



VILLAGE OF LAWRENCE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

Conducted by Julie Hales-Smith and Jamie Schriener, CEDAM
Sponsored by Consumers Energy
December 18, 2018

The Village of Lawrence applied for, and was the recipient of a grant from Consumers Energy. The grant provided the Village with a community assessment conducted on December 18, 2018 by consultants from Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM) including Julie Hales-Smith, Jamie Schriener, and Rachel Diskin; also attending was Chris Thelen, Community Affairs Manager for Consumers Energy. This report is the product of the community assessment where a cross-section of community leaders and residents shared their thoughts, feelings and aspirations about the Village of Lawrence. Under contract with Consumers Energy, the CEDAM consultants produced this report after receiving, summarizing and analyzing community feedback.

METHODOLOGY

The process of the assessment consists of a tour of the community, hitting highlights and sites of interest that provide context for what the consultants will be hearing from the community throughout the day. Next the consultants conduct four focus groups made up of cohorts of stakeholders. In the Village of Lawrence, the group categories were: downtown building owners and DDA members; elected/appointed officials and public services; business owners and economic development professionals; and service providers. At each of the focus groups, the consultants ask questions following a modified SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis model. Feedback is meticulously collected. In the evening, a communitywide meeting is held, facilitated by the consultants.

The product of the assessment is this report that includes all of the community feedback gathered during the day. It also provides observations made by the consultants and identification of focus areas, based on feedback from the focus group and community-wide meetings.

BACKGROUND

Per the 2010 US Census (<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>), there were an estimated 996 people and 371 households, 251 of which are family households, residing in the Village of Lawrence. The majority of the population at 74% is white, with the second largest group Hispanic at 27%.



Per the 2013-2017 American Community Survey from the US Census (<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>), the village has approximately 433 housing units, well over 92% of which are occupied units. Of the occupied units, just over 55% are owner occupied and nearly 45% are renter occupied. An estimated 32 units of housing are vacant in the village, which makes up just over 7% of the total housing stock. The housing stock is relatively old in the village with 71.6% of all housing units having been built before 1979. This would indicate that there is a high need for lead paint and other hazard reduction measures, in addition to general upgrades and maintenance to this housing. There has been little recent housing development, with only 3% of the housing units built between 2000-2017. Single family/1 unit dwellings make up just over 53% of all units. The remaining units are made up of just over 4.2% 2-4 unit buildings, nearly 43% multi-unit buildings over 5 units, and mobile homes making up just more than 13% of the total housing stock.

THE TOUR

The tour was conducted by Dan Faulkner, Village Administrator. The group first traveled to the site of the Lawrence-Crandall Business Centre (LCBC) Industrial Park adjacent to the I-94 interchange. The park was developed in 1997 and currently has only two tenants, Quality Assured Plastics and American Cooler Technologies. Additional parcels range in size from 1.5 to 28 acres, include public utilities and offer purchasers the chance to take advantage of Industrial Abatements on taxes. The site is completely development ready for industrial sites, and offers a beautiful office setting.

Heading back toward town, we drove through the impressive Intermediate School District campus that serves the entire county. Initially seen as an alternative to college, the "Van Buren Skills Center" opened its doors in 1976 with a primary focus of preparing students to immediately enter into the workforce. Over the past 40 years, times have changed and so have the name and the educational focus within the walls of the Technology Center. Today's CTE programs provide a multi-faceted training experience, utilizing high-tech equipment and training, in combination with project and work-based learning, to assist students as they explore career options, prepare for college, and develop skills for the workplace. Students can leave the Technology Center with up to 60 college credits, a state or national license/certification, and advanced skills that employers are in high demand. Each year, more than 1,000 high school juniors and seniors from 15 partnering school districts throughout southwest Michigan, choose to attend the Technology Center for a portion of their school day. The flexibility in program offerings at VBTC allows students to maintain their affiliation with their "home school," while pursuing opportunities to work with educational and technical resources that would otherwise be unavailable.

Just across the road from the ISD campus, we toured a new housing development where the trade students from the ISD developed a series of single family homes. The homes vary in size and style, but they are very attractive and in high demand. Adjacent to the campus are several multifamily developments – Lawrence Downs and Brush Creek Apartments. Lawrence Downs provides affordable, rental housing for residents of the area. Both appeared to be in good repair.



Leaving the ISD campus area we traveled a short distance to the downtown of the Village. The heart of the downtown is the intersection of Paw Paw St. and St. Joseph St., north of the former Kalamazoo, Lake Shore & Chicago Railroad. Although small (by “city” standards) the downtown has a rich variety of architectural styles, is extremely walkable and has latent charm. Several of the buildings are listed on the Michigan Register of Historic Buildings. Vacant storefronts just scream “potential”. The jewel of the downtown is the Village Park, and the elaborate play scape where, according to the residents, people come from all around to play in nice weather.

The Lawrence Public School district campus is also walkable from downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods with all three of the facilities – Elementary School, Junior High School and Senior High School – located at one site. The facilities appear to be well kept and cared for by the community.

