

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

CITY OF KALAMAZOO

2024



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the following organizations for their support in the preparation of the City of Kalamazoo Economic Development Strategic Plan.



The City of Kalamazoo is the county seat of Kalamazoo County and home to over 70,000 residents. The Community Planning & Economic Development Department (CPED) oversees land use and planning, housing programs, historic preservation, economic vitality, and the enforcement of codes and ordinances. The Economic Development Corporation (EDC) is the governing board of a special-purpose corporation that provides financing and other assistance for commercial and industrial development projects.



MEDC awarded the City of Kalamazoo a RRC Technical Assistance grant to support the creation of this strategy. MEDC delivers tailored assistance to invest and expand your operations and workforce in Michigan communities. Through collaboration with more than 100 partners, we have the tools and resources to support businesses at any stage of growth. No matter your business size, industry, or community needs, the MEDC's programs and local and regional partners have resources to help. MEDC provided funding through the Redevelopment Ready Community initiative.



Camoin Associates has provided economic development consulting services to municipalities, economic development agencies, and private enterprises since 1999. To learn more about our experience and projects in all of our service lines, please visit our website at www.camoinassociates.com.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Economic development is an endeavor based on collaboration, building partnerships, and recognizing what roles are best suited to be played by partners in the larger ecosystem. The City of Kalamazoo's Economic Development Strategy encompasses economic development activity undertaken by the City along with the activities of many public, private, non-profit, and philanthropic partners throughout Kalamazoo. The strategy seeks to coordinate and advance the positive work that is already underway and direct additional attention to strategies that will help the City reach its vision.

This strategy is inclusive of the wider economic development system, where each partner has a part to play in achieving the shared vision.

Developing an economic development strategy for the City of Kalamazoo began with renewing Kalamazoo's status as a Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) in Michigan. Achieving RRC certification allows communities access to funding opportunities unavailable to non-certified municipalities. Recognizing this advantage, the State of Michigan and the City provided financial support to create a plan to attract investment, expand the tax base, and generate jobs that provide opportunities for wealth creation.

This economic development strategy strongly emphasizes community wealth building, leveraging the successes of the Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo (SPK) efforts. The plan ensures that recommendations are aligned with and enhance the interests and priorities of SPK and other community-related activities. This aligns with the evolving field of economic development across the country. Once an area that relied on measuring success solely with private sector investment and new jobs added to the economy, today's economic development measures of success are based on a broader set of metrics that tell the story about the quality of jobs, the overall health of the community, and diversifying the economic base.

As decisions are made over the next five years based on this strategy, it is imperative to maintain an approach to economic development where neighborhoods are not pitted against downtown or the city against the region. While it is advantageous to take a place-based approach where investments are based on the unique circumstances of a corridor or neighborhood, each investment must tie back to a shared vision for the city. This unified approach will yield the greatest economic gains for the most people.

Economic Development Vision for the City of Kalamazoo



“The City of Kalamazoo is a...

**thriving city for inclusive growth,
attracting talent, catalyzing
innovation, and fostering vibrant
neighborhoods.”**

Setting the Context for “Equitable Economic Development.”

The City of Kalamazoo is steadfast in its commitment to pursuing ambitious goals in its economic development efforts. The city recognizes the importance of creating a thriving economy that benefits all its residents and is dedicated to implementing strategies that drive substantial and inclusive growth.

At the heart of Kalamazoo's approach is a strong focus on equitable economic development and community wealth building. The city's highest priority is ensuring that economic growth translates into real opportunities for its residents, allowing them to share in the prosperity of development. Kalamazoo aims to create a more inclusive and thriving community by prioritizing these values.

There are many ways to define equitable approaches to economic development. For clarity and consistency, the city operates with the definition put forth by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), which published the following:



Economic development promotes economic well-being and improves the quality of life in communities by creating and retaining jobs, enhancing wealth, and providing a stable tax base. Equitable economic development is achieved when every member of a community is able to share in and benefit from economic growth.

- *International Economic Development Council*



Transformation in action.

Several transformational projects are underway within the city that will impact Kalamazoo's economic landscape. This strategy accounts for the current conditions and anticipates how these investments will yield opportunities for related economic growth. Two notable projects are outlined below.

- **Sports and event center** — A privately funded multi-use event center is slated to come to the city in 2028. The space will be 380,000 square feet on Kalamazoo Avenue and include an ice rink, two basketball courts, community space, parking, and an event hall. It will also be the home to Western Michigan University's women's and men's basketball and hockey teams. The developer anticipates that the facility will bring in 55,000 annual attendees and 800,000 people downtown and infuse nearly \$54 million into the [local economy](#).
- **Investments in transportation** — Over the next four years, select streets will be converted from one-way to two-way. This includes Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo Avenue, Ransom Street, South Street, Lovell Street, and West Main Street. The work is slated for full completion by [2028](#). The construction will be phased over the next four years.

2 ESTABLISHING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Economic Development Strategy is built on four goal areas that encompass activities that will drive equitable economic development in the City of Kalamazoo. Each goal area contains descriptions of strategies that outline projects, programs, or approaches to achieving the city's desired outcomes. Anticipated outcomes from the strategies are found on page 31. Pages 6-11 provide an overview and the priorities for each goal area and how they contribute to the overall strategy.

1.

Foster the Business Environment, Target Markets, and Entrepreneurship.

Support a thriving business climate, attract businesses in key sectors, and nurture start-ups and small businesses through resources, mentorship, and financial assistance.

2.

Strengthen Neighborhoods and Community Connections.

Improve quality of life in neighborhoods through comprehensive support, infrastructure investments, and community engagement.

3.

Advance Conditions for Growth.

Plan proactively for future growth by securing strategic land, enhancing infrastructure, and ensuring equitable development.

4.

Improve the Downtown Experience.

Transform downtown into a vibrant, inclusive, and welcoming space for residents and visitors through mixed-use development and cultural enhancements.

GOAL 1 OVERVIEW

Foster the business environment, target markets, and entrepreneurs.

A healthy business climate requires ongoing nurturing and constant engagement with business and trained economic development professionals who can provide insights to policymakers and inform the public on market trends and strategies for growth.

A feedback loop between the City government, institutions, non-profits, and the business community enables proactive responses to emerging issues, timely support, and adaptable strategies that meet the evolving needs of small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). This approach fosters a dynamic business environment where policies are continually refined based on real-world experiences.

Attracting businesses that align with the city's strengths creates a cycle of growth, where successful enterprises support each other, enhance the city's reputation, and draw in more investment. This begins with defining the city's unique competitive assets and distinguishing Kalamazoo from other Southwest Michigan locations. To expand economic opportunities across neighborhoods, delivering consistent and frequent messaging through digital and in-person channels is essential.

