

CITY OF HOUGHTON, MICHIGAN



2024-2028 MASTER PLAN

Acknowledgements

Houghton City Council:

Mayor Brian Irizarry
Mayor Pro Tem Joan Suits
Robert Backon
Robert Megowen
Mike Needham
Jan Cole
Craig Waddell

Houghton Planning Commission:

Tom Merz, Chairperson
Bill Leder, Vice Chairperson
Dan Liebau, Secretary
Kristine Bradof
Ben Ciavola
Brian Irizarry
Joan Suits
Norma Veurink
Eric Waara

Eric T. Waara, P.E. City Manager
Ann Vollrath, Assistant City Manager/Clerk

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1-3
Chapter 2: Physical and Natural Setting.....	5-6
Chapter 3: Community Facilities.....	7-10
Chapter 4: Recreation.....	11-33
Chapter 5: Neighborhoods and Housing.....	35-40
Chapter 6: Mobility.....	41-47
Chapter 7: Downtown.....	49-57
Chapter 8: M-26 and Sharon Avenue Business Corridors.....	59-64
Chapter 9: Economic Development.....	65-70
Chapter 10: Zoning Plan and Future Land Use.....	71-77
Chapter 11: Sustainability and Resilience.....	79-87
Chapter 12: The Master Plan Process.....	89-90
Chapter 13: Historical Timeline.....	91-92
Chapter 14: Demographics.....	93-95
Chapter 15: Strategies.....	97-102

GLOSSARY

ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

ATV – All-terrain vehicle (see also ORV)

DDA – Downtown Development Authority

EGLE – Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy

Form-Based Zoning – an alternative means of regulating urban development, such as in downtown districts, that focuses more on physical form than use, allowing for mixed use where traditional zoning would not

HUD – Department of Housing and Urban Development

ICLEI – International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives

IPMC – International Property Maintenance Code

KEDA – Keweenaw Economic Development Alliance

KTS – Keweenaw Trail Service

LDFA – Local Development Finance Authority

MDNR – Michigan Department of Natural Resources

MDOT – Michigan Department of Transportation

MEDC – Michigan Economic Development Corporation

Michigan Tech – Michigan Technological University

Mixed-Use Development – when discussing urban planning means commercial and residential development

MML – Michigan Municipal League

MSHDA – Michigan State Housing Development Authority

SBDC – Small Business Development Center

MTEC – Michigan Tech Enterprise Corporation

ORV – Off Road Vehicle (see also ATV)

Placemaking – creating a livable, walkable, vibrant community

RRC – Redevelopment Ready Community

SmartZone – a specially created technology park designed to spur the growth of technology-related or research-oriented businesses and employment opportunities

STR – Short-term rental

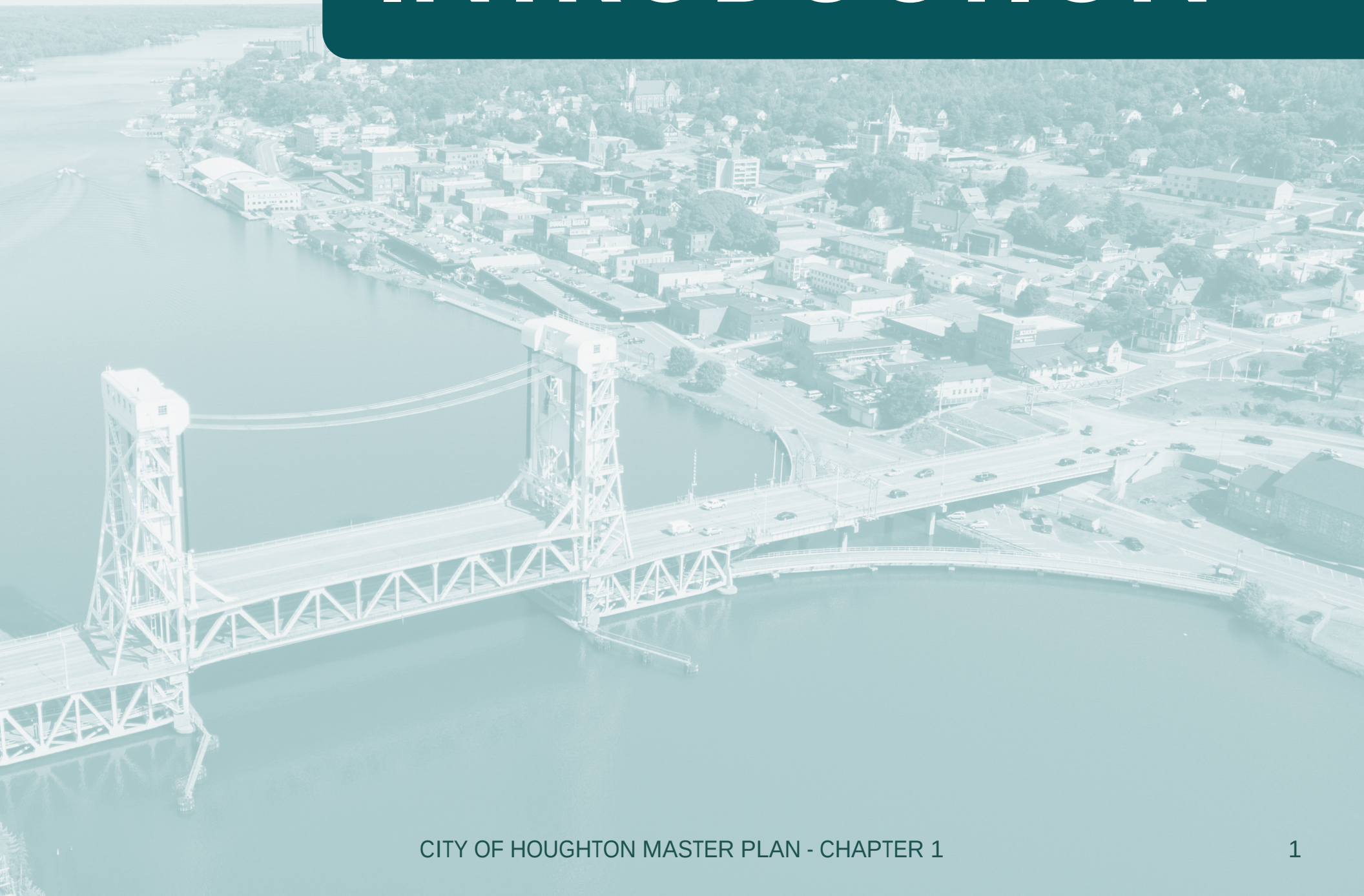
The City – City of Houghton

TIFA – Tax Increment Finance Authority

UPPCO – Upper Peninsula Power Company

WUPPDR – Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region

INTRODUCTION



This is Houghton's Master Plan documenting our community's principles and guidelines for our future. The preparation of this document involved community leaders, citizens who participated in the citywide survey and public meetings, the City's planning commission, and staff. This plan reflects what the residents of the City said is important to them and thus provides a guide for future decision-making, actions, and policies by City leadership.

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008 requires each community to have a master plan that satisfies three criteria:

- is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient, and economical
- considers the character of the planning jurisdiction and its suitability for particular uses, judged in terms of such factors as trends in land development and population changes
- best promotes public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare

This Master Plan is a flexible document serving as the foundation of community vision—what the people of our community envision for their collective future. This Master Plan incorporates community and regional input which aids in establishing appropriate goals and strategies consistent with our regional identity.



This Master Plan establishes a framework for zoning and other public policies affecting the community. Community goals relating to growth, economic development, recreation, environment, education, historic preservation, and resource management provide criteria for updating this Master Plan. A desirable community implements policies consistent with community goals conveying a strong sense of identity and pride of place, while promoting public and private investment.

This Plan's Guiding Principles

- Attract and retain a diverse population and talented workforce
- Foster a "sense of place".
- Preserve our rich history.
- Improve non-motorized and motorized travel and improve connectivity with neighboring communities.
- Assist Michigan Tech in attracting and accommodating a diverse student body, faculty, and staff.
- Strengthen neighborhoods and housing.
- Establish a more vibrant downtown.
- Plan future land use.
- Promote a viable business community.
- Incorporate resilient and sustainable practices into daily operations.

Use of the Plan

This Master Plan is prepared under authority of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, P.A. 33 of 2008, as amended. It provides the basis for zoning under the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, P.A. 110 of 2006, as amended. This Master Plan also provides a basis for subdivision regulations, local land use regulations, and the capital improvements program to ensure consistency with expressed community goals and policies. This Master Plan is designed to be consistent with other regional plans, thereby setting the stage for regional collaboration.

This Master Plan provides advisory guidelines for development based on public vision, interests and intentions. These guidelines aid private sector landowners and developers in making decisions that are consistent with public sector goals.

Executive Summary

Houghton is a dynamic and forward-thinking city, embracing progress as an essential element of its identity. This progress, synonymous with change, is not haphazard; rather, it is meticulously planned. As we navigate the evolving landscape of our community's future, the 2024-2028 Master Plan stands as a testament to the hundreds of hours invested in its development. We are fortunate that our Planning Commission and residents have once again demonstrated their commitment to this endeavor.

The city we proudly call home today is the result of decades of purposeful change. While external forces have necessitated some adaptations, most transformations have been guided by careful planning and unwavering efforts of our City Councilors, Planning Commissioners, City employees, and engaged residents.

Houghton boasts outstanding educational facilities, high-quality public services, and diverse cultural enrichment opportunities—amenities too numerous to list. We embrace continuous improvement meeting the evolving needs of our residents and the expectations of our visitors. The visitor economy, vital in supporting the amenities enjoyed by full-time residents, thrives as Houghton serves as a base for attractions throughout the region.

Integral to Houghton's appeal is our extensive park system, offering a variety of outdoor activities in every season. Recognizing the importance of maintaining and enhancing these spaces, we commit to annual maintenance and improvement efforts.

With a diverse population, the City hosts a wide range of housing types, reflecting the global reach of Michigan Tech in attracting professionals and students to our community to become part of our neighborhoods. Balancing growth and change with the retention of cherished neighborhoods is a priority.

While our climate and topography contribute to our community's attractiveness, they also present mobility challenges. The City's commitment to operating, maintaining, and improving our roads, trails, sidewalks, and public transportation systems enable residents to go about daily and leisure activities.

Our downtown area stands as a source of pride, seamlessly blending a bustling business district with historic architecture and direct access to the Keweenaw Waterway shoreline. Over more than half a century, Houghton has invested time and resources into downtown and waterfront development, fostering community facilities that support local businesses.

Serving as the commercial nexus of our area, Houghton strategically plans and expands a retail corridor along M-26. This corridor attracts national retailers, local businesses, shoppers, and diners from surrounding counties, complementing the vibrant atmosphere of our downtown.

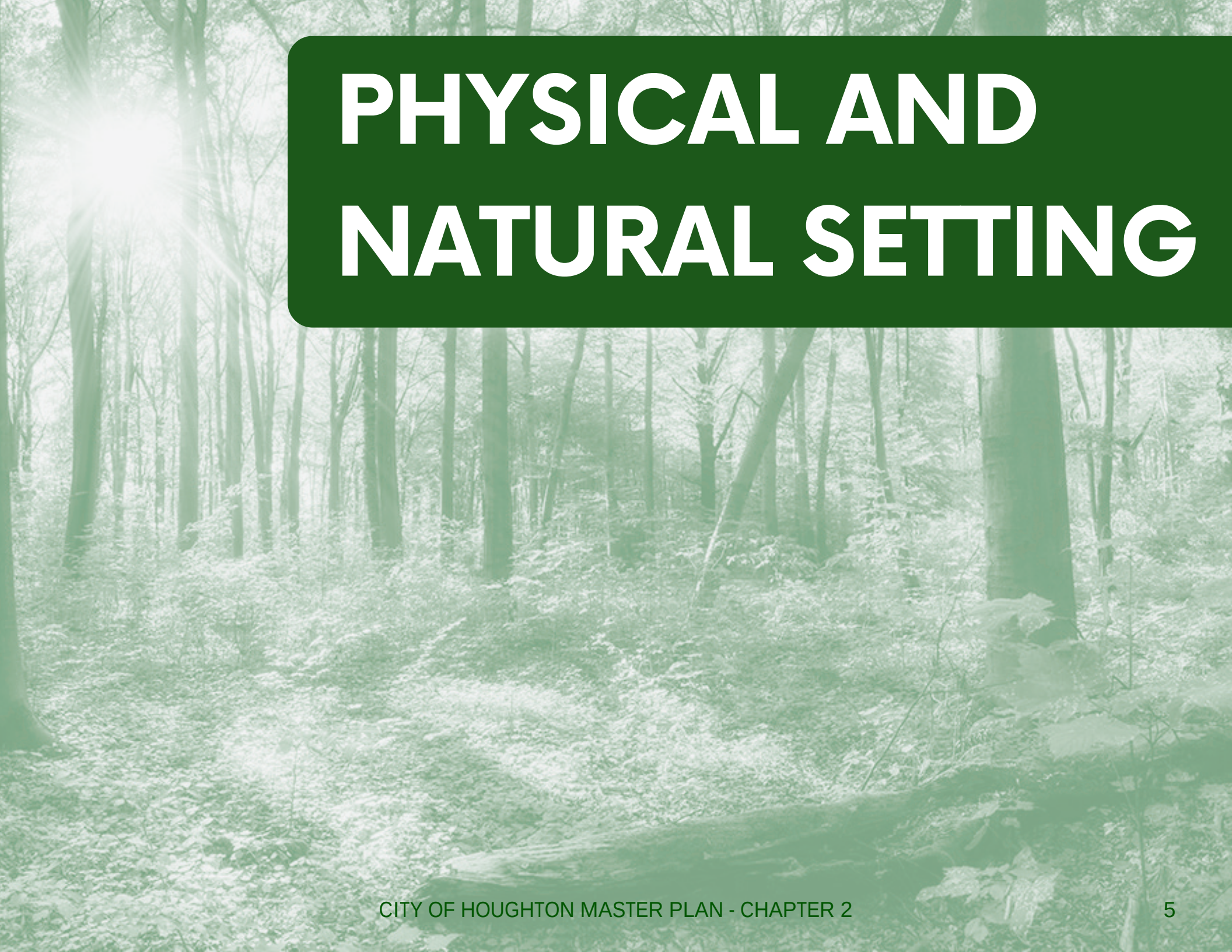
To manage the effects of land development and traffic, we continuously seek ways to improve development standards, prioritizing the protection of the natural and built environment while ensuring safe and convenient access to businesses and recreational facilities by all modes of transportation.

Economic development is a key focus, and collaboration is essential. Within the City, placemaking plays a pivotal role in building attractive spaces that drive economic development, enhance residents' lives, and draw talent and visitors. Houghton's strong visitor economy supports the year-round amenities enjoyed by our community.

Utilizing our zoning ordinance, we carefully manage land use to maximize benefits to the City and its residents while preserving shared values. The City remains open to considering changes in zoning designations or revisions of ordinances to meet the evolving needs of a changing society.

To remain a desirable community for residents and businesses, sustainability and resilience must be integral to all city functions. Recognizing economic, environmental, and social factors beyond our control, we actively explore threats and implement policies, practice, and infrastructure to mitigate their effects. City services, growth, and new development must contribute lasting benefits.

The city we take pride in today is a product of thoughtful change. Our steadfast commitment to progress ensures that Houghton remains a vibrant and sought-after community.



PHYSICAL AND NATURAL SETTING

PHYSICAL AND NATURAL SETTING

Houghton is a unique community in that the combination of our geography, geology, economy, and climate provide residents and visitors unparalleled experiences in every season. For more than a half century, the City has worked to leverage those assets to build a community which attracts new residents, seasonal visitors, new investment, and robust commerce which capitalize on those assets during all four seasons. The City was declared an official “Winter City” decades ago for embracing winter and promoting the benefits of what often feels like our longest season, but we are more than that. We are also known for our often-extended springs and long, temperate summer days that last late into the evening hours; culminating in brilliant autumn colors when the days get shorter. The changing seasons provide variety in our daily lives throughout the year and maximize our opportunities for outdoor recreation and enjoyment.

Located in the northwestern portion of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, the City is considered the gateway to the Keweenaw Peninsula as US-41 and M-26 merge in the City and cross the only bridge to the north. The Keweenaw is a unique physical and geological land formation clearly visible on satellite photos. The City is 200 miles from Duluth and Green Bay, 370 miles from Minneapolis, 325 miles from Milwaukee, and 550 miles from Detroit. This proximity to these larger population centers is important to both the business and visitor economies as we are within less than a day’s drive.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The City ranks among the snowiest cities in America.
- The City’s steep hillside location creates challenges for infrastructure maintenance, winter driving, walking, and cycling, but provides spectacular views and contributes to the City’s unique sense of place.
- The Keweenaw Waterway is an important community asset.



Climate

Lake Superior influences the climate of the Keweenaw Peninsula. The open waters of the lake moderate temperatures in both the summer and winter. The City’s location on the Keweenaw Peninsula, with Lake Superior on both sides, ensures that the area is among the snowiest in the Midwest. Annual lake-effect snowfall usually exceeds 200 inches making for excellent skiing, snowmobiling, and snowshoeing. As Lake Superior generates the snow, it also keeps our temperatures warmer than most winter communities to the west, such as Duluth and Minneapolis. Winter recreation activities typically start in early December and end in early April. During the summer months, average daily high temperatures in the 70s to low 80s, make outdoor activities very comfortable. Spring temperatures tend to be cooler, and autumn is typically warmer than other areas with the same latitude.

Topography

The City occupies steep hillside areas sloping down to the water. As a result of this natural setting, the City has spectacular panoramic views of the surrounding hillsides and the Keweenaw Waterway.

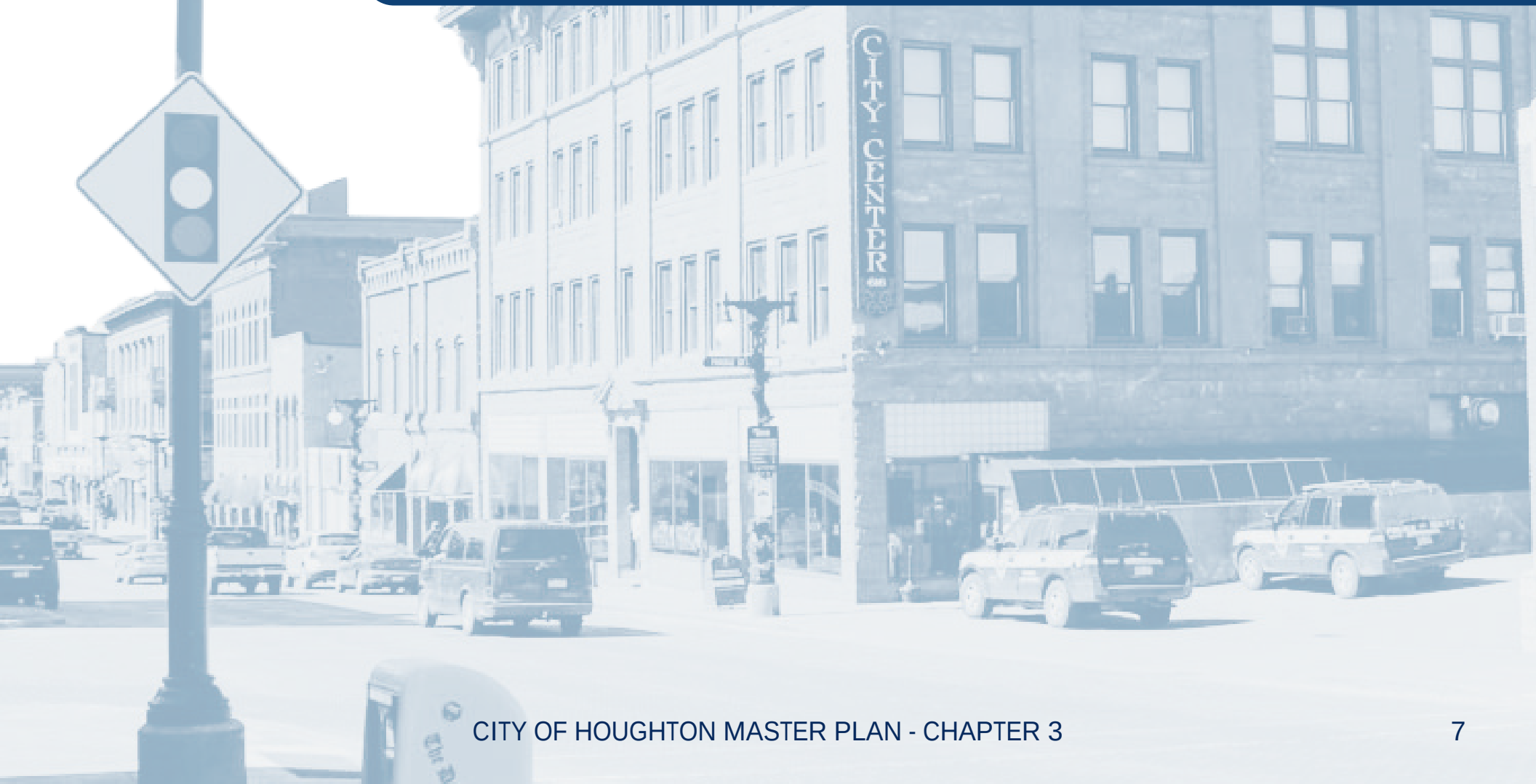
Keweenaw Waterway

The Keweenaw Waterway is Houghton’s northern city limit and is largely open and accessible to the public. Much of the City and the entire downtown is bordered along the waterway by a paved trail, mooring facilities, and public spaces. This is a key feature that differentiates Houghton from many “waterfront” communities where others’ waterfronts are mainly private property. The Keweenaw Waterway offers excellent boating, fishing and swimming opportunities in the summer months and ice fishing in the winter. There is access to Lake Superior on the north and south ends of the Keweenaw Waterway.

Soils and Geology

Soil composition analysis is used in land use planning to predict soil behavior for selected land uses and to identify special practices needed to ensure compatibility of land uses. Depending on the planned use of the land, improvements may be needed to overcome soil limitations. This information is useful to community officials, engineers, developers and home buyers. Most of the soils in the City are deep loams amid rock outcrops.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES



HIGHLIGHTS

- Entertainment, recreational, and cultural opportunities in the City provide year-round enjoyment for all age groups.
- The City provides essential services to the community including police, fire and public works departments that are integral in protecting and maintaining the community and our resources.
- The City is home to one public elementary school and one combined public middle and high school complex that serves not only city residents, but also residents from surrounding communities.
- Michigan Tech enrolls more than 7,000 undergraduate and graduate students from across the nation and around the globe.

The facilities and services offered by a community enhance its residents' quality of life. The City, other local governments or quasi-public entities own, operate and maintain the facilities listed below that benefit City residents.

GOVERNMENT FACILITIES AND SERVICES

City Center

The City Center at 616 Shelden Avenue houses the police department, transit department, manager, clerk, treasurer, assessor, and the council chambers. The City occupies about one-third of the building, and some of the remaining space is leased to business tenants. The four-story Jacobsville sandstone building was constructed in 1910 as the Masonic Temple. The building is a contributing building to the Shelden Avenue Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places.

Police Service

The City provides police protection through a department consisting of a police chief, lieutenant, sergeants, corporal, patrol officers and a parking enforcement officer. In September of 2023 the department became an accredited agency through the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police. The department patrols with the help of SUVs, cars, and bicycles. The department provides mutual aid throughout Houghton County.

Fire Service

The City's fire department was established in 1861 as the Continental Fire Company located on Montezuma Avenue. The department includes a fire chief and approximately 25 volunteer firefighters. Their equipment includes one 100' aerial platform truck, two full-size pumpers, and one mini-pumper truck. The department provides ice water rescue on the Keweenaw Waterway, elevator rescue, and mutual aid throughout Houghton County.



Water Service

The City's wells and water filtration plant operate under the direction of the Director of Public Works. The plant has the capacity to pump up to 2,200,000 gallons of water per day. Three wells pump groundwater from a subsurface aquifer. The water is filtered to remove nuisance amounts of iron and manganese to improve aesthetics. The water is then chlorinated and pumped to the storage and distribution system composed of four water tanks, three pumping stations, and more than 30 miles of distribution mains.

Wastewater Service

The Portage Lake Water and Sewage Authority oversees treatment of the City's wastewater. The cities of Houghton and Hancock jointly established the Authority in 1964 to construct and operate a wastewater treatment facility. The current treatment plant was constructed in 1992 as a modern replacement for the original facility that was located in Hancock. The facility treats wastewater from the cities of Houghton and Hancock and two surrounding townships.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES



Department of Public Works

The department includes a director, two foremen, two mechanics and several heavy equipment operators. They spend approximately five months each year managing and removing snow from the streets. The rest of the year they break up into smaller construction crews that concentrate on maintaining City infrastructure including 10 miles of major streets and 25 miles of local streets. Street maintenance consists of patching potholes, line striping, cleaning catch basins and sweeping. The department is also responsible for maintenance of all City water and sewer lines and mains. The City continually focuses attention on groundwater infiltration and/or stormwater not separated from the sewer system. Crews use a television camera for inspecting sewer mains throughout the year. The department repairs all problem areas.

The department also maintains the City's general infrastructure such as street signs, sidewalks, parking lots, and parks. Department members have diverse skill sets such as carpentry, concrete, plumbing, and welding which allows the City to perform much of its own heavy maintenance work when not committed to snow removal.

Parks and Recreation

Houghton is known for its extensive parks and recreation infrastructure that contributes to the quality of life for our residents. The park and recreation system is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

EDUCATION

Houghton-Portage Township School District

The Houghton-Portage Township School District supplies the K-12 public education for the City and Portage Township. The elementary school on Jacker Avenue opened in 1973, with an addition completed in 1998. It contains a computer lab, library, gym, and large playground. The middle school and high school are located on Gundlach Road. The high school opened in 1990. The middle school addition opened in 1998. Another addition was opened in 2010. The High School-Middle School complex includes a pool, two gyms, computer labs, music room, and an auditorium/theater. In 2018, the athletic fields underwent a significant improvement project. Houghton High School is a Michigan Blue Ribbon Exemplary School.



Copper Country Intermediate School District

The Copper Country Intermediate School District provides skilled-trades programs at several teaching venues throughout the Keweenaw. These programs include building trades, culinary, health care, cybersecurity, accounting, machining, welding, and automotive. The programs are available to local high school students interested in Career Technical Education.

Michigan Tech

The City is home to Michigan Tech, which enrolls more than 7,000 undergraduate and graduate students from across the nation and around the world. Students prepare to address the needs of tomorrow in more than 120 degree programs in engineering, arts, humanities, social sciences, business, economics, computing, forest resources, and environmental science, natural and physical sciences, and technology. Michigan Tech is known for its high-quality academic programs, career placement rates, and safe campus environment.

Michigan Tech was founded in 1885 as the Michigan Mining School, specializing in training for mining engineers, with four faculty members and 23 students; it was housed on the second story of the Continental Fire Hall on Montezuma Avenue. In 1898, the school moved to its present location and became the Michigan College of Mining and Technology. In 1964, the institution became Michigan Technological University.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Carnegie Museum of the Keweenaw

The Museum occupies the former Carnegie public library building, built in 1909 with a grant from Andrew Carnegie. When the Portage Lake District Library moved to its present location in 2006, the City purchased the building and turned it into a museum with changing exhibits on local history, natural history, science and culture. The City provides the majority of the operational funding for the museum. The Carnegie also serves as a venue for regular public programming with informative lectures on history, current events, and other topics.



Exhibits are separated into 14 galleries and include a collection of crystallized native copper, native silver, datolite, Lake Superior agates and greenstones, and a worldwide suite of minerals. The 1890 school catalog stated that the collection of minerals numbered over 27,000 specimens, now stands at about 40,000. Some specimens from the collection were sent to the Paris Exposition of 1900.

The Keweenaw

With Houghton as a hub, residents can avail themselves of numerous other cultural and recreational opportunities in neighboring communities. Music venues, museums, art galleries, trail systems and historic sites are scattered across the Keweenaw within a short drive of Houghton.

Portage Lake District Library

The 11,000-square-foot library on the waterfront in downtown Houghton opened in 2006. The building houses a children's area, teen area, study rooms, a community room, computers and provides Wi-Fi access. The Portage Lake District Library houses more than 46,000 items for check-out, including print books, audio books, movies and music CDs. The library also offers interlibrary loan services giving patrons access to over 9,000,000 titles and media. The library serves the residents of the City and Portage Township, as well as fee-paying individuals residing outside of its district.

Rozsa Center for the Performing Arts

The Rozsa Center opened in 2000 on the Michigan Tech campus. The 80,000-square-foot building was designed to resemble the architecture of copper mine shaft houses. The main theater has 1,101 seats. The Rozsa hosts world-class theater, orchestra, ballet and dance ensembles. The theater also hosts performances from students in the Department of Visual and Performing Arts, the Keweenaw Symphony Orchestra, Michigan Tech Theatre Company, Michigan Tech Concert Choirs, Superior Wind Symphony and jazz ensembles. An art gallery with rotating exhibits is also part of the center.



A.E. Seaman Mineral Museum

The official Mineral Museum of Michigan is located on East Sharon Avenue on the Michigan Tech campus. The museum dates back to 1902, with the present museum building opening in 2011. The museum features one of the finest collections of minerals in North America.

GOALS

- The best possible level of public services to City residents is provided.
- Public infrastructure and cultural facilities are enhanced and improved.
- Private and public partnerships are pursued to promote enhancement of existing and development of new community resources.