As we drove through the surrounding neighborhoods, we saw a range of housing types, but the area could be generally described as modest housing with only a few examples of blight or disrepair. We also saw the small park on Paw Paw Street where folks have access to the Paw Paw River for fishing and picnicking.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK¹

Focus Group #1: Downtown Property Owners and Local Officials

The top challenges identified by this group included housing, local capacity, and inability to attract business and industry. They commented that the only new development in the community in years are the homes developed by the trade school, there is no variety other than single family homes and apartments, and the existing housing stock is old and in need of repair.

According to this group (and others throughout the day), there is a critical barrier to new development or expansion in the community – Lawrence is not able to do inspections and supply building permits, thus any building or renovations must go through the State of Michigan. This process causes delays and creates unnecessary complications.

Closely interrelated to the previous two issues is the inability to attract business and industry to the industrial park, or the community in general. Participants also mentioned the lack of high speed internet at the park. Even if a business is interested, when they do their due diligence they learn that it is difficult to develop property in Lawrence and that the internet is still at dial-up speeds. And, if they want to attract a talented workforce, there is no place for them to live in Lawrence.

When asked what they would like to see accomplished, the group primarily focused in on two topics:

¹ See Appendix 1: Community Feedback Tables for detailed listing of comments.

- The need to capitalize on the opportunity of the historic downtown – need for more energy and focus on attracting small business/retail such as a bakery, flower shop, coffee shop, candy store, etc.
- Need to address the problem of not having a local inspection/permitting process. This might be accomplished by partnering with the township and/or neighboring villages.

Focus Group #2: Public Officials and Residents

The top challenges identified by this group were accessibility, employment opportunities and schools of choice draining the already dwindling school population. The Village Park, a unique amenity in the downtown, is not accessible, and although the downtown appears walkable, there are sections that are not safely passable by those in wheelchairs.

Participants discussed lack of employment opportunities at length. They posited that if the industrial park was more inviting (Is it too expensive? Does it require too much expensive and time consuming groundwork to be development ready?) and if Council would be more strategic and proactive in attracting businesses, there might be more plentiful and a wider range of employment opportunities in Lawrence.

It sounded like a “catch 22”; because the school census is so low the schools can’t field a football team, so some families are abandoning the school system to take their kids to schools where they can play football. Low census is not all related to schools of choice, however; without jobs and decent housing, Lawrence can’t attract families with children into the village.

When asked what they would like to see accomplished, the group primarily focused on the following:

- The community needs more affordable/workforce housing and a variety of housing choices. The community is basically single family housing now and in order to attract new people or transition folks from these single family homes, they need condos and other choices.
- The village needs to be more accessible – there are residents that currently can’t get around or enjoy the amenities the community has to offer.
- Village of Lawrence needs a local building inspector; any kind of development or redevelopment is hindered by lack of local autonomy.

Focus Group #3: Business Owners, Local Developers

When asked about challenges, this group voiced a variety of concerns, but they were all generally related to the business climate in the community. The most specific, immediate need (and seemingly the most attainable) is high speed internet for the industrial park.



Most communities would rejoice at the news that a business wants to expand in their village; while in Lawrence, they are met with red tape and neighbors complain about traffic or not wanting Lawrence to “change”.

When asked what they would like to see accomplished, the group primarily focused on the following:

- High speed internet for the industrial park.
- More active, strategic and creative business recruitment for the industrial park.

Focus Group #4: Local Official

Challenges identified were blight, attracting new business and taking advantage of natural amenities. Although the village has made good progress on blight in recent years, there are still properties such as apartment buildings and some of the housing that are sub-par.

The community needs new business and industry. There is such potential in the industrial park and even the downtown, but there is no plan for attraction and retention. There is also potential to capitalize on the waterfront and the nascent trail system.

When asked what he would like to accomplish:

- Continue with good work but make it happen faster!
- Attract more people and more business.

Town Hall

The town hall portion of the assessment attracted only a few additional Lawrence residents; the balance was people who participated earlier in the day. However, the small group enthusiastically expressed their vision for Lawrence. The community will have more business and industry including mixed use development and other housing types. There will be high speed internet throughout the community, a seamless trail system and lots to do. The downtown will be vibrant and a destination for both seasonal and year-round residents.

OBSERVATIONS

The common thread in the feedback solicited during the assessment is the need to prioritize, and more strategically and actively capitalize on, three amazing assets in the community of Lawrence: the industrial park, the ISD Technology Center and the downtown (including the waterfront

and park). Lack of decent and varied housing types was also identified as an issue, and without better housing it will be difficult to attract business and industry to Lawrence.

There are, however, prerequisites that need to be addressed before using precious resources to take action steps on these priority areas. The prerequisites are: install high speed internet in the industrial park, and develop a local building construction permitting process which includes creating a position or contract for a local building inspector. First, simply put, no matter how hard and cleverly the industrial park is marketed, it is not feasible as a development site until it has high speed internet. Second, Lawrence will not be able to attract business development or expansion if the construction process is onerous, unpredictable and time consuming and the local area has no control over how the process is conducted.

