

The background of the entire page is a blue-tinted photograph of a long pier extending into a body of water. At the end of the pier, a lighthouse is visible. The sky is clear and blue. The text is overlaid on this background.

# MICHIGAN CITY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

## **MICHIGAN CITY 2040**

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## **STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN**

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# LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Stakeholders,

As we embark on our collective journey towards economic development in Michigan City, I am honored to address you with a shared vision for our future prosperity. It builds on the work that we have been engaged in for numerous years and is the byproduct of months of interviews, roundtables, surveys, analysis, and discussions with residents and businesses, across our community.



Michigan City is building on our existing work from a position of strength. Over the last five years, we have moved forward on the South Shore Line Double Track, have over 1,000 new units of housing in the pipeline, have brought in over \$500M in private investment and created thousands of new local jobs. Within 20 miles of Michigan City, major corporations such as Amazon, Microsoft, and Samsung have made major investments in data centers, an electric vehicle battery plant, and more. Michigan City is poised to leverage these catalytic investments to bring more opportunities to our community. Our economic growth bucks national trends as comparable small industrial cities have struggled to achieve any economic growth in the backdrop of the global pandemic, international conflicts, and volatile inflation and interest rates.

Our continued success hinges on a unified effort across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors and effective leveraging of regional, state, and federal resources. The Michigan City Economic Development Corporation is privileged to lead these efforts for our community and this strategic planning process for our future prosperity. However, we cannot do this work alone. There are components of this work to be led by private firms, other public entities, and nonprofit partners. I'm honored to facilitate this coordination and work with you and our robust network of partners to secure our collective success.

At the core of our strategy lies the commitment to creating quality jobs. That said, jobs alone are not enough. The accessibility, wages, sustainability, and diversification of those jobs will determine the quality of life for our residents and our future role in the region. Unfortunately, we have poverty levels that are twice the poverty levels of the country. As those data points are further disaggregated, communities of color disproportionately represent the poorest segments of our

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community. One of the most important indicators of economic progress in our next phase of growth is our ability to dramatically reduce these persistent poverty figures and chip away at disparities seen along racial, ethnic, and gender lines. We recognize that sustainable economic growth can only be achieved when every individual has ample opportunity to participate in the economy. This work builds on the Vibrant Michigan City Playbook (<https://vibrantmc.com>) through its focus on enlarging the economic pie and increasing opportunity for all of Michigan City. Vibrant Michigan City was an action-oriented set of policies, research, and insights developed by the Michigan City Development Corporation in concert with the Brookings Institution and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation.

Michigan City 2040 is an ambitious and comprehensive plan which is grounded by the rich history of Michigan City yet recognizes the changing landscape of business and investment. This plan aims to identify and sharpen our focus on the unique value we can provide in the global economic competition. It is intentional in elevating opportunities for youth, young professionals, immigrants, families and others. It recognizes major technological changes such as the disruptions fueled by generative AI and embraces the need to diversify our industry sectors to align with new opportunities and the interests of our residents. It advocates for smart investments to increase tech infrastructure and training opportunities and argues for spaces and programs to support local entrepreneurs. Finally, it does not look at Michigan City through rose-colored lenses. Rather, it acknowledges and addresses the pressing issues of affordability, housing access, and other quality of life amenities as core to attracting and retaining residents and companies. The goals and strategies outlined in this plan reflect the ambitions and commitments of our businesses, residents, and political leaders .

Michigan City has a great history and a brighter future. It can only be achieved by working together. I invite each of you to join us on this journey. Together, we can build a thriving community that serves as a beacon of opportunity for generations to come.

Sincerely,

**Clarence Hulse, CEO**



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# INTRODUCTION

Over the past half-decade, the global and national economies have undergone significant fluctuations, characterized by inflation-driven hikes in interest rates, disruptions in global supply chains due to heightened insecurity, and the arduous process of recovering from a devastating global pandemic that claimed numerous lives. Despite this pervasive instability, Michigan City's economy has demonstrated resilience and growth. Notably, substantial investments in infrastructure, such as the South Shore Line Double Track, have bolstered accessibility for workers and enhanced connectivity with job opportunities and amenities. Additionally, the pending closure of the state prison and power plant have presented lucrative opportunities for scalable redevelopment initiatives. Lastly, the continuous influx of investments from corporations into air compressor manufacturing underscores the city's economic vitality by providing quality jobs. While many communities across the nation grapple with strategies to return to pre-pandemic economic levels, Michigan City stands poised to innovate and further reinforce its economy from a position of strength.

