

# Strategic Program

As previously defined and based on the comparative assessment and demand forecasts, The opportunities presented for retail activity for Fennville are limited but relatively clear at this time. From a strategic standpoint, the greatest opportunities are:

- ✓ 4,000 to 5,000 square feet of additional supermarket space.
- ✓ Auto service space (TBA) expansion of about 1,500 square feet.
- ✓ About 4,000 square feet of Home furnishings space.
- ✓ Possibility of adding potentially additional food service space beyond that associated with the expanded Mexican supermarket and food service operation.

However, the opportunities for Fennville and the downtown, beyond the retail function, are significant as defined through the comparative assessment. When couple with the retail opportunities, Fennville's economic future can be secured, providing for increased return on investment, increased services to residents, and increased local jurisdiction revenues.

However, in order to secure that future, Fennville must continue to be pro-active in the economic development arena. The following is a designed program for Fennville that is comprehensive in nature, but is based upon available resources. While all elements are important, it is recognized that not all are likely to be pursued completely. Yet, Fennville should try to proceed with all elements to maximize its potential.

## Goals

The strategic program is based on a set of goals established. These goals follow.

- A. Set as a priority the enhancement of economic vitality of the community that results in increased employment, tax base, and services for the residents.
- B. In further developing the focus for future activity, Fennville should maximize its assets. These assets include the central location within the county, their character as a traditional "main Street" area, the atmosphere and the surrounding character of the community, and its competitive real estate price/lease advantage of commercial relative to lakefront communities.
- C. To enhance current sales and revenues, marketing efforts should focus upon increasing the penetration level within the primary market, or residents of the immediate area, from its current level of 56% to 15% to 80%. This will result in as much as a 50% increase in sales and revenues generated from the residents. Increased penetration of the secondary market is feasible as well and should be pursued.
- D. Create a sustainable environment for retail by developing non-retail synergistic activity. It is further suggested that the initial focus be on increasing non-retail critical mass.

- E. Attract increased revenue and sales from visitors to the area.
- F. Assure a transition of ownership for existing businesses to avoid the loss of activity from retirements.

## Recommendations

Based on the six goals, the desire to achieve them, Fennville's resources, and the ability to take advantage of the presented opportunities, the following suggestions are made.

**(1)** Expansion or new "tenant" activity or users in the following non-retail arenas should be sought:

- ✓ Medical offices & facilities.
- ✓ Other professional offices.
- ✓ Activities with appeal to younger households in an effort to develop a long-term relationship with future generations of shoppers. One fundamentally sound suggestion is to pursue a children's museum in downtown.
- ✓ Higher education activity or institution. Initially this could involve a limited number of classes at a temporary location associated with an extension of a community college, college, or university, but could evolve to a permanent building or buildings or space.

It is recognized that in some cases previous attempts have been made to recruit/attract some of these activities to the community, or, some cases, like activity existed in the past. Because success was not previously achieved, either in the attraction/recruitment process or operation of a business or activity, does not mean that it should not be pursued again. Marketability exists with the potential benefits accruing to all parties.

The following are some potential colleges/universities that might be contacted in the process.

**Westwood College** is a successful organization of nationally accredited post-secondary learning institutions that offers hands-on, career-focused educational programs. Their primary goal is to prepare students for rewarding jobs in high-demand careers. As opportunities are recognized in high-demand career fields, Westwood develops new programs with the cooperation of industry leaders. These programs are designed to meet the needs of their students, graduates, and employers. At Westwood you can earn an associate degree in as little as 17 months or a bachelor degree (where offered) in less than three years. Westwood College of Technology Campus Locations include Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Denver, Houston and Southern California areas.

**Johnson & Wales University** is a world-class university, where students have an opportunity to pursue a career education in business, hospitality, culinary arts, or technology. Scores of majors and degree programs are offered at the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral level. Johnson & Wales' five domestic campuses are located in Providence, Rhode Island; Charleston, South Carolina; Norfolk, Virginia; North Miami, Florida; and Denver, Colorado. A Charlotte, North Carolina campus was scheduled to open in September, 2004. Unique features include a 4-day school week, the opportunity to earn 2 degrees (associate and baccalaureate) in four years, and hands-on training at University-owned, operated or partnership facilities or at worldwide co-op sites

**Baker College** is one of the most affordable colleges, public or private, in the State of Michigan. There is abundant financial assistance available for those who qualify, including state grants, federal grants, scholarships, work study, etc. Baker offers both undergraduate and graduate degree programs in certain sciences, administrative areas, human services, and engineering technology. Baker also has online programs.