Entrepreneurs need access to the right resources at the right time to succeed. A "no wrong door" approach ensures that individuals can easily find and access the necessary support. By integrating financial aid with mentorship and peer networks, Kalamazoo can better prepare small businesses for growth challenges, increasing their chances of long-term success. Inclusive, curated marketing is crucial for ensuring diverse population segments can access these resources, achieved by creating culturally relevant materials and partnering with non-profit and community-based organizations.

Summary of Goal Area

Priorities for this goal area:

1. Clarify economic development leadership and functions and where there is "no wrong door" for businesses and entrepreneurs.
2. Amplifying the city's competitive positioning and market positioning.
3. Supporting the people of Kalamazoo to access good jobs and create businesses.

Implementation timeline for strategies (no.):

- Immediate - 2
- Short-term - 7
- Mid-term - 3
- Long-term - 0



GOAL 2 OVERVIEW

Strengthen neighborhoods and community connections.

In Kalamazoo, neighborhoods are the heartbeat of the city's identity. They are the places where community networks take root, grow, and ultimately weave together the city's fabric. With many neighborhood associations spread across Kalamazoo, a strong grassroots movement advocates for meaningful change. These associations champion initiatives such as workforce development training, small business support, resources for first-time homeowners, and offering pathways for generational change, among other programs. However, the disparity in resources and capacity among these associations, coupled with the lack of clear expectations regarding their interactions with the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED) and other city departments, presents challenges that must be addressed through this strategy.

Neighborhoods hold the potential to be incubators for home-grown businesses that cater to local needs and contribute to the wider regional economy. Developing neighborhood commercial corridors is crucial in creating internal linkages between local businesses and the broader economic ecosystem. The size, scale, and market of these businesses are likely to be different from a downtown business, and it is important to recognize the difference in local serving versus regional serving businesses and ensure areas are not competing against each other but rather are providing complementing uses.

By enhancing physical linkages like accessible pedestrian walkways or safe bicycle travel routes, local spending is circulated more effectively. Another large part of vehicular circulation across the city is being addressed by transforming many of the city's one-way streets into two-way streets.

As the national demand for walkable communities with diverse housing options, strong community networks, and locally driven businesses continues to remain strong, Kalamazoo's neighborhoods are well-positioned to attract new residents and generate economic activity with the right planning and intentional support. Each neighborhood possesses a unique set of assets, and by adopting a place-based approach, the city can effectively leverage these assets to foster growth and development.

Summary of Goal Area

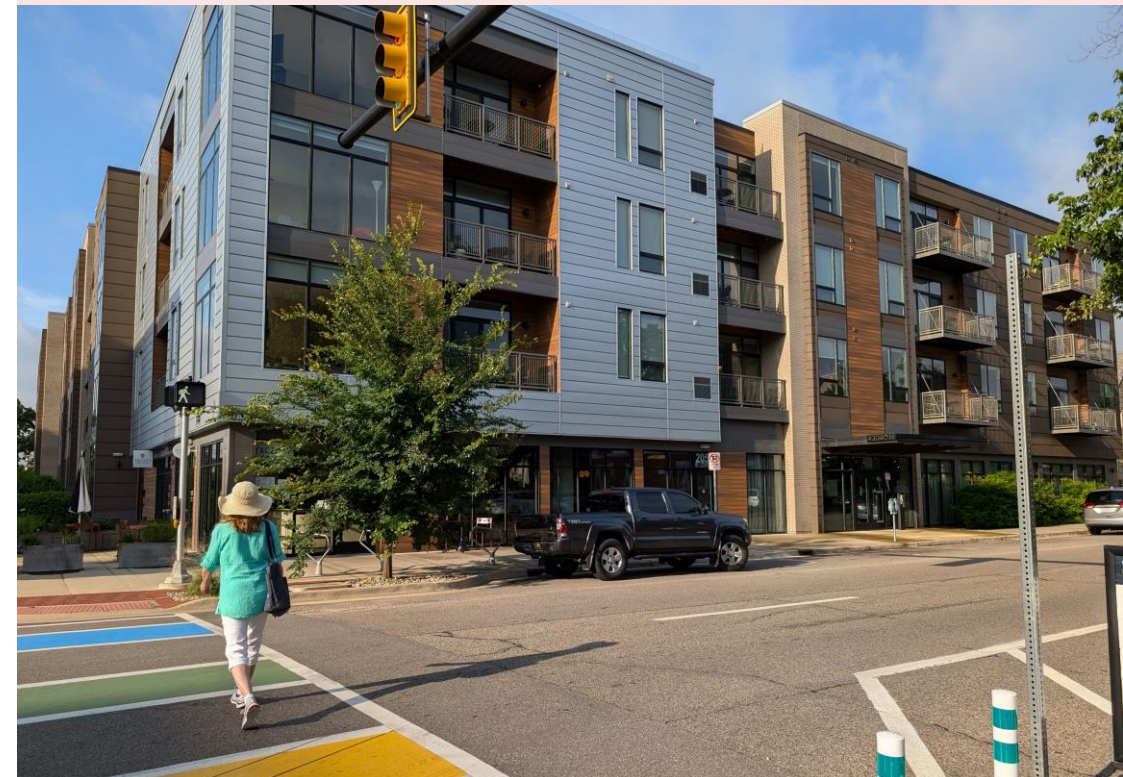
Priorities for this goal area:

1. Formalizing the working relationship and expectations between the neighborhood associations and CPED.
2. Identifying ways that neighborhoods can prepare and benefit from surrounding investments.

Implementation timeline for

priority (no.):

- Immediate - 0
- Short-term - 1
- Mid-term - 3
- Long-term - 1



GOAL 3 OVERVIEW

Advance conditions for growth.

The City of Kalamazoo can be pivotal in fostering growth and ensuring shared prosperity. Achieving these ends will require an unyielding commitment to:

- Streamlining the site and project review process. This is essential for sound economic development, efficient governance, and public trust. The current process sometimes causes delays, frustration, and increased costs, reducing tax revenue and slowing job creation.
- Continuing to review zoning regulations to manage growth, attract investment, and create a more equitable urban environment. These reviews should ensure that the City can promote sustainable development, climate resilience, and the creation of mixed-use, walkable communities.
- Addressing public safety concerns, particularly in downtown areas. This is crucial to improve the city's economic vitality and reputation. Unaddressed safety issues can lower property values, discourage development, and weaken civic pride.
- Supporting the establishment of a public/private entity to champion positive change and redevelop underutilized or blighted areas with incentives and fast-tracked approvals. This will transform them into vibrant spaces that benefit the local economy.