Alignment with Master Plan: The Village of Lawrence Master Plan identifies priority areas of focus and recommends credible and effective strategies for community and economic development. The assessment process findings echo and support those priorities identified in the Master Plan. This report aims to complement the Master Plan by providing specific suggestions for resources to pursue the strategies listed in the Master Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the assessment process was to gather feedback from a cross section of Village of Lawrence stakeholders, summarize what we heard, share our observations and make recommendations for resources.

FOCUS AREA	ACTIVITY	FACILITATOR(S)	RESOURCES
High speed Internet for Industrial Park	The Local Development Funding Authority (LDFA) and Tax Increment Plan (proposed September 11, 2017) identifies installing high speed internet as a top priority infrastructure improvement for the industrial park. http://www.lawrencemi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/copier@lawrencemi.org_20171002_102300.pdf LDFA members, working with the Village Manager, County Economic Development	LDFA Chairperson, Kim Thompson	1. On December 13, 2018 Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is offering up to \$600 million in loans and grants to help build broadband infrastructure in rural America. Telecommunications companies, rural electric cooperatives and utilities, internet service providers and municipalities may apply for funding through USDA’s new ReConnect Program to connect rural areas that currently have insufficient broadband service. https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2018/12/13/usda-launches-new-program-create-

	<p>and business owners can create an ad hoc committee to pursue resources including technical assistance and funding.</p>		<p>high-speed-internet-e-connectivity</p> <p>2. In 2015 Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) partnered with Connect Michigan to evaluate SW Michigan Region’s broadband strategy. Community leaders throughout Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties assisted SWMPC and Connect Michigan by filling out assessments that address local high-speed internet accessibility, adoption, uses, and educational opportunities in a variety of contexts. Although now somewhat dated, the inventory can provide valuable information for this effort. See the Van Buren Technology Action Plan https://www.swmpc.org/downloads/van_buren_county_michigan_technology_action_plan_final.pdf</p> <p>3. Connect Michigan is a subsidiary of Connected Nation and operates as a non-profit in the state of Michigan. Connect Michigan partnered with the Michigan Public Service Commission to engage in a comprehensive broadband planning and technology initiative as part of a national effort to map and expand broadband. The program began by gathering provider data but has since progressed to working with communities on community plans. https://connectednation.org/michigan/about/; Eric Frederick, Executive Director, connectednation.org@cmail20.com</p>
<p>Permitting System and Building Inspector</p>	<p>Village Council and Manager must prioritize this effort and work together to incorporate permitting and a building inspector into Village government.</p>	<p>Village President and Dan Faulkner</p>	<p>4. A construction permit or building permit is a permit required in most jurisdictions for new construction or adding on to pre-existing structures, and in some cases for major renovations. Generally, the new construction must be inspected during construction and after completion to ensure compliance with national, regional, and local building codes. Failure to obtain a permit can result in fines, penalties, and demolition of unauthorized construction if it</p>

			<p>cannot be made to meet code. Building permits and a permitting system are very beneficial to both the building owner and the community. By working with expert code officials, owners will benefit from their knowledge of building codes to ensure their construction project is built right, will be safe, and will last. Learn more about the benefits of a permitting process (https://www.iccsafe.org/safety/Documents/BSW-Benefits-Permits.pdf.)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Pursue partnership with neighboring townships to share services of a qualified building/code inspector. 6. Look to villages of similar characteristics for model forms and processes
<p>Industrial Park (and PUD properties)</p>	<p>The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) Redevelopment Ready Certification (RRC) staff and resources are key to the success of developing the industrial park and the Planned Unit Development (PUD).</p>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. It is critical that Lawrence continue to pursue and become Redevelopment Ready Certified. Once certified, the following services are available from the MEDC: The Redevelopment Services Team (RSTeam) is the next frontier of the Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) program with experienced and dedicated staff focused on a proactive approach to site redevelopment. Upon RRC certification, communities gain the expertise of the RSTeam focused on proactive site redevelopment on their priority Redevelopment Ready Sites (RRsites). The team is built upon three foundational focus areas as we engage with each certified RRC community: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High-quality and in-depth technical assistance 2. RRSites marketing and promotion 3. Developer relationship building and matchmaking <p>Examples of services offered through the team include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site analysis • RFP/RFQ development • Site design • Environmental assessments