**General Motors University (GMU)** has established a learning organization and culture for its employees across the entire enterprise. It has been designed to help GM's executive, management, technical and professional employees continuously improve their competitive performance. This drives overall success at GM, aligns the company's training investment with its business needs, and disseminates best practices and core values. Established in 1997, GM University is one of the largest corporate educational programs in the world. It currently has 16 functional colleges tied to GM's global processes that are charged with developing curricula tailored to the professional needs and unique challenges facing GM employees from a business sector, divisional or regional perspective. Most of the classes within GMU are lecture-based and in a traditional classroom format. But over the past couple years, the focus has been to move most of the training courses on-line. The 16 colleges within GMU are: Communications, Engineering, Finance, Health and Safety, Human Resources and Labor Relations, Information Systems and Services, Leadership, Legal, Marketing, Manufacturing, Order To Delivery, Planning, Public Policy, Quality, Worldwide Purchasing, and Sales, Service and Parts.

GMU uses three dedicated classroom facilities in the U.S. The main campus is located at the new GM global headquarters in Detroit's Renaissance Center with additional campuses being operated in Auburn Hills and Warren, Michigan. In addition, GMU relies on affiliated sites and local accommodations elsewhere.

The University of Maryland **University College (UMUC)** is the Open University of the State of Maryland and of the United States. The University in its entirety has but one focus, the educational needs of the non-traditional student. Online education makes it possible for students to attend class at any time of day, in any place they choose. Because students communicate with class online, they can complete their entire degree or certificate without setting foot in a classroom. If they decide to take *only* online courses, they can choose from 19 majors and 24 minors for your degree.

At the **University of Phoenix** more than 171,600 working professionals have earned their degrees since 1976,. The University is the nation's largest accredited university; with over 17,000 highly qualified instructors, 151 campuses, and Internet delivery worldwide.

**Davenport University** is the largest independent private university in Michigan and northern Indiana. Davenport University is an independent, non-profit, multi-location university offering master's degrees, bachelor's degrees, associate's degrees, diplomas, and certification programs in business, technology, health professions, and graduate studies (MBA).Davenport's MBA program allows one to choose from 10 specialties in Business, Health, & Technology, attend 7-week classes, starting 6-times a year. You can also earn your MBA partly or entirely online.

**Thomas Cooley** is an independent, graduate college of law fully accredited by the American Bar Association since 1978 and the North Central Association since 2001. Thomas Cooley has grown from a regional law school in Lansing, Michigan, to one of national stature. They are the nation's largest Juris Doctor program and most comprehensive accredited part-time legal education program. A fair and objective admission policy and tough, practical, professional legal education are combined. Locations include Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Rochester, Michigan.

**Sanford-Brown Colleges**, founded in 1866, are a group of private, career-oriented postsecondary learning institutions with five Midwest campuses- four in Missouri and one in Illinois. SBC offers highly focused, high quality, short-term, degree and certificate programs in information technology, business and healthcare

**Katharine Gibbs** provides its students with the technology, business or graphic design foundation for career growth. Career choices with the most potential-degrees in Computer Network Operations, Visual Communications, and Office Administration, as well as Certificate and Diploma programs. Programs speed employment as within two years you can earn a degree backed by practical hands on learning, professional internships and job placement services.

**Western International University.** With WIU's Business and Technology programs, working adults can work toward their Bachelor or Master degrees in as little as one night a week. Western International University (WIU) was founded in 1978 as a non-profit institution intent on focusing on the individual student. Students learn from instructors who hold advanced degrees in their respective fields and are extremely successful in the "real world." The majority of their students are working adults. They also offer courses via the Internet through WIU Interactive

**Franklin University** has nearly 8,000 globally-minded students at their campuses in Ohio and their well-established online courses and programs each year. Of Franklin's total enrollment, more than 500 are international students, representing more than 75 different countries around the world. The University provides undergraduate and graduate students, who often work full or part-time, both the breadth of knowledge and the career-focused applications required of a balanced education. Franklin University is designed for non-traditional students.

**Remington College** has 18 college campuses located throughout the United States. Remington College prepares students for careers in Business, Computers, Medicine or Criminal Justice. Locations are found throughout the country, including the Cleveland, Ohio area.