The objective of this document is to provide strategic guidance, delineate actionable strategies, and establish measurable benchmarks for success. This entails fostering economic opportunities for all residents, maintaining a consistent quality of life, and fostering cross-sectoral partnerships. Achieving this ambitious agenda requires collaboration across public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Political leaders must leverage their platform to communicate the vision, while policies should be crafted to create a conducive environment with a clear public and private return on investment. Private enterprises need to reaffirm their commitment through investments, job training, and insights into economic trends. This dynamic interplay between the public and private sectors is crucial for managing risks, encouraging intelligent investments, and attracting talent. The best part of this is that everyone wins with more profitability for companies, better opportunities for wealth generation by residents, and an enviable quality of life found in few communities across the country. Fortunately, the Michigan City Economic Development Corporation and its partners are well-positioned to facilitate this dialogue, support investments, and enhance the market's capabilities. These collaborative efforts serve as the cornerstone of advancing Michigan City's agenda for economic prosperity.

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Based on this foundation, the methodology for this project centered on understanding how to leverage the progress experienced since 2018 to further diversify and grow the economy. Our team augmented labor and economic data analysis by actively involving diverse business figures that represented multiple sectors, political representatives, and community leaders to gain insights into their views regarding the market's evolution, potential, and the economic landscape. For this work, over 120 people responded to a survey, roundtable were conducted with dozens of residents, and individual interviews were held with politicians, business executives and civic leaders. While the overall outlook is positive, Michigan City grapples with housing needs, shifting population dynamics, and the need to build a more dynamic and diversified economy. Essential to achieving this goal is bolstering business retention and attraction, enhancing public perception, and building an ecosystem that provides clear information and pointed support for businesses. This strategic planning initiative thoughtfully gleans from past endeavors to provide a forward-looking roadmap to navigate the evolving economic landscape.

Key areas of focus emerged organically from this inclusive dialogue, encapsulating the core imperatives of economic inclusion, workforce development, placemaking, storytelling, and economic modernization. By anchoring efforts within these focal points, Michigan City can not only navigate the present challenges but also catalyze sustainable growth and prosperity for all residents and stakeholders.



# TARGETED SECTORS

Advanced manufacturing, logistics, and professional services continue to be important sectors for Michigan City. At this juncture, expansion to additional sectors are essential for continued economic growth. The targeted sectors for the region are: advanced manufacturing, logistics & distribution, food & beverage manufacturing, information technology and professional office space.



To strengthen its local economy, Michigan City will have to diversify its job base, upskill its workforce and provide a pathway with specific programs that will spur entrepreneurship. As Michigan City reimagines its economy it is essential that it keeps a keen focus on mixing its traditional sectors with emerging opportunities, expands its commercial reach, and grows in a fashion that ensures opportunities for all of its residents. While the sectors above, have been the mainstay for decades, to build the modern economy needed to retain and attract talent, elevating next-generation opportunities in robotics, electronics, healthcare, and technology likely present the best channels for new growth.

## REGIONAL SECTORS

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Logistics & Distribution
- Food & Beverage Manufacturing
- Information Technology
- Professional Office Space

## CITY SECTORS

### EXISTING SECTORS

- Advanced Manufacturing
  - Air Compression Equipment
  - Food Processing
  - Metal Fabrication
  - Machining & Auto Accessories
- Logistics
- Professional Services
- Tourism

### EMERGING SECTORS

- Healthcare & Life Sciences
- Technology
- Advanced Manufacturing
  - Robotics and Automation
  - Electronics

# KEY ECONOMIC DRIVERS

As Michigan City pivots to create a brighter future for its residents, it is essential that it keeps in mind global economic shifts which are constantly impacting its ability to drive jobs and investments. The world is changing. Global and local economies are in flux. Key drivers of this uncertainty include:

- Technological disruption
- Slow population growth and considerable aging in Western economies
- Increased access to global markets, technology, and education in developing countries
- New business models and technologies that threaten traditional hegemony by large corporations (generative AI, blockchain, etc.)
- More fluid capital and policies that impact trade and Foreign Direct Investment
- Increasing political instability and global conflicts

The following goals are core objectives that Michigan City should adapt to move its economy forward in a fashion that is inclusive and sustainable.

