has purchase power: The median income is well-above the county and state at \$72,933 • We are affordable: Linden has a lower cost of living than neighboring areas • We have excellent recreational opportunities: A beautiful natural feature of the downtown is the Shiawassee River and historical Mill Pond. The State Bank Trail and LAFF pathway offer year-round recreational opportunities. • New commercial investment and development in downtown is happening • Families choose us for our excellent school system
Visitors/Potential Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entertainment opportunities • Fun activities for all age groups • High quality of life • High quality of education • Affordability • Accessibility • Convenience • Safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Social Media • Word of mouth • Advertisements and Paid media • Newspaper or media articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charming, historical downtown with retail and dining opportunities • Great for recreation and play—Linden has Enjoy our Mill Pond, gazebo, and the State Bank recreational trail • Affordable while offering a great quality of life • Great school system • Linden’s small-town charm and agrarian heritage offer a perfect place to raise a family

Regional & Intermediary Organizations, Public-Private Partnerships (Chamber of Commerce, Schools, Foundations, Colleges and Universities, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting and expanding economic development in the region • Growing the organization's reputation and credibility • Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Websites • Social media • Brochures/Fact sheets • Briefings, meetings • Engagement in community building vision • Community educational forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Together we can make Linden a great place to do business and development projects • Forward-thinking leadership is open to change • We are leveraging your investment
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Telling Linden's Story

The 30-second elevator pitch

Telling Linden's story to its target audiences, and more specifically, to potential investors and developers, is a critical first step for the community to attract the type of investment that fits and experience the right type of growth. Developing a succinct yet complete 30-second elevator pitch that accurately illustrates the community and can be communicated through a variety of channels is the first step to successfully positioning and marketing Linden. Points of interest could be added in certain instances in bullet format depending upon the specific target audience and media (i.e. labor force size, median income, downtown traffic counts).

Linden is a community that has managed to keep the best of its Victoria-era charm while maintaining a forward-facing focus on continuing to provide its residents with the elements they need to build a wonderful life. Generations of families continue to choose Linden and call it home. It is the purist definition of community—neighbors look out for each other, kids can safely run around and explore, and families gather to take a relaxing breath away from the hustle and bustle of life.

As a town of about 4,000 people in the southwest corner of Genesee County, downtown Linden is home to thriving shops, restaurants, and professional services. Among many others, Linden's points of pride include its well-maintained parks and waterways, excellent schools, local businesses, charming atmosphere, senior center, and the intangible assets like safety, care, cooperation, and community support.

Linden is where Yesterday Meets Today.

Community Marketing Strategy 1: Identify & Market Redevelopment Ready Sites

To be vibrant and competitive, Michigan communities must be ready for development by planning for new investment and reinvestment, identifying assets and opportunities, and focusing limited resources. A major part of the RRC program focuses on the creation of a predictable and straightforward experience for investors, businesses, and residents working within the community. As part of that effort, this strategy provides Linden with a plan to land new and reinvestment. One of the most direct and implementable actions a community can take is the marketing of the redevelopment ready sites in the City.

Target Audiences:

- **Developers and investors**
- **Regional and intermediary organizations and public-private partnerships**

The Priority Redevelopment Sites section in the City of Linden Master Plan identified four sites within Linden that will be targeted as priority redevelopment sites. Specific strategies and a conceptual redevelopment concept plan were prepared for each site. These sites included:

1. Evan's Building
2. DPW Yard
3. Parkside
4. Old Theater

Identifying three to five prime sites to promote to developers and investors focuses promotional efforts on improving the potential entertainment, overnight accommodation, retail, and dining opportunities available to residents and visitors. As an effort to attract key target audience members to learn more about key re/development opportunities, the City should develop the following:

- Dedicated page on the City's website
- A Business Information Packet
- Site-specific one-sheets or brochures
- Request for Qualifications (RFQs)
- Partnering with MEDC

Dedicated webpage

A page on the City's website that contains information about the visions for the redevelopment sites is an effective way to spread the word about and generate excitement about the redevelopment opportunities. The webpage should include existing relevant information including to generate interest and increase reach including the list below.

