

FREMONT DOWNTOWN BLUEPRINT REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

APPRECIATING THE PAST PROVIDING FOR TODAY PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

STATUS REPORT May 17, 2007

The Fremont Downtown Development Authority (DDA) has been working since June 2005 to implement the recommendations as detailed in the Fremont Downtown Blueprint Plan. To date, the following actions have been taken:

PARTNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

- The Fremont City Council and Fremont DDA formally adopted the *Fremont Downtown Blueprint 2005* document as the official guide for the further economic enhancement of Downtown Fremont.
- The Fremont DDA assumed the responsibility for overseeing implementation of the Downtown Blueprint; the Blueprint Process Committee sunsetted.
- The DDA decided to promote the work of the Blueprint Program through the City newsletter that is distributed quarterly to every resident and business in the City and through the City's website, www.cityoffremont.net. City staff also prepare press releases (e.g. rental rehab program) on Blueprint Program issues.
- The City submits an annual report to the State on the Fremont DDA's programs and budget.
- The DDA strives to involve local groups or individuals who would have an interest in the work of the DDA. For example, when the DDA was considering the design of the Fremont Market Place Pavilion, the Fremont Farmers Market Committee was invited to participate. Also, the DDA has invited Downtown business and property owners to many of the DDA meetings to receive their input on various issues.
- The DDA invited all citizens to participate on the following DDA Subcommittees:
 1. Marketing
 2. Public Art
 3. Parking Issues
 4. Façade/Historic Preservation
 5. Business/Real Estate Issues
 6. Streetscape/Signage

Anyone wishing to serve on these Subcommittees should contact DDA Chair Lon Vredevelde at 924-3920 or Michele Ribant, Fremont's Neighborhood & Economic Development Director, at 924-2101.

DESTINATIONS/DRAWS ACTIONS

- The City of Fremont is building a Fremont Market Place pavilion in the parking lot directly north of the Artsplace. It is anticipated that the pavilion will be constructed by July 4, 2007. The City has been awarded a \$50,000 grant through the Fremont Area Community Foundation and an \$85,000 grant through the USDA Rural Development Business Enterprise Program to aid in the cost of constructing the pavilion.
- The DDA has had two meetings with the Downtown restaurant owners to encourage them to work together on an on-going basis to support Downtown and City-wide events. Restaurant owners are being encouraged to offer entertainment in the evenings in their establishments.
- The Fremont Area Chamber of Commerce organized the Summer Concert Series so that there is a more diverse range of concerts that appeal to many age groups and tastes.

Art Placement Plan

- A Public Art Subcommittee has started a Public Art Program. The Downtown Fremont Public Art Program Guidelines and Placement Plan have been approved.
- The Public Art Subcommittee identified the first public art project; it consists of two murals, one for the front facade of the AT&T building and one for the rear facade of the AT&T building. Renae Wallace, a local artist, designed the murals. AT&T and the City are to enter into a license agreement to allow the murals to be painted on the building facades.
- The Public Art Subcommittee is also working with Cara O'Brien, a local artist. She has designed a sculpture for public art for the front of the Fremont Post Office site. A grant request to fund the proposed sculpture has been submitted.
- The City has embarked on a public art project with its Friendship City of Yahaba, Japan. A sculpture designed and created by an artist in Yahaba will be placed in the front of Fremont's City Hall at the northeast corner of Main Street and Merchant Avenue. The art sculpture will be on display in June of 2007.
- The Public Art Subcommittee created a banner placement plan. Seasonal banners (winter, spring, summer and fall) have been purchased. These banners are placed on the large overhead lights downtown Fremont from Stewart to Weaver. Holiday banners have also been purchased. They will be placed on the decorative lights from Stewart all the way to Industrial on the west end of the City during the holiday season.