**DeVry University offers** career-oriented education, with locations throughout North America, ongoing career support, and regional accredited. Programs include Business management and technology. DeVry has been a leader in technology-grounded education since 1931.

**Saginaw Valley State University** provides academic and professional programs and services for its students and is recognized as among the finest teaching universities in the United States.

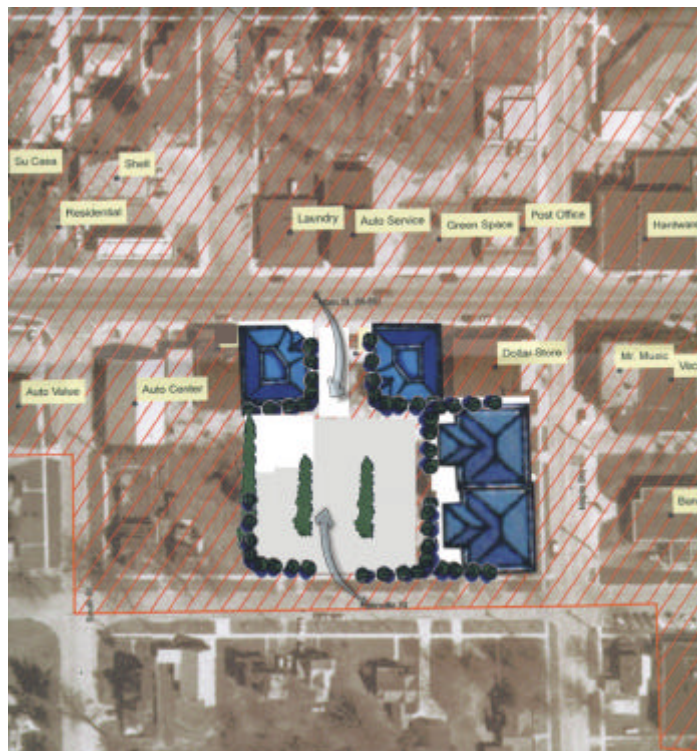
**Strayer University** provides higher education programs for working adults. Programs are in information technology, accounting and business. A degree can be completed quickly, gaining marketable skills and specialized knowledge through a six to 12-course certificate or diploma. Many of our programs also provide the background to prepare for professional certification in a wide variety of disciplines. Current undergraduate and graduate programs are available at 30 campuses in Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and Washington, D.C., as well as online.

2. The expansion, attraction, recruitment and development of the activity will require new space. In an effort to maintain the character of the area, important to the continuation as its perception of a main street area and an atmosphere conducive to increasing visitor based activity, new space must blend with the current character of downtown and its traditional main street feel. Thus, there are design considerations or guidelines that could be applied. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- ✓ Compatible materials on the exterior of buildings, predominantly brick application.
- ✓ Heights of new buildings, irrespective of the number floors, should be similar to existing buildings within the block or blocks where development is to occur or sought.
- ✓ Structures should be placed to continue like set backs or lack thereof in accordance with the street upon which they front.
- ✓ Sufficient parking, meeting codes, should be on-site. The parking should be apparent and visible from the main street” although not necessarily situated on the main street.
- ✓ Lot coverage, area and setback requirements should be flexible.

A primary site was selected by the client for redevelopment. That site is one of the key blocks in the heart of the downtown. Much of the site is currently cleared at present. Two concepts are developed for the site. Both are simply concepts. The first concept to the right:

- ✓ Illustrates about a 60% increase in space;
- ✓ Depicts four smaller buildings;
- ✓ Has a landscaped buffer around the development to the rear and west end;
- ✓ Has two points of ingress and egress;

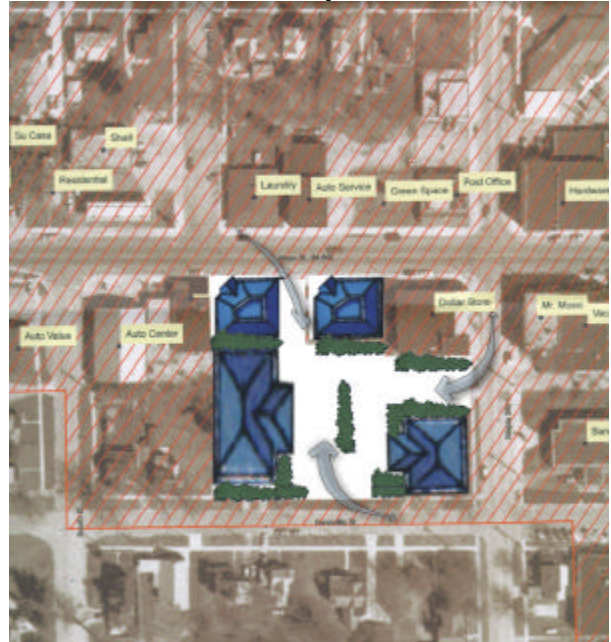


- ✓ Has parking visible from main street as well as structures across the street, where demand for parking at times exceeds the supply; and
- ✓ Has buildings that can front on both main street and off the parking either with one entrance or two separate entrances.