- Site information including a description, specs, maps, images, incentives, and contact information
- Community assets
- Competitive advantages
- Community demographics
- The development process overview

Business Information Packet/Developer Recruitment Tool

A communications tool that would help the community stand out is a Business Information Packet/Developer Recruitment Tool that can be developed to give potential investors and outside business owners straightforward and useful information about the community and its economy. It can include images, graphics, information, and charts on economic aspects and unique assets in Linden. Specifically, data on the labor force, traffic counts, market size, proximity to talent, major employers, affordability, labor market, incentives, etc. Additionally, content should include quality of life metrics using information about the school systems, the downtown, businesses in Linden, recreation opportunities, as well as brief information and pictures about available sites throughout the area.

Site-Specific Brochure

Coupled with the Business Information Packet, site-specific brochures that feature the redevelopment sites and provide statistics, images, incentives, and possible uses and applications would serve as a leave-behind for potential investors and developers. These could be posted on the website for download and printed when meeting face-to-face with interested parties.

Request for Qualifications (RFQs)

Request for Qualifications (RFQs) for key development sites can be useful during the pre-qualification stage of a procurement process and can be leveraged as a city-branded marketing tool for sites. The City would have the opportunity to gather responses from interested developers while explaining the site's characteristics and the perks of developing in Linden. Those who successfully respond to the RFQ and meet the qualification criteria would be included in the subsequent [Request for Proposals \(RFP\)](#) solicitation process. The city can then choose the developer that best suits the interests of the community.

Once the city has officially identified sites for development or redevelopment, include information and photos in the Developer Recruitment Tool.

As development occurs and as site projects are completed, dedication ceremonies where partners and supporters are invited shall be held to celebrate success. Post-project signage should identify any grant funding, partnership support, financial support, and other incentive programs that assisted in development, and should be displayed in the same areas where the pre-development project signage was displayed.

Partner with MEDC

Additionally, support from the MEDC's Redevelopment Services Team (RSTeam) will aid in marketing the community's redevelopment ready sites. Linden's economic and community development team can work with the RSTeam to build the community's redevelopment ready site map page. An example of this is here: <https://www.miplace.org/redevelopment-ready-sites/dearborn/>

It is recommended to be proactive in development efforts by engaging with community stakeholders potentially affected by each development/redevelopment. Information and visual representations about the projects should be communicated through signage, printed and online material and located at City Hall. The material should also be duplicated and shared with community centers, schools and other public places that have access to public audiences. Use social media channels to communicate project status, updates, images; and gauge and respond to public perception and feedback.

Community Marketing Strategy 2: Linden Ambassadors

Whether individuals set out to be in the role or not, often times politicians, business leaders, hotel workers, uber drives, retailers, real estate professionals, education professionals, investors, and well-known residents find themselves in the role of city ambassador. Each of them may have different messages and intents, but they become the face of the community. Often, the most

important ambassadors for cities are often its current and past residents. They may have the credibility and a capacity to convey positive sentiments to prospective audiences. Consider how word-of-mouth marketing works—when trusted sources promote a brand, more loyal followers are gained, and is often times is more effective than advertising.

Target Audiences:

- Tourists and potential residents

Potential Population for Volunteers:

- Business leaders and DDA members

City ambassadors are engaged to represent the place in a positive, influential manner and often are volunteers. Considering that Linden has a healthy base of volunteers, a city ambassador program should be manageable and effective. A well-managed ambassador program can positively influence external perceptions of the community. The form of the program could take the form of a formal, in-person training, or could be an informal group of digitally savvy residents with positive attitudes about the community. In either or both instances, residents with social media influence could be tapped to deliver image-rich content to their social networks.

As an example, the Flint & Genesee Group in Genesee County runs a Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) program where volunteers attend a half day training. They learn about the history of Flint, present-day occurrences and events, an overview of retail and businesses, and sites of interest. The expectation is that they are invited and expected to attend special events and be enthusiastic about the city's future vision.

While the Linden Ambassador program doesn't need to be as formal as the Flint & Genesee Group's CTA program, initiating an ambassador program with a group of influential volunteers is an effective word-of-mouth strategy. The ambassadors would need to remain in regular communication with city staff, potentially scheduling quarterly meetings to hear about updates, and maintain the expectation of spreading positive news about the community among their network and in their social media accounts.