STRATEGIES

- Actively assist the Carnegie Museum of the Keweenaw with becoming financially independent.
- Regularly evaluate City operations, examining ways to leverage opportunities to improve services and lower operational costs.
- Pursue timely grant opportunities to make impactful improvements.
- Work to further build out an asset management system to allow resources to be targeted for maximum benefit while maintaining all assets.
- Study long-term facility needs to plan for systematic rehabilitation or replacement of City facilities.
- Address aging water, sewer, and street infrastructure holistically to maximize community benefit.
- Investigate opportunities to relocate City offices to a modern, energy efficient facility, and presumably sell the current City Center to the private sector.
- Construct an elevated water tank and booster station at the south end of Razorback Drive when needed for development on Cedar Street.
- Identify locations or buildings that will be amenable to the location of a senior center.

RECREATION



HIGHLIGHTS

- The City partnered with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) to complete the Pier Placemaking Project. The Pier Project, which was included in previous recreation plans, creates a year-round gathering place along the downtown waterfront.
- The City owns and maintains approximately 150 acres of parks, waterfront, greenspace, and recreational facilities.
- A four-mile paved waterfront trail connects Kestner Park on the west side of the City to the Nara Nature Park on the east side.
- With assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), the City completed reconstruction of the raised boardwalk elements of Nara Nature Park, improving the accessibility of the waterfront nature park.
- The healthy lifestyles and economic activity created by the community's vast recreational opportunities have earned the City a Pure Michigan Trail Town designation from the State of Michigan.
- The City's Lakeshore Drive Corridor Rehabilitation Project has created opportunities for public input regarding planning and recreational facilities along the City's waterfront.
- City-owned Dee Stadium is one of the oldest operating ice rinks in the world and is "The Birthplace of Professional Hockey."
- Kestner Park, on the western edge of the City, is a waterfront park with a swimming beach, picnic areas, covered pavilions, band shell, and Chutes and Ladders play area for children. The park is conveniently located adjacent to the City's RV park.
- The City's parks and recreation system is an important component of the quality of life enjoyed by residents and visitors. Due to the proximity to downtown, it plays a critical role in the ongoing success of Houghton's downtown business community.



This chapter is required by the State of Michigan and serves as the City's Recreation Plan as well as the City's plan for maintaining its Pure Michigan Trail Town designation. Certain elements in this chapter are required by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which uses the plan to score recreational grant applications and assign recreational designations. The DNR states "the intent of a community park and recreation plan is to create an inventory of existing facilities and resources, identify community recreation and open space needs, and set a plan of action for a five-year period."

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

The City of Houghton caters to a wide array of recreational stakeholders. Our City residents form the core of this group, enjoying Houghton's recreational opportunities as an integral part of their daily lives. From picnics along the waterfront to pick-up games in our parks, Houghton's citizens, young and old, make regular use of our parks and green spaces. The following paragraphs provide a summary of the community's natural and recreational landscape. Additional information related to the City's demographic, social, and physical characteristics is summarized in Chapters 2 and 14 of the Master Plan.

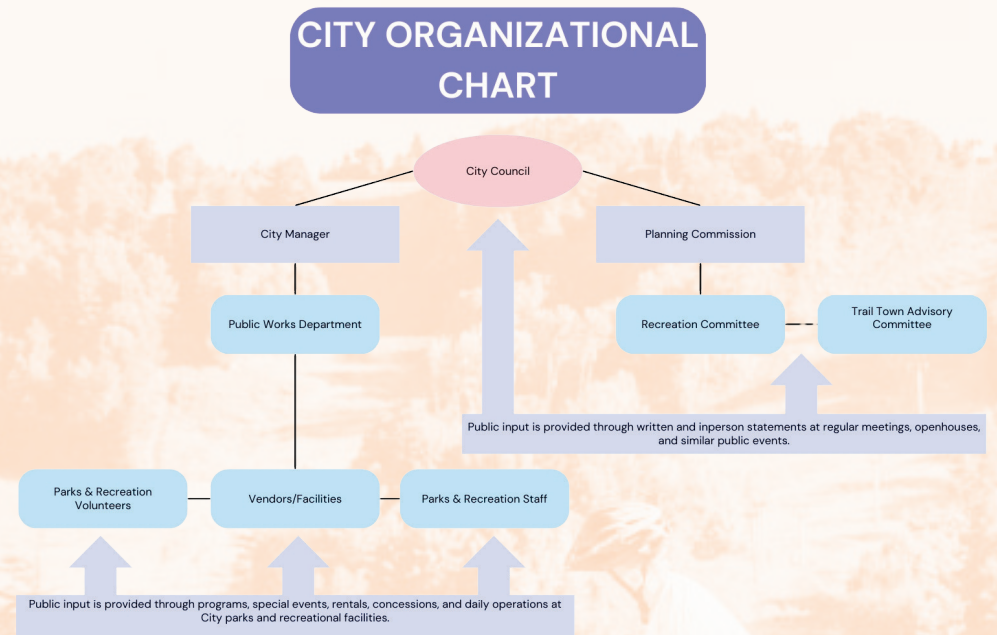
Geographically, Houghton's recreational offerings are scattered across its landscape. To the north the waterfront along the Keweenaw Waterway provides a venue and idyllic backdrop for both leisure and athletic activities. Neighborhood parks and greenspace vary in quality and purpose, but are plentiful in both the East and West Houghton neighborhoods. The City owns and maintains approximately 150 acres of parks and green space. The City is also home to vacant land that includes undeveloped rights-of-way or unbuildable land that interconnects the neighborhoods and adjacent communities. These natural areas create an environment that allows for the establishment and movement of wildlife, plants, and biota while preserving natural drainage ways throughout the City. The potential for residential or commercial development encroaching on these designated areas is limited, primarily due to the topography of the City, but also due to the attributes of our citizens who typically embrace and preserve the natural beauty of their surroundings.

The appeal of Houghton's recreational activities extends far beyond our City limits. Our local tourism draws from a close-knit Keweenaw community, for whom Houghton acts as a cultural, economic, and recreational hub. Regional tourism has established the City as a destination and home-base to travelers visiting the Keweenaw Peninsula. Consequently, the City has become an intersection of multiple local and regional partners including trail systems, waterborne navigational tours, and commuter systems. The City regularly collaborates and consults with neighboring municipalities, trail commissions, and Michigan Tech to align mutually beneficial goals.

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The planning of parks and providing recreational services and open space for a community requires staff, volunteers and funds to purchase land and open space for the development, operation and maintenance of such areas. The City manager serves as recreation director and has the authority, with council consent, to administer funds, accept grants and purchase land on behalf of the City related to recreational improvements. The planning commission functions as a reporting point for the public and provides recommendations to the council on recreational issues. The police department provides security for all parks and recreational centers. In addition to routine patrolling, remote monitoring is done through the use of security cameras.

The Parks and Recreation budget for 2023/24 is \$704,000. This amount is projected to increase five percent annually, resulting in the amount doubling in 15 years. Despite the City's planned investments, the costs associated with maintenance and upkeep of these facilities also increase annually. The continued development of the City's parks and recreational facilities must also consider each facility's relative age and need for rehabilitation. City staff, councilors, commissioners, and volunteers must weigh these planned facility investments against rising costs, facility usage, and the long-term facility benefits. The City also budgets funds in the public improvement fund for special projects. Projects in the public improvement fund are funded through the City's general fund and grants received from other sources.



The prioritization and appropriation of funds are managed throughout the fiscal year with respect to the seasonal operations of the City. Climate and geography contribute significantly to the operation and maintenance of the parks and recreation system. Use of the facilities depends greatly on the department's ability to open and close each area for the season. Each fall, recreational areas are secured and stabilized, picnic tables and planters are moved to storage, snow fencing installed, signage removed, and vegetation protected. Winterizing minimizes costs associated with replacing damaged equipment and facilities caused by snow and ice accumulation over the long winter. A similar effort is put forth in the spring when crews work to repair damage caused by ice, snow, and melt water to rehabilitate damaged turf, and to return equipment to each park and recreational area. The work involved with the opening/closing of each area can be easily overlooked when considering the day-to-day operations of our park system, but it should not be discounted when considering the overall operational costs associated with each facility.

The upkeep and maintenance of the City's parks and recreational facilities are further supported by a significant outlay of resources and a commitment by volunteers to ensure that they are available, desirable, and safe for the public. The following provides a summary of some of the committees, advisory boards, commissions, and volunteer groups that have actively supported the City since the last master planning cycle.

- Houghton Rotary – has a long history of funding recreational projects in the City including projects in both the Kestner Waterfront Park and the East Houghton Waterfront Park.
- Houghton Beautification Committee – active volunteers that design, plant, and maintain gardens in the City parks and along the City rights-of-way.
- Houghton Police Department – coordinates activities at the West Houghton Park Ice Rink.
- Keweenaw Land Trust – a nonprofit organization that assisted with a monetary donation to purchase the land for the Central Houghton Greenspace Park and whose members maintain the park.

Ad hoc committees made up of citizens and city staff are created when specific issues or tasks are identified. Both competitive and recreational programs for school-age children are provided by multiple local organizations and Michigan Tech. Programs available include options for soccer, junior level hockey, swimming, softball, baseball, and alpine and Nordic skiing. The Houghton-Portage Township schools provide competitive teams in soccer, football, basketball, hockey, swimming, volleyball, track and field, baseball, and softball.



RECREATION INVENTORY

The City's park system includes neighborhood parks with basketball courts, an outdoor ice rink, children's play areas, and quiet places to sit and relax along more than four miles of waterfront including a paved non-motorized trail. Most Houghton residents are within a short walk of a city park or recreational opportunity.

CITY RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

For the purpose of this document defining a park's service area, the City was divided into five parts:

- M-26 Neighborhoods (West of M-26)
- West Houghton (M-26 to Bridge Street)
- Central Houghton (Bridge Street to Franklin Street)
- East Houghton (Franklin Street to Michigan Tech campus)
- The Sands (East of Michigan Tech)

The recreational inventory describes the types and location of recreational facilities currently available. Each facility is compared to the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design and rankings are provided for each site based on parameters outlined by the DNR:

- 1 = None of the site elements meet 2010 ADA standards
- 2 = Some of the site elements meet 2010 ADA standards
- 3 = Most of the site elements meet 2010 ADA standards
- 4 = The park meets the 2010 ADA standards
- 5 = The facility meets the Principles of Universal Design

A recreational facility/park maintenance requirement is defined as follows:

- Light – requires very little maintenance
- Regular – requires regular maintenance during the season it is used
- Heavy – requires a lot of maintenance as it is heavily used and often holds special events

Woodhaven Park

A 0.8 acre neighborhood park that primarily serves the M-26 Neighborhoods. This park is accessible by foot, bike, and car. Facilities include playground equipment, a playfield, and basketball court. Requires regular maintenance during the summer. Accessibility assessment = 2.

West Houghton Park

A 0.7 acre neighborhood park that primarily serves West Houghton. This park is accessible by foot, bike, and car. Facilities include an outdoor hockey and skating rink, basketball nets, warming house, and tot-lot playground. The West Houghton Neighborhood Association built the rink and warming facility with help from volunteers. Requires regular maintenance year-round. Accessibility assessment = 2.

Kestner Park and Chutes and Ladders

A 5+ acre park that serves residents of Houghton and the region. This park is accessible by foot, bike, car, and watercraft. Residents of West Houghton can access the park through a tunnel under M-26. Construction of the park started in 1986. Facilities include an RV Park, swimming beach, picnic area, and the Chutes and Ladders play area for children. With the help of DNR grants, there is also a concession room, restrooms, and a band shell for community events. With help from Houghton Rotary there is a covered pavilion for community and private events. Requires high maintenance in the summer. Accessibility assessment for Chutes and Ladders = 1. Accessibility assessment for Kestner Waterfront Park = 4.



Waterfront Trail

A 4.5 mile paved waterfront trail that serves residents of Houghton and the region. The trail is accessible by foot, bike, car, and watercraft. A very popular recreational venue in Houghton, this trail was constructed in the 1980s along the abandoned railroad grade. It connects the waterfront parks and the state-owned Houghton-Chassell rail trail. When snow covered, it serves as a snowmobile trail. During the snow-free months, it is a non-motorized trail that the police department patrols regularly on bicycle. The Beautification Committee continues to put forth a significant effort to plant and maintain the downtown portions of the gardens. Another recent improvement on the trail includes the relocation of the Verna Mize memorial to the waterfront. Requires heavy maintenance year-round. Accessibility assessment = 4.



Lakeshore Drive Boardwalk

A ½ mile boardwalk and other features start east of Kestner Park and go to the Lift Bridge, serving residents of Houghton and the region. This facility is accessible by foot, bike, car and watercraft and includes fishing piers, picnic facilities, a large boardwalk, watercraft slips, deep water mooring for larger vessels and two boat launches, a smaller ramp for canoes, kayaks, and small craft, and a paved ramp for trailerable boats. This area is located along the waterfront trail and the aforementioned elements are oriented along the waterfront in a linear fashion. Requires regular maintenance in the summer. Accessibility assessment = 4.

Veterans Park

A 0.9 acre park that serves residents of Houghton and the region. This facility is accessible by foot, bike and car. This park honors local veterans. It contains a seating area, gardens, and monuments. Requires regular maintenance in the summer. Accessibility assessment = 1.

Bridgeview Park

A 1 acre linear park along the waterfront trail that serves residents of Houghton and the region. Accessible by foot, bike, car, and boat. Facilities include a broadside mooring facility for transient boaters, kayak launch, picnic area, gardens, pavilion with fire pit, viewing area and interpretive information. Requires regular maintenance in the summer. Accessibility assessment = 4.

Bridge Street Basketball Court

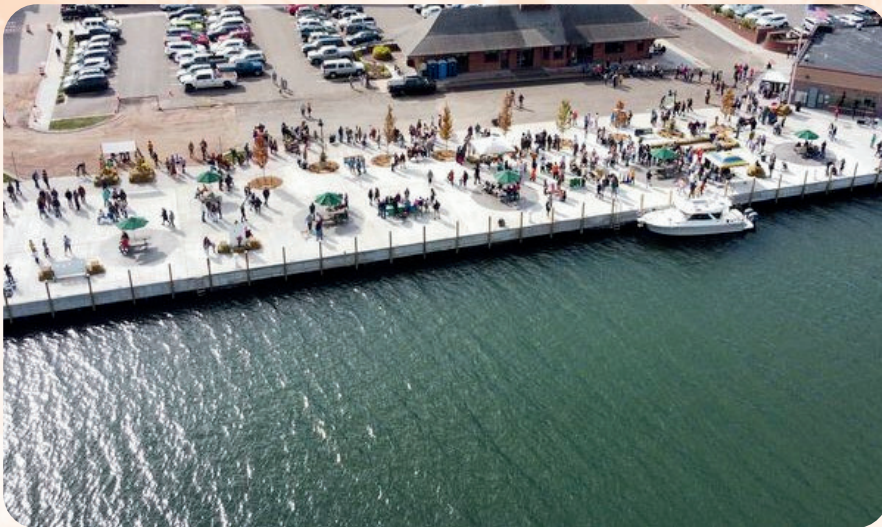
A 60' x 200' park that serves residents of West and Central Houghton. Accessible by foot, bike, and car. Facilities include fenced basketball courts, gardens, and a picnic area. Requires light maintenance in the summer. Accessibility assessment = 2.

Central Houghton Greenspace Park

A 4.5 acre park that serves residents of Houghton and the region. Accessible by foot, bike, and car. Acquired in 2015 with assistance from a DNR Trust Fund Grant and Keweenaw Land Trust, facilities include a pedestrian trail providing a natural area in the central part of Houghton. This park remains a relatively undeveloped natural setting within the relatively developed central part of the City. Requires light maintenance in the summer, mostly provided by the Keweenaw Land Trust. Accessibility assessment = 1.

Houghton Waterfront Pier

A year-round gathering place, the 550-foot waterfront pier serves downtown and the region. The concrete pier features green space, tables, and a dock capable of accommodating recreational watercraft up to Great Lakes cruise ships. Accessible by foot and bike along the waterfront trail, the pier also has nearby public parking and mooring stations. The waterfront pier is a community center, bringing residents and visitors to downtown. The facility is new and currently requires regular maintenance. Accessibility assessment = 5.



Dee Stadium

A 34,000-square-foot arena houses a regulation ice rink and a ballroom that serves residents of Houghton and the region. Accessible by foot, bike, car, and watercraft. Dee Stadium was built in 1928 and is one of the oldest operating ice rinks in the world. The stadium has ice surface from October to mid-April. The ice rink is home to the Copper Country Junior Hockey Association, Houghton High School hockey teams, adult hockey leagues, and the Portage Lake Pioneers. It also offers free open skating and open hockey sessions. Its lobby houses the Kenner Ruohonen History Museum which tells the story of how Houghton became the Birthplace of Professional Hockey. The Dee also has a 6,000 square foot ballroom used for pickleball in the winter and available year-round for fundraising receptions, public meetings, and private parties. The ballroom is accessible with a chair lift. Requires heavy maintenance year-round. Accessibility assessment = 3.



Franklin Square and Mott Park

A small park that serves Houghton residents and the region. Accessible by foot, bike, and car. Facilities include planters, a statue, and a welcome sign. Requires regular maintenance in the summer. Accessibility assessment = 1.

Houghton Skatepark

The Houghton Skatepark occupies a section of land within the East Houghton Waterfront Park to serve Houghton residents and the region. This park is accessible by foot and bike on the waterfront trail as well as by car and watercraft. This park requires regular maintenance in the summer. Accessibility assessment = 3.



East Houghton Waterfront Park

A 2-acre park that serves Houghton residents and the region. This park is accessible by foot, bike, car, and watercraft. The land was purchased in 2002 with assistance from the DNR Trust Fund. A subsequent grant funded a pavilion with restrooms, showers, picnic area, and a boardwalk that links to the waterfront trail. A strip of public waterfront east of the park includes public watercraft slips, fishing piers, and picnic tables. Requires regular maintenance in the summer. Accessibility assessment = 4.



College Avenue Park

A 50' x 100' park that serves residents of Houghton and the region. This pocket park is accessible by foot and bike. A DNR grant in 2000 assisted with construction of a deck and seating area to view the Keweenaw Waterway and relax while traveling on College Avenue between downtown and the Michigan Tech campus. Requires regular maintenance in the summer. Accessibility assessment = 3.

East Houghton Greenspace Park

A 0.77-acre park that serves residents of East Houghton and the region. Accessible by foot, bike, and car. The City purchased the land in 2010 with the assistance of a DNR Trust Fund grant. Intended to be an unmanaged natural space, this park provides habitat for local wildlife and a walking trail for residents to enjoy the variety of flora and fauna. This park requires light maintenance in the summer. Accessibility assessment = 1.

Garnet Street Park

A 1.25-acre park that serves residents of East Houghton and the region. This park is accessible by foot, bike and car. Facilities include a tennis court, playground, and picnic area. This park requires regular maintenance during the summer. Accessibility assessment = 1.

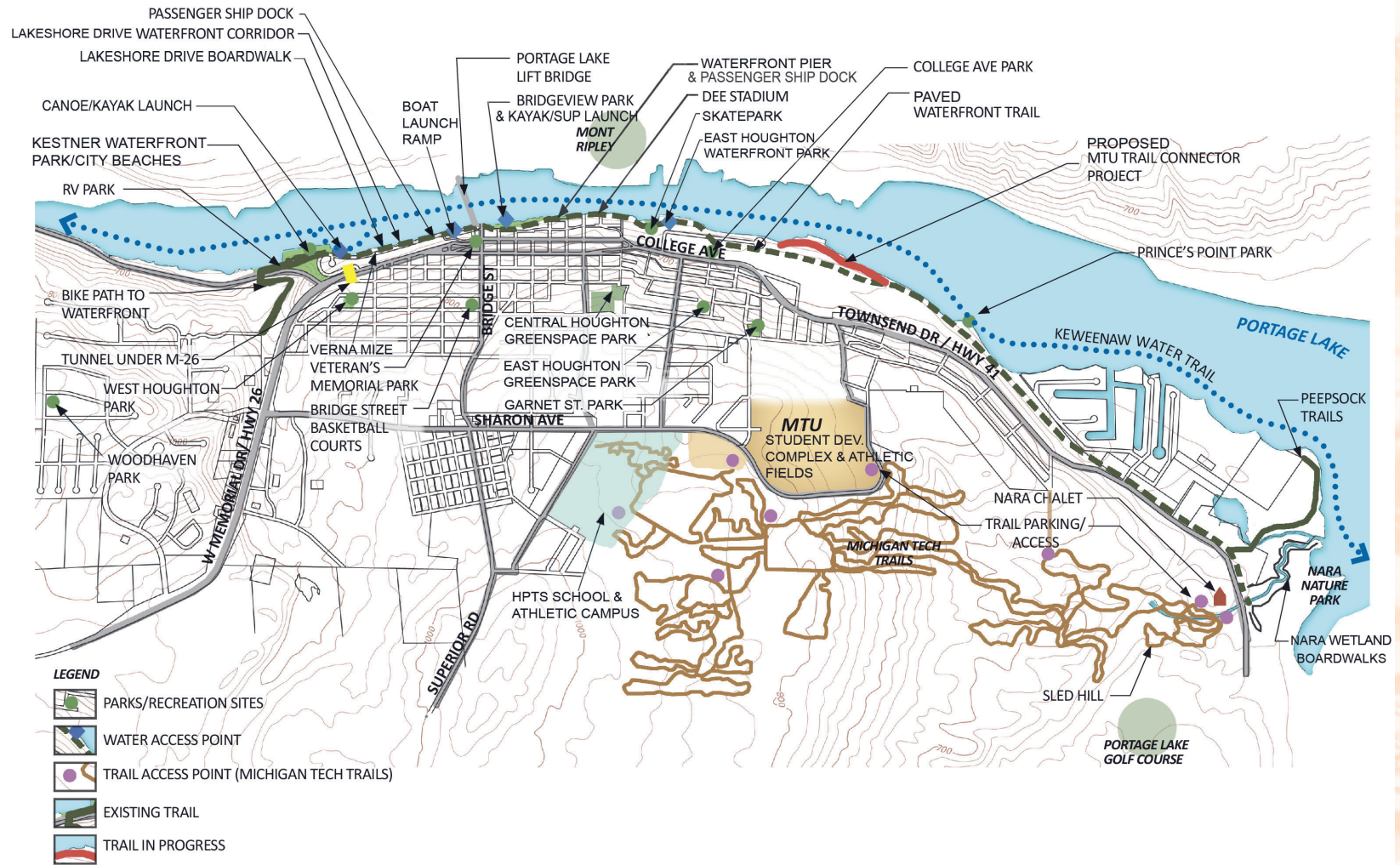
Nara Nature Park

A 115-acre park that serves residents of Houghton and the region. Accessible by foot, bike, and car, it features a chalet complete with a fireplace, concession room, bathrooms, and shower facilities. Volunteers have also added a native plant demonstration garden in front of the chalet. The park trails connect to the Michigan Tech Trail system for biking, hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. On the north side of US-41, is a six-foot-wide, 4,500-foot-long elevated boardwalk on both sides of the Pilgrim River, providing wildlife viewing, fishing sites, benches, and access for launching kayaks and canoes.

On June 17, 2018 a record storm event occurred which created flood conditions on the Pilgrim River and its tributaries within Nara Nature Park as well as throughout Houghton County. As a result, several sections of the park trail system were washed out or severely damaged and the elevated wetland boardwalk system was all but destroyed. The City worked with FEMA and EGLE on reconstruction of these elements. In rebuilding, the design of the replacement facilities included increased accessibility. Requires heavy maintenance year-round. Accessibility assessment for the Nara Park Chalet = 3.

Recreational Boating Facilities

Facilities that serve residents of Houghton and the region are accessible by foot, bike, car, and watercraft along the waterfront trail and Keweenaw Waterway. They include a boat launch on the Lakeshore Drive boardwalk west of the Portage Lake Lift Bridge, a kayak launch at Bridgeview Park, and a small craft boat launch at the East Houghton Waterfront Park. Requires light maintenance during the summer. Accessibility assessment = 2.



Existing Recreational Facilities Map

LOCAL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Michigan Tech Trails

The Michigan Tech trails consist of 21 miles of trails for biking, hiking, snowshoeing, snow-biking, and cross-country skiing. The system includes four miles of lighted trails. The trails are nationally recognized for the quality of skiing, consistency of grooming, and variety of terrain. The trails, which link to the Nara Nature Park trails, regularly host national ski qualifying and championship races. The ski season runs from December to April. The trails include a disc golf course that was recently expanded within the wooded area east of Garnet Street, between Sharon Avenue and 7th Street.



Mont Ripley Alpine Ski Area

The ski hill across the Keweenaw Waterway is owned and operated by Michigan Tech. It has two chair lifts and one T-bar lift. A total of 24 runs range from beginner to expert and include a tubing hill. Mt. Ripley is open from December to April. The hill supplements natural snow with man-made snow and is lighted at night. The hill is open to the public and provides lessons and league racing to children and adults.

Portage Lake Golf Course

The Portage Lake Golf Course is owned and operated by Michigan Tech. Open to the public from May to October, it has 18 holes, golf cart rentals, and large tee boxes with four tee-off areas on each hole. The course, which has a fully appointed pro shop with a bar and grill, sponsors men, women, and youth leagues. Lockers, showers, and storage space for privately owned carts are available.

Prince's Point Park

The Prince's Point Park consists of a small natural area north of the Michigan Tech campus that is used by students and the community for access to the Keweenaw Waterway. The park includes a beach area with picnic tables, fire pits, and volleyball net. The park is located northeast of the Rozsa Center and is accessible from the waterfront trail, a hillside trail, or via wooden stairs (121 steps) that are accessible from Cliff Drive.

Michigan Tech Ball Fields Complex

Ball fields at the intersection of Sharon Avenue and Garnet Street are used by the university and community softball leagues. A disc golf course is located along the Michigan Tech trails adjacent to the fields.

Michigan Tech Student Development Complex and Gates Tennis Center

A 235,000-square-foot complex that provides a wide range of recreation and fitness options for the community includes an ice rink, gyms, pools, pickleball/tennis courts, and a fitness center.

Hurontown Recreation Area

This park, owned by Portage Township, has a fenced softball diamond, backstop and dugouts, two tennis courts, a large privately owned soccer field and handicapped-accessible restrooms. The soccer facility is also open to the public, depending upon the private club's training and game scheduling.

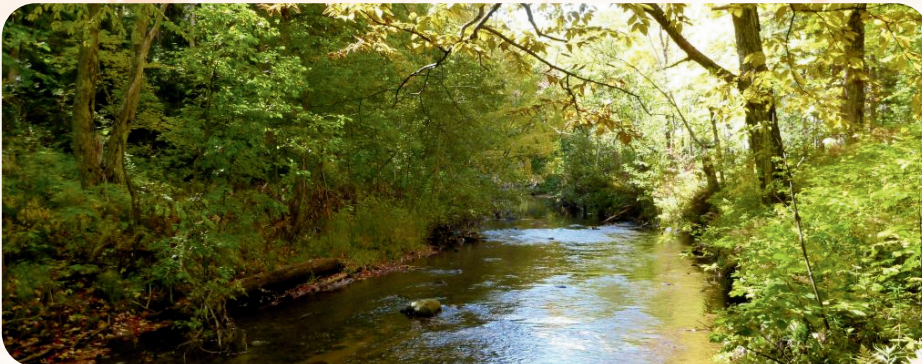
Houghton-Portage Township Schools

Houghton students and residents have access to some recreational activities and facilities owned by the Houghton Portage-Township School District.

The Houghton School Forest includes approximately 23 acres bounded by Sharon Avenue, Gundlach Road, and the Michigan Tech Ski Trails, with the ball fields located next to the school. The forest is used by school classes and community members. It features Isle Royale Pond at the corner of Sharon Avenue and Gundlach Road, the source of a stream that parallels Sharon Avenue and eventually enters the Pilgrim River, plus a 900-foot barrier-free nature trail and bike/ski trails that merge seamlessly into the Michigan Tech ski and bike trails.

Pilgrim Community Forest

Four miles of the Pilgrim River and six miles of trails are part of these 1,600 acres of forest land in neighboring Portage Township. This Keweenaw Land Trust natural area provides opportunities for non-motorized public recreation including hiking, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, hunting, fishing, berry picking, and mushroom gathering. The Pilgrim River is an excellent trout stream.



REGIONAL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Situated on the hills bordering the beautiful Keweenaw Waterway, Houghton offers a bounty of recreational opportunities all year long and is commonly referred to as the "Gateway to the Keweenaw." A number of regional parks that are easily accessible for residents are summarized below.

Regional Conservation Areas and Nature Preserves

The Keweenaw Peninsula is part of the historic lands of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, whose residents have used it for hunting, fishing, gathering, and ceremonial purposes. For the local community, nature-based recreation plays an essential role in both the economy and way of life. Regional conservancy groups and the State of Michigan have collaborated with public and private partners to promote long-term protection and public access to natural areas, shorelines, and waterways for hiking, biking, hunting, and fishing.

Snowmobile/ORV Trail

An extensive motorized trail system on the Keweenaw Peninsula connects to trails throughout the Upper Peninsula and northern Wisconsin. It attracts ORVs in the summer months, and the area's abundant snowfall attracts thousands of snowmobilers in the winter.



Bill Nicholls Trail

This trail stretches for 41 miles from Mass City to the lift bridge in the City of Houghton. The trail follows the route of the Copper Range Railroad, making it a perfect pathway for history lovers. The route is relatively moderate in difficulty, as it passes through pine and hardwood forests and near the Twin Lakes State Park. Hiking, horseback riding, biking, and cross-country skiing are permitted on all areas of the trail; some segments also allow for motorized vehicles (ORVs & snowmobiles).

Hancock Maasto Hiihto/Churning Rapids Trails

Groomed cross-country ski, snowshoe, and snow-bike trails also provide 16 miles of biking and hiking in the snow-free months.