- Bring levels of unemployment and wages in line with national and state averages, respectively
- Increase startup activity
- Curb population outmigration
- Focus on diversifying overall sectoral mix
- Increase access to jobs, entrepreneurship, and opportunities for all residents of Michigan City



# DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1: Population Demographics

US Census	Michigan City	Indiana	US
Population	31,792	6,832,274	333,271,411
White	62.7%	84%	75%
Black	27.5%	10.3%	13.6%
Hispanic	8.4%	7.23%	19.1%
Household size	2.57	2.49	2.7
Poverty Rate	21.2%	12.6%	11.5%
Income-Household	\$51,554	\$67,173	\$75,149
Unemployment Rate	3.6%	3.6%	3.7%
Labor Participation	54.8%	63.8%	63%
Education - High School	89.9%	90%	89.1%
Education - College	18.1%	28.2%	34.3%

Michigan City, Indiana, exhibits a varied demographic profile with notable diversity in its population composition. The city has a population of approximately 31,792 as of 2023, with racial demographics comprising 62.7% White, 27.5% Black or African American, and 8.4% Hispanic or Latino residents.

The city has a homeownership rate of 59.3%. The median value of owner-occupied housing units is around \$116,000, which is lower than both the state and regional medians and the median rent is \$825.

Economically, the city faces challenges with a poverty rate of 21.23%, which is significantly higher than the state average. The median household income of \$51,554 is significantly lower than that of the state and nation.

This economic strain is reflected in varying poverty rates across different races, with 29.32% of Black residents and 24.65% of Hispanic residents living below the poverty line. The city's economic challenges are mirrored in the employment sectors, with varying income levels based on educational attainment. The city's labor force participation rate stands at 54.8%, with an unemployment rate of less than 5%.

Education in Michigan City shows that 88.9% of residents aged 25 and over are high school graduates, while 18.1% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. This educational attainment is a crucial factor in the local workforce and economic development. The economic backdrop and demographic specifics of Michigan City paint a picture of a community with diverse challenges and opportunities, from education and economic participation to housing affordability and poverty alleviation.

# ECONOMIC INCLUSION

The concept of economic inclusion asserts that every resident not actively engaged in the economy, whether through employment or entrepreneurship, represents untapped potential and lost productivity. Respondents surveyed overwhelmingly believed that there were not ample opportunities for all residents to participate in the economy. Unfortunately, the data affirms their concerns. Michigan City contends with notable disparities that mirror national trends, particularly higher poverty rates and significant income disparities by Black and Hispanic populations vis-a-vis white residents, as illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 2. These realities coupled with low educational attainment beyond high school, a returning citizen demographic, and a growing immigrant community further exacerbate these income and poverty challenges. However, through an inclusive approach, these impediments can represent an opportunity for innovation. Within these communities lie reservoirs of untapped talent, creativity, and entrepreneurial drive. Empowering them with the requisite tools, capacity-building initiatives, and opportunities is paramount to harnessing their potential for tangible economic advancement through enhancing workforce productivity and creating pathways to business ownership.

Prioritizing inclusion is essential for the long-term economic health and growth of Michigan City. By adopting an inclusive economic strategy driven by market dynamics rather than reliance on patronage or social assistance, Michigan City can pursue a proven pathway to economic rejuvenation. Michigan City is uniquely positioned to shape its economic landscape in alignment with demographic shifts, positioning itself as a community that fosters tailored economic opportunities for all its residents and businesses.



Whether individuals of color, immigrants, women, seniors, or veterans, intentionality in crafting inclusive economic programs yields better results. Michigan City is particularly well-suited to take an inclusive-approach to economic development as its population is more diverse than surrounding areas and the rest of the state. Michigan City has a longstanding-African American community (27.5%), a small and growing Hispanic population, and a history of being a place where immigrants could build the American dream for themselves. These trends make it doubly important for Michigan City to be inclusive in its approach so that people see themselves in the future of the community, greater income disparities along racial lines can be reduced, and the local economy can optimize performance of its greatest asset - its people.

The survey captured a significant gap between the career aspirations of Michigan City's emerging workforce and the available employment opportunities. While there is a plethora of jobs, particularly in traditional manufacturing, the emerging workforce exhibits a strong preference for tech and other high-growth industries. Increasingly, entry-level jobs in the manufacturing sector are inadequate for one to be able to afford housing in Michigan City. The lack of tech jobs and the unattractiveness of manufacturing jobs often prompt young professionals to seek employment opportunities outside the region, contributing to outward migration. Moreover, there's a perception that certain fields lack career advancement prospects, compounding the challenge of retaining local talent and fostering economic growth.



FIGURE 1: MEAN INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2022 INFLATION ADJUSTED DOLLARS) MICHIGAN CITY & U.S.