The second concept is somewhat similar to the first but:

- ✓ Depicts a larger critical mass, if assumed that both concepts consist of only one s-story structures (However, the initial concept could have two story structures with activity on each.);
- ✓ Has at least one structure that fronts only on the parking;
- ✓ Has three points of ingress and egress;
- ✓ Has less parking than the initial concept; and
- ✓ Has parking visible from main street as well as structures across the street, where demand for parking at times exceeds the supply.

**Concept B**



It is noted that surface parking could be expanded in either concept by utilization of additional land to the west of the defined development envelop, but within the same block.

**3.** In an effort to assist with a smooth transition of business ownership, given the current age composition, as well as with the desire of many in the area to foster additional development, including retail and service operations, an entrepreneurial and apprenticeship program should be developed. (It is noted, that if success is met with attracting cone of the higher education institutions, more or less “incubator and apprenticeship efforts could be linked to that institution.) The following is a brief description of the components of such a program.

- ✓ Recruitment of “new ownership” can be affected through community’s colleges, vocational and technical schools, and other colleges. Through the institutions students can be identified with potentially successful entrepreneurship profiles. Community recruitment speakers could also go out and stimulate interest, outlining the program and it’s benefits and requirements.
- ✓ Current owners can also identify current employees with potential. The process would include:
  - Internship – introduction and part-time work while attending school or training.
  - Apprenticeship – 1 to 3 years working and learning in the business.

- Purchase – with previous ownership staying on for 1 to 2 years.

Business “scholarships” could be arranged through cooperative partnerships with banks and other financial entities to sponsor the student apprenticeships, assist with financial planning, and procure resources for the purchase and financing of businesses.

Fennville’s economic viability will also depend upon continued market growth in the city and immediate surrounding areas. **4.** Fennville should seek to foster and facilitate quality housing in and around its immediate vicinity through the provision of utilities and the control of density. Additional quality housing, not just any housing is desirable and will have a positive impact on commercial viability.

**5.** The city should also foster the provision for some industrial growth opportunity outside of downtown. While the preference would be for such activity to occur within the city limits, due to other policies and difficulties, that may not be possible. If not possible than through influence at the county level and through provision of utilities, Fennville should foster such activity nearby.

As previously defined, Fennville is very fortunate in that both the public and private sector has an understanding that return on investment is both short and long-term. Sometimes short-term returns can be marginal or non-existent to achieve greater long-term returns. **6.** This implicit policy should continue as Fennville should seek to foster further investment in existing businesses. Additional resources can be brought to bear to assist existing operations by enhancing linkages to resources such as CDBG funds, state grant funds for mixed-use activity and other state efforts.

**7.** In addition, Fennville, either through the DDA, Chamber, or combination of both should conduct an annual survey of all businesses in the community. The survey should be conducted, if possible, peer-to-peer, using volunteers and in-person or face-to-face.

**8.** In addition to the above two efforts to continue fostering investment in existing business activity limited but coordinated direct marketing efforts should be developed. These efforts might include:

- ✓ Expansion of the current primary festival into wildlife art, crafts, and extension of its time.
- ✓ Development of a “welcome wagon” or information presentation packet to everyone who moves in to the general area, coordinated with Realtors, jurisdictions granting occupancy, or the utility companies. New residents might get a discount for the first six months to establish shopping patterns and allegiances.
- ✓ Development of a “rewards” program for frequent patrons of individual or collection of downtown operations. These could include discounts, something “free” after a number of visits, etc.
- ✓ Development of a “seniors” discount program or day of the week or time of the month (near the 3<sup>rd</sup>).
- ✓ Direct mail advertising (already being done by frame shop).

