

CITY OF LITHCHFIELD
DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MASTER PLAN

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PLAN HISTORY

Recommended to Council

Date: 8-11-97

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**DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT
TAX INCREMENT FINANCING AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS
LITCHFIELD, MICHIGAN**

I. General

This report is intended to describe the objectives and goals that the City of Litchfield Downtown Development Authority are considering to implement a development plan to complement existing development programs underway in the downtown area. It is intended that this plan will establish the basis for projects and will describe what steps must be taken to accomplish the implementation of these projects and this plan.

The DDA's mission is to halt property deterioration, increase property tax valuation and promote economic growth in the Central Business District.

The latest step taken has been the formation of the City of Litchfield Downtown Development Authority. Pursuant to the provisions of the Public Acts 1975-No. 197, the city council adopted an ordinance on, August 11, 1997, which created the City of Litchfield Downtown Development Authority. The Authority was given all of the powers and duties prescribed in the Public Act including implementing development plans and authorizing use of tax incremental financing.

The purpose of this plan is to provide a means whereby the City of Litchfield Downtown Development Authority can coordinate and revitalize downtown development.

The improvement projects undertaken in connection with this plan will enhance the shopping environment of the downtown area and encourage movement between the retail core, parking areas, recreation and office uses. They will reinforce existing downtown development programs and assure the success of the present redevelopment efforts.

The following are some of the duties that the DDA can perform under the Public Act:

1. Correct and prevent deterioration in business districts; encourage historic preservation; authorize the acquisition and disposal of interests in real and personal property; authorize the creation and implementation of development plans; promote the economic growth of the district; and create a board.

2. Analyze economic changes taking place in the downtown.

3. Plan and propose construction, renovation, repair, remodeling, rehabilitation, and restoration of a public facility, an existing building or a multiple-family dwelling unit.
4. Develop long and short-range plans.
5. Lease any building under its control.
6. Accept grants and donations for property, labor and other things of value from public or private source.
7. Revenue Bonds/Full faith and credit to the support the "Authority's" bond.
8. Capture Assessed Value.
9. General Obligation bonds.
10. Board may retain legal council. May employ and fix compensation of a director.

In addition of all the duties spelled out in the public act the City of Litchfield has adopted the FOUR POINT APPROACH: Design, Economic Restructuring, Organization and Promotion. Each of these areas is unique and must be worked on in connection with each other.

Four Point Approach

I. Design

- A. Building/Signage
- B. Parking
- C. Unification/Logo: encourage similar like styles in the district.
- D. Walking and talking areas
- E. Design Guidelines

II. Organization

- A. Cooperation with current owners
- B. Involvement with lending institutions
- C. Historical Society
- D. Partnerships with Industrial Park, Schools, City, County, and all pertaining governmental units.
- E. Presentations to the public
- F. Festivals, Special Events
- G. Survey/Census Data

- III. Promotion
 - A. Advertise to the public
 - B. Provide activities/recreation/community center
 - C. Recruit new business
 - D. Parks/promotions with business
 - E. Banners/signage/billboard
 - F. Brochures/recruitment packages
 - G. Land use

- IV. Economic Restructuring
 - A. Conversion of unused space/incubator program
 - B. Upper stories usage.
 - C. Expand existing businesses
 - F. Financial/Technical support

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT AREA

NORTHWEST PART OF DOWNTOWN AND M-99 CORRIDOR:

That portion of the City of Litchfield bounded on the east by North Chicago Street and on the west by Warriner Avenue and on the south by west St. Joseph Street including lots #135 through 168 and Lots #223 AND 224

NORTHEAST PART OF DOWNTOWN:

Public Square and Lots #39 through 45

SOUTHWEST PART OF DOWNTOWN:

That portion of the City of Litchfield bounded on the north by west St. Joseph Street and on the east by South Chicago Street and on the south by the St. Joseph River including Lots # 226 through 235 and Lots #278 through 280.

SOUTHEAST PART OF DOWNTOWN:

That portion of the City of Litchfield bounded on the west by South Chicago Street and on the north by East St. Joseph Street including lots #281 through 294, 352,353, and 358 through 367.

Also including those sections of all streets, alleys, and railroad rights of way abutting said lots.

III. PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT ACTIONS

B. Statement of Overall Project Objectives:

The City of Litchfield is seeking to strengthen the position of its downtown and adjacent areas. Competitive shopping centers and the major development occurring out of the City have led City officials to take steps necessary to enhance the downtown area. This is being accomplished through a range of improvements. Additional projects are required which will remove impediments to development, encourage development of existing physical and economic potentials and re-shape portions of the area as needed in accordance with sound principles of planning and design. It is anticipated that these projects will create a more advantageous and attractive environment for essential services and other central area functions. Specifically, the purpose for undertaking this project is as follows:

1. Assure the success of present downtown redevelopment projects through programs that will facilitate compliment and complete these efforts.
2. Reinforce the City's existing retail, commercial and service activity areas through programs of physical redevelopment and improvements.
3. Provide a way by which the City's can expand its economic base.
4. Provide the potential for expanded employment opportunities in the City.
5. Assure the future of the downtown area as a viable commercial, cultural and recreational center and assure its economic well being.

C. Redevelopment Activities:

The following types of redevelopment activities are proposed for the downtown district:

1. Construction of open landscaped areas, which will become the focal points to which redevelopment will relate.
2. Provisions for new public facilities, utilities, landscaping and other features necessary to adequately serve and enhance the general area.
3. Maintenance and expansion of the downtown parking lots.

4. Establishment of design objectives and development controls for the Central Business District such that the overall objective for this area and its environs may be adequately realized and redevelopment insured which will harmonize with the rest of the City.