Calumet Swedetown Trails

In addition to a four-season chalet and sledding, 22 miles of groomed cross-country ski, snowshoe, and snow-bike trails also provide single-track mountain bike trails and hiking trails the rest of the year.



Chassell Classic Ski Trails

Just over six miles of groomed classic ski trails in the winter months serve as hiking and biking trails in warmer weather.

McLain State Park

Located on Lake Superior, the park offers campsites, cabins, hiking/skiing trails, sandy beach, picnicking, and playgrounds.

Isle Royale National Park

Located in Lake Superior, the park offers hiking, boating, kayaking, fishing, and scuba diving. Park headquarters are located in downtown Houghton.



Fort Wilkins State Park

A restored 1844 army military outpost offers camping, boating, and fishing on Lake Fanny Hooe in Copper Harbor.

Copper Harbor Trails

Adventure awaits on over 50 miles of single-track mountain bike trails, along with hiking, cross country skiing, and snow biking. These nationally renowned trails have grown in popularity and bring in significant numbers of bikers during the season.

Mount Bohemia

With 585 back-country skiable acres and a vertical drop of 900 feet, this resort also offers trails for hiking and biking, along with swimming, kayaking, boating, and fishing in the summer months

Keweenaw Waterway Trail

A network of camping and public-access parks on the Keweenaw Waterway and around the Keweenaw Peninsula along Lake Superior complement kayaking and canoeing.



Twin Lakes State Park

A 175-acre campground on the southwest shore of Lake Roland includes a beach, boat launch, playground, fishing, and a nature trail with scenic overlooks to Lake Superior.

Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park

This popular park has 60,000 acres of hiking, mountain biking, camping, alpine skiing, cross country skiing, and snowmobiling along the shores of Lake Superior.

Baraga State Park

Overlooking scenic Keweenaw Bay on Lake Superior, the park offers 115 grassy summer camping sites.

STATUS REPORT OF ALL GRANT-ASSISTED PARKS

The City has received 13 recreational grants from the DNR:

- A 1978 grant funded little league and softball fields at Bugni Park. The city of Houghton sold Bugni Park to the Houghton-portage Township Schools for recreational expansion in 1990.
- A 1986 large grant-funded project allowed the City to develop the Kestner Waterfront Park. The original work included the beach site, construction of bridges, picnic area, landscaping and lighting. The City continues to maintain and improve this very popular park.
- In 1989 the DNR funded a restoration project at Dee Stadium to provide a new roof, siding, fire resistant ceiling, and viewing area. The City continues to operate and upgrade Dee Stadium. The City renovated its locker room facilities, partially funded with a DNR Passport Grant.
- The Chutes and Ladders play area was funded through a 1991 grant. The City continues to maintain and improve this facility that is part of the Kestner Waterfront Park.
- In 1995, the DNR funded a grant to construct the first Nara Park boardwalk, a wood chip trail, and fishing piers. In 2002, Phase 2 of the project was completed at Nara Park, adding another boardwalk and more fishing sites. The final grant-assisted project at the park was the renovation of the chalet and restroom improvements completed in 2006. The City continues to maintain this park.
- College Avenue Park was improved with a 2000 grant. A concrete walk, deck, benches, lighting, and landscape were completed, providing a place to sit and enjoy nature between the Michigan Tech campus and downtown.
- In 2002 the DNR assisted the City with the purchase of 1.9 acres of waterfront land east of downtown. A pavilion with restrooms, showers, seating, trail, and landscaping were added with the assistance of grant funds in 2004. In 2018 the City added a skatepark.
- Also in 2002, Nara Nature Trail Phase II expanded the trail system.
- A 2004 grant funded the East Houghton Waterfront Park Pavilion, added restrooms and a shaded area to enjoy the park.
- With the assistance of a 2006 grant, the Nara Nature Park chalet was constructed. The chalet provides a warming room with a fireplace as well as restrooms and equipment storage.
- In 2008, the DNR assisted the City with the purchase of 0.77 acres of wooded land in East Houghton for the East Houghton Greenspace Park. This park contains a rustic trail for nature walks.

- The Central Houghton Greenspace Park comprises 4.5 acres purchased in 2014 with the assistance of a DNR Grant. This park contains rustic trails that Keweenaw Land Trust maintains for hiking and bird watching.
- A 2016 Recreation Passport Grant funded renovation including ADA compliance of two locker room showers and restrooms in Dee Stadium.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC INPUT

The City is including this Recreation Plan as a separate chapter in its 2024 Master Plan. Recreation is an important part of the quality of life in the City, as evidenced by the public input received during the planning process. The Master Plan and Recreation Plan process employed several methodologies to gather public input over the last several years. As a result, the City has a better understanding of citizen satisfaction with parks and recreational facilities in Houghton. This overall planning process is described in detail in Chapter 12 of the City's Master Plan.

Public involvement for the recreational portion of this plan included a community survey and public meetings/open house events.

Survey

In the fall of 2022, the City distributed a survey to all households. Results indicated that respondents are very satisfied overall with the quality of the park and recreational facilities. The summary of the survey results for parks and recreation can be found on the City's website. Results showed that 75.8% of respondents are satisfied with parks and recreation, with the most satisfaction for the waterfront parks at 86.2%. A majority of respondents (77.8%) were also satisfied with ongoing beautification efforts within the community.

Master Plan/Recreation Plan Open House Events

Engagement from the City's residents is needed when prioritizing the care and maintenance of the City's parks and recreation facilities. Input from the people who use the facilities assists the City with establishing maintenance priorities and ensuring that resources are allocated accordingly. On October 11, 2022 and November 1, 2022, the planning commission conducted open houses regarding master plan topics including recreational planning.

The following is a summary of the input provided by community members at those public open houses:

- Evaluate the operations and management of Kestner Park, including but not limited to expanded seasonal recreational activities, public access changes, and equipment replacement/maintenance.
- Continue to engage the community and seek public input on the Lakeshore Drive Corridor Concept.
- Consider opportunities for improvements like year-round restrooms and children's play areas along the waterfront trail.
- Improved maintenance and accessibility for outdoor summer recreational opportunities including basketball courts, natural areas, and playgrounds.
- Consider opportunities for additional parks and recreational amenities such as dog parks and pickleball courts.

Advance notice for these open house events was published in the Daily Mining Gazette, posted on the City's website and Facebook page, and mailed to all city residents.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The City's parks and recreational facilities provide a wide range of opportunities for the public to experience nature, gather with family, exercise, and convene with other residents. It's widely recognized that parks and recreational facilities benefit a community in a variety of ways and contribute to the overall health of the City and its residents. Through recreational planning the City of Houghton seeks to enhance the quality of life for residents, neighbors, and visitors through accessible and unique recreational opportunities by embracing our natural surroundings, promoting a healthy and active community, and conserving our natural and cultural resources.

The City's coordination of the care, maintenance, and continued development of these properties requires a thoughtful and intentional plan as well as financial forecasting that extends 3-5 years. Beyond the financial and physical resources committed by the City, a conceptual understanding of each facility's attributes and evaluation of key metrics such as walkability, accessibility, and affordability also contribute to the goals and objectives for each. Walkability ensures that our recreational spaces are within a comfortable distance for as many residents as possible, promoting active lifestyles and a stronger sense of community. Accessibility is paramount as we strive to make recreational activities inclusive and available to all, regardless of age, ability, or income.

In general, the goals for the parks and recreation in the City are defined by its natural landscape and neighborhoods. There is the hillside extending north from Sharon Avenue to the Downtown Business District, the waterfront defined by miles of the Keweenaw Waterway, and the natural/undeveloped areas intertwined throughout. These areas are largely defined by the residents and visitors who share in the use of each area. Statistics related to the demographics and population concentrations within each area are certainly a consideration when prioritizing city resources, but the placement and shape of these facilities is built upon decades of planning and understanding the value of having desirable areas set aside for the public. Given the complexity of the parks and recreational system, the City will evaluate opportunities for establishing a staff position for a Recreation Director.

The following outlines the City's goals for developing and maintaining our existing parks and recreational infrastructure.

SPECIFIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1 - Facility Maintenance and Improvement

Parks are maintained to provide clean, safe, attractive, and functional environments.

OBJECTIVES

1. Replace/upgrade aging park facilities and equipment.
2. Remove barriers to universal access.
3. Refurbish athletic fields and parking/pavement surfaces.
4. Provide training and education for personnel to ensure regulatory compliance and improve employee productivity.
5. Provide signage in each park with a consistent message to assist the public in understanding the purpose and use of the park.
6. Enhance park maintenance through increased weeding, tree pruning, and general park upkeep.
7. Plant trees and shrubs to create shade and supplement landscaped areas.

Goal 2 - Property and Land Management

Community recreational needs are responded to by evaluating property transactions, community service areas, usage of future and existing parks and recreational facilities.

OBJECTIVES

1. Evaluate and consider opportunities for the development of new and expansion of existing recreational facilities.
2. Pursue grants, fundraising, and other funding opportunities that benefit and enhance our existing recreational properties.
3. Maximize the utilization of properties and their respective square footage to ensure that community recreational needs are being appropriately managed.
4. Evaluate and assess current recreational properties to ensure that the services that are provided continue to be appropriate based on local and regional developments.
5. Integrate recreational facility considerations into city infrastructure projects to ensure that long-term cost savings are captured through economies of scale.
6. Consider collaborating with other local units of government to provide improved recreational opportunities for citizens.

Goal 3 - Natural Resource Management and Sustainability

Best practices and planning considerations are utilized when developing and maintaining parks while specifically addressing soil erosion, watershed management, and wetland/wildlife protection.

OBJECTIVES

1. Incorporate sustainable design considerations into existing recreational properties and future park development opportunities.
2. Promote and integrate the planting of native vegetation within the park system with an eye towards pollutant reduction.
3. Create natural stormwater management systems and other green infrastructure, such as rain gardens and swales with native grasses.
4. Minimize non-porous surfaces such as roads, parking lots, and paved trails.
5. Minimize land disturbance during construction activities to ensure that native soils and vegetation remain intact and reduce susceptibility to erosion.
6. Plant trees and shrubs to create shade and supplement landscaped areas.

Goal 4 - Accessibility and Connectivity

Existing infrastructure is improved to ensure that parks and recreation opportunities are accessible and compliant, but also interconnected to make it safe and convenient for the community to walk and bike.

OBJECTIVES

1. Prioritize and implement accessibility improvements based on community input and documented shortfalls.
2. Ensure that accessibility is incorporated into park improvements and development, including but not limited to landscaping, equipment, and signage.
3. While considering seasonal availability, incorporate stops within the parks and recreational system into public transportation routes.
4. Incorporate "Complete Street" philosophies and best practices into planned infrastructure improvements and community development.
5. Continue to partner and pilot enhancements related to pedestrian, bicycle, and waterborne accessibility to the community parks and recreation system.

6. Connect recreational opportunities in the City to each other and to recreational opportunities in neighboring communities.
7. Provide more recreational opportunities for all residents, especially those between the ages of 18 and 24, which is the largest demographic in the City.

Goal 5 - Community Programming and Wellness

Partner and build relationships on a continuing basis that foster community and recreational programming, while also maintaining existing programs and events developed around social engagement.

OBJECTIVES

1. Enhance availability of recreational facilities to accommodate external recreational programs.
2. Continue to sponsor and host public events that foster community and personal well-being.
3. Continue to sponsor and host community education and youth events.
4. Incorporate fitness and advocate for active lifestyles.
5. Continue to sponsor and support local and regional sporting events.

ACTION PROGRAM

The action program further details how the goals and objectives will be met. It includes a list of desired improvements which can be considered as long-term projects to be accomplished for each park or facility. In addition to the facility-specific improvements, there are also several overarching concepts that will be instrumental in driving the changes proposed in the following subsections

- **Community Trail Network** – The objectives defined under *Goal 4 – Accessibility and Connectivity* will be partially achieved by developing a continuous trail system around the City limits. The proposed system will connect existing individual trail sections and park components and provide users with multiple points across several different topographies to access the entire trail system.
- **Prioritization Strategy and Facilities Maintenance Plan** – *Goal 1 – Facility Maintenance and Improvements* is a relatively straightforward concept; however, parks and recreation staff routinely have to make funding and resource allocation decisions to ensure that the facilities are safe and well-maintained. Developing a planning document will assist city personnel in the decision-making process by prioritizing improvement efforts and standardizing maintenance activities.
- **Sustainable Development and Biodiversity** – Areawide flooding in the

spring of 2018 and blight caused by pests such as the emerald ash borer have created a renewed awareness of our environment and natural surroundings. Reactive maintenance can be costly to our community, diverting funds away from potential improvements and development. *Goal 3 – Natural Resource Management and Sustainability* will be incorporated into planning considerations while developing and maintaining parks in an effort to minimize long-term economic and aesthetic impacts to the community.

With the aforementioned strategies in place, each park-specific improvement will benefit by being developed under similar guidance and uniform decision making. The intention is to create a more cohesive park system that is linked and integrated into the community it serves.

DESIRED IMPROVEMENTS

The improvements summarized below incorporate changes that have been proposed or requested by the community as well as facility and/or infrastructure improvements recommended by the City and its consultants. These proposed improvements represent the long-term vision for each park/facility, but also satisfy the overall goals and objectives established for the parks and recreation department.

The following subsections outline the desired improvements for each facility based on the goals and objectives defined in the preceding section. Proposed improvements for each facility are summarized in a tabular format that includes the targeted goals, a potential project development schedule, costs, and funding source scenarios to implement the suggested enhancement. Ultimately, the projects and the desired implementation schedule will be dependent upon available funding and resources.

A desired improvement which has been requested during the 2024 Master Plan revision process is the addition of dedicated pickleball courts within the City or in cooperation with Michigan Tech. While potential for pickleball courts as an added element in 34 existing parks is mentioned as a possible option, the City may also want to explore creating a dedicated outdoor area or one possibly within a building for four-season use. The matter was thought important enough for inclusion as a goal in the City's recreation planning, though the best location may not fall under any of the specific parks in the current inventory. Until a suitable location can be determined, the goals for such a future project are outlined below:

Houghton Pickleball Facility (Future)

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 2 GOAL 5	• Development of seasonal outdoor pickleball courts	2025	\$200,000	General, DNR, Fundraising
	• Enclosure of seasonal courts for year-round use	2027	\$600,000	General, DNR, Fundraising

Woodhaven Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 5	• Development of an outdoor ice rink	2028	\$25,000	General
	• Add pickleball courts to the rink area in the summer months	2028	\$8,000	General, Fundraiser

West Houghton Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 5	• Outdoor rink improvements	2024	\$10,000	General
	• Build a roof over the ice rink.	2026	\$200,000	General, DNR
	• Add pickleball courts to the rink area in the summer months	2025	\$8,000	General, Fundraiser
	• Repair/replace fencing	2024	\$ 10,000	General
	• Repair/replace lighting	2024	\$ 20,000	General
	• Repair/replace signage	2024	\$ 2,000	General

Kestner Park and Chutes and Ladders

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 3 GOAL 4 GOAL 5	Cut and fill to re-establish grades to Chutes and Ladders to reduce erosion and improve access	2027	\$30,000	General
	Incorporate a seasonal "splash park" into the park infrastructure	2025	\$100,000	General, Rotary, DNR
	Replace more picnic tables with tables featuring a barrier free end to accommodate wheelchairs	Ongoing	\$5,000	General
	Expand Chutes and Ladders to provide an accessible area using Universal Design principles	2024	\$ 125,000	General, DNR
	Concession building improvements	2027	\$ 25,000	General

Lakeshore Drive Boardwalk

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 3	Boat launch and mooring area require resurfacing	2025	\$50,000	General
	Wood dock/boardwalk heavy maintenance	2027	\$250,000	General, DNR
	Mooring area enhancements	2028	\$200,000	General, DNR

Waterfront Trail

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 2 GOAL 3 GOAL 4 GOAL 5	Erect a series of exercise stations	2024 2025 2026 2027 2028	\$20,000 \$20,000 \$20,000 \$20,000 \$20,000	General
	Relocation of snowmobile trail to establish a four-season trail	2028	\$1,000,000	General, DNR, MDOT
	Connect to the Sharon Avenue bike lane with a trail along Huron Creek	2025	\$1,000,000	General
	Connect the Nara Nature Park with a bridge over, or tunnel under, U.S. 41	2028	\$1,200,000	General, DNR
	Collaborate with Michigan Tech to create improved connectivity to campus and to implement trail safety improvements along the campus waterfront	2028	\$100,000	General
	Provide well-established connection between the RV Park and trailhead	2024 2027 2028	\$25,000 \$80,000 \$80,000	General

Veterans Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 3 GOAL 5	Replacement of trees, including an increase in species diversity	2026	\$200,000	General, Grants
	Continue to coordinate with veteran organizations to create enhancements	Ongoing	\$350,000	General, Veteran Orgs

Bridgeview Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 3 GOAL 5	• Establish a series of finger piers	2025	\$200,000	General, DNR
	• Major boardwalk maintenance	2027	\$350,000	General, DNR

Bridge Street Basketball Courts

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 3 GOAL 4 GOAL 5	• Incorporate restroom facilities and a drinking fountain into the park	2025	\$75,000	General, DNR
	• Add seating and natural features adjacent to the basketball courts	2026	\$5,000	General

Central Houghton Greenspace Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 3	• Protect from erosion	Ongoing	Varies	General, DNR
	• Add seating and interpretive signage	2026	\$5,000	General

East Houghton Greenspace Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 3	• Protect from erosion	Ongoing	Varies	General, DNR
	• Add seating and interpretive signage	2028	\$5,000	General

Central Houghton Dog Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1	Establish a dog park in Central Houghton	2026	\$15,000	General

Houghton Waterfront Pier

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 3 GOAL 5	Add shade elements	2025	\$50,000	General, DDA
	Add outdoor fireplaces	2025	\$40,000	General, DDA
	Construct year-round restroom facilities	2026	\$150,000	General, DDA
	Add a seasonal bandshell	2027	\$100,000	General, DDA

Dee Stadium

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 5	Install elevator	2025 2026	\$200,000 \$200,000	General, DNR, Fundraising
	Remodel entrance and lobby	2026	\$150,000	General, DNR, Fundraising
	Locker room expansion	2027	\$150,000	General, DNR, Fundraising
	Improve seating area	2028	\$150,000	General, DNR, Fundraising

Franklin Square and Mott Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 3 GOAL 4	• Enhance the usability of Mott Park with accessibility improvements	2026	\$20,000	General, MDOT
	• Increase plantings of flowers and trees	2025	\$20,000	General
	• Incorporate benches and tables	2026	\$5,000	General

Houghton Skatepark

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 2 GOAL 4	• Monitor initial operations to develop recommended improvements	2025	\$2,500	General
	• Adding lighting and “tot” lot	2026	\$25,000	General, Fundraising
		2027	\$25,000	
		2028	\$25,000	
	• Construct next phase(s)	2027	\$150,000	DNR, Fundraising
	• Incorporate seating	2028	\$15,000	General, Fundraising

East Houghton Waterfront Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 3	• Improve docks	2027	\$50,000	General, DNR
	• Monitor and maintain shoreline	Ongoing	Varies	General, DNR

College Avenue Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1	Provide trash receptacles, a dog waste station, and equitable sitting areas	2025	\$5,000	General

Recreational Boating Facilities:

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 3	Construct convenient transient docking stations that provide electricity, etc.	2027 2028	\$100,000 \$50,000	General, DNR

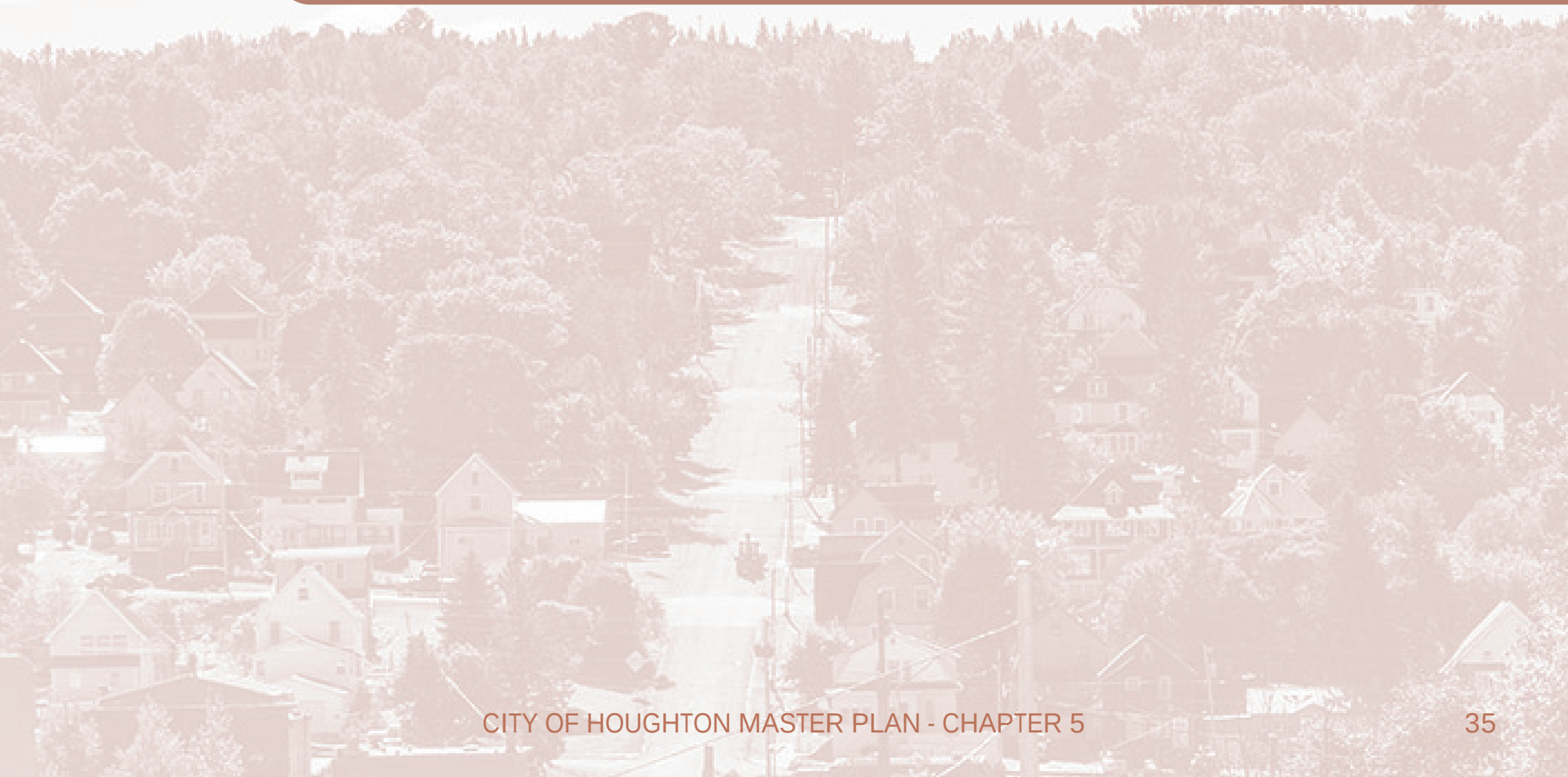
Garnet Street Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 4	Resurface tennis courts and fix fencing along Seventh Avenue	2024	\$30,000	General
	Add pickleball court to the tennis court	2024	\$2,000	General, Fundraising
	Define sidewalk from parking area to playground	2025	\$15,000	General
	Increase accessibility along the hillside between the tennis courts and playground	2025	\$50,000	General, DNR

Nara Nature Park

APPLICABLE GOALS	PROPOSED PROJECT	PROJECTED COMPLETION TIMEFRAME	ESTIMATED COST	FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1 GOAL 3 GOAL 5	Build bridge over Peepsock Creek	2026	\$75,000	General, DNR
	Connect Nara Nature Park to the Portage Lake Golf Course with a bridge over the Pilgrim River	2028	\$1,200,000	General, MDOT, DNR
	Connect the Nara Nature Park with a bridge over, or tunnel under, U.S. 41	2028	\$1,200,000	General, DNR, MDOT
	Collaborate with Portage and Chassell townships and DNR to improve old railway trail between Houghton and Chassell	Ongoing	--	General, DNR, MDOT

NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING



City residents desire neighborhoods that are attractive, well maintained, friendly, and affordable. Houghton's expansive park system, proximity to highly-ranked K-12 schools, a university and a community college, shopping, and employment create a community with strong and diverse housing demand. Each of the City's neighborhoods has its own unique sense of place as described by these general geographical boundaries:

Downtown Houghton

Downtown Houghton features apartments above retail shops lining Shelden Avenue and a mix of building types along Montezuma Avenue. Apartments are populated mostly by Michigan Tech students and senior citizens.

- Living downtown is attractive to those seeking proximity to restaurants and shops, the waterfront, and Michigan Tech.
- Removal of the 1978 era parking deck created opportunities to revitalize the Lakeshore Drive corridor, adding to downtown ambiance.
- While not to the extent of "big city downtown living," apartment living in downtown Houghton provides a different pace and lifestyle than a traditional house/yard setting.
- Heritage Manor and The Douglass House provide affordable housing for residents with lower incomes.

Waterfront

The residential waterfront corridor is divided into three parts.

- West Lakeshore Drive from the Kestner Waterfront Park to the lift bridge is a single strip of owner-occupied houses, several rental units, and businesses.
- East Lakeshore Drive contains two large apartment buildings, five mining-era rental houses, and several newer owner-occupied waterfront houses to the border of Michigan Tech's campus.
- East of Michigan Tech is the Isle Royale Sands location made up of relatively new owner-occupied houses and a five-building apartment complex.



HIGHLIGHTS

- Between 2010 and 2020, the population of Houghton grew by 682 residents (8.85%).
- The City offers a variety of housing options, whether it be the congeniality and convenience of a downtown apartment, a quiet waterfront townhome, a modern apartment in a residential area, an older home in a well-established neighborhood, or a newer home constructed on a larger lot in a more suburban setting.
- Consistent with national trends, aging-in-place and multi-generational living have created a growing interest in renting or purchasing dwellings that meet those needs.
- The number of short-term rentals is growing at a fast pace, which is consistent with national trends.
- The supply of and demand for housing of all types continues to be a factor affecting living in the City.
- New single- and multi-household construction continues to occur throughout the City.
- Houghton's place as a regional center naturally bolsters property values, sales, and rentals in the City as people generally desire to live close to employment, school, shopping, and recreational opportunities.
- Michigan Tech continues to influence the diversity of the City's neighborhoods.
- A significant majority of respondents to the 2022 Quality of Life Survey reported somewhat or extreme satisfaction with their neighborhood.

West Houghton

West Houghton, located between Bridge Street and M-26, contains a mixture of houses constructed primarily prior to 1960. The area includes owner-occupied and rental houses as well as rental complexes.

- A pedestrian tunnel under highway M-26 provides year-round safe and convenient access to Kestner Waterfront Park and to the trailhead of the waterfront trail. The West Houghton Neighborhood Park includes an outdoor ice rink, basketball and pickleball courts and playground equipment. The elementary school is within walking distance.
- Many houses are on single, smaller lots. Off-street parking spaces are limited. The closeness of residential structures encourages neighbors to get to know each other.

Central Houghton

This area, roughly between Bridge Street and Franklin Street, contains older houses, new townhouses, and apartment complexes.

- This area is close to downtown, providing residents with walking access to shopping and services. This area also includes the Pewabic Street Community Garden, of which many Houghton residents are members.
- This neighborhood has the traditional smaller lots as in West Houghton but also contains areas developed later in the 20th century with larger lots and a significant amount of green space between some lots due to bedrock outcroppings.
- The privately run Arbor Green and Copper Hills Apartments provide affordable housing for lower income residents.

East Houghton

East Houghton is located near the Michigan Tech campus from Franklin Square to MacInnes Drive. This area includes mining-era houses, mostly serving as rentals, post-1960 owner-occupied houses, and a number of relatively recent 8- to 12-unit apartments.

- The neighborhood is made up of several zoning districts (R-1, R-3, R-4, B-1, and B-2). Residents have multiple housing options as well as grocery and dining businesses within the neighborhood.

MacInnes Drive – Campus Corridor

Historically defined by institutional facilities and parking lots, this relatively small area features new private residential apartment developments that have significantly increased the population density. The City, in cooperation with Michigan Tech, has responded by improving sidewalk access along Upland Road and Fairview Avenue to complement the private developments. These apartments draw students who do not live in university residence halls closer to the campus, thus encouraging non-motorized mobility and reducing reliance on automobiles.

M-26 Subdivisions

Developed post-1985, this area west of the state highway M-26 commercial corridor contains relatively large residential lots with ample off-street parking. Most houses are owner occupied. The area includes an assisted living complex and aging-in-place duplexes.

- This area features suburban neighborhoods with larger houses on larger lots and some cul-de-sacs. It includes a playground, and the area is connected to the M-26 business district by a paved walking trail. A private subdivision along West Sharon Avenue has available lots.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

The geographic areas summarized in the preceding section provide a brief history and current summary of the housing stock in each neighborhood. The breakdown, however, does little to describe the opinions or observations of residents about their neighborhoods. The results of the 2022 Quality of Life Survey include the following level of satisfaction with neighborhoods.

	<u>Somewhat or Extremely Satisfied</u>
Building exterior appearance	66%
City maintenance	66%
Community environment	76%
Feeling of security	88%
Peaceful environment	83%

Short- and long-term rentals are regulated by the City. In the single-household neighborhoods, short-term rentals must be owner-occupied and attached to the primary dwelling. In other neighborhoods, non-owner-occupied short-term rentals are allowed. While 75 percent of Quality-of-Life Survey respondents reported they were extremely satisfied, satisfied, or neutral about rentals, they continue to be a concern for 25 percent of respondents.