The need for clear communication about the new downtown Event Center project's timeline and impact is of pressing concern. This is vital for building trust with residents, businesses, and investors. Such transparency will help minimize disruptions, prepare businesses for changes, and foster public support. The Event Center can enhance the urban environment and boost the local economy if viewed as an integral part of a delicate ecosystem and not just a development project. It can be a fulcrum to produce more well-designed spaces with improved accessibility, attract a diverse workforce, and promote social equity.

To maximize the benefits of the Event Center project, residents and small businesses will need access to clear information, including timelines and participation opportunities. Providing workshops, training, and details on available financial support will help advance economic inclusion, strengthen the local economy, and build community trust.

Summary of Goal Area

Priorities for this goal area:

1. Improving the business climate by infusing a sense of urgency and shared economic growth imperative to how public services are delivered.
2. Ensuring a safe and welcoming environment for residents and visitors.
3. Expanding economic opportunities to realize shared prosperity.

Implementation timeline for strategies (no.):

- Immediate: 2
- Short-term: 6
- Mid-term: 4
- Long-term: 3



Kalamazoo's Commitment: Equitable economic development approaches

"In an equitable economy, all workers would earn a living wage, without systematic differences by race and gender. Low wages and pay gaps by race and gender undermine workers and their communities while reducing local spending and tax revenue."

- *National Equity Atlas*

The city's population is growing more diverse over time, and recognizing this will impact the types of services provided, how outreach is conducted, and what languages must be represented in materials. Individuals who identify as Multiple Races are the fastest-growing demographic group as a proportion of the total population, followed by individuals of Hispanic or Latino Origin and Black/African American individuals (Source, Esri).

While Hispanic and Black populations are growing as a proportion of the overall population in the City of Kalamazoo, county-level data shows these cohorts are facing challenging economic circumstances. 2021 data from the United Way on Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed populations (ALICE) shows that Black/African American households had the largest shares of ALICE households and households below the poverty level. Hispanic households had higher shares of ALICE households but lower shares of households below the Federal Poverty line.

It is critical that through collaborative efforts with other city departments, the private sector, non-profits, activists, philanthropists, and other members of the economic development ecosystem, there is a clear, defined goal to work toward an equitable economic development environment. In addition to the strategies presented in this plan, community-level work and the Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo plan will be critical to eliminate the additional barriers entrepreneurs and small businesses owned and operated by people of color face. Increasing connections to financing networks, mentorships, unique markets, and available real estate are all part of expanding opportunities and reducing barriers for historically disadvantaged populations.

Case Study: Small Business Anti-Displacement Toolkit Supporting existing businesses in times of growth.

The *Small Business Anti-Displacement Toolkit (SBAN)* offers a selection of approaches to avoid the displacement of businesses based on a series of factors. As neighborhoods are impacted by new development and growth advancement, engaging businesses and community advocates and exploring how to support new and existing businesses proactively will strengthen the overall business community. There is no one-size-fits-all all for business support, and factors like systemic barriers, race, gender, and neighborhood location will all play a role in determining a strong place-based approach.

The Small Business Anti-Displacement Toolkit is generated through the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education at the University of Maryland. It includes examples from neighborhoods with distinct racial or cultural identities.



GOAL 4 OVERVIEW

Improve the downtown experience.

Downtown Kalamazoo is a dynamic, evolving part of the city that requires targeted strategies and resources to thrive. Downtowns play a dynamic role in the community – they support housing, lodging, retail, restaurants, employment opportunities, and services and are generally spaces for human connection and events. They can also inform a person’s first impression of a place. Conversations across different stakeholder groups yielded similar impressions of downtown – there remains much potential to capture. That clear leadership is necessary for the area to truly grow and thrive. With a pedestrian mall, a range of shops and restaurants, and live music, there is a strong foundation of experiences to grow.

With the impending Event Center, Kalamazoo will welcome hundreds of thousands more people through its front door in the next two to five years. As activity increases with the development of the event center, it is important that the city is clear on its vision for growth in and around the area and becomes a collaborator in the city’s destiny. There are already strong efforts underway to collaborate with the Northside Association for Community Development (NACD) on workforce development, supporting local contractors, identifying BIPOC businesses to locate in and around the event center, along with a donation of \$6 million to NACD to further contribute to opportunities for prosperity for residents.

While visitation will be one way to grow downtown's market potential, another is to introduce additional housing options downtown and across the city. The city’s population remained steady except for a brief pandemic loss around 2020. While numerous factors impact population change, housing (affordability, quality, style, availability) remained common throughout the planning process. The adage that “retail follows rooftops” remains true, and with population growth, the city can make the case to small and medium businesses about the growing consumer market.

For Kalamazoo’s downtown to stand out as an exciting option for visitors or to draw in residents, the retail, services, and entertainment must reflect the latest consumer demands. This is no small task as the retail market changes in the post-pandemic era. While online shopping remains a reality of day-to-day life, consumers are more apt to come out to shop in person to discover something new, try a unique experience, or eat something they’ve never had. The next page details three examples of ways downtowns draw in customers, support unique small businesses with diverse backgrounds, and celebrate culture.

Summary of Goal Area

Priorities for this goal area:

1. Expanding the mixture of retail, food, and entertainment offerings through attraction and growth from existing businesses.
2. Building mixed-use developments that offer housing solutions and have vibrant ground floor uses.
3. Creating a built environment that encourages people to frequently visit downtown for a variety of uses.

Implementation timeline for strategies (no.):

- Immediate – 1
- Short-term – 2
- Mid-term – 3
- Long-term – 1



Case Studies: Approaches to filling commercial storefronts with local talent and diverse voices in target neighborhoods.



Salt City Market in Syracuse, NY, is a community-focused food hall born from a decade-long vision to showcase the city's diverse culinary culture. Initiated by local organizers and realized by the Allyn Family Foundation, the market aims to empower local entrepreneurs, build generational wealth, and foster a sense of belonging. The project involved extensive community input and significant financial commitment, including \$25 million from the Allyn Foundation. Opened in January 2021, the market is a vibrant gathering space celebrating Syracuse's rich cultural heritage.

Visit their website for more information: <https://saltcitymarket.com/about/>



The "Vacant to Vibrant" initiative in San Francisco transforms unused downtown spaces into lively community areas through pop-up events. Local property owners, artists, and entrepreneurs propose ideas for these pop-ups, and the program handles logistics and securing permits and grants. This community-driven effort re-energizes downtown with diverse activities supported by local organizations, corporate partners, and city agencies. The program is part of SF New Deal and aims to make downtown a thriving hub once more.