B. Statement of Specific Project Objectives:

Redevelopment and design objectives for the City of Litchfield regarding the Central Business District are as follows:

1. Achievement of functional and aesthetic integration of new development in the redevelopment area with existing downtown development. (Design Zoning)
2. Articulate movement and add character to the development district and give downtown a human dimension.
3. Consolidate and intensify the downtown district as a specialized environment.
4. Improve access and strongly connect the principal activity centers and parking areas.
5. Develop guidelines for an overall streetscape system and create a visual unification for the district.
6. Encourage land uses which will include the following:
 - Compatibility and unity of architectural treatment.
 - Consideration for the relationship of land uses and building front designs to those surrounding areas.
 - Other measures contributing to the aesthetic enhancement of the area.
7. Elimination of structures which become incompatible land uses and detract from the economic welfare and appearance of the project.

VI. Revitalization Projects

Redevelopment projects provided for in this plan are intended to reinforce, enlarge upon, and complete ongoing development in the Central Business District. These objectives are to be achieved by undertaking projects, which will visually and physically connect activity centers and unite the downtown area. Projects are also set forth that will improve parking areas and provide for pedestrian connections between parking areas, stores, office and other activity centers. Focal points and public areas will be completed and other physical development action and achieve design objectives for facade restoration, and streetscape improvements.

A. Summary of Projects

1. Short Range Projects (1998-2008)

a. Storefront and Façade Improvements

A program may be implemented to encourage storefront and façade improvements, and guidelines will be prepared for physical development action needed to strengthen and reinforce the original architecture of Litchfield. Low interest loan pools will be initiated with local lending institutions to encourage renovations. Rebate programs will be instituted by the DDA, as money becomes available to encourage renovations.

b. Parking Lot Improvements

Improvements may be undertaken to make the parking lots in downtown area more attractive and efficient. Building owners and tenants will be encouraged to make improvements to enhance building facades and rear entrances. Improvements will include the use of colorful banners on poles to screen unsightly utilities lines, construction of special pedestrian surfaces incorporating the use of street pavers, special surface treatments and other decorative material, and the construction of interesting and attractive courtyard spaces where possible. Better defined and organized parking areas should be encouraged behind stores and unused and unattractive areas should be utilized and made more attractive. In addition, expanded parking facilitates need to be incorporated throughout the district.

c. Graphic Communications

A graphic communications system should be implemented to coordinate and control all informational, directional, and advertising signs. A uniform sign shape, size and color will be developed in order to build a unified identity for the downtown area.

The letter style and logo adopted by the Downtown Development Authority will be incorporated in the graphic communications program. Signs will be constructed and installed that will identify the entrance to the shopping district, public parking areas, and time limits. Other signs such as coded directory signs showing store locations and safety information may also be provided.

d. Entranceway Improvements

Improvements should be made to the entranceway areas into the central business district. These improvements will include special street lighting and landscaping. Highly visible surface parking lots and other unattractive areas should be buffered with landscaping to neutralize their visual impact. Distinctive and easily recognizable landscape lighting and graphics will be used to indicate points of entry into the downtown. Other programs will be undertaken to inject greenery into the downtown area.

e. Interconnected Stores

It is recommended that interior passageways be developed between the stores in each block so that shoppers and visitors can pass from one store to the next without having to go back outside.

f. Flags/Banners

Flags and banners are encouraged to be used to enhance a vital and lively image for the downtown area.

g. Pedestrian Emphasis

Benches, awnings, planters, trash collectors, tree and bicycle racks are but a few of the items that may be added to the downtown area to make the pedestrian extremely comfortable. The downtown area will be given a more "human" dimension with this emphasis on pedestrian traffic.

2. Long-Range Projects (2000-2020)

a. Expanded Parking

A vitally important aspect of our downtown area is its parking. As the population grows and demand for parking space overwhelms our present parking lots, more parking areas will have to be provided. Surface parking, if placed too far from the shopping area will not be used. Two alternatives might be considered:

1. Parking Ramp:

For instance, a one-story or underground parking ramp in now vacant land would provide additional 60 spaces.

2. Streetcar/Horse drawn Carriages:

Unique attractions can be considered as a draw to Litchfield. These types of specialty items are a big draw with a revitalized downtown.

b. Downtown Hotel:

A hotel in the downtown area providing a full range of amenities, i.e., restaurants, meeting rooms, pool, etc, would become a major asset to the county's tourism industry.

c. Ornate Street Lighting

"Old time" streetlights installed in the downtown shopping area would enhance the architectural significance that is being recommended as a part of this plan.

d. Residential and Office Development

Affordable housing and office space needs to be built in the central business district. Adjacent properties would be a good location for further development.

e. Daycare Facilities

f. Community Center

Facilities providing the community with recreational activities, Theater, Auditorium and community pool.

3. Financing of Projects

The Downtown Development Authority Act, Act 197 of PA 1975, as amended by Act 32 of 1981 authorized a new concept in financing projects undertaken by DDA's. This concept is referred to as tax increment financing and is a method whereby the taxes on an increased value of property which has benefited from development projects become available to finance further development.

The DDA can also receive money from donations, grants, and City funds, bonding and from lending institutions.

Short Range Projects

1998-2008

Public Acts 1975-No.197
Ordinance - No 97-3 City of Litchfield
Adopted 8-11-97 By Council

Long Range Projects

2000 - 2020

DDA's mission is to halt property deterioration,
increase property tax valuation and promote economic
growth in the Central Business District.

Four Point Approach

Design-Organization-Promotion-Economic Restructuring