The single defining aspect of a “neighborhood” is that it features residents who know, trust, and mutually support each other. Doing so nurtures a sense of security, belonging, and meaning. While enforcement of various ordinances pertaining to housing and social behavior is needed, the quality of neighborhoods also requires property owners and renters taking pride in where they live, embracing diverse points of view, and respecting each other.



MANAGING CHANGE

Pandemic social response produced significant changes. People live and work differently than they did just five years ago. Working from home is a recent major trend that is expected to persist. More retired persons are finding it desirable to “snow-bird,” spending at least a portion of the winter in warmer climates. Global connectivity and social interaction have created a digital marketplace that has changed how residents buy, rent, and lease property, both short- and long-term. The lending industry continues to respond based on fluctuating economic and financial market conditions, including eliminating some loan products and increasing requirements for down payments and credit scores, making home ownership more difficult for some first-time buyers.

The Michigan Tech 2022 Campus Master Plan includes a goal of growing enrollment from 7,000 students in 2023 to 10,000 students by 2030. Continuous growth will increase demand for off-campus housing and impact neighborhoods. Houghton welcomes a diverse population. The nature of urban living is changing, including a desire for urban farming that includes, for example, chickens, rabbits, and bees.

Several higher density multi-unit housing developments have been constructed in the City during the past five years, and new home construction remains steady at two or three per year. The pace of sales and rental conversions has increased substantially in the past three years. STRs have increased substantially and are limiting longer-term housing supply. The market factors include a combination of lending conditions mentioned above, Michigan Tech enrollment, availability of purpose-built apartment units, and overall rental unit availability in the general area, including outside of the City. Given the current conditions, the supply of the following housing types is limited compared to demand:

- Single-household dwellings available for rent or purchase
- Convenient apartment-style rental options for professionals and students
- Multi-household options that are occupied by student renters
- Independent retired/senior living, low-maintenance options for rent or ownership as a condominium

This and future master plans need to be cognizant of changes beyond the City's control. To that end, updating land use and zoning can help as mitigation measures. The City assists and manages development and redev-

elopment including possible rezoning of areas where the residents request changes or where the changing demographics and uses of property create a long-term need. Also, the City might encourage and allow redevelopment of underutilized properties that responsibly increases density and reduces impacts on infrastructure and services. Areas for development and redevelopment are discussed in Chapter 10.

HOUSING OPTIONS

The single-family housing market in Houghton remains strong. Competitively priced, well-kept houses that meet the needs of buyers do not remain on the market for long. The supply and demand for single-household dwellings with the regular recruitment and turnover at Michigan Tech and other local employers leads to steady sales each year.

Options are available for those who prefer to rent. Many rental houses are conducive to occupancy by a group or a single household. Rental units are interspersed throughout the neighborhoods amongst owner-occupied houses.

Developers have been testing the range of housing markets by constructing housing options on speculation at differing price points and building townhome-style apartments that offer more amenities than typical apartments, such as more interior space and an onsite garage.



Some housing options help meet the particular needs of residents:

- **Independent senior living** – dwellings for older adults who desire to leave their houses and continue an independent life in an easy-to-access and easy-to-maintain environment. As previously discussed, independent senior living options, especially owner occupied, are insufficient to meet the needs of the community.
- **Affordable housing** – The City is proactive in increasing the availability of affordable housing by:
 1. Encouraging the redevelopment of vacant buildings into mixed-use buildings with businesses on the first floor and apartments on remaining floors
 2. Identifying funding programs to assist with neighborhood revitalization
 3. Encouraging private developers to take advantage of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority's grant and loan programs to assist in creating new apartments for low- and moderate-income residents

Other housing options, beyond the traditional buying or renting of an existing single-household dwelling, are available:

- **New single-household construction** - Most of the available vacant lots for new single household housing construction are located on the Isle Royale Sands and in the neighborhoods west of M-26.
- **New multi-household construction** - Recent construction of multi-household dwellings has taken place near the Michigan Tech campus and on smaller redevelopment sites throughout the City.
- **Subsidized housing** - The Houghton Housing Commission has single-household homes and apartments for low-to-moderate income people as defined by the Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD). The Commission has 30 houses scattered throughout Houghton and 40 senior citizen apartments at Heritage Manor. Other rent-subsidized properties include the Douglass House Apartments downtown, Copper Hills Apartments, and Arbor Green.

NEIGHBORHOOD APPEARANCE

Aging housing stock and the level of attention to upkeep in some neighborhoods present challenges in uniform maintenance of properties to desirable standards. To address this issue, Section 3 of the International Property Maintenance Code, setting a minimum standard for the maintenance of building exteriors, was adopted as a city ordinance.

The City employs a code enforcement officer who routinely inspects properties, notifies owners of code violations and works with them to correct violations. This effort is intended to maintain a high-quality neighborhood appearance. Over the past decade those efforts have improved the overall appearance of the neighborhoods.

CHALLENGES

Diverse viewpoints, just like diverse people and households, make up our neighborhoods. With a variety of perspectives and evolving needs within our community, the following outlines some of the foreseeable challenges related to both the housing market and finding an acceptable balance of housing options for neighborhoods and the community as whole.

- Although a wide variety of housing options are available, there are shortages of suitable housing options for low- to moderate-income residents, senior citizens, and families looking for suitable rental options.
- Century-old houses (some without garages), topography, and multi-vehicle households combine to create a shortage of off-street parking, which is exacerbated during the winter months.
- Property maintenance is critical to the perceived quality of a neighborhood. Aging houses, costly repairs, and insufficient budgets can contribute to maintenance issues for property owners, regardless of whether the property is renter- or owner-occupied.
- Neighborhoods consist of a variety of people, assorted households, and diverse perspectives and viewpoints.
- Improving the quality of our neighborhoods is a community issue requiring the City, property owners, and renters to work together.
- The Michigan Tech goal of rapid growth combined with local population growth indicate that housing needs can be expected to shift in the coming years. Accordingly, the availability of housing options, parking, and rental conversions, and more efficient land use will continue to be community discussion topics.
- The City encourages open dialogue in the community and provides a number of outlets for residents to express their views. However, maintaining open communications between the City government and residents and among residents will always require attention.

GOALS

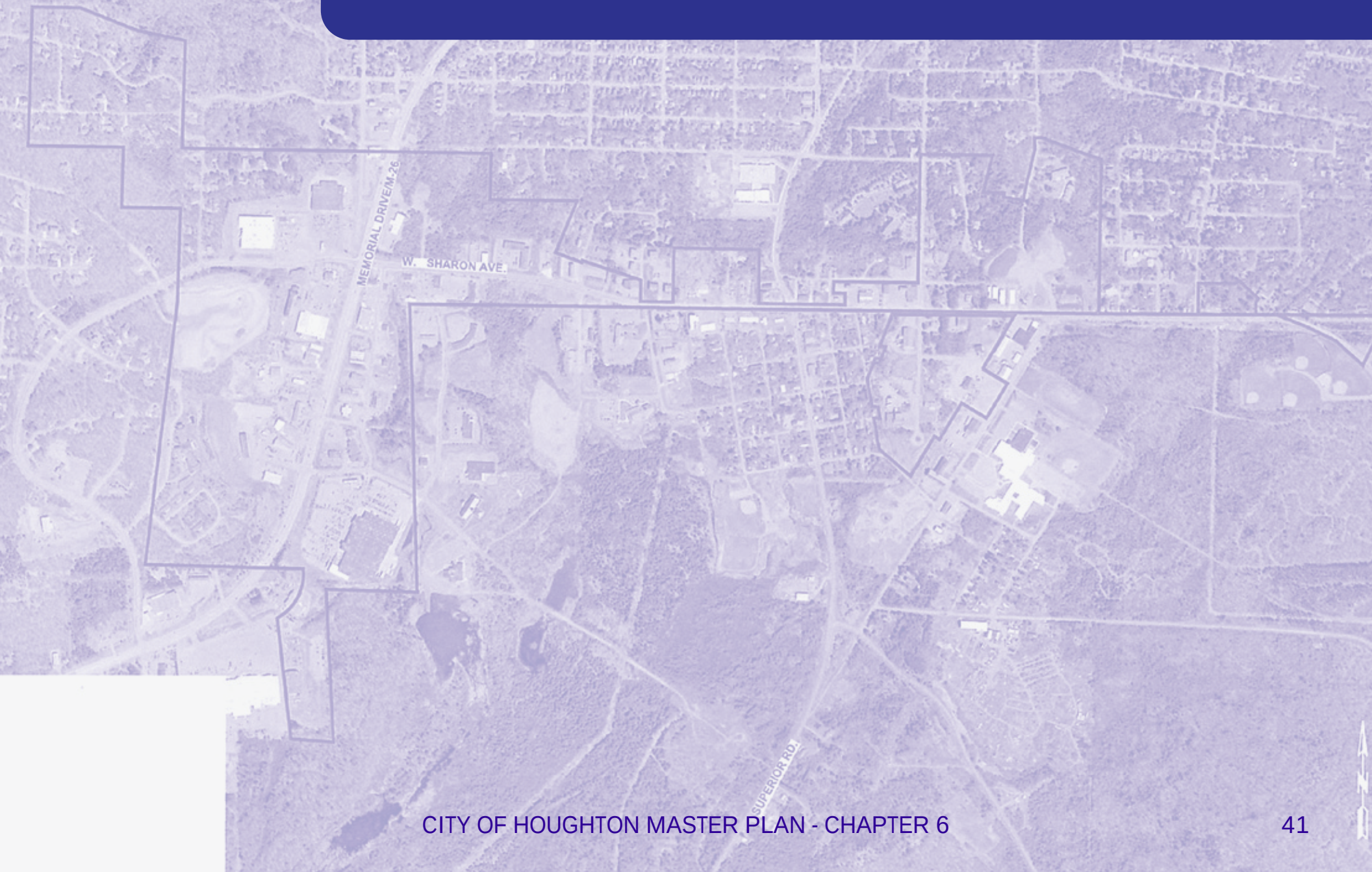
- Houghton is a sought-after place to live in the region.
- A wide range of housing options, along with public and private amenities that our diverse (socio-economic, age, family size) population desires, are available.
- Residential structures are regularly cared for as one means of improving neighborhood quality and increasing property values.
- Regular communications among residents and between residents and City government maintain open, positive relationships and a strong sense of community.

STRATEGIES

- Foster an increase in the supply of all housing types to meet demand.
- Consider making city-owned vacant land available for new construction.
- Consider allowing duplexes in neighborhoods currently restricted to single-household residences.
- Examine options for expanding accessory dwelling units.
- Encourage planned unit and multi-use development.
- Continue to work with and encourage developers to pursue a range of new construction and renovation options to serve changing market conditions and demands.
- Explore funding opportunities for neighborhood revitalization.
- Continue to diligently and consistently enforce ordinances.
- Encourage neighborhood socialization through neighborhood park improvement and promotion of such activities as block parties and community-wide events that build relationships across neighborhoods.
- Continue to work with Michigan Tech on planning for future impacts to neighborhoods close to the campus.
- Increase housing options for older adults who do not want the responsibility and physical challenges of residential home ownership.
- Continue to regularly review the zoning ordinance and zoning map and consider revisions that align with neighborhood and housing goals.



MOBILITY



HIGHLIGHTS

- The City's street and road system is anchored by two state highways that are primary regional transportation routes.
- Very steep street grades in Houghton create transportation infrastructure challenges.
- Providing safe, efficient, and accessible mobility for cyclists, motorists, and pedestrians is a high priority for the City.
- Planning initiatives, such as the Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School Programs, help the City in improving access, traffic flow, and safety on shared local roadways.
- Reconstruction of Townsend Drive and College Avenue improved traffic circulation, lighting, and safety of motorized and non-motorized traffic.
- Houghton's harsh winter climate creates challenges for maintaining roads and walkways in winter and contributes to the continual need for pavement maintenance.
- Bicycling for recreation, exercise, and commuting year-round has become commonplace.
- The City operates a successful public transit system and is collaborating with the City of Hancock and Michigan Tech to better serve the Cities' residents and students.
- Great Lakes cruise ships bringing tourists to the City is a re-emerging trend.

MOBILITY SYSTEM

The transportation network is a very complex program for the City to manage and maintain. Anchored by two state highways, the City is a transportation crossroads in the area that is further complicated by the presence of the Portage Lake Lift Bridge. The City also has a network of side streets providing access to residential and business neighborhoods.

- Sharon Avenue is a well-traveled alternate route, bypassing downtown while providing connectivity to the eastern and western limits of the City.
- With the removal of the 1978-era downtown parking deck, Lakeshore Drive between Huron and Quincy Streets will become a more important thoroughfare for motorized and non-motorized mobility.

The City's roads are the foundation of its transportation network; however, there are other mobility assets the City manages. These include sidewalks, bicycle paths, trails, and snowmobile routes that are well maintained, appropriately signed, and accessible to the public. The use of some sidewalks and bicycle paths during winter is problematic due to steep topography and extensive snowfall. A bus and van transit system is managed, operated, and maintained by the City.

Cultural shifts and economic factors influence the behavior and transportation needs of the community. For example, year-round bicycling has become more popular. Higher fuel costs may encourage carpooling, bicycling, or the use of the City's public transit system. Ride hailing such as Lyft and electric scooters are new trends that will need to be addressed.

Maintaining and growing the transportation network to facilitate mobility must be balanced with other needs of the community. This chapter addresses the state of the existing multi-modal transportation systems in the City and presents recommended goals, strategies, and improvements.

STATE HIGHWAYS

The State of Michigan oversees the two highways serving the City including signs, signals, crosswalks, and the Portage Lake Lift Bridge. U.S. 41 is integral to transportation in the region, serving as the primary thoroughfare through the City. The alignment of U.S. 41, oriented from east to west through town, is unique, as it features several distinct stretches of roadway shared by motorists. The following provides a summary of the U.S. 41 corridor as it passes through the City.

- **U.S. 41 – East** U.S. 41 is a typical two-lane highway east of the Michigan Tech campus, having paved shoulders but limited access for pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Speed limits along this stretch of U.S. 41 range from 45-55 miles per hour, increasing risks to pedestrians and bicycles that are limited to traveling along the narrow shoulders of the road. In addition, traffic on U.S. 41 hinders access to the waterfront Nara Nature Trail and boardwalks from the chalet on the south side of the highway.
- **U.S. 41 – Townsend Drive** As U.S. 41 enters the Michigan Tech campus, the speed limit decreases to 30 mph to accommodate students crossing the highway, and shoulders are replaced with sidewalks. The highway also transitions from a two-lane roadway to a divided highway. A center median improves pedestrian safety through the campus. The medians include turning lanes, improving the overall traffic flow in the area. The only traffic signal is at MacInnes Drive.

- **U.S. 41 – College Avenue** At the west end of campus, the highway again returns to two-way traffic. Lined with historic properties, College Avenue is home to large private residences, multi-family developments, fraternities, sororities, businesses and a church. College Avenue is flanked on the north and south sides by sidewalks and updated historically themed lighting. These well-traveled sidewalks along College Avenue serve as a primary walking and cycling route for commuters and students alike. Motorists use College Avenue for local access to north-south streets. There are no traffic signals or marked crosswalks.

College Avenue is the main thoroughfare linking the Michigan Tech campus and downtown Houghton. During 2021-23 MDOT completed a major rebuilding of Townsend Drive and College Avenue that extended the pedestrian islands from MacInnes Drive to Pearl Street to improve safety and added a center left turn lane on the College Avenue section to enhance safety and traffic flow.

U.S. 41 – Shelden Avenue At the west end of College Avenue, U.S. 41 enters downtown Houghton. The highway once again transitions from two-way traffic to a divided highway with one-way traffic west/northbound on Shelden Avenue and east/southbound on Montezuma Avenue. Shelden Avenue is vital in routing traffic through the downtown district. Similar to College Avenue, the sidewalks there provide foot traffic to the shops, service businesses, and eateries lining the roadway. Shelden Avenue is considered pedestrian friendly with well-marked and handicap-accessible crossings; however, the one-way pair of lanes presents challenges to pedestrian crossing in heavy traffic. The signal-controlled intersection at Isle Royale Street provides ample opportunity for pedestrians to cross safely with traffic stopped. Farther west, gaps in traffic are few during busy times with side street traffic entering Shelden. Montezuma Avenue runs parallel to the south side of downtown, where the speed limit is higher than on Shelden Avenue, requiring pedestrians and bicyclists to use extra caution. Riding bicycles is prohibited on sidewalks.

- **U.S. 41 – Montezuma Avenue** The City has had discussions with residents and MDOT about converting Montezuma Avenue into a two-way street. (Montezuma operated as a two-way street prior to 1970 and was temporarily configured for two-way traffic during the reconstruction of Shelden Avenue in 2008.) Three significant constraints relate to two-way traffic. First, a two-way Montezuma intersection at the south lift bridge approach, known as the Yooper Loop, would be impractical because of the extreme elevation changes and the fixed position of the Portage Lake Lift Bridge. Second, seven north-south streets leading to and from downtown intersect Montezuma. Making left turns across opposing traffic would be a safety concern while creating additional traffic congestion during busy periods. Third, with two-way traffic, pedestrian crossings would require increased caution. Currently, there is no plan to alter Montezuma Avenue traffic flow.
- **Highway M-26** runs west from the lift bridge bordering West Houghton and some Portage Township neighborhoods and leads to the well-traveled shopping corridor south to the City limits. Much of the area is accessible from Houghton neighborhoods via sidewalk or paved non-motorized path. The four M-26 crossing opportunities are traffic signal-controlled intersections at Sharon Avenue, Razorback Drive, and Green Acres Road and via the non-motorized tunnel near the Lakeshore Drive intersection. The tunnel under M-26 is a well-used crossing point that connects the bike boulevard and the West Houghton neighborhoods to the waterfront trails near Kestner Park. In August 2022 MDOT conducted a formal Roadway Safety Audit of M-26 from Green Acres Road in Portage Township to U.S. 41. Local officials, including the Houghton city manager and police chief, participated in meetings with MDOT staff. A final report with findings, recommendations, and potential alternative improvements was issued in September 2022. The alternatives ranged from revised traffic signs and pavement markings to a signalized intersection at Canal Road to geometry changes at key intersections. (*Final Report, Road Safety Audit, MDOT Superior Region, M-26 from Green Acres Road to US 41, Houghton County, September 2022.*)

MDOT sets the parameters for traffic lanes, intersections, speed limits, design and placement of traffic signals and signs, maintenance, snow removal policy, and street use for special events. The state reimburses the City for plowing and snow removal on both highways, which include Montezuma and Shelden Avenues in the downtown. These reimbursed funds are instrumental in the City's ability to maintain highly regarded winter road conditions.

In recent years there has been a more robust interest in the Portage Lake Lift Bridge, the lone crossing point for the Keweenaw Waterway centrally located in Houghton. One of the first items of interest was contingency planning in the event that the bridge was not usable for an extended period for some reason. The City participated in exhaustive planning including local, state, and federal officials to devise plans for supporting traffic flow until the bridge was back in service. More recently there has been a significant interest in exploring the construction of a second crossing of the Keweenaw Waterway. The City will remain involved in the study and planning of a second crossing as it, if constructed, will have profound effects on mobility and traffic in the region, especially in Houghton.

ROAD MAINTENANCE

The City's asset management software program rates the condition of its roads, forming the basis for the City's road maintenance program. Routine maintenance includes regularly scheduled preventive treatments such as street sweeping, drainage clearing, gravel shoulder grading, and sealing of tight cracks. Preventive maintenance consists of planned treatments applied to existing roads to retard further deterioration. Regular road paving projects to restore pavements at the end of their life are done as funds permit. The City has adopted a plan where small critical paving projects are completed annually and one large project encompassing a number of different streets is accomplished every few years, creating cost savings through economies of scale. Results from the 2022 Quality of Life Survey show that, even with the City's maintenance efforts, a majority of survey respondents believed the roads were not in good condition and are not well maintained.

NON-MOTORIZED MOBILITY

Walking and biking are increasingly popular throughout the City and are tightly linked to quality-of-life and economic development strategies. Cities that are walkable and bikeable encourage active and healthy lifestyles, resulting in a more vibrant community. In the portion of the 2022 Quality of Life Survey pertaining to biking, 40% of respondents said that bike paths were in good condition and 41% said they were well maintained.

The City's Non-Motorized Transportation Plan includes a set of goals and objectives to guide non-motorized improvements in the City, as well as an action plan to provide specific direction for achieving them, thereby improving conditions for cyclists and pedestrians.

There is a designated Bicycle Boulevard along Houghton Avenue providing a direct crosstown route between the M-26 tunnel and east Houghton Avenue near Michigan Tech. The route is painted with bicycle roadway-sharing arrows and wayfinding signs directing users to the best routes in the City.

The paved waterfront trail continues to be a well-traveled route for persons exercising and commuting, as well as simply enjoying the views and amenities along the trail. The trail serves as the lone snowmobile route to the lift bridge in winter, requiring other users to take to the road. The trail is an important feature of Houghton's waterfront, and consideration should continue to develop it in such a way as it can meet the needs of multiple stakeholders year-round.



COMPLETE STREETS AND SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

The City's Complete Streets Ordinance, enacted in 2010, states when a street is constructed or reconstructed, the City or the developer will provide appropriate accommodation where practical for motorists and non-motorists. The Ordinance is being followed.

The City worked closely with the Houghton-Portage Township School District and the Western Upper Peninsula Health Department to complete the Safe Routes to School Plan. This 2011 plan recommends the installation of sidewalks on Second, Agate, Portage, Dodge, Bridge, and Fourth Streets as well as Jacker Avenue, all with year-round maintenance. It also recommends the installation of traffic calming and pedestrian safety islands at the intersections of Sharon Avenue and Gundlach Road, Sharon Avenue and Dodge Street, and Sharon Avenue and Military Road. Additional recommendations include increased lighting along designated routes and bus stops, together with educating pedestrians and drivers about sharing the road. Improvements have been implemented on MacInnes Drive, Portage Street, and Military Road. This initiative will continue as opportunities arise.

While there are many challenges related to snowfall, narrow streets, and steep slopes, the City recognizes the value of sidewalks as a means to encourage walking and cycling and to enhance social interaction in neighborhoods.



PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

At the present time, the only municipal bus services available in Houghton County is in the cities of Houghton and Hancock with each city offering its own service. In 2023, the Cities of Houghton and Hancock received an MDOT grant to study how to increase efficiency, improve service, possibly combine their public transit systems, and also possibly expand service to include surrounding communities. The study will be conducted in 2024.

Houghton Public Transit provides approximately 41,000 rides annually. Seniors make up about 34 percent of the ridership. Fixed routes and demand service are offered between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on weekdays. Current route information and schedules can be found on the City's website. A Citizen Advisory Committee assists administration. The City uses two buses of various sizes and six vans with four full-time and some part-time drivers. It is difficult to find qualified drivers who possess the CDL license, which is necessary to operate a bus. The combination of vans and buses reduces the need for drivers with a CDL license.

The 2022 Quality of Life Survey reported that 86% of respondents have never used Houghton Public Transit. But for those who have, 81% are satisfied with frequency of service and 86% are satisfied with fares. A 2022 MDOT survey showed favorable approval ratings among riders. Among those who have never used the service, 43% cited stops are not being convenient, and 30% were unaware of the service. These issues may be addressed by the MDOT-funded study.

Funding for transit system operating service in a typical year comes from the federal government (19%), state government (35%), the City general fund (29%), and the fare box (17%). The purchase of buses and vans is funded entirely from federal and state capital grants.

RAILROAD

There are currently no active rail lines within or leading to the City. However, a CN line runs to Baraga, 25 miles south of Houghton. The state owns the rail corridor in the City.

PORT

The City maintains a dock just west of the Portage Lake Lift Bridge for large-vessel mooring. It can accommodate vessels up to 500 feet in length. Cruise ships, the United States Coast Guard, and other large ships often use this dock. In 2022 the City completed a Downtown Pier that can accommodate vessels up to 350 feet in length. The Ranger III, owned by the National Park Service, docks at the Isle Royale National Park Headquarters downtown. These port facilities facilitate waterborne tourism, a growing industry on the Great Lakes that benefits the City.

AIR TRANSPORTATION

SkyWest Airlines, a United Airlines regional affiliate, currently serves Houghton County Memorial Airport with two flights per day to and from Chicago O'Hare International Airport under the Federal Essential Air Service program. Fifty-passenger turbojet aircraft currently are being flown on this route. Occasional passenger charters and daily express shipments are provided by other commercial operators. The airport also accommodates general aviation. As of January 2023, 22 single-engine aircraft were based at the airport. Isle Royale Seaplane Service is a private entity that provides seasonal flights to and from Isle Royale National Park.

TAXI AND RIDE HAILING SERVICE

Licensed taxis provide transportation in and around the City, and ride hailing service is available.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATIONS

The City has two public EV Charging Stations downtown on the parking deck at the Sheldon Avenue and Isle Royale Street intersection that were provided through a grant. The City will continue to pursue additional EV infrastructure.

GOALS

- Houghton is characterized by efficient, accessible, safe, and well-maintained multi-modal mobility throughout the City that recognizes pedestrians, bicycles, motor vehicles, and public parking.
- In keeping with a recent urban planning trend, Complete Streets are part of the City's ecological fabric that integrates green stormwater management infrastructure alongside a range of mobility options.
- The City's Non-Motorized Transportation Plan is up to date.
- There is growth in the extent of trails, bike paths, and walking paths that can be used as all-season routes for recreation, commuting, and general wellness.
- The City maintains the quality of existing roads, sidewalks, bicycle paths, and trails.
- New roads are planned and constructed as needed to support development.
- Port and shoreline infrastructure is expanded based on tourism and cruise ship industry trends.



STRATEGIES

Non-Motorized

- Continue to apply the Complete Streets Ordinance when constructing new roads and making renovations to existing roads.
- Investigate and accomplish measures to improve pedestrian road crossing safety throughout the City.
- Install road stencils and signs for bike routes.
- Focus attention on adding sidewalks in a coordinated manner in established neighborhoods that do not have them.
- Link the waterfront trail to the Michigan Tech campus at the top of Cliff Drive.
- Investigate and implement ways to improve walking and biking during winter months.
- Collaborate with the Bike and Pedestrian Committee to plan and implement projects.
- Work to continue to add and improve Safe Routes to School.
- Continue to implement wayfinding for all forms of non-motorized mobility throughout the City.
- Obtain ownership of the rail corridor within the City and maintain the trail easement.

Motorized

- Explore the possible extension of Cedar Street from Razorback Drive east to Main Street between Hurontown and Dodgeville as another east-west connection for City and Portage Township residents.
- Continue to monitor motor vehicle speeds in the City.
- Pave and maintain local streets as funds become available.
- Assess public parking and related vehicular circulation.
- Coordinate with MDOT to implement enhanced traffic safety measures on trunk line highways within the City.
- Continue with the asset management rating system to evaluate road conditions.
- Monitor the continuing development and use of emerging technologies and systems, including autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles, electric scooters, drone deliveries, and ride hailing. Take into account their potential impacts on city infrastructure.

Public Transportation

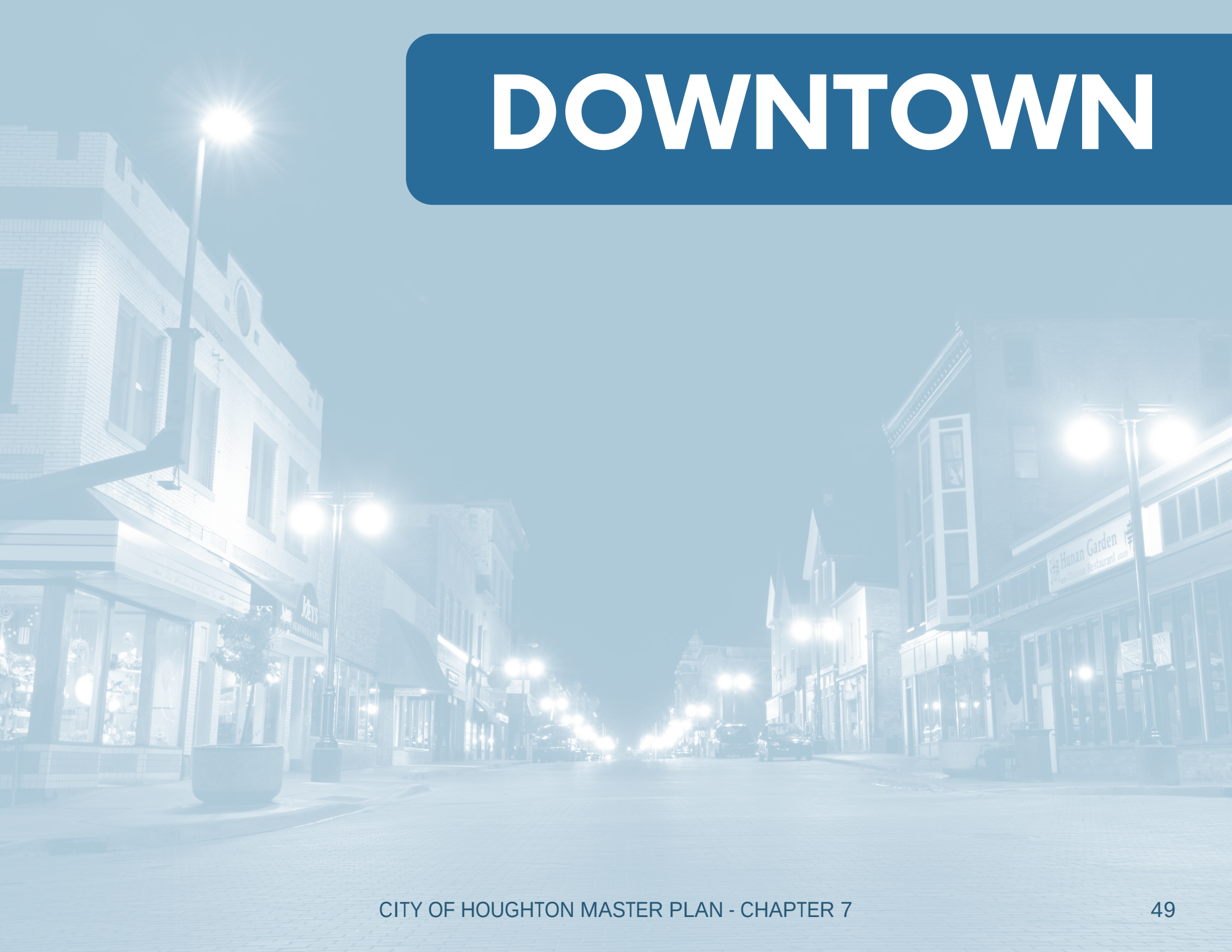
- Participate with the City of Hancock and MDOT in the MDOT-funded study of combining Houghton and Hancock's transit systems and pursue ways to implement recommendations.
- Explore ways to better coordinate the City's public transportation with Michigan Tech's student-focused shuttle bus routes.
- Look for ways to enhance the coordination of public transit service with walking and biking.
- Follow nationwide transit developments that may be useful in the City, including apps for hand-held devices that display bus routes, schedules, and real-time locations, and enable electronic payment of fares.