Visit their website for more information: <https://www.vibrantsf.org/about>



A collaboration between workforce and economic development partners in Burlington, Vermont, the Cart Vendor Incubation program supports fledging food cart vendors to grow their business ideas and refine their products. Once vendors have gone through the initial program and received mentorship, they can test their product in the marketplace on Burlington's award-winning pedestrian mall on Church Street.

Visit their website for more information: <https://loveburlington.org/incubationprogram>

3 ACTION PLAN MATRIX

The following Action Plan Matrix is the tool that will direct the City of Kalamazoo's Economic Development Strategy for the next five years. It serves as a roadmap, guiding resources and efforts toward areas where they can yield the most significant returns. The Matrix is intended to evolve over the next five years as resources change or market opportunities shift. The strategy is responsive to Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) *Redevelopment Ready Communities* along with ongoing City efforts like Imagine Kalamazoo and Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo.

Timeline Key

Each strategy is labeled with the initial steps and a priority/timeline level. The description below indicates how to interpret the priority/timeline column.

- Immediate** -- This is a priority action that requires attention in the **next six months**. While the strategy initiation may require attention within the next six months, full execution of the strategy may require several years or ongoing resources.
- Short-term** -- This strategy is important and will require resources from staff operational plans and resources from related partners in **six to twenty-four months**.
- Mid-term** -- This strategy will require attention over the mid-term after other strategies have been addressed. Strategies in this category should be prioritized in staff operational plans in the **two-year to four-year timeframe**.
- Long-term** -- This strategy is best positioned to succeed after other initiatives are completed. Resources and staff should be prioritized by the **fifth year** of the strategy.



ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities are critical to the success of the City's economic development strategy. They provide the direction, coordination, and accountability needed to achieve the desired outcomes.

A smaller version of the following scale appears in the "Accountability and First Steps" column in the Action Plan Matrix. The arrow ▲ indicates where the center of management, control, and accountability must be located along the scale to yield the maximum impact for that strategy. See Appendix I for additional details on the roles within Kalamazoo's economic development ecosystem.



Partners listed in the Action Plan Matrix

The following organizations are abbreviated throughout portions of the Action Plan Matrix.

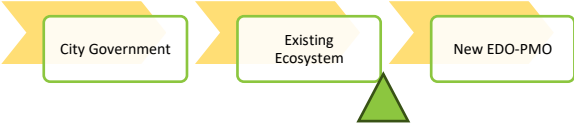

- Chamber:** SWMF Chamber
- CMO:** City Manager's Office
- CPED:** City of Kalamazoo Community Planning and Economic Development Department
- DDA/DEGA:** Downtown Development Authority/Downtown Economic Growth Authority
- DK:** Discover Kalamazoo
- EDC:** Economic Development Corporation
- KRESA:** Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service
- KZEN:** Kalamazoo Entrepreneur Network
- KZCF:** Kalamazoo Community Foundation
- LISC:** Local Initiative Support Corporation Agency
- MEDC:** Michigan Economic Development Corporation
- SPK OC:** Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo Organizing Committee
- SWMF:** Southwest Michigan First

Note that this is not a comprehensive list of *all* stakeholders within the existing ecosystem, as there are dozens of entities across sectors that contribute to the wealth of resources in Kalamazoo.

To see a full list of organizations involved in this planning effort, please refer to Appendix II.



1.

Foster the business environment, target markets, and entrepreneurs.

#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
City of Kalamazoo's Competitive Positioning				
1.1	Establish a Kalamazoo Business Advisory Committee comprised exclusively of founders of new enterprises and chief executive officers of small, medium, and large businesses located in the City and include business owners who reside in the city.	A healthy business climate needs constant nurturing, monitoring, and improvement. The best way to achieve this is by continuously engaging business professionals to provide input to public policymakers and information to the public on market trends, competitive positioning, and ways to meet market needs and improve bottom-line results.	 <p>First Step: The Mayor assumes the lead in reaching out to several private sector leaders to convene the Committee.</p>	Immediate
1.2	Gather real-time data on the challenges and opportunities businesses face , which can inform policy decisions and resource allocation. Do this by regularly engaging the city's small-to-medium-sized businesses and using standardized outreach questions to gauge changes in the business environment over time.	It is critical to maintain a pulse on the local economy through face-to-face engagement combined with data-driven tools; by establishing a feedback loop between the city and its business community, local governments can proactively address emerging issues, provide timely support, and adapt their strategies to meet the evolving needs of small-to-medium-size businesses. This data-driven approach is critical for creating a responsive and adaptive business environment where policies and initiatives are continually refined based on the actual experiences of businesses.	 <p>First Step: The Business Advisory Committee meets with other groups to compile a complete business inventory and develop a customer relationship system tool.</p>	Short-term

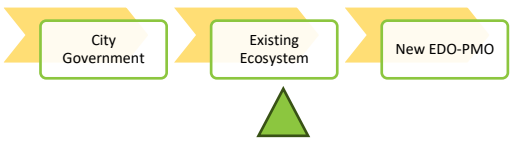
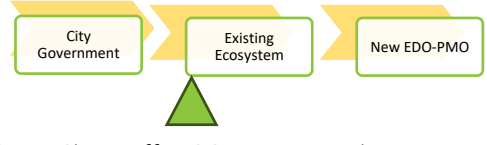

1.

Foster the business environment, target markets, and entrepreneurs.

#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
1.3	<p>Enhance the City's reputation as a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship by capitalizing on the City's strengths by developing distinct marketing tactics to attract small-to-medium businesses that match the core competitive sectors, specifically pharmaceuticals, professional services, technology, and arts and culture. Do this by highlighting access to specialized talent, proximity to markets, availability of supportive infrastructure, community cohesiveness, and high quality of life.</p>	<p>Attracting enterprises that align with Kalamazoo's strengths creates a self-reinforcing cycle of growth, where successful businesses support one another, enhance the city's reputation, and draw in more investment. This begins with defining the city's competitive assets and differentiating Kalamazoo from other Southwest Michigan locations. To grow the city's economic base and increase opportunities for prosperity across neighborhoods, the messaging must be consistent and frequent across digital and in-person marketing channels.</p>	 <p>First Step: The Business Advisory Committee meets with SWMF and other groups to develop a city-focused public relations strategy.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>
Small Business Resources				
1.4	<p>Create a more cohesive and comprehensive entrepreneurial ecosystem by evaluating and distinguishing the role of each support organization, establishing a "front door" approach, and promoting effective collaboration among such groups.</p>	<p>When entrepreneurs can easily access the right resources at the right time, they are more likely to overcome challenges and succeed. There is a plethora of interests operating in this space. A front door, or "no wrong door" (seamless integration), is needed to foster entrepreneurship and maximize the effectiveness of available support. Individuals must know how and where to access information and feel confident they will be guided to the right resources.</p>	 <p>First Step: The KZEN, Can-Do Kalamazoo, and others meet with small business advocates and other groups to develop common messaging and linkages among service providers.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>


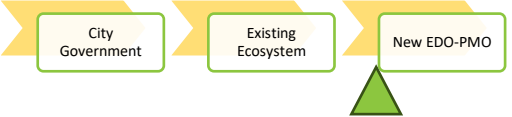
1.