- ✓ The establishment of a “holiday bazaar”, featuring local artist, groups, perhaps with street performers. Sponsors could include schools, student clubs, financial institutions, merchants, major employers in Fennville, the County, and in other area (Holland/Zeeland, etc.)
- ✓ Expansion of or enhanced coordination with county event planning and the development of other events (potentially a fishing oriented event much like the hunting event).

9. Fennville also must develop its own recruitment effort. That effort would focus on attracting the previously defined activity. The proposed recruitment/marketing effort is essentially “tiered”. The recruitment efforts for those activities will be regional and national. On the other hand and in disseminating information and marketing, the recruitment effort is also local or includes the greater Grand Rapids-Holland area by definition. The following is suggested for the general recruitment effort.

- A. The calendar is developed. The calendar is based on the available human and fiscal resources. Quality and consistency is more important than quantity. It is assumed that for this and all other tasks, available resources will be limited.
- B. Marketing materials are developed, both professionally printed, in limited cases, and “in-house”.
- C. Contact lists are developed. (Much information is available through internet research).
- D. Contact methods are determined (may vary by season, etc.), but should include “cold call door knocking” within the local area to reach those who might want an additional location, and direct mail solicitation.
- E. Work load is determined (number of contacts per month, etc.) and assignments are made depending upon resources.
- F. A follow-up process is put into place, including phone calling after initial contact and additional mailings.

It is assumed that both volunteer and professional staff will be involved. It is suggested that an “ambassador” group, composed of existing elected officials, property owners and business owners be formed to assist professional staff with communications to those being sought. The solicitation of businesses should try to employ a combination of public relations, direct marketing, and some industry specific advertising. The following are the primary tools in the recruitment process.

1. Public Relations should be a key tool and employed whenever possible with regularity. Press releases will create awareness and could be targeted to publications within West Michigan, the Midwest and national professional “communities” for each targeted “business”.
2. Advertising is a broader message delivery method for building awareness within a wider audience. Distinguished from public relations by virtue of its paid status, exact timing, placement and message content is assured. While expensive, it potentially reaches the greatest number of potential entities.

Creating a promotional calendar, all marketing methods, including public relations, should be considered in the advertising plan so there is no waste of budget or efforts. By “calendar” planning, both the marketing budget and time commitments become manageable for implementation. .

Limited resources are likely to mean that Fennville efforts will require leveraging dollars and advertising, through joint advertising, “piggy-back” advertising with other private sector interests, seeking corporate sponsorship of ads, seeking state and county grants, and piggy-backing with quasi-public sector entities. “Piggybacking” might occur if a developer is seeking tenants for a site in the area, if an event is being held and promoted, if a store or merchandise line that is already in the area is running a promotion, etc.

3. Direct mail can be as simple as a postcard, letter with a brochure, or as fancy as a multi-piece envelope with enclosures, response cards, etc. It, along with door knocking, can be an extremely effective tool that can be spaced out over time in the recruitment program.
4. Promotional materials should be available to respond to inquiries, hand out at meetings and included with packages.

A simple, 4 x 9” tri-folded format brochure, fitting in standard racks and #10 business envelopes, is suggested as one piece because of its versatility. The contents of the brochure should emphasize the benefits of Fennville.

Additional promotional materials could include a presentation folder.

None of the above is or will be accomplished without a concerted effort. **10.** In order to achieve implementation of part or some of the recommendations or to increase downtown activity, taking advantage of the defined opportunities; Fennville must be sufficiently and effectively organized. This implies both enhanced coordination of business interests, such as the DDA and Chamber and increased commitment of resources to establish some dedicated paid professional personpower. This latter, a critical suggestions irrespective of economic development activity to be pursued, could come from potentially several sources or be handled in one or more of the following ways.

Circuit Rider. Employed in other communities for both planning and economic development activity and employed by Fennville at present in the code enforcement area, the circuit rider could be an employee of a government or an independent contractor.

Part-time City or DDA Employee. While much work has been defined, Fennville has a strong volunteer history and base that can supplement but not totally replaced paid professional staff. Thus, part-time is considered to be an affordable option. Such an employee would require some ability to coordinate volunteers to achieve success in effective utilization of resources.

Contractual Services. Some of the marketing efforts may require contracting services. However, an option would be to contract services with a private non or for-profit entity for all of the activity. While this is often felt to be too expensive, it generally is competitive in price or has less costly when all factors are taken into account.

Combination. As noted above some elements, may require contracting of services, particularly parts of the materials development for recruitment and grant writing; thus, a combination of the above could be employed.