Port and Shoreline Infrastructure

- Make improvements to port and shoreline infrastructure including docks, piers, and supporting facilities as needed.



DOWNTOWN



FOCUS ON DOWNTOWN

Our downtown is an indicator of the City's overall health and well-being for businesses and visitors, as well as a source of pride for residents. Downtown is a place where people meet, eat, shop, and work. It is a place to hold festivals and parades and conduct business. Houghton will continue to place emphasis on maintaining and improving its downtown, as it has always been an important part of our identity as a community.

With ever-changing consumer trends, the rise and fall of the shopping mall concept, and a rekindled longing for a sense of community and place as part of daily life, downtown has become a place of renewed focus for community planners. This focus has resulted in dozens of recent public and private projects to start new businesses, rehabilitate buildings, and create attractive places. Many of these projects have been able to leverage state and federal funding.

Houghton will continue to invest resources into maintaining a healthy, vibrant downtown. Past efforts continue to pay off with relatively high occupancy rates, stable/growing property values, new private investment, and a multitude of patrons enjoying what downtown offers. Past investment by the City in acquiring waterfront property for public use has paid dividends in the support of our downtown.

BLUEPRINT FOR GROWTH

Growth is not a natural evolution; it requires planning and resources and by definition entails change. In 1983 the City established a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to finance public improvement projects in downtown Houghton. The DDA District boundaries are the Keweenaw Waterway to the north, Franklin Square to the east, the Kestner Waterfront Park to the west, and south along Montezuma Avenue, including the frontage properties 100 feet to the south. The DDA financing mechanism allows for the capture of the incremental growth of local property taxes over a period of time to fund public infrastructure improvements in the district. It also provides a mechanism to borrow against the future tax increments to fund large-scale projects, which can lead to new development within the downtown.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Downtown Houghton is home to a variety of businesses, shops, restaurants, and gathering places as well as apartments and houses.
- Downtown Houghton encompasses Franklin Square to Kestner Waterfront Park and Montezuma Avenue to the waterfront. It contains the Sheldon Avenue Historic District, placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987.
- The businesses of the downtown area provide a multitude of employment opportunities; including two business incubators associated with the Michigan Tech Enterprise Corporation SmartZone.
- Downtown Houghton is currently home to more than 400 residents, many of whom reside in apartments on the upper stories in mixed-use buildings. This number is likely to increase with developers meeting the growing demand for housing in the downtown area.
- Since 2006, more than \$40 million has been invested in the downtown area, including \$18 million in public grants for façade improvements, marketing, placemaking, utilities, and building acquisition and rehabilitation. The City invested \$7 million, with private investment of \$15 million.
- Houghton's 4.5 mile waterfront trail connects downtown with all of the City's waterfront parks. When snow-covered, the trail serves as part of the area's snowmobile trail system.
- The Houghton Business Association assists with marketing and special events for the downtown area.
- Downtown special events include the Parade of Nations, Bridgefest, Treat Street, seasonal events, the Farmers Market, and dozens of live musical performances.
- Dee Stadium is the documented birthplace of organized professional hockey.
- There are approximately 1,100 public and 500 private parking spaces downtown.
- Sheldon Avenue sees an average of around 10,000 vehicles daily.

Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) grants and city funds have been used for many projects to construct, rebuild, and refurbish many downtown structures. In 2005, the City took part in the Blueprints for Michigan Downtowns—a partnership effort of the MEDC, Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), the Michigan Municipal League (MML), and local representatives—developed to assist downtown revitalization efforts. Hyett-Palma, Inc., completed the Houghton Downtown Blueprint Strategy. In the following years, the City completed numerous improvements, which include the following:

- Lakeshore Drive underwent a significant utility upgrade project in 2017, funded by MEDC and the City. The project scope included replacing the pavement and many sidewalks along with water and sewer. Improvements have allowed the area to continue to evolve from its historical role as a side street to a contemporary downtown featuring specialty businesses and modern, affordable living space.
- In 2021, the City partnered again with MEDC on the Pier Placemaking Project to construct a large waterfront gathering space in the center of downtown. This project was completed in 2022 and further improved connectivity between Shelden Avenue, Lakeshore Drive and the waterfront. This new asset now provides ample space to host community events in the heart of downtown.
- The City achieved certification in 2021 as a Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) with MEDC. This statewide program is designed to certify a community as one that actively engages stakeholders in the planning process. RRC certification also signals to business owners, developers, and investors that a community has removed barriers to development by enacting deliberate, fair, and consistent processes to attract investment and create thriving places where people will want to live, work, and play.
- In 2023 the City embarked on an ambitious project to remove the 1978-era parking deck which dominated the downtown waterfront for many years and had become an unaffordable maintenance liability. Leveraging its investment in the demolition of the deck, the City was able to win a Revitalization and Placemaking Grant from MEDC to redevelop the deck property and streetscape corridor. The project further improved mobility between Shelden Avenue and the waterfront, created attractive new spaces where people gather, and made Lakeshore Drive a contributing downtown street.

PRESERVING THE PAST, PROMOTING THE PRESENT, LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Part of the charm of a downtown is paying homage to the legacy of the past while embracing growth and change. When historic building uses change, Houghton seeks to preserve their appeal, balanced with the needs of today and advances in design and planning.

The Shelden Avenue Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. The district encompasses the historic core of Houghton's central business district and contains 43 historic buildings. The 100-odd buildings downtown range in age from the 1870s to the 1980s, with a majority dating from the 1880s to 1920s. These buildings are the western Upper Peninsula's largest concentration of architecturally significant historic commercial buildings. Historically the structures housed retail stores, lodge halls, municipal facilities, a movie theater, warehouses, and a railroad passenger depot. Some of the more modern infill projects have created a contrast to the historic structures, but also attest to the value of rebuilding and being located in our downtown. Listing on the National Register provides access to some sources of funding for renovations that follow guidelines helping to preserve the historic character of the downtown.

Development within the downtown creates challenges because the buildings, structures, and boundaries are relatively fixed. Although the opportunities for the construction of new structures are limited, there have been significant reinvestments in existing building stock, both historic and some relatively new.

Establishing historic districts and registering buildings on state and federal registers not only preserves the past, but also encourages changes to the community that are consistent with the intent of preservation. Federal funding sources typically require review of projects for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to maintain a balance between preservation and progress.

While Houghton remains a destination and meeting point for travelers, it is also home to hundreds of people living in the apartments and lofts above the storefronts. Downtown Houghton offers residents a high quality of life in an accessible and safe neighborhood. Rental units are available with short- or long-term leases. Demand is growing for a variety of housing options. Downtown's proximity to Michigan Tech, employment opportunities, indoor/outdoor recreation, shops, and restaurants make it an attractive place to live and work. All of these downtown elements coupled with their close proximity to waterfront amenities make for a unique business and residential ecosystem.

The 2023 removal of the 1978 parking structure creates opportunity for further development of a space in a prime location between the beautiful Keweenaw Waterway with its recreational opportunities and the vibrant downtown district.

Downtown Houghton has high speed internet by cable or fiber optic network. This connectivity provides both global connectivity for business and the ability to work from home for many residents.

DOWNTOWN LIVING

Apartments in the upper floors of downtown buildings provide ideal living space for adults, families, and people staying in the area for a shorter term. Building owners continue to develop desirable living space with modern amenities and design aesthetics that are consistent with current building trends. The vantage point from the upper floors of Sheldon Avenue offers scenic views of the Keweenaw Waterway. The City will encourage future projects to meet growing demand for a variety of housing, including condominiums and new apartments. This may involve adding floors to single-story infill projects to create living space, rehabilitation of existing structures, or new construction.

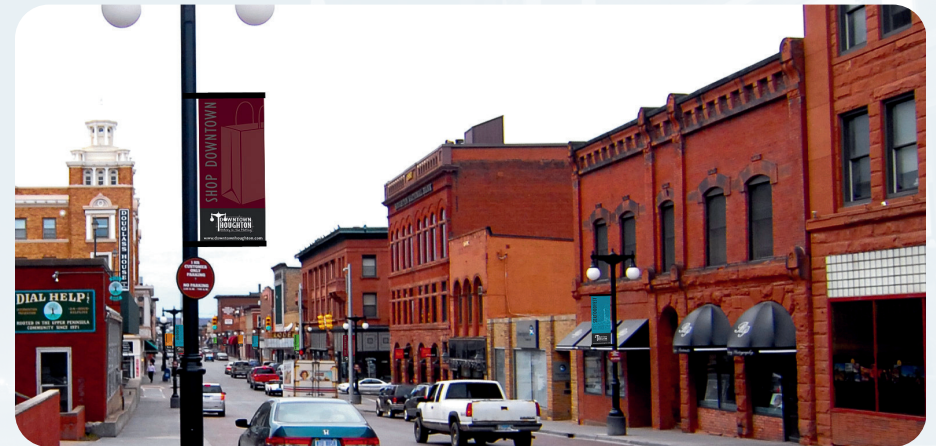
In addition to downtown's younger population, older adults also find downtown to be a convenient place to live. The Douglass House Apartments and Heritage Manor provide subsidized apartments for more than 100 residents. Tenants in these buildings have convenient access to public transportation, restaurants, and businesses lining Sheldon Avenue and can easily interact with those working in and visiting downtown.

Most downtown residents with cars purchase parking permits from the City, though there are several apartments that do offer onsite or private parking. Many of the cars do not see daily use, as the proximity to Michigan Tech and employment afford those living downtown with the ability to walk or bicycle to their destinations.

SHOPPING AND BUSINESSES

Downtown Houghton serves an important niche in providing a shopping experience that welcomes diversity of goods and services, coupled with the ability to rest on a park bench, chat with a store owner, or grab a quiet meal that makes for a more relaxing experience. Multiple options provide spaces to enjoy a lively nightlife. This mix of retail, restaurant, and services allows businesses to support each other as customers can accomplish so much when downtown.

Of the nearly 100 downtown buildings, many are mixed use. There are also four hotels. The varied types of businesses and occupancies are divided almost equally among retail, hospitality, professional services, and purely residential uses. This mix of uses creates activity beyond traditional "business hours" where those working during the day remain downtown into the evening to eat, drink, or shop. Visitors can extend their day by taking in an evening activity like a concert while they sample what downtown has to offer.



The City sponsors and assists events and ongoing initiatives to bring people downtown. Some of the events the City initiates directly, while for others the City provides the venue and logistical support to the organizers. These efforts help to round out the range of experiences available to appeal to a broader population:

- The City's Farmers Market, held June through October, is an event that brings locally grown and made products to market and draws hundreds each week. Partnering with the Portage Lake District Library and local health professionals, the Market offers a wide variety of goods and services.
- Brewfest is a fundraising event that Houghton Rotary sponsors on the Downtown Waterfront Pier. Attendees can sample a variety of craft beers while enjoying food and live music.
- Afternoon on the Town is a Michigan Tech-sponsored event held just prior to the start of fall semester when students fill the downtown. Businesses showcase their goods and services, restaurants tempt them with samples, and organizations offer informational resources and membership.
- Parade of Nations is a Michigan Tech-sponsored event that celebrates the diversity of its peoples and cultures. The parade runs from Hancock to downtown Houghton and finishes at Dee Stadium. The rest of the day is filled with ethnic foods, music from all over the world, and fellowship.
- Treat Street is a popular Halloween event where traffic is rerouted from Sheldon Avenue and children of all ages dress in costume for a trick-or-treating event. The event has grown to draw numbers in the thousands.
- Ladies Night, held each November, is a popular evening event where local merchants extend their business hours and offer sales, creating a busy evening of pre-holiday shopping and a night out for many.
- The onset of winter and the holiday season is kicked off with the Winter Wonderland event held at the Pier. The area is lit up for people to enjoy costumed characters, warm drinks, festive music, or sharing their wishes with Santa in a giant chair.
- Winter Carnival is a tradition at Michigan Tech that has drawn visitors since 1922. Its month-long, themed snow sculpture competition began in 1936. Downtown Houghton makes efforts to attract and entertain these visitors with ice sculpture carving, snow-themed creations, and a decorated atmosphere while providing food, drink, lodging and shopping.

- Bridgefest is an annual June weekend-long event that celebrates the lift bridge linking Houghton and Hancock with a parade, food, music, and fireworks.
- 2023 saw the return of Jibba Jabba, a snowboard competition where a downtown street is turned into a snowboard course and professional riders compete in a very nontraditional venue.



Beyond the events listed above, Houghton continues to promote events that either involve downtown as a venue or simply draw visitors to the area. The City and partners in the business community constantly evaluate these events to increase attendance and provide new experiences.

The City supports an ongoing beautification program as an important component of placemaking. This effort includes adding plantings and gardens, murals, and interesting elements for people to enjoy throughout the City. The Houghton Beautification Committee, a group of volunteers, has for several years been the driving force in creating new garden spaces, rehabilitating old ones, and adding seasonal elements, especially to the downtown infrastructure. The City supports these efforts by purchasing plants and materials, performing excavation, and providing consistent watering of the gardens and planters. These efforts have been a key component in differentiating Houghton from other areas and have been credited with positive responses and “reviews” from residents and visitors. Other aesthetic elements—banners, large murals, and public art such as whimsical crosswalk stenciling—are added each year to enliven public spaces and inject color throughout the year.

Other assets draw people downtown. The Portage Lake District Library, once housed in the historic Carnegie Library building, relocated in 2006 to a new city-owned building on the waterfront. It may be the only Michigan public library that can also be accessed by watercraft. The library has become a dynamic crossroads for the community, offering meeting space and multiple programs on a variety of topics as well as being a hub of information.

The Headquarters for Isle Royale National Park is located adjacent to and east of the Dee Stadium. The National Park Service maintains offices and equipment at the location that provide access and support to park operations, including docking of the Ranger III. The Headquarters brings a significant portion of Park visitors to Houghton to board the Ranger III.

Dee Stadium brings thousands of hockey players, fans, and families downtown during the winter season to watch the games. The recognized birthplace of professional hockey, this historic hockey rink is now home to junior hockey, high school, and adult teams that draw large numbers of people downtown on any given night. The ice is also available to the public to enjoy skating during the winter months.

In 2023, the City established a Social District within a downtown area where alcoholic beverages can be purchased, carried, and consumed. The City also enacted a food truck ordinance increasing options for food consumption downtown.

PARKING

There are about 1,100 public and 500 private parking spaces in downtown Houghton. The City maintains public spaces divided between streetside parking and defined lots. More than 500 private parking spaces are at hotels, apartments, and other lots. Based on past and more recent studies of parking, there is a surplus of parking downtown. The City has been and continues to be proactive in anticipating the need to adjust parking resources to improve walkability and access.

The City owns and operates four elevated parking decks downtown. These single-level decks, built in the late 1980s and early 1990s, account for 87 spaces above the surface lots below them. These decks are located on the 100, 600, and 700 blocks. In 2018 and 2019, major maintenance was performed on three of the parking decks. The deck located on Isle Royale Street was enhanced with the addition of electric vehicle fast chargers in 2022. With the 2023 demolition of a large waterfront parking structure, the City is actively seeking opportunities to increase and densify downtown

parking to provide areas for additional desirable development downtown.



PLANNING THE FUTURE

Preserving the aesthetics and vitality of our downtown district is paramount to maintaining our sense of community. As in the last century, downtown Houghton will continue to be the core of the City, and with foresight and planning, sustain its importance to the region.

Houghton continues to focus on the details of placemaking in the downtown. Over the past several decades, the City has supported a strong downtown by building needed infrastructure, adding placemaking elements, and maintaining relationships with the business community. The focus on attractive spaces in a historic context with sought-after business and entertainment options provides an ecosystem where business can thrive. Key to the future will be the creation and preservation of unique experiences that can be had downtown as opposed to those that are paid for, scripted, and homogenous.

Placemaking has become increasingly important in the information age and with a changing economy of how people conduct business, shop, pick a restaurant, decide where they spend their next vacation or where they would like to live. The sharing of experiences through social media means a community must pay close attention to the experience they give residents, potential residents, and visitors, as experiences are routinely shared with a global audience.

The City undertakes maintenance projects on the parking decks; paints and spruces up public spaces; adds gardens, greenery, murals, and public art; and creates relaxing niches for persons to gather or eat take-out on a summer night. These efforts support residents, visitors, and businesses in creating a flourishing place with a desirable atmosphere to live, spend leisure time, or conduct business, enhancing the overall quality of life.

Recent projects have improved connectivity between Shelden Avenue, Lakeshore Drive, and the waterfront toward unifying the downtown as a single place. In 2022 the City, with MEDC funding assistance, completed a transformative waterfront project that created a central downtown gathering space on the water. Called the Pier, this space provides a multi-use space for festivals, concerts, and gatherings in a unique waterfront location.

In 2023 the City undertook a major project to remove the large parking deck on the waterfront between Quincy and Huron Streets. The project rehabilitated the streetscape and added sidewalks, trees, and rain gardens while creating a more accessible pathway dubbed the “Waterfront Walk” between Shelden Avenue and Lakeshore Drive.

Developers, investors, and site selectors look to communities that understand the importance of place, pay attention to detail, make the effort to provide uniquely inviting experiences, and foster fun, healthy lifestyles. Houghton will continue to proactively cultivate its sense of place in order to maintain such an environment.

The City must keep aware of development—and redevelopment—opportunities throughout the downtown. As building uses and market demands change and as buildings and infrastructure age, the City must actively pursue projects either through private developers or of its own initiative. Where property or structures can be improved or better used to promote growth, the City aims to maintain a healthy downtown for growth to occur. The City fosters an open, partnership-based approach to development. The City will continue to participate in the development process, embrace change, and provide a collective vision through planning and zoning to ensure that the community’s goals are met.

The City will continue to be proactive downtown by providing physical infrastructure and public services to help maintain a strong business climate. The City will also maintain its role as an advocate for growth, a matchmaker to facilitate collaboration, and a problem solver for our business community. Matchmaking has been a key component in past and current success and will be important to maintain in the future.

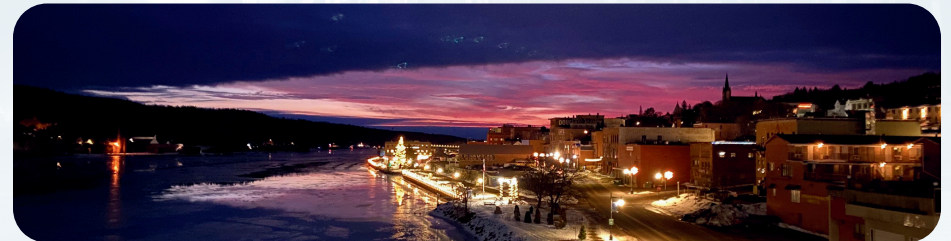
GOALS

- Downtown continues to be a center for retail, service, entertainment, and dining experiences.
- Further improvements to accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders are planned.
- A dynamic downtown with multiple opportunities for social interaction is maintained.
- The culture of business support for more new growth is encouraged.
- Job opportunities and product offerings are provided as investment continues in new ventures.
- Living options for residents are expanded to include apartments and condos for a full spectrum of residents from newcomers to those wishing to age in place while enjoying the benefits of downtown living.
- Comprehensive wayfinding signage is used to orient and inform the public and enhance community experiences.
- Incorporation of sustainable design elements in both public and private infrastructure continues.
- Cultural offerings are increased to enhance the variety and diversity of experiences available to residents and visitors.
- The unique sense of place felt by residents and visitors to downtown is enhanced and improved.
- Connectivity between Shelden Avenue and the waterfront is improved.

STRATEGIES

Traffic

- Study and consider options to improve traffic flow and safety throughout downtown.
- Maintain robust and highly visible crosswalks throughout downtown.
- Continue to evaluate realignment and rerouting of downtown traffic to maximize benefits to businesses and the public.



Real Estate and Economic Development

- Continue to support and partner with the MTEC SmartZone, as their continued success will be a critical driver towards the vitality of downtown Houghton.
- Assist business ventures that are interested in locating in Houghton and showcase the advantages of locating downtown.
- Continue working with downtown businesses to assist with marketing, special events, and business consulting offered by the Michigan Small Business Development Center.
- Continue to monitor development opportunities for real estate in downtown Houghton.
- Continue with façade improvements and work quickly to fill vacant buildings as businesses change.
- Support the redevelopment, reactivation, and reuse of building faces along Lakeshore Drive.

Pedestrians and Bicycles

- Improve pedestrian and bicycle connections to the waterfront trail at Quincy, Huron, and Isle Royale Streets.
- Continue to add pedestrian and bicycle signage and controls to promote both motorist and user awareness.
- Continue to enhance visual and physical connectivity between Montezuma Avenue, Shelden Avenue, Lakeshore Drive, and the waterfront.

Parking and Signage

- Consider sites and develop options for new parking assets south of Shelden Avenue as land becomes available to meet anticipated demand.
- Continue parking structure renovations to maintain parking availability.
- Continue implementation of a coordinated system of wayfinding signage, including gateway, attraction, directional, and parking signage.



Landscape and Urban Design

- Work with MDOT to replace the overhead sign and steel truss on Shelden Avenue at the bridge with a sign arrangement that meets MDOT requirements but is more context sensitive to the historic downtown district and urban design.
- Plan and implement streetscape and visual enhancements for Montezuma Avenue.
- Explore options for adding street trees and vegetation on Shelden Avenue.
- Design and implement landscape and vegetation treatments for slopes currently landscaped with mine rock cover.
- Consider more locations and continue to take advantage of opportunities to incorporate public art and interpretive displays into the downtown setting.
- Look into building height regulation.

Redevelopment Opportunities

- Continue to monitor property transactions and opportunities for redevelopment.
- Collaborate with the National Park Service on a new Isle Royale National Park headquarters facility, possibly at another location, and evaluate redevelopment opportunities for the site.
- Evaluate options for enhancing pedestrian connections, and increasing green space and parking at the Pier site between Huron and Isle Royale Streets to further develop the area as the "town square."
- Consider obtaining the depot building on Huron Street for use as a welcome center and other public use.
- Actively market the Hodge Building at the entrance to downtown to leverage its location for redevelopment by the private sector.
- Work with the Pewabic Street Community Garden and local farmers to create a multi-seasonal farmers market that can be used for community-related activities in the non-growing season.
- Continue to work with property owners and developers to improve and increase the availability and diversity of living spaces downtown.
- Assess the operational costs for city-owned facilities and coordinate with facility management to evaluate funding resources and establish goals for operational cost sharing.

Downtown Waterfront

- Further enhance the aesthetics and function of the waterfront multi-use trail by continuing to develop infrastructure along the trail, add lighting, widen the trail, improve wayfinding, add art, and increase opportunities for exercise.
- Add more year-round public restroom facilities.
- Pursue ownership transfer of the waterfront trail property from MDOT and MDNR to the City so the City can apply for funding to assist in improvements.
- Install finger piers and/or boat slips to improve the broadside mooring facility.
- Leverage and promote use of the Pier to enhance community events and cultural growth opportunities.



An aerial photograph of a suburban area, showing residential streets, houses, and a large pond. A semi-transparent red rectangle is overlaid on the top half of the image, containing the title text in white.

M26 AND SHARON AVENUE BUSINESS CORRIDORS

M26 AND SHARON AVENUE BUSINESS CORRIDORS

HIGHLIGHTS

- The M-26 and Sharon Avenue Corridors are the focus of commercial and light industrial development in the City of Houghton.
- The City planned much of the development east of M-26 with safety in mind, limiting access points onto the highway.
- The expanding commercial corridor continues to experience business growth.
- The growth and development of the M-26/Sharon Avenue commercial district is governed and supported by City ordinances and the Tax Increment Finance Authority.
- Planning initiatives and regional review committees strive to improve access for pedestrians and bicyclists, while also incorporating landscaping and urban design elements into developments along the corridor.
- Huron Creek, which serves as a central drainage feature in the district, has been the focus of a watershed management plan (updated in 2023) to improve water quality, aesthetics, natural environment, and more recently, flood planning and mitigation.

Highway M-26, Sharon Avenue, and connecting streets are distinctly different from the neighborhoods and downtown areas of the City. With limited property area for expansion within the City limits, M-26 has been a focus of commercial growth and development in the community since the 1980s. Sharon Avenue appeals to developers as an increasingly traveled roadway that has evolved as a secondary direct connector from east Houghton, Michigan Tech, and Portage Township to the M26/Sharon Avenue Business District. As such, the effective radius of the district has increased eastward along Sharon Avenue as new businesses and property developments take advantage of available real estate along the popular thoroughfare. The intersection of Sharon Avenue and M-26 is the busiest in the City. This chapter discusses the issues and prospects associated with this growing commercial district, as well as the City's plans for ensuring that development is consistent with the City's goals.

DESCRIPTION

Most of the development along the corridors has occurred since the 1980s and continues to this day. Developments include new retailers, hotels, and restaurants. Along with Houghton's downtown, these corridors are a shopping hub for Houghton, Keweenaw, Baraga, and Ontonagon Counties.

Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA) District

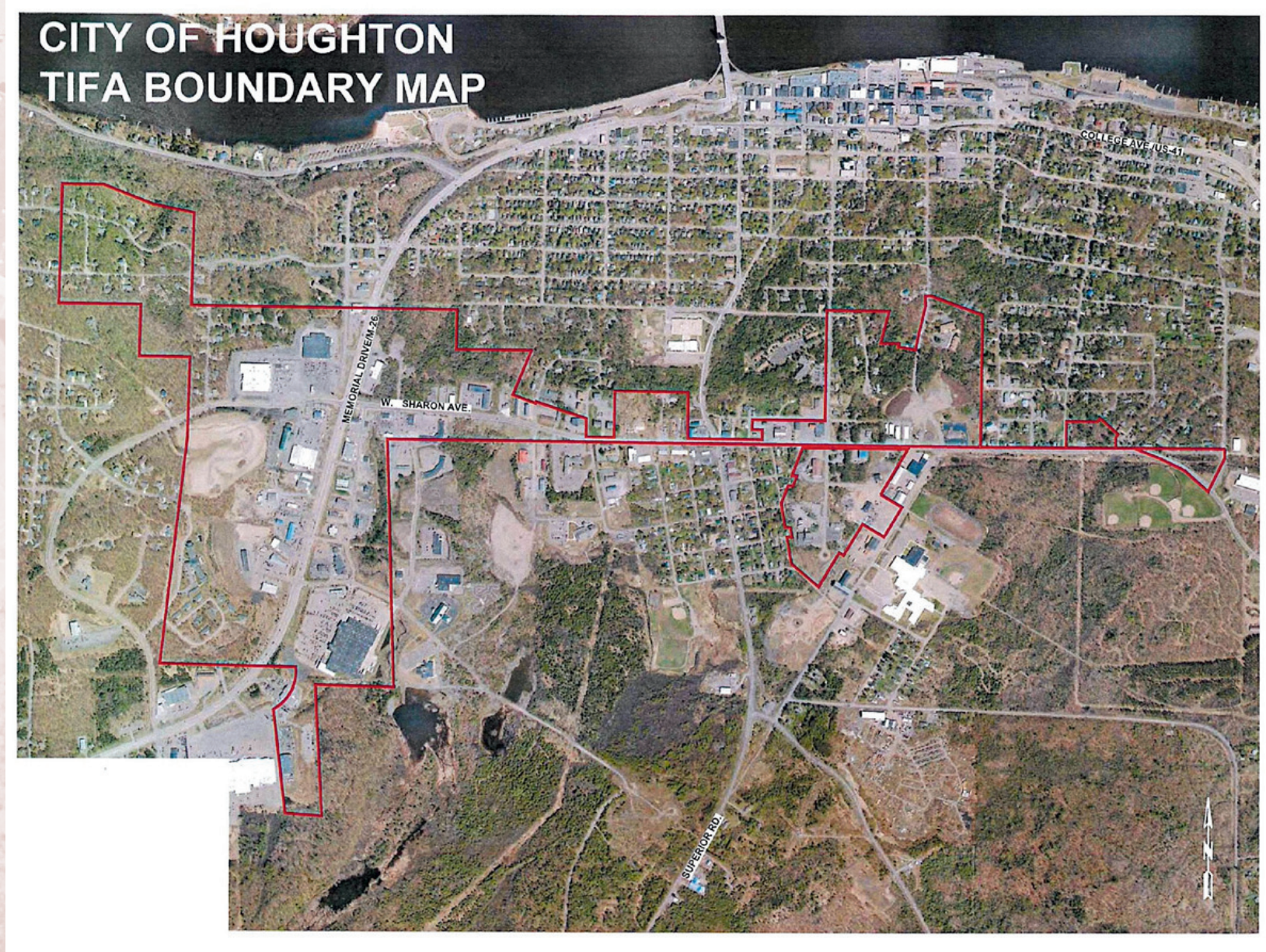
The TIFA collects a portion of the City and county property taxes on the increased value of the properties developed within the district. Those funds are then used for projects such as utility extensions, sidewalks, street lighting, etc., within the district. Such projects lead to further economic development, which in turn increases the tax base.