Foster the business environment, target markets, and entrepreneurs.

#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
1.5	Partner financial resources with peer support, mentorship, and other personal guidance to ensure that SMBs not only receive funding but also have the knowledge and support necessary to use those funds effectively.	By integrating financial support with mentorship and peer support, Kalamazoo can help businesses navigate the complexities of growth, from scaling operations to entering new markets. This holistic approach to support ensures that businesses are better prepared for the challenges they will face, increasing their chances of long-term success.	 <p>First Step: LISC and KZEN convene lending community, non-profits, and service providers to frame goals and objectives.</p>	Short-term
1.6	Develop marketing materials for available resources that are tailored to distinct populations of underserved entrepreneurs and use marketing efforts through trusted community partners.	Curated marketing is crucial for promoting inclusivity and ensuring diverse population segments can access the necessary resources. This involves creating culturally relevant materials, partnering with community organizations to reach specific populations, and using channels that are most effective for different demographic groups.	 <p>First Step: City staff, LISC, KZEN, service organizations, and entrepreneurial groups convene to discuss how to implement recommendations.</p>	Immediate
1.7	Support relationships with CDFIs and other non-traditional lending partners to expand access to capital, especially for businesses that may not qualify for traditional bank loans.	CDFIs and similar organizations are often more willing to take on risk and invest in underserved or emerging markets, making them a critical resource for SMBs. By fostering these relationships, the city can ensure that more businesses have the financial resources they need to grow and thrive. This is particularly important for fostering entrepreneurship in communities historically marginalized or overlooked by mainstream financial institutions.	 <p>First Step: LISC, KZEN, and the EDC convene lending community, non-profits, and service providers to frame goals and objectives (see 1.5 above.)</p>	Mid-term

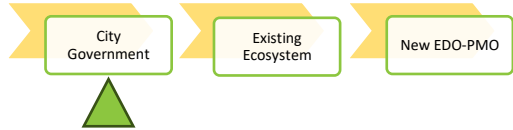


1.

Foster the business environment, target markets, and entrepreneurs.



#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
1.8	<p>Relaunch City provided small business resources with clear eligibility standards and internal due diligence procedures. Develop marketing materials to the community about new requirements and application expectations. Provide technical assistance support as needed for applying for help and overcoming barriers to access.</p>	<p>The City of Kalamazoo's programs, such as façade improvements and White Box, have been characterized by inconsistent funding, long administrative reviews, and the absence of performance metrics and enforcement standards.</p>	 <p>First Step: The CMO and CPED conduct internal assessments and provide recommendations to improve program and service offerings.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>
1.9	<p>Pursue partnerships with local entrepreneurial resources to pilot a retail/food and beverage/Main Street training cohort.</p>	<p>Main Street businesses have distinct needs and learning from a cohort of peers is a beneficial way to learn what else is happening in the market and also troubleshoot in a safe environment.</p>	 <p>First Step: Can-Do Kalamazoo and the Community Foundation will hold a joint meeting with all entrepreneurial entities to discuss the possibility of a Main Street training cohort. Coordination and oversight of this work may eventually fall to the new EDO-PMO.</p>	<p>Mid-term</p>

1.


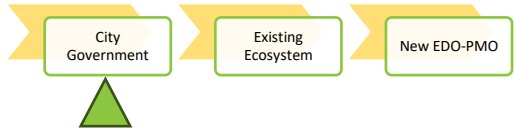

Foster the business environment, target markets, and entrepreneurs.

#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Workforce Connections to Opportunity				
1.10	Advance the SPK Action Plan Goals to “Promote strong families” and “Promote the health growth, development learning of children.”	These are the building blocks for education, addressing systemic barriers, and are foundational for all other economic development and workforce actions to succeed. This work can coordinate with other related, emerging efforts over the course of the strategy.	 <p>First Step: SPK OK continues developing needed programs and initiatives with an eye toward aligning with this strategy.</p>	Short-term
1.11	Continue to grow business engagement with the new KRESA Career Connect Campus to advance skills needed for the next generation of jobs.	Business and industry representatives, together with educators and community partners, must provide the full spectrum of support for specific skills training and certifications for high-school students interested in high-demand, high-wage careers.	 <p>First Step: KRESA implements operational plans for Career Connect Campus with engagement of education and business leaders.</p>	Short-term
1.12	Advance opportunities for work-based learning across a variety of sectors for middle and high school and post-secondary institutions.	Students need to apply what they learn in the classroom to real-world situations by gaining hands-on experience with the tools, technologies, and practices required of the workplace. This will enhance soft skills, help bridge skills gaps, and increase students' motivation to succeed while directly addressing opportunities for equity and access.	 <p>First Step: Workforce development, educational leaders, and Kalamazoo Promise meet to consider integrating the Kalamazoo Economic Strategy into its operational planning.</p>	Mid-term

2. Strengthen neighborhoods and community connections.



#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Organizing with Community Partners				
2.1	Proactively engage with businesses in neighborhoods pending major development to identify potential challenges in their operations and employ small business anti-displacement strategies where they will be the most effective.	Clear messaging to consumers about what to expect for business openings/closures around construction sites, along with incentives to continue patronizing businesses, will be necessary to support the business community during extensive infrastructure upgrades.	 <p>First Step: CPED, with support from the Chamber, SWMF, and DK, will conduct in-person and digital outreach to the immediately affected areas to gather input from businesses.</p>	Short-term
2.2	Work with neighborhood associations and other local partners to advocate for programs that actively reduce barriers to employment training and or pathways to long-term careers.	Ongoing work with trusted local partners to address the root of systemic barriers to employment or training will be an integral part of elevating opportunities for all residents of Kalamazoo and align with the goals of SPK. There are successful examples of this work already happening, and continuing to integrate this into citywide economic development efforts will yield positive outcomes.	 <p>First Step: CPED will pull together partner stakeholders to have a focused discussion on recent approaches to reducing barriers to employment and where funding and resources are needed to advance this work.</p>	Mid-term

