

City of Kalamazoo

Economic Development Strategy
September 2024

Appendix II

Planning Stakeholders

The City of Kalamazoo Economic Development Plan was developed with the thoughtful perspective and valuable contributions of many stakeholders throughout the city and region. Thank you to the individuals and entities who shared their time and resources for this work.

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Summary of the City of Kalamazoo's Open House Engagement Activity

Background

On May 8, the City of Kalamazoo hosted an open house for the community in an effort to share progress on their current strategy development work. The open house also served as a forum for the City to gather feedback from community members. Attendees were asked to consider a variety of statements about the City of Kalamazoo. Using stickers, the attendees were then asked indicate if they agreed or disagreed with the statement and to what level. The following pages summarize these rankings.

Please note that stickers were regularly placed in between rankings so the counts are somewhat subjective. For transparency, a note explaining the sticker distribution is included under each statement.

The open house also asked attendees to leave comments. We have included a sample of these comments in three "Comments from the Community" sections. Not all of the comments collected during the open house are included in these sections. Comments were excluded for several reasons including legibility, duplication, and relevancy.

Key Takeaways from Public Participation

Topic 1: Business Vitality

- The majority of participants do not believe finding resources to start a business is straight forward in the City of Kalamazoo.
- Participants are divided on whether the City has a diverse economic base with many employment opportunities.
- Several comments on this topic state that the City struggles to communicate effectively and provides inconsistent support for local businesses.

Topic 2: Quality of Life

- Most participants are proud of the City and enjoy the entertainment options it provides.
- Most participants believe the City needs to improve its walkability.
- The comments from this topic highlight several safety concerns related to the downtown area.

Topic 3: Vision and Leadership

- Overall, the open house attendees believe the City of Kalamazoo does not have a clear economic development vision and struggles to prepare residents to enter the labor force.
- Most participants agree that the city has some resources and expertise to advance economic development. However, related comments indicate that accessing this expertise can be challenging if not impossible.

STATEMENT 1.1: It is straightforward to find resources for how to start a business in the City of Kalamazoo.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
5	12	8	5	0

Note on participant ranking: All the strongly disagree stickers were placed between *Strongly Disagree* and *Disagree*. Three of the *Agree* stickers were between *Agree* and *Strongly Agree*

STATEMENT 1.2: The city has a diverse economy with many businesses providing employment opportunities.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
2	12	0	15	0

Note on participant ranking: Seven of the *Disagree* stickers were placed between *Disagree* and *No Opinion*. Ten of the *Agree* stickers were between *No Opinion* and *Agree*.

STATEMENT 1.3: The City of Kalamazoo is business-friendly and welcoming to new ideas.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	7	4	17	0

Note on participant ranking: Seven of the *Agree* stickers were placed between *Agree* and *Strongly Agree*. Four of the *Disagree* stickers were between *Disagree* and *No Opinion*

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMUNITY

- "The businesses that are supported most by the city are larger employers and industries."
- "While resources exist to support smaller and start up businesses, there still are not enough financial, technical, and neighborhood-based resources to truly incubate these types of opportunities."
- "The City supports businesses depending on who, what, and where they are or want to be located."
- "Kzoo seems very intent on encouraging economic development. My perception is that development in the city is sporadic. Small businesses come and go (especially restaurants) Larger employers seem to focus more on expanding in surrounding communities/suburbs."
- "I believe the city would benefit by a more balanced approach with businesses. In my experience, the building department and fire marshal have too much influence and interaction with brick-and-mortar businesses; the cornerstone of local economies. Also, financial incentives are far too low."
- "I have used the City website to gather information about starting a business."
- "Many resources but communication falls short"
- "There are a lot of resources but If I were just starting out, I wouldn't know where to start."
- "There should be a one stop center for start ups and resources to grow a business versus all of the groups we have today. Doesn't feel cohesive and it's confusing."
- "We are pretty reliant on a few big companies and industries"
- "Nice diversity of businesses. Redesign for walkability will be great for downtown and street level businesses."
- "Definitely welcoming to new ideas and could be more business-friendly with less restrictive zoning."

STATEMENT 2.1: I can access goods and services within my neighborhood or adjacent neighborhood.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
2	8	1	14	5

Note on participant ranking: All of the *Strongly Disagree* stickers were placed between *Strongly Disagree* and *Disagree*.

STATEMENT 2.2: Entertainment and amenities are available in the City of Kalamazoo that fit my demographic.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
3	3	0	20	7

Note on participant ranking: Cluster of stickers between stating near *Agree* and continuing to *Strongly Agree*.