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing assistance • Developer matchmaking events <p>For more information contact: Nate Scramlin, Manager 517.862.7742 scramlinn@michigan.org</p>
ISD Campus and Programs	<p>Business and industry recruitment: strategies should include collaborations with the ISD programming to target specific skills development to specific industry.</p> <p>Housing: ISD could consider an employer assisted housing program in conjunction with new development in the PUD, or units in upper stories of downtown buildings. This could incentivize staff to live in Lawrence.</p>	ISD, LDFA and Village Manager	<p>8. Create a pipeline of talent for business and industry: Talent 2025 serves 13 counties in West Michigan, embracing the industries, businesses, and educational institutions of each county. They convene stakeholders from each of these sectors and facilitate an efficient collaboration that integrates resources, streamlines processes, and leverages energies to address the talent demand needs of each sector. Learn more http://www.talent2025.org/.</p> <p>9. Studies have shown that as workers are forced to live further from their workplace, their productivity declines, creating many challenges for business owners. Employer-assisted housing programs help employees meet their housing needs, which in turn helps employers to achieve their business goals. Learn more at https://www.fels.upenn.edu/recap/posts/1570</p> <p>10. Check out the <i>Employer Assisted Housing Resource Guide</i> published by the Great Minnesota Housing Fund at https://hospitaltoolkits.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/GMHF_EAH.pdf</p>
Housing	Southwest Leadership Council has a housing subcommittee. Identify an interested community leader to join the subcommittee and eventually create an ad hoc group at the local level to assist the Village pursue resources.	Village Manager	<p>11. Van Buren County Habitat for Humanity in Bangor, http://vbchabitat.org/</p> <p>12. SW MI Community Action Agency: http://www.smcaa.com/ has homebuyer education programs.</p> <p>13. Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis programs: In partnership with their members, FHLBI offers three grant programs designed to address the affordable housing needs:</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the Homeownership Opportunities Program (HOP) to help first-time homebuyers with down payment assistance; b. the Neighborhood Impact Program (NIP) to assist low-income homeowners with home repairs; c. and the Accessibility Modifications Program (AMP) to aid seniors and households with disabled family members with home improvements that will allow them to remain in their current homes. https://www.fhlbi.com/products-services/communities-and-housing d. Mary Beth Wott, Community Investment Officer; (317) 465-0368, mwott@fhlbi.com <p>14. First State Bank in Decatur is a member of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis Federal Loan originators: Laura J. Hillyer and John W. Grosvenor (269) 423-7014</p> <p>15. MSHDA has launched a modular housing program for affordable homeownership. Contact Tiffany King at KingT12@michigan.gov</p> <p>16. USDA RD –Aileen Waldron, aileen.waldron@mi.usda.gov USDA Rural Development Single Family Home Repair Loans and Grants can help very low income applicants remove health and safety hazards, make essential repairs or make accessible for residents with disabilities. Learn about all the USDA RD programs here. http://www.rd.usda.gov/about-rd/agencies/rural-housing-service.</p>
	<p>Explore rental rehabilitation for upper story units in the downtown.</p>	<p>Village Manager, DDA Director</p>	<p>17. MEDC offers Community Development Block Grant resources for Rental Rehabilitation, a program that partners with landlords to provide safe, decent affordable rental housing. MEDC CATEam representative: Michelle Audette-Bauman 269.568.0371, audette-baumanm@michigan.org ;</p>

			<p>or read more about the rental rehab program at http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cm/files/fact-sheets/cdbg.pdf</p>
	<p>Improve opportunities for homeownership through down payment assistance</p>		<p>18. MI Home Loan - The MI Home Loan program is a mortgage product that is available to homebuyers. All homebuyers work directly with a participating lender. Amerifirst Financial in Kalamazoo is a participating lender. Jeremy Drobeck (269) 488-9494 130817; jdrobeck@amerifirst.com</p> <p>Program Description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Michigan Down Payment up to \$7,500. (Homebuyer Education class required.) Southwest Community Action Agency offers homebuyer ed classes; http://www.smcaa.com/community-development b. Available to repeat homebuyers in targeted areas.(Van Buren County is a targeted area) c. Household income limits apply and can vary depending on family size and property location. d. Sales Price limit - \$224,500 statewide. e. Minimum credit score of 640 required or 660 for multiple-section manufactured homes. <p>19. See section 13 a. above for Federal Home Loan Bank DPA program</p>
Downtown	<p>Continue to explore resources for historic properties downtown</p>	<p>Property owners, DDA</p>	<p>20. Benefits of historic districts and buildings: Invite Michigan Historic Preservation Network (MHPN) (http://www.mhpn.org/ , Amanda Reintjes, reintjes@mhpn.com , 906-250-6301) to conduct a community education session to let property owners know about the benefits of historic districts and associated incentives for buildings with historic designations. Consider creating a packet of available incentives to hand out to developers and business owners looking to complete rehabilitation projects on older and historic properties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. MHPN Intervention Loan Program: Low interest