2. Strengthen neighborhoods and community connections.

#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Development in Neighborhoods				
2.3	Continue to expand opportunities for childcare through existing efforts like MI Tri-Share, the YWCA Kalamazoo, and the Kalamazoo Literacy Council in SPK neighborhoods and throughout the city.	Childcare remains a top need for families and communities across the state and city. Solutions between the public, private, and non-profit sectors will be needed to address the dearth of options. Increasing daycare options will require numerous components, including identifying appropriate locations, addressing affordability, and identifying individuals with the skills to operate and staff the businesses.	 <p>First Step: CPED will initiate a meeting with the leaders in this sector document existing efforts and identify how and where development opportunities align with childcare needs.</p>	Mid-term
2.4	Continue to invest in physical infrastructure that connects downtown to neighborhoods across the city. This includes pedestrian sidewalks, bike lanes, lighting, public transit, and wayfinding signage across neighborhoods and educational institutions.	To fully realize commercial corridors' economic potential, the city must have strong physical and social linkages. These connections facilitate the seamless flow of economic activity, resources, and talent between various parts of the urban landscape, ensuring a unified and inclusive city.	 <p>First Step: CPED will meet with related city departments to coordinate existing infrastructure efforts and determine the level of priority for corridors throughout the city.</p>	Mid-term
2.5	Identify and prioritize infill or redevelopment opportunities to grow housing options throughout neighborhoods.	Housing availability and affordability are key components to supporting neighborhoods and the economic potential of the city. The housing style by neighborhood will vary greatly, so it is necessary to take a place-based approach to this strategy to maximize the impact.	 <p>First Step: CPED will initiate meeting with CMO to review existing documents that inventory known sites and document ownership status and prioritize 2-3 sites.</p>	Long-term

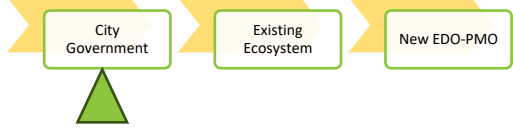
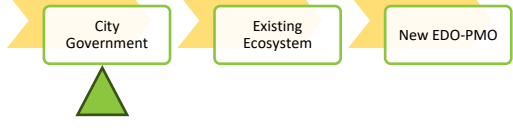

3.

Advance conditions for growth.

#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Land Use, Infrastructure, and Environment				
3.1	Workshop the site and project review plan process, with developers' and investors' involvement , to secure a streamlined and consistent process. When completed, publish and widely disseminate new and improved, user-friendly guide(s) for how best to work with the city.	Streamlining the site and project review process enhances economic development, efficient governance, and public trust while aligning urban development with the city's strategic goals for achieving shared prosperity. The current process allows too much latitude for delay and uncertainty, which increases frustration, slows project initiation and completion, delays job creation and social benefits, increases holding and financing costs, and decreases tax revenue to the city.	 <p>First Step: The CMO and CPED conduct internal assessments and provide recommendations to improve program and service offerings.</p>	Immediate
3.2	Proactively address public safety concerns experienced by residents of and visitors to all areas of Kalamazoo, especially the downtown.	Real and perceived concerns for public safety directly impact the economic vitality, social well-being, and overall reputation of the city. These concerns are most acute in the downtown area, which decreases visitation, quality of life, and outdoor experience and, if not addressed, can depress property values, discourage development and preservation, and affect civic pride.	 <p>First Step: The CMO and public safety departments conduct internal assessments and provide recommendations to improve program and service offerings.</p>	Short-term

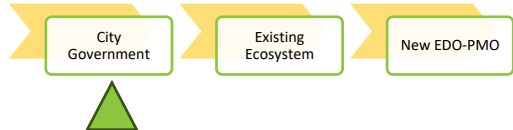

3.

Advance conditions for growth.

#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Land Use, Infrastructure, and Environment				
3.3	Identify top 2-3 City and State-owned sites in a position to be marketed more favorably for new development or reuse based on changing market conditions and develop new expedited development processes and financial packages for these sites.	Underutilized or blighted areas controlled by public entities should be identified and prioritized, with incentives and accelerated approval processes to encourage redevelopment and transform them into vibrant, productive uses that contribute to the local economy.	 <p>First Step: The CMO and CPED conduct internal assessments.</p>	Short-term
3.4	Reposition the EDC board to help the City team implement those recommendations in the strategy where the City is identified as the point of contact.	The current EDC has the potential to become an effective voice in furthering the Economic Development Strategic Plan.	 <p>First Step: CPED representative to EDC initiates changes.</p>	Immediate
3.5	Position and market BRA-owned properties that will add properties back to the tax roll and increase property values. Focus development efforts on projects that align with the city's needs, such as job creation, business expansion, and increased property values. Ensure incentives offered are calculated to maximize return on investment and long-term economic benefit.	The BRA will collaborate with CPED and the EDC to create a targeted marketing strategy for its properties. This will begin by using criteria to identify priority properties that have the highest potential for impactful redevelopment. The BRA will engage stakeholders to clarify expectations for the highest and best use of these properties, considering broader economic factors. The group will also establish performance metrics to track progress on returning properties to the tax roll.	 <p>First Step: CPED initiates the increase in activity.</p>	Short-term

3.

Advance conditions for growth.

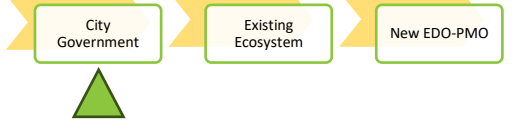


#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Land Use, Infrastructure, and Environment				
3.6	Review zoning assumptions and regulations on an ongoing basis to align with the goals of the Economic Strategic Plan and new development opportunities, ensure sustainable growth, and improve the overall quality of life for residents. Seek developer input with the review and incorporate into Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 as necessary.	By updating zoning regulations, the city can better manage growth, attract investment, and create a more equitable and vibrant urban environment. This is needed to adapt to changing needs and economic shifts and provide adequate housing, infrastructure, and services. Updating codes can promote more sustainable development and resilience to climate changes, encourage “smart-city” improvements, and encourage high-quality mixed-use and walkable communities.	 <p>First Step: The CMO and CPED conduct internal assessments.</p>	Short-term
3.7	Sustain the multi-channel marketing campaign surrounding the Event Center infrastructure improvements and impacts on existing businesses.	Transparent communication about the Event Center’s project timeline, progress, and impact is critical for helping build trust between the city, residents, businesses, Western Michigan University, and investors. This will minimize disruption and help current businesses prepare for changes. It also becomes a public safety issue to reduce the risks of accidents. Moreover, such communication is needed to encourage public support, manage expectations, and assist with retaining, expanding, and attracting more businesses in the area.	 <p>First Step: The Business Advisory Committee meets with City officials, the Chamber, SWMF, and other groups to develop a Communications Plan.</p>	Long-term

3.