Community Marketing Strategy 3: Content Marketing

Content marketing is the practice of crafting messages to resonate with target audiences. It provides the opportunity to build credibility and trust by turning visitors into audience members, then audience members to potential visitors, and potential visitors into actual customers and then loyal advocates. There are four types of media content—paid, earned, shared, and owned. An effective strategy incorporates all types.

Target Audiences: All

Paid Media: Paid media for a communications program is social media advertising, sponsored content, and email marketing.

Earned Media: Earned media is either publicity or media relations. The media outlets include local and state-wide news media, radio, and publications, both online and in print. It's getting the community's name in print, having a newspaper or media outlet write about you, appearing on the news, radio, or podcasts.

Shared Media: Shared media is also known as social media. It includes not just social networking, but partnerships, distribution, and promotion.

Owned Media: Owned media is otherwise known as content. It is something owned, and it lives on the website. You control the messaging and tell the story in a way you want it told.

By integrating paid, earned, shared, and owned media, the authority of the can be further established and its reach more concentrated. When you integrate the four media types, you may find you also have influencer engagement and partnerships that extend beyond your internal walls.

Where to start?

The easiest place to start is owned media because the organization has control over the messaging. Content generation plays a role in the effectiveness of marketing/branding your community, and public relations relies heavily on content. As we think about the primary audiences for the City's marketing, we need to think about the type of information that would both interest them and form a concept of who and what Linden is all about.

Start with the recreational opportunities and business that support them that are based in Linden. Ask the downtown business about the reasons they chose Linden, what challenges they face, what successes they experience, how they find employees, and any long-term plans they may have. Compiling those stories will develop and generate content to provide to media. Learn the story of the businesses that are experiencing success in the community and share them with media outlets through press releases and story outlines. Proactively provide branding elements and images to the media to accompany stories and releases.

Using a social media hashtag when you post or share these stories would enable residents, business owners, and visitors to easily find related content online and would encourage them to use the hashtag. Encouraging the current business owners to use the hashtag when sharing on their social media channels will catalyze the ripple effect and continue to help build awareness of the city with the target audiences.

Public Relations Campaigns and Content Ideas:

- Community history lesson (interview and photo of a long-term resident who is knowledgeable about the community's history)
- Completion and updates of plans related to economic development
- Local business spotlight (interview and photo of the business owner)
- "Entrepreneur Corner" or "Entrepreneur of the Month" (interview and photo of a business owner who started their first business)
- "Commercial real estate site of the week" (vacant land or building with photo and the story behind it/info about it)
- Non-profit spotlight (interview, background story, and photo)
- Pre-event preparation with photos
- Post-event summaries with photos

- Sharing stories of events and other news from neighboring communities
- Photo contests

Below is a non-exhaustive list of relevant media outlets including radio:

- MLive: <https://www.mlive.com/>
- Michigan Radio: <https://www.michiganradio.org/>
- Tri-County Times: <https://www.tctimes.com/>
- ABC 12: <https://www.abc12.com/>
- WNEM: <https://www.wnem.com/>

Once the content is available, you'll use shared media to distribute it, paid media to amplify it, and earned media to rubber-stamp it.

Shared Media

Instagram

Instagram is a good channel when it comes to reaching a younger audience and using images to create awareness and promotion. It is recommended that Linden, especially downtown Linden, consider setting up an Instagram page on behalf of the community to reach younger residents, visitors, and potential residents. The City's commitment to recreational opportunities in every season translates well in images, which is Instagram's main method of communication. Building development and available property images could be posted to promote economic vitality.

Grow followers by first following them—reach out and follow residents, businesses, schools, and others that live, work, and play in and around Linden.