			<p>loan program available for buildings in threatened conditions i.e. roof repair, foundation, structural issues, etc. up to \$15,000. This loan program is available to nonprofits, municipalities and churches. Learn more at https://www.mhpn.org/programs/intervention-loan-program/</p> <p>b. MHPN Certified Local Government Program: Consider making application to this fund to initiate and support historic preservation activities at the local level. Learn more: http://www.michigan.gov/mshda/0,4641,7-141-54317_19320_61960---,00.html</p> <p>c. MHPN predevelopment loan fund: provides financial support for rehabilitating historic buildings and covers reasonable third party costs that occur in the early stages and are necessary in making projects happen. Learn more: http://www.mhpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Handout-MPF-Predevelopment-Loan_One-Pager1.pdf</p> <p>d. Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits: Available for buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places – individually, or collectively in a National Register Historic District. The building(s) must be commercial (income-producing), and the investment has to be substantial in order to be eligible for the credits. Qualified expenditures include new roof, painting, kitchens, bathrooms, electrical, plumbing, etc. and the property owner will receive 20% in federal income tax credits of the total expenditures when the project is complete. These credits can be carried forward for 20 years if the income tax liability is not high enough. They can</p>
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			<p>also be sold/syndicated to another property owner at a discounted rate. Rehabilitation work would then have to follow the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Learn more: https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives/taxdocs/about-tax-incentives-2012.pdf https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives/before-you-apply.htm</p> <p>21. Guide to repurposing downtown buildings: For ideas regarding the use of historic buildings downtown the MHPN has a new resource: "A Community Guide to Repurposing Vacant and Underutilized Historic Buildings" that can be found at: http://www.mhpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/A_Community_Guide_to_Repurposing_Vacant_and_Underutilized_Historic_Buildings_FINAL.pdf</p>
	Promotions, festivals and events	DDA	<p>22. Southwest Michigan is home to the founding farmers of the Michigan Organic Farming Movement. There are many small farmers in the Lawrence area selling a wide variety of products. Paw Paw promotes wine, Coloma has a peach and gladiola festival, Bangor has an apple festival. Lawrence can promote its many small farmers and their products. Look at agri tourism opportunities – local food is a hot topic and growing.</p> <p>23. Develop a small business shared space focused on local small farmers, a “coworking space”. It would also be a space where people can come in to town and network. The space could have the usual office amenities, maybe even a place for shipping packages. Check out what Shannon Hayes, a farmer in New York, did in her small town as a showcase for her farms products and as a way to make a community space. https://theradicalhomemaker.net/farm-store-cafe/</p>

			<p>24. There is a large Hispanic community in Lawrence. Might the Ox Roast planners reach out (through the Hispanic Churches, perhaps) to include their members in this event with their own special foods and products? Or the DDA and others work with the Hispanic community to develop a Cinco do Mayo festival?</p> <p>25. Explore ways to create better access from the river to downtown. This could include a sidewalk on west side of Paw Paw Street and signage. Pursue the river trail designation and create a trail head where the park is.</p>
<p>Leadership Development</p>	<p>Communities cannot survive and grow without passionate, energetic citizens. One way to grow capacity is to take advantage of leadership development programs.</p>		<p>26. Michigan Great Southwest Strategic Leadership Council conducts the Leadership Accelerator. It is an intensive, interactive leadership development program for a group of approximately 30 emerging or existing leaders. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to grow and impact Michigan's Great Southwest. This is the premier program to engage, empower and develop participants as leaders who will be more effective leading, growing and sustaining your organization and our community into the future.</p> <p>http://www.drivegreatness.org/about/the-leadership-accelerator-powered-by-michigan-s-great-southwest-strategic-leadership-council</p>

APPENDIX 1

Lawrence Community Assessment 12/18/18

Community Feedback

GROUP	PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES	STRENGTHS/ASSETS	WHAT WOULD LIKE TO ACCOMPLISH?	IF YOU WERE GOING TO DO ONE THING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?
<p>Zoning Administrator, Village Administrator, Downtown Property Owners</p>	<p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of low-income housing, affordable housing and a strong mix of housing. May want to look at the zoning and make better use of our old housing stock. • There isn't enough housing if you bring more industrial or commercial into the town. Currently have 3-4 homes for sale. Population is about 1,000. • Have many older homes, but not too many new ones. Have the new development that's through the trade school and more new homes on the north side of town. • Might have housing, but the homes are dated and run down. People who are here 	<p>Small Town Charm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-town safety • "Everybody knows your name." Know everybody and their characteristics. You're not a number. • Small town with historic and rural character <p>Location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halfway between Detroit and Chicago. Have a great mix of people. Meet people fabulously interesting. It attracts great people with interesting backgrounds. Have some diversity with ethnic and income. Have a large Latino population. Close to the Pokagon band of Pottawatomi Indians. 	<p>Downtown/Local Business District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want more benches, outdoor, and an overall streetscape plan. Need to test out things first. • Need a grocery store. Go to Hartford or Kalamazoo. It's so easy to get to Benton Harbor, Kalamazoo, etc. We need small shops to bring the people in, as you can go to the big shops in other areas. • Want to see: bakery, flower shop, produce shop, coffee shop, hair and nail salon, candy store, hardware, laundromat. Just had a nail salon that left. • Have a DDA that does street lights and would like to do wayfinding signs. Don't have a small business group through the DDA. The DDA doesn't get much money (\$8-12k per year.) It's just the downtown core. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful historic Dehavens building open • Have the Masonic Lodge Renovation finished and turn the upstairs into apartments • Beautification for parks and rec. Want town to be an attraction • Retail shopping • Destination instead of a drive through to the highway