Advance conditions for growth.

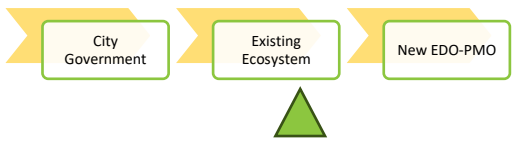
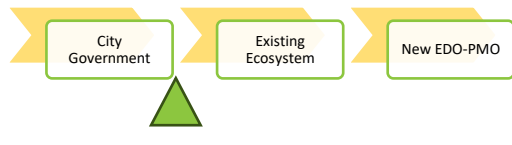
#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Land Use, Infrastructure and Environment				
3.8	Provide sustained focus on creating, maintaining, and improving resilient urban design. This includes: parklets, wayfinding signage, upgraded lighting, landscaping, and streetscaping in business corridors.	This is important to enhance the day-to-day experience of its residents and visitors and build a more sustainable, vibrant, and resilient urban environment. Well-designed spaces foster community and improve safety. Additionally, these enhancements boost the local economy. These investments are also an opportunity to integrate green infrastructure approaches that mitigate the impacts of climate disruption.	<p>First Step: City reviews current and future budget priorities and names corridors of focus.</p>	Long-term
3.9	Build a variety of housing types using the City of Kalamazoo housing market analysis to align with the greatest needs in the community.	Cities that are ahead of the curve in ensuring people of all income levels can find suitable homes prevent displacement, attract needed workforce, stimulate the local economy, promote social equity and inclusion, reduce homelessness, and enhance the quality of life. Building a diversified housing stock is critical for the city's ability to attract population, which will play a role in driving economic activity.	<p>First Step: Public and private partners prioritize this among actions to be taken.</p>	Short-term
3.10	Identify the top 2-3 private-owned sites that can be marketed more favorably for new development or reuse based on changing market conditions.	Proactive site development can help attract different industries and businesses and contribute to a more diversified and resilient economy. For each site, develop a vision that is vetted by the community and begin to market that vision in developer channels. These efforts will support growing the city's tax base.	<p>First Step: The EDC and the City will review their portfolio and establish criteria to determine the top sites. In the future, the EDO-PMO could take on the role of advancing transformative development projects.</p>	Mid-term

3. Advance conditions for growth.

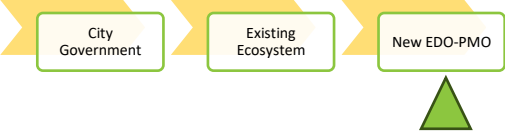
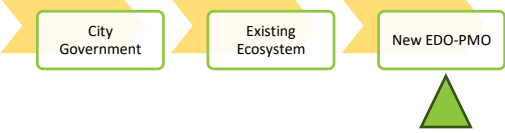
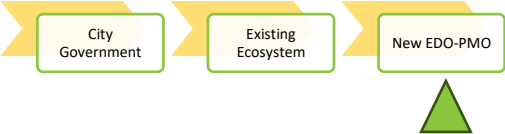
#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Entrepreneurs and Supporting BIPOC Businesses				
3.11	Evaluate and document the progress of the Social Equity Cannabis Chamber over time and report to the City Commission and the public.	As a unique pilot opportunity, learning from the Social Equity Cannabis Chamber will be important to either adapt programming, grow its reach, or determine how to otherwise support operators in the Cannabis industry.	 <p>First Step: Convene partners of this initiative and review interim metrics on activity.</p>	Mid-term
3.12	Improve the reach of programs that reduce predevelopment costs and lower barriers for first-time or small-scale local real estate developers.	Predevelopment costs can be one of the largest hurdles for first-time or small-scale housing and real estate developers. Financing, grants, low-interest loans, or partnerships with impact investors are all viable approaches to addressing these hurdles. Involve the development community in discussion.	 <p>First Step: City staff, LISC, and the development community convene to discuss how to implement recommendations.</p>	Mid-term
3.13	Partner with Discover Kalamazoo on efforts to train businesses that are interested in attracting target populations – minorities, LGBTQ+, and differently-abled – to leisure, meeting, and sports events.	Diverse communities represent large and growing segments of the population, and catering to their needs can bring new visitors who may not have considered Kalamazoo a destination otherwise. This will contribute to the local economy through spending on hotels, restaurants, entertainment, and shopping, thereby creating new jobs and supporting inclusive economic growth.	 <p>First Step: Discover Kalamazoo and CPED meet to discuss coordination strategic planning efforts.</p>	Long-term

3.

Advance conditions for growth.


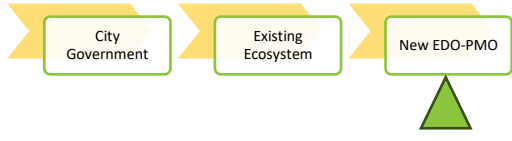
#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Entrepreneurs and Supporting BIPOC Businesses				
3.14	Focus on providing financial literacy for underserved communities to foster economic empowerment, reduce inequality, and promote overall community well-being.	Financial literacy equips individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions about budgeting, saving, investing, and managing debt, which empowers them to take control of their financial futures. It helps break the cycle of poverty and reduces economic inequality, thus helping to close the wealth gap, promote economic mobility, and build community wealth.	 <p>First step: The KZEN group meets with small business advocates and financial institutions to develop approaches among service providers.</p>	Mid-term
3.15	Leverage and support the new Event Center by engaging with local small businesses across the city and entrepreneurial support organizations to gather input on their needs, concerns, and ideas for how they can participate in and benefit from the project.	It will be important to ensure that small businesses across the city have access to clear, timely information about the Event Center project, including timelines, opportunities for participation, and potential impacts. Workshops and training will need to be provided, along with information relevant to any set-aside contracts, simplified procurement processes, and financial support and incentives that may be available. In this way, the Event Center project can help advance economic inclusion, strengthen the local economy, engage the community, and build trust.	 <p>First step: The Business Advisory Committee meets with City officials, the Chamber, and other groups to develop an Engagement Plan.</p>	Short-term