STATEMENT 2.3: The City of Kalamazoo has opportunities to travel safely by bike, vehicle, or foot across different neighborhoods.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	11	14	6	0

Note on participant ranking: Tight cluster of stickers distributed along the line between *Disagree*, *No Opinion* and *Agree*.

STATEMENT 2.4: I go to downtown Kalamazoo when I am searching for culture, arts, and entertainment.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	3	5	15	10

Note on participant ranking: Tight cluster of stickers distributed along the line between *Agree* and *Strongly Agree*

STATEMENT 2.5: I am excited to have visitors in town and showcase Kalamazoo’s businesses, attractions, and entertainment opportunities.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	3	7	16	7

Note on participant ranking: Tight cluster of stickers distributed along the line between *Agree* and *Strongly Agree*

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMUNITY

- “Walkability could be improved especially between neighborhoods. Many sidewalks are damaged or stop and start. Many of the larger roads do not have enough pedestrian crossings. Particularly W. Maine and Drake area. Crossing should be better coordinated with metro bus stops.”
- “Walkability to and from neighborhoods is not great.”
- “Crossing W. Maine, south to north, in Westwood requires going out of your way by a considerable distance.”
- “It is easy to get around by car. Much less safe and easy to get around walking and biking.”
- “We need more lunch options. Fresh salads”
- “I would love to see a higher level of support for the organically grown arts community in Kalamazoo. While I don’t have a grand idea for a booming, multi-million-dollar business, I do know that those big businesses need to attract talent. A vibrant entertaining arts community does that. I also believe Kzoo is on the cusp of and has all the ingredients to be a destination city for performing arts. This would be an economic boost in itself.”
- “More events downtown. We should have a Christmas/Holiday Market like Grand Rapids.”
- More mixed-use businesses inside neighborhoods. If an aspiring business owner could diversify their income by buying a storefront with an apartment above either for renting or for living in, they could feel more comfortable taking the risk. Also, this would encourage walkability.”
- “Mixed use business/housing in neighborhoods.”
- The business mix in Kalamazoo is impressive—however where these businesses are is a challenge. More neighborhood-based business development in childcare, services such as home maintenance, and auto repair. Also, more pipeline development for talent. Consider using Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) to organize businesses in these areas.”
- “It would be cool to see more entertainment/things to do around Kalamazoo. Also, this should be communicated out more. I don’t really know of much to do besides food places around.”
- “There are many bike lanes and sidewalks, though safety is still an area that needs work. I am proud of the street improvements in the past few years. New crossings are not being abided by drivers. Crossing by foot can take over 10 minutes due to no opening to cross the road. Cycling is safer though more work needs to be done.”

STATEMENT 3.1: There is a bold, well-established vision for economic development in the city.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
9	13	6	3	1

Note on participant ranking: Tight cluster of stickers between *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree*

STATEMENT 3.2: The economic development and workforce system prepares its residents for relevant and meaningful employment.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	14	12	2	0

Note on participant ranking: Most stickers were clustered between *No Opinion* and *Disagree*

STATEMENT 3.3: There is expertise in the following subjects to advance Kalamazoo’s economic development.

- Brownfield remediation
- Structuring complex financial deals
- Recruitment of new businesses
- Streamlining the development process

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	9	11	8	0

Note on participant ranking: Tight cluster of stickers distributed along the line between *No Opinion* and *Agree*.

STATEMENT 3.4: The City provides clear and relevant information about upcoming projects or opportunities for businesses.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
3	9	7	11	0

Note on participant ranking: Four stickers were between *Agree* and *Strongly Agree*.

STATEMENT 3.5: There is a clearly defined marketing message about the advantages of establishing a business in the City of Kalamazoo.

Participant Ranking by Sticker Count

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
7	12	7	2	0

Note on participant ranking: Large cluster of stickers distributed along the line between *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree*

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMUNITY

- “Certain businesses receive information early. By the time it’s on the website, the funds are gone.”
- “What does Kzoo want its identity to be?”
- “There should be more outreach to high schoolers that want to a business.”
- “How you can you make the message more known to the youth (8th-12th)”
- “Remove roadblocks to development and unnecessary code restrictions.”
- “Allow businesses within neighborhoods to expand.”
- “There is a plethora of knowledge and talent right here.
- “I can see where you want to go, but there’s no map.”
- “There is a bold vision, but the paths, processes, and especially the way for residents, developers etc. to get engaged—that part isn’t clear.”
- “Yes, there is expertise and there are also so many barriers that it can’t always be activated.”
- “I have noticed resources around, but they can be harder to find and clouded down by lack of explanations and open availability”