Zoning

The growth and development of the M-26 and Sharon Avenue commercial district is supported and controlled by city ordinances. The commercial district is currently zoned B-3, General Business. The City requires site plan review approval for new construction. This process ensures that development conforms to city ordinances for land use.

The City revisits ordinances to ensure that sustainable practices are incorporated into all developments. Recent changes to ordinances include reductions in parking requirements and the ability to create shared parking to lessen runoff from parking lots. Previous changes to the ordinance addressed stormwater management and landscaping. The implementation of these and other changes ensure that developments are done according to best practices, protect the environment, and provide overall benefit to our community.

M26 AND SHARON AVENUE BUSINESS CORRIDORS



M26 AND SHARON AVENUE BUSINESS CORRIDORS

Undeveloped Land

A few tracts of undeveloped land exist within the City. As those properties with road frontage are developed, the remaining pieces become more attractive as building sites. The City has taken a proactive role in future development by building new roadways and installing utilities to sites where opportunities present themselves.

A large tract of land between the Copper Country Mall and Walmart is available. With the road frontage developed, some heavily wooded land is also still available for development.

Razorback Drive, developed in the mid-1990s, contains vacant lots with utilities in place.

Evergreen Drive contains some large tracts just off Sharon Avenue west of the M-26 corridor. This area has city utilities and a basic roadway.

The City owns 160 acres southeast of Walmart and has preliminary plans and right-of-way to extend Cedar Street to connect M-26 north of Walmart to the Hurontown/Dodgeville Road in Portage Township. This road would alleviate some of the traffic congestion on Sharon Avenue and M26 and would be instrumental for the development of the 160-acre parcel. The City continues to communicate with developers concerning available sites as market conditions create demand. The City welcomes future development in the area and would consider rezoning to accommodate development.

The City's goals for corridor improvements will contribute to the future of the business district, particularly as it relates to safety, aesthetics, and accessibility. However, economic factors and changing markets will dictate the growth and viability of the district. With the continuing evolution of the retail industry some businesses will come and go. It is the City's charge to manage access, promote public safety, and provide services, but also to provide a stable home for existing business and welcoming climate for new businesses.

Land outside of the City limits may offer development potential as well. The City has the ability to enter into PA 425 tax-sharing agreements with neighboring townships which allow the available City-provided services to support development and increase the City's tax base while sharing the increased tax revenues with the township. The City has several PA 425 agreements in place that have allowed development to occur with the City's support, providing new opportunities to the benefit of City taxpayers and those in neighboring townships.

Traffic

Highway M-26 has the highest traffic count in the region with an average daily traffic of 18,000 vehicles per day according to MDOT. Traffic volume declines to about 5,000 cars per day just south of Walmart, demonstrating the importance of the M-26/Sharon Avenue commercial district. As commercial and residential development in the area continues, traffic volumes are expected to increase. The current infrastructure needs continuous evaluation to properly address growth and changes to traffic patterns to promote safe and orderly access to and exit from the district.

New local access roads, like the previously mentioned Cedar Street extension, would provide access to properties adjacent to the highway while reducing the need to use M-26. Frontage roads, with a centralized entry point, could eliminate some driveways on M-26. Roadways such as Ridge Road, with access to M-26 at Frogpool Lane and Luanne Avenue, already incorporate these concepts. The City has considered similar design elements for businesses on the west side of M-26, though practical issues prevent such a road because existing buildings and property lines leave little space. Future considerations such as improved traffic signal phasing technologies, as well as consideration of adding roundabouts or left-turn boulevards will be evaluated to promote safe, convenient access.

M26 AND SHARON AVENUE BUSINESS CORRIDORS

PLANNING/ACCESS MANAGEMENT

The City continues to make mobility and aesthetic improvements in the district. As culture and transportation technology evolve, the City will continue to improve accessibility and safety for pedestrians, bicycles, e-bikes, and automobiles.

A Visual Enhancement Plan for M-26 has helped to beautify and improve mobility in the corridors. The City has constructed non-motorized trail connectors to access routes away from vehicle traffic. Volunteers, with help from the Department of Public Works, have constructed new gardens at the Sharon Avenue intersection. The City will continue implementing the recommendations in the plan and landscaping projects along the right-of-way as funds become available.

A Highway Corridor Access Management Plan covers the cities of Houghton and Hancock, the Charter Township of Portage, and Franklin Township. The local Access Management Committee, with representatives of each community, MDOT, and the Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region, manages access on-and-off the state trunk line for intersections and private drives. The Committee has a site plan review process for any new development within 1,000 feet of the state highways to ensure that any new access is necessary and safe. The Access Management Committee recommends ways to improve safety when accessing M-26. MDOT conducted a Roadway Safety Audit of the corridor in 2022. This audit is discussed in more detail in the Mobility chapter.

Further growth of the M-26 corridor as a regional retail center may occur westward along M-26. West of the southern intersection of Sharon Avenue and M-26, the corridor continues into the Charter Township of Portage which is outside the City limits. Several larger parcels exist on the highway frontage that are suitable for commercial development. The committee will review future development plans when proposed. The City may consider PA 425 agreements to bring services to those sites.

HURON CREEK WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Huron Creek's headwaters are south of the City. The creek flows on the westerly side of the City's 160-acre open parcel of land, dividing the M-26 corridor as it flows north to the Keweenaw Waterway at Kestner Park. The Huron Creek Watershed Management Plan was developed with guidance from the Michigan Tech Center for Water and Society and was updated in 2023. The goals of the plan are to improve water quality, protect aquatic life, maintain recreational access to the creek, and provide opportunities for community education.

Huron Creek has experienced significant drainage and environmental issues resulting from mining activities, failing septic systems, closed landfills, and commercial development. Stormwater management techniques have been implemented to reduce pollutants entering the creek through uncontrolled inflow. The City implemented a stormwater management ordinance to prevent further contamination of the creek and continues to monitor water quality. The Huron Creek Watershed Management Plan has identified many potential improvement projects for the watershed. The City will continue to collaborate with Michigan Tech to monitor the health of the creek and implement the improvement projects outlined in the plan. Implementation of the plan's recommended actions is expected to achieve the goals of improving water quality, creating a creek that the public can enjoy and sustaining a viable aquatic ecosystem.

In 2018, the importance of stormwater management was demonstrated when an historic once-in-1000-years rain event dropped over seven inches of rain in just a few hours. The Huron Creek watershed collected rainwater that was funneled into the corridor between Razorback Drive and Ridge Road, causing massive erosion and the destruction of roads and property. The rain event triggered state and federal disaster declarations for the Houghton/Hancock area. However, newer developments that were designed and built according to the City's stormwater ordinance suffered less damage and appeared to be less of a contributing factor in the flood damage. The infrastructure that was rebuilt after the rain event was designed to modern best practices and will help manage future events, should they occur.

M26 AND SHARON AVENUE BUSINESS CORRIDORS

The City will continue efforts to mitigate potential hazards in the basin within the City limits. A significant portion of flow enters Huron Creek from outside of the City, so collaboration with Charter Township of Portage will be critical in order to control or reduce upstream flows into the basin within Houghton. The City will continue to pursue funding assistance to update the watershed plan and perform a more detailed study of the Huron Creek basin to guide future improvement and minimize risk.

GOALS

- Commercial development of the M-26/Sharon Avenue corridors continues in order to meet the changing needs of the City while remaining consistent with master planning, zoning, and overarching development plans.
- A number of mobility options are provided for people to safely reach the businesses in the district; including new/alternate routes, improved pedestrian/bike access, and public transit.
- Future flood damage in the Huron Creek basin is prevented.

STRATEGIES

- Maintain the legal status and tax capture of the TIFA District to fund continued maintenance and development of the district.
- Continue access management and site plan review processes to ensure development does not negatively impact the highway's capacity and safety.
- Continue to mitigate flow-related hazards within the Huron Creek basin and collaborate with neighboring units of government to enact best management practices within the greater watershed to lessen the impact on the City infrastructure.
- Continue to evaluate traffic and use patterns in the commercial district to allow for the preservation and/or improvement of traffic safety for both motorized and non-motorized travel.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the corridors.
- Develop and implement a plan for a coordinated system of wayfinding signage including gateway, attraction, and directional signage.
- Continue implementation of the M-26 Visual Enhancement Plan.
- Improve lighting on Sharon Avenue to fill gaps.
- Continue to evaluate parking needs and revise requirements for private commercial development.
- Continue to monitor and improve Huron Creek water quality.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2022, the Pier Placemaking Project was completed providing Houghton with a “Town Square.”
- In 2021, the City achieved Certified Redevelopment Ready Community status with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC).
- The MEDC has provided extensive financial support for downtown infrastructure improvements including utilities, placemaking elements, building facades, and private redevelopment of buildings.
- In the last decade the City has successfully leveraged in excess of \$10 million of grant funding for downtown and community-wide improvements supporting economic development.
- Downtown Houghton routinely maintains a building occupancy rate over 90 percent.
- The City has a very active planning commission which develops its own master plan.

IMPORTANCE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development involves change, and thriving communities embrace change. By embracing change, the City was able to turn around past economic decline to create a thriving business climate and a community that offers a higher quality of life.

With increasing municipal expenses and uncertainty in levels of state-shared revenues, the City is diligent in balancing its budget, which is required by state law. While state-shared revenues are based, in part, upon population levels, revenue sharing funds have not kept up with the rising costs of maintaining service levels to which residents are accustomed. Thus, the City looks for opportunities to become more efficient while improving overall service to its residents. For the City to weather and even thrive through constant economic changes, it must be diligent in seeking and supporting economic development to increase the local tax base that contributes to the quality of life to which its residents are accustomed.



MEDC REDEVELOPMENT READY CERTIFICATION

Redevelopment Ready Communities is a voluntary technical assistance initiative offered through the MEDC which empowers communities to shape their future by building a foundation of planning, zoning, and economic development best practices and integrating them into their everyday functions. The City is certified and has successfully completed most of the six best practices: (i) Plans and Engagement, (ii) Zoning, (iii) Development Review, (iv) Boards and Commissions, (v) Economic Development and Marketing, and (vi) Redevelopment Ready Sites.

The next step is to complete best practice (v) by developing a marketing plan. Marketing and branding are essential tools for promoting a community's assets and unique attributes. A marketing plan establishes goals and strategies for how a community should partner locally to build a consistent brand, tell its unique story, and attract new residents, visitors, businesses, and development. Following the completion of best practice (v), the City will address the completion of best practice (vi) by determining redevelopment ready sites.

PLACEMAKING

An important means of attracting and retaining both businesses and residents, by including both in the growing high-tech sectors, is *placemaking*. The concept of placemaking has been defined as “...the process of creating quality places where people want to live, work, play, shop, learn, and visit. Placemaking is a simple concept—people choose to live in walkable, mixed-use places that offer the amenities, resources, social and professional networks, and opportunities to support thriving lifestyles.”

The State of Michigan, primarily through the MEDC, supports a variety of efforts to improve and create places as a means of building and maintaining the local economies, which in turn contribute to regional and statewide prosperity. MEDC has invested in Houghton as a hub of the regional economy.

By actively engaging in placemaking, the City creates a thriving community attracting talented workers in high-tech industries, entrepreneurial pursuits, medical and education fields, skilled trades, and creative endeavors such as art and music. The City continues to focus on how to best utilize and expand its unique placemaking assets by looking for opportunities to leverage otherwise routine maintenance such as utility and roadwork in concert with grant funding to improve the overall built environment. In doing this, the City not only maintains the infrastructure, but also improves the street, neighborhood, or the place, making that place within the community better.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

Working cooperatively with developers has been instrumental in past successes which have built and maintained Houghton as a center of economic development for our area. Maintaining a strong economy is essential for delivering services, jobs, and opportunities to City residents, but also provides the resources for the City to maintain a high quality of life for its residents.

Houghton's downtown plays a key role in the City's economic development. Currently, the City offers downtown businesses and businesses seeking to locate downtown several opportunities:

- The City's revolving loan fund provides moderate low-interest loans to downtown businesses.
- The City has leveraged local façade mini grants to assist property owners within the boundaries of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) with smaller projects that do not meet the threshold of more intensive State-funded programs.
- The City provides four free hours of design assistance for downtown businesses wanting to renovate storefronts.
- The City works closely with the MEDC to acquire grant funding for downtown property owners to improve their property, resulting in economic development. In recent years the City partnered with MEDC and downtown businesses on a variety of projects utilizing State-funded programs for new historic building facades, existing rental rehabilitation, new apartment development, redevelopment of commercial space, and building acquisition for redevelopment.

Assistance is offered to all Houghton businesses:

- City administration stands ready to assist businesses seeking to locate within its boundaries whenever the assistance is both financially feasible and beneficial to the community. City administrative staff routinely connects entrepreneurs and current business owners with local, state, and federal business development organizations.
- The City retains a community and business development director who regularly works with downtown and M-26 businesses to enhance business growth and retention as well as planning and promoting community events, which not only benefit our citizenry but also help drive traffic to those businesses.

The City actively supports local business development in a variety of direct ways:

- Thoughtfully considering rezoning property to help bring desired business services to a neighborhood.
- Working with local broadband providers to install broadband infrastructure throughout the entire City.
- Obtaining MEDC Redevelopment Ready Community certification to adopt best practices to encourage growth.
- Developing City-owned properties through placemaking to create and maintain an environment that will continue to help businesses succeed.
- Actively pursuing redevelopment projects to improve the overall business climate.
- Working closely with our neighboring communities and organizations to promote area-wide growth which benefits the City.

TALENT

With Michigan's ongoing transition from a manufacturing-based to a knowledge-based economy, the ability to provide employers with skilled workers is critical to the City's economy. Michigan Technological University, with a growing base of high-tech entrepreneurship, positions the City to become an innovative leader. Just as important as high-tech workers are tradespersons that play a critical role in the community. Together, those sectors provide a diverse pool of talent supporting the larger economic ecosystem driving a successful community.

The City works with other organizations supporting initiatives helping ensure young professionals, recent graduates, and those relocating will choose to live and work in our area, creating a vibrant and attractive community continuing to attract and retain new talent and businesses.

Michigan Tech

Faculty and staff members comprise a vast pool of talent to tap. When appropriate, the City partners with university talent for community improvements and economic development.

Gogebic Community College Copper Country Center

Based in Ironwood, Gogebic Community College operates a campus in Houghton which educates students in a variety of areas critical to the overall economy.

Copper Country Intermediate School District (CCISD)

The CCISD serves the educational needs of citizens in Houghton, Keweenaw, and Baraga counties through leadership, cooperation, and quality support services. The Career and Technology Education (CTE) program prepares students with the academic background, technical ability, and work experience to open doors to a variety of career opportunities.

Keweenaw Young Professionals

Keweenaw Young Professionals is a group for young professionals formed to network, engage with their community, and socialize. The organization provides opportunities to build a local social network, relationships, and contacts, as many of the members may be new to our community.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCE AUTHORITY

The state created Tax Increment Finance (TIF) legislation as an economic development tool in the early 1980s. A TIF district collects a portion of city and county property taxes on the increased value of the properties developed within the district. The funds are used for projects that support business growth within the district.

The City has two TIF districts: The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) collects a portion of city and county taxes to be used within the boundaries of the DDA for improvements. The Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA) collects a portion of city and county taxes to be used within the boundaries of the M-26/Sharon Avenue district.

BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCE GROUPS

Beyond working directly with new or emerging business interests within the City, Houghton also actively engages with neighboring communities and the following formal organizations supporting economic development. Collaborative efforts between the City and one or more of them on a wide variety of projects and initiatives are common due to the varying types of projects and needs. More information regarding these organizations can be found on their websites.



Michigan Tech Enterprise Corporation SmartZone (MTEC SmartZone)

The MTEC SmartZone was incorporated in 2002. The cities of Houghton and Hancock, Michigan Tech, and the State of Michigan collaborated to form the SmartZone with a goal of increasing employment opportunities in the area through the launching and growth of high-tech businesses. The SmartZone maintains three incubator sites: The Powerhouse and one floor of the Lakeshore Center in Houghton, and one floor of the Jutila Center in Hancock. SmartZone programs include SmartStart that provides individuals with a business idea a solid understanding of what it takes to create a sustainable business. The SmartZone also provides support in connecting entrepreneurs with mentoring, securing venture capital, access to legal assistance, talent acquisition, and state/federal programs to successfully and sustainably grow their companies.

Michigan Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

The City works with the SBDC, which provides free consultants to advise start-up businesses and assist existing small businesses with growth. SBDC helps with market research, business plans, and training, while serving as a conduit to other resources to help small businesses succeed.

Local banks

An integral part of our community, relationships with our local financial institutions support local efforts.

Keweenaw Economic Development Alliance (KEDA)

The Keweenaw Economic Development Alliance (KEDA) is the private, nonprofit local economic development organization serving the Baraga, Houghton, and Keweenaw County region which serves both the public and private sectors. KEDA provides a wide variety of services to both business and local communities through consultation, grant writing assistance, and support for a variety of initiatives.

Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region (WUPPDR)

WUPPDR provides general planning support to the western six counties of Michigan's Upper Peninsula through its many programs, projects, and services.

Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)

Located in Lansing, the MEDC has been a key player in the City's growth. Established in 1999, MEDC is a public-private partnership that serves as the state's marketing arm and lead agency for business, talent and jobs, tourism, film and digital incentives, arts and cultural grants, and overall economic growth. MEDC offers many business assistance services and capital programs for business attraction and acceleration, entrepreneurship, strategic partnerships, talent enhancement, and urban and community development.

Keweenaw Chamber of Commerce

The Keweenaw Chamber of Commerce is a community resource for small businesses focusing on supporting, attracting, and developing business. The Chamber also provides information and referrals to people inquiring about visiting or relocating to the area.

Visit Keweenaw (formerly the Keweenaw Convention and Visitors Bureau)

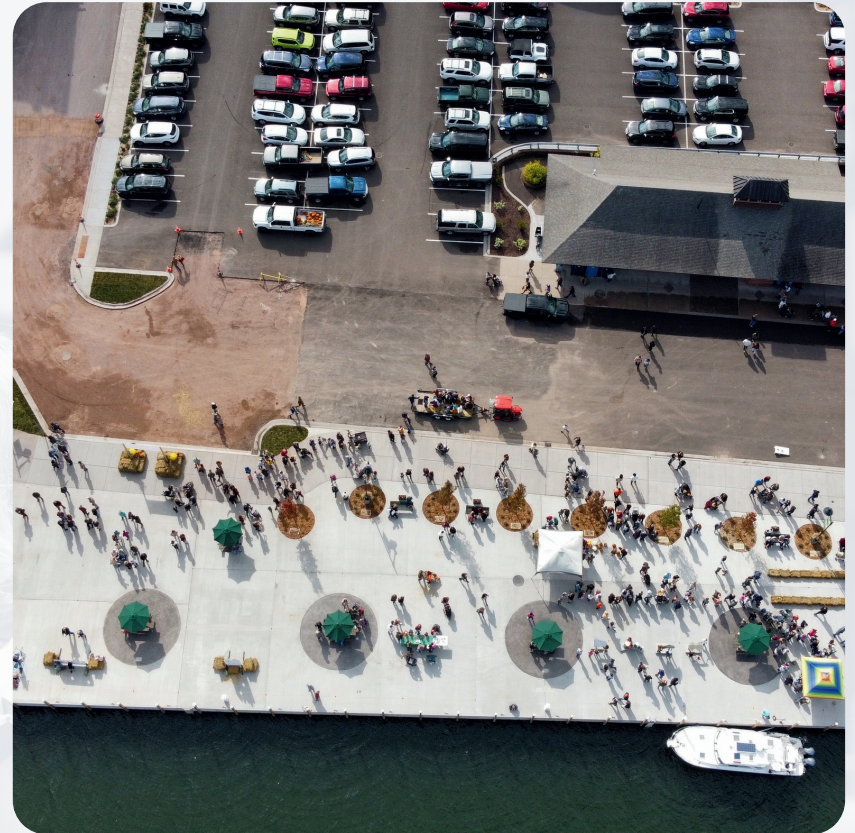
Visit Keweenaw is funded by a 5% lodging room tax in Houghton and Keweenaw counties. Its main objective is to promote the Keweenaw Peninsula as a destination. The impact of the visitor economy should not be overlooked in the ongoing success of our area's overall economic development. Many of the area's visitor attractions contribute to the quality of life enjoyed by permanent residents, which is important for talent recruitment and retention to support business and industry.

GOALS

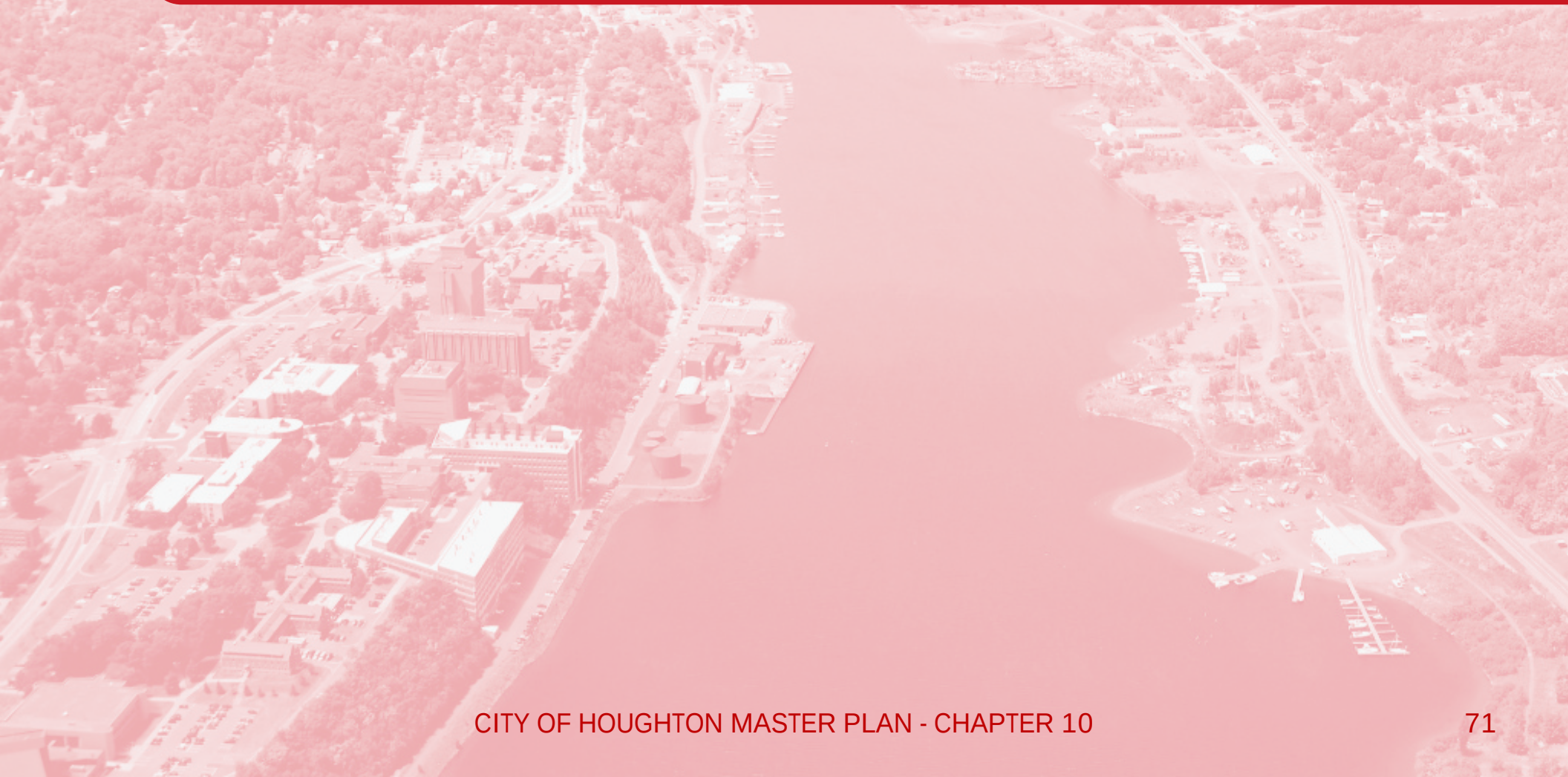
- Houghton continues to be the leader in, and the center of, economic development in the area.
- The City contributes to area-wide prosperity.

STRATEGIES

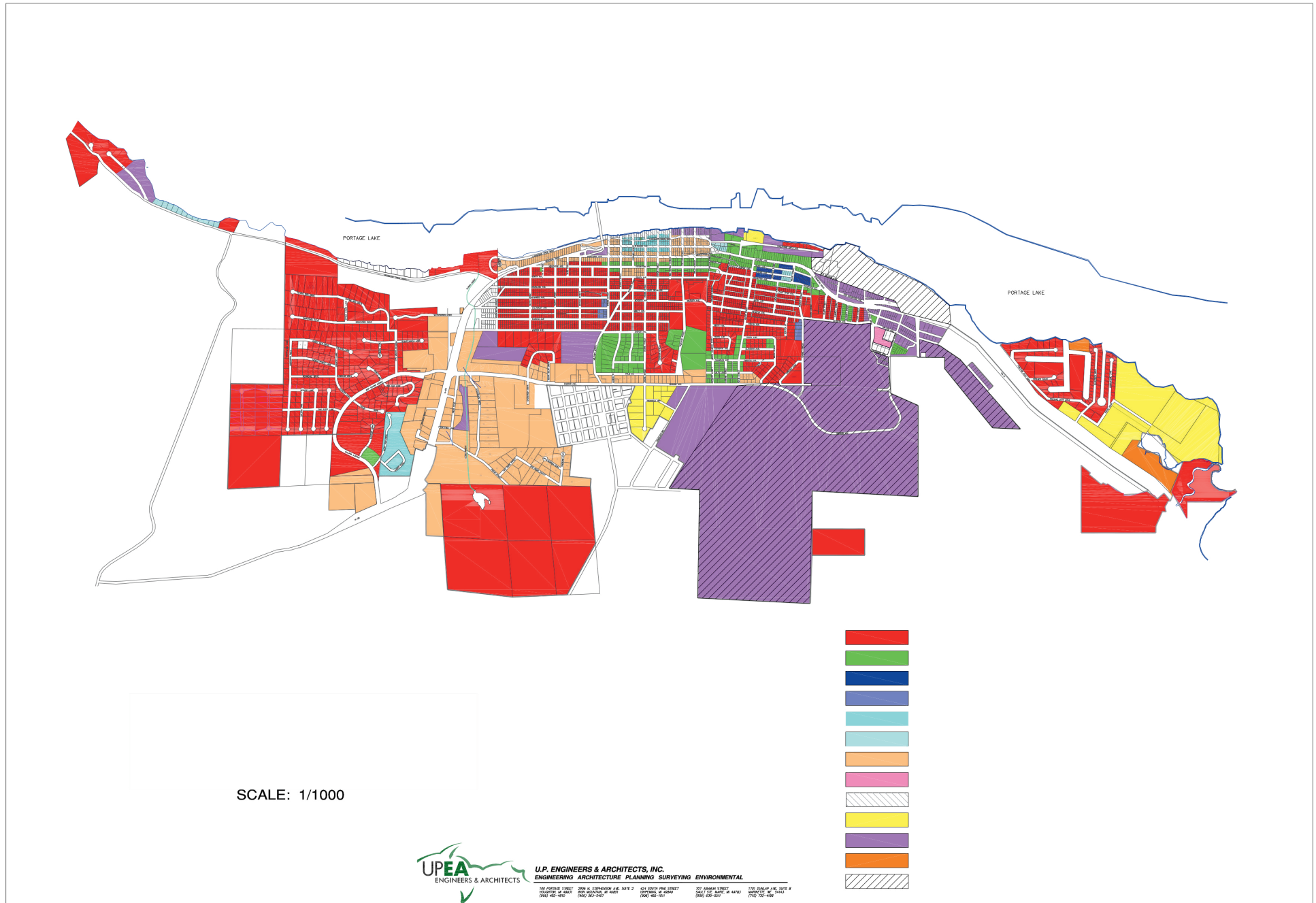
- Maintain a strong, vibrant downtown through business recruitment, retention, and enhancement.
- Continue working on community-wide placemaking as a catalyst for economic growth.
- Foster a higher quality of life to aid in talent recruitment and retention in our area.
- Continue supporting and partnering with the MTEC SmartZone.
- Solicit all sources of funding, including grants, for continued improvements within the City.
- Work together to create, improve, maintain and support business organizations and resource groups.
- Stay engaged with residents, businesses, and governmental agencies on evolving trends to meet the needs of the 21st century.
- Continue collaborating with Michigan Tech and community businesses to develop civic improvements and cultivate a shared vision for the community.
- Consolidate services with neighboring communities where appropriate.
- Continue using Public Act 425 tax-sharing agreements to bring additional property into the City for development.
- Support local and regional efforts to attract and welcome visitors to the area.



ZONING PLAN & FUTURE LAND USE



ZONING PLAN & FUTURE LAND USE



ZONING PLAN & FUTURE LAND USE

HIGHLIGHTS

- The City maintains flexibility regarding land use and zoning to be adaptable to change.
- The City may benefit from the flexibility provided by form-based zoning.
- The City currently owns nearly 200 acres of undeveloped land that would be considered for rezoning to accommodate suitable development.

