

Forum & Interviews

Community input is critical both from understanding dynamics and economic conditions as well as generating attitudes and opinions. Through the analysis process, various input methodologies were employed. These included a community forum and individual face-to-face interviews with select stakeholders. This latter group included business operators, property owners, hoteliers, residents, real estate industry representatives and government officials or elected representatives. In addition, input was also obtained through surveys of businesses, residents, and visitors.

The following are highlights from the forum and “stakeholder” interviews. It is important to note in reviewing presented issues that perceptions are reality to those that hold or believe them, whether or not those perceptions are premised upon actual facts.

- ✓ In general, there is consensus that people would like to see Mackinaw City and area be unified as a community, working “on the same page” towards common goals.
- ✓ There is consensus as well that the greatest asset of the area is its natural beauty and setting (water, sky, stars, sunsets, and islands).
- ✓ There were a series of goals for economic development that surfaced including: diversifying the economy, thereby improving the standard of living and creating year-round employment, and insuring ethics in the hospitality industry. It was felt that none of the above should be accomplished without maintaining the area’s quality and beauty.
- ✓ A range of new activity or opportunity areas was suggested, including those that follow:
 - Home occupations**
 - Higher education center
 - Business recruitment
 - Quality development and planned activity
 - Affordable housing
 - Increased development/more hotels
 - Convention facilities/port facilities
- ✓ There was also concern expressed for the average age of area residents, with a significant proportion known to be seniors.
- ✓ In addition to the natural environment, other area assets were identified by participants including:
 - Interstate location.
 - Proximity to Mackinac Island.
 - Reputation as the State’s #1 tourism destination.

- Abundance of hotel/motel rooms.
 - The attraction of affluent tourists with disposable income.
 - Central location to numerous tourist attractions such as the Island, the bridge, the Upper Peninsula, St. Ignace, the fort, light houses, and underwater vessels (for divers).
 - Proximity to Pellston Airport.
 - Repeat business, with people coming back year after year.
- ✓ The greatest factors preventing additional business activity or “drawbacks” to doing business in Mackinaw City are defined by the participants as:
- Limited winter activities.
 - Tourism season limited to 90 to 120 days.
 - Village beginning to “over-regulate” with zoning restrictions. (Mentioned were restrictions on temporary signs, excessive parking requirements, and selective enforcement by staff.)
 - One family beginning to control the local business climate.
 - Views of the water being destroyed by increasing shoreline development.
 - Small town politics getting in the way of new opportunities.
 - Area beginning to experience unplanned development (sprawl).
 - Lack of downtown parking in season.
- ✓ Two families are seen as being most successful in creating new business opportunities in the last few years. These are the Lieghios and Sheplers.
- ✓ While limited winter activity was identified as being a significant factor in preventing additional business activity, most people were at a general loss on what winter activity should or could stimulate the economy. A few mentioned cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, sled dog racing, and ice fishing.
- ✓ There was also limited support for casino proposals, although majority feel that its inclusion is inevitable. Many that support the concept do not do so for philosophical reasons, but feel a casino would generate year-round opportunities and provide some spin-off to area hotels and restaurants.
- ✓ Few voiced a genuine need to encourage industrial development, especially manufacturing industries. In fact, most seemed to almost disparage the idea of industrial development since it was, in their minds, linked (negatively) to the automobile industry, as opposed to any other type of industry. At least several indicated that attempts to support industrial development would probably fail due to ups and downs with the auto industry. Several voiced concern over “smoke stack” industries!
- ✓ Much concern was expressed for the lack of communications between three area organizations most involved with the business community. The Village, the Chamber of Commerce and the Tourism Bureau were deemed to be less effective than they might be if they worked better together. There was also a sense that resources were not effectively utilized because of the lack of cooperation among the three entities.

- ✓ Many individuals feel that the Visitors' Bureau does a good job at marketing the community, but that there have been past mistakes that impact the group. Furthermore, potential conflicts with some interest in the area have weakened marketing efforts to a certain extent.
- ✓ All parties were supportive of interagency cooperation, especially in the areas of marketing and promotion. Most stated the goals of the Chamber and Visitors' Bureau were very unclear or uncertain.
- ✓ Mackinaw Crossings, a significant downtown shopping and entertainment complex, and the increased hotel development are the two most important business changes in the past five years.
- ✓ Mackinaw Crossings was largely seen as a positive for the community, with the exception of some concern for its impact on parking. Mentioned is the heavy amount of marketing dollars spent by the Crossings and the positive impact resulting in an increase in tourism. Yet, there was concern expressed for the financial viability of the Crossings. Several mentioned issues associated with the Crossing's theater and inability to draw sufficient crowds to support the establishment.
- ✓ The Village is seen as being relatively supportive, but there were concerns expressed beyond the noted communications issue. These include not doing enough to plan for future development, often not "pro-active" enough with respect to seeking change, and study things "to death" without implementing much. Some additional concern was expressed for "high" property taxes. (It is noted that the Village has just recently initiated a new comprehensive planning process.)
- ✓ The DDA is not perceived as being active or doing much of anything at this time. It is not seen as a vehicle for change. They are given credit by those that are knowledgeable for doing a "good job" with the downtown "streetscape".
- ✓ Several voiced concern that many business owners and people with investment potential are moving out of Mackinaw to other nearby communities. No one was certain why. Importantly, it is felt that the Village has limited land area/limited shoreline for future expansion.
- ✓ Neither the local press nor any nearby radio or television stations are seen as being effective tools for marketing or disseminating information on Mackinaw City.
- ✓ While there was general consensus a convention facility would be a plus offering an opportunity to attract larger, possibly year round, events, no one was certain of the appropriate size nor that a convention facility would be self-supporting. In fact, most had their doubts about the latter.
- ✓ There are no known regional marketing efforts. No one is perceived as working together. The Village and Island continue to avoid working together on economic development issues and opportunities. Some feel Island people think they are "too good for us". Furthermore, the relationship between Mackinaw City and the Island has changed over time. The Village is no longer highly dependent on the Island as the Village has developed their own set of tourism opportunities.