4. Improve the downtown experience.

#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Retail, Arts, Culture, and Entertainment				
4.1	Conduct sustained outreach and provide data on market dynamics to the regional real estate community to attract retail and restaurant activity.	Retailers and restaurants look for specific benchmarks to determine whether there is a suitable market. Clearly communicating the city's strongest market factors and collaborating with the real estate community to communicate with regional and national businesses will help attract attention to Kalamazoo.	 <p>First step: CPED and DDA/DEGA will develop a shared brief and meet with the real estate community to communicate the study's findings and elaborate on what markets the city is targeting to grow.</p>	Mid-term
4.2	Attract and grow available venues for arts and culture , along with related nightlife entertainment options.	Kalamazoo's arts and culture scene is well-regarded by the public, and continuing to expand the variety of offerings will attract new patrons, attract visitors downtown, and contribute to a healthy, vibrant economy.	 <p>First step: Discover Kalamazoo will meet to identify examples of the types and scales of venues that are desirable and then document a plan to conduct outreach. The new EDO-PMO may take on this role and partner with tourism agencies in the future.</p>	Mid-term
4.3	Foster the formation and growth of various daytime family-friendly attractions to develop day/night activity.	Daytime activities contribute to the overall vitality of a downtown area, ensuring it remains active and lively throughout the day rather than just during evening hours. This helps maintain a continuous flow of visitors, which is essential for the sustainability of local businesses.	 <p>First step: Build on the conversations in the previous joint meeting for strategy 4.2.</p>	Mid-term


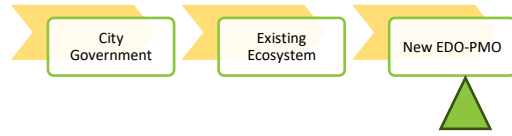
4.

Improve the downtown experience.

#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Built Environment				
4.4	Advance efforts to expand access to safe housing and support services.	The perception of safety is necessary to attract consumers to spend time and money downtown. The City is currently working with partners to address the multi-faceted crisis around affordable housing and access to shelter. These efforts are an absolute priority for the health and well-being of unhoused individuals and the potential of Kalamazoo's downtown.	 <p>First step: CPED will engage with leaders in the field to continue to prioritize effective strategies.</p>	Short-term
4.5	Build mixed-used development by partnering with developers and investors in locations with appropriate zoning.	With a dire need for housing across the city and a soft retail and office market, mixed-used buildings will offer a way to incorporate multiple elements needed downtown and encourage activity that occurs during the day and evening.	 <p>First step: SWMF and the City will convene another iteration of a roundtable with developers to improve the site review process.</p>	Short-term

4.

Improve the downtown experience.

#	Action	Description	Accountability and First Steps	Timeline
Leadership and Collaborations				
4.6	Engage with business support organizations to facilitate spaces where downtown businesses can gather, network, learn, grow, and plan events collaboratively.	The direct connections with fellow businesses who understand the distinct experience of a downtown business are essential to supporting a cohesive downtown ecosystem. Gatherings may help problem-solve a particular issue or plan or be a joint celebration.	 <p>First step: The CPED Downtown Coordinator, along with the Chamber and Discover Kalamazoo, will hold a joint meeting and synchronize their efforts to re-engage a downtown-specific audience.</p>	Immediate
4.7	Determine how the downtown can best achieve Discover Kalamazoo's objective to increase Kalamazoo County's share of Michigan visitor spending to 3%.	Discover Kalamazoo has a clear directive to increase visitor spending in Kalamazoo County, and downtown Kalamazoo will play a role in driving those numbers up by increasing spending and awareness of existing businesses, getting visitors to stay longer, and attracting new businesses that generate buzz for visitors.	 <p>First step: The new EDO-PMO will meet with Discover Kalamazoo and align implementation efforts on respective strategic plans.</p>	Long-term

4 MEASURING IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

OUTCOMES FROM THE STRATEGY If the strategy is advanced successfully by the City and their partner, progress toward the following outcomes are expected in each goal area.

1.

Foster the Business Environment, Target Markets, and Entrepreneurship.

Increased **business formation** and sustainability.

Expanded base of targeted industries and growth of existing businesses.

Diversified tax base through attraction of **emerging sectors**.

Enhanced resources, mentorship, and financial assistance for start-ups and small businesses.

2.

Strengthen Neighborhoods and Community Networks.

Increased connectivity and better coordination with neighborhood associations.

Development of multifamily housing with access to complete streets and amenities

Continuation of infrastructure investments that connect downtown to neighborhoods (sidewalks, bike lanes, wayfinding).

3.

Advance Conditions for Growth.

Improved transportation and utility infrastructure.

Proactive property acquisition to gain site control in strategic locations.

Avoiding displacement in the development process through commercial cooperatives, community investment trusts, and community land trusts.

Streamlined and consistent development processes.

4.

Improve the Downtown Experience.

The attraction and growth of **diverse retail and entertainment** options.

Increased mixed-use housing close to employers.

Expansion of cultural and **family-friendly attractions**.

Redeveloped properties into productive uses that have previously been stagnant or vacant for long periods of time.

PERFORMANCE METRICS TO TRACK SUCCESS

Measuring impacts throughout the lifetime of the strategy will be critical to understanding where adaptations may be necessary over time. These quantitative metrics should be used in conjunction with qualitative discussion with partners. All metrics should be tracked by race, gender, and income level where data is available.

Goal	Metric	Data Source
Foster the Business Environment, Target Markets, and Entrepreneurship.	Number of jobs added with wages above the living wage	W.E Upjohn Institute
	Number of self-employed firms	US Census: American Community Survey
	Active project prospects	City of Kalamazoo, SWMF
Strengthen Neighborhoods and Community Networks.	Per capita income	US Census: American Community Survey
	Population change	US Census: American Community Survey
	Poverty Rate/ALICE – Families and Individuals	US Census: American Community Survey, United Way
	Number of childcare facilities in the city	City of Kalamazoo
Advance Conditions for Growth.	Number of new housing units added to the market in the city, annually	City of Kalamazoo
	Number of commercial properties added back to/new to the city's tax role	City of Kalamazoo
	Number of infill sites that are developed	City of Kalamazoo
	Instances of crime in the city, by type	City of Kalamazoo Public Safety
Improve the Downtown Experience.	Annual visitor spending in Kalamazoo County	Discover Kalamazoo
	New square footage of office, residential, and commercial space activity downtown	City of Kalamazoo, DDA/DEGA
	Number of events hosted downtown	City of Kalamazoo, DDA/DEGA