EXISTING ZONING

Residential areas in the City comprise both single-family and multi-family districts, with most of those properties being zoned R-1. Business districts are primarily downtown and within the M-26/Sharon Avenue business corridor. There are also two City industrial sections, one located on the south side of Sharon Avenue and the other situated on the east side of town bordering the Keweenaw Waterway. The land zoned as Reserve in East Houghton is the Michigan Tech campus, which also includes many multi-unit dwellings in the form of residence halls and apartment complexes.

REZONING

Zoning is a tool used by city planners to bring about orderly development. The establishment of zoning boundaries is conducted with the general welfare of the community in mind. Creating and changing districts can have unintended consequences as it relates to future changes and development within the community. As such, rezoning is not to be taken lightly. The process to rezone property is lengthy and involved but provides assurances that any changes are made with forethought and planning.

The City will consider rezoning areas where changes are logical. After receiving and considering commentary from City residents and property owners, rezoning may occur where it would serve the greater good of the City. An example may be rezoning some sections of R-1 to either R-2 or R-3 to increase population density within the City. If appropriate, increased density can benefit a community by spatially concentrating people and structures. A density increase can take advantage of a service area's existing infrastructure (ie: water, sewer, roads) that can easily support a denser population and potentially increase property values as opposed to developing more utility/road infrastructure into undeveloped property. The City also recognizes that these types of changes might have inadvertent negative impacts such as increases in pedestrian and vehicle traffic or limitations on

parking, reinforcing the importance of thoughtful deliberation when it comes to rezoning.

In 2021 the City rezoned a vacant tract of land that was brought into the City under PA 425 with the intent that it be developed as a traditional R-1 zoned subdivision. A developer purchased the property intending to use it as a resort. A portion of it was rezoned to Reserve and B-1 Business to be consistent with the proposed use. The property is now being developed.

In 2022 the City rezoned a section of East Houghton Avenue from R-1 to R-3 as well as a section of College Avenue west of Pearl Street from R-3 to R-4 to further increase density closer to Michigan Tech's campus.

The process for rezoning, once a request has been made, includes public hearings by the planning commission and city council. The City may also initiate rezoning, subject to the same process.

CONDITIONAL REZONING

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act includes a process for property owners to request rezoning of their property by offering voluntary conditions to the use of the property. The City reviews the request to determine if it is acceptable. The process for a conditional rezoning also requires public hearings with the planning commission and city council.

FORM-BASED ZONING

Form-based zoning provides an alternative to conventional zoning that can benefit both the City and developers. Conventional zoning primarily focuses on the use of the property (residential or commercial) and provides strict separation of land uses. Form-based zoning focuses primarily on form (building placement and the physical form of structures). Because there isn't strict separation of land uses, form-based zoning encourages mixed-use urban design, economic development, and pedestrian mobility. The City considers form-based zoning as another tool to assist economic development.

ZONING PLAN & FUTURE LAND USE

ZONING ORDINANCE CHANGES

The City will proactively review the zoning ordinance to maintain consistency with norms, long-term trends, and revisions to the master plan. The City will also continue to investigate and consider changes such as the following that support community initiatives and position the City for a shared vision of the future:

- Expand the central business overlay district to further create opportunities for growth downtown.
- Modify setback requirements as necessary in some neighborhoods with small lots. The number of setback variances granted in neighborhoods may be an indication that existing requirements are too stringent.
- Allow some hard-surface, off-street parking in front and side yards so that property owners can provide more off-street parking to alleviate on-street parking issues in some neighborhoods.
- Review parking requirements for commercial uses to lessen environmental impacts, especially stormwater generation, resulting from new development.
- Consider changes in residential zoning districts to address owner-occupied short-term rentals.
- Rezone some R-1 areas to R-2 or R-3 to provide more housing options.
- Change zoning of areas within the City to promote development consistent with its master plan.

FUTURE LAND USE

The City's size, geography, and current buildout limit the number of "empty" development sites, as the most desirable have been occupied, especially over the past 30 years. While some larger parcels are available, the market may not be right at any given time for them to attract developers given the multitude of factors that impact development potential. In some instances, properties exist, but are not marketed for sale and thus remain inactive. Inactivity could be for a variety of reasons, potentially including lack of interest in selling the parcel by the owner(s) or the owner(s) may have their own development plans upon which they have not yet acted.

Physical limitations such as available property, geography, etc. are generally more permanent, but economic development trends, market forces, and consumer habits can change over time. The City continues to work with developers, residents, and our neighboring communities to find creative solutions to its land-use challenges. Reevaluating existing properties combined with a form-based zoning model could maximize land use and drive the City towards its goals for future residential and commercial development. The City will continue to work with property owners and those seeking property to develop by staying apprised of the overall market and being actively involved in bringing people together where opportunities arise.

Depending on zoning and adjoining land uses, properties may be developed as residential or commercial uses. Residential development of lands within the City can occur on the single-home scale, multi-unit buildings, or as a planned subdivision-type composed of several homes to create a new neighborhood. A variety of factors can influence whether a single-family home is built on an empty lot or a larger scale development is undertaken. Plans for both commercial and residential uses depend largely on market demand which changes over time. The City must remain somewhat flexible in zoning for future uses while being cognizant of the market and the potential for unintended consequences.



ZONING PLAN & FUTURE LAND USE

Below is an abbreviated list of City-owned potential development or redevelopment properties identified in the City which, dependent on proposed use, may require rezoning to accommodate other future uses:

- **Huron Dam Area**

An undeveloped 160-acre parcel southeast of Walmart is owned by the City and zoned R-1. A small portion of the property is encumbered by a conservation easement for wetland mitigation. However, the remaining property's natural features with proximity to a commercial corridor lend to it having the potential for development. The City would consider development in this area and would consider rezoning to accommodate a development. There is also an adjoining privately-owned 60-acre parcel which has been actively marketed for sale.

- **Land on City's West End**

The City owns 40 acres of an undeveloped 80-acre parcel west of the M-26 neighborhoods. The other 40 acres are privately owned. The parcel is tree covered and contiguous to an R-1 residential district.

- **East Lakeshore Drive Property**

The City owns a 3-acre tract of land between East Lakeshore Drive and the lots along College Avenue. While this property does contain steep topography in some locations, its proximity to Michigan Tech, the waterfront, and downtown Houghton do provide an opportunity for development.

Michigan Tech owns a significant amount of property that is currently undeveloped. With much of it close to the main campus, there are opportunities for development, though the university's own master planning and future land needs will dictate whether any may be offered for development. The City will continue to work with Michigan Tech in planning for mutual growth, benefit, and sustainability.

Several other parcels are partially developed within the City where significant undeveloped acreage exists as part of a smaller development on a larger parcel of property. As the supply of developable property eventually decreases these properties may be separated from their parent parcels and marketed. Again, availability would rely on a willing seller if a buyer or developer came along.

There are underutilized, but otherwise occupied, properties within the City that may present redevelopment opportunities. These properties can range from undeveloped lots to older developments to properties that may better serve the community with a higher and better use. The City may consider selling properties for reuse or redevelopment, but also will require a development plan and agreement as a condition of sale to assure that the redevelopment is consistent with the City's master plan and will result in an overall benefit to the community.

- **Houghton RV Park at 1200 West Lakeshore Drive**

The City currently owns and operates an RV campground on the waterfront west of Kestner Park. It is possible that this approximately 2.25-acre parcel could be rezoned and redeveloped by a private owner to increase access to housing in the City.

- **Downtown City Property along Lakeshore Drive**

The City removed the 1978-era elevated parking structure between Quincy and Huron Streets adjacent to the downtown public waterfront. Two parcels totaling approximately 1.7 acres where the structure once stood are currently used for surface parking. This property presents an opportunity for redevelopment. Future redevelopment of these properties will also need to consider parking as part of the plan.

- **Carnegie Museum at 105 Huron Street**

Formerly the Carnegie Library, this historic building with a change in ownership may lead to higher and better use that would benefit the City.

- **City Center at 616 Shelden Avenue**

The City of Houghton city hall and police department occupy approximately 25% of the 35,000-square-foot, 4-story building. The City leases office space to short-term and long-term tenants, but the building is currently underutilized and presents a unique opportunity for redevelopment given its size, location, and elevator, among other things, which could be better utilized. If the building were to be purchased and privately redeveloped, the municipal operations would have to relocate. A relocation of city hall could lead to greater efficiencies in operations and better service to the public.

ZONING PLAN & FUTURE LAND USE

Shelden Avenue 700 Block Parking Garage and Deck

The City converted a multilevel parking garage once owned by the Upper Peninsula Power Company into a municipal parking garage and added a small parking deck to increase capacity from the Shelden Avenue level. The garage portion provides covered and indoor parking, but due to its age will require extensive maintenance in the coming years. This property which fronts on Shelden Avenue has a panoramic view of the Keweenaw Waterway and Mont Ripley. Reconfigured and repurposed, this property could be redeveloped into multistory parking with mixed use above.

Hodge Building at 902 College Avenue

The City owns vacant lots and the mixed-use “Hodge” building currently occupied by the Chamber of Commerce and rental apartments. These City-owned lots were zoned R3 (lots 7, 10-14) and B3 (lots 8,9). It was recognized that rezoning of the R3 lots to a business designation would allow for mixed use, providing opportunity to incorporate needed housing options.

In October and November of 2023, the planning commissioners discussed conditionally rezoning the R3 property to B3 with the condition that no building will be more than 50 feet in height above College Avenue. Commissioners also discussed desired guidelines for any potential sale of this city property:

- No short-term rentals
- Height limit
- Desire for residential component
- Desire for mixed use
- A development agreement accompanying the sale of the City property.

Subsequently in December 2023, based on a Planning Commission recommendation, the City Council rezoned the property to B-2 with conditions along with some privately owned R-3 zoned property. The conditions were generally those listed above as well as other conditions requested by the abutting private property owner whose property was included in the rezoning.

Isle Royale National Park Property

Isle Royale National Park in downtown Houghton needs a new headquarters facility, as the current site is aged and has several functional challenges. As stated in Chapter 7, if the National Park Service were to move its headquarters, there would be a development opportunity along the downtown waterfront.

Several otherwise occupied, privately owned parcels with redevelopment potential exist throughout the City. The City makes the effort to stay up to date on the real estate market, both the supply and demand ends, and can be of assistance in the redevelopment of properties deemed advantageous to the City.

From time to time some commercial properties may be placed for sale or become unoccupied. In some cases these properties adjoin others in a similar circumstance or where the owner has indicated that they would consider selling. In the interest of a healthy, growing business climate, the City actively engages the business community to stay abreast of changes that could lead to opportunities for growth and facilitate matchmaking opportunities resulting in growth.



ZONING PLAN & FUTURE LAND USE

GOALS

- Zoning changes that support quality neighborhood development are implemented.
- Appropriate City-owned properties are redeveloped to benefit the taxpayers and provide long-term benefit to our community.

STRATEGIES

- Adopt form-based zoning in areas where it may improve development options.
- Consider rezoning targeted residential areas to R-2 or R-3 to increase density and create more housing opportunities.
- Encourage development of undeveloped parcels with possible zoning changes.
- Designate and promote Redevelopment Ready Sites to take advantage of the MEDC marketing assistance.
- Review Zoning Ordinance for possible changes to development standards in residential zoning districts.
- Review ordinance development standards to encourage development and redevelopment of commercial properties.
- Work with Michigan Tech regarding the possible sale of underutilized university property for development.
- Further streamline planning and zoning approval processes as part of embracing our Redevelopment Ready Status.

SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCE

HIGHLIGHTS

- The City has designated bike routes, seeks to improve pedestrian access and safety in public projects, and maintains a viable public transportation system that reduces traffic congestion and air pollution.
- Restoration and enhanced redesign of the boardwalk at Nara Nature Park and connection to the Michigan Tech Trails improved accessibility for all community members and improved resilience.
- The City increased community outreach and stakeholder engagement to build stronger support for future downtown redevelopment efforts and build resilience into its large project planning.
- The historic summer rainstorm and flooding in 2018—a low probability, high consequence event—illuminated the need to incorporate resilience planning into future City projects.
- The City provides single-stream curbside recycling for residents and supports the development of a countywide hazardous waste and recycling program.
- A native plant demonstration garden is under way at Nara Nature Park, and the planning commission encourages developers during site plan review to use native plants.
- The City's first engineered bioswale rain gardens for stormwater management were constructed near the waterfront along Lakeshore Drive in 2023.

The City has a history of adopting services and implementing improvements that include sustainability and resilience. The City's capital planning process forecasts expenditures for community improvements, representing a community that is prepared to move forward with specific, goal-oriented planning.

The goal of this chapter is to move the City toward development of a sustainability plan, but the factors discussed are also relevant to hazard mitigation. While Houghton County's hazard mitigation plan covers the City of Houghton, a City sustainability plan would be another useful tool for planning and management.

Communities in Michigan develop sustainability initiatives in many ways, ranging from employing sustainability professionals to establishing organized volunteer-based committees. Regardless of the organization, the efforts should strive for transparency and enhance collaboration within the community to develop a sustainability plan. ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, founded in 1990 as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, notes that long-term sustainability is the end goal, but a sustainability plan also provides a common framework for action in service of several goals:

- Conserve energy and resources while saving money through smart investments with identifiable payback periods.
- Create jobs, increase tax base, encourage development, and enhance competitiveness.
- Improve the area's air and water quality, decrease waste, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and auto dependency with better transportation options and limited urban sprawl.
- Promote a more equitable society, targeting economic and environmental improvements to communities most in need, and ensuring access to high-quality health care, education, and arts and cultural amenities for all residents.
- Lay the groundwork for major investments that can have a dramatic impact on overall sustainability.

DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

A sustainable community meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Cities around the world are achieving improved sustainability through various means, including the following:

- Doing more with less; cities are finding ways to maintain or even improve services through the use of technology, more efficient operations, and partnerships with shared services.
- Different agricultural systems, such as community gardens, reduce the distance food has to travel and provide locally grown, healthy food.
- Renewable energy sources, such as wind turbines, solar panels, biomass, district heating, and other energy sources can be viable where cities provide economies of scale.
- Improving public transport and facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists to reduce vehicle emissions. A different approach to city planning integrates business, industrial, and residential zones. Roads may be designed to slow traffic. Reduced parking availability may discourage driving.
- Solutions to minimize urban sprawl find new ways for people to live closer to the workplace and increase density by considering Smart Growth principles in planning and development.

Resilience has become an umbrella term for planning and design strategies needed to help communities meet future economic, social, environmental, and climate challenges. It is a measure of the sustained ability of a community to use available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations. The MEDC identifies a resilient community as one that takes the following actions:

- Is informed of threats and risks. The policymakers, planners, and citizens have identified the shocks and chronic stresses that threaten their community. Additionally, the community understands the magnitude of each threat's impact on the region.
- Is organized to address vulnerabilities. It actively reassesses vulnerabilities, creates plans to reduce negative impacts, and executes plans to achieve improvements. Resilience-building responsibilities are clearly assigned to policymakers, planners and organizations.
- Has connected people and organizations that provide support. People from different groups and organizations are connected and prepared to work together to respond to a shock or address a chronic stress. Community members understand their roles and ways they can assist in building resilience.
- Has future-prepared infrastructure and services. Infrastructure and services are designed to accommodate future needs, remain functional during and after a shock, protect people and resources, and support a high quality of life.
- Supports the unique needs of vulnerable groups. The community understands it is only as resilient as its most vulnerable population and addresses specific needs for this group.

Communities interested in becoming more resilient assess their vulnerabilities and create action plans to reduce their sensitivities and exposures to hazards of all kinds.

The following sections propose a framework for evaluating the long-term strategic factors that will inform the City's approach to sustainable infrastructure and economic development. Included is stakeholder engagement in developing a more environmentally and socially responsible community.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK, RISKS, AND RESILIENCE

Sustainability can be evaluated using the “three pillars” approach, in which economic, social, and environmental systems all play essential roles in the City's long-term success. A sustainable city will strive to balance the goals of each pillar with the community's need to use resources efficiently. This section assesses each pillar to identify the City's key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The goal is to provide planners with a foundation to assist decision-making and support long-term strength and resilience.

The long-term strategic factors outline potential focus areas for a more sustainable city. Identifying and addressing stresses and shocks, both human-made and environmental, that could potentially threaten the stability of the pillars will promote a more desirable and thriving community. The MEDC notes that “Stresses are factors that pressure a community on a daily or recurring basis, such as chronic food or water shortage, an overtaxed transportation system, endemic violence, or high unemployment. Shocks are typically single-event disasters such as wildfires, earthquakes and floods.” This section has been adapted from the MEDC's Redevelopment Ready Communities resilience toolkit and presents potential risks and vulnerabilities associated with each pillar that could be disruptive to our community.

Pillar 1: Economic Viability

A thriving economy provides jobs and income for residents, increases property values, and generates tax income for the City to reinvest in the community. A robust and sustainable economy is characterized by the presence of diverse and high-value economic activities. The remnants of the mining era are a stark reminder of the risk of overreliance on any one economic driver. Multiple regional EPA Superfund sites are the consequence of economic development without adequate consideration of environmental and health impacts.

SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCE

While the City of Houghton is physically remote from major economic centers, it has an economic base that can be characterized by the following sectors:

- **Michigan Technological University** - Michigan Tech is one of the primary economic drivers in the region. With a goal of increasing enrollment to over 10,000 students by 2035, the University drives local building construction and changes in land use. This construction and influx of students impact our city's population, tax base, and need for infrastructure. Michigan Tech is a beneficiary of City services (such as water, sewer, and fire protection), but its tax-exempt status means the City does not collect property tax revenue from the University. However, the University is by far the largest economic entity in Houghton, with the salaries, housing, shopping, and service needs of its employees and students representing a significant source of regional household income and tax revenue.
- **Service and Retail** - Houghton is host to the highest regional concentration of services and retail opportunities. These businesses include national and regional chains alongside thriving small businesses. This concentration of goods and services drives economic activity from local and regional residents as well as visitors to the area.
- **Tourism** - Houghton's tourism economy is driven by the richness of our natural and past industrial resources. From the unspoiled wilderness of Isle Royale and the Keweenaw Peninsula, the tranquil expanses of Lake Superior and Portage Lake, to the historical relevance of our mining past, Houghton offers a diverse palette to visitors. Tourist demographics and preferences include both motorized (offroad/ATV, traditional RV) and non-motorized (birding, hiking, boating, mountain biking) recreational activities from spring to fall. In the winter, primary tourism activities include snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, snow biking, and snowshoeing.

Many activities drawing tourists to Houghton occur beyond city limits, so a significant portion of the City's economy relies on the health and viability of systems outside of its jurisdiction. The continued regional availability of amenities for the various tourist activities is an important factor in the future of Houghton's visitor economy. These amenities include motorized and non-motorized trail networks, access to the land on which these systems are built, and connectivity to the Houghton core.

- **Advanced Technology** - Houghton has developed an interconnected system to promote high-tech entrepreneurship and is home to several successful examples. These companies, many launched from research and development at Michigan Tech, create jobs, build wealth, and contribute to our economy. With support from the MTEC SmartZone in their early stages, these enterprises are given the tools for long-term success. That sustained community benefit not only requires infrastructure such as workspace and high-speed internet access, but also must address the needs of those entrepreneurs and employees outside of work, like housing, schools, recreation, and cultural opportunities. As has been demonstrated in recent history, many careers allow people to work from anywhere, and hundreds have come to this area. Maintaining a community that provides a desired lifestyle is as important in keeping people here as it is in attracting those remote workers seeking a new home.
- **City Finances** - A sustainable community both maintains a balanced budget as required by law and encourages growth. Thoughtful, intentional growth of the City's tax base and population provides the needed funding that helps offset costs and can create opportunities for the City to improve and increase services. By providing a quality of life in which people want to live, our City in turn also creates a desirable climate where new service, retail, and commercial ventures want to locate. These new businesses fill a need; and our land use plans and zoning guide development projects to fit our collective community vision.



Economic Risks and Resilience: The economy is a complicated web of supply and demand. Resilient economies include businesses, institutions, and agencies that provide financial capital to support community livelihoods. A robust economy provides resources to develop and maintain critical infrastructures—technical, environmental, and social—that are needed for communities to thrive in the long term. A resilient economy is also one that is prepared to weather financial downturns and has measures in place to help aid its members in recovery from financial hardships. A resilient economy includes:

- **Workers** - Workforce development and training; equitable wages; supportive and fair benefits, including language proficiency, education access and attainment, higher education, literacy, retention, job training, and apprenticeship.
- **Entrepreneurship** - Local small and medium-sized enterprise retention and development, including a focus on stable income streams, capital, and financing, as well as physical innovation incubation.
- **Partnerships** - the public and private sector organizations in a community that organize services, labor, or traded goods to maintain stable means of revenue. Key to resilience are organizations looking to foster industry diversity and recruitment.

The City has embraced the concept of placemaking to attract and retain residents and grow a variety of businesses in the community. Managing a balanced budget and pursuing funding opportunities are critical to the community's economic viability. A number of shocks and stresses have the potential to disrupt the City's financial health:

Shocks

- Global and national economic downturn or local closure of a major business or institution reduces demand for local goods and spending. These broader impacts can have a significant negative impact on local and regional economies through reduced tourism and demand for supply of labor for the production of goods and services.

- Natural disasters (severe storms, wildfire, extreme temperatures, drought, tornadoes, flooding) can have catastrophic impacts on the City's financial health. Prolonged outages and the failure of critical infrastructure can have devastating effects on property values and similar community assets. Distant disasters or public health emergencies can impact supply chains.
- Human-made disasters (nuclear attack, sabotage, terrorism, structural fires, petroleum/gas pipeline accidents, infrastructure failure, transportation and fixed site hazardous materials incidents, subsidence, and ground movement) can produce many of the same negative effects as natural disasters.

Stresses

- Rising median age of the population
- Breakdown of collaboration
- Climate adaptation costs
- Declining tax base, property values, and industrial and commercial activity
- Excessive dependency on a single employer or industry
- Lack of capital or other impediments to advancing business interests
- Lack of transportation access or options
- Limited broadband access or adoption
- Skills/jobs mismatch, unemployment, poorly trained workforce

Pillar 2: Social Equity and Well-being

The backbone of Houghton's resilience is our tight-knit community. Volunteerism and cohesion within subcommunities present opportunities for collaboration. Support for local and regional collaborations, such as farmers markets, special events, and conservation and trail advocacy groups, contribute to the enrichment of our community. Preservation of our neighborhood character and the balance between student rentals and local resident housing impact our residents' quality of life. Recreational opportunities, cultural enrichment, and access to health, wellness, and economic support services are integral to our city's livability.

- **Housing and Neighborhoods** - Following concepts and strategies outlined by the State of Michigan, “placemaking” continues to be a guiding principle for the City. The strategies outlined in Chapter 6 for incorporating Complete Streets into the community, and the importance of maintaining a relevant and dynamic downtown community, also align with sustainable growth initiatives. Demand exists for increased supply of low-, middle-, and high-income housing, while limited inventory has driven prices significantly higher.
- **Mobility** - Communities that are walkable and bikeable encourage active and healthy lifestyles. The City continues to develop strategies for improving pedestrian conditions and encouraging walking and bicycle use. The ad hoc Bike and Pedestrian Committee created the City of Houghton Non-Motorized Transportation Plan. Supporting the plan is the City’s Complete Streets ordinance, which incorporates use plans for bicyclists and pedestrians into street improvement projects. 94 As outlined in Chapter 6, the City operates an affordable public transportation system providing approximately 41,000 rides annually with scheduled service throughout the City. The provision of public transportation is a sustainable practice promoting reductions in traffic congestion and emissions of air pollution. The City is also working with Michigan Tech, the City of Hancock, and MDOT to expand public transit opportunities and improve community mobility.
- **Public Health** - Houghton faces the same well-established public health difficulties as other rural locations. Two hospital systems provide local healthcare for which attracting and retaining medical professionals remains a top priority. Although widespread pollution and poor air quality have not been a significant issue, recent impacts from distant forest fires are reminders that recognizing potential public health issues is an important aspect of a sustainable community. Recalling the severity of flooding in 2018, our region remains susceptible to climatic changes like rising/receding water levels, extreme temperature fluctuations, and changes to our landscapes and ecosystems.

Social Risks and Resilience:

As individuals, residents exercise their voices, actions and rights in diverse ways. Collectively, the cultures, social groups and organizations they form provide support and momentum for the lives of residents. Several themes around which communities can evaluate and plan for a resilient population include health, wealth, housing, education and training, safety, security, and culture. Resilience depends

on providing people with access to the resources needed to ensure a stable and well-rounded quality of life, meaning equal opportunities across age, race, gender, language, and culture. Resilience for people includes several factors:

- **Health and well-being** - Reduced risk of infectious and chronic diseases, air and water quality declines, and exposure to risk factors for stress or lower life expectancy.
- **Housing** - Access to diverse and affordable housing options, home repair financing and training, home ownership, temporary housing, shelters, and long-term care facilities. Housing in Houghton is limited and there are definitely gaps, as in most communities.
- **Safety and security** - A safe and secure community is one that is inclusive, welcoming, and comfortable. These qualities that make a place “safe” rely on the physical environment, policies and operational strategies. Crime rates and resident surveys demonstrate successful maintenance of a safe environment for residents, as well as a strong perception of public safety.
- **Equity and inclusion** – Civic participation and engagement, equitable access to resources, arts and culture, public events, history, emergency response, racial equity and communication. By valuing both the collective social condition and equitable rights of diverse or at-risk individuals, communities grow stronger and more resilient.

The volunteer response to the 2018 Father’s Day Flood is regularly cited as an example of the strong sense of social responsibility found in the Keweenaw and is a good example of how social factors can make communities meaningfully resilient when faced with serious emergencies. Some emergency responders said that mutual support, sharing of resources, and cooperation accelerated the region’s recovery by weeks relative to major disasters in other areas. Chapters 4, 5, and 10 address many of the factors outlined above, including but not limited to recreation, housing availability, and land-use. A number of shocks and stresses have the potential to impact the community’s health and well-being, such as:

Shocks

- A prolonged Portage Lake Lift Bridge outage, air service disruption or elimination, blockage of emergency evacuation routes, or terrorism
- Sudden, extended disruption to communications, utilities, supply chains, or resources
- Health emergencies or pandemics
- Loss of employment
- Sudden economic downturn

Stresses

- Housing cost burden (insufficient access to low and middle income housing)
- Access to health care (physical and mental)
- Rising median age of the population
- Poor diet and exercise, limited access to healthy, affordable food
- Lack of education and training, unemployment
- Living paycheck to paycheck
- Lack of family and social support, isolation

Pillar 3: Environmental Protection

The environmental aspect of sustainability is deeply tied to our natural resources. Groundwater provides the majority of our drinking water, and maintaining its source and quality is paramount. The management of surface water bodies, including Lake Superior, Portage Lake, the Keweenaw Waterway, creeks, streams, and rivers, has a direct impact on activities like fishing, boating, and the preservation of wildlife habitat. Native flora and fauna add to the richness of our environment and should be safeguarded against invasive species to the extent possible. The need for resilience in a changing climate and movement toward carbon neutrality will inform our environmental initiatives.

City governance responds to these multi-faceted sustainability challenges in a holistic, adaptive manner. In our quest to evolve Houghton's sustainably, we stand at the crossroads of careful planning, strong partnerships, and diligent execution, all while fostering a community spirit that makes Houghton a city of choice for generations to come.

- **Natural Resources** - The community relies on our natural surroundings as a valuable resource. Recreational use of trails and forests, along with fishing and boating on the Keweenaw Waterway, are economic drivers in the community. The City and surrounding units of government, along with state and federal agencies, are responsible for ensuring these natural resources are sustained. Chapter 4 details the unique natural attributes available to the community, and Chapter 4 discusses recreation and use of public land by the community and visitors alike.
- **Parks and Greenspace** - Many neighborhoods in the City feature wooded lots and small neighborhood parks that provide both natural beauty and a sense of privacy. Maintaining such areas throughout the region is important to the long-term protection of the Keweenaw Waterway and contributing creeks and tributaries. Incorporating green space and stormwater controls encourages infiltration and protects these water bodies from excessive sediment loading and contamination. Natural areas, such as the City's Nara Nature Park, are community-wide assets. Protection and improvement of existing green space contributes to the preservation of natural resources.
- **Water Quality and Stormwater** - The City's topography causes sediment and pollutant-laden runoff to flow to the Keweenaw Waterway. The Huron Creek and Pilgrim River Watershed Management Plans have identified the need for stricter site planning regulations to minimize impacts of storm and snowmelt runoff to watershed ecosystems that result from urbanization, particularly commercial developments and parking lots. The City's stormwater ordinance requires new development or major redevelopment to manage onsite stormwater to not exceed predevelopment discharge rates and improve the overall quality of the discharge. The City continues to work with Portage Township to update stormwater regulations to address stormwater management and protection of the Huron Creek and the Pilgrim River watersheds. Recalling the storm of 2018, the City recognizes its role in promulgating ordinances intended to protect the greater community and continuing to collaborate with neighboring units of government in managing the infrastructure to reduce risks.

- **Energy Conservation** - The City continues to strive for ways to reduce energy consumption. All City-owned buildings have been upgraded with the most energy-efficient lighting available. When upgrades are needed the City evaluates energy-efficient options for the replacement system to maximize long-term economic benefits from energy savings. Energy efficiency contributes to improved comfort, while lowering energy demand and reducing air pollution. Future outdoor lighting upgrades may also take into account dark sky best practices, further reducing energy consumption by minimizing waste light while also protecting and enhancing the Keweenaw's dark sky amenity.

Environmental Risks and Resilience:

"Resilient places" go beyond homes and workplaces to include all the spaces, structures, systems and environments that our community occupies: physical parks and open spaces, cultural and historic buildings, and also the underlying natural and man-made systems that support and impact our daily lives. These places are made resilient by managing natural systems, physical structures, and freshwater systems.