Twitter

There are some good examples of cities that are aiming for increased communication and transparency and they do a good job using twitter to reach their audiences. Setting up a Twitter account and using a tool like Hootsuite to enable staff to generate posts efficiently and enable them on various accounts will streamline staff time and will enable a wide reach. Access this link for more information about case studies on cities using Twitter: <https://www.clearpointstrategy.com/cities-using-twitter-foster-transparency/>

You Tube

As video content is created, it is highly recommended to create a YouTube channel to reach a wide audience. Not only are target audiences on YouTube, but as the internet's second largest search engine. YouTube can help improve SEO (search engine optimization) and overall brand presence. YouTube allows people to present unique content that's easy for viewers to consume and share. You can upload your logo to communicate the City's brand. Here is more information and a step-by-step guide:

<https://www.hubspot.com/youtube-marketing>

TikTok

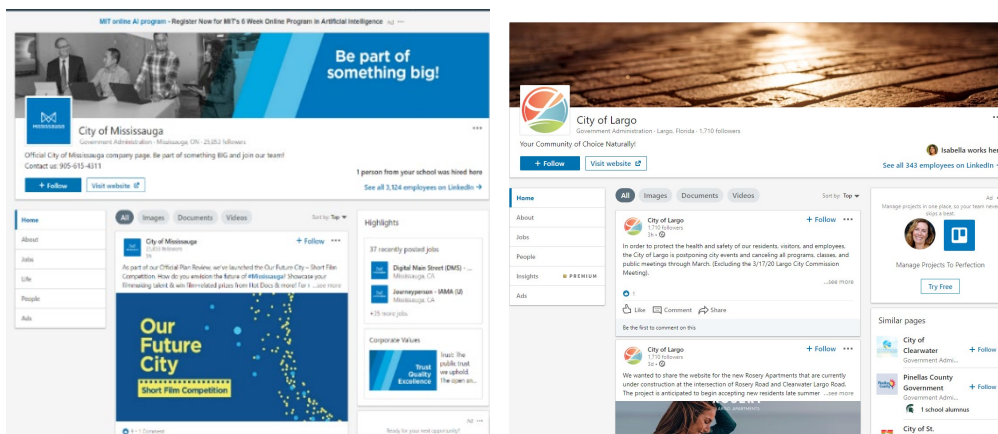
TikTok is a relatively new social media platform that has exploded in popularity, particularly among young audiences. The City and DDA can leverage TikTok to showcase the community's amenities in a fun and creative way. Linden maintains a TikTok channel to promote local events and new developments and should continue to utilize this media outlet. Below are strategies to get more engagement on TikTok:

- Create short videos that showcase the community's unique features and economic advantages. Use popular music, effects, and filters to make the videos more engaging.
- Use challenges to promote Linden's economic growth. Create challenges highlighting workforce, businesses, natural beauty, and recreation opportunities.
- Use TikTok's advertising platform to reach a targeted audience. TikTok's advertising platform allows accounts to create targeted ads based on demographics, interests, and location.

By leveraging TikTok, communities can reach a younger and more diverse audience, increasing the potential for future recruitment opportunities.

LinkedIn

The City should consider creating a Linden account on LinkedIn for economic development purposes and to publish content about economic-related activities in the community. By building a company page for the City, you can invite individuals to follow your page. Be sure to include information in the "About" section to include economic development key messages to properly position Linden to those unfamiliar with the community. This will give the City an opportunity to engage with target audience members in a professional environment, target key prospects utilizing LinkedIn's professional data, and nurture professionals by delivering insightful, relevant, and educational content in a native newsfeed format. Posting both created and curated content will enable the community to interact with target audience members and will extend your reach when content is shared. Local, regional, state, and national level economic development organizations are successfully utilizing LinkedIn for marketing and lead generation initiatives. Examples of the City of Mississauga, Canada, and the City of Largo, Florida's LinkedIn pages can be seen here.



Encourage the City's leadership team to follow other municipalities, developers, investors and site selectors who have a strong presence on LinkedIn. By linking or sharing content generated by the City on the City's page, individual team members can start to build a network of target audience members. Additionally, by following other communities like the City of Mississauga, Canada, you can borrow some campaign and content posting ideas that could also work for Linden. By following these groups, you will not only learn about good practices in this space, but you'll also be able to start a relationship with potential partners and investors through this means of interaction.