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	<p>working in the factories can't afford what's available. The builders are building \$200k homes, but what we really need is \$100k homes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involved in RRC. Have a company, A&B Packaging with 225 employees and would like to double in size, but there's nowhere for people to live. <p>Local Capacity and Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only one of seven employees lives in the area. Had an inspection with a new build for cold storage which was a huge nightmare. Cost the company \$60k. Because Lawrence doesn't have building permits and they all go to Lansing, they sat on it for three weeks and then took two more weeks for plan review. Had steel on-site before permits were issued. Used building before 	<p>Have a great and brand new Amish community. Reference "horse and buggy" in multimodal in their transportation plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great location off 94 Attending a placemaking session and talked about the transects of the zones. We're in a great area in regard to Kalamazoo being an employment hub, but you're a great bedroom community. There was an idea to have the Red Arrow Corridor and to share in the benefits of the region <p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School system is great and [can] get a good quality education. Have STEM education, art programs and more. The ISD with its 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Chamber for the community. The LDFA generates about \$20k per year. They pay for the water tower and then village has been paying the difference. <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need high speed internet in order to get people to the industrial part (currently at dial-up speeds.) Parking issue. Just added an additional handicapped parking space, but the salon went to Hartford. Want community to be more inviting. The village employs five full-time employees: Manager, DPW (three people), two office staff. ISD is relocating their dental program to the facility here and will bring in 20k patients per year on the campus. New multi-million dollar project. Had trouble with the building inspectors coming in from the state. Don't have a local building inspector. Contract with the 	

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	<p>the final inspection and still don't have C of O. Need to get a county-level inspection process. Don't do local-level reviews.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No rental ordinances and inspections. Have occupancy inspections for change of ownership or occupancy. PUD is all set up with water/sewer, but has never been set up for housing since it was created in 1995, but nothing has been developed. <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication is a major issue. No local paper. Don't have the amenities because we don't have the amenities, which is a catch 22. 	<p>technical programs including the trades and culinary school. The conference center is part of the ISD complex. The admin office is at the conference center. The ISD isn't as connected yet for training programs. The fire service program has maxed out two years in a row the number of people they can train. They are thinking of doubling the size of the program.</p> <p>Recreational Amenities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hunting, fishing, outdoor recreation Parks are amazing with a great playscape. Have a wonderful library where the librarian is doing great programming with lectures and other things as a social and 	<p>state to get things done. Village website has links to the state and they all go to Lansing for approval from the state. The inspector is a state employee. Not sure how to get someone other than the council hiring someone. Township and Village may be able to collaborate as well as with PawPaw to work together.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Village and township work well together and have a joint recreation plan. The new township supervisor has a great relationship. Have a quarterly meeting (not meeting quite as often yet) 	

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		<p>community center and social agency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lawrence Garden Club is a great group that meets at the library. • Have a Lions Club, American Legion both with great dinners and breakfasts. The Methodist church is active with a food bank and do meals. <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The people. • Everyone wants to be a part of the community and work together as a team to accomplish things. • Don't know if it's good or bad that price point is such that a new Amish community is starting. Don't have internet, so that's not an issue. But we don't have people using the gas and 		

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		<p>electric.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the big picture, it's a good sign in that we're reducing our dependency on utilities. They are very hard workers, which is an asset. Have brought in a metal fabrication company where they make steel roofing and siding with the Amish. They're in the process of opening up a bakery and grocery store (two miles outside of downtown), but have two groups of contractors who do building and remodeling and the rest are farmers. Lawrence Township and Lawrence Village share a fire department. 		
Public Officials and Residents	Accessibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs to be more handicap accessible. Wheelchairs 	Good Public Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a great community with public resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Want to see a local building inspector. Something wasn't done right years ago and the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meijer by the highway New water and

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	<p>can't get into the park and playscape. Sidewalks don't have ramps to cross the street, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to have more accessible buildings <p>Lack of Proper Employment opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are employable, but don't have the skill set to fit the needs of the village. • The business district being developed would create jobs, which would help people here. Need to build a Meijer-type store in the PUD which would spur more students, etc. • Lack of opportunities. Lack of jobs and lack of public transportation, which leads to people "being a mess." <p>Loss of Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School system has a dwindling number of kids. Need to think about consolidating and get a 	<p>and natural resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public service from fire to DPW to police is great. • Have two water towers. Fire protection is amazing with access to water. <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good employers with nice facilities that are using resources • Community is good about giving back. • Have an ox roast, Christmas festival, parades for everything, • Talked to the city folks and helped to get a disabled child into a building. • Nice town that just needs a bit of TLC • Have low insurance rates based on ISO ratings. • Water bills are too high. Lawrence has the 	<p>state came in and said that there would not be an individual inspector but have to use the state of Michigan for inspections. Likely happened in the early 2000s. Only three new commercial buildings from 2000 – 2017.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More accessibility for people with disabilities. Have a large number of kids with disabilities who can't access the resources that are here. • Develop the industrial park and create jobs. • "Life pumped into the downtown" – we need a draw for people. • Had a restaurant and brewery looking at the PUD, but the lots were too expensive. • Housing goes in the township, but not the village. The housing that has gone in is the ISD. They are all affordable and have built eight homes. They are the only thing going in the village right now. 	<p>sewer mains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four corners of downtown alive • Any store – grocery store or something similar • Branding • Water and sewer under the expressway