- **Natural systems** – Ecosystem services allow social, environmental, and economic systems to thrive. Healthy natural systems provide animal habitats; improve stormwater management; increase air and water quality; reduce the urban heat island effect; reduce and process pollution and contamination; resist erosion and flooding; and increase biodiversity.
- **Structures** – Historic and culturally important structures provide the community with a sense of place that builds resilient social systems. Building energy efficiency, rehabilitation, code compliance, accessibility, and management of vacant and underutilized structures ensures that local emissions are minimized, blight is avoided, and that all community members can take advantage of the City's systems.
- **Reliable and safe freshwater supply** – Water bodies including Lake Superior, Keweenaw Waterway, lakes, streams, and aquifers provide for potable water distribution and are protected by sanitary and storm sewer systems. The City is responsible for providing high-quality drinking water and appropriate codes and systems for managing stormwater.

Chapters 5, 10, and 13 summarize the City's natural setting, historic preservation, and zoning and land use. They outline the City's plans for addressing many of the above factors. Shocks and stresses that could impact the City's natural systems and built environment are summarized below:

Shocks

- Natural disasters, such as flooding, droughts, heatwaves, wildfires, or tornadoes
- Loss of or damage to historic structures
- Economic downturn impacting financing

Stresses

- Aging building systems with high energy use and deferred maintenance
- Brownfields and contamination, sprawl, fragmented habitat and systems, impervious surfaces, coastal erosion
- Rising temperatures and heat island effect, shifting planting and habitat zones, invasive plant and animal species

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability reminds us that “sustainability is not an end goal, but a journey that local governments can take to improve the social equity, environmental, and economic conditions in their jurisdiction.” A common framework to guide their efforts is a sustainability plan, which ties together a community’s goals, strategies, implementation plans, and metrics for improving sustainability. Plan development requires significant effort from a committee or coalition dedicated to the task.

GOALS

Actions that address both short term (resilience) and long-term (sustainability) threats to the healthy growth and function of the City of Houghton and its community are identified and implemented.

STRATEGIES

While some strategies can be implemented quickly, developing a comprehensive Sustainability and Resilience Plan for the City of Houghton could follow these steps:

- Form a task force representative of the community.
- Conduct a sustainability self-assessment.
- Perform a vulnerability assessment.
- Establish a vision and sustainability goals.
- Model planning and implementation on the successes of other municipalities.
- Develop an implementation plan.
- Engage in public outreach.

Until a sustainability plan is developed, the following actions can be considered:

- Join Michigan Green Communities, a statewide sustainability benchmarking, networking, and technical assistance program from a partnership of state agencies, Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and Michigan Association of Counties.
- Create a sustainability and resilience section on the City website with links to resources for property owners, including for improving the sustainability and resilience of homes and other buildings.
- Maintain the native plant demonstration garden at Nara Nature Park and increase the use of native plants in City projects.
- Construct additional engineered rain gardens for stormwater management where possible.
- Evaluate addition of sustainability criteria to the site plan review process and zoning ordinance.
- Identify and remove unintentional barriers to sustainability and resilience in City ordinances.

THE MASTER PLAN PROCESS

THE MASTER PLAN PROCESS

City residents, business owners, and City officials played an important role in the development of this Master Plan. During the planning process, the City offered several opportunities for public involvement.

SURVEY

In the fall of 2022, the City conducted a city-wide survey. A total of 1,900 surveys were distributed and the response rate was 33 percent. The respondents were a representative cross section of city residents by location and age.

The survey team, consisting of City staff, a faculty member from Michigan Tech, and a student intern from Michigan Tech College of Business, prepared a detailed report and analysis of the survey responses. Overall results were very positive, matching closely the input provided at the open house events. The full report can be found on the City's website. The survey measured respondents' satisfaction levels and perceived improvement since the last survey. There were 182 written comments provided by respondents.

OPEN HOUSE EVENTS

In October and November of 2022, residents, business owners, landlords, and developers from the City were invited to imagine the future of the City and discuss any issues or opportunities the City is facing. The goals and strategies for individual chapters of the master plan were displayed. Attendees were asked to highlight goals and strategies they support and provide new ideas for consideration. Planning commissioners and staff were on hand to meet with the public.

The topics included:

- Community facilities
- Recreation
- Neighborhood preservation and development
- Mobility
- Downtown
- M-26 and Sharon Avenue business corridor
- Economic development, zoning plan, and future land use
- Sustainable practices and energy conservation.

Suggestions received from the events included: adding a senior center, providing public restrooms downtown and along the waterfront trail that are open year-round, expanding the community garden, and zoning more areas of the City R-2, R-3, and mixed-use residential to reduce travel distances and make housing affordable to all.



HISTORICAL TIMELINE

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

1850 - Houghton's first downtown building is constructed.

1861 - Houghton becomes a village shortly after both entrances to the Keweenaw Waterway are developed.

1876 - The first bridge was built across the Keweenaw Waterway between Houghton and Hancock.

1885 - The Michigan College of Mines (now Michigan Tech) is established by the State Legislature.

1890 - Houghton County is the wealthiest county in Michigan with a population of 854.

1903 - Houghton becomes the Birthplace of Professional Hockey in the world where, for the first time, players are openly paid.

1959 - The present lift bridge opened and was recently designated a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

1970 - The Village of Houghton becomes a city.

1972 - Houghton completes its first Master Plan.

1978 - Houghton constructs the first elevated parking deck in the Upper Peninsula

1982 - Houghton completes its first waterfront plan and begins converting its four miles of shoreline from industrial to residential and public recreation.

1987 and 1989 - Houghton receives the State of Michigan Community of Excellence Award from the Michigan Department of Commerce.

1988 - Houghton receives the International Winter Cities award for Urban Design for the downtown parking and pedestrian connection system and receives the Shoreline Partnership Award from the State of Michigan for the work done on the waterfront.

2001 - Houghton and Hancock are designated by the state as one of ten SmartZones in Michigan.

2006 - Houghton receives a Michigan Cool Cities award from the State of Michigan.

2007 - Houghton receives the Signature Building of the Year award from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

2009 - Houghton completes a Downtown Streetscape Project that receives the Michigan Construction Quality Partnership Breaking the Mold Award and the National Partnership for Highway Quality Making a Difference Gold Award.

2010 - U.S. Census shows Houghton's population grows by the largest percentage of any Upper Peninsula city from 2000-2010.

2012 - The Great Lakes Research Center is constructed along the waterfront of the Michigan Tech campus.

2017 - Houghton receives an Infrastructure Capacity Enhancement Grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) to complete a major improvement project on Lakeshore Drive.

2017 - MTEC SmartZone receives a 15-year funding extension from MEDC.

2018 - Houghton experienced a 1,000-year rainfall-induced flooding event that resulted in a federal disaster declaration.

2018 - Houghton is designated a five-star community by the Michigan eCities Program and remains on the list.

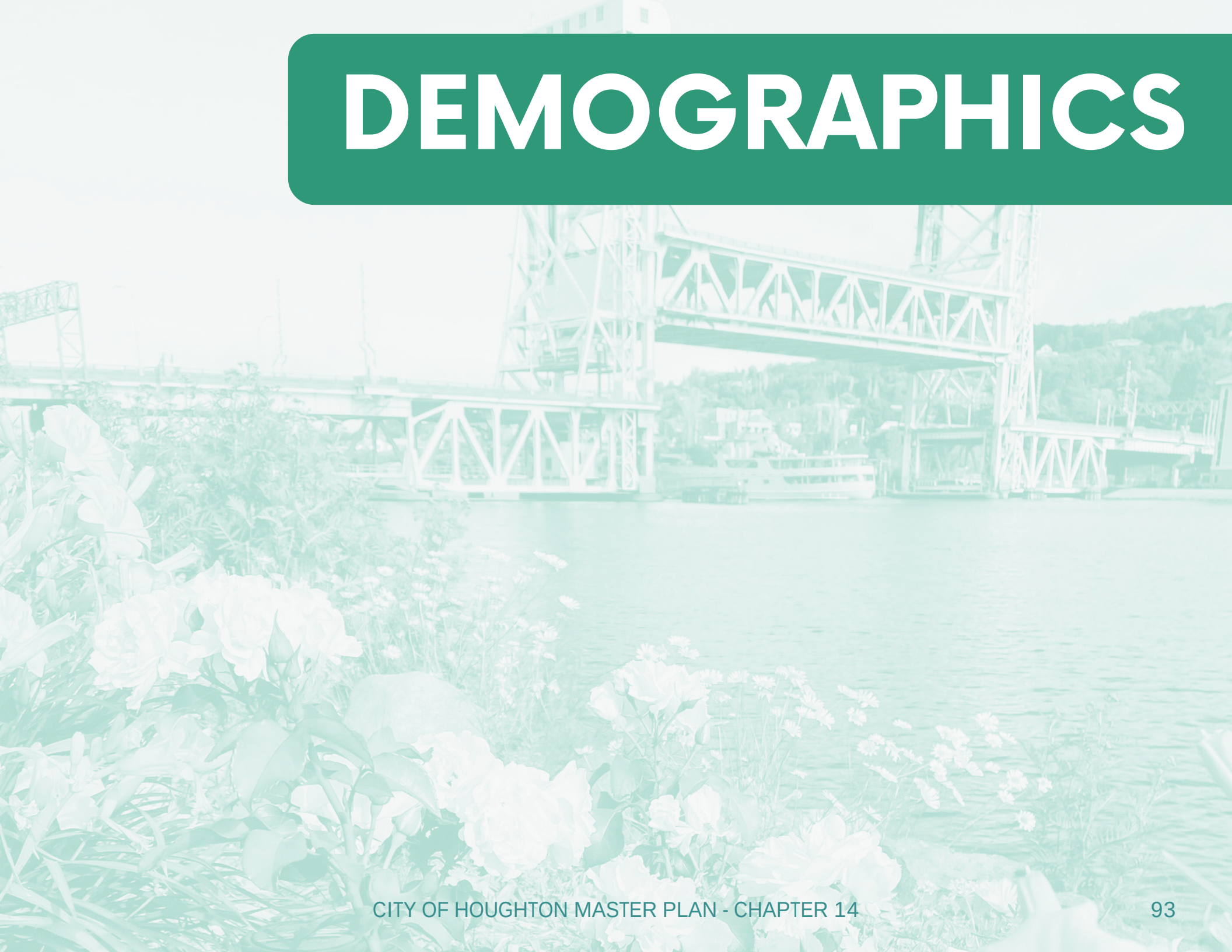
2020 - Covid 19 pandemic shut down much of the nation, but created a travel boom for Houghton as a sought out safe place to travel.

2020 - U.S. Census shows Houghton's population grows by the largest percentage of any Upper Peninsula city from 2010-2020

2022 - The Pier along the Keweenaw Waterway opens between Isle Royale Street and Huron Street.

2023 - The 1978 parking deck is demolished and the Lakeshore Drive Corridor Rehabilitation Project is complete.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The background of the page is a photograph of a large steel truss bridge spanning a body of water. In the foreground, there are lush green plants and white flowers, possibly roses, which are slightly out of focus. The bridge has a complex steel structure with many vertical and diagonal beams. A small boat is visible on the water under the bridge. The sky is a pale blue.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The 2020 Census saw the City's population grow to 8,386. The City was one of two communities in the Upper Peninsula that saw population increases.
- Diversity in age, race, and ethnicity in the City differentiates our community from other parts of Houghton County.
- The number of housing units and households in the City has steadily increased.
- Michigan Tech remains the largest employer in the region.
- The Michigan Tech Enterprise Corporation (MTEC) SmartZone continues to grow and develop high-tech jobs and entrepreneurial endeavors.

Population growth is the most important factor influencing land use decisions. If the population of a community is growing, there will be a need for more housing, roads, commerce, parks and recreation, and public services and facilities.

Population and Age Distribution

The population in the City has been increasing since 2000. In the 2000 Census, the City's population was 7,025. In the 2010 Census, the City's population increased by 683 to 7,708 (9.72%). Between 2010 and 2020, the population of the City grew by 682 residents to 8,390 (8.85%).

Information on age distribution assists a community in matching public services to community characteristics and in determining special needs by age groups. Policymakers may use current and projected age distributions to identify current gaps in services and to project future service needs for housing, education, recreation, and medical care.

A unique feature of the City's population is the predominance of persons in the age groups of 15 to 19 and 20 to 24, especially when compared to Houghton County. The large number of 15 to 24-year-olds can be attributed to the presence of Michigan Tech.

Another important characteristic of a community is its ethnic and racial makeup. Knowing this makeup helps to identify the cultural needs of its population. The City has a slightly more diverse population when compared to Houghton County. Similar to its age distribution, the diversity of the City can most likely be attributed to Michigan Tech.

Population Trends

The City's population is predicted to increase slowly over the next 20 years as job growth continues at both the University and high-tech companies, and with people seeking "place" as the digital economy allows many jobs to be done from nearly anywhere. This should increase the number of people between the ages of 18 to 60. As families are having fewer children and couples are getting married later, the number of children under 18 in the City is predicted to decline slightly. As with a lot of other communities in Michigan, the over-60 population should continue to grow over the next 20 years.

Housing

Shelter is a primary need of every community to support a growing population. Meeting the housing needs of residents in different stages of life and circumstances can help to revitalize communities and retain residents. One way to do this is by supporting mixed-use neighborhoods, which combine residential and commercial uses in an effort to promote walking and a sense of community. This allows greater independence for those who either do not have the opportunity or prefer not to depend on the automobile as their primary mode of transportation.

Income

In the 2020 Census, the City's median household income was \$24,660. This includes Michigan Tech students living on campus.

Education

The City has a higher number of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher (55%) than the State (32%).

Commuting

Because of its size, the average travel time to work for City residents is 13 minutes. This is less than the average travel time to work in the State at 24 minutes.

Employment

Michigan Tech is the largest employer in the area. The Michigan Tech Enterprise Corporation (MTEC), one of the now twenty SmartZones in Michigan, has fostered new company creation and thus job creation. The SmartZone is focused on commercializing ideas, patents, and other opportunities surrounding corporate, university, or private research institute efforts. The SmartZone works with the cities of Houghton and Hancock, Michigan Tech, the Keweenaw Economic Development Alliance (KEDA), and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). There are four SmartZone incubators, three in Houghton: The Advanced Technology Development Center on the Michigan Tech campus, the Powerhouse, and the first floor of the Michigan Tech Lakeshore Center. The fourth, the Jutila Center, is located in Hancock. The SmartZone office is in the Michigan Tech Lakeshore Center in downtown Houghton. The SmartZone continues to develop high-tech jobs in the area.

Along with Michigan Tech and the SmartZone, the City is home to businesses large and small that employ residents from throughout the region, as the City is the commercial hub of the Keweenaw.



STRATEGIES



Introduction

Simply documenting strategies and recommendations for improving the City is not enough. To ensure that the Master Plan is a useful document, it is necessary to outline an implementation plan to help set priorities for fulfilling the many recommendations presented. While the Master Plan is a tool for City leaders, its implementation requires commitment and involvement from the entire community.

Prioritization of Master Plan Recommendations

A number of steps must be followed to ensure that implementation of the Master Plan is a success:

- Promote community awareness and understanding of the Plan.
- Update City policies and regulations to reflect the Plan's vision.
- Partner with the City of Hancock, Portage Township, Houghton County and Michigan Tech to ensure consistency between individual master plans.
- Actively seek ways to promote and fund projects that are in accordance with the Plan.

CHAPTER	GOALS	STRATEGIES
CHAPTER 3: COMMUNITY FACILITIES	• The best possible level of public services to City residents is provided. • Public infrastructure and cultural facilities are enhanced and improved. • Private and public partnerships are pursued to promote enhancement of existing and development of new community resources.	• Actively assist the Carnegie Museum of the Keweenaw with becoming financially independent. • Regularly evaluate City operations, examining ways to leverage opportunities to improve services and lower operational costs. • Pursue timely grant opportunities to make impactful improvements. • Work to further build out an asset management system to allow resources to be targeted for maximum benefit while maintaining all assets. • Study long-term facility needs to plan for systematic rehabilitation or replacement of City facilities. • Address aging water, sewer, and street infrastructure holistically to maximize community benefit. • Investigate opportunities to relocate City offices to a modern, energy efficient facility, and presumably sell the current City Center to the private sector. • Construct an elevated water tank and booster station at the south end of Razorback Drive when needed for development on Cedar Street. • Identify locations or buildings that may be amenable to the location of a senior center.
CHAPTER 4: RECREATION (See Chapter 4 for specific goals and objectives)		
CHAPTER 5: NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING	• Houghton is a sought-after place to live in the region. • A wide range of housing options, along with public and private amenities that our diverse (socio-economic, age, family size) population desires, are available. • Residential structures are regularly cared for as one means of improving neighborhood quality and increasing property values. • Regular communications among residents and between residents and City government maintain open, positive relationships and a strong sense of community.	• Foster an increase in the supply of all housing types to meet demand. • Consider making city-owned vacant land available for new construction. • Consider allowing duplexes in neighborhoods currently restricted to single-household residences. • Examine options for expanding accessory dwelling units. • Encourage planned unit and multi-use development. • Continue to work with and encourage developers to pursue a range of new construction and renovation options to serve changing market conditions and demands. • Explore funding opportunities for neighborhood revitalization. • Continue to diligently and consistently enforce ordinances. • Encourage neighborhood socialization through neighborhood park improvement and promotion of such activities as block parties and community-wide events that build relationships across neighborhoods. • Continue to work with Michigan Tech on planning for future impacts to neighborhoods close to the campus. • Increase housing options for older adults who do not want the responsibility and physical challenges of residential home ownership. • Continue to regularly review the zoning ordinance and zoning map and consider revisions that align with neighborhood and housing goals.

CHAPTER	GOALS	STRATEGIES
CHAPTER 6: MOBILITY	- Houghton is characterized by efficient, accessible, safe, and well-maintained multi-modal mobility throughout the City that recognizes pedestrians, bicycles, motor vehicles, and public parking. - In keeping with a recent urban planning trend, Complete Streets are part of the City's ecological fabric that integrates green stormwater management infrastructure alongside a range of mobility options. - The City's Non-Motorized Transportation Plan is up to date. - There is growth in the extent of trails, bike paths, and walking paths that can be used as all-season routes for recreation, commuting, and general wellness. - The City maintains the quality of existing roads, sidewalks, bicycle paths, and trails. - New roads are planned and constructed as needed to support development. - Port and shoreline infrastructure is expanded based on tourism and cruise ship industry trends.	NON-MOTORIZED - Continue to apply the Complete Streets Ordinance when constructing new roads and making renovations to existing roads. - Investigate and accomplish measures to improve pedestrian road crossing safety throughout the City. - Install road stencils and signs for bike routes. - Focus attention on adding sidewalks in a coordinated manner in established neighborhoods that do not have them. - Link the waterfront trail to the Michigan Tech campus at the top of Cliff Drive. - Investigate and implement ways to improve walking and biking during winter months. - Collaborate with the Bike and Pedestrian Committee to plan and implement projects. - Work to continue to add and improve Safe Routes to School. - Continue to implement wayfinding for all forms of non-motorized mobility throughout the City. - Obtain ownership of the rail corridor within the City and maintain the trail easement.
		MOTORIZED - Explore the possible extension of Cedar Street from Razorback Drive east to Main Street between Hurontown and Dodgeville as another east-west connection for City and Portage Township residents. - Continue to monitor motor vehicle speeds in the City. - Pave and maintain local streets as funds become available. - Assess public parking and related vehicular circulation. - Coordinate with MDOT to implement enhanced traffic safety measures on trunk line highways within the City. - Continue with the asset management rating system to evaluate road conditions. - Monitor the continuing development and use of emerging technologies and systems, including autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles, electric scooters, drone deliveries, and ride hailing. Take into account their potential impacts on city infrastructure.
		PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION - Participate with the City of Hancock and MDOT in the MDOT-funded study of combining Houghton and Hancock's transit systems and pursue ways to implement recommendations. - Explore ways to better coordinate the City's public transportation with Michigan Tech's student-focused shuttle bus routes. - Look for ways to enhance the coordination of public transit service with walking and biking. - Follow nationwide transit developments that may be useful in the City, including apps for hand-held devices that display bus routes, schedules, and real-time locations, and enable electronic payment of fares.
		PORT AND SHORELINE INFRASTRUCTURE Make improvements to port and shoreline infrastructure including docks, piers, and supporting facilities as needed.

CHAPTER	GOALS	STRATEGIES
CHAPTER 7: DOWNTOWN	- Downtown continues to be a center for retail, service, entertainment, and dining experiences. - Further improvements to accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders are planned. - A dynamic downtown with multiple opportunities for social interaction is maintained. - The culture of business support for more new growth is encouraged.	TRAFFIC
		- Study and consider options to improve traffic flow and safety throughout downtown. - Maintain robust and highly visible crosswalks throughout downtown. - Continue to evaluate realignment and rerouting of downtown traffic to maximize benefits to businesses and the public.
		REAL ESTATE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
		- Continue to support and partner with the MTEC SmartZone, as their continued success will be a critical driver towards the vitality of downtown Houghton. - Assist business ventures that are interested in locating in Houghton and showcase the advantages of locating downtown. - Continue working with downtown businesses to assist with marketing, special events, and business consulting offered by the Michigan Small Business Development Center. - Continue to monitor development opportunities for real estate in downtown Houghton. - Continue with façade improvements and work quickly to fill vacant buildings as businesses change. - Support the redevelopment, reactivation, and reuse of building faces along Lakeshore Drive.
		PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLES
		- Improve pedestrian and bicycle connections to the waterfront trail at Quincy, Huron, and Isle Royale Streets. - Continue to add pedestrian and bicycle signage and controls to promote both motorist and user awareness. - Continue to enhance visual and physical connectivity between Montezuma Avenue, Shelden Avenue, Lakeshore Drive, and the waterfront.
		PARKING AND SIGNAGE
		- Consider sites and develop options for new parking assets south of Shelden Avenue as land becomes available to meet anticipated demand. - Continue parking structure renovations to maintain parking availability. - Continue implementation of a coordinated system of wayfinding signage, including gateway, attraction, directional, and parking signage.
		LANDSCAPE AND URBAN DESIGN
		- Work with MDOT to replace the overhead sign and steel truss on Shelden Avenue at the bridge with a sign arrangement that meets MDOT requirements but is more context sensitive to the historic downtown district and urban design. - Plan and implement streetscape and visual enhancements for Montezuma Avenue. - Explore options for adding street trees and vegetation on Shelden Avenue. - Design and implement landscape and vegetation treatments for slopes currently landscaped with mine rock cover. - Consider more locations and continue to take advantage of opportunities to incorporate public art and interpretive displays into the downtown setting. - Look into building height regulation.

CHAPTER	GOALS	STRATEGIES
CHAPTER 7: DOWNTOWN	- Downtown continues to be a center for retail, service, entertainment, and dining experiences. - Further improves to accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders are planned. - A dynamic downtown with multiple opportunities for social interaction is maintained. - The culture of business support for more new growth is encouraged.	REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES - Continue to monitor property transactions and opportunities for redevelopment. - Collaborate with the National Park Service on a new Isle Royale National Park headquarters facility, possibly at another location, and evaluate redevelopment opportunities for the site. - Evaluate options for enhancing pedestrian connections, and increasing green space and parking at the Pier site between Huron and Isle Royale Streets to further develop the area as the "town square." - Consider obtaining the depot building on Huron Street for use as a welcome center and other public use. - Actively market the Hodge Building at the entrance to downtown to leverage its location for redevelopment by the private sector. - Work with the Pewabic Street Community Garden and local farmers to create a multi-seasonal farmers market that can be used for community-related activities in the non-growing season. - Continue to work with property owners and developers to improve and increase the availability and diversity of living spaces downtown. - Assess the operational costs for city-owned facilities and coordinate with facility management to evaluate funding resources and establish goals for operational cost sharing.
CHAPTER 8: M-26 AND SHARON AVENUE BUSINESS CORRIDORS	- Commercial development of the M-26/Sharon Avenue corridors continues in order to meet the changing needs of the City while remaining consistent with master planning, zoning, and overarching development plans. - A number of mobility options are provided for people to safely reach the businesses in the district; including new/alternate routes, improved pedestrian/bike access, and public transit. - Future flood damage in the Huron Creek basin is prevented.	- Maintain the legal status and tax capture of the TIFA District to fund continued maintenance and development of the district. - Continue access management and site plan review processes to ensure development does not negatively impact the highway's capacity and safety. - Continue to mitigate flow-related hazards within the Huron Creek basin and collaborate with neighboring units of government to enact best management practices within the greater watershed to lessen the impact on the City infrastructure. - Continue to evaluate traffic and use patterns in the commercial district to allow for the preservation and/or improvement of traffic safety for both motorized and non-motorized travel. - Improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the corridors. - Develop and implement a plan for a coordinated system of wayfinding signage including gateway, attraction, and directional signage. - Continue implementation of the M-26 Visual Enhancement Plan. - Improve lighting on Sharon Avenue to fill gaps. - Continue to evaluate parking needs and revise requirements for private commercial development. - Continue to monitor and improve Huron Creek water quality.
CHAPTER 9: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	- Houghton continues to be the leader in, and the center of, economic development in the area. - The City contributes to area-wide prosperity.	- Maintain a strong, vibrant downtown through business recruitment, retention, and enhancement. - Continue working on community-wide placemaking as a catalyst for economic growth. - Foster a higher quality of life to aid in talent recruitment and retention in our area. - Continue supporting and partnering with the MTEC SmartZone. - Solicit all sources of funding, including grants, for continued improvements within the City. - Work together to create, improve, maintain and support business organizations and resource groups. - Stay engaged with residents, businesses, and governmental agencies on evolving trends to meet the needs of the 21st century. - Continue collaborating with Michigan Tech and community businesses to develop civic improvements and cultivate a shared vision for the community. - Consolidate services with neighboring communities where appropriate. - Continue using Public Act 425 tax-sharing agreements to bring additional property into the City for development. - Support local and regional efforts to attract and welcome visitors to the area.
CHAPTER 10: ZONING PLAN AND FUTURE LAND USE	- Zoning changes that support quality neighborhood development are implemented. - Appropriate City-owned properties are redeveloped to benefit the taxpayers and provide long-term benefit to our community.	- Adopt form-based zoning in areas where it may improve development options. - Consider rezoning targeted residential areas to R-2 or R-3 to increase density and create more housing opportunities. - Encourage development of undeveloped parcels with possible zoning changes. - Designate and promote Redevelopment Ready Sites to take advantage of the MEDC marketing assistance. - Review Zoning Ordinance for possible changes to development standards in residential zoning districts. - Review ordinance development standards to encourage development and redevelopment of commercial properties. - Work with Michigan Tech regarding the possible sale of underutilized university property for development. - Further streamline planning and zoning approval processes as part of embracing our Redevelopment Ready Status

CHAPTER	GOALS	STRATEGIES
CHAPTER 11: SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE	• Actions that address both short term (resilience) and long-term (sustainability) threats to the healthy growth and function of the City of Houghton and its community are identified and implemented.	• While some strategies can be implemented quickly, developing a comprehensive Sustainability and Resilience Plan for the City of Houghton could follow these steps: • Form a task force representative of the community. • Conduct a sustainability self-assessment. • Perform a vulnerability assessment. • Establish a vision and sustainability goals. • Model planning and implementation on the successes of other municipalities. • Develop an implementation plan. • Engage in public outreach. • Until a sustainability plan is developed, the following actions can be considered: • Join Michigan Green Communities, a statewide sustainability benchmarking, networking, and technical assistance program from a partnership of state agencies, Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and Michigan Association of Counties. • Create a sustainability and resilience section on the City website with links to resources for property owners, including for improving the sustainability and resilience of homes and other buildings. • Maintain the native plant demonstration garden at Nara Nature Park and increase the use of native plants in City projects. • Construct additional engineered rain gardens for stormwater management where possible. • Evaluate addition of sustainability criteria to the site plan review process and zoning ordinance. • Identify and remove unintentional barriers to sustainability and resilience in City ordinances.

**CITY OF HOUGHTON
PLANNING COMMISSION
RESOLUTION 2024-133**

WHEREAS, the City of Houghton Planning Commission has undertaken a planning process to determine the needs and desires of its residents during a five-year period covering the years 2024 to 2028, and

WHEREAS, the City of Houghton Planning Commission began the process of developing a master plan in accordance with Public Act 33 of 2008, and

WHEREAS, the Houghton City Council approved the distribution of the draft master plan to adjacent local units of government providing them with a 63 day comment period, and

WHEREAS, the residents of the City of Houghton were provided with a well-advertised opportunity during the development of the draft plan to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss all aspects of the master plan, and

WHEREAS, the public was given a well-advertised opportunity and reasonable accommodations to review the final draft plan for a period of at least fifteen days, and

WHEREAS, a final public comment session was held on April 23, 2024 at the City Center, 616 Shelden Avenue, Houghton, Michigan to provide an opportunity for all citizens of the area to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss all aspects of the master plan, and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the City of Houghton Planning Commission hereby recommends adoption of the City of Houghton Master Plan 2024-2028.

Resolution adopted this 23rd day of April, 2024.

Dan Liebau
Secretary

**CITY OF HOUGHTON
RESOLUTION 2024-1937**

WHEREAS, the City of Houghton Planning Commission has undertaken a planning process to determine the needs and desires of its residents during a five-year period covering the years 2024 to 2028, and

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WHEREAS, following the public comment session, the City of Houghton Planning Commission recommended adoption of the City of Houghton Master Plan 2024-2028.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Houghton City Council hereby adopts the City of Houghton Master Plan 2024-2028.

Resolution adopted this 22nd day of May, 2024.

Ann Vollrath
Clerk