More information about LinkedIn can be found here:

<https://www.linkedin.com/business/marketing/blog/linkedin-pages/5-ways-marketers-can-build-an-audience-on-linkedin>

The Others

It's important not to ignore Reddit, Pinterest, and some of the others. Test post in those spots and see what happens. For instance, if you have a nice image on a piece of content and you pin it to a board on Pinterest, it could help drive a good number of new readers.

Shared Media Campaign Recommendation

As the downtown area sees additional commercial development, and the LAFF recreational path moves into phase two (projected completion date of November 2023), Linden will see an increase in visitors and foot traffic.

Marketing Linden as a destination for visitors would be supported by a social media campaign with images and content about the charming downtown, the business that exist, and the events that happen. To raise awareness of the City and encourage additional non-residents to visit downtown Linden, it is recommended to initiate a social media campaign through existing accounts and channels, encourage visitors and residents to post photos of themselves enjoying downtown Linden and posting photos on social with the following possible hashtags:

#LindenLove
#TheLindenLife
#LindenIsHappening

Additionally, the City leadership, business owners, and community leaders should be asked to post about the events and happenings throughout the community on their social media channels.

Paid Media

Paid media may be in the form of paid amplification (such as [Outbrain](#) or [Sprinklr](#)), sponsored content, [native advertising](#), or sponsorships of influential blogs. It also could take the form of sponsored content on Facebook or LinkedIn or sponsored tweets on Twitter. You can start with a budget of as little as \$5 a day. LinkedIn also often offers free advertising coupons to those who use the social network often. While you don't want to spend money to sponsor all your content, it's a good idea to test it with one piece each month.

Earned Media

Now it's time to build relationships with industry bloggers, journalists, and other influencers who may share your content—after they learn who you are and what value you might bring to their readers or followers. On Twitter, create a list of bloggers and journalists you want to collaborate with. This will make it easy to follow them, share their work, and start conversations with them. An example of a good blog and Twitter account to collaborate with is @johnlongshore and other similar bloggers.

Create a list of books and podcasts you want to review. Every author and podcaster need reviews and ratings to gain more traction. They may be appreciative of the work you do there and may be willing to do something for you in return.

On LinkedIn, create tags (<https://www.natlawreview.com/article/why-you-should-use-tagging-feature-your-linkedin-posts>) so you can augment your LinkedIn visibility and follower growth. This may lead to new relationships where you can ask them to share your content later.

On [Pocket](#), create a list of bloggers to watch. Then any time they publish new content, share it with your own networks. Eventually, these influencers may share your content, include it in their own content or interview you for a piece they're producing.

Owned Media

Owned media is content that you own. If you want to truly own it—and never lose it—always publish on your site first and then use those outposts for distribution and promotion. Answer questions customers, clients, prospects, loyalists, stakeholders, your family, and even the trolls ask. Build your content so one big piece can be repurposed into several smaller pieces.

Content Planning

The best way to get organized, efficient, and effective on social media is to build an editorial calendar for social media posting. Similar to how a team would view and organize editorial content planning, it's helpful to use an Excel spreadsheet or similar tool to organize content pieces, links, dates, and statistics. By planning future content postings and creating pre-built headers and post images, you can be more intentional about your social content.

This tool could also help guide and plan content with the wider team as events and business openings happen and will provide a cohesive voice in your online communications channels. The important factors to keep in mind when putting together a content marketing strategy is frequency and consistency. It is recommended to determine a set frequency for the content types, so your followers keep the city front of mind. Making sure the content can easily be shared and even asking people to share it will expand your reach.

The screen shot below contains an image example of an excel spreadsheet identifying social media content planning components.

Date	Section	Title/Location	Blog/News item/Newsletter story	Link	Social Channel	Image	Author	Views	Shares
	Entrepreneur Cor	Tech company	Newsletter		Facebook, LinkedIn	Person_v1			
	Local Business Sp	Local business name	Blog/site		Facebook, LinkedIn	Person_v2			
	Commercial real	Site 1	Blog/site		Facebook, LinkedIn	Land_v1			
	Local Business Sp	Site 2	Blog/site		Facebook, LinkedIn	Person_v3			

Metrics for Online Presence and Social Media

Website:

Use Google Analytics on the website to track website traffic, page views, average time spent on the website, referral links from partner sites; leads generated.