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	<p>handle on things. Already short on staff and difficult for folks to get applicants here. Have a bus parked because we can't get a driver for it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School of choice seems to be high for kids to leave the district with kids going to Hartford or Paw Paw. Didn't have fall sports due to a lack of kids. Kids are going to other communities to play football and are then introduced to that school system. Don't get many kids in the school from other schools of choice. <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The dollar amount that they tacked onto the industrial park that's empty. The village pulled in a realtor to give prices on the lots. There are no utilities and need to have significant groundwork to be feasible. It's a burden on most developers and the 	<p>highest water rates in the county. They were raised last year as well. Had not raised the water rate and done a study in years, so understanding is that this matches what's needed. Didn't have a lot of preventative maintenance and had the state come in and demand a number of things be addressed. Wade Trim did basic work, but didn't put in any preventative maintenance, which was unfortunate. They spread the cost of the maintenance to the water customers. Water quality is still not the greatest, which has high iron in the water.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISD Trade School 		

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	<p>prices are way off. They give some incentives on jobs, but the space needs significant work even just to get things ready to build.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime rate is definitely down. The county contracts for 40 hours of police service for the community. • Park has things torn up from people messing with it. • Council needs to look at the big picture and network with other communities for a business that might want to come in (as opposed to saying a casino will bring in trash and prostitution so it goes eight miles down the street), and then we miss out on the opportunity and great things going on. • We don't have great sewers due to curb and gutter. We're the only local community without curb and gutter. We need to be able to have matching funds 			

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	<p>for local grants. The ISD owns a ton of property so the village doesn't get any taxes. But, it brings people here and could support a quick lunch place due to the 200-300 employees (programs are year-round,) but don't have any of those businesses coming in. A&B factory with 100 employees had 45 cars leave and go to Hartford; five went to Lawrence. All were going to McDonalds and other places for fast food. Vast majority of local employees also don't live in Lawrence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxes are too high. 			
<p>Business Owners, economic development, banks, local developers</p>	<p>Lack of Employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor pool is very small, which makes it difficult to open here vs Kalamazoo. • Most employees come from the west, not the east. Office and technical staff comes from the east in bigger communities, but the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet community with good programs for the kids • Very active alumni association who donates quite a bit of resources • Farmers are now planting houses and not vegetables 	<p>High Speed Internet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High speed internet • Business recruitment for the business park. Want to have competition come in so that we have a competitive edge and we would get a more qualified labor pool and negate some of the turnover rate. Village and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-speed internet in the industrial park – xx • Restaurants and retail • More businesses in general

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	<p>labor pool comes from the west. Kalamazoo thinks the world stops at Paw Paw. They can't think past it!</p> <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need high-speed internet in the entire village. People work at home because the internet is better. It's in the town, but not in the industrial park. Have to send people home to download files. Cell service is weak but better than the internet. • Truck traffic – neighbors complain about truck traffic – but three sides of town are surrounded by wetlands, which raises the costs of things. Talked about doing a road diet around 2000, but they are the emergency route for 94. Truck trailers are much bigger now and can cause a major issue. The county is now grinding up roads and making them gravel as they get really bad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Amish are moving into the community and creating a great atmosphere. • Rail may be looking at shipping product out of Michigan and to the west coast • Small town feel and know people by their name • Small things have been done over the years to improve things. There are now a couple of places for food when there was only one for years (Burger shack, bar and gas station – not just Acapulco). • Walkability 	<p>industrial park use the same realtor and have it on the MLS. It's on SW Michigan First's website and are now talking about listing the bigger parcels and farms. No larger companies will locate there without the high speed internet. We need money to get high speed internet here. Bloomingdale Communications has it close. It's slightly less than \$100k to bring it to the industrial park. LDFA has matching funds if there's a grant. But, the USDA generally will not give funds to private owners. LDFA funds are currently going to pay for the water tower.</p> <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking trails in the industrial park and tied into the ISD walking trails and having a trail system. • People used to fish in the pond in the industrial park and it's now overgrown. • People have talked about a 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People didn't want the community to grow, but don't want it to shrink. It needs to grow in order to maintain the schools and businesses here. • People here rarely participate in village and other meetings. If there's no interest other than sleeping here (they work elsewhere), they don't really care. They look at it as a bedroom community, but there's no housing here. Here people say that we need affordable housing, but housing here is affordable, although run down. The ISD is building beautiful stuff, and the village is doing a better job now of dealing with blight. Have a blight ordinance but didn't have an enforcer for a long time. Now have an enforcer and it's improving significantly in the last four years. But, there's a lack of 		<p>processing and grow facility in the industrial park, but it can't happen without high speed internet for the security. People were not against it.</p>	