Farmers Market

- The DDA has worked with local farmers and the Fremont Farmers Market Committee to create a design for a permanent market pavilion in Fremont that will satisfy the needs of both the farmers/vendors and the patrons.
- The City Council approved operating procedures for the proposed market pavilion. It will be a multi-purpose facility that can be used by many groups in the community. The pavilion will be named the “Fremont Market Place,” and the City will book the pavilion. The Artsplace is proposing to use it for an artisan market.

Local History Projects

- The City contracted with Germann & Associates of Ohio to create a Fremont Museum Economic Feasibility Study to determine whether it would be prudent for the Fremont community to establish a local history museum. Among other topics, the museum or interpretive center could promote the Gerber story and Fremont’s history. The study was provided to the City in the spring of 2006. The Museum Committee has reviewed the study and is in the midst of deciding whether a formal Board should be created to spearhead the project. Kyle Converse has offered to donate a downtown building located at 10 E. Main Street to house the museum/interpretive center.
- The City has been in contact with the owners of Windmill Gardens just east of town and a small group toured the Windmill Gardens site to determine if the windmills and the Village itself should be included as part of the museum project or whether the windmills and other structures should be strategically located in various locations throughout the City. At this point, it appears that if the City and its DDA decide to pursue the acquisition of any of the artifacts or buildings at Windmill Gardens, it will be to house them on a site which would be separate and apart from any museum. The owners of Windmill Gardens have offered to donate to the City a structure they believe is the first school house in Fremont.

PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS

The DDA worked with Fleis & Vandenbrink, an engineering and design firm, to create a Downtown Enhancement Plan for Fremont that includes the following:

- A market pavilion
- Parking lot improvements
- New or refreshed landscaping
- Public art
- Streetscape furniture (flower pots, benches, etc.)
- New signage (way-finding and entryway signage)
- New signage and landscaping for the Fremont Industrial Park

Currently the NE parking lot downtown is being reconstructed and the market pavilion is being built.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS

- The Fremont Area Chamber of Commerce partnered with the Newaygo County Economic Development Office, Inc. (NCEDO) and offered a “Customer Service” training seminar, which was offered to Downtown business owners.
- The City met with downtown business owners and introduced the idea of keeping businesses open one night a week. Thursday evenings is the evening that was suggested.
- The DDA is working to create a recycling program for Downtown businesses.
- The City’s Planning Commission is working with its planning consultants from Langworthy, Strader & LeBlanc to create a new Form-Based Zoning Code. The new ordinance may allow for projecting signs Downtown that are pedestrian-oriented and of appropriate size, design and lighting.
- The Police Dept. is enforcing speed limits and continuing to offer Downtown its Community Policing program. An additional seasonal bike patrol officer was added to concentrate efforts Downtown.
- The City’s Neighborhood & Economic Development Director is meeting with Downtown business and property owners to conduct business retention visits.
- A Downtown Fremont Marketing Plan has been approved. Grant dollars are being pursued to obtain funding for elements of the Plan.

REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS

Downtown Fremont Façade Improvement Program

The DDA’s Façade/Historic Preservation Subcommittee is creating a Downtown Façade Improvement Program. The Downtown Fremont Façade Improvement Program Guidelines and the Design Guidelines have been approved. The Program was launched in April of 2007. The City has had requests for funding from three different property owners.

Historic District Downtown Fremont

The State Historic Preservation Officer has toured and evaluated Downtown Fremont and has preliminarily determined that a large portion of Downtown is eligible as an historic district. The Façade/Historic Preservation Subcommittee gave thoughtful consideration as to whether to recommend establishing a historic district. Approval by the City was obtained to start the nomination process to recommend Downtown Fremont as a Historic District for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. City staff is conducting research so a formal nomination can be submitted in 2007.

Fremont Rental Rehabilitation Program

The City was awarded a \$365,800 grant from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority to develop upper-floor housing in Downtown. There are three downtown property owners who are participants in the Program; 10 downtown units are being renovated, 51% of which must remain affordable for 5 years. The renovation work is due to be completed by December 2007.