Social Media:

- Track follower growth on social media channels
- Likes and reactions for your posts
- Monitor mentions
 - On Facebook, you'll get notifications whenever someone tags your page name in their post
- Determine reach
 - On Facebook, go to your Insights tab and click the reach option in the navigation panel on the left. The top graph you see displays your post reach, which is basically the number of people who saw your post. Scroll to the bottom of the page to find your total reach.
- This is the number of people who saw any activity from your page as a result of follower interactions, ads, mentions, check-ins, and so on.
- Review replies and comments for your posts
 - Replies and comments on your posts can help you gauge how interesting or engaging your topics are. As with reactions, they're direct response metrics that help you weed out uninteresting content from your publishing schedule. Because replies are typed out, you can also view individual posts that performed well to measure follower/fan sentiment. To find this information on Facebook, go to your Insights and click the Posts option in the left navigation. Scroll down to All Posts Published and click the right drop-down arrow to view Reactions, Comments, and Shares.
- Find out and track what content is being shared

Social Media Listening

Another option to monitor comments or feedback about Linden, including what is shared by tourists on their social media networks, would be to initiate a social media listening tool. Many good options for tools, including the descriptions of the tools' operations can be found here:

<https://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-business/12-best-social-media-monitoring-tools-consider>

Content Marketing Evaluation Metrics

For each media type, there are different metrics to track.

Paid Media

It depends on the tactics you use under this umbrella, but could include the following:

- Social media marketing, such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, or Twitter ads and boosted content
- Landing pages and how many people download your content and go into your email marketing database
- New fans or followers who come from reading your sponsored content
- Leads and conversions

Earned Media

To measure the effectiveness, consider the following metrics:

- How much web traffic comes from a story about your organization? See if those news outlets and blogs are sending visitors to your site
- An increase in new audiences
- If you have access to a CRM (customer relationship management system), the number of new email subscribers that resulted from the story
- An increase in search rankings for the topic for which the story is about

Shared Media

It's recommended to track the number of fans and followers because sharp declines—or a trend of decreasing followers—will tell you something is wrong. Try these options:

- Assign points to things such as likes, retweets, shares, and comments. This gives you numerical data on whether something works.
- Use unique URLs, coupons, discount codes, or even telephone numbers only in your social media efforts. This will tell you whether you're getting results from these efforts.

Owned Media

The beauty of owned media is it completely integrates with the other three media types. Think about the following:

- Pay attention to unique visitors, time spent on the site, and bounce rate. Those things, such as an increase (or decrease) in social media followers, can indicate success or failure. If you have an organized owned media program, you're likely distributing through email marketing. When you integrate your content with this paid media tactic, you can track things such as downloads and shares. Do people download the content? Do they read or watch or listen to it once it's been downloaded? Is it so good they can't help but share it with their communities? Are people sharing your content? This is important to know because it provides proof to a new reader that you know what you're doing. Track the effectiveness of a community (people who comment on and share your content) by whether they're referring business to you.

Benchmarking for Events

The metrics for event marketing success encompass financial results, event attendance, lead generation, overall awareness, and post-event analysis, all aligned with the overall business goals.

Event Attendance: Measuring the total attendee draw is a natural gauge for event success. Higher attendee numbers have a trickle-down effect as they can translate into greater event buzz for subsequent future events.

Media Impact: The media metric has several component parts encompassing social media traffic and new followers generated; clicks and website visits; and press coverage, both quantitative and qualitative.

Post-Event Surveys: These surveys can provide an accurate and timely read on the experiences and satisfaction levels of event attendees. The survey can also touch on other helpful areas such as likelihood to purchase from vendors, partners, and sponsors.

Benchmarking Economic Development

When tracking economic development metrics, it is critical to have a set of metrics that are used consistently year over year. A simple excel spreadsheet can be used to track the community's economic development metrics.

Metrics Include:

- New investment
- Number and type of new business openings
- Number and size of new business expansions
- New job creation (as result of new investment)
- How many jobs retained by staying in the community rather than going elsewhere
- Business closures
- Jobs lost



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