

Executive Summary

Founded in the late 1830s, Utica, Michigan, is a tight-knit community with a rich history. This report focuses on ways to revitalize Utica's downtown to improve connectivity, streetscape, and downtown form. By assessing the strengths and existing conditions of the downtown district, the Practicum Team has created a report emphasizing how Utica can foster a more consistent and livelier downtown.

The overall goal of the planning and development recommendations in this report are to promote a cohesive downtown that encourages pedestrian traffic along with attracting new businesses and residents. Holding events in available open spaces, enhancing wayfinding signage, establishing traffic calming measures, and creating a uniform downtown are all key to ensuring the longevity of revitalization efforts.

The methods used to complete this report include a detailed socio-economic profile, an existing conditions analysis, a situational analysis, and the feedback from residents obtained during the community engagement workshop and online survey.

Based on the results from the methods mentioned, the following conditions were realized:

Assets:

- Utica has a steady and growing economy with various competitive industries.
- Many housing options are affordable, with low vacancies across the city.
- Utica boasts a highly educated population.
- One of the prominent qualities of this city is the small-town feel that appeals to many residents and visitors.

Challenges:

- The current zoning ordinance limits mixed-use development.
- The median age is continuously increasing.
- There is a lack of recent college graduates in the area.
- There are limited housing options within the downtown district.
- Open spaces throughout the downtown are severely underutilized.
- Pedestrians crossing the street and using the bridge may feel unsafe.

Recommendations:

Utica's downtown district has significant potential to become a bustling and vibrant space. The following four recommendation categories would play a pivotal role in its transformation.

- Bridge and Connectivity Enhancements
 - Reduce bridge speed limit to 15 mph. Reduced driving speed on the bridge will improve safety for pedestrians and discourage commuters from taking Auburn Road as a shortcut to Hall Road.

- Use font size and design to make wayfinding signs more attention grabbing and direct patrons from Jimmy John's Field into downtown.
- Widen the bridge sidewalks to allow for greater pedestrian accessibility. Giving pedestrians more space on the bridge will reduce some of the perceived danger that residents feel about crossing the bridge as well as making it easier for pedestrians with mobility aids to cross.
- Open Space Utilization
 - Improve outdoor seating along the core downtown area by adding benches, chairs, tables, shade elements, and encouraging businesses to provide outdoor seating.
 - Utica can host a farmer's market by joining MIFMA's Community Driven Marketplaces program, which facilitates the exchange between consumers and producers of local food and farm products.
 - Convert the alley into a pedestrian-friendly zone by repaving with decorative materials, adding greenery, seating areas, public art, decorative lighting, and encouraging businesses to activate the space with outdoor seating.
- Streetscape and Wayfinding Improvements
 - Repave the sidewalks downtown or consider putting in pavers in order to make it safer and more aesthetically pleasing.
 - Implement bump-outs at crosswalks and intersections to make crosswalks safer for pedestrians.
 - Adequate parking signage should be installed throughout the downtown for the public parking lots.
 - Include planters throughout downtown along Auburn Road that have flowers or other plants in order to brighten up the downtown area.
- Cohesive Downtown Form
 - Adjust current zoning ordinance to encourage mixed-use development along Auburn Road.
 - Establish design standards that promote cohesive aesthetics.
 - Place a mixed-use development with a grocery store and apartments in the location of the current City Hall and Police Department.

Utica's downtown has potential to be a vibrant and attractive destination that draws people from all over Macomb County and surrounding areas. Improving connectivity with downtown and Jimmy John's Field, improving downtown form and aesthetics, and taking advantage of open space downtown will benefit the city. The goal of this plan is to aid downtown Utica in becoming a hotspot of activity and development for residents and visitors alike.