

A stylized, light blue map of the City of Niles is overlaid on a dark blue background. The map shows a winding river on the left side and a grid of streets in the center and right. The text 'THE CITY OF NILES' is positioned at the top center of the map area.

THE CITY OF NILES

Master Plan

DRAFT 3/1/2021

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WELCOME TO
NIILES

Part I.

INTRODUCTION



This Master Plan is intended to guide growth, development, and revitalization in the City of Niles. This plan reviews the community's resources, assets, and limitations, considers its existing conditions, and contemplates how these conditions might be impacted by future development and redevelopment. This plan also seeks to protect the character of the City of Niles and its historic and small town charm, while also seeking to understand the needs and desires of the City residents. Through these efforts, this plan provides a framework for future development and a vision for the future that is best suited for the Niles community.

The effort that went into this plan illustrates a strong commitment to retain and strengthen local quality of life. It outlines the preferred future for the community and sets forth a comprehensive plan to realize it. It is appropriately general, recognizing that planning for the future is a delicate blend of art and science, and that flexibility will be needed to enable the City to appropriately apply this plan to the challenges of the future.

This plan is also intended to address the community's desire to strengthen its numerous existing assets. The previous Master Plan was completed in 2003 and conditions in the City have changed significantly since that time. Some of the information, recommendations, and policies are no longer relevant to planning in Niles, although some of its policies were retained. Finally, through careful research, this plan is an advisory guide for future land use planning decisions.

CHAPTER

1

Introduction

What's a Master Plan?

- 1.** A Master Plan looks years ahead to meet future needs related to the development of the City.
- 2.** It serves as the official policy statement for land use, transportation, infrastructure, and other city services.
- 3.** It provides a basis for development regulations, public improvement plans, and for work by the City to address the development of the City.
- 4.** The plan provides a means for private organizations and individuals to determine how they may relate their building and development projects and policies to official City planning policies.
- 5.** A Master Plan connects Niles' plans to the plans of other communities in the Southwest Michigan region.

The fundamental purpose of the Master Plan is to enable the City's Planning Commission to establish a future direction for the City's physical development. Because of constant change in our social and economic structure and activities, the Plan must be maintained through periodic review and revision so that it reflects contemporary trends while maintaining long range goals. The Plan will be effective to the degree that it:

- Reflects the needs and desires of the citizens of Niles;
- Realistically interprets and reflects the conditions, trends and the dynamic economic and social pressures that are brought about by change; and
- Inspires consensus and cooperation among the various public agencies, developers, and the citizens of the City toward achieving common goals.

Niles' previous Master Plan was adopted in 2003. When the City began the process to update the plan in 2018, it had several objectives. First, it was important to perform a comprehensive update of community data to see how the City had evolved over the past 15 years. Secondly, the City sought to clearly define the priorities of the City with regard to community character and land use. Thirdly, the updated plan needed to reflect the numerous planning efforts that have been undertaken since the 2003 Plan was adopted, and incorporate the policies and recommendations of those efforts into a new comprehensive document.

Finally, the planning process was as an opportunity to build and strengthen a community consensus about the future land use patterns in the City, and to outline realistic and effective mechanisms to achieve the plan's objectives.



FIGURE 1-1. LOCAL STREETScape

The Planning Process

The planning process involved five inter-related phases:

- **Data Analysis** - A current assessment
- **Public Input** - Listen and learn
- **Goals and Objectives** - Creating a policy foundation.
- **Plan Preparation** - Defining Niles' preferred future
- **Implementation Strategies** - What to do next

This City of Niles Master Plan was prepared in 2018-2019 pursuant to the procedures of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008, as amended).

On _____, the City Planning Commission held a public hearing and recommended adoption of this Plan to the Niles City Council.

The City Council formally adopted the Plan on _____



FIGURE 1-2. RIVERFRONT PARK

The Organization of the Plan

This Plan is organized into five parts, each consisting of one or more chapters.

Part I includes this introduction which outlines the purpose of the plan, the process for its development, and acknowledgments to those involved.

The next three parts provide an overview description of the Niles community: **Our Landforms, Our People**, and **Our City**. Together, these provide a community profile, which presents an overview description of the City of Niles.

The final part, **Our Plan**, defines goals, objectives, redevelopment sites, and implementation strategies for achieving the desired vision for the community.



FIGURE 1-3. DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY

Community Profile

Our Landforms, Our People, and Our City present a general profile description of the City of Niles. This section is not intended to be an exhaustive inventory of all the numerous aspects of the community. Rather, its purpose is to give some general impressions of the natural features, people, land use patterns, and infrastructure that make up the City.

These chapters are intended to set the stage for the plan's goals and objectives, the future land use plan and map, and implementation strategies.

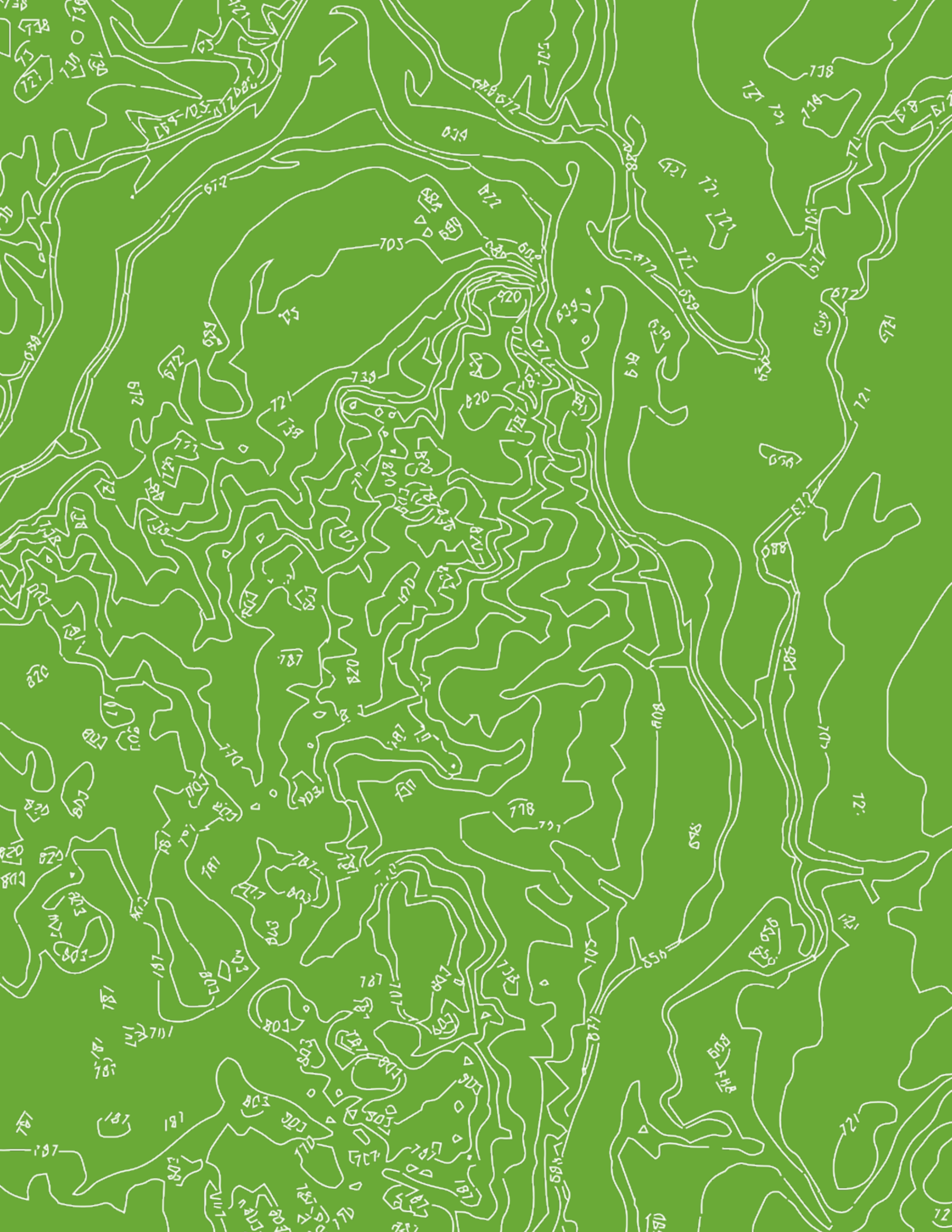
Each of the following chapters includes an overview of its subject matter along with a brief discussion of the planning trends that are relevant. The material presented has been drawn from existing research and published texts. This approach provides an efficient use of City resources in the development of

the plan. However, in a few instances, this approach may result in some unanswered questions. Further research or analytical work could be undertaken to find answers to those questions, but extensive refinement of the details at this stage of the process seldom results in large-scale shifts in policy.

The City has found that the resources available for the completion of the Plan are best directed at forming the general outlines of land use policy with the intent of refining the details of strategies as implementation proceeds.



FIGURE 1-4. NILES NEIGHBORHOOD





Part II.

OUR LANDFORMS

The City of Niles is located in southwest lower Michigan, primarily in Berrien County. Niles is only three miles north of the Michigan/Indiana state line and is generally considered part of the South Bend metropolitan area. Niles is a classic Midwest small town of 5.5 square miles. It benefits by its prime location to transportation corridors, major metropolitan centers, access to the St. Joseph River, and proximity to Lake Michigan.

The natural and cultural features, along with strong industry, quality housing, and beautiful public amenities, quickly built a strong and prosperous local economy in the 1960s that has continued to this day.

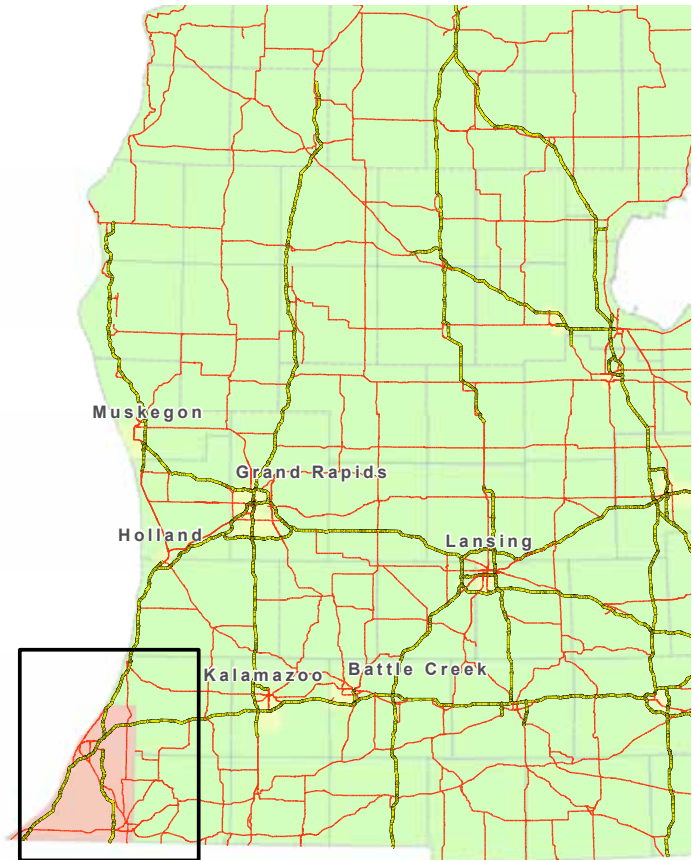
Niles is a community in which most available land has been developed as the City has grown and evolved over the years. Like many cities, however, plentiful redevelopment opportunities exist throughout Niles on properties that are served with modern public utilities, infrastructure, and conveniences.

The City has a well-defined downtown located in the center of the City surrounded by traditional neighborhoods, key commercial corridors, and productive industrial enterprises that contribute to Niles' well-rounded and diverse local economy.

Part II of the Master Plan looks at Niles' natural and built environments.

CHAPTER 2

Physical Geography



MAP 2-1. LOCATION

Cultural & Historical Features

Evidence of human activity has been documented around Niles for centuries. At the point of European contact, the Miami Native American tribe inhabited much of the St. Joseph River Valley. Replacing the Miami in the early 18th century, the Potawatomi settled here, growing crops of corn, beans, and squash as well as medicinal herbs.

In the 1680s, French Jesuits established a mission on the east bank where the St. Joseph River narrows. The Potawatomi, who had a large settlement on the River's west bank, called this area "Pawating," or crossing. The French government constructed Fort St. Joseph in 1691

at this strategic site. As a mission, garrison, and trading post, Fort St. Joseph helped the French maintain control of the Great Lakes region over the British. A commercial success, Fort St. Joseph ranked 4th in volume of furs traded among all posts in New France. French officers relied on the support of Native allies. The two groups exchanged culture and knowledge in addition to trading goods, and also intermarried.

In 1761, following the Seven Years' War (also called the French and Indian War), the area fell under British control. Unhappy with British rule, Native American tribes united under the Odawa Chief Pontiac attacked several forts in 1763, including Fort St. Joseph. The British never regarrisoned the Fort after Pontiac's rebellion, though some trading continued. In 1781, an expedition of French and Native subjects from Spanish St. Louis claimed Fort St. Joseph for the King of Spain. They plundered the Fort and raised a Spanish flag for a single day. The incident earned Niles its moniker "City of Four Flags," the flags belonging to France, Britain, Spain and later America. This does not account for the Native groups who controlled the area before European arrival, nor Chief Pontiac.



FIGURE 2-1. CITY OF NILES ORIGINAL PLAT MAP

Fort St. Joseph was abandoned by the end of the 18th century. Trading centers and a new mission opened near Bertrand. During the 1820s, Leopold Pokagon negotiated for some of the area Potawatomi to remain in southwest Michigan, avoiding removal to western lands. The Pokagon Band received federal recognition in 1994. Today, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians has tribal offices in nearby Dowagiac and is an active cultural agency offering services for tribal members and programs for the general public.

Did You Know?

- There are six state or US highways that meet in or near Niles: (US-31, US-12, M-51, M-60, M-139, M-140)
- Niles is within three hours by car to six major metropolitan centers: Chicago (IL), Detroit, (MI) Indianapolis (IN), Fort Wayne (IN), Grand Rapids, (MI), and Toledo (OH)
- There are ~17 million people within a three hour drive.

FIGURE 2-2. HISTORIC DOWNTOWN RENDERING



Interest in Fort St. Joseph was renewed in 1998 when a team of archaeologists from Western Michigan University discovered artifacts from Fort St. Joseph. Since then, at least six houses have been identified along with religious, military, and trade items to give a glimpse into past residents of the Fort. WMU and the City of Niles have developed the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project into a wide-ranging program with many community partners. Excavations, site tours, summer camps, lectures, and an Open House event with reenactors offer opportunities for the public to engage with the past.

In the 1820s, Baptist missionary Issac McCoy built Carey Mission near the present-day western limits of the City. McCoy and his family set up a school and farm to teach local Potawatomi new methods of agriculture, blacksmithing, and sewing. Many of these methods conflicted with traditional Native culture. By 1830, the McCoy's abandoned Carey Mission, though their tenure here paved the way for European settlement. The Village of Niles was platted on August 1, 1829 and incorporated as a City in 1835. Since many east-west trails converged here, Niles served as a stopping point for westward bound travelers. Many stayed and settled, recognizing the River's potential for industrial use.

FIGURE 2-3. FORT ST. JOSEPH MUSEUM



The railroad arrived in 1848, cementing Niles as hub for transportation and commercial activity. In 1891, a new, grand, Romanesque train depot was constructed to impress travelers en route to Chicago’s Columbian Exposition. The depot remains a landmark in Niles today, and Amtrak continues to provide daily service. Hollywood took notice of the picturesque depot and several movies have been filmed here.

Clues to the Past

Public and private buildings provide evidence of the City's history, including the Niles History Center in the Chapin Mansion and the Carnegie Library.

Historical Landmarks

Niles’ rich history is evident in its neighborhoods, museums, downtown areas, and antique shops. Niles has seven sites recognized on the National Register of Historic Places and ten through the State of Michigan. The City identifies 37 notable sites and two historic districts, the Downtown Historic District and the Fourth Street Historic District (Map 2-2).¹ Much of this history is shared by the Niles History Center, housed at the Historic Chapin Mansion. The Mansion’s former carriage and boiler house serves as the Fort St. Joseph Museum. The Niles History Center offers exhibits, walking tours, lectures, field trips and several public programs and events annually.



FIGURE 2-4. NILES TRAIN STATION

¹National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service. Retrieved from <https://npgallery.nps.gov/nrhp>

Historic Places

- 1. Beeson House/Mausoleum (in township)
- 2. Camp Barker
- 3. Carey Mission Marker (in township)
- 4. Carnegie Library
- 5. Dickereel Neighborhood
- 6. Dodge Brothers
- 7. Father Allouez Grave Site
- 8. Ferry Street School
- 9. First Presbyterian Church
- 10. Fort St. Joseph Site
- 11. Four Flags Hotel
- 12. Franklin AME Church
- 13. French Paper Company
- 14. French Paper Mill Dam
- 15. Henry A. Chapin House
- 16. Island Park
- 17. John Moore Lodge
- 18. Krick House
- 19. Lottie Wilson House (not pictured)
- 20. Mechanical Freezing Plant (not pictured)

- 21. Michigan Central Railroad Depot
- 22. Michigan Central Railroad Roundhouse
- 23. Mount Calvary Baptist Church
- 24. Niles History Center
- 25. Old Post Office Building
- 26. Pawating Crossing (not pictured)
- 27. Ready Theater
- 28. Reddick Building
- 29. Ring Lardner House
- 30. Riverfront Park
- 31. Second Street Viaduct
- 32. Silverbrook Cemetery
- 33. St. John's United Church of Christ
- 34. St. Mary's Catholic Church
- 35. Terminal Grounds Hotel (not pictured)
- 36. Trinity Episcopal Church
- 37. Wesley United Methodist Church

Fourth Street Historic District
 Downtown Historic District

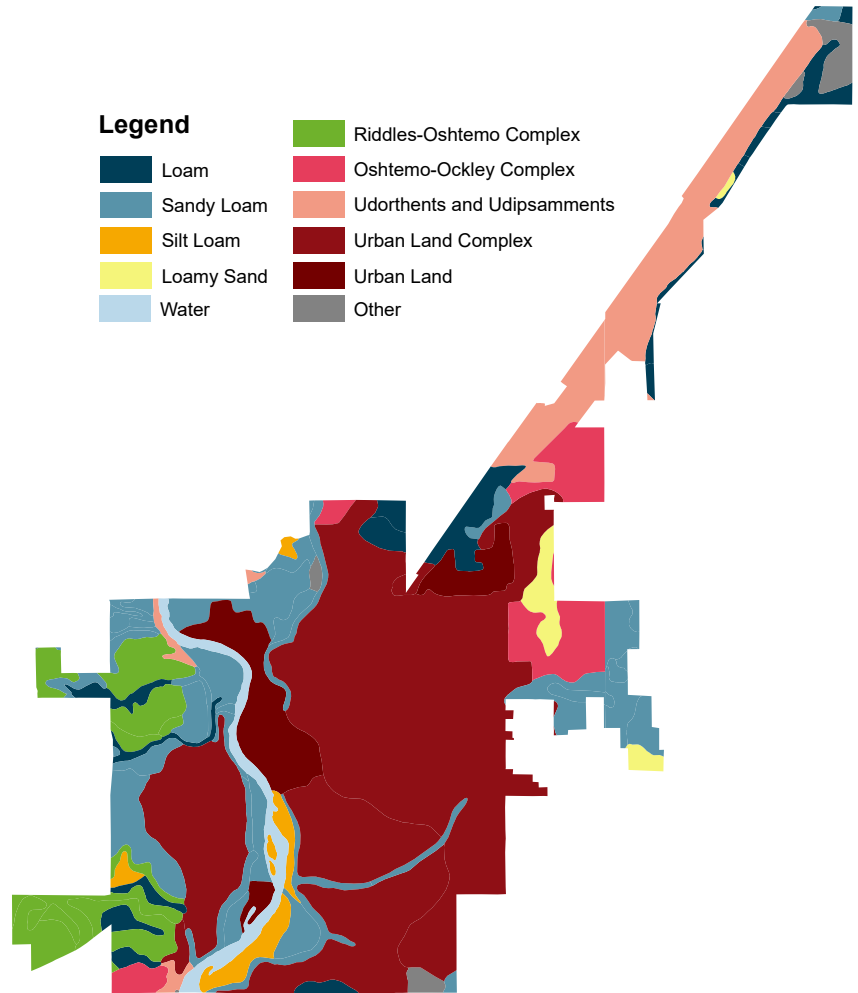


MAP 2-2. HISTORIC LANDMARKS

Topography, Geology, and Soils

The City of Niles falls within the geophysical region known as the “Cass-Kalamazoo Plains.” The region is characterized by flat plains and low hills, lakes, and lake basin swamps. The dominant bedrock in Niles is Ellsworth Shale, along with the presence of some Coldwater shale. These range from Upper Devonian to Mississippian time periods. Soils in the region developed from unconsolidated glacial till weathered by the action of the climate and vegetation.² The most significant relief occurs as part of the river ravine.

According to the Web Soil Survey of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the soils in the City of Niles are primarily an Oshtemo-Urban land complex. These soils are set within the Cass-Kalamazoo outwash plains. Other primary soil types are an Oshtemo-Ockley complex, Riddles-Oshtemo complex, and Plainfield-Urban land complex (Map 2-3). All of these soil types have a varying composition of sand and loam, allowing for good drainage. Although sand and loam soils are the basis for soil composition in the City, most of the soil is covered by urban land features.



MAP 2-3. SOIL TYPES

Climate

According to NOAA climate data for Berrien County in 2018, winter months averaged 30.4°F with an average of 2.2 inches of precipitation. Summer months averaged a temperature of 71.5°F with an average precipitation of 3.8 inches. The seasons in Niles provide exceptional opportunities for fishing, golfing, hiking, sledding, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. Additionally, Niles celebrates its seasons through community activities, such as the Hunter Ice Festival and the Apple Festival Grande Parade.



FIGURE 2-5. HUNTER ICE FESTIVAL
SOURCE: HUNTER ICE FESTIVAL FACEBOOK PAGE

²Gillespie, R., Harrison III, W. B., & Grammer, G. M., 2008. Geology of Michigan and the Great Lakes. Michigan Geological Repository for Research and Education & Western Michigan University.



FIGURE 2-6. ST. JOSEPH RIVER

A defining element of the City is the St. Joseph River. Today, the riverfront offers recreational destinations, residential locations, and wildlife habitat. The unique benefits of riverfront property provide the City with the opportunity to preserve unspoiled riverfront areas, provide recreational opportunities, and educate the public on the importance of protecting the water quality for future generations.

Lakes, Watersheds, Wetlands, and Drainage



FIGURE 2-7. DOWAGIAC RIVER CORRIDOR

Watersheds

A watershed is a region of land that is drained by a particular river or river system. Typically, these systems include many smaller tributaries such as creeks and streams that feed into a larger river and are influenced by elevation or the lay of the land. The St. Joseph River watershed is the primary watershed in Niles, which is fed by the smaller Dowagiac River Watershed (Map 2-4).

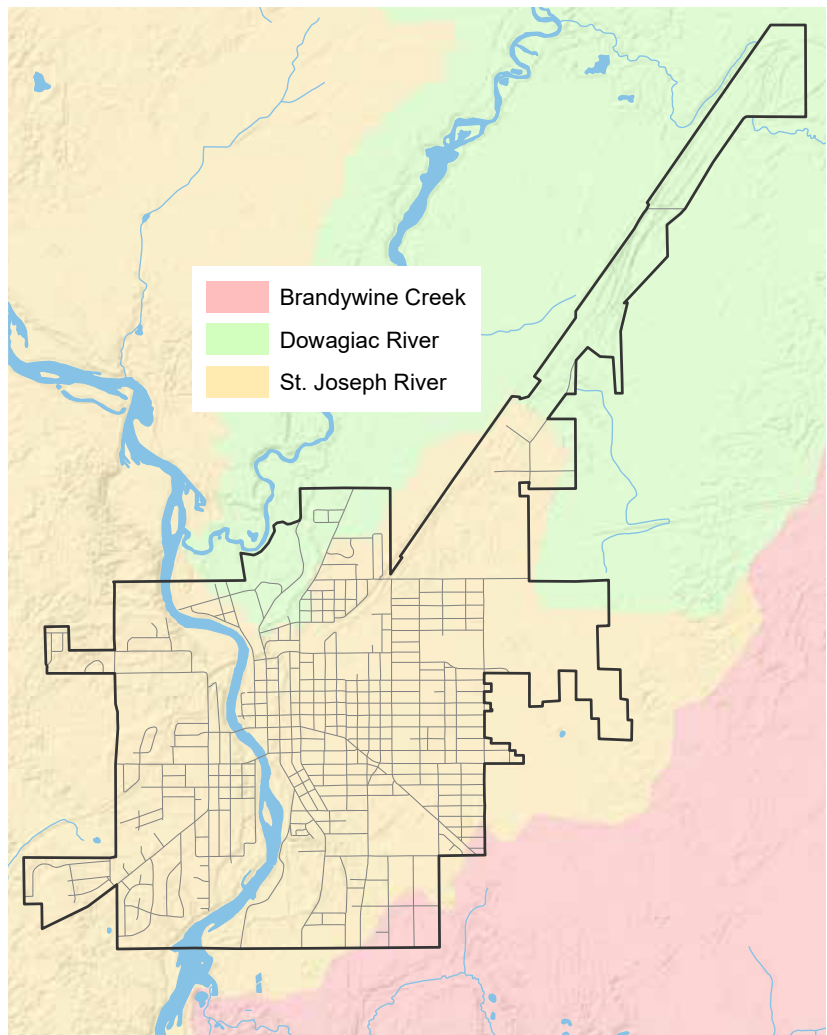
The St. Joseph River watershed drains approximately 4,600 square miles in 14 counties and two states. The river and its tributaries flow through hundreds of rural, suburban, and urban communities. The river's headwaters are located in Hillsdale, Michigan, and travel 210 miles before

flowing between the twin cities of Benton Harbor and St Joseph into Lake Michigan.

It is important to plan for human impacts on watersheds. The Dowagiac River Watershed Project was completed in 2002 in an effort to educate residents about trends in current land use, opportunities for change, and how to make informed decisions related to the Dowagiac River Watershed. There are many organizations associated with the St. Joseph River Watershed, the most active of which is the Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FofSJR).

The City of Niles and partners are making a major effort to increase water quality through the removal of the Pucker Street Dam. This dam has been ranked as having highest priority in the entire St. Joseph River watershed.³ The dam is located about 3 miles from the convergence of the Dowagiac River and St. Joseph River and is responsible for closing off almost the entire Dowagiac River Watershed and its tributaries to the St. Joseph River. The Dowagiac River is a coldwater stream with a high gradient, which is rare for southern Michigan. The removal of the dam would restore approximately two miles of high gradient habitat upstream from the dam. The Dowagiac River is also known as a high-quality fishing river.

A project involving the removal of the Pucker Street Dam occurred in 2019 and river remediation is scheduled to continue through 2020. The removal of this dam allows migratory fish such as salmon and trout to continue up the Dowagiac River further into their habitat. Because the dam removal allows the river to flow freely into the St. Joseph River, it is expected to become a great ecological and recreational asset for the surrounding area.⁴



MAP 2-4. WATERSHEDS

Water Quality

Water quality within a watershed is directly related to the land management practices within that watershed. Large amounts of impervious surfaces (parking lots, buildings, etc.) within a watershed can increase sediment runoff and nonpoint source pollution both within the watershed and streams, lakes, and rivers into which the watershed drains.

³2016-2020 Community Recreation Plan for the City of Niles, Michigan.

⁴Pucker Street Dam, 2018. Southwest Michigan Planning Commission. Retrieved from www.swmpc.org/puckerstdam.asp.

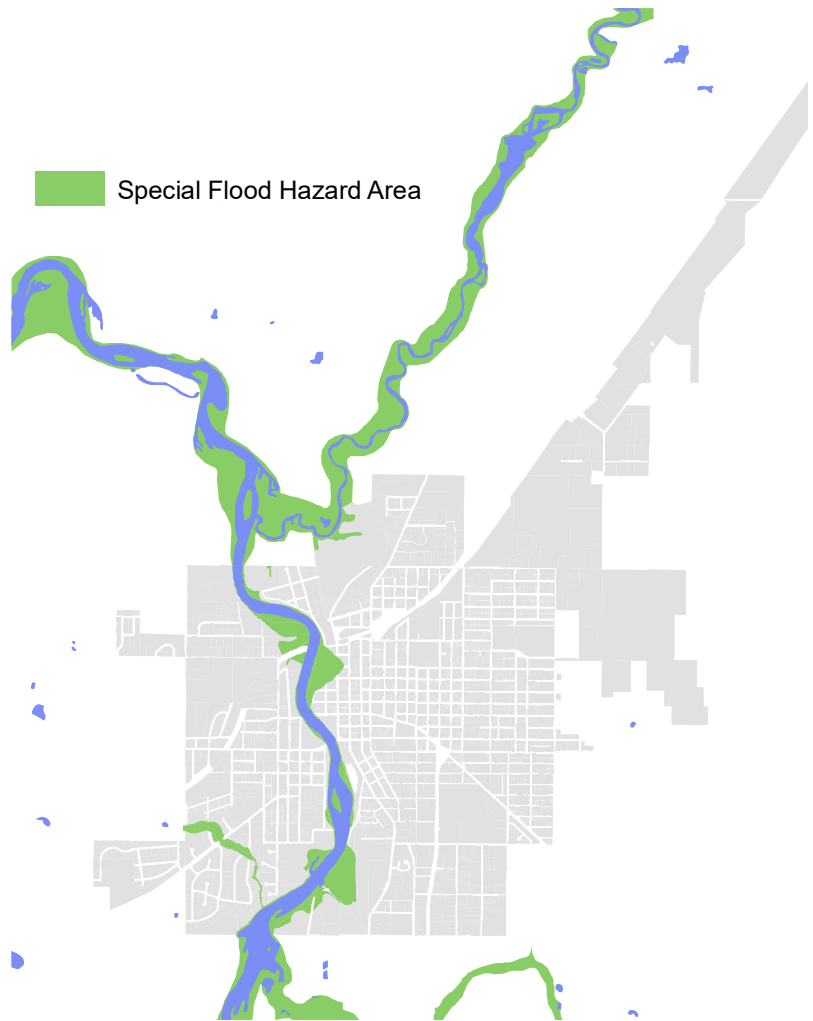
Floodplains

Flood areas deserve specific attention within the City of Niles. Much of the area in and around the St. Joseph River, the Dowagiac River, and the West Tributary fall within the Federal Emergency Management’s (FEMA) designation of the floodplain. Map 2-5 also illustrates FEMA’s Federal Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) in Niles.

On February 22, 2018, the Saint Joseph River reached a record historic crest of 17.33 feet. This flood impacted numerous buildings, reaching several key properties.⁵ This historic flood also closed Island Park due to damaging structural impact on the pedestrian bridge, although the City seeks to reopen the bridge in the near future. Community support and funding will play a vital role in repairing the damages.

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was established by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development pursuant to the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968.⁶ The City of Niles became a participating member in 1987 and Section 322 of the City of Niles Zoning Ordinance approves the NFIP rules and regulations, as amended. The NFIP Community Rating System (CRS) was implemented in 1990 as a voluntary program for recognizing and encouraging community floodplain management activities that exceed the minimum NFIP standards.

This program can provide up to 45% reduction in flood insurance premium rates for policyholders, depending on the level of participation.⁷ Because there are several properties in the Special Flood Hazard Area near the St. Joseph River, this program may offer an opportunity for the community to engage in positive floodplain management activities.



MAP 2-5. 100-YEAR FLOODPLAIN

⁵Spalding, Mary Beth. Rising St. Joseph River Continues to Threaten Niles Residents, South Bend Tribune, February, 2018.

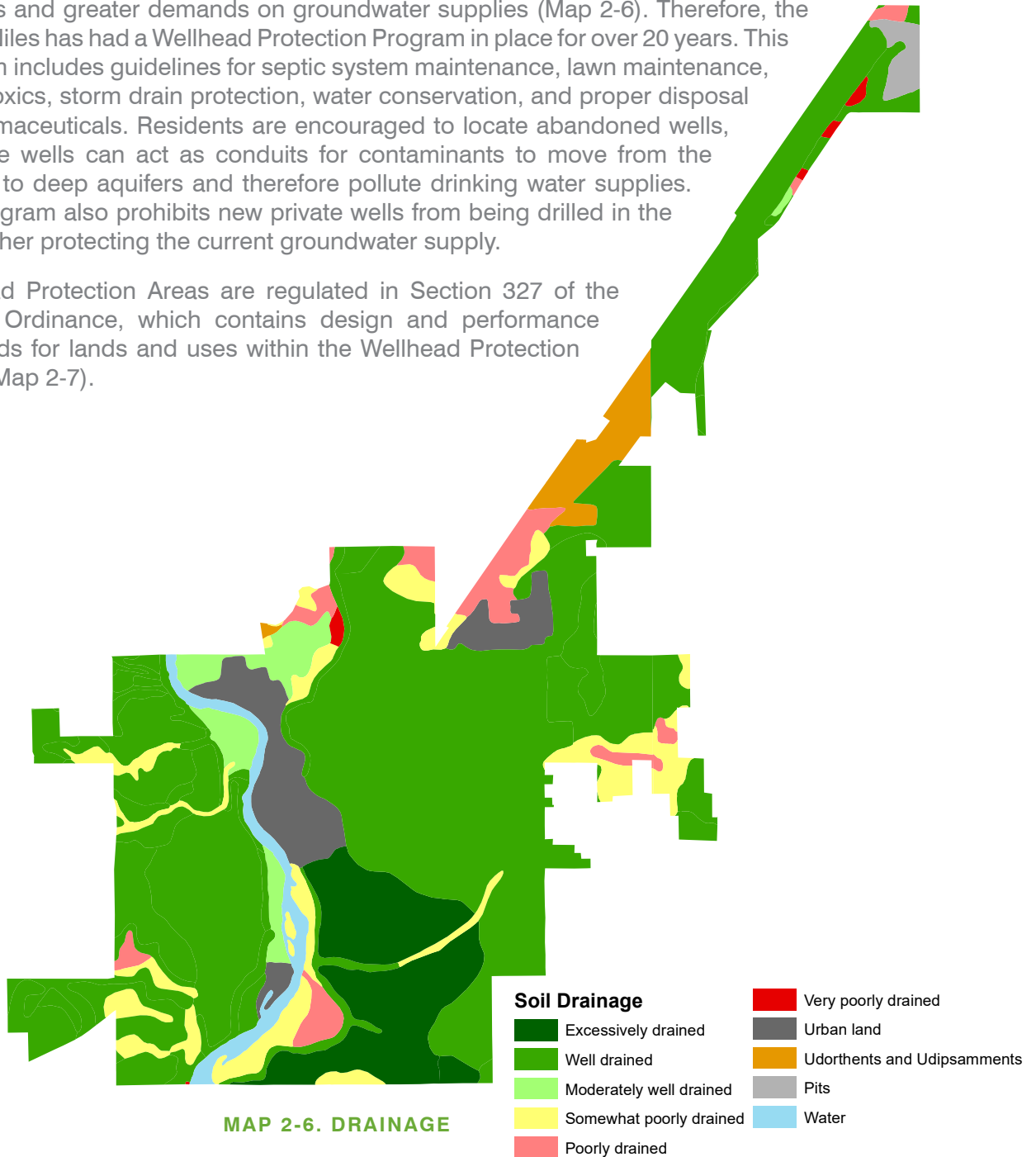
⁶National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-448) as amended and by the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-234) as amended, and any supplemental changes to such rules and regulations.

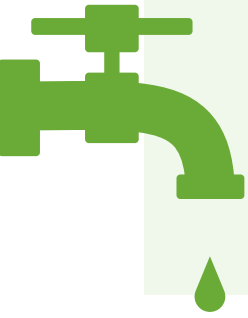
⁷Community Rating System, 2017. FEMA. Retrieved from [fema.gov/community-rating-system](https://www.fema.gov/community-rating-system)

Groundwater and Surface Water

The City of Niles uses a groundwater-sourced public water supply. Although the groundwater supplies are abundant in the City, they can be impacted by impervious surfaces and greater demands on groundwater supplies (Map 2-6). Therefore, the City of Niles has had a Wellhead Protection Program in place for over 20 years. This program includes guidelines for septic system maintenance, lawn maintenance, home toxics, storm drain protection, water conservation, and proper disposal of pharmaceuticals. Residents are encouraged to locate abandoned wells, as these wells can act as conduits for contaminants to move from the surface to deep aquifers and therefore pollute drinking water supplies. The program also prohibits new private wells from being drilled in the city, further protecting the current groundwater supply.

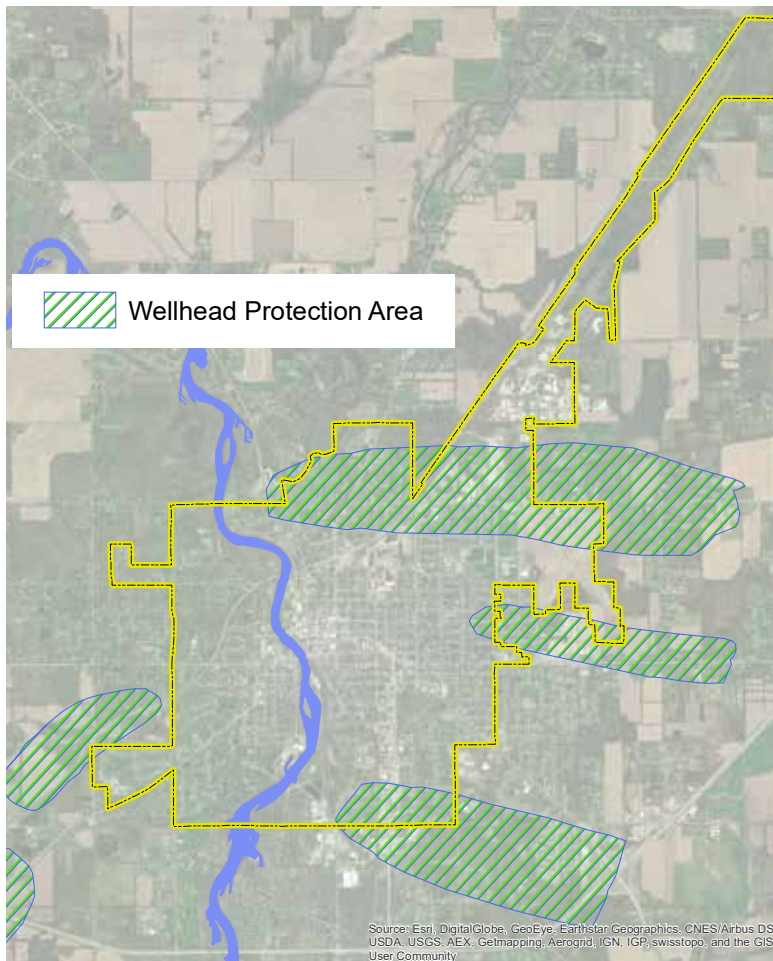
Wellhead Protection Areas are regulated in Section 327 of the Zoning Ordinance, which contains design and performance standards for lands and uses within the Wellhead Protection Areas (Map 2-7).





Niles has been a leader in wellhead protection for years and has one of the best wellhead protection programs in the state.

In August 2018, the City of Niles resolved to protect immediate wellhead areas and take steps to determine the zone of contribution to the wells, in compliance with the State of Michigan Wellhead Protection Program. It was also resolved that the City of Niles would work with zoning committees to establish and enforce ordinances to protect the City’s water support through building permits and land uses within capture areas.



MAP 2-7. WELLHEAD PROTECTION AREAS

In order to promote groundwater quality in planning and development decisions, the City also developed a Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA) Overlay Zone. The use of a zoning “overlay” district in the City’s Zoning Ordinance to protect the public water supply is based on known and clearly identifiable physical criteria. This method is a common and well-accepted method. The purpose of the WHPA overlay zone is to protect water quality, keep pollutants from entering surface water and groundwater, reduce the danger of contamination, and protect potable water supplies.

The goal of the Wellhead Protection Area Management is to provide a mechanism to prevent existing and potential sources of contamination from reaching the public water supply or well field. Intelligent land use decisions regarding development can be much more effective by using wellhead protection policies and specific management techniques. A discussion of wellhead protection management strategies in the Plan should assist community leaders in the recognition of the Wellhead Protection Area and the importance of wellhead protection. Planning elements are intended to provide guidance in the development of land use and land protection measures supporting wellhead protection.

WHPA Overlay Zone

The purpose of a WHPA overlay zone is to protect water quality, keep pollutants from entering surface and groundwater, reduce the danger of contamination, and protect potable water supplies.

Open Space, Parks, and Trails

Niles is blessed with more than 200 acres of parks and greenspaces located throughout the City (Map 2-8). Greenways positively impact individuals and communities by providing opportunities for recreation, transportation, economic development, and community development. They support economic renewal and growth by increasing property values, tourism, and recreation-related spending.

Additionally, greenways promote healthy living by offering a safe, inexpensive avenue for regular exercise. Greenways are also important environmentally by protecting important habitat, providing wildlife corridors, and improving air and water quality. By acting as a link to natural reserves, parks, cultural sites, and historic sites, they provide a vital connection between people and places.⁸

Parks

1. Marmont Street Boat Ramp
2. Plym Park and Golf Course
3. Tot Park
4. Tyler Sports Complex
5. Birkholm Park
6. Vella Park
7. Eastside Park
8. Cass Street Park
9. Eagle Street Park
10. Riverfront Park
11. F.O.P. Park
12. Clevenger Park
13. Saathoff Park
14. Donovan Smith Veterans Memorial Park
15. Cable Street Park
16. Southside Park
17. Thomas Stadium
18. French Field (pvt.)
19. Ruff and Tumble Dog Park

— IN-MI River Valley Trail



MAP 2-8. PARKS

⁸Benefits of Trails and Greenways. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

Several organizations exist in Michigan to help with trail planning, land acquisition, design and construction. Groups like Rails-to-Trails, the Southwest Michigan Greenway Collaborative, and the West Michigan Trails/Greenways Coalition are all involved with helping communities build their greenway networks. Also, the City of Niles has sought input and support from the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), which has provided technical assistance and additional opportunities for recreational development. This included guidance on Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail (IN-MI RVT) development, improvements to the Dowagiac River through the Pucker Street Dam removal project, and other important projects in the 5-year Parks and Recreation Plan.⁹

The most notable effort to strengthen recreational linkages among different municipalities near Niles has been through the development of the IN-MI RVT. This trail offers a 34-mile round-trip path connecting Mishawaka and South Bend, Indiana to Niles Charter Township and the City of Niles, Michigan (Map 2-9). In Niles, the trail follows the railroad right of way north of Fort Street to Riverfront Park, then travels through downtown Niles to Plym Park. Several points of interest are located along the trail, offering numerous destinations and connections along the route.

FIGURE 2-8. IN-MI RIVER VALLEY TRAIL



⁹2016-2020 Community Recreation Plan for the City of Niles, Michigan.



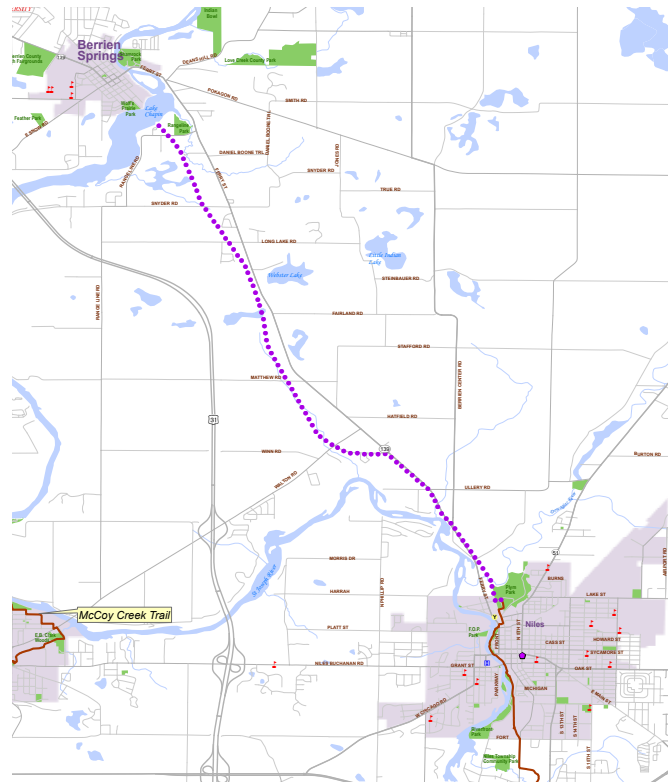
MAP 2-9. COMPLETE ROUTE OF THE IN-MI RVT
SOURCE: SWMPC

Extending from the IN-MI RVT are several other proposed trail routes that would further increase non-motorized transportation connectivity. One proposed extension would lengthen the route from Plym Park in Niles to Lake Chapin in Berrien Springs (Map 2-10). The future extension would continue to enhance connectivity between urban centers and provide additional recreational opportunities for the residents of Niles.

The City of Niles' proximity to water features also allows residents to enjoy water trails. These trails provide scenic recreational opportunities for canoeing and kayaking, while connecting to several rural and urban areas. In the City of Niles, there is a public boat launch at the end of Marmont Street that provides access to the St. Joseph River. The St. Joseph River Water Trail begins in Niles and eventually enters Lake Michigan in Benton Harbor, with a total trail length of about 41 miles.

Connecting to the St. Joseph River Water Trail is the Dowagiac River Water Trail, which provides a 19 mile route between Dowagiac and Niles. This water trail largely travels through rural areas, often providing excellent opportunities for viewing wildlife. Because the Pucker Street Dam was recently removed, there is a safer connection between this water trail and the St. Joseph River Water Trail.

The removal of the Pucker Street Dam also enhances the City's recreational opportunities. Although located outside of the City's traditional boundary, Niles City Park (Losenksy Park) is owned by the City of Niles. This park provides open space and access for canoes, kayaks, and drift boats. The Pucker Street Dam was previously located at this site, but with its recent removal, the City has an exceptional opportunity to enhance this park for recreation. The park's location near the intersection of the Dowagiac River and St. Joseph River provides an excellent site to encourage water recreation.



MAP 2-10. IN-MI RVT PROPOSED EXTENSION
SOURCE: SWMPC



FIGURE 2-9. ST. JOSEPH RIVER WATER TRAIL

Vegetation and Wildlife

The beauty of the built form of the City coupled with the urban forest system makes Niles extremely appealing. Although Niles was established as an urban area many years ago, there are still areas of natural landscape. Most long-term residents remember Niles as “The Garden City.” Niles was given this honor when the Niles Train Depot and its surrounding land were beautified with gardens to welcome visitors years ago. That tradition has been carried on through the establishment of botanical gardens and nature centers in the surrounding area. Additionally, several area yard and garden supply stores promote landscaping to develop “backyard habitat” for local wildlife.

Niles has an enviable urban forest through many of its older neighborhoods. To protect this valuable asset and preserve it for future generations, the City should continue to be proactive and maintain a formal “tree care” program to maintain tree health and canopy coverage.



FIGURE 2-10 (ABOVE). BACKYARD HABITAT
FIGURE 2-11 (RIGHT). LOCAL STREET TREES



The Urban Forest

To protect the City's urban forest and preserve it for future generations, the City should continue to be proactive and maintain a formal “tree care” program to maintain tree health and canopy coverage.

Niles offers a unique setting for residents to enjoy both built and natural environments.

Land Use

Land use describes the vegetation or land use that occupies the land in a given community. Land uses in Niles are reflected in Map 3-1. An analysis of the existing land uses reveals the following approximate breakdown and allocation of land uses among property classification codes.

Residential land is the predominant land use type in the City. Thus, residential properties are common everywhere except the north-eastern portion of the City where industrial uses dominate. The City also has a high percentage of tax exempt land. The Jerry Tyler Memorial Airport contributes a large portion of tax-exempt land in the north-eastern portion of the City. However, many of the tax exempt uses naturally tend to follow the St. Joseph River due to the presence of parks along the River. This important natural feature offers the benefits of recreational opportunities and natural beauty. The combination of greenspace and the urban environment provide a unique setting for City residents to enjoy both built and natural environments.

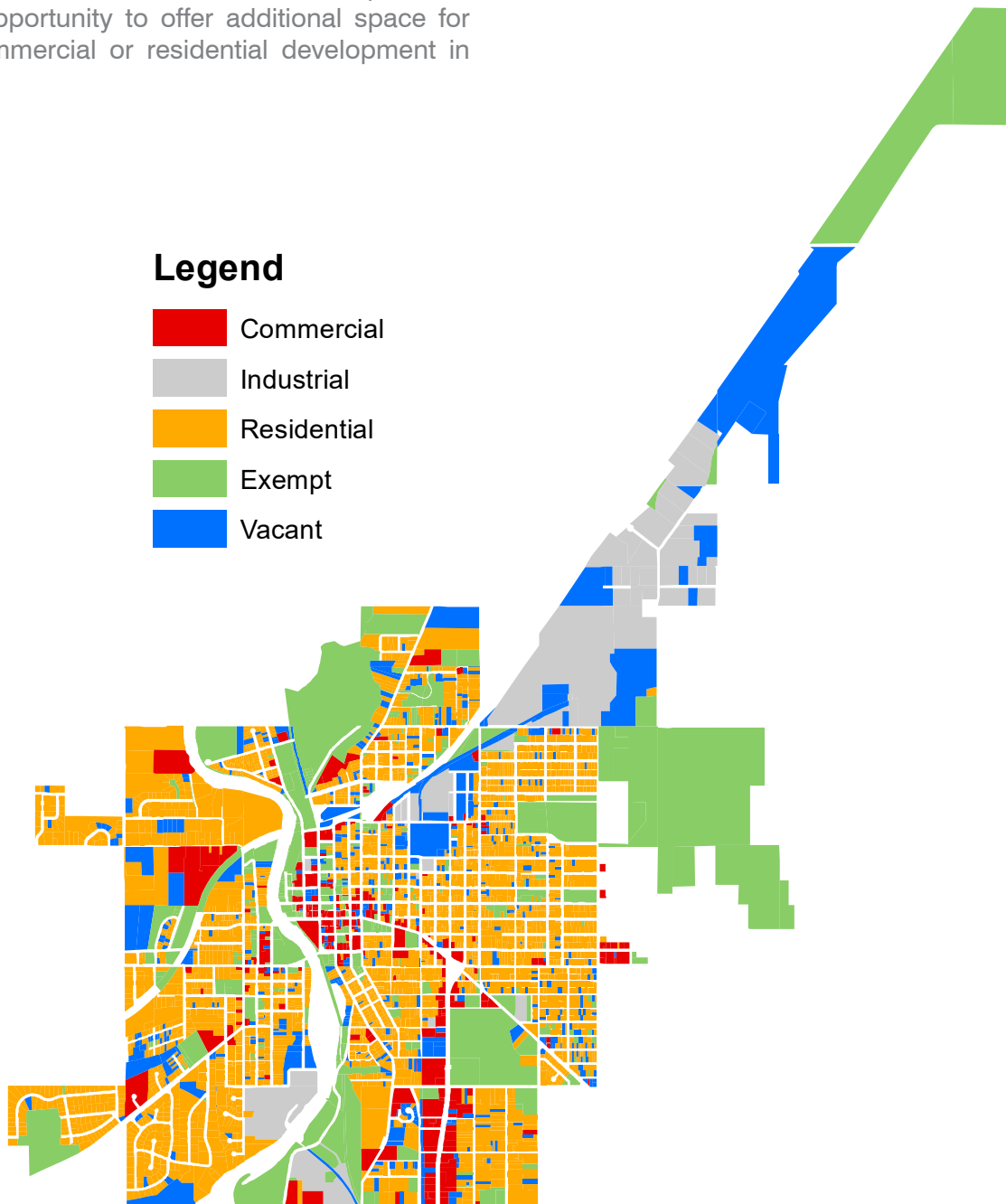
Although the City has been largely built-out, there are ample opportunities for redevelopment within the City. There are also significant areas of zoned industrial properties that are ripe for development in the northeastern portion of the City. With infrastructure nearby, these properties are ready for private investment. There are also several residential areas that offer new excellent opportunities for redevelopment.

TABLE 3-1. ALLOCATION OF LAND USES BASED ON PROPERTY CLASSIFICATION CODES

Land Use Category	Approximate Acreage	Percentage of the City
Residential	1146	37.1%
Commercial	195	6.3%
Industrial	341	11.0%
Tax Exempt	967	31.3%
Vacant	441	14.3%

Commercial areas are found within the downtown area and along Main Street, extending southward along the 11th Street corridor (M-51) into Niles Township. The uses in the downtown tend to be traditional, commercial buildings of two- and three-stories with retail uses on the ground floors and office or residential uses above. In the past, some downtown property owners have found the use of upper stories to be difficult, but this represents a great opportunity to offer additional space for future commercial or residential development in the City.

One exception to the multi-story pattern downtown is the suburban-style strip shopping center located at the intersection of Main Street and N. 2nd Street. This structure is representative of attempts that many communities made in the 1970s to bring suburban style development forms into downtown areas. This area may present an opportunity for redevelopment in the future.



Legend

- Commercial
- Industrial
- Residential
- Exempt
- Vacant

MAP 3-1. LAND USE BASED ON PROPERTY CLASS

Redevelopment

As some of Niles' houses are reaching the end of their useful life, significant remodeling and/or replacement is beginning to occur. Appropriate redevelopment of these areas will depend on current and future zoning provisions. Currently, buildings in the historic district must be approved by the Historic District Commission before exterior remodeling. Additionally, many single-family houses have been turned into multi-family residential units. In order to encourage redevelopment of residential areas, changes in the Zoning Ordinance may be helpful. This may include, but is not limited to, amendments in zoning regulations for historic buildings, the Low Density Residential district, and the Planned Unit Development district.

The central city area has many opportunities for redevelopment. In 2009, a Cultural Economic Development Plan was created to identify long-term economic and development goals. Each year since 2008, the City has received roughly \$250,000 for community and economic redevelopment projects through the Community Development Block Grant Program.

The City was also selected to receive PlacePlans technical assistance in 2015 from the Michigan Municipal League (MML), and the Niles PlacePlan was adopted in March 2016. The purpose of the PlacePlan was to “help local officials identify, develop, and implement strategies that will grow and strengthen their community in the coming decades.”¹⁰ Both the Place Plan and the Cultural Economic Development Plan are bedrocks of future land use and economic development planning in Niles.

This program uses the approach of placemaking to plan for development. Placemaking recognizes that places are central gathering spots that must be designed to support a desired social activity, and therefore a positive response, from those who spend time in that place.



Mixed Use Buildings

Traditional downtown buildings offer space for future commercial or residential development in upper stories.

This program identified eight assets that help make communities vibrant places: physical design & walkability, cultural economic development, multiculturalism, transit, green initiatives, entrepreneurship, messaging & technology, and education. These are used to help design plans for community development.

In Niles, the PlacePlans program helped develop studies to position and redevelop three publicly-owned sites adjacent to the Main Street district. These include the former public safety site, the Water Street Block area, and the former downtown YMCA building, which is being considered for residential space.¹¹ These sites represent an excellent opportunity for redevelopment in downtown Niles.

Development Goals

Four main goals were established through the Cultural Economic Development Plan:

1. To build a creative economic environment;
2. To develop Niles' heritage;
3. To promote Niles;
4. To organize for cultural development.

¹⁰Niles Turn the Corner PlacePlan 2016. City of Niles & the Michigan Municipal League.

¹¹Target Market Analysis: Berrien County, 2016. TMA Consultant Team, LandUseUSA.



- A - Mixed Use Buildings (45k-60k sq ft, 3 to 5 Floors)
-Ground Floor Retail
-Upper Floors Residential
- B - Residential Building (12k-24k sq ft, 2 to 4 Floors)
-Overlooking river / trail
- C - 3 Story Townhomes (17x, 2200 sq ft each)
-Attached 1.5-car garage
- D - 2 Story Townhomes (12x, 2200 sq ft each)
-Walk out basement
-Attached 2-car garage
- E - Courtyard Cottages (22x, 500 sq ft each)
- F - Single Family Homes (10x, 1400 sq ft each)
-Detached garage, option for new alley access
- G - Public Outdoor Space
- H - Existing Structure (800 sq ft)
-Reused for Retail/Community
- I - Existing Home / Apartment / Office
-Retained and restored if necessary
- J - Planned Senior Apartments
-Not in scope

- Proposed Buildings
- Existing Buildings
- Other Planned Projects



Niles 3rd Street Village
Site Plan
March 21, 2018



FIGURE 3-1. SITE PLAN DEPICTING NILES 3RD STREET VILLAGE

The City has focused many redevelopment efforts toward Main Street in the downtown area. In 1978, the City of Niles' Main Street Initiative (formerly the Downtown Development Authority) was created. Niles Main Street is responsible for overseeing the redevelopment of the downtown area based on a plan that was revised in 1998. Their main focus is increasing residential density in downtown Niles, developing private and public land, increasing commercial development, improving streetscapes, and developing Riverfront Park.¹²

In order to create a mixed-use corridor south of downtown, the City recently received a grant from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). This was granted to assist in implementing the City's 3rd Street Village Plan.

The 3rd Street Village neighborhood holds a unique position in the community as a transition point of access from upper neighborhoods to Riverfront Park. The proposed development would include mixed uses such as office, commercial, and a variety of residential opportunities (Figure 3-1). Because of its geographic setting, the River can be viewed below from the neighborhood. This allows opportunities for trails and overlooks to be created as part of the transition space. Additionally, a historic electric shelter house exists in the neighborhood, which could be redeveloped for use in a park. All design features were promoted as very pedestrian friendly to create a positive space for people to gather.¹³

¹²Niles DDA Main Street, 2017. Retrieved from nilesmi.org/business/niles_dda_main_street/index

¹³Niles 3rd Street Village Corridor Study Draft Report, 2018.



Part III.

OUR PEOPLE



Population is among the most important measures to express growth and its likely impact on land uses in a community. Therefore, it is vitally important to achieve an understanding of the City's population and the changes that are occurring in order to prepare a meaningful and realistic Master Plan. In this section, the population of Niles is analyzed, and the current and likely future trends are discussed.

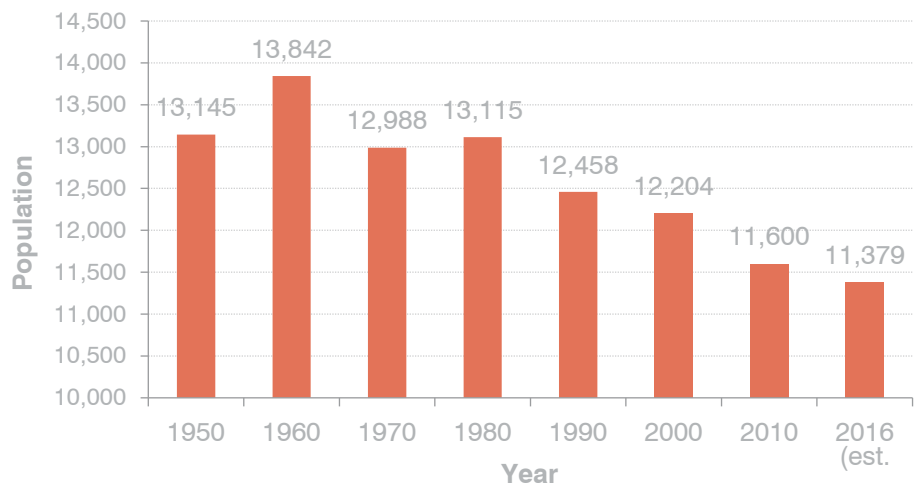
CHAPTER
4

People and Public Health

Population Growth

According to the American Community Survey, the population of the City of Niles was 11,379 in 2016. The City's population has been declining since 1980, with the greatest decreases in population from 1980 to 1990 (-5.0%) and from 2000 to 2010 (-4.9%). However, Niles remains the largest city in Berrien and Cass Counties.

FIGURE 4-1. CITY OF NILES HISTORIC POPULATION CHANGE



Source: 1930-2010 US Census Bureau; 2012-2016 American Community Survey

TABLE 4-1. COMPARATIVE RATES OF POPULATION GROWTH

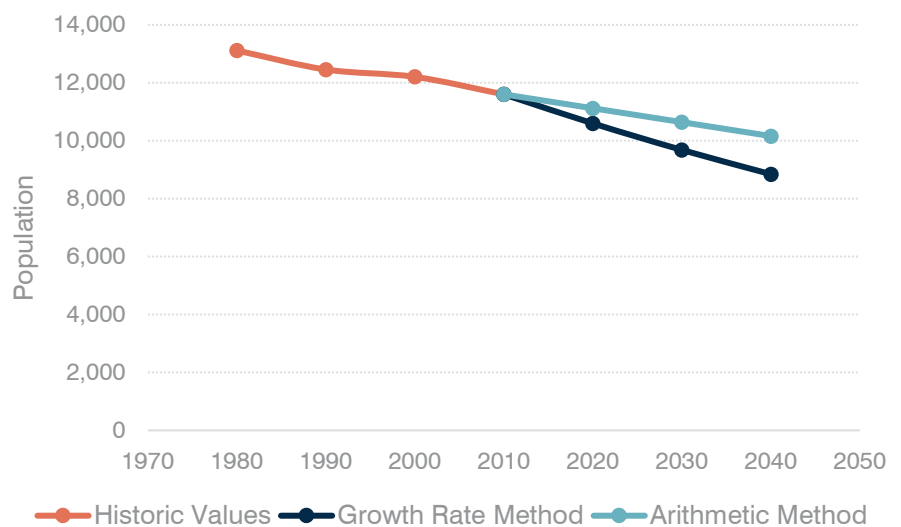
Community	Population			% Population Change	
	2000	2010	2016 (est.)	2000-2010	2010-2016
City of Niles	12,204	11,600	11,379	-4.9%	-1.9%
City of Buchanan	4,681	4,456	4,388	-4.8%	-1.9%
Niles Township	13,325	14,164	13,950	6.3%	-1.5%
Bertrand Township	2,380	2,657	2,631	11.6%	-1.0%
Howard Township	6,309	6,207	6,168	-1.6%	-0.6%
Milton Township	2,646	3,878	3,862	46.6%	-0.4%
Berrien County	162,453	156,813	155,134	-3.5%	-1.1%
State of Michigan	9,938,444	9,883,640	9,909,600	-0.6%	0.3%

To put this population change in perspective, it is helpful to compare the City with its neighbors. Table 2 compares the 16-year population growth history in Niles to that of other communities in southeastern Berrien County and western Cass County. Between 2000 and 2010, population change greatly varied in surrounding areas. The City of Niles had a population decline similar to the City of Buchanan (-4.9% and -4.8%, respectively). Some municipalities near the Indiana/Michigan border experienced strong growth, such as Bertrand Township (11.6%) and Milton Township (46.6%). However, all neighboring municipalities experienced similar population declines from 2010 to 2016. This was likely a result of the Great Recession in the late 2000s and early 2010, during which there was a decline in national economic markets.

Projections

For the purposes of this Community Profile, statistical averaging techniques were utilized to project the City's population growth to the year 2040. These approaches are adequate to give a general sense of growth trends, but they have limitations especially in areas of rapid growth or decline that may run counter to statistical trends.

FIGURE 4-2. POPULATION PROJECTIONS



Growth Rate Method

The Growth Rate method projects future population growth or decline based on the past rate of growth in the City. This method assumes that future growth will occur at the same average annual rate of growth between 1980 and 2016. Based on the US Census Bureau and American Community Survey Estimates, the City has experienced a 0.10% annual rate of decline during a 36-year period. Based on this average rate of growth, it is predicted that the City's population will reach 10,597 by the year 2020, 9,681 by the year 2030, and 8,844 by the year 2040.

Arithmetic Method

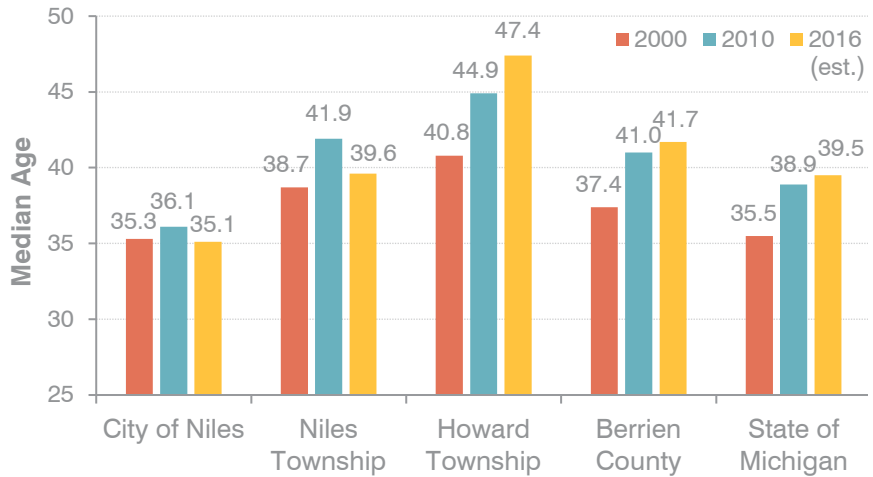
The arithmetic method also projects the City's population based on growth in preceding decades. This method assumes that the City will grow by the same average number of people per year as it did over a 36-year period between 1980 and 2016. Based on the US Census Bureau and American Community Survey Estimates, the average number of persons per year in the City decreased by 48 persons annually. A continuation of these rates will result in a population of 11,120 in 2020, 10,640 in 2030, and 10,160 in 2040.

Age Characteristics

Analyzing age distribution provides another measurement of population change, helps determine the type of housing demands that may occur, and provides insight on recreational needs of the community. In 2016, the median age of Niles residents was 35.1 years. This was younger than Berrien County (41.7 years), the State of Michigan (39.5 years), and the United States (37.7 years). The City's young median age is not reflective of State and National trends towards an increasing age.

The median ages of both the City of Niles and Niles Township increased in 2010 and decreased in 2016. This suggests that the area's demographic profile shifted at this point. The City's median age is also considerably lower than surrounding Howard Township (47.4), Milton Township (50.1), and Bertrand Township (49.0). In general, it is common for cities to have a lower median age than townships. This younger demographic may desire more active recreation types, affordable housing options, and steady jobs. The presence of youth in the community also provides an opportunity for the retention of young talent in the community.

FIGURE 4-3. COMPARISON OF MEDIAN AGE

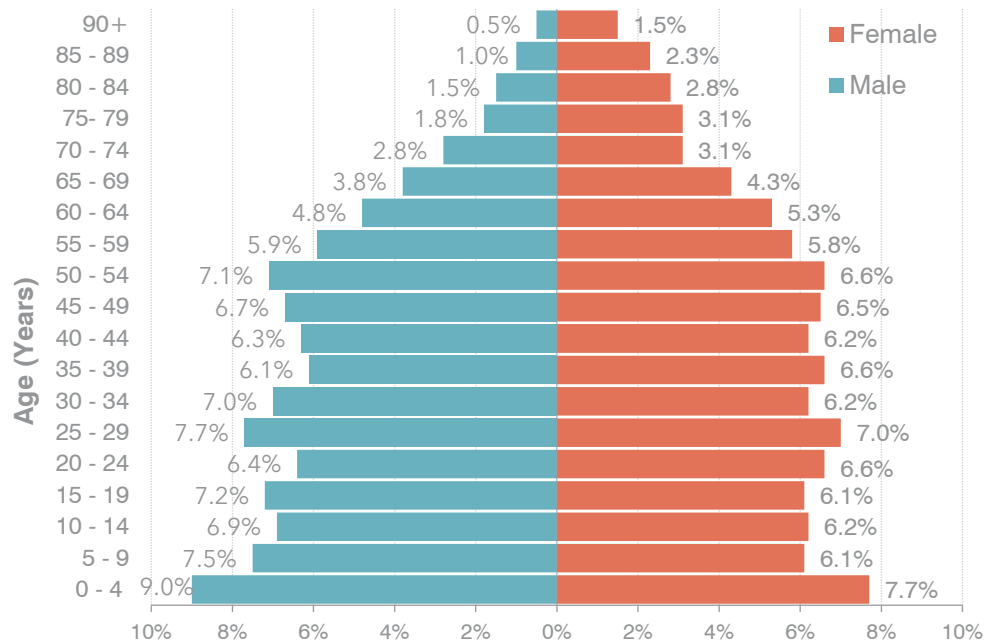


Source: 2000 & 2010 US Census; 2012-2016 American Community Survey

FIGURE 4-4. NILES RESIDENTS



FIGURE 4-5. POPULATION PYRAMID



Source: 2010 Census

A population pyramid helps visualize the distribution of age groups. In the City of Niles, the largest overall cohorts were children and young adults. Those under 20 years of age comprised 28.2% of the total population. The largest individual age cohorts were under 5 years (8.3%) and from 25 to 29 years (7.3%). The overall shape of the pyramid with a wide base, suggests that Niles is poised for growth.

As the “baby boomer” generation has continued to age, their successive generations can be observed on the population pyramid. In 2010, the “baby boomer” generation from ages 50 to 70 comprised 21.9% of the total population

The 20 to 54 years age group is important as it represents the prime wage-earning population as well as the principal child-rearing group. About 46.5% of the population falls within this age category in Niles. This value has not changed considerably since 2000 (47.0%). Compared to Berrien County (43.0%), the City of Niles had a greater number of people in this age group.

The “empty nesters” group (55 to 65 years) comprised about 11% of the City’s residents in 2000 and remained at 11% in 2010. Persons in this age group have typically reached their peak earning potential and have higher disposable incomes. The age group of 65 and older represented about 14.4% of the City’s population in 2010. This signifies a slight decrease since 2000, when this age group was 15.4% of the City’s population. The values in these age groups seem to indicate that residents began moving out of the City for retirement.



FIGURE 4-6. RESIDENTS IN DOWNTOWN NILES



FIGURE 4-7. EASTSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Local Education

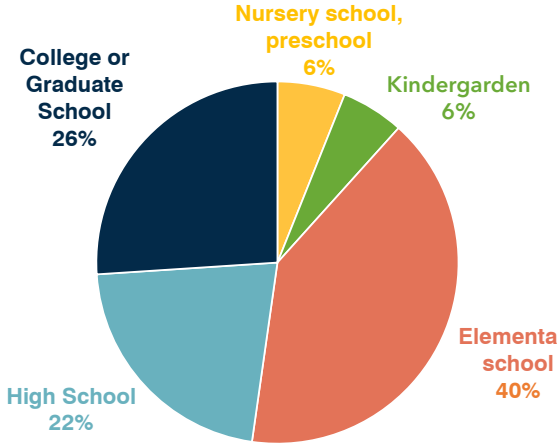
The quality of the local school system is generally an important consideration for couples choosing a place to raise a family. In Niles, residents are served by the Niles Community School District and Brandywine School District. From 2017 to 2018, the Niles Community School District served the City and surrounding area with about 3,600 students in the K-12 program, and the Brandywine School District accommodated about 1,400 students. Together, these school districts staff 389 teachers and administrative employees.¹⁴ As the largest school district in Niles, the Niles Community Schools District includes five elementary schools, a middle school, a high school, early childhood development, and alternative education programs. The City is also within close proximity to numerous post-secondary educational institutions.

It is likely that there are also numerous students not enrolled in Niles formal education system (homeschooled). According to the National Home Education Research Institute, about 2.5 million children in the United States are homeschooled, and this number has expanded at a rate of 2-8% annually.

While exact figures for Niles could not be located, it is likely that there are many homeschooled children in the Niles community.

Between 2000 and 2016, the percentage of students in high school stayed the same, while the number of students in college or graduate school increased from 16% to 26%. Students enrolled in elementary school decreased from 48% in 2000 to 40% in 2016.

FIGURE 4-8. 2016 SCHOOL ENROLLMENT



Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

¹⁴Berrien County School Directory. Berrien RESA. Retrieved from berrienresa.org/about_us

Educational Attainment

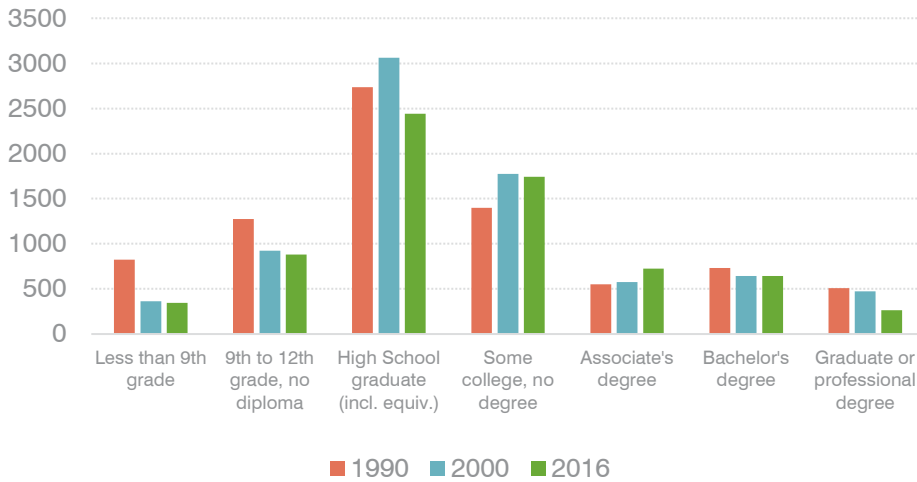
Table 4-2 compares the educational attainment of residents in Niles, Berrien and Cass Counties, and the State. As shown, there are fewer Niles residents (25 years and older) with a bachelor's degree or higher compared to Berrien and Cass Counties, and Michigan. However, Niles has made strides in recent years, as the number of residents with an associates degree has increased from 2010-2016. While fewer residents obtained a high school diploma or equivalent in 2016, it appears that further education was valued by those who graduate.

TABLE 4-2. COMPARISON OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

	High School Graduate	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Niles	82.6%	12.9%
Cass County	87.8%	17.4%
Berrien County	89.1%	26.7%
Michigan	89.9%	27.4%

Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey Estimates

FIGURE 4-9. NILES EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT 1990, 2000, & 2010



Since 1990, educational attainment in Niles has shown slight variation. Although the number of high school graduates has decreased, the number of residents with Associates degrees has increased.

Source: US Census Bureau

FIGURE 4-10. NILES GRADUATION CEREMONY

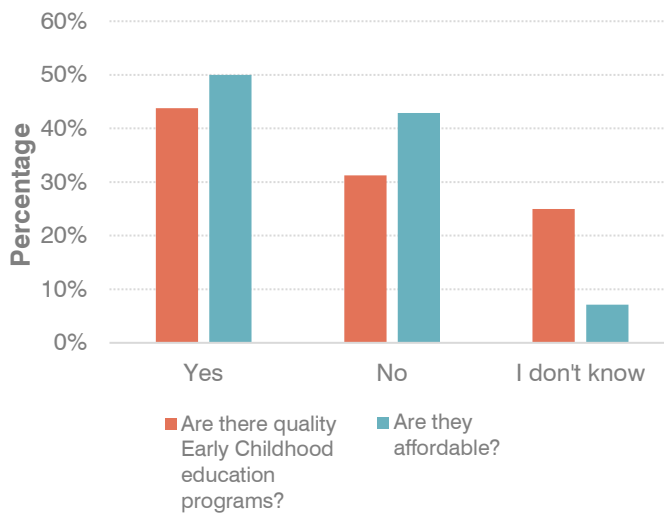


Early Childhood Education

Niles Community Schools offers a number of valuable preschool and early childhood education programs. The Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) is a state-funded center-based preschool program serving income eligible four-year-old children. The goal of the program is to "provide every preschooler with the best educational opportunities through child-centered, hands-on curriculum set in a rich learning environment which is created through our families, community, and professional staff."¹⁵

Northside Child Development Center (NCDC) includes the Montessori method, which is summarized by the NCDC: "through the ongoing process of observation and experimentation, students are encouraged to become thoughtful readers, clear writers, skillful computers, problem solvers, and logical thinkers."¹⁶ The NCDC includes early childhood curriculum for children from ages 2.5 to 6.

FIGURE 4-11. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS



Post-Secondary Education

Local education plays a vital role in preparing students for post-secondary education. During a survey conducted on education in the City of Niles, the majority (55%) of respondents believed that Niles Community Schools supported their child's leadership development. Further, 60% of respondents felt that the type of instruction was more important than the specific curriculum material. As students are engaged through effective teaching, they are encouraged to strive for success after high school graduation.

There are several options for post secondary education in the vicinity of Niles. These include Andrews University, University of Notre Dame, Tri-State University, Trine University-South Bend, Southwestern Michigan College Niles, Lake Michigan College, Bethel, Indiana University South Bend (IUSB), Ivy Tech, Holy Cross, and St. Mary's. These colleges and universities offer a variety of programs to suit the needs of students, while all being less than 30 minutes from the City of Niles. Therefore, the City's location provides excellent access to post-secondary educational opportunities.

¹⁵Berrien RESA GSRP Family Handbook (2018-2019). Retrieved from https://www.nilesschools.org/about_ncs/great_start_readiness_program

¹⁶Northside Child Development Center: Montessori (n.d.). Retrieved from https://ncdc.nilesschools.org/about_northside/montessori



FIGURE 4-12. SPECTRUM HEALTH LAKELAND

Public Health

According to County Health Rankings, Berrien County was relatively similar to the Michigan average when comparing physical activity, adult smoking, and adult obesity. However, Berrien County had a ratio of 1,230:1 primary care physicians, providing more individual attention to patients in clinical care than the Michigan average (1,250:1). This enhances the community's ability to care for individual patients.

By promoting investment in both the local and regional communities, the City enhances its ability to offer goods and services to a larger population. A major contributor to local and regional health is the merging of Lakeland Health and Spectrum Health. Lakeland Health, which operates hospitals in Niles, Watervliet, and St. Joseph, signed a letter of intent in 2018 to become a division of Spectrum Health. Spectrum Health is based in Grand Rapids and approximately 10 times larger than Lakeland Health. According to the Truven Health Analytics in 2017, both Lakeland and Spectrum were listed among the nation's top 15 health systems. Spectrum was also listed among the top five largest health systems.¹⁷ Resulting from this merge, Spectrum is offering a health plan that current Lakeland clients will be able to use. It is also expected that this merge will provide even better services, decreased medication costs, and additional improvements in client care.

The Cassopolis Family Clinic Network also recently opened a new community health center in Niles at the former Eastgate Shopping Plaza on Oak Street. The Niles Community Health Center was relocated to this approximate \$8.5 million new facility, allowing a great increase in the number of patients that can be served. This investment also contributes to the local economy by providing additional jobs. The facility provides physician and obstetric services on site, and coordinates with Spectrum Health Lakeland for laboratory work. In 2020, the facility will also be expanding their behavioral health program and offering an on-site pharmacy with a drive-up window.

¹⁷Matuszak, John, 2018. Lakeland Health set to become part of Spectrum, The Herald Palladium.



FIGURE 4-13. IN-MI RIVER VALLEY TRAIL

Community Health Programs

Niles is increasing participation in community health programs. In 2017, The Healthy Berrien Consortium (HBC) made a commitment to collective impact on mental health. The mission of HBC is to “work in collaboration with community health organizations to help facilitate improvements in health and wellness” of the community.¹⁸ The HBC is acting as the catalyst for community change in Berrien County, with Lakeland Health acting as a backbone organization. The HBC chose to work with a collective impact approach because of its capacity to address and solve complex social problems. Because mental health issues are varied and involve many outside influential factors, a collective impact approach provides shared experience and knowledge to help promote overall success.¹⁹

The goal of their effort is to create a community of hope and healing by raising mental health awareness, eliminating stigma, and fortifying

community resources and response. This effort was based on resident feedback and a population-based assessment, which demonstrated a burden of mental health issues and trauma affecting Berrien County residents. Residents may never reach a diagnosable mental illness, but mild to moderate symptoms can include stressors such as nervousness, anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. These can impact optimal health potential and the HBC has identified a gap in services for residents with these symptoms.²⁰ In order to fill this gap in mental health services, the HBC model of change views policy and practices as the final foundation for preserving community health. This allows incorporation of principals that are trauma informed. Resources & training and awareness & destigmatization are crucial elements in the first year of implementation. These provide knowledge and resources to create awareness and inform policy.²¹

¹⁸Healthy Berrien Consortium (HBC).

¹⁹Creating a Community of Hope & Healing, 2018. Healthy Berrien Consortium.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Healthy Berrien Consortium: From Trauma to a Resilient Community, 2017.

Planning Implications

→ Niles' population is comprised of a younger median age than the County and State. This younger population may require more recreational opportunities, job opportunities, and affordable housing. In order to accommodate a variety of residents, the City may need to diversify its opportunities for different age groups. Attracting and retaining older residents may require additional senior living facilities, health care facilities, and handicapped-accessible pathways.

→ The percentage of residents with a high school graduation or a bachelor's degree are lower than the percentages for Berrien County, Cass County, and the State. However, residents with an Associates degree increased between 2010 and 2016. Continued efforts to support educational opportunities in the City will help students understand, be equipped, and pursue further educational opportunities.

During a community survey, 60% of respondents felt that instruction was more important than curriculum in the school system. Promoting the value of education through positive instruction and enhanced school programs may increase community perception regarding the value of education. Additionally, attracting skills and trade-based jobs may provide opportunities for residents who don't wish to continue on to further education.

→ The largest percentage of residents were in the family/working class age group (46.5%). In order to accommodate this group, the City will need to provide single-family housing, recreational facilities, and dependable jobs. The percentage of people in this group has not changed considerably since 2000, indicating that the City is likely providing sufficient opportunities for this group.

However, since the City is primarily "built out," creative housing options may be required to continue accommodating this group. There are presently several opportunities for redeveloping suitable neighborhoods for middle-class families. Additionally, attracting a variety of industry and job opportunities would provide stability for families living in the City.





Part IV.

OUR CITY

This portion of the Master Plan outlines the human developments that comprise the City of Niles. These chapters focus on the built environment and the social and economic implications this environment has on the City and its residents.

Chapter 5. Neighborhoods

Chapter 6. Economics

Chapter 7. Public Places & Services

Chapter 8. Infrastructure

Chapter 9. Mobility

CHAPTER
5

Neighborhoods

Niles is characterized by a range of housing types located throughout the City. Multi-family units are mixed in with the single-family units and owner-occupied homes are adjacent to rental properties in many neighborhoods. This provides a good balance in many areas of the City and improves neighborhood stability and diversity.

Housing Characteristics

According to the American Community Survey Estimates, there were 5,386 housing units in the City as of 2016. Of those, 733 (13.6%) were vacant. This presents redevelopment and affordable/attainable housing opportunities for young families throughout the community.

Another good test of the health of a community is the ratio of owner-occupied to renter-occupied housing. Generally, communities strive to achieve a 2:1 or even 3:1 ratio of owner-occupant housing.²² Central cities and more urban areas tend to have higher proportions of renters. This is true in Niles where the proportion of owner-occupied to renter housing stock is almost 1:1. This suggests that Niles' housing market provides both rental and ownership opportunities for many residents.

FIGURE 5-1. 2016 HOUSING OCCUPANCY

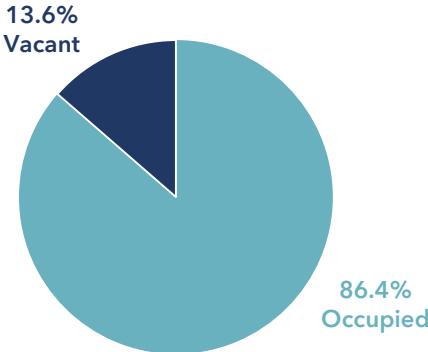
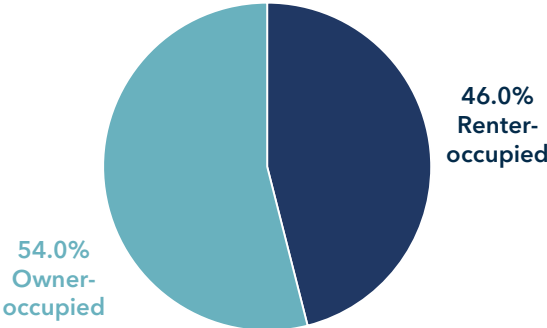


FIGURE 5-2. 2016 HOUSING TENURE



²²Michigan State Housing Development Authority

This almost 1:1 ratio of owner and renter-occupied housing reflects the results of an effort in the 1970's and 1980's to increase the City's population by encouraging the splitting of larger homes into multi-family rental units. Multi-family rental housing have many positive effects on community, although it is generally recommended that rental units not be heavily concentrated in one area. Instead, rental housing should be well distributed throughout the community. Locating single-family rental housing among owner-occupied housing helps to hold rental property owners to the same standards as surrounding homeowners. In Niles, rental and owner-occupied homes are located throughout the community and in many cases is seamlessly integrated into the community, which has formed a stronger community social fabric.

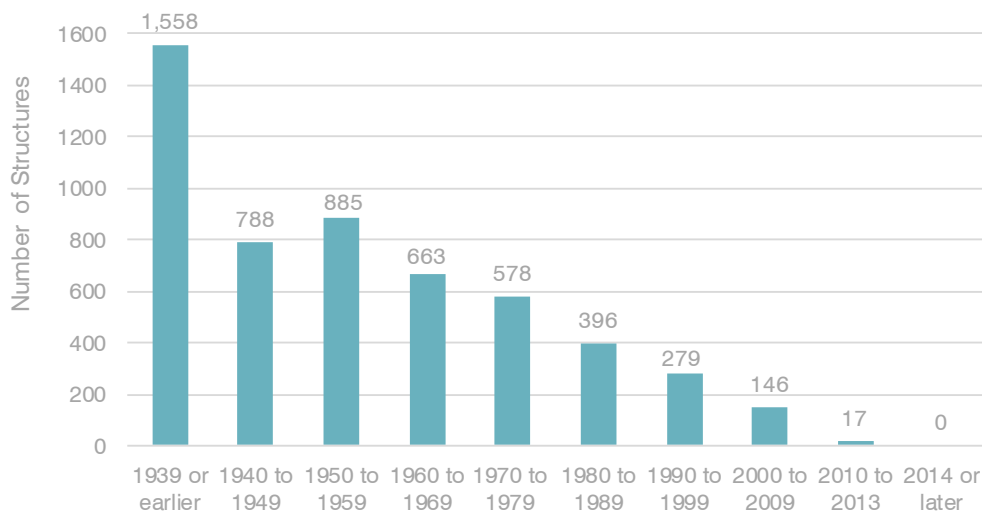


FIGURE 5-3. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD IN NILES

New Development and Redevelopment

New residential growth has been limited in recent years due to the essentially built-out nature of the City, and many homes are older structures. Out of 5,310 total housing structures built in the City, 1,558 of them were built in 1939 or earlier. Houses built before 1970 comprise 73.3% of the housing market, while only 26.7% of the houses were built in or following 1970. According to the 2017 American Community Survey Estimates, no houses were built between 2014 and 2017.

FIGURE 5-4. YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT



Source: 2013-2017 American Community Estimates

Niles has several vacant areas that would provide prime locations for development or redevelopment. As currently zoned, many of these developments would need to be single-family in nature. However, there are also opportunities for commercial and industrial development. In addition, some parcels throughout the City are available for infill development. A target market analysis indicates that approximately 650 housing units are needed to provide middle-income housing. Therefore, there are ample opportunities and great need for additional residential housing in the City.

The 2016 American Community Survey reported that the majority (53%) of owner-occupied homes in the City of Niles are valued between \$50,000 and \$99,999. About 19% of the homes were reported to be valued at less than \$50,000, suggesting an abundance of affordable housing opportunities. In addition, 47.4% of home owners reported their monthly costs for their homes to be less than 20% of their household income. This also demonstrates the attainability of the housing stock in Niles. The Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development uses one-third of household income as a typical upper limit for housing costs.

FIGURE 5-5. 2016 HOUSING VALUES FOR OWNER-OCCUPIED UNITS

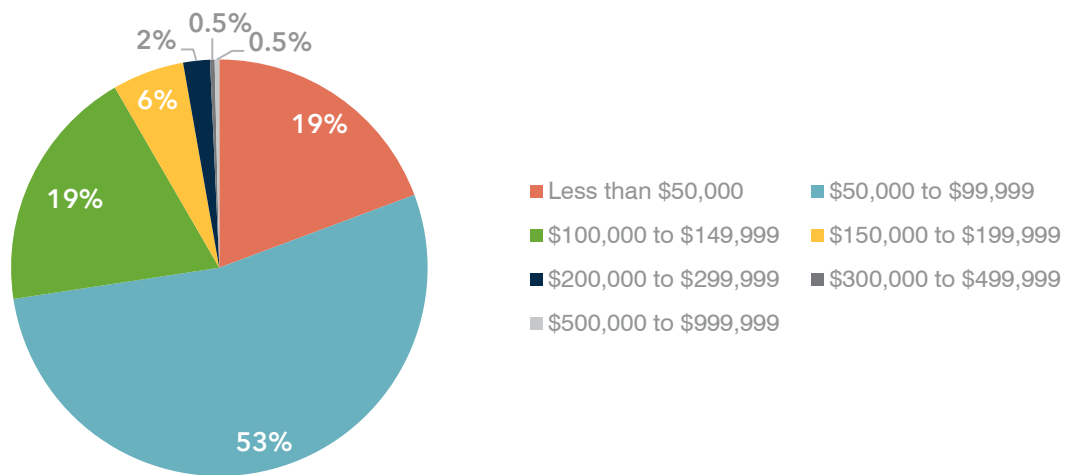




FIGURE 5-6. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD IN NILES

The median housing values in Niles have been slightly below the median housing values elsewhere in the region. It is common for cities to have more affordable housing than surrounding townships, as they often offer a greater variety of options for residents. Between 1990 and 2010, the City of Niles and the City of Buchanan have had relatively similar median home values. Between 2010 and 2016, many of the surrounding municipalities and Michigan experienced a decline in housing values. This was likely a result of the Great Recession that impacted the economy in the late 2000s.

Niles has an abundance of attainable housing, although there is a lack of middle-income housing in the City, a characteristic often referred to as "missing middle" housing. Approximately 72% of owner-occupied units in Niles are valued less than \$100,000. Home equity is a primary source of wealth for middle-income families, so concerns exist for neighborhoods with consistently low home price-to-income ratios.²³ This is the case in Niles, where the median household income was \$31,208 and the median housing value was \$76,300 in 2016. This is approximately a 2:1 ratio, while healthy proportions would place median home values approximately 2.5 to 4 times the median household income.²⁴ Because of the abundance of housing in Niles with a low value-to-income ratio, the City has been devoting effort towards building wealth to fill the missing middle gap. This will provide an opportunity for revitalization of neighborhoods and a more vibrant, diverse community.

TABLE 5-1. MEDIAN HOME VALUE COMPARISONS

Community	1990*	2000	2010	2016	2016 Gross Monthly Rent
City of Niles	\$47,273	69,600	\$88,400	\$76,300	\$613
City of Buchanan	\$47,528	69,300	\$90,000	\$105,900	\$541
Niles Township	\$55,705	\$80,000	\$103,400	\$98,800	\$688
Howard Township	\$62,860	\$90,400	\$130,000	\$117,500	\$761
Bertrand Township	\$72,825	\$100,000	\$181,600	\$184,800	\$757
Milton Township	\$71,803	\$106,500	\$165,900	\$184,800	-
State of Michigan	\$77,400	\$115,600	\$144,200	\$127,800	\$799

*1990 values are based on inflation rates in 2000 dollars. Source: US Census; American Community Survey Estimates

²³Murray, C. & Schuetz J., 2018. Housing in the US is too expensive, too cheap, and just right. It depends on where you live. Metropolitan Policy Program Report at Brookings.

²⁴Ibid.

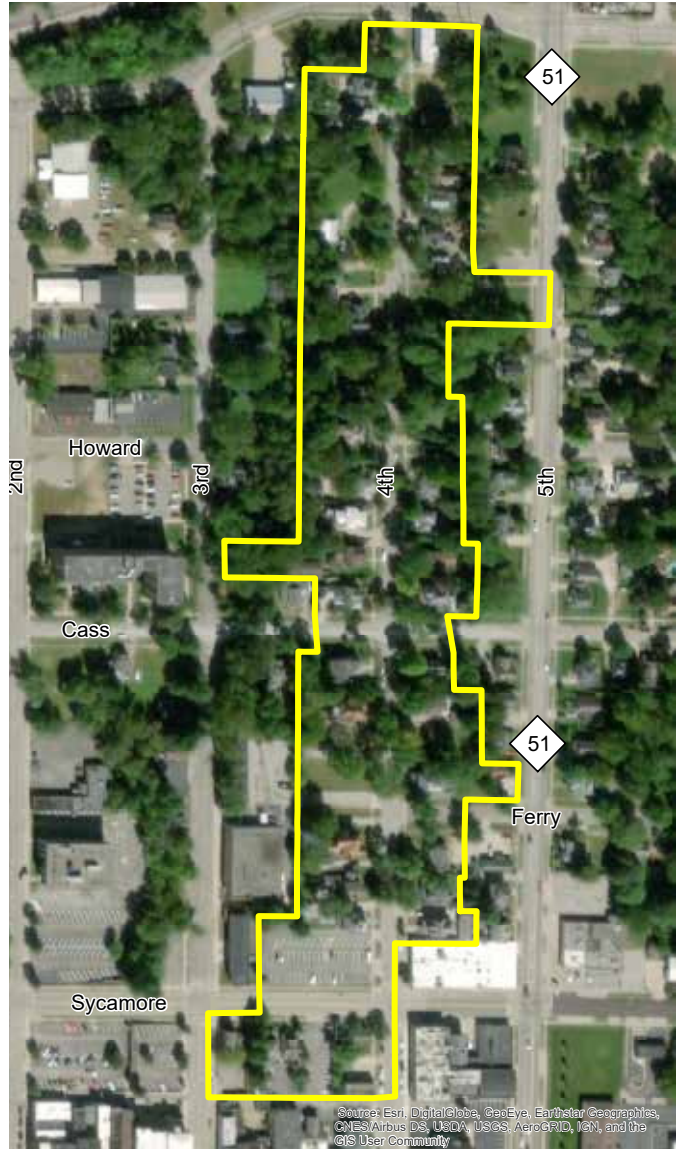
Historic Districts

The Downtown Historic District and Fourth Street Historic Districts were established to preserve the historic character of the housing stock in parts of the City (Maps 5-1 & 5-2). Improvements to homes within the Historic District must meet historic guidelines established by the Historic District and may entitle the owner to certain tax benefits. A Historic District Commission was established to implement the guidelines for renovations or improvements to homes in the historic district. Homeowners and business owners must approach the Commission for review and approval before making any improvements to the exterior.

The historic character of many of the homes in the City is an important part of the community’s personality and these homes are certainly an asset that should be preserved.



FIGURE 5-7. NILES HISTORY CENTER (HISTORIC CHAPIN MANSION)



MAP 5-1. FOURTH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT



FIGURE 5-8. STREET VIEW OF THE DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

Planning Implications

→ Housing vacancies provide many opportunities for neighborhood redevelopment. The majority of homes are valued within \$50,000 to \$99,999, resulting in an abundance of attainable options, particularly for younger residents, who often require more attainable housing options. In order to increase housing values that would accommodate families with a moderate to high income level, the City should promote redevelopment efforts towards diversity in the housing market.

Most of the housing market was constructed before 1940. This provides attainable housing options, although the City can expect that many of these houses will require updates in the near future. The presence of historic buildings is a unique feature of Niles that contributes to the character of the City. Preserving these old structures is a worthwhile task that will contribute to the City's identity as a place of historical significance.



FIGURE 5-9. SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL HOMES

CHAPTER 6

Economics

An important measure of the overall vitality of a community is its economic health. Incomes and job growth are key indicators in this area, and this chapter seeks to evaluate the City’s position relative to other communities.

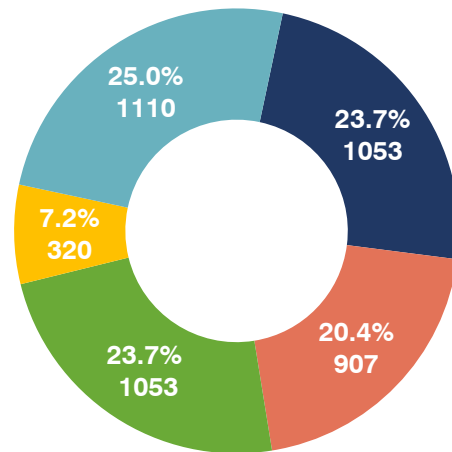
Employment

Niles residents are employed in a wide range of occupations. According to the 2016 American Community Survey, the occupation with the highest number of employees was production, transportation, and material moving (25.0%) followed by business, science, education, and related occupations (23.7%), and sales and office occupations (23.7%). Overall, employees in Niles were distributed fairly evenly between these three occupation groups. Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations accounted for a much smaller percentage of employees (7.2%).

Employment has been changing fairly dramatically over the last few decades. Many jobs within the City have moved elsewhere and modes of transportation appropriate for short distances have decreased. Driving is the primary mode of transportation to work (91.4%), while 2.4% of residents walk to work, 1.5% bike to work, and 0.9% take public transportation. In 2016, the mean travel time to work was 19.4 minutes, indicating that most residents travel farther distances in order to commute to work.

Approximately 71.6% of the residents worked outside the City. Of those, 26.0% worked outside the state of Michigan, most likely in South Bend, Indiana. Therefore, the majority of residents commute outside the City or State for their employment.

FIGURE 6-1. PERCENT EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION



- Business, science, education, and related
- Service
- Sales and office
- Natural resources, construction, and maintenance
- Production, transportation, and material moving

Source: 2012-2016 American Survey Estimates

The growing development in the industrial park will likely increase local jobs, while public transportation may increase cost-effective travel for many residents. Additionally, the City could consider designing bike lanes to minimize human-vehicle interactions while promoting alternate methods for local transportation.

Income

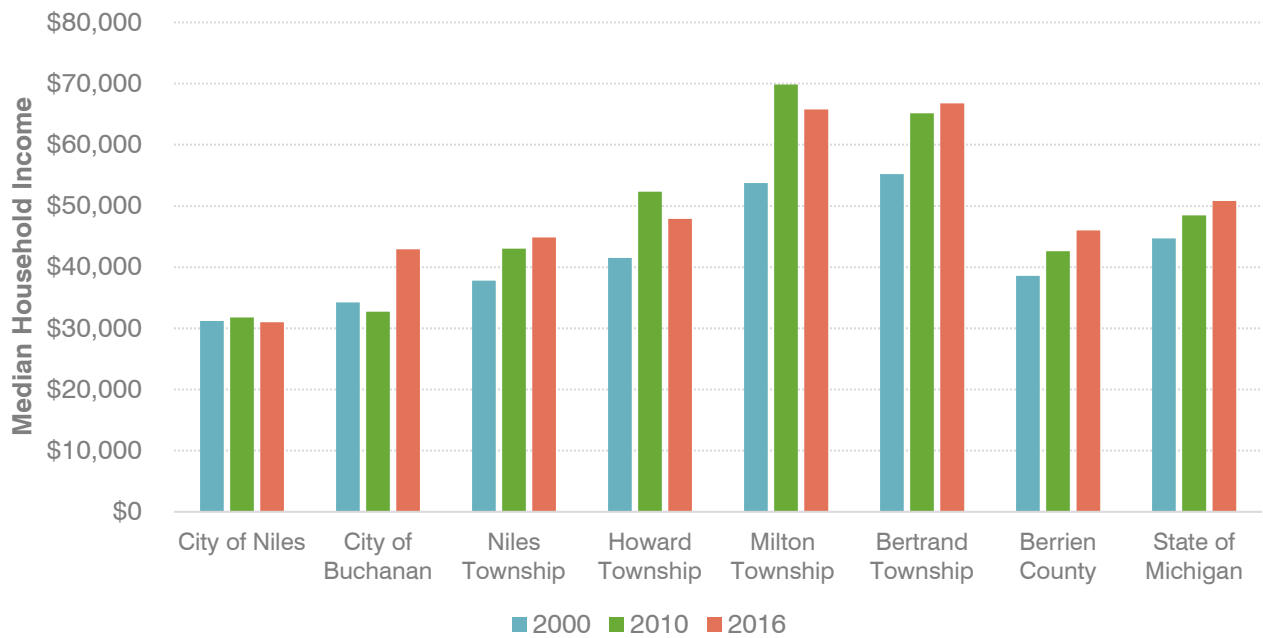
Between 2000 and 2016, the median household income of the City has remained relatively steady. In 2000, the median household income in the City was \$31,208, by 2010 it had increased by 1.76% to \$31,757, and between 2010 and 2016 the median household income decreased by 2.50% to \$30,963. Compared to neighboring municipalities and Berrien County, Niles has the lowest median household income. While Niles has remained relatively steady, all other municipalities have experienced a net increase in median household incomes between 2000 and 2016.

Cities typically have lower median household incomes compared to surrounding communities. This is especially true in Niles, as the abundance of rental houses in the City often offer affordable

options for residents with lower household incomes. However, increasing housing and business diversity through future development will likely increase the median household income of residents.

Generally, a lower median income means that residents do not have the kind of disposable income enjoyed by those in neighboring communities. The amount of disposable income enjoyed by residents largely dictates the types of recreation, retail, and entertainment that will locate in the City. City residents may receive great benefit from low-cost recreation and entertainment options such as trails, bike paths, amphitheatres, and similar options.

FIGURE 6-2. COMPARISON OF MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Source: US Census Bureau; 2012-2016 American Community Survey

Economic Development

Niles is engaged in the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program, which is a certification program that supports community revitalization and business retention. In order to achieve certification, the RRC requires the implementation of their best practice criteria:

1. Community plans and public outreach
2. Zoning regulations
3. Development review process
4. Recruitment and education
5. Redevelopment Ready Sites®
6. Community prosperity

Through the RRC Baseline Report in 2017, Niles was encouraged to create a user-friendly website, provide thorough orientation materials to new board and commission members, create economic development and marketing strategies, and ensure that the downtown plan and zoning regulations promote pedestrian-friendly concentrated development. The completion and adoption of this updated master plan will help promote these best practices and encourage the certification process.

The Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce created a new economic development Strategic Plan for 2017-2021 to provide direction for the future of the Greater Niles / Buchanan Region. Nine objectives were outlined in this strategic plan with measurable goals.

These goals are as follows:

1. Support existing business
2. Making it easier to do business in the Greater Niles / Buchanan Region
3. Differentiate the Greater Niles / Buchanan Region from other regions
4. Increase collaboration between other business and economic support agencies to attract business to the region
5. Identify technologies that will positively or negatively impact the region
6. Attract new talent to the region
7. Attract and motivate housing developers
8. Reigniting the culture of entrepreneurship and innovation
9. Building leadership depth in the region

Goals established through this program include building a business retention and expansion program (BR&E), taking an inventory of assets, working with the Michiana Partnership Regional Cities Initiative and their Industrial Growth Committee to learn other strategic plans and future technologies, participating in targeted recruiting for talent, meeting with Housing Developers to discuss housing challenges and begin 1-2 new housing developments by 2019, creating a business-to-business Mentoring Program, and creating a Leadership Academy to engage young professionals. These and several other strategies are being implemented to encourage economic growth through the Strategic Plan for 2017-2021.

Industry

With its proximity to several interstate transportation corridors, the City has attracted significant industrial and commercial investment. Enthusiasm for downtown development and the marijuana industry has generated economic growth in recent years.

Niles offers a diverse mix of manufacturing firms. Firms that have expanded in Niles include Toefco Engineered Spray Coatings, which has generated approximately 15 to 20 new skilled manufacturing jobs. Additionally, a local technology firm, UltraCamp, has relocated its headquarters to the newly renovated Gallery Building downtown. The

following table presents the major employers in the community and their product or service.²⁵

Medical facilities have experienced tremendous growth in recent years. The presence of Spectrum Lakeland Regional Medical facility in Niles holds a unique advantage for economic development. This hospital is within walking distance of the downtown area, providing a central location to the community. In 2016, the Niles Community Health Center Dental facility was opened, offering 20 new jobs.²⁶ Additionally, the Cassopolis Family Clinic built a new \$8.5 million facility to relocate the Niles Community Health Center, providing multiple new jobs.

Products & Services

Company	Industry Sector
Lakeland Regional Medical	Medical service
National Standard	Wire Products
Modineer Company	Metal Manufacturing
Niles Precision Company	Metal Manufacturing
NSG Pilkington	Glass Manufacturing
United Federal Credit Union	Banking
YMCA Family Center	Social Services
Martin’s Super Markets	Grocer
Chalet of Niles	Assisted Living/Nursing Care
Riveridge	Assisted Living/Nursing Care

The Niles Industrial Park covers approximately 418 acres. The entire industrial park is zoned I-2 General Industrial District and there are approximately 75 acres of vacant land in the industrial park. The park is adjacent to Norfolk Southern tracks and passenger service is provided by Amtrak with eight trains daily. The Park is also within three miles of several major highways, with East-West highways US-12 and M-60, and North-South highways of M-140, and M-51. Sixteen major firms are located in the park, with existing buildings and land available for expansion.

In the early 2000s, Indeck Energy Services, Inc. (Indeck) proposed a natural gas turbine electrical generating facility in the City of Niles Industrial Park. This plan was postponed after the market fell in the late 2000s. However, groundbreaking occurred in 2019 with the opening expected in 2021.

The Indeck facility will occupy approximately 30 acres of a 115-acre parcel. The combined-cycle plant will be configured with dry-condensers, cutting its need for water, which will be supplied by the City. This type of energy will produce 50-90% fewer emissions than traditional coal-fired plants.

²⁵Target Market Analysis: Berrien County, 2016. TMA Consultant Team, LandUseUSA.
²⁶Ibid.



FIGURE 6-3. DOWNTOWN STREETScape

The facility is also anticipated to generate 1,000 megawatts of electricity annually, which is enough to power 635,000 homes and businesses. It will be the most efficient energy center of its kind in Michigan.

The Indeck site is close to a major natural gas pipeline and a major electrical transmission station. In addition, the property was formerly part of a railroad yard. Vestiges of the former use remain, and the soil consists primarily of railroad cinders and ballast with a good deal of heavy metal content. The results of the ground samples and well testing prove the site meets criteria for brownfield redevelopment. Given the brownfield designation, Indeck received tax relief for site remediation.

Output will be sold into the East Central Area Reliability Council wholesale market. Construction costs are estimated to be nearly \$1 billion. The City of Niles will be the beneficiary of an estimated \$25 million in annual tax revenues over 27 years, 21 permanent jobs, and 500 temporary construction jobs.

Niles is also located in proximity to Bertrand Crossing, a technical park in neighboring Bertrand Township that offers 127 acres zoned Industrial and 16.74 acres zoned Commercial properties. Lake Michigan College built a 30,000 square foot facility in Bertrand Crossing to provide state-of-the-art training for industry. In 2013, \$1.8 million worth of improvements were made so that students could get LMC certificates and degrees without going anywhere else.



Industrial Opportunity

There are about 75 acres of vacant land in the City's Industrial Park, all zoned I-2 General Industrial District.

The City’s fiscal year begins on October 1 of each year. The City’s projected general fund revenue for 2018-2019 was \$7,592,381. The tax base for the City of Niles is somewhat unique for the surrounding area, primarily because it is the central city for the region. As a result, the City is urbanized and therefore has no agricultural uses. In addition, the proportion of taxable value in commercial property is much higher than the rest of the region. This is positive in terms of generating activity in the community. Commercial uses generally require fewer services than residential; however, they tend to be more susceptible to fluctuations in the market and consequently are the most unstable class of property. Industrial property value is underrepresented in the City in relation to the County overall.

The City has taken steps to improve the balance in favor of industrial land uses. The attraction of Indeck will serve to significantly improve industrial values in the City. Industrial uses can be of great benefit to the City because they generate tax revenue and jobs while requiring the least services of all the use classes other than agriculture.



FIGURE 6-4. DOWNTOWN ARCHITECTURE

The City has slightly less than three-fourths (73.7%) of the community’s tax base in residential properties, as compared to 71.7% county-wide. This proportion of value in the local tax base will be important in future land use decisions and municipal revenue-expense projections for both the City and local school districts, as residential properties tend to require government and school services valued in excess of the property tax revenues they generate. Typically, residential uses require between \$1.02 and \$2.11 in municipal services (i.e., schools, police, fire, roads, parks, etc.) for every \$1.00 contributed in tax base.

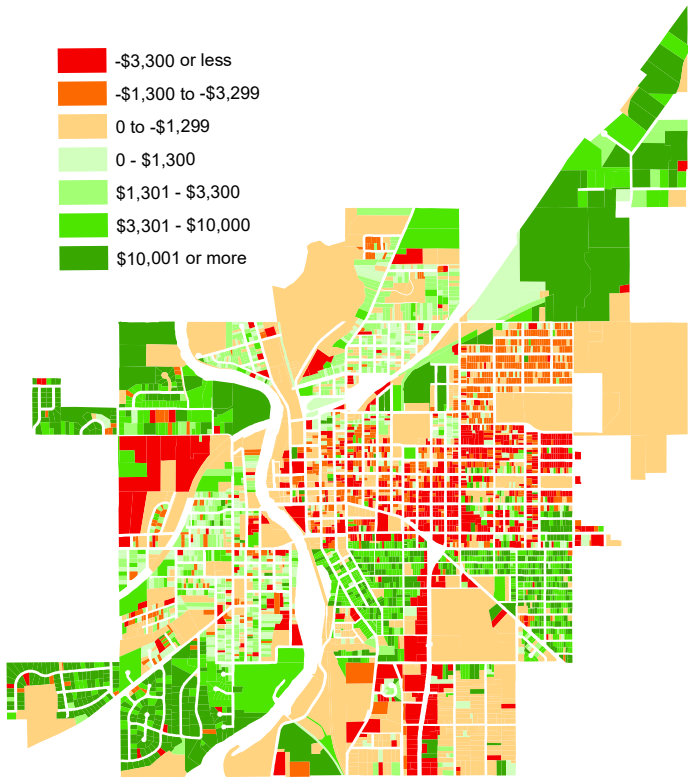
TABLE 6-1. COMPARISON OF 2018 REAL PROPERTY VALUATION

Jurisdiction	Agricultural		Commercial		Industrial		Residential	
	VAE* (millions)	% of Total	VAE* (millions)	% of Total	VAE* (millions)	% of Total	VAE* (millions)	% of Total
Niles City	\$0.00	0.0%	\$42.34	21.2%	\$10.35	5.2%	\$147.28	73.7%
Buchanan City	\$0.00	0.0%	\$13.53	15.5%	\$12.61	14.4%	\$61.39	70.1%
Niles Twp.	\$30.25	7.3%	\$66.17	16.0%	\$10.09	2.4%	\$307.15	74.3%
Bertrand Twp.	\$33.97	21.0%	\$8.26	5.1%	\$6.33	3.9%	\$113.37	70.0%
Berrien Co.	\$551.30	6.1%	\$777.99	8.6%	\$1,224.38	13.6%	\$6,460.59	71.7%

*VAE = Value as Equalized

Source: Berrien County 2018 Annual Equalization Report

Property Values

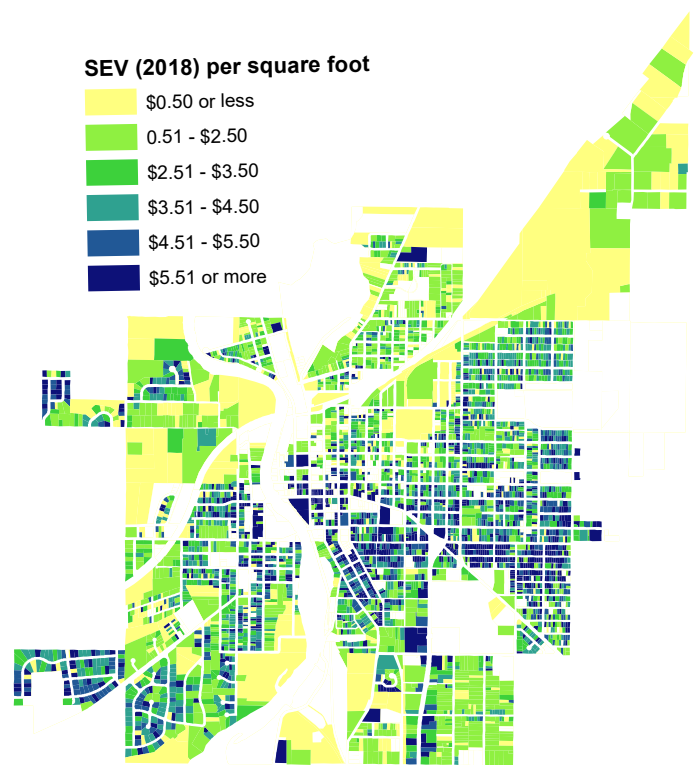


MAP 6-1. PROPERTY VALUE CHANGE 2016-2018*

*Data shown for Berrien County only

Map 6-1 illustrates the change in state-equalized value for properties within the City from 2016-2018. It highlights substantial differences in which neighborhoods appear to be thriving and those that may be struggling. It should be referenced by the City when making capital improvements or infrastructure investments in the City, as certain areas many benefit substantially from such investments.

Map 6-2 illustrates the value per square foot of parcels within the City using the state-equalized value. It represents the productivity of land uses and development patterns in the City.



MAP 6-2. PROPERTY VALUE PER SQUARE FOOT 2018*

Many of Niles' traditional residential neighborhoods outperform other areas that are often considered to be more valuable, including many commercial properties on south 11th Street. Even areas that appear to have lost value from 2016-2018 are among the more valuable properties in the City. This is because land in dense, walkable neighborhoods is used more efficiently.

Many large lot, suburban style developments are subject to large setbacks, which results in large open spaces that do not provide any financial productivity to the community. This underscores one of the many benefits of traditional neighborhood patterns, compact, walkable developments, and smaller lots.

CHAPTER 7

Public Places and Services

Community facilities, such as schools, parks and public buildings, play an important role in maintaining and improving quality of life. This chapter discusses these facilities and the comprehensive development needs of the City.

Schools

The Niles area is predominantly served by the Niles Community School and Brandywine Public School districts. Niles Community Schools rank above the State average in math, science, and reading scores in many of the elementary and high school grade levels. Private and parochial schools provide alternatives to public education. The following schools are located within the City of Niles:

- Niles Senior High School
- Ring Lardner Middle School
- Ballard Elementary School
- Eastside Elementary School
- Westside School
- Southside School (Special Education)
- Northside Child Development Center
- St. Mary's School (private)
- 7th Day Adventist School

Niles also has an active homeschooling community. This includes the Niles Home School Partnership and the Michiana Christian Co-Op. These groups support the learning of students through customizable courses and flexibility. Homeschooled students who enroll in at least four courses through the Niles Home School Partnership are also eligible to participate in extracurricular sports programs in the Niles Community School District.

Niles New Tech provides another alternative approach to education through project-based learning and the use of smart technology. Students are encouraged to collaborate on projects, be creative, and learn in context, developing necessary skills for the work force. Self-directed learning is also encouraged through a 1:1 ratio of computers to students.



FIGURE 7-1. NILES NEW TECH



FIGURE 7-2. RIVERFRONT PARK AMPHITHEATER

Park Facilities and Recreation Plans

Niles offers residents and visitors many types of indoor and outdoor recreation activities. Opportunities for fishing, canoeing, hiking, and cross-country skiing abound. Organized sports such as baseball, softball, pickleball, and soccer leagues, and individual activities such as the YMCA Turkey Trot, provide athletic recreation. Community celebrations include the Hunter Ice Festival, the Historic Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project open house, and the Four Flags Area Apple Festival. Free summer concerts at the amphitheater on the riverfront in downtown Niles provide entertainment and a focal point for the community.

The Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail provides a 2.2-mile asphalt path along the St. Joseph River. This trail also runs through Riverfront Park, which offers the area's largest children's playground. The route in Niles is part of the larger 34 round-trip route that connects to South Bend and Mishawaka, Indiana. In November 2019, a grand opening celebration was held to honor decades of work put into completing the trail route. In the future, the trail is envisioned to extend even farther north from Niles and connect to Berrien Springs.

The City of Niles Parks and Recreation Board consists of nine volunteer members and a liaison City Council member. The board's primary responsibilities include the improvement of parks, future park development, and the establishment of organized recreation programs. This board develops short and long-term plans involving public parks and recreational facilities and programs.

The City of Niles updated their Parks and Recreation Plan in 2016. The Recreation Plan updated information regarding the community's description, inventories of recreational facilities, the action program, and basis for action. The Plan was tailored to meet the recreational needs of the City through 2020.

The budget for parks and recreation in FY 2019 was \$156,126 or 2.1% of the City's General Fund. When possible, the City utilizes grants to assist the park and recreation budget. However, the City regularly maintains and performs upgrades to park facilities and equipment each year.



FIGURE 7-3. NILES SKATE PARK

Within the City, there are nearly 90 acres of parks, eight schools with park facilities, and the Plym Park golf course. In addition, there are a number of private recreational businesses servicing Niles, including the Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve, Niles Water Sports canoe rental, Riverfront and Spaulding Campgrounds, and the YMCA.²⁷

The City provides playground and other equipment at many parks, including a skate park downtown, and the City is responsible for routine maintenance. During the process to update the 2016 Recreation Plan, a few parks were found to have outdated playground equipment in need of replacement, and much of this work has already been completed.

Most City parks generally meet American With Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, and the City ensures that any new large-scale park projects include universal design concepts to ensure that its parks are available for everyone. The City is always evaluating new opportunities to develop or improve parks and open spaces for residents.

The Parks of Niles

The following parks are located within the City of Niles:

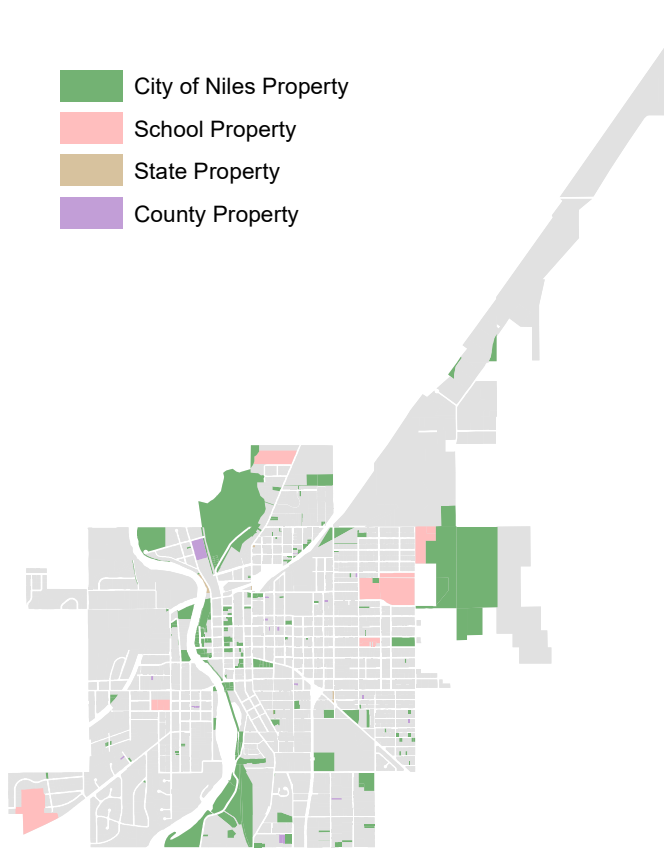
Eastside Park	4.6 acres
Island Park	3.5 acres
Clevenger Park.....	1.0 acre
Eagle Street Park	0.3 acres
Southside Park.....	3.8 acres
Birkholm Park.....	0.8 acres
Saathoff Park.....	1.1 acres
F.O.P Park.....	4.7 acres
Cable Street Park	1.8 acres
Thomas Stadium.....	9.6 acres
Tot Park	0.1 acre
Troost Park	0.1 acre
Vella Park.....	6.2 acres
Tyler Sports Complex.....	23.1 acres
Lt. General Donovan Smith Veterans Memorial	1.0 acre
Father Allouez Marker	0.2 acres
Fort St. Joseph Monument	0.2 acres
Blue Star Memorial Hwy Veterans Memorial	0.1 acre
Pucker Street Dam Site.....	0.1 acre
Plym Park Golf Course.....	19.0 acres
Riverfront Park.....	25.2 acres

Other Publicly Owned Facilities

The City maintains several buildings and facilities for public use. The Niles History Center is located in historic downtown and includes the Fort St. Joseph Museum and the Chapin Mansion. The Fort St. Joseph Museum tells the story of Niles from the prehistoric era to the present. The Chapin Mansion served as City Hall and is now available to the public for guided tours and special programs. In addition, the City of Niles maintains the Jerry Tyler Memorial Airport, the Silverbrook Cemetery, and the golf course at Plym Park.

²⁷City of Niles 2016-2020 Parks and Recreation Plan

Public and Tax Exempt Land Maps

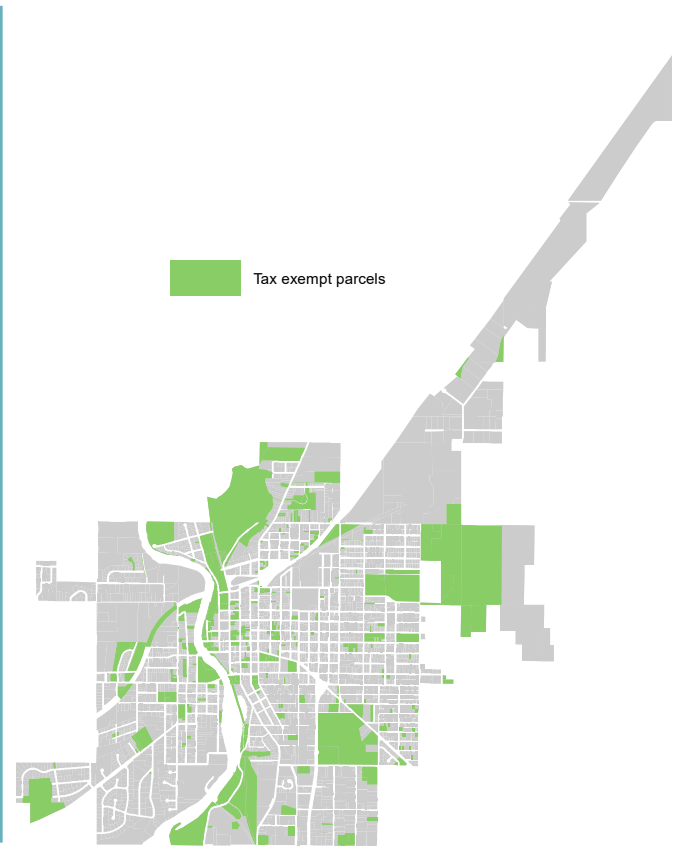


MAP 7-1. PUBLIC PROPERTY

Map 7-1 shows properties owned by the City of Niles, Niles Community Schools, Berrien County, and the State of Michigan. While some are undeveloped, most of these properties are used for providing vital cultural, educational, governmental, or other services to Niles residents. These properties total about 545 acres in area, or 20 percent of the total land area (not including rights of way) in the City.*

Map 7-2 shows all tax-exempt property in the City. This includes the public property shown in Map 7-1 and property owned by religious organizations, health care facilities, nonprofits, and other tax-exempt entities.

These properties total about 700 acres, or 26 percent of the total land area in the City (not including rights of way).*



MAP 7-2. TAX EXEMPT PROPERTY

There are two practical implications that can be drawn from the above maps. First, city parks, cemeteries, trails, schools, and other public services occupy a significant amount of property and therefore require significant public investment to properly maintain and operate.

Secondly, each of the tax exempt properties shown in Map 7-2 above do not contribute to a primary source of revenue for the City (property tax). Therefore, considerations regarding property acquisition for public use must be carefully balanced against the fiscal impacts of doing so.

*Cass County parcels were not included in these calculations.



FIGURE 7-4. FIRE DEPARTMENT OF NILES

Fire Protection Facilities

The City of Niles fire station is located on the corner of East Main Street and Maple. The Niles Fire Department employs 10 full time and 21 on-call members who respond to emergency incidents. There are three shifts including one captain/lieutenant and two drivers. There are also six part-time code enforcement officers who cover from 8am to 5pm on weekdays.

The Niles Fire Department is given a score from the Insurance Service Office (ISO), which represents how well they protect the community. The scoring system evaluates Fire Department training, equipment, staffing, available water supply, and Dispatch capabilities. Scores range from 1 to 10, with 1 being the best. Historically, the Department has scored very well on this test, receiving a 4. It is often the best-scoring department in the County, although St. Joseph recently received a 4 as well.

The Fire Chief reports that the Department has three front line apparatuses that are all currently serviceable: a 1995 E-1 Engine, a 2001 E-1 Engine, and a 2001 E-1 Platform Ladder. In order to keep the 1995 engine operational, the Department has been undergoing an in-house refurbishing plan. These efforts are helping extend the life of the engine. The Fire Chief expects that the other two units will not be too far behind in needing refurbishing or

replacement. The department also maintains four utility vehicles. Two of these were picked up on a grant and will need to be replaced in the next five years. The other two should see at least 10 years of service. Overall, Fire Department vehicles are serviceable, but necessary upgrades are expected in the near future.

When firefighters are not responding to emergencies, their duties include inspection and code enforcement. This helps keep neighborhoods safe and healthy for the residents of Niles by ensuring building safety. The Department usually conducts 150-250 Commercial Fire Inspections annually. Each shift is assigned a list of places to inspect, which allows them to prevent major fires and familiarize themselves with the buildings. Additionally, the Department also performs approximately 800 Rental Inspections and 1,500 Notice of Violations related inspections annually.

The fire department also offers free smoke and carbon monoxide detectors to the public in an effort to improve safety in City homes. The department has noted that the typical service life of 10 years is often neglected for these detectors. In order to combat this problem, the firefighters will install the devices for free. In the last 5 years, about 850 smoke detectors have been given out by the department.



FIGURE 7-5. POLICE OF NILES

Police

The Niles Police Department employs a total of 32 full-time persons, 23 sworn officers, and 9 civilian employees, including 7 dispatchers. Between 2004 and 2016, crime rates in the City were reduced by 33%. The Police Department has 36 vehicles total, including surveillance, tactical, motorcycles, and the electric GEM vehicles. Over the course of FY 2019, \$2,906,265 was projected for police and fire public safety services.

The City is investing in positive redevelopment opportunities to further encourage safety. In 2017, the primary location of incidents that required responses from the Niles Police Department were near Downtown Niles close to Broadway Street, Sycamore Street, and the St. Joseph River. As the City focuses positive redevelopment efforts towards areas that are susceptible to crime activities, places are transformed and redeemed into safe and enjoyable community places.

The City has been involved in several community action programs to reduce crime. These include Advocates and Leaders for Police and Community Trust (ALPACT), which aims to reduce criminal activity, increase police training, and strengthen police and community relationships. The City is also working with school systems to incorporate a school police officer in the Niles Community Schools.

R.A.D. (Rape Aggression Defense) classes for women are also offered through a joint effort from the Niles City Police Department and Michigan State police. This class teaches defensive concepts and techniques to reduce chances of being victimized and works with area businesses and organizations to educate about active violence. Community training can often be an important step in decreasing crime and increasing community awareness. Such training has provided positive steps towards crime reduction in the City since 2002.

Media

The City of Niles has several modes of communication through which it conveys information to the public. The Niles Daily Star is an active local newspaper that provides the community with several opportunities to stay updated on community news. This includes the distribution of a physical newspaper, a Facebook page with informational posts and responses from the community, and updated articles in Leader Publications, which publishes newspapers from the greater southwest Michigan area. The Niles Chamber of Commerce also has its own Facebook page. Through multiple forms of communication, there are excellent opportunities for the community to stay updated on local news.

Public utilities and infrastructure are an important element in a land use plan. Through the delivery of reliable and plentiful water and the safe and efficient disposal of wastewater, communities can achieve an improved quality of life for local residents. Utility systems also have the potential to aid in growth management by enabling greater densities in selected locations. Finally, and most importantly, public utility systems give the community the ability to provide effective stewardship over such important natural features as groundwater and surface water.

Utilities



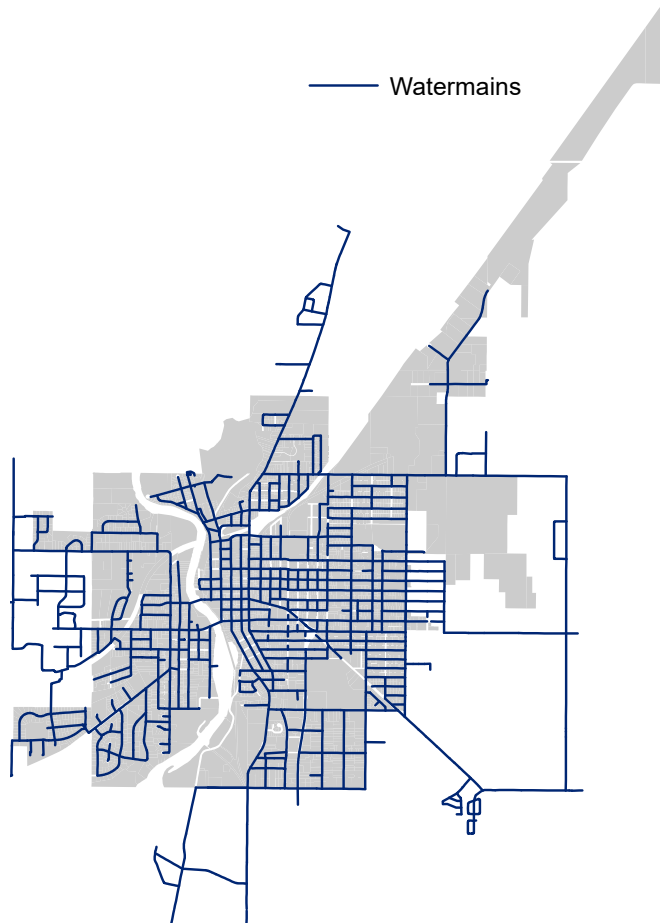
FIGURE 8-1. LOCAL RESIDENTIAL STREET

Water

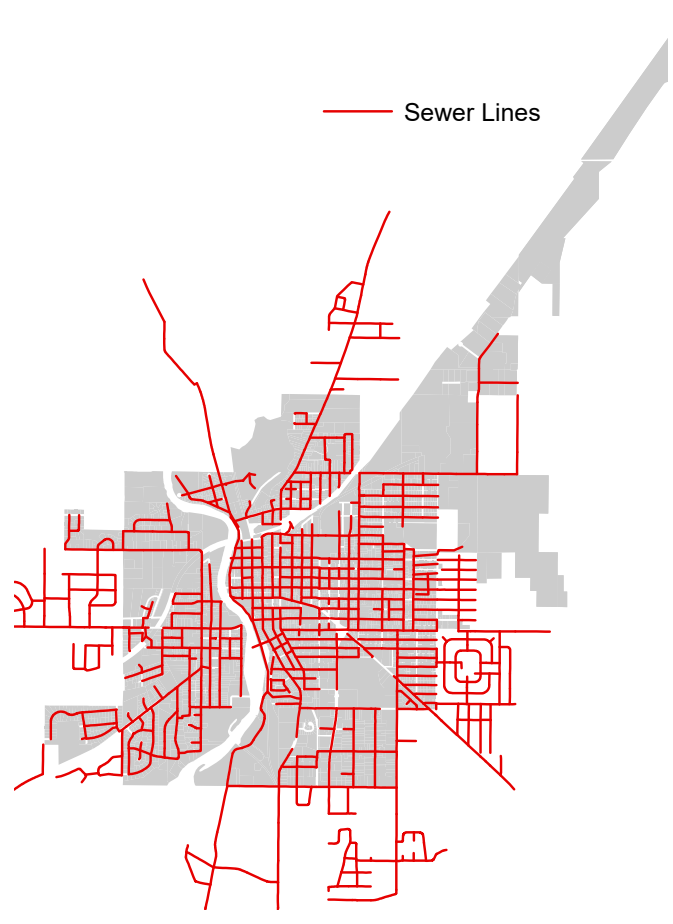
The City of Niles water system has received significant improvements in recent years. The system consists of a network of water distribution mains most of which were installed over 50 years ago, but major improvements have increased water quality and system efficiency. These improvements included the construction of an iron filtration plant, an intermediate water pressure district on the east side of town, and additional water storage in the Bertrand Township Industrial Park. The Niles water system serves all of the City of Niles as well as limited portions of Niles Township at Bertrand Crossing, Howard Township through Howard's infrastructure, and a few retail water customers in Milton Township.

The City has numerous dispersed wells within the City and can pump a combined maximum of 7.6 million gallons per day. The City's average demand per day is 2 million gallons, but the peak usage reaches almost 4 million gallons in the summer. The City has five elevated water tanks and certain wells are equipped with backup generators to be able to pump water in an electrical power outage event.

Water and Sewer maps



MAP 8-1. PUBLIC WATER



MAP 8-2. PUBLIC SEWER

According to the 2017 Water Quality Report, there were no violations in the Niles City water quality. Only one site out of sixty was above the action level for lead ppb, which is a likely result of household plumbing system corrosion. The City is active in replacing lead service lines. Since January 2016, there have been 54 lead service lines replaced.



FIGURE 8-2. WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT

Wastewater

The City of Niles wastewater treatment plant processes both storm and sanitary sewers. While the City and Townships use approximately 2.5 million gallons per day, the plant has an average capacity of 5.8 million gallons per day, providing a 3.3 million gallons per day reserve. Since the collection system was maintained as a combined storm and sanitary sewer for many years, the City experienced occasional combined sewer overflow (CSO) events. Due to the negative impacts of this design, the City is involved in a CSO program to separate portions of the combined sewer and increase water quality.

In April of 2000, the City began Phase I of a CSO program with the primary goal of eliminating the combined sewer overflows into the St. Joseph River.²⁸ The secondary goal of the program was to separate enough of the collection system to allow the Waste Water Treatment Plant to handle its design capacity of a 1-year, 1-hour storm with a retention basin to equalize flows to enable the system to handle a 10-year, 1-hour storm. Through the CSO program, all of the original sewer separations that were outlined in the 1970s have been completed.

In the 2003 Master Plan, a survey was conducted to analyze the wastewater collection and treatment system. This provided insight on necessary upgrades. Since the wastewater treatment plant had been in operation over 40 years, the infrastructure had significant aging and has a high cost of operation and maintenance. However, since the 2003 survey, there have been several upgrades to help update the infrastructure and improve its performance. In 2009, some improvements were made that eliminated all but one of the diversion chambers. The Sycamore diversion chamber was kept in place for an emergency outfall. A major upgrade also occurred in 2011, as the City installed new influent pumps, a sodium hypochlorite disinfection system, and sludge screw presses. In 2016, an amended operating plan was approved for the City of Niles Septage Waste Receiving Facility. This included an increased fee to 5.84 cents per gallon and an increase in service area to 25 radial miles, stopping at the Michigan-Indiana border. A Capital Improvement Program is also nearing completion, with the resulting renovations increasing the plant's life span for another 25 to 30 years.

²⁸City of Niles Combined Sewer Overflow Program - Phase I, Wightman and Associates, Inc. April 25th 2000 memo to Mr. Fred Morley of Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

Electric and Telecommunication

The City of Niles has a 34.5 kV electric transmission system that interconnects seven distribution substations. Each substation converts this transmission voltage to either 12.47 kV or 4.16 kV for 28 different substations. This electric utility power is purchased wholesale from American Electric Power. Additionally, Indeck Energy Services, Inc. (Indeck) has been approved to site a gas turbine electrical generating facility in the City of Niles Industrial Park. The facility will supply electric power to the electrical grid that serves the surrounding region and up to 19 states on a merchant basis. This will undoubtedly add capacity to the existing electrical system as well as provide an economic benefit to the City.

Telecommunication systems in Niles may be experiencing upgrades, as the Utilities Department has had telecommunication interest in expanding their existing systems. The Department is closely following the recent Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on small cell and 5G deployment, along with Michigan's Senate Bill 637 "Small Wireless Communications Facilities Deployment Act." With the development of 5G network technology, existing infrastructure will eventually need to be upgraded to accommodate the new technology. Additionally, fiber technology offers access to better high-speed Internet services. Currently, fiber has been installed in the industrial park and is being installed in several business locations.



FIGURE 8-3. UTILITY POLE

The way land uses are connected through a transportation system can have a significant affect on the way a community develops and evolves over time. Thus, generally speaking, the more diverse and interconnected the transportation network, the healthier the community. Planning for transportation systems is complicated because each land use and each mode of transportation place different demands on the network. Providing a safe, efficient, and multi-modal transportation system creates ease in commerce and can make daily trips an enjoyable experience for residents and visitors.

Traffic and Connections

Transportation linkages between the City of Niles and the remainder of the region are quite good. However, like any aging community, roads need repair each year and as more residents are commuting to jobs, roads can become congested at peak periods. The local street network is laid out in a traditional grid pattern. Internal circulation in residential neighborhoods is generally accomplished on paved and fully improved streets. Only a few streets remain unpaved.

Niles is self-described as a “crossroads town.” In addition, the City is within close proximity to major transportation routes, which provide easy access to large urban areas. Five main highways, M-51, M-140, US-31, US-12, and M-60, converge in Niles. Business Route 12 provides east-west access to the City, while the US-31 bypass provides access to points north and south. Interstate 94 can be accessed by driving 25 minutes west of the City or 45 minutes north. Interstate 80/90 (Indiana Toll Road) is about 15 minutes south of Niles. These provide connections to the broader Midwest region.



FIGURE 9-1 BOARDWALK AT THE ST. JOSEPH RIVER

Connectivity

Transportation linkages can improve efficiency and enhance local economies. Niles' location provides transportation connections that are highly desirable to maximize these benefits.

In June 2019, the Southwest Michigan Commission completed the NATS 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan. The Plan was written to provide guidance to local officials as they plan for the present and future development of the transportation network in their communities. The Plan describes eight guiding principals and strategies for all modes of transportation within the Niles Study area, which are embraced by this Master Plan.

Guiding Principles & Strategies

1. Economic Opportunity

Supports growth, innovation, job creation and productivity.

2. Environment

Protects and preserves our natural resources, including land, water and air.

3. System Preservation

Maintains existing facilities in good and reliable condition.

4. Choice

Offers multi-modal transportation options that are affordable and accessible.

5. Safety & Security

Enhances the safety and security of all users.

6. Health

Invites and enhances healthy and active lifestyles.

7. Equity

Provides access and opportunity for all people and all neighborhoods.

8. Resiliency & Reliability

Improves the ability to prepare, plan for, absorb, and recover from actual or potential adverse events.



FIGURE 9-2. NILES DIAL-A-RIDE (DART) BUS



FIGURE 9-3 JERRY TYLER MEMORIAL AIRPORT
SOURCE: CITY OF NILES

Public Transportation

An important component of an overall surface transportation plan is the presence of public transportation. A well-organized and highly-used transit system can provide many benefits to an area by lessening traffic volumes and congestion, reducing wear and improving the lifespan of roadway surfaces, and contributing to improving the environment through cleaner air.²⁹

Bus Service

Public transit in Niles is provided by Niles Dial-A-Ride Transportation (DART) through demand-response and hourly deviated fixed-route services. The deviated fixed-route service runs Monday through Friday from 10:00am to 5:00pm. This route includes stops at 23 destinations that provide connections to retail areas, apartment and senior living facilities, and the South Bend Public Transportation Corporation (Transpo) just south of the State line for a connection to South Bend, IN. The demand response service provides transportation for the general public in the City of Niles and Niles Charter Township. Customers are encouraged to call dispatch at least 24 hours in advance of their trip to schedule their ride when utilizing demand response services.³⁰

Berrien Bus, Buchanan Dial-A-Ride, and Cass County Public Transit also maintain a connections

at the Niles DART station. DART also provides non-emergency medical transportation services to citizens.

The average number of passengers per hour has been increasing. In FY 2019, the number of passengers per vehicle hour (ppvh) was 3.75, increasing 2.2% from 3.67 ppvh in FY 2018. The DART buses accommodate over 35,000 annual riders and have a service area of over 25,000 people.³¹

A local millage provides supplementary funds to Federal and State funds.³² In order to adhere to ADA Standards, all DART buses provide wheelchair accessibility with wheelchair lifts that bring passengers aboard the bus.



FIGURE 9-4. NILES DART BUS IN ROUTE

²⁹Center for Livable Communities, Streets and Sidewalks, People and Cars, April 2000.

³⁰2045 Long Range Transportation Plan: Making Connections, Southwest Michigan Commission, June 2019.

³¹Ibid.

³²Berrien County Master Plan, 2015.

Rail Service

Rail services to Niles are offered by Norfolk-Southern for freight and Amtrak for passenger service. The Wolverine and Blue Water Amtrak lines both have stops at the City’s local station, located half of a mile from the downtown area. Both provide connections to Chicago, where passengers can access any passenger rail line in the United States. The Blue Water line also connects to Port Huron, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Lapeer, and Flint, while the Wolverine line connects to Hammond-Whiting, Michigan City, New Buffalo, Dowagiac, Kalamazoo, Pontiac, and Detroit.³³



FIGURE 9-5. HISTORIC NILES AMTRAK STATION

Air Transportation

The City owns and operates a general utility airport for private and corporate use, offering a less-congested alternative to the South Bend Regional Airport. Jerry Tyler Memorial Airport serves general aviation needs in Michigan and Indiana. The airport has a NW/SE 4,100 foot paved runway and a NE/SW 3,300 foot paved runway. The facility is at an elevation of 750 feet and at a distance of about 2 miles from the populated areas in Niles. There are about 29 aircraft based at the airport.³⁴

The airport and surrounding properties are zoned as a tax-exempt use. The adjoining uses in Cass County and Howard Township are rural and undeveloped. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is involved with review and approval of applications for industrial development within a certain proximity to the airport.

Commercial air passenger service is offered in nearby South Bend Regional Airport. Daily

service is provided to and from Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee. The airlines that operate out of South Bend are Allegiant, American, Delta, and United.

TABLE 9-1. SUMMARY OF AIRPORT AIRCRAFT AND OPERATIONS

Aircraft	
Total aircraft based on the field	29
Single engine airplanes	25
Multi-engine airplanes	3
Helicopters	1
Operations	
Average Operations per week*	57
Local general aviation	50%
Transient general aviation	50%

*For a 12-month period ending December 31, 2015

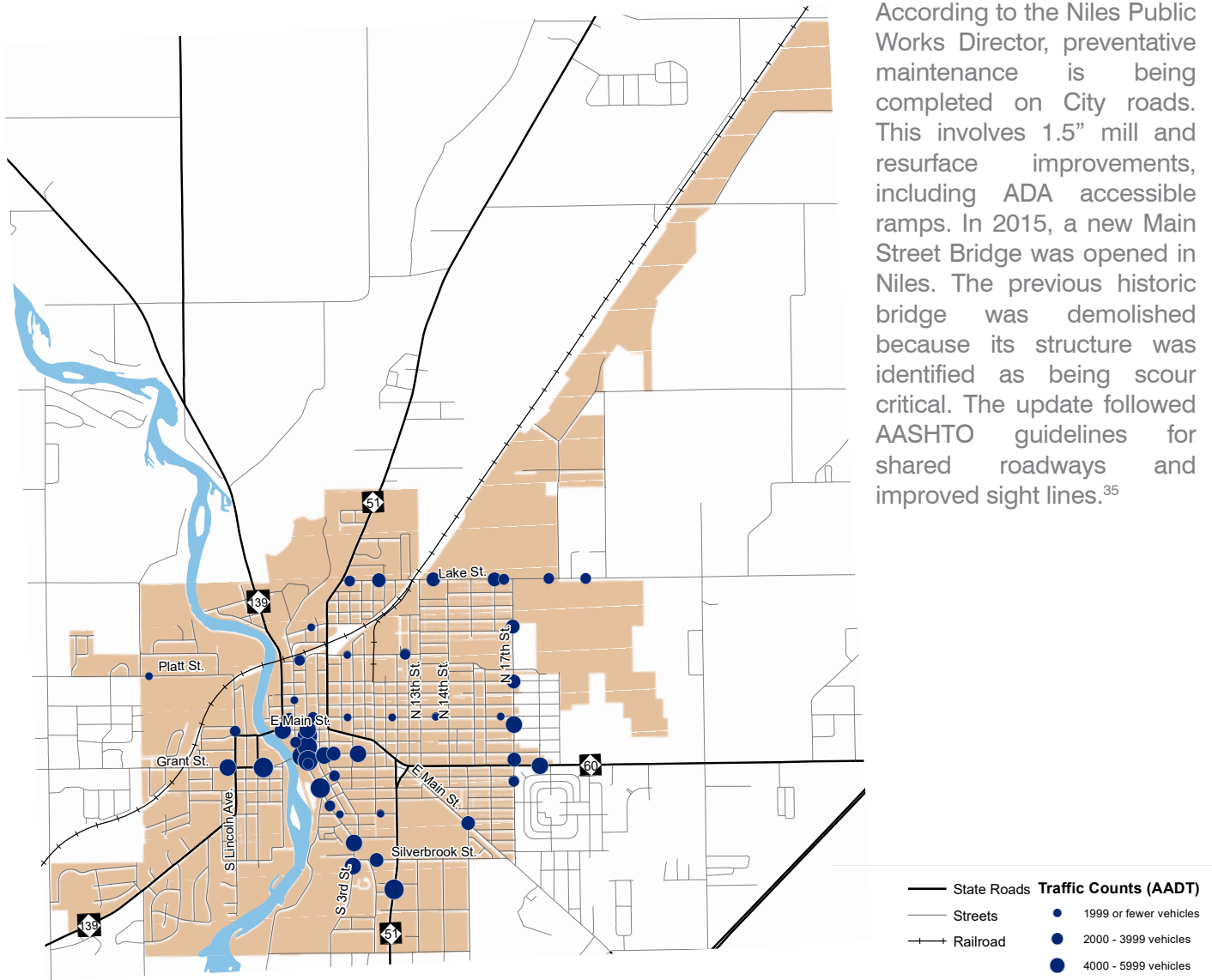
³³2045 Long Range Transportation Plan: Making Connections, Southwest Michigan Commission, June 2019.

³⁴3TR: Jerry Tyler Memorial Airport, 2020 Retrieved from Airnav.com/airport/3TR.

Road Improvement and Enhancement

The Niles Buchanan & Cass Long Range Plan (September 2016) includes road improvements and a separate list for enhancements. Specifically, road improvements consist of such projects as lane widening and reconstruction; road enhancements include projects specifically for the augmentation of the surface transportation system, such as bike paths and scenic roadway preservation.

According to the Niles Public Works Director, preventative maintenance is being completed on City roads. This involves 1.5" mill and resurface improvements, including ADA accessible ramps. In 2015, a new Main Street Bridge was opened in Niles. The previous historic bridge was demolished because its structure was identified as being scour critical. The update followed AASHTO guidelines for shared roadways and improved sight lines.³⁵



MAP 9-1. TRAFFIC

³⁵Finding of No Significant Impact and Supporting Documentation for a Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2012. Michigan Department of Transportation.

Pedestrian and Other Non-Motorized Connections

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) have recognized the many benefits non-motorized transportation and its contribution to community health. The SWMPC developed several strategies in their 2045 Long Range Plan to improve non-motorized transportation in the Niles-Buchanan-Cass area. These include improving safety, building connected networks, planning and designing for users of all abilities, and promoting facilities where people can walk and bike.³⁶ Through coordinated efforts, the SWMPC and MDOT also developed a Southwest Regional Non-motorized Plan. This plan encourages policy development related to accommodating bicyclists and pedestrians as an integral part of the transportation system.

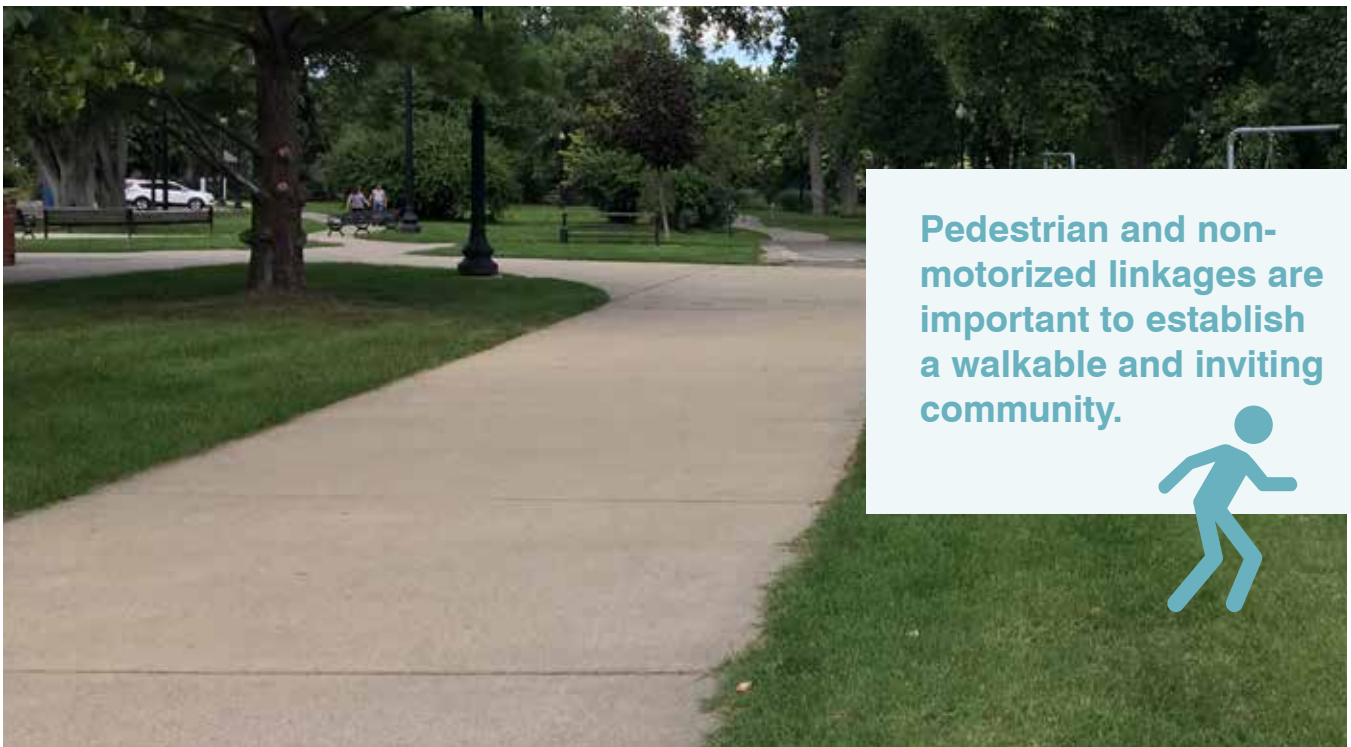
Sidewalks are a significant component in developing a thorough non-motorized transportation system.

The City previously offered a voluntary sidewalk repair program in an effort to promote non-motorized transportation. Although it was successful for a couple years, participation dropped off and the program was discontinued. Currently, residents must pay for sidewalk repairs. This is done through a permit and City approval.

A major contribution to pedestrian and bicycle transportation in Niles is the recently completed Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail (IN-MI RVT). The route travels approximately 2.2-miles through the City, much of which includes scenic views along the St. Joseph River. This trail provides a 34-mile round-trip connection between Niles and Mishawaka, Indiana. Along this route, transportation connections are made to universities, schools, downtown areas, parks, hospitals, historical areas, and businesses.

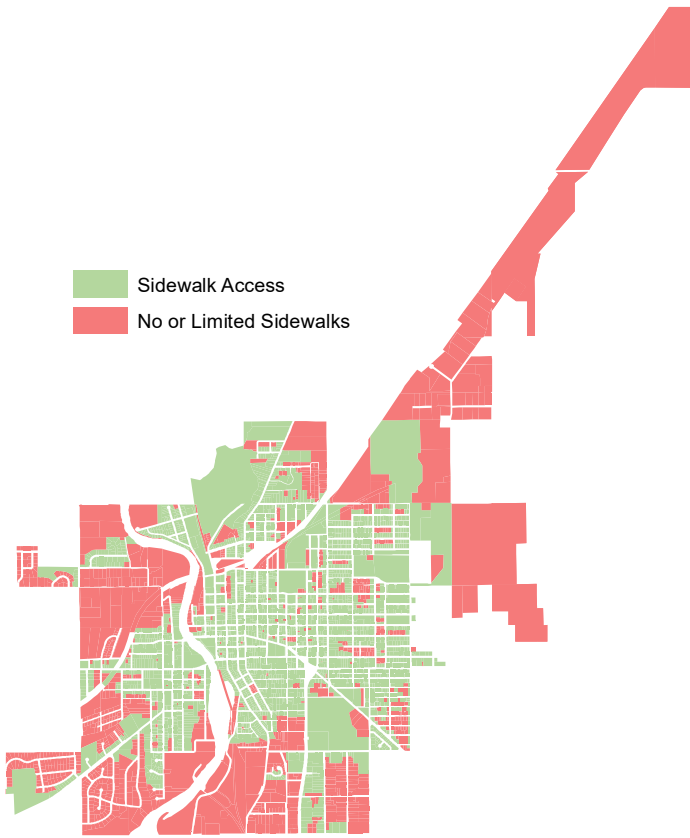
Other non-motorized facilities in the City include sidewalks and a pedestrian-only bridge leading from Parkway to Island Park over the St. Joseph River. A historic flood event in the spring of 2018 damaged this bridge, so it is currently awaiting improvements to its safety.

FIGURE 9-6. IN-MI RIVER VALLEY TRAIL

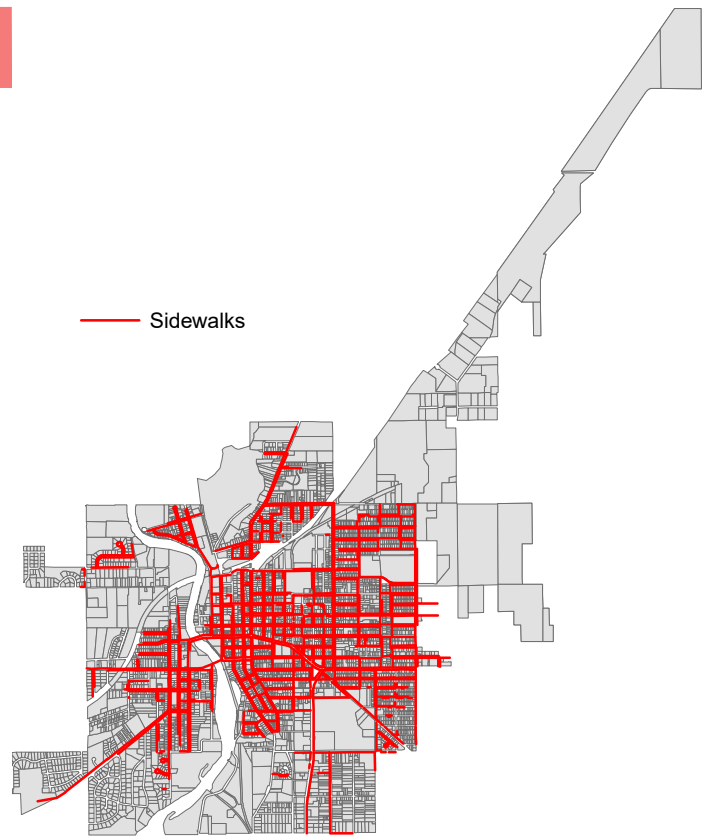


³⁶2045 Long Range Transportation Plan: Making Connections, Southwest Michigan Commission, June 2019.

Pedestrian Mobility



MAP 9-2. SIDEWALK ACCESS



MAP 9-3. SIDEWALK LOCATIONS

Maps 17 and 18 illustrates which parcels have direct access to a sidewalk in the City. Sidewalks serve as critical social infrastructure in cities and connect people to neighbors, parks, shops, churches, and other public and community services and facilities.

There are a number of streets in Niles neighborhoods where sidewalk segments are not connected, and certain parcels are not served by sidewalks. Not only is this limiting for residents of the unserved parcel, but it also serves as a barrier that precludes segments of the population (such as those with disabilities) from easily and safely moving through their neighborhoods without a car. As the City works to invest and reinvest in its neighborhoods, it must be cognizant of the role sidewalks serve as transportation and social infrastructure.

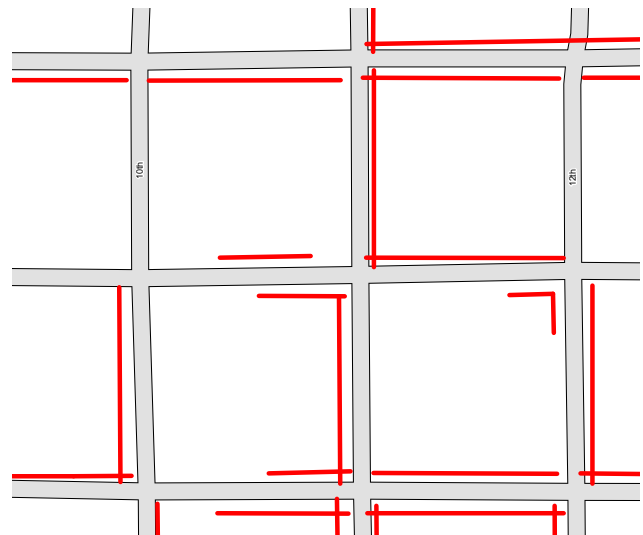


FIGURE 9-7. LACK OF CONNECTIVITY IN SIDEWALKS (RED) IN CERTAIN PARTS OF THE CITY.



Part V.

OUR PLAN



Parts II-IV of the Niles Master Plan outlined the current conditions, challenges, opportunities, and trends facing Niles. Part V summarizes the broad community input that was instrumental in developing this Plan, and sets forth specific goals and objectives that will serve as official City policy for the foreseeable future. These policies are rooted in the public interest and are founded on community input received in support of the planning process.

Part V also establishes general guidelines for growth and development, outlines an economic development strategy for the City, and identifies specific sites in Niles where redevelopment is desired.

Finally, several strategies that the City should seek to implement to accomplish the Plan's overall goals are included. In order for the overall vision of this plan to be achieved, these strategies must be employed.

CHAPTER 10

Public Participation

Effective long-range planning is founded on policies rooted in citizen comments and participation in the planning process. Community engagement efforts are intended not only to gather information, but more importantly, to engage citizens in the planning process. The act of marking up a map, drawing, and conversing with City staff and consultants allows citizens to be a part of the process. Master Plans are more than guidelines; they reflect the desires of residents throughout the community, represent diverse interests and priorities, and ensure that the City has the public support necessary to accomplish its objectives over the long term.

This report outlines and summarizes the City's community outreach and engagement in the development of the Niles Master Plan.

Master Plan Survey

To kick-off the master planning process, the City created a short online survey to gauge community interests and concerns. The survey was conducted early in 2016 and promoted through several different advertising platforms (i.e. City listserv, local newspaper, television advertisements, and social media platforms). The survey consisted of 10 questions and attracted 183 participants. With a total City population of 11,379 in 2016, the results of this survey represent a small sample (1.6%) of the population. Therefore, it is recognized that these survey results may not be representative of the public as a whole. Nevertheless, these results were useful in gaining insight on trends and values held by members in the community that could be considered during the Master Plan process. The survey results are discussed on pages 78-80.

SWOT Analysis

To build upon the data collected in the Master Plan survey, the City conducted a SWOT analysis later in 2016, after the survey. This strategic planning technique provided a simple overview of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and

Threats present in Niles at the time in order to better understand perceived assets and constraints of the City. A total of 870 comments were received from participants in the SWOT analysis work groups. Meetings were held at the Niles District Library and the Niles Fire Department. Members of the public and City staff were all invited to participate in the analysis, which is discussed on pages 81-84.

Stakeholder Meeting

In September 2018, the City of Niles engaged community stakeholders in identifying key core issues facing the community today. Stakeholders are those who hold a specific interest and role in the project. This includes City officials and staff, local business owners, and other governmental representatives. A total of 35 stakeholders attended this meeting and it lasted approximately 90 minutes.

The workshop involved three parts. During the first part, the planning process was presented along with a summary of the work completed to date.

Next, participants were asked to participate in an interactive polling activity using an online software platform called Mentimeter. Questions were provided on-screen, and as participants answered

these questions, results appeared instantly for the stakeholders' review. This poll focused on desired improvements, development, priorities, and important characteristics of the City.

During the third part of the meeting, participants were asked to prioritize their thoughts related to key issues in Niles related to economic development, housing, recreation/entertainment, and utilities/public safety. This was done via 7-minute rotations of "Heat Index" worksheets, each with a different topic. Each worksheet allowed participants to prioritize their concerns as having low priority ("simmering"), moderate priority ("hot"), or high priority ("sizzling"). Stakeholder meeting results are found on pages 85-89.

Niles New Tech

In January 2019, students at Niles New Tech participated in an engagement event to provide their thoughts on long-range planning in Niles. This event was scheduled for two hours during class time. The morning started off with a presentation to help orient students on what a master plan is and how they may be able to influence its content.

Following this introduction, the students participated in a series of activities, including a short survey, mapping and design exercises, prioritization activities, and writing personal letters to themselves from the future.

The survey allowed students to utilize their cell phones or laptops to engage in a real time voting exercise through the Mentimeter survey platform. Questions were provided on-screen, and as the students answered these questions, results appeared instantly for the groups' review. This activity was not only a good ice breaker for the event, but prompted discussion of items important to the students and allowed them to see how their priorities aligned with that of their peers.

Students also participated in two mapping exercises. First, students were given maps of the City and asked to place colored stickers on the map, which correlated with a specific topic. By using different stickers, students identified places related to four predefined categories: preserve/protect, rebuild/



FIGURE 10-1. STUDENTS AT NILES NEW TECH

restart, enhance/improve, and/or other comments. Afterward, students were given maps of the Wayne Street area, spanning from 5th to 14th Street. They were then asked to redevelop this section of the City in their vision.

After discussing the vast possibilities for the City of Niles' future, students were given ten pennies for a prioritization exercise. It was explained that these pennies represented the student's tax dollars and that they were to decide what public services and amenities would be supported by placing their pennies in ten jars with various labels.

Lastly, students were asked to write post cards from their future self, reflecting on what Niles is like at that future point. Results from this meeting are found on pages 90-93.

Common Threads

The following topics were noted as common threads or themes that were consistently mentioned by participants throughout all of the outreach events. Ideas and conclusions surrounding each of these themes are found on pages 94-95.

- Buildings
- Transportation & connectivity
- Housing availability
- Business development
- Zoning enforcement
- Entertainment and recreation

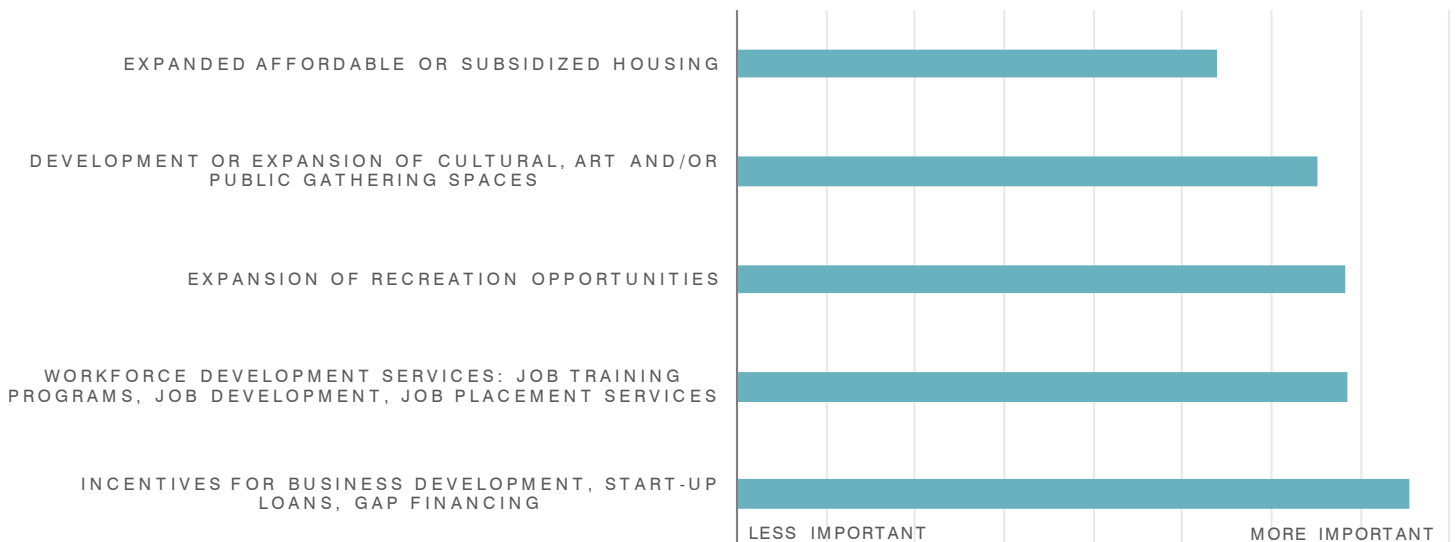
Online Survey

The online survey provided insight regarding trends and values held by community members. Because these results were obtained from a relatively small sample size compared to the population of Niles, they are not interpreted from a purely scientific mindset. However, these results are useful for understanding some values held by the community, identifying overarching trends, and better informing the planning process. Selected results of the survey are described and illustrated on the following pages.

In order to grow the local economy, incentives for business development and workforce development services were considered most important. These contribute to preparing individuals for jobs and encouraging employers to invest in the local area. Additionally, opportunities for recreation and expanded cultural, art, and/or public gathering spaces were desired. Complementary to job development, these desires address leisure-time activities for residents to enjoy within the City (Figure 10-2).

The majority of survey respondents (68%) believed that the City of Niles was the same or better compared to 5 years ago. When requiring assistance, respondents most commonly contacted a City employee or department (including fire and police) and the mayor or City council member, suggesting that City officials and departments are easily approachable and accessible to community members. Additionally, police and fire departments were also considered to provide some of the most important services to the community (Figure 10-3). Therefore, the work of these City departments is highly valued by the community.

FIGURE 10-2. WHAT WOULD HELP GROW/EXPAND THE LOCAL ECONOMY?



When presented with questions relating to community services, respondents were most familiar with the Niles District Library, DART, the Fort St. Joseph Museum, and Chapin Mansion. These services meet critical cultural, educational, and transportation needs. Respondents also desired a youth center, veteran's service center, and additional cultural destinations (museums, parks, theaters, etc). Together, responses indicate the importance of the City's historic and cultural character to those in the community.

When asked to identify needs in the community, survey respondents considered the removal of abandoned, deteriorating buildings or structures to be the highest critical need (28%). This was followed by sidewalk improvements (19%) and street/road improvements (17%) (Figure 10-4). The removal of undesirable buildings allows new infill development to occur, promoting economic growth and community prosperity. Good connectivity between places is often desired in new developments. This includes road, sidewalk, and bicycle networks, as they provide transportation to and from essential goods and services.

Further, the plurality of respondents (46%) believed housing in Niles was very affordable or extremely affordable (Figure 10-5). Affordable housing can attract and retain employees, support the local workforce, stimulate economic growth, and provide options for various ages and income-levels, while offering a relatively stable means to build wealth in a community. Affordable housing, along with new infill development and connectivity in neighborhoods, will continue to enhance Niles housing market for all ages and income levels.

FIGURE 10-3. WHAT SERVICES ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

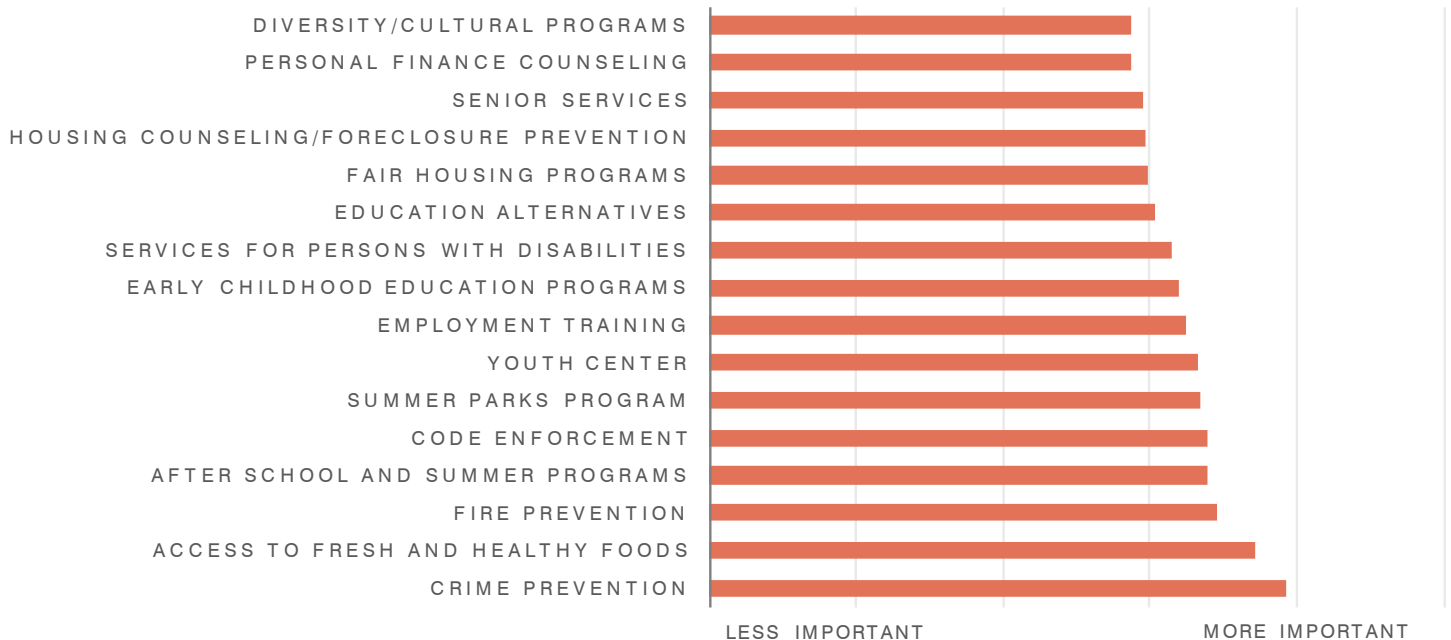


FIGURE 10-4. PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING NEEDS IN OUR COMMUNITY

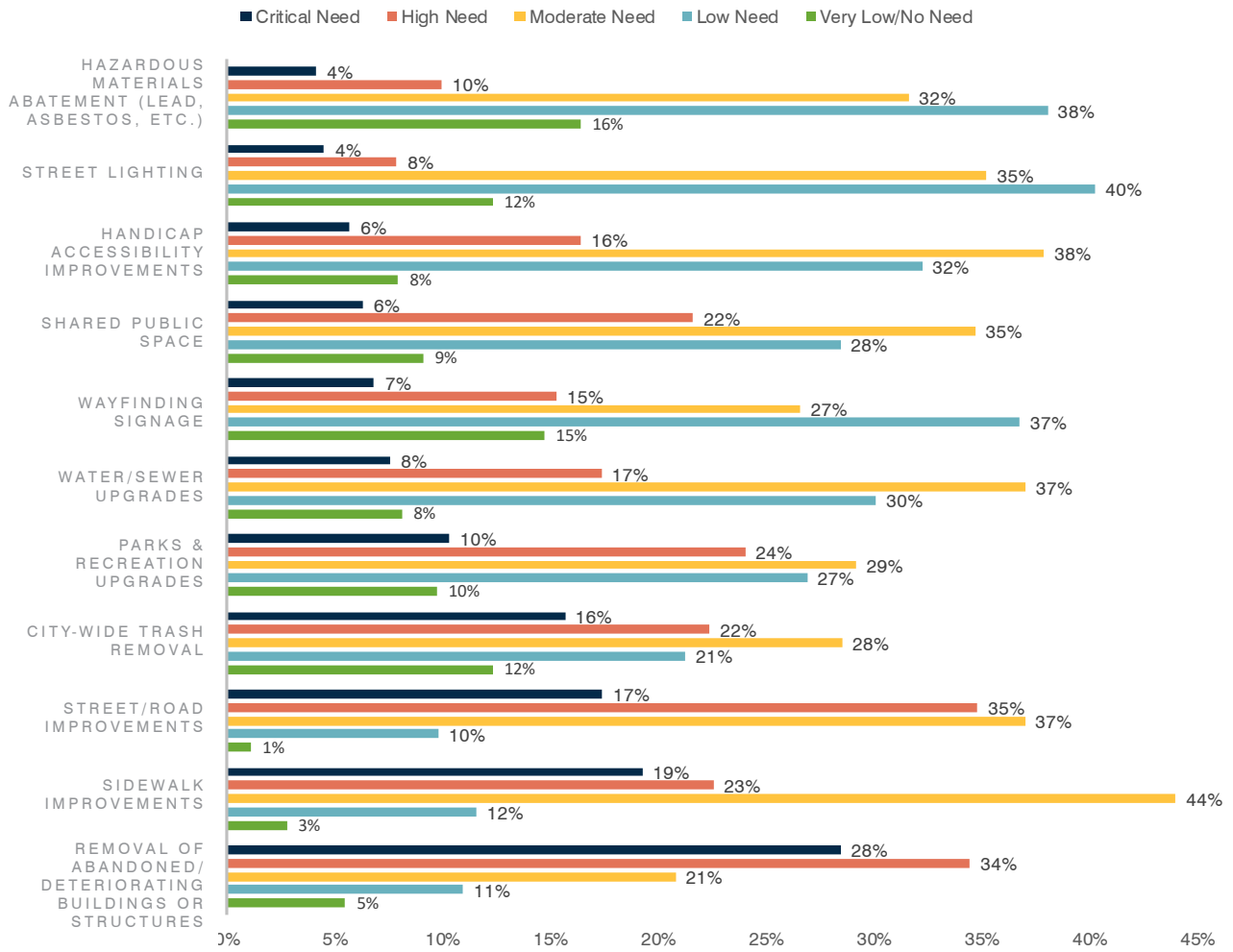
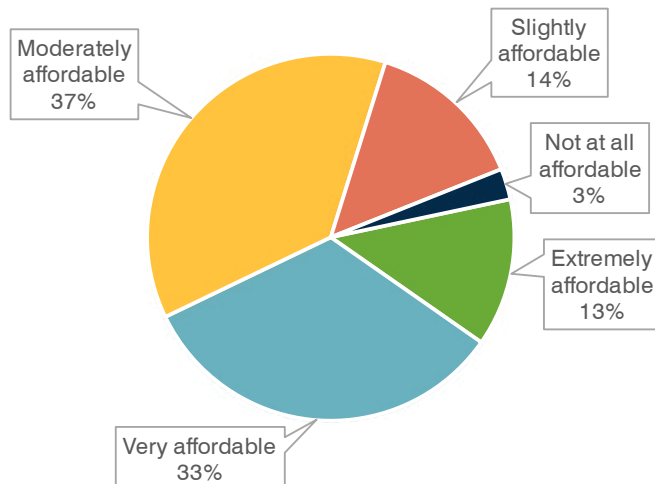
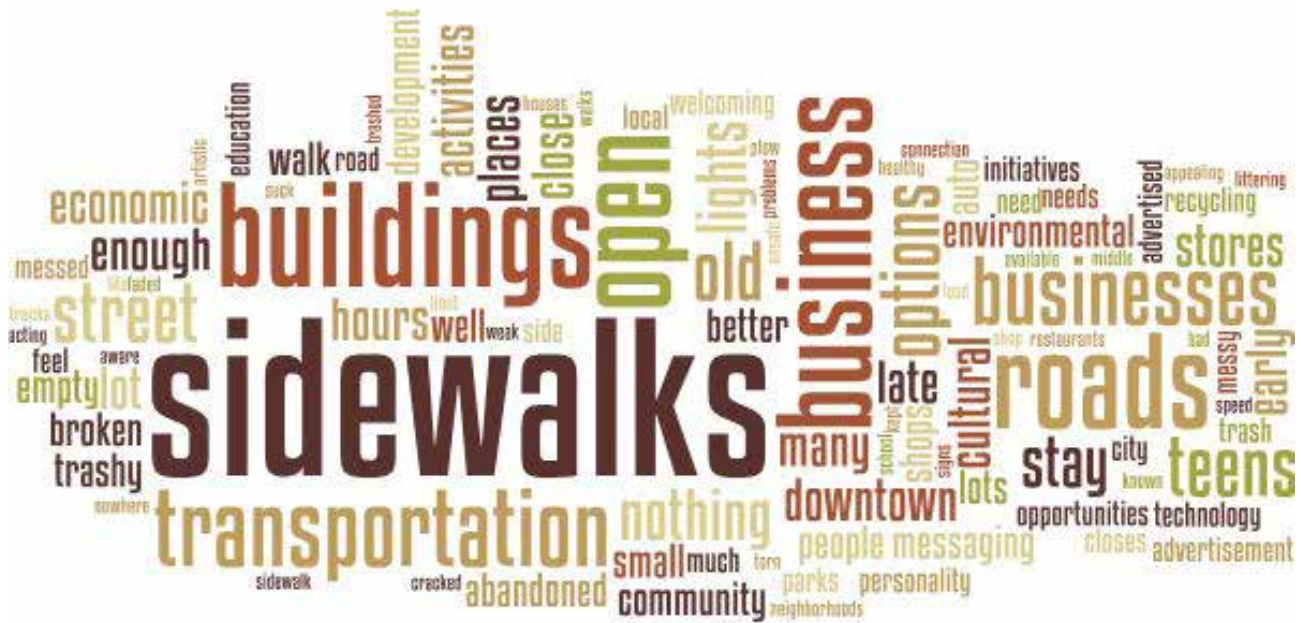


FIGURE 10-5. HOW AFFORDABLE IS HOUSING IN NILES?



WEAKNESSES



INPUT SUMMARY - WEAKNESSES

The following weaknesses were frequently identified:

- Condition of sidewalks is poor in some areas.
- Several properties are poorly maintained.
- Roads are in need of improvement and/or maintenance.
- Traffic congestion and lack of walkability on 11th Street is poor
- Some neighborhoods are experiencing blight
- Public infrastructure in need of upgrades
- Many local businesses not open late enough
- Absentee landlords contributes to poor maintenance of homes and degradation of neighborhoods

THREATS



INPUT SUMMARY - THREATS

The following threats were frequently identified:

- Industrial vacancies
- Poor infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, etc.)
- Potential for vandalism, crime, and other public safety concerns
- Over-saturation of rental properties and overabundance of absentee landlords
- Depressed or blighted buildings that are not maintained

Stakeholder Meeting

The City's September 2018 stakeholder meeting allowed stakeholders such as City officials, City staff, and local business owners to provide input on different aspects of planning in Niles. This included prioritizing their thoughts related to key issues in Niles related to economic development, housing, recreation/entertainment, and utilities/public safety.

The following pages present stakeholder responses to the Mentimeter survey and comments obtained from the Issue Heat Index activity.

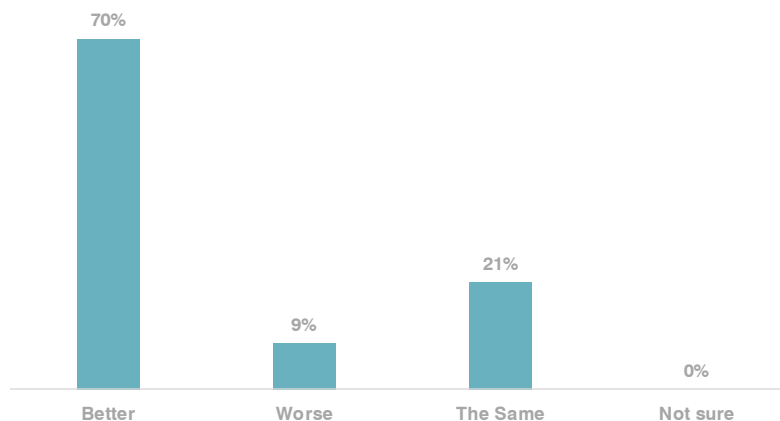
Event Schedule

- Welcome and Opening Presentation (15 minutes)
- Mentimeter Survey (15 minutes)
- Issues Heat Index
 - Economic Development (15 minutes)
 - Housing (15 minutes)
 - Recreation & Entertainment (15 minutes)
 - Utilities & Public Safety (15 minutes)

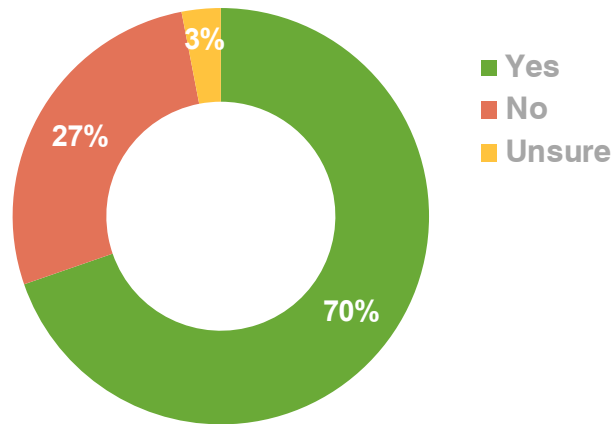
Mentimeter Survey

The results of the survey are illustrated on the following pages. Overall, the City was perceived positively by stakeholders. Areas which scored high were satisfaction with facilities and services, like utility and emergency services. There was a distinct interest in building a climate which would be attractive to new and supportive of local businesses, with providing more walkable and diverse housing options following just behind.

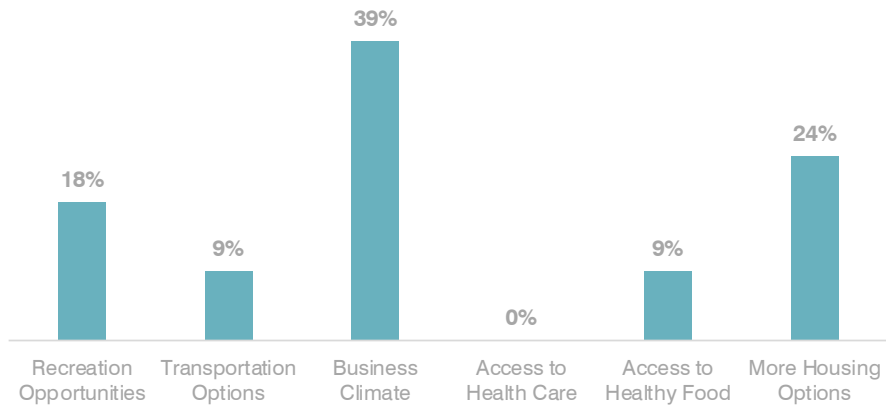
1 COMPARED TO 5 YEARS AGO, HOW WOULD YOU RATE NILES?



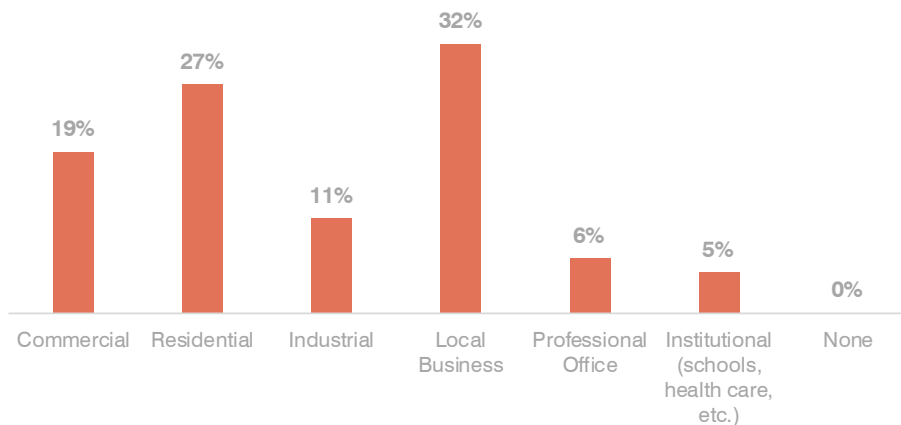
2 ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH FACILITIES AND SERVICES (POLICE, WATER, ETC.) OFFERED IN NILES?



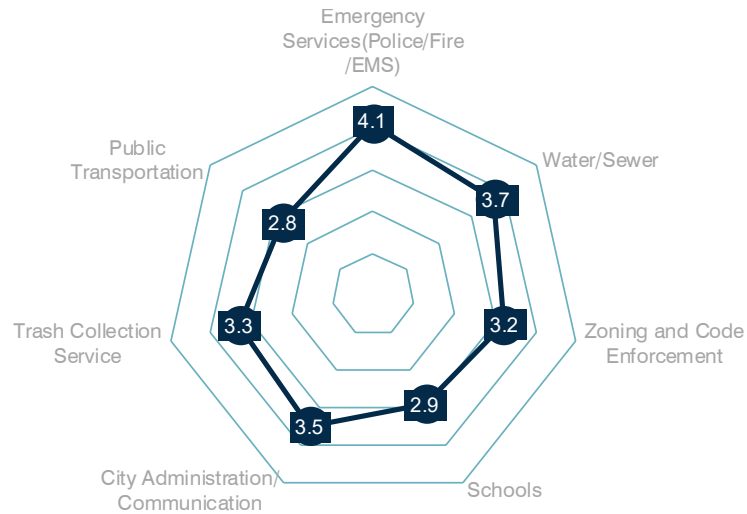
3 WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IMPROVED IN NILES?



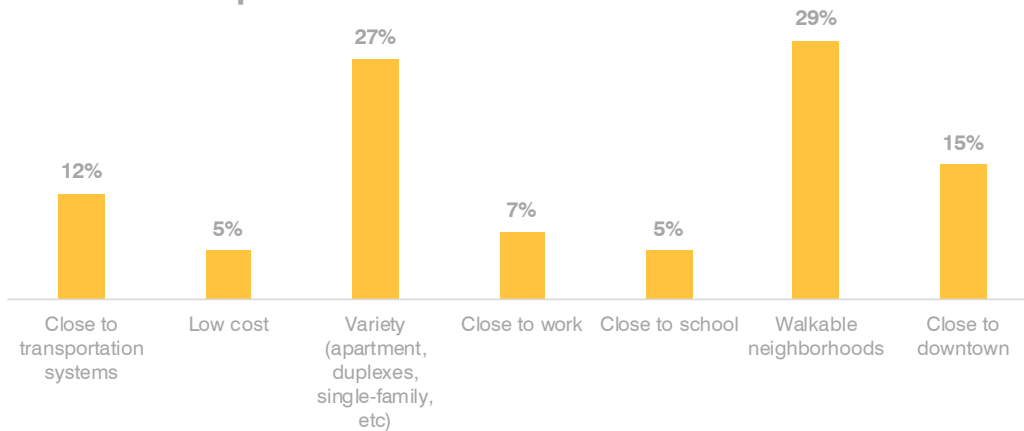
4 WHICH TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IN NILES?



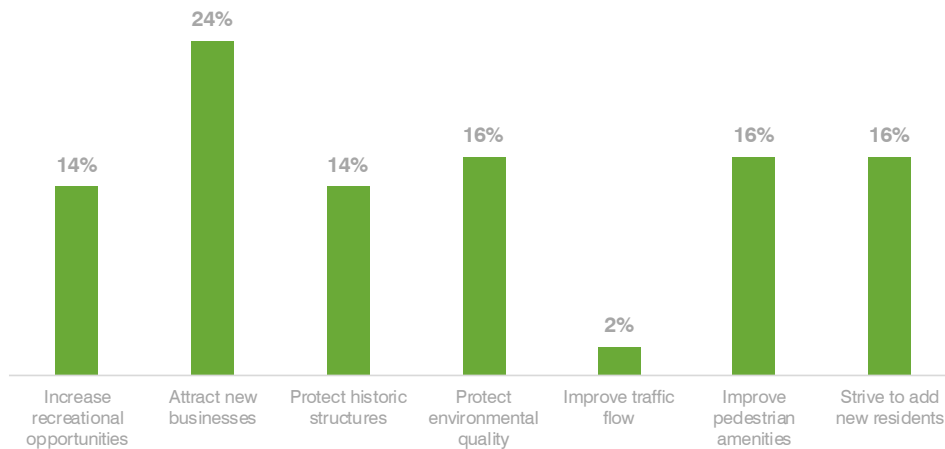
5 HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE FOLLOWING?



6 WHICH HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN NILES?



7 OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, NILES SHOULD...



Issue Heat Index

Stakeholder participants were asked to prioritize issues currently evident throughout the City. Four table topics were explored, including Economic Development, Housing, Recreation & Entertainment, and Utilities/Public Services.

The groups were asked to categorize these issues into three groups, "Sizzling" for issues to be addressed immediately, "Hot" for items to be considered in the near future, and "Simmering" for issues which are evident but not pressing.

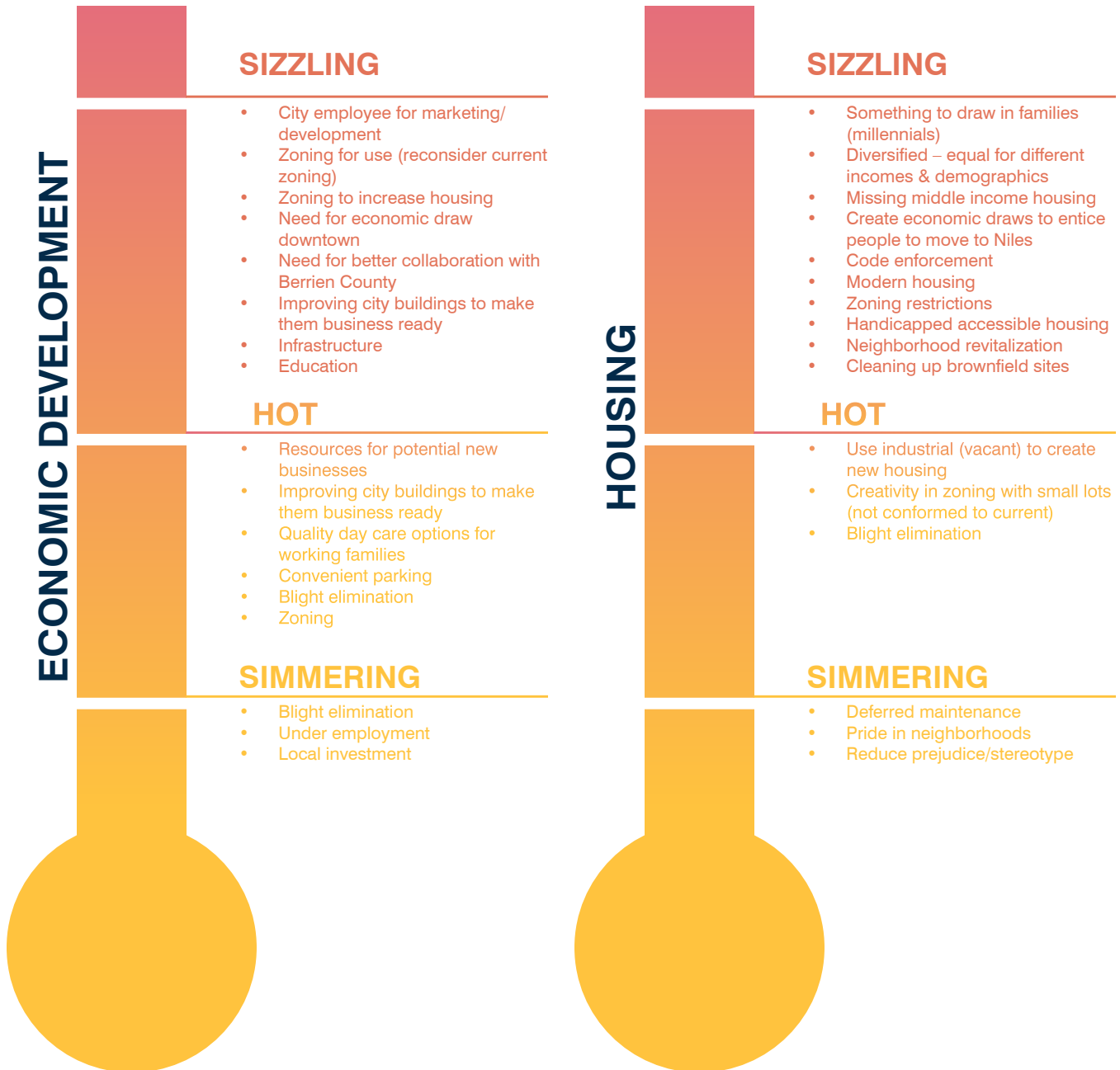
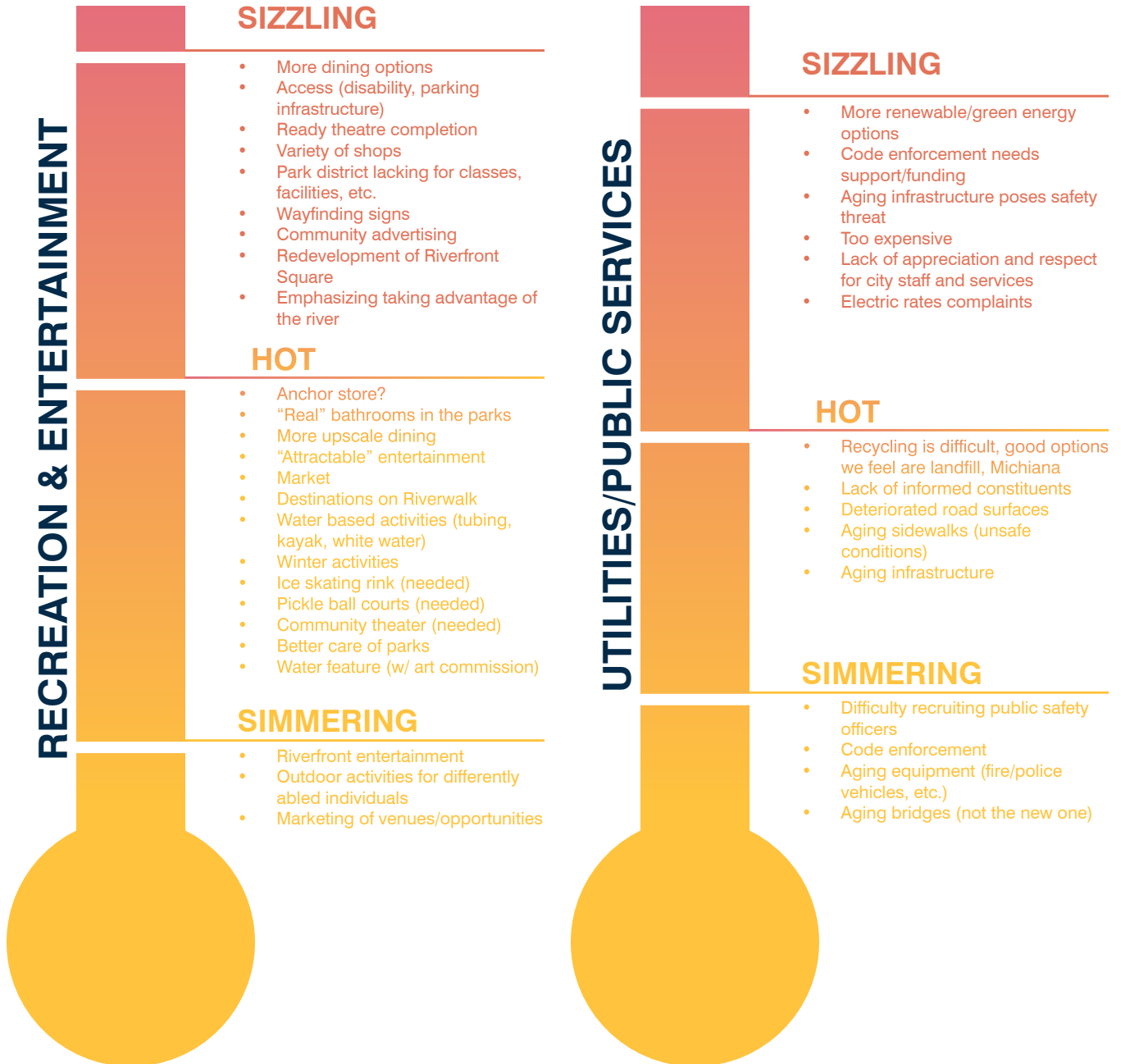




FIGURE 10-6. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MEETING



Niles New Tech

Students at Niles New Tech participated in a series of engagements events related to the Master Plan update. The results of these events are summarized on the following pages.



FIGURE 10-7. NILES NEW TECH ENGAGEMENT EVENT

Event Schedule

- Welcome and Opening Presentation (15 minutes)
- Mentimeter Survey (20 minutes)
- Group Work:
 - Mapping Exercise (20 minutes)
 - Issue Heat Index (20 minutes)
 - Wayne Street Design (20 minutes)
 - Penny Jar Voting (10 minutes)
 - Postcards from future self (15 minutes)

Mentimeter Survey

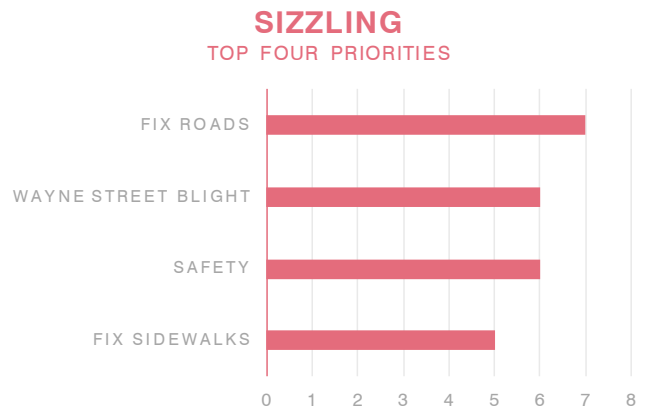
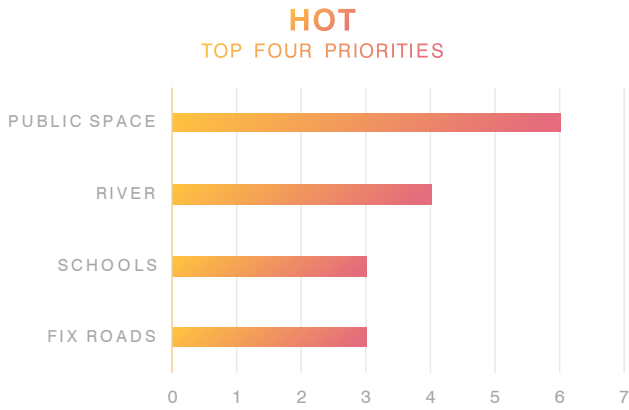
To kick off the event, students were asked to participate in a short survey using the online platform Mentimeter. For each question, clear priorities emerged. Students love the sense of community and small town feel of Niles, but notice areas for improvement as well, such as the conditions of roads and perceived poverty within the City. Desires for the future included fixing up blighted buildings, creating safe and walkable neighborhoods, providing more affordable housing, and establishing more places for passive entertainment.

Mapping Exercise

For this exercise, students were given maps of the City and asked to place colored stickers on the map which correlated with a specific topic. Areas which received the greatest attention within the City limits included Downtown, Riverside Park, Wayne Street, both Niles High School and Ring Lardner Junior High School, and the Jerry Tyler Memorial Airport. Preservation was primarily focused along the river and within large green spaces. Outside of the City boundaries, the undeveloped land to the Northwest and the Oak Manor Sixth Grade Center also garnered interest from students as areas to preserve and improve. The desire for redevelopment was clearly identified along Wayne Street, followed by downtown.

Issue Heat Index

The third activity allowed students to prioritize issues currently evident throughout the City. The highest "sizzling" issues addressed road conditions, Wayne Street blight, safety, and sidewalks. The top "hot" issues were public spaces, the river, schools, and road conditions.

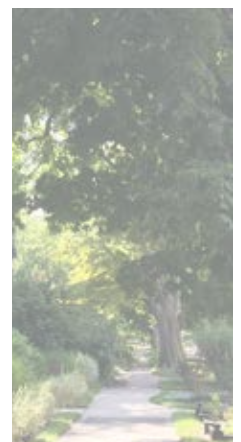
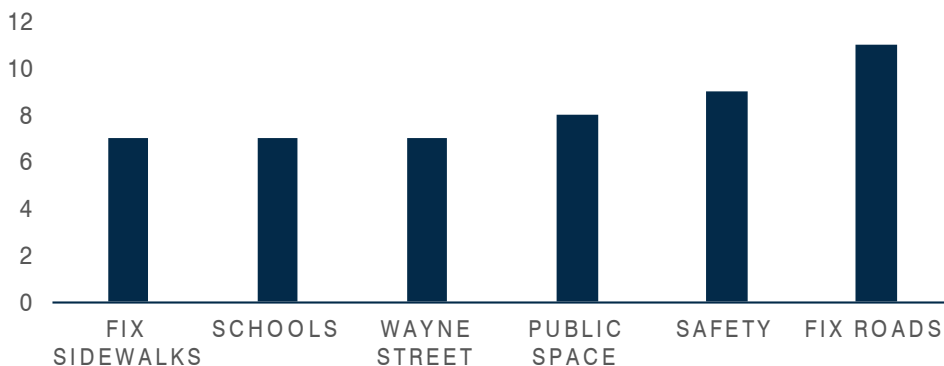


- Parks need to be cared for
- Pot holes
- Protecting the river
- New Tech needs their own building

- Sidewalks, roads, pot holes, etc.
- Run down buildings on Wayne Street
- More and better sidewalks
- Improve safety at/around schools



ALL CATEGORIZED PRIORITIES TOP SIX PRIORITIES



Wayne Street Design

For this activity, students were given maps of the Wayne Street area and asked to redevelop this section of the City in their vision. The majority of the student drawings included notes about fixing the roads and sidewalks, adding trees, and improving the existing neighborhood housing stock. Although there were many creative and diverse ideas about how this area could be reinvigorated, several themes emerged and were turned into diagrammatic plans on the following page.

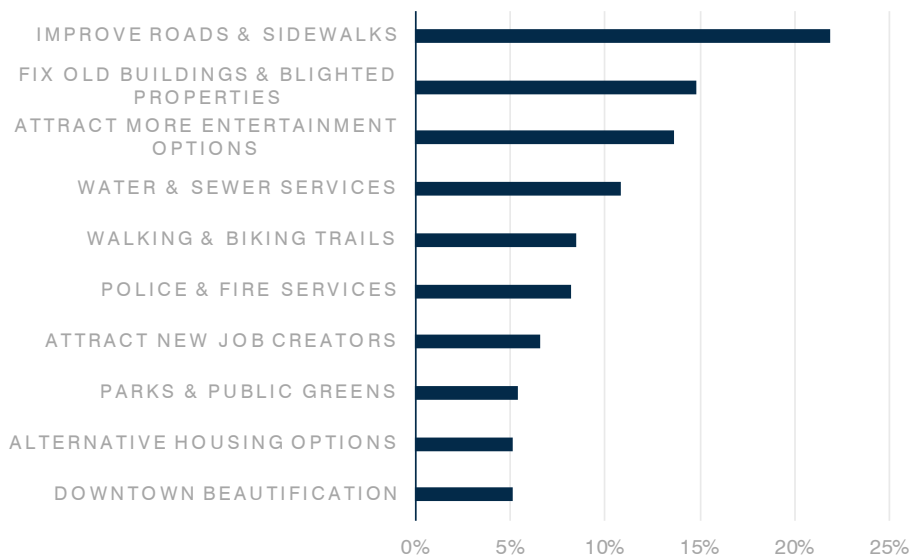
These themes have been named **SPORTS & RECREATION CENTRAL**, **BUSINESS & ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT**, and **COMMUNITY CENTERED NEIGHBORHOOD**.

Penny Jar Prioritization

Students used pennies to represent how they would spend their tax dollars. At the back of the room, ten jars were arranged with the following labels: Police/Fire, Water/Sewer, Parks, Beautification, Walking/biking trails, Additional housing options, Fix up old buildings / Property maintenance, Attract more entertainment options, Improve roads and sidewalks, and Attract new job creators.

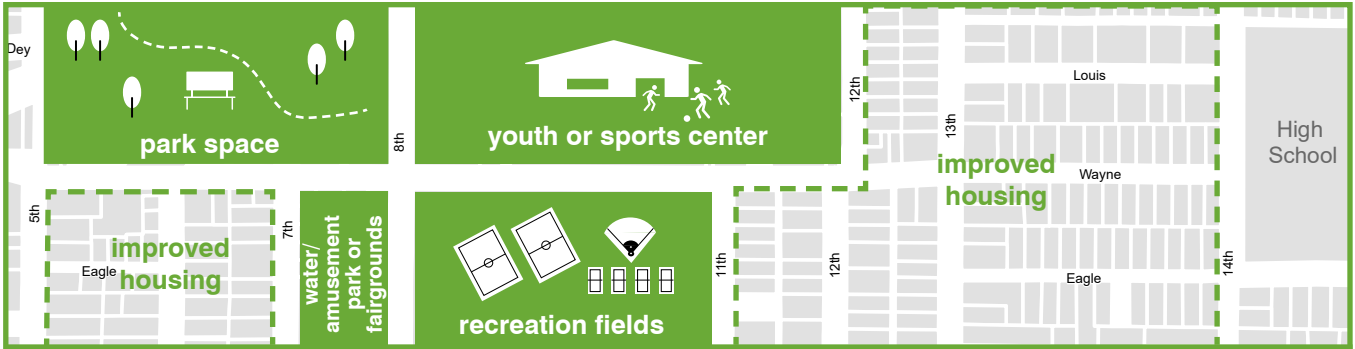
Improving roads and sidewalks was shown as the number one priority, receiving 22% of the groups tax dollars. With 15% of the tax dollars, fix old buildings & blighted properties the identified as the second priority, closely followed by attract more entertainment options at 14%.

FIGURE 10-8 PENNY JAR PRIORITIES



Post Cards from Future Self

To finish up the event, students were asked to reflect on the days activities and write a letter from their future self about what Niles is like. Many students wrote about the beautiful downtown and restored buildings, the fixed roads and sidewalks, the activity that has come to the City because of booming business and entertainment. Most apparent was the attention to a sense of community and charm ingrained into the people and places of the City.



SPORTS & RECREATION CENTRAL

This concept is centered around sports, recreation and access to public open space for healthy living.



BUSINESS & ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

This alternative illustrates the desire for creating an engaging place filled with restaurants, entertainment venues (arcades, zoos, festivals), and local businesses.

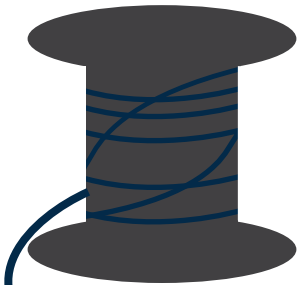


COMMUNITY CENTERED NEIGHBORHOOD

The community based concept highlights the need for providing more and diverse places to live, supporting neighborhoods through markets and gardens, soup kitchens and daycares.

Common Threads

The following topics were noted as common threads or themes that were consistently mentioned by participants throughout all of the outreach events.



HOUSING AVAILABILITY

- Housing is affordable in the City.
- There is a "missing middle" in the housing market, which should be targeted through new infill development and a variety of housing types.
- Housing variety is important to provide for all ages and incomes.

TRANSPORTATION & CONNECTIVITY

- Sidewalk improvements are needed to facilitate transportation between residential, retail, and recreational areas.
- Road and sidewalk infrastructure provides the basis for development and growth as it promotes connectivity between places.
- Connectivity between places and walkability encourages community health.

BUILDINGS

- Underutilized buildings provide a great opportunity for future development.
- Removal of abandoned buildings will improve the streetscape, enhance community character, and provide areas for infill development.
- Attracting new businesses is important for continued economic viability.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- Attracting new businesses encourages economic viability and retains young talent.
- Incentives for business development and workforce developmental services would enhance opportunities for new businesses.
- Infrastructure availability, transportation connectivity, and continued education will work together to enhance the economic environment.



ZONING & ENFORCEMENT

- Zoning standards can be used to enhance opportunities for housing and business development.
- Code enforcement will continue to promote property maintenance.



ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION



- The St. Joseph River and City parks are a great strength in the community, as they offer a variety of recreational opportunities and scenic viewsheds.
- Placemaking is important to the community, which may include space for an amphitheater, youth center, or other community common space.
- Promoting and prioritizing accessibility for all people enhances the community's recreation and entertainment options.

CHAPTER 11

Goals and Objectives

Goals and objective statements provide a policy foundation for the Niles Master Plan by defining values and visions that the City strives to achieve. These goals and objectives are based on input received from residents, students, business owners, property owners, and elected and appointed officials, which was received throughout the planning process. Therefore, goals and objectives are reflective of the community and they provide the policy foundation for the Master Plan and establish a basis for the future direction of the City.

Each goal is supported by more specific objectives. Goal statements describe the City long-term vision for the community. These statements are intentionally general, but attainable through planned effort. Several objective statements are associated with each goal. These objectives are more specific in order to specify actions that the City should will accomplish in pursuit of the larger goal. These statements provide an overview of the intended future character of the community, provide guidance for land use and public policies, and serve as a reference for future zoning and land use decisions

A. Housing and Neighborhoods

1. The City will continue to offer a variety of residential settings to serve all Niles' citizens with attractive, efficient, and affordable homes located in safe and attractive neighborhoods. Residential areas will be located in harmony with the area's natural features and conveniently arranged to promote walking and social interaction among neighbors.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Establish and support mechanisms to encourage in-fill housing development in the City's neighborhoods.
- b. Establish and support mechanisms to encourage a variety of traditional and non-traditional housing types in the City, including increased density and smaller lot sizes in neighborhoods near downtown.
- c. Establish and support mechanisms to develop and encourage housing opportunities in the downtown.
- d. Implement a program to replace or fill in street tree gaps to maintain and strengthen the City's mature tree canopy.
- e. Work with local community groups or educational institutions to offer training to residents about how to care for street trees.
- f. Support housing developments that include ADA accessibility and designs that encourage aging in place.

2. The City's neighborhoods will continue to be characterized by strong socially and ethnically diverse networks that work together to maintain the housing stock, the public realm, and promote a sense of community and belonging in every neighborhood.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Identify, define, and maintain logical and appropriately-sized neighborhoods.
- b. Form and support neighborhood organizations to build the capacity in neighborhoods to address community issues and concerns effectively, efficiently, and cooperatively.
- c. Encourage housing typologies and designs which encourage happenstance and daily interaction, such as front porches and cottage courts.
- d. Expand the City's network of social infrastructure such as sidewalks, trails, plazas, and other public gathering places to foster social interaction and a sense of place.

B. Natural Features, Parks, and Recreation

3. Residents of Niles will continue to enjoy clean air and water resources and significant areas of open space, riverfront, wetlands, and woodlands. The St. Joseph River will continue to be the centerpiece of the community characterized by opportunities for recreation, programmed events, and activities by area residents and visitors while promoting the health of the river.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Work with upstream communities, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the Friends of the St. Joseph River 319 Watershed Management Planning Project to further develop and implement efforts to improve the water quality of the St. Joseph River and the wildlife habitat it supports.
- b. Acquire public areas along both banks of the St. Joseph River throughout the City and link recreational areas wherever possible.
- c. Preserve mature vegetated riparian buffer areas along the St. Joseph River where appropriate.
- d. Implement the recommendations and design considerations of the Niles Place Plan regarding the St. Joseph River waterfront and waterfront activation.
- e. Plan and implement recurring downtown events to encourage families and tourists to enjoy downtown amenities and businesses.

4. Recreational opportunities in Niles will be located in proximity to population centers and include a diverse range of outdoor and indoor activities that further the physical and mental well-being and interaction of residents and visitors.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Cooperate with Niles Charter Township and Niles Community Schools to plan, implement, and maintain the park and playground facilities in the City, Township, and school district, and provide recreational programming to the community.
 - b. Working with the YMCA and other community organizations, develop programs to attract people of all age ranges and income levels to participate in indoor and outdoor recreational activities.
 - c. Enable temporary pop-up recreation opportunities which activate underutilized parks and greenspaces.
 - d. Implement the [City of Niles Community Recreation Plan](#).
5. Natural features, recreational opportunities and neighborhoods will be interconnected with trails and walking paths to promote walking, biking and healthy lifestyles.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Continue to expand the network of walking and biking trails and rights-of-way to connect neighborhoods with shopping, schools, parks, mass transit, regional trails, and the downtown.
- b. Improve and maintain sidewalk connections throughout the City of Niles, with a particular emphasis on “filling the gaps” in the network to allow for a continuous sidewalk network throughout the City.

C. Economic Development and Redevelopment

6. The vitality of the City of Niles will be assured through the growth of existing businesses and the addition of new businesses resulting in a diverse local economy served by a highly-skilled and educated local workforce.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Support the expansion of programs to provide vocational training and higher education to the Niles workforce.
- b. Expand the business retention and technical assistance activities of the Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce and the [Niles DDA Main Street](#) to support local business growth and prosperity.
- c. Provide the Niles Entrepreneurial and Culinary Incubator with sufficient financial and technical support to continue to foster successful entrepreneurs.

7. Land use patterns and infrastructure in the City will promote a range of quality employment opportunities, and clean and desirable job-producing development.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Extend water and wastewater services in rational and economical patterns to support areas of existing development, emerging development, and infill in the City, with an emphasis on promoting industrial and commercial development.
- b. Reduce parking minimums in the zoning ordinance to encourage infill development in underutilized surface parking lots.

8. Receive and maintain status as a Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Follow the best practices of the Redevelopment Ready Community program.
- b. Maintain an up-to-date list of priority redevelopment sites.

9. Utilize Niles' heritage, history, and natural environment as an economic development strategy.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Implement the goals, outcomes, and strategies outlined in the [Niles Cultural Economic Development Plan](#).
- b. Encourage or provide places for outdoor industry related businesses such as canoeing and kayaking rental establishments.

D. Streets, Mobility, and Transportation

10. A safe and efficient system of complete streets, nonmotorized facilities, and public transportation will serve citizens and visitors of all means, abilities, and ages, providing effective linkages between surrounding communities, employment, neighborhoods, services, recreation, and cultural amenities.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Develop roadway and parking area design and landscape standards to assure that such facilities are discretely designed to complement and support natural features, land uses, and social activities and to function efficiently.
- b. Support the Niles Dial-a-Ride system and expand it to offer reliable and efficient local bus service.
- c. Continue to expand the network of walking and biking trails and rights-of-way to connect neighborhoods with shopping, schools, parks, mass transit, regional trails, and the downtown.

- d. In cooperation with Transpo in South Bend, develop and implement a reliable and efficient inter-city bus connection.
- e. Consider traffic calming measures as opportunities arise, particularly in neighborhoods and downtown.
- f. Adopt and implement Vision Zero street safety policy and support and advocate for changes and improvements in street design.
- g. Refine as necessary a Complete Streets policy to help meet the needs of all types of users – motorists, pedestrians, users of assistive devices, and bicyclists.
- h. Adopt and implement a sidewalk repair and enhancement program.

E. Downtown

- 11.** Downtown Niles will serve as the area’s economic and commercial core characterized by successful retail and service businesses and entertainment venues for all segments of the community as well as high quality residential development.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Plan and implement recurring downtown events to encourage families and tourists to enjoy downtown amenities and businesses.
- b. Maintain appropriate ordinance and code standards to encourage upper story living and office units and commercial uses in the downtown area reflective of traditional use and development.
- c. Work with the [Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce](#) and [Niles DDA Main Street](#) to market underutilized space in the downtown and to encourage the location of mutually supportive businesses and services in the area.
- d. Promote infill of new residential and commercial development on vacant lands and in underutilized buildings in the downtown.

- 12.** Development in downtown Niles will be sensitive to the community’s heritage while incorporating attractive design elements to promote inviting and walkable patterns of growth.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Implement the design recommendations and strategies outlined in the [Niles Place Plan](#).
- b. Support the work of the Main Street Design Committee to develop and implement design guidelines that provide consistent standards for buildings, while allowing flexibility to meet the needs of individual businesses.
- c. Implement the Main Street America and [Michigan Main Street](#) transformation strategies: economic vitality, design, promotion, and organization.

- d. Expand the use of the downtown alleys to enhance building use and to create interesting and attractive spaces.
- e. Implement the parking strategy for both on-street and off-street parking outlined in the Niles Place Plan to create a more livable city.

F. Planning, Code Enforcement, and Regional Cooperation

- 13.** Residential and commercial property in Niles will consistently exceed minimum Code standards through the cooperative efforts of the City and property owners.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Improve property inspections and code compliance activities with a program of financial assistance for low- and moderate-income property owners to assist in completing property improvements.
- b. Form and support neighborhood organizations to build the capacity in neighborhoods to address community issues and concerns effectively, efficiently, and cooperatively. (duplicates goal 2, objective B)

- 14.** The City of Niles will be a leader with the State of Michigan in promoting regional cooperation and mutual support between the communities and school districts of Southwest Michigan and Northern Indiana to strengthen the entire region.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Work with the [Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce](#) and its counterpart in Indiana to create a forum of area local governments and school districts to periodically meet and consider issues of greater than local importance.
- b. Build and expand upon the community's presence before the agencies of the State of Michigan to assure continued access to decision-makers.

G. Utilities and Infrastructure

- 15.** Utility services will be extended strategically to encourage growth and development that is consistent with local and regional land use and economic development goals, but which doesn't overextend the system beyond the capacity to be maintained financially or otherwise.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Expand cooperative efforts with Niles, Howard, Milton, and Bertrand Townships to foster economic development in the Niles area that benefits the entire region.

- b. Establish a set of cost-benefit criteria for utility service extensions which focus on the cost of infrastructure compared to proposed residential density, increased tax base, and existing or potential pinch points.

16. Niles will encourage and utilize renewable energy and green infrastructure when possible or available.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Permit solar energy collectors in the City at both private and utility scales in appropriate locations.
- b. Encourage green stormwater infrastructure in new development and street reconstruction that discourages site run-off.

H. Community Heritage

17. The unique historic character of Niles will be preserved through compatible and consistent development forms and patterns and the community’s heritage will be sustained through the careful preservation of important landmarks.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Maintain an inventory of all key historic landmarks and identify resources that may be threatened by deterioration.
- b. Develop and promote a database of information on renovation techniques and financing sources to aid in the preservation of historic homes in the City.
- c. Partner with organizations such as Support the Fort to develop a “Fort St. Joseph Living History Complex” at the south end of Riverfront Park.

18. Niles will eliminate blight from historically significant properties through preservation, restoration and/or rehabilitation projects

- a. Conduct a study of publicly owned historically significant properties that includes a building and/or property needs assessment.
- b. Conduct a study of historically significant privately owned buildings and work with property owners to encourage a building needs assessment.
- c. Seek out funding opportunities for public and private historic preservation, restoration and/or rehabilitation projects
- d. Develop a cultural district corridor that includes the Ferry Street School, The Mason’s Lodge and Mount Calvary Baptist and AME
- e. Develop a cultural district overlay that includes zoning guidelines, historic district guidelines, and other building requirements

I. Quality of Life

19. The City of Niles will continue to be known for its friendly and inclusive social climate, a relaxed and casual pace of life, unspoiled natural resources, a commitment to strengthen families, and a willingness to cooperate to achieve the continual improvement of the community.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Build a Neighborhood Watch program to expand the social capital of Niles residents resulting in improved social interaction within and among neighborhoods.
- b. Develop and implement a Leadership program in the City to identify and foster the community's next generation of leaders.
- c. Work with community institutions to establish a Citizen's Academy to foster greater understanding of community issues and build a constituency for responsible local government in the area.
- d. Create an anti-discrimination culture protecting vulnerable populations as a tool to address talent attraction and retention.
- e. Actively provide training and educational opportunities to continually foster a climate of inclusivity.

J. Communication

20. The City of Niles will remain technologically advanced and active as leaders in communication and information.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Proactively communicate updates and share information with the community through the City website and support active social media use by city departments and authorities.
- b. Enhance and revise the City's website, as appropriate, to ensure its format and information remains user-friendly and accessible from all types of devices.
- c. Encourage communication efforts with neighboring townships and Berrien County to ensure coordinated planning efforts, identify current land use trends, and discuss mutually-beneficial planning strategies to address long- and short-term needs.

CHAPTER

12

Future Land Use

The City of Niles Future Land Use Plan establishes a general blueprint of land usage to guide growth, development, and redevelopment for the next twenty years. Since the City of Niles is built out, the primary purpose of this plan is to encourage the enrichment of already existing development patterns that preserve and augment the City's historic charm, neighborhood enhancement, downtown investment opportunities, industrial potential, and further the economic development strategies outlined in this Plan.

By continually planning for the future, Niles is realizing objectives and setting the pace for continued progress and improvement. For example, by establishing priority redevelopment sites, Niles is targeting special areas for investment that will provide attainable housing options, attractive and functional urban infill development, and provide needed goods and services to serve the immediate needs of neighborhoods. Furthermore, by continuing to strengthen the downtown, Niles will champion efforts to augment the downtown's role as a regional destination and an attractive spot for entertainment, dining, shopping, living, and culture. Other future land use districts help strengthen Niles as an area employment and recreation center.

The Future Land Use Plan is inevitably linked to the zoning districts in the City of Niles. Zoning is the act of regulating the use of lands, while planning is essentially the advanced scheduling of land within a community for a general usage. To this end, the Future Land Use Plan uses a map to visually express the intended conditions of land uses in the City. Even though Niles is a fully established community, these uses are illustrative of how the City is recommended to grow in an effort to boost positive characteristics and to encourage investment and reinvestment in the City.

FIGURE 12-1. DOWNTOWN STREETScape





FIGURE 12-2. ARCHITECTURAL BLUEPRINT

Future Land Use Descriptions

LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

The low density residential land use designation is intended for primarily detached single-family homes surrounding the City. This designation encompasses neighborhoods that are not in a traditional gridded pattern and homes are often located on properties with generous setbacks in a rural or suburban setting. Fewer of these properties are served by sidewalks compared to the Traditional Residential designation and homesites are more suburban in character. Nevertheless, new buildings and developments in this designation should be designed to provide attractive, connected, and inclusive living environments for persons of all ages, income levels, and mobility levels.

Compatible Zoning District	Desired Uses	Residential Density	Public & Sanitary Sewer	Features
LDR, MDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> detached dwellings public parks and similar low-impact civic uses schools two-family dwellings 	6 to 8 dwelling units per acre	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> open community spaces pedestrian/bike access to trail system, internal trails, and sidewalks street trees, street lights bicycle racks

TRADITIONAL RESIDENTIAL

The traditional residential land use designation is intended for primarily detached single-family housing with a mix of attached units arranged in a traditional grid pattern. The majority of Niles residential areas are within this designation. Neighborhoods should be designed and developed to provide attractive, connected, and inclusive living environments. Buildings should be constructed of high quality materials and be of a traditional design, with front porches facing the street and decreased setbacks that form a consistent streetwall with neighboring properties. While most properties in this designation will be used for residential purposes, civic, institutional, and recreational uses may also be found in appropriate locations. Limited small-scale commercial uses could also be permitted on key corridors or near Neighborhood Mixed Use areas.

Compatible Zoning District	Desired Uses	Residential Density	Public & Sanitary Sewer	Features
LDR, MDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attached or detached dwellings 	4 to 6 dwelling units per acre	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> open community spaces traditional gridded blocks pedestrian/bike access to trail system, internal trails, and sidewalks street trees, street lights bicycle racks transit service where feasible

NEIGHBORHOOD MIXED USE

Description and Desired Uses: The community mixed use land use designation is intended to provide flexibility in development by meeting demand for both goods, services, and housing within a small urban node context offering greater potential for walkable neighborhoods. The development of desirable mixed-use buildings should be feasible, and residential building types should support “cradle to grave” and sustain local neighborhood retail activity. This classification will provide commercial and service options at a scale and a distance that encourages walking with additional associated residential forms to create a village-like atmosphere. In this designation, buildings should be oriented toward the street with minimal setbacks, wide sidewalks, and multi-modal transportation options. Parking should be behind buildings and heavily screened whenever possible.

Compatible Zoning District	Desired Uses	Residential Density	Public & Sanitary Sewer	Features
OC, NC, CB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> neighborhood scale retail, services, eating and drinking establishments, offices, hotels attached residential, mixed-use buildings community facilities 	6 to 8 dwelling units per acre; density bonuses up to 12 units per acre when residential is mixed with other uses within same building	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> traffic calming, crosswalk demarcations, countdown walk signs sidewalks landscaping signage limitations street trees, street lights bicycle racks service by transit where feasible cross-access easements

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

The Central Business District land use designation is intended to foster a walkable, pedestrian-scale environment in the City’s traditional downtown area. The downtown serves the entire community of Niles with goods and services while developing in accord with the surrounding residential and mixed use centers. It is the heart of the City and is meant to serve as the social and cultural center of the City as City Hall, the St. Joseph Museum, the Niles Library, and numerous shops, restaurants, and recreational amenities are all located here.

All new development should address pedestrian and bicycle circulation and include access from sidewalks and non-motorized paths and sidewalks to any building entry. Higher density development is intended to make development of desirable mixed use buildings feasible, allow for residential building types that support “cradle to grave,” and sustain local retail activity. In this designation, buildings should be oriented toward the street with minimal setbacks with wide sidewalks. Sidewalks should accommodate outdoor seating and other pedestrian and bicycle amenities such as benches, street trees, and similar features. Parking should be behind buildings and heavily screened whenever possible. On-street parking should also be provided in numerous locations to minimize the amount of land devoted to off-street parking.

Compatible Zoning District	Desired Uses	Residential Density	Public & Sanitary Sewer	Features
OC, NC, CB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> neighborhood scale retail, services, eating and drinking establishments, offices, hotels attached residential, mixed-use buildings community facilities 	6 to 8 dwelling units per acre; density bonuses up to 12 units per acre when residential is mixed with other uses within same building	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> traffic calming, crosswalk demarcations, countdown walk signs sidewalks landscaping signage limitations street trees, street lights bicycle racks service by transit where feasible cross-access easements

FIGURE 12-3. CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT



REGIONAL COMMERCIAL

The regional commercial land use category is intended for more intense land uses in terms of traffic generation and building height to serve the auto-oriented areas of the City and major thoroughfares. This designation is intended to provide goods and services for the greater Niles area, including jobs for residents and goods for visitors. Developments should, to the greatest extent possible, be designed and built to preserve unique natural features and to support smooth traffic movements. This area is generally limited to the South 11th Street corridor south of Hickory Street. Commercial uses typically exist in “strip” development form with abutting parking areas separating the structures from the road. It is desirable for such facilities to be designed in architectural good taste with generous landscaping to minimize the appearance of the oppressive, asphalt dominated “big-box” look. Cross access easements should be provided between development to minimize the number of curb cuts on 11th Street.

Compatible Zoning District	Desired Uses	Residential Density	Public & Sanitary Sewer	Features
RC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retail, convenience shopping • eating and drinking establishments • offices, hotels • attached residential 	4 to 8 dwelling units per acre	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crosswalk demarcations, countdown walk signs • sidewalks, plantings • wayfinding signage • street trees, street lights • bicycle racks • service by transit

INDUSTRIAL

The industrial land use designation is intended to provide employment for area residents, manufacture goods, and provide services to meet the needs of the larger Michiana region while strategically leveraging locations near the airport and rail service.

Compatible Zoning District	Desired Uses	Residential Density	Public & Sanitary Sewer	Features
IND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • warehousing, manufacturing and assembly, fulfillment and shipping facilities, mini-storage • contractor's offices and yards, research and development, and similar industrial activities 	N/A	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arterial connections • direct access to airport property • crosswalk demarcations • landscaping between incompatible uses • street trees, street lights

CIVIC

The civic future land use designation includes City parks and open space, civic buildings such as the courthouse and fire station, cemeteries, community centers, schools, or other public or quasi-public property intended for community-wide use. Properties in this district should be owned and operated by a public or quasi-public agency and designed for everyone.

Compatible Zoning District	Desired Uses	Residential Density	Public & Sanitary Sewer	Features
OS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parks, non-motorized trails • schools, courthouses, civic buildings and structures, fire stations and similar public uses 	N/A	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designed for public use • architectural features on buildings • generous landscaping and street trees, street lights • universal accessibility

INSTITUTIONAL

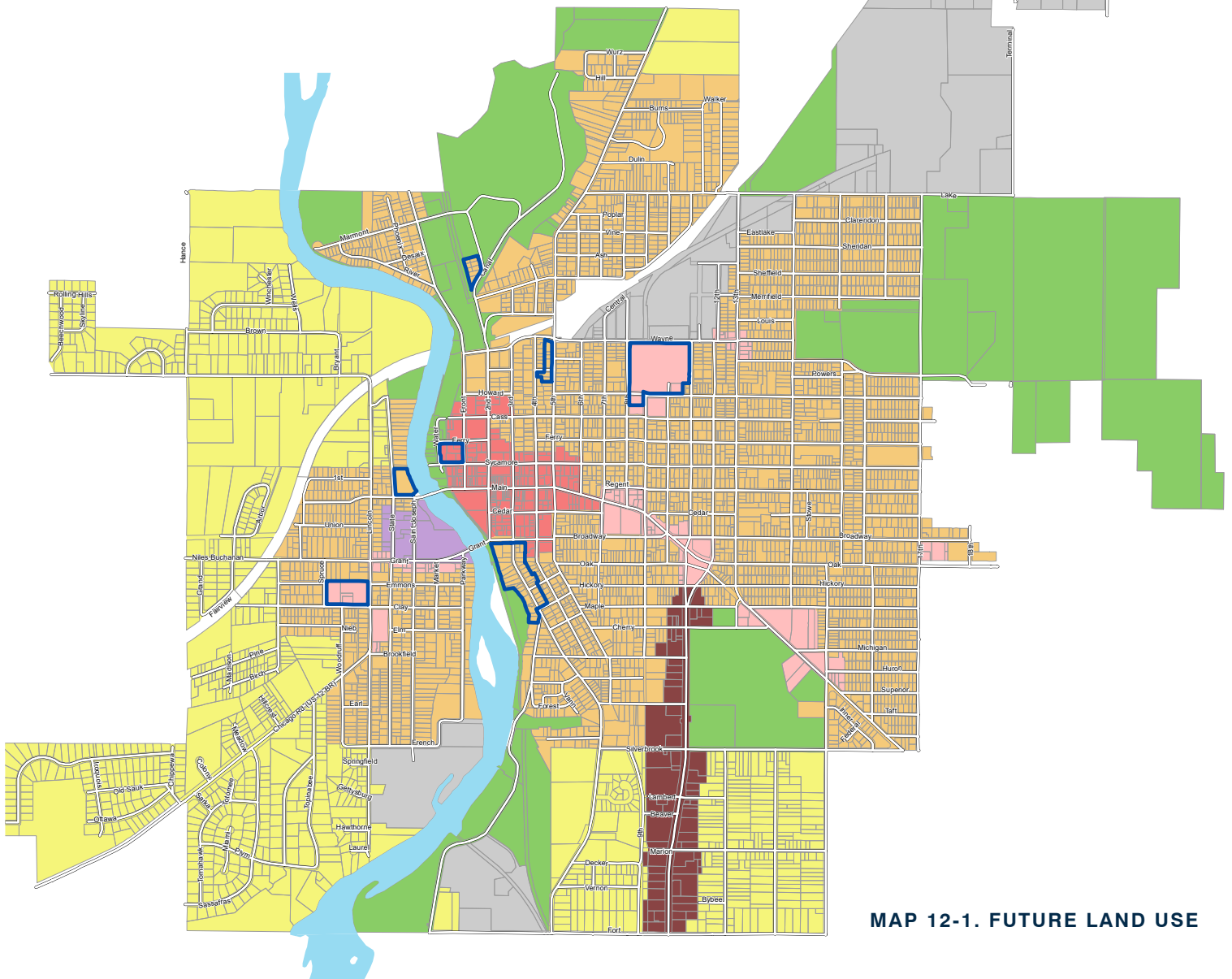
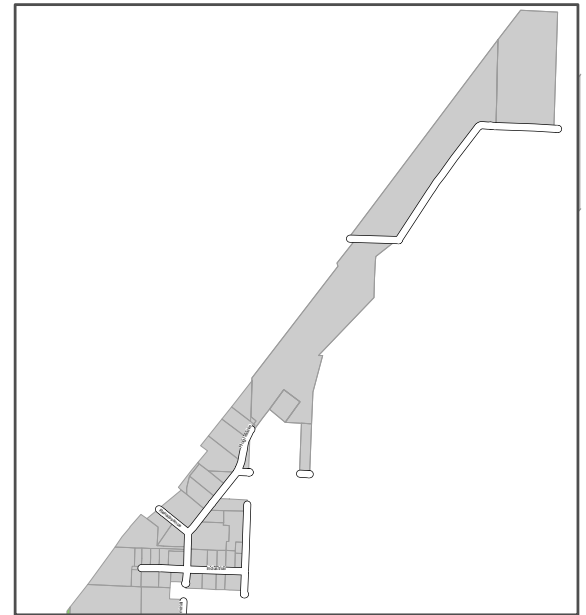
The institutional future land use designation includes Spectrum/Lakeland Hospital campus located between Grant and Main Street on the west side of the St. Joseph River, nursing care facilities, and similar institutional and health care related uses. Despite their institutional nature, sites in this designation should be integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood as much as possible. Buildings should face the street and offer access to pedestrians, bicyclists, users of assisted devices as well as automobiles and emergency services personnel. Generous landscaping and screening should protect neighboring residential properties from these relatively intense land uses.

Compatible Zoning District	Desired Uses	Residential Density	Public & Sanitary Sewer	Features
OS or OC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • health care or university campuses, nursing care facilities, and similar institutional uses 	N/A	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pedestrian connectivity to and within the site • generous landscaping and street trees, street lights • universal accessibility

Future Land Use Map

Legend

- LDR, Low Density Residential
- TR, Traditional Residential
- NMU, Neighborhood Mixed Use
- CBD, Central Business District
- RC, Regional Commercial
- IND, Industrial
- C, Civic
- I, Institutional
- Redevelopment Sites



MAP 12-1. FUTURE LAND USE

Economic Development and Redevelopment Strategy

The City of Niles has taken proactive steps to prepare for commercial, office, residential, and mixed use redevelopment in key identified areas on the Redevelopment Sites Map. The City strives to be business-friendly, encourage private investment, and seeks the redevelopment of key properties in the City. This goal is balanced with preservation of natural resources (particularly water resources), protection of environmentally sensitive areas, the needs of neighborhoods, and the City's goals for its traditional downtown area. This balance will preserve the City of Niles' unique characteristics while providing economic opportunities for its citizenry.

Strategy

The City of Niles' overall redevelopment strategy includes the following components: placemaking, mobility, streamlining, and marketing.

PLACEMAKING

The City will strive to create quality places where people want to live, work, play, and learn. The City has already begun pursuing this strategy through the development and adoption of its [Turn the Corner Place Plan in 2016](#). The City will continue to implement this plan by identifying assets and connections, implementing design solutions for city streets, shaping the public realm through effective site design, developing building typologies, adopting a parking strategy, and implementing creative tactical solutions to test key concepts in the City. This plan strongly supports the full implementation of the Turn the Corner Place Plan.

MOBILITY AND COMPLETE STREETS

The City will continue to design and enable safe transportation access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. This includes creating additional non-motorized trails, expanding the network of bicycle lanes, facilities, and infrastructure, connecting all sidewalks in the City. This will form a completely connected network of mobility infrastructure for all citizens and reduce dependency on automobiles for getting around the City.

STREAMLINING AND PROCESSES

The City will continue to assess and improve its development processes and the manuals and outlines available to guide the public and development community. This includes reviewing and amending its zoning ordinance where necessary to ensure that development reviews are thorough, fair, responsive, and efficient. Application forms and checklists will be reviewed to ensure that they are accurate and easy-to-understand.

MARKETING

Through partnerships with the [City of Niles' Main Street Initiative](#) and the [Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce](#), the City will promote the prosperity of all business within Niles. The principles of Main Street America and [Michigan Main Street](#) are embraced in this Plan. Further, Niles Main Street, Fort St. Joseph Museum, and Western Michigan University will promote the Niles authentic historical learning experience especially for day-trip visitors from the Midwest as outlined in the [Niles Cultural Economic Development Plan](#).



FIGURES 13-1 & 13-2. GREATER NILES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND AMBASSADOR
SOURCE: GREATER NILES CC FACEBOOK PAGE

Redevelopment Sites

The City has prioritized potential redevelopment sites by assessing the inventory of undeveloped private land and potential redevelopment sites. The prioritization criteria include the following:

- **Adequate access to safe, multi-modal transportation networks.** The identified redevelopment sites should be served by safe and efficient road networks that accommodate not just cars and trucks, but also pedestrians, bicyclists, and users of assistive devices.
- **Ability to satisfy needed commercial, residential, and recreational activities and uses.** Many of the redevelopment sites in this plan are intended to accommodate a combination of uses, including attainable single- and multi-family homes, recreational activities, and commercial uses in appropriate locations.
- **Proximity to downtown.** Downtown is the cultural and economic engine of Niles. Therefore, in evaluating redevelopment opportunities in the City, this plan considered the sites' proximity to downtown Niles. Sufficient multi-modal transportation linkages are needed to connect residents of these redeveloped properties to the heart of the City.

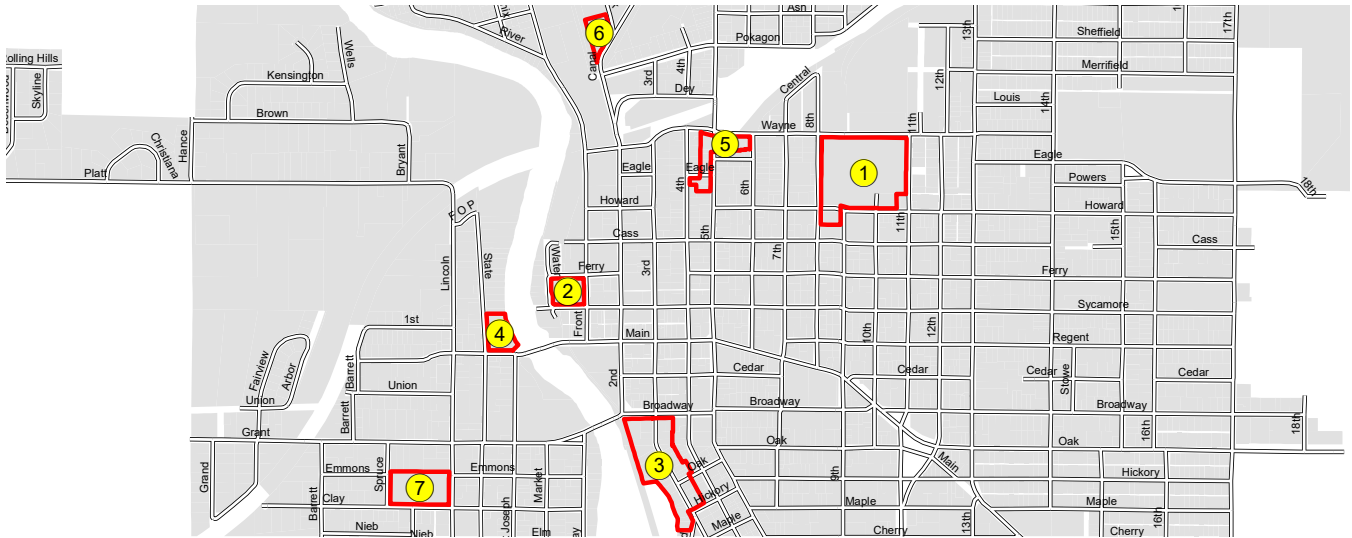


FIGURE 13-3. REDEVELOPMENT SITES IDENTIFIED IN THE CITY

Through this review process, seven potential redevelopment sites were identified. The list of specific sites within these areas will evolve over time and as conditions change. While some of the sites within these areas are currently listed for sale, others are not and the property may not be immediately available.

The following sites are considered key redevelopment sites in the City:

1. NATIONAL STANDARD SITE. Located at 901 Howard Street, this 11-acre redevelopment ready site is located south of Wayne Street, east of 8th Street, west of 11th Street, and north of Howard Street. The buildings on this site have largely outlived their useful life and have fallen into a state of disrepair or collapsed. While some more well-kept or aesthetically interesting structures may be saved, this site will benefit from complete redevelopment. Potential opportunities for redevelopment include restoring the traditional street grid by extending 9th Street and 10th Street through the property to Wayne Street. A variety of housing types, both attached and detached, recreational space, and retail opportunities exist for the site. It is bounded on the south, west, and east by primarily single-family homes, so redevelopment of the property will need to be mindful of this context and complement surrounding residential neighborhoods.

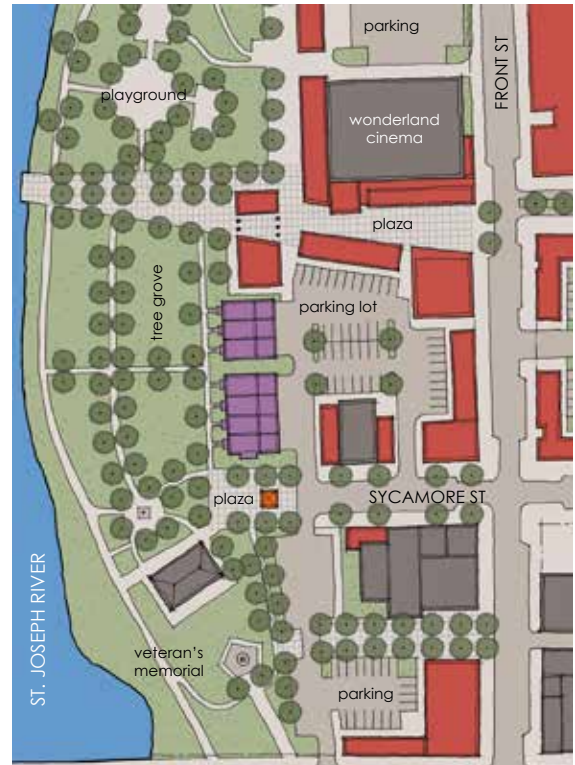
FIGURE 13-4. NATIONAL STANDARD SITE



2. WATER STREET BLOCK. This redevelopment ready site is located along the east St. Joseph River riverfront north of Main Street, west of Front Street, and south of Cass Street. Site design concepts in the [City of Niles PlacePlan](#) (see illustration at right) recommend a mix of residential and commercial land uses with mixed-use building types and rowhouse building types. The concept plans have been proposed in five incremental phases and include the integration of public plazas into the design. Concept build outs call for 60,000 square feet of retail and 127 residential dwelling units.

New mixed-use buildings are envisioned along Ferry, Sycamore, and Front Streets with parking in the interior of the site so as to form a consistent, walkable urban development. The design also incorporates trees and enhanced pedestrian connections between Front and the St. Joseph River to connect people to Riverfront Park.

FIGURE 13-5. ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN: BUILD OUT



3. 3RD STREET VILLAGE. Located on the east side of the St. Joseph River near the intersection of Broadway and Third Street, this site offers a transition between established neighborhoods and the central business district. It is also the transition point of access to the Riverfront Park from the upper neighborhoods. Site design concepts outlined in the [City of Niles PlacePlan](#) (see illustration at right) and the 3rd Street Village Plan recommend a mix of residential and commercial land uses with mixed-use buildings, rowhouses, and detached homes with the mixed-use buildings fronting the immediate corner of Broadway and Third. Concept build outs call for 50 residential dwelling units and 18,000 square feet of retail.

Redevelopment of this site would eliminate blighted properties, provide additional housing opportunities including single-family and moderate density attached homes or rowhouses. It would provide opportunities for modern, market rate, and attainable housing, enhanced green space, and walkable amenities that would add to the overall value of the community by bolstering the aesthetic and economic value of the 3rd Street corridor, which is a key entry and exit to our community.

FIGURE 13-6. ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN



4. FORMER YMCA SITE.

This redevelopment site is located on the west side of the St. Joseph River near the intersection of State Street and Main Street. Site design concepts outlined in the [City of Niles PlacePlan](#) recommend residential land uses with mews entry rowhouses, rowhouses, and detached single-family homes. The concept plans have been proposed in three phases with two build out options. Conceptual buildouts call for 14 to 16 residential dwelling units.



FIGURE 13-7. ILLUSTRATIVE YMCA REDEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS

This site contains some limitations as it the east side of the property slopes rather quickly to the St. Joseph River. However, this can be transformed in to an opportunity for an overlook or similar amenity. The site has good access to infrastructure and is within walking distance of downtown Niles, resulting in reduced dependence on private automobiles for transportation and residential development that would complement the existing urban fabric.

5. 5TH STREET VILLAGE. Located on 5th Street south of Wayne Street, and along the south side of Wayne Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets, this site consists primarily of vacant or underutilized platted properties that are part of the neighborhood’s urban fabric. A development design has not yet been completed for this site, although redevelopment offers several benefits, including the acquisition and elimination of blighted properties, the development of new housing opportunities consisting of single-family homes, smaller “cottage” dwellings, and townhomes or rowhouses in appropriate areas. Eagle Street Park is located at the corner of 5th and Eagle, offering an opportunity for recreational amenities. This park is small and presently offers limited amenities; a small play structure, swings, and spring rocker are the only features. Redevelopment of this site should be coordinated so that improvements to Eagle Street Park occur at the same time to enhance marketability. Finally, the City should explore connecting Eagle Street from 4th to 3rd Street, although topographic limitations may render this connection infeasible.

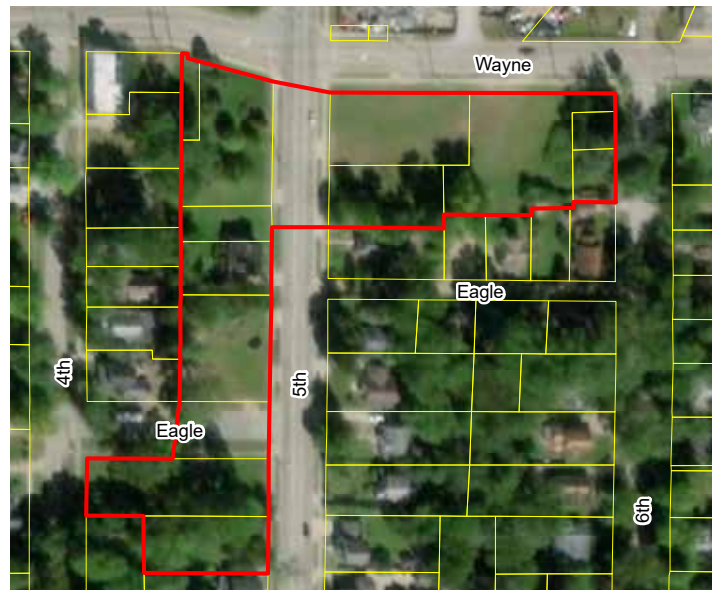


FIGURE 13-8. LOCATION OF 5TH STREET VILLAGE SITE

6. PLYM PARK REDEVELOPMENT AREA.

Tucked away on the south side of Plym Park, and adjacent to the Niles Buchanan YMCA and the South County Building containing the County Sheriff and 5th District Court, the Plym Park Redevelopment Area consists of a handful of properties in need of creative redevelopment. Like the 5th Street Village, a design has not yet been completed for this site, but opportunities abound in this area. This property is located at a transition between institutional/offices to the northwest, recreational uses to the northeast, and residential uses to the south. Due the unique surroundings of the property, varied redevelopment opportunities are available. This plan contemplates attached rowhouses or townhomes with frontage on either Canal Street, Plym Park Road, or the nonmotorized trailway that forms the western boundary of the parcels. Regardless of the use, this site should be developed in a way that capitalizes on the proximity to Plym Park and the trail, offering residents a short walk or bike ride to downtown Niles and numerous recreational amenities.



FIGURE 13-9. PLYM PARK REDEVELOPMENT LOCATION

7. FORMER SCHOOL PROPERTY. Located at the northwest corner of Lincoln and Clay, this site was the Westside Elementary school and is presently the Niles Community Schools district’s administration building. The site has a total area of about five acres, and about half of that area is unused. Site is surrounded by primarily single-family residences, although a few small business, religious, office, and educational uses are found within a few blocks of the property. Like many sites, a variety of uses are possible at this location, although this site is likely best suited for single-family homes, “cottage” homes, and other relatively low-intensity land uses due to the character of the surrounding neighborhood.



FIGURE 13-10. WESTSIDE ELEMENTARY REDEVELOPMENT LOCATION

CHAPTER
14

Implementation Strategies

In order for Niles to fully realize the vision set forth by this Master Plan, it must be implemented. While there are numerous recommendations and suggestions in this plan, making one improvement at a time will create the vision the City has now defined.

Primary responsibility for implementing the Plan rests with the Niles City Council, the Planning Commission, and the City staff. This is done through a number of methods. These include additional planning activities, ordinances, programs, and administrative procedures which are described in this chapter. Many of the action strategies require significant public and private investment. Some are small enough to be implemented immediately, while others will take time. Nevertheless, all of the steps outlined in this chapter are important, as they contribute individual elements that will help build the overall vision expressed by the Master Planning process participants.

1. Amend the Zoning Ordinance

The Zoning Ordinance is the primary implementation mechanism for this Plan. This strategy contemplates an evaluation of the entire Ordinance, but specific attention should be paid to areas that have been the subject of significant planning activities already, such as the downtown area and Third Street Village. This step may include a revision of the Zoning Map to support the future land use map, and a revision of some zoning classifications to better conform to the future land use designations in this Master Plan.

In addition, the Ordinance should be evaluated in the context of [Redevelopment Ready Community \(RRC\) certification](#) and, if desired, reviewed for current land uses, building types, and housing options that are permitted in the Zoning Ordinance. Before evaluating whether or not the zoning ordinance will prevent undesired outcomes or land uses, it is critical to evaluate whether or not the ordinance enables the development of land uses, buildings, and development the City desires. Further, the Zoning Ordinance should address innovative development techniques and emerging land use issues, such as short-term rentals, recreational marijuana establishments, and others.

2. Develop Sub-Area Plans for Priority Redevelopment Sites

This plan identifies seven priority redevelopment sites, and outlines an economic development strategy to prepare for commercial, office, residential, and mixed-use redevelopment in these key locations. These are vacant, unused, or otherwise underutilized properties that are in need of redevelopment. Some properties are large – encompassing the equivalent of several city blocks – while others are much smaller and may consist of only one block or less. To stimulate investment and establish a vision for these areas, all should have a detailed plan that expresses desired land uses, building forms, housing options, and similar ideas. This has been done for several properties already – the PlacePlan, for example, contains specific plans for

the Water Street Block, the former YMCA (Main and State), and the Third Street Village (Broadway & Third). Similar plans should be completed for the remaining sites to define the intended use and character in the area. Once the City becomes RRC certified, it will be eligible for redevelopment assistance for these sites.

3. Continued Implementation of Previous Planning Efforts

Niles has been extremely proactive in identifying areas of the City in need of revitalization and developing plans to address them. In addition to this Plan, the City also developed a downtown [Placemaking Plan](#), [Cultural Economic Development Plan](#), [Parks and Recreation Plan](#), 3rd Street Village Plan, and others. This plan fully embraces the concepts of these plans and strongly encourages their implementation. The concepts from these and other community plans are sound and it is the intent of this plan to amplify them and encourage their implementation.

4. Support Emerging Neighborhood Organization Efforts

Neighborhood associations are difficult for a government body to initiate because their success requires broad support and buy-in from neighborhood leaders and residents. However, neighborhoods in Niles have initiated several efforts across the City to encourage these associations. Several neighborhoods in Niles participate in Nextdoor, which is a private social network for neighborhoods. Through Nextdoor, neighbors can connect and share advice, make recommendations, post classified ads, and communicate important alerts. In order to encourage continued participation in neighborhood organizations, the City should work with neighborhood leaders in various areas of the City to encourage the existence and emergence of neighborhood groups to engage in civic activities.

5. Improve Non-Motorized Network and Sidewalks

As a fairly dense community, it is important to develop safe and effective pedestrian connections throughout the City. Not only is this true between parks and public amenities, but there are numerous locations throughout the City where “gaps” exist in the sidewalk network, preventing safe transportation routes for those without a car – people who are sometimes the City’s most vulnerable residents. It is essential to have a fully-connected sidewalk network throughout the City to provide residents with options other than private automobiles, to encourage healthy lifestyles, and to allow mobility and safe access to destinations for all citizens. Enhanced measures of accessibility may include power stations for charging mobile devices throughout the City, amenities with ADA compliance, and developmental designs that support the accessibility of multiple users. The City may explore options to improve pedestrian connections through publicly supported loan and grant assistance for sidewalks or as a long-term measure as redevelopment occurs.

6. Improve Local and Regional Public Transportation

Currently, Niles is served by Dial-a-Ride and one deviated fixed route that runs from downtown Niles to the Wal-Mart in Niles Township, with selected trips into South Bend, Indiana, connecting to South Bend Transpo at Auten Road. The City should seek to expand regular service to other portions of the community to ensure that sufficient transportation options are provided to all residents. Expanded, consistent service to and from and within Niles would serve a large segment of the population, expand Niles market area, and offer additional low-cost transportation options to more people.

7. Continue Community Education and Outreach

The planning process is persistently changing with shifting social, cultural, historical, and economic concerns and unique land use challenges. Attitudes of residents toward growth, economic development, traffic, drinking water, and other pertinent land use issues will likely differ from person to person depending on their personal circumstances. It is vitally important for City officials to continue to provide educational opportunities for residents to inform them of the issues of highest priority.

An element of this strategy includes continuing education of City officials. In addition, the City should seek opportunities to educate the public on current planning trends and the benefits of implementing the goals and objectives in this Plan. Public meetings, for example, should be instructive for the public. The City must also continue its involvement with Niles New Tech. The involvement of young citizens in participatory planning processes is vital to the future of the community and it is in the City's long and short term interest to engage with residents and ensure that they feel represented by City government.

Niles must also continually strive to find new ways to provide residents with news and information regarding their City government. Most residents have smartphones, tablets, and similar devices, and are consuming more news, entertainment, and social media digitally. Therefore, the City should continually look to improve its online presence to keep residents apprised of local current events that may affect them.

The City Council, Planning Commission, and city staff will all be responsible for seeking and attending seminars and conferences on current planning topics, as well as establishing new community organizations and committees to increase public involvement in local government.

8. Coordinate with Neighboring and Regional Municipalities

Some of the goals in this plan will not be achievable without the cooperation of the City's neighboring municipalities. Niles Township shares many of the same challenges when it comes to land use along the 11th Street corridor and the City should be engaged in discussions pertaining to the improvement of this key street. This corridor, along with local infrastructure, will likely serve as a catalyst for local economic development over the coming years, and the extent to which efforts to attract new business and industry can be coordinated will be helpful to the City and Township. Additionally, coordinating some site and design standards for zoning districts along this corridor will help to create a unified aesthetic, establishing a greater sense of place within the community. The City should also work to form alliances with Berrien County and other regional organizations to market the City as a cultural and entertainment destination and further implement the Economic Development Strategy outlined in this Plan.

The City Council, Planning Commission, and staff will need to be responsible for advocating seasonal or bi-annual meetings with governing bodies in neighboring communities and continuing to foster productive relationships with key regional partners.

9. Marketing and Promotional Efforts

One of the City’s top priorities throughout the planning process was to develop and market the redevelopment of key properties throughout the City. Concurrently and subsequently, the City must also increase promotional efforts to attract the attention of developers and to attract additional visitors to Niles. The City has much to offer to residents and visitors alike: charming local businesses, high quality public spaces, recreational spaces, cultural amenities, a scenic riverfront trail, and solid, yet attainable housing opportunities. To this end, the City must continue to increase promotions and marketing efforts to position itself as a premier community in southwest Michigan. This is supported by recommendations of the [Cultural Economic Development Plan](#), which includes a desire to “become a heritage tourist destination” and to position itself “as a cultural attraction for regional visitors, businesses, and new residents.”



FIGURE 14-1. NILES GRADUATION



FIGURE 14-2. COMMUNITY BOARDWALK



FIGURE 14-3. CITY OF NILES PARADE
SOURCE: SANYA VITALE

Implementation Matrix

A work plan, or implementation matrix, is a tool that can be utilized by the Planning Commission, City Council, and city staff to implement this Master Plan. The work plan identifies the actions outlined in this implementation chapter, the responsible party, and the timeline for implementation. Each action is generalized so that similar action items are combined into a common and implementable strategy. Many of the tasks outlined in this matrix will require the support of numerous city boards and/or departments, and in some cases, outside consultation will be necessary.

Many of the action items outlined below have no specified end date. Rather, implementation of this Master Plan will require the responsible parties to continually work toward implementation, and in some cases, incorporate the tasks below into the regular daily operations of the City. Other items will need to be revisited, reviewed, and revised regularly with the Planning Commission and/or City Council to ensure that the actions being implemented are effective and to ensure that any appropriate budgetary commitments are being considered.

The action items below are not intended to be an exhaustive list of implementation tasks, and nothing should preclude the City from taking additional proactive steps not listed here to capitalize on opportunities that are consistent with the general policies and recommendations of this Master Plan.

Action	Responsible Party	Timing
Targeted Zoning Ordinance amendments	Planning Commission, City Council	Year 1-2
Prioritize and develop sub area plans for redevelopment ready sites	Planning Commission, city staff	Prioritize: Year 1 Subarea Plans: Years 2-5
Continued Implementation of Previous Planning Efforts	City Council, city staff	Year 1, ongoing
Engage and support emerging neighborhood organizations	City staff	Year 1, ongoing
Improve non-motorized network and sidewalks	Planning Commission, City Council, city staff	Years 3-5, ongoing
Improve public transportation	City Council, city staff	Years 3-5
Continue community education and outreach	Planning Commission, city staff	Year 1, ongoing
Cooperation with neighboring and regional governments	Planning Commission, City Council, city staff	Year 1, ongoing
Marketing and promotional strategy	City Council, city staff	Year 2, ongoing