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	<p>long-term vision. The Master Plan from '77 looks very much like the current one. The businesses are fighting to be competitive and support the customer base and have a different perspective. At times, feel as if we are not supported by the village.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial Park won a prize for intergovernmental collaboration (27 different ones), so we've had good things done – like the water tower – but there doesn't seem to be any economic development work going on. • Real estate isn't too pricey for the targeted businesses. • Nothing here unless you have kids – adults go elsewhere. • Neighboring businesses are with ADP rather than consumers. Consumer's bills annually but ADP does quarterly, so they can save 			

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	<p>money on their fees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential areas are built next to commercial and industrial areas – which don't necessarily live in harmony and people want the businesses to cut back hours. 			
<p>Community – Planning Commission Chair and Village Trustee</p>	<p>Blight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beautification. Have a number of rundown buildings. The Woda Group is working on rehabbing one, but other apartments are dumps. The village proper has a number of homes that have been taken over by banks. The village is making progress with the blight ordinance. The new village administrator is making some progress. <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Posted information about the planning meeting on Facebook. Village manager does a good job of 	<p>New Leadership Making impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a parks department events committee and does the music in the park and parades. New blood is really taking initiative, but more people are talking budgets and helping. As for volunteers, we have an Ox Roast in August. Have older people on the committee but just starting a beer tent which has been new. People are moving things along. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a Safe Routes to School program and partnered with the ISD to increase the grant and the coverage, but having some issues with easements. We have some deteriorating sidewalks that need work with buckling, etc. Continue with the things that are going on but make it move faster! Get more people here. Have a tax abatement. IFT reduces the eligible mills by 50% Tore down the red arrow bar and now have an empty lot Want a microbrewery in the corner building downtown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A thriving downtown like an east coast downtown with quaint shops and festive with a thriving industrial park filling all lots. Want to see a rail trail if the railroad doesn't come back in.

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	<p>communicating things. Local paper is out of PawPaw. People will post things at the gas station and other places.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic – bringing in new businesses. Thinking about marijuana, we need businesses to come in here. It’s been a tough sell to get people here. Everyone has sunk a ton of money in the water tower, but it’s a no-go. In the downtown, there are many revolving doors. • Want to see more done with the waterfront. We have a tiny park and the Lions Club but could do so much more. There’s also a creek and a trail on it. The parks department does a great job. Have flooding and it’ll go over the bridge, but we have a beautiful section of water that goes through the community. • ISD wants to put in a health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has that unique, traditional feeling with small town values. Have a progressive movement that’s changing the community’s opinion on things. The conversation on marijuana would not have happened ten years ago like it did last night (positive!) <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ISD is doing a great job and selling the new homes for \$130-\$140 and does one every two years. The ISD owns the home until it is purchased. 		

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	<p>department with public health, dentists, etc., which will bring in foot traffic but it's also another area that will be non-taxable that will be taking up land but not necessarily cover the expenses to the community. Very few people who work at the ISD actually live here. Most are in Kalamazoo.</p>			

Group	Vision	Weakness	Assets	Lightening Round
Community Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move businesses to create infill and increase population • Look at zoning for more mixed-use development and allowing for more people • More focus on the water -> Reynolds, Crystal, Lake Cora • Great opportunities that invite the locals and part-time communities • High speed internet available throughout the community • Opportunities for more housing density types (have 100 acres available) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown Vacant Buildings • Need more People • More housing and Business in industrial park in Downtown • Vacant houses -> tax foreclosures (2 in 5 years) • Economically deprived area with governmental services • Town is seen, but not used • Missing retail -> hardware, market, laundromat, etc. • Locals don't support local biz • No match with living and working, so they shop elsewhere • Lack of local communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have access to leadership/strong community • Comes together around a good project -> Palace Playground • People • Walkable • Good Schools • Top-Notch Fire and EMS and water system to support it • Technical Center/Vocational School and adding a health dept • Potential of the River Trail - Two Rivers Coalition - Recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gym and safe place for kids (youth centers) • Fiber optic throughout community • Vibrant Downtown with business mix – xx • Coffee Shop • Road Diet/More pedestrian friendly/Benches and walkways • Wayfinding signage and curbs • Campus system on ISD • Someone to buy business and allow retirement • Beautification and someplace you'd like to be

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail opportunities for both seasonal and year-round populations • Industrial park and downtown are seamlessly connected ->utilizing trail space in the industrial park • Look at business clusters who work with each other and create a hub • Active nightlife (keep the streetlights on!) 	<p>means ->no paper</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural changes ->different expectations and norms • Blight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayfinding for the trail • ISD Trail System with bridges and accessibility • New Playground • Downtown with historic buildings with different Architectural Styles • Rich business history due to the Red Arrow Highway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Way to get people off 94 (food and coffee) • A great brand and destination • Agro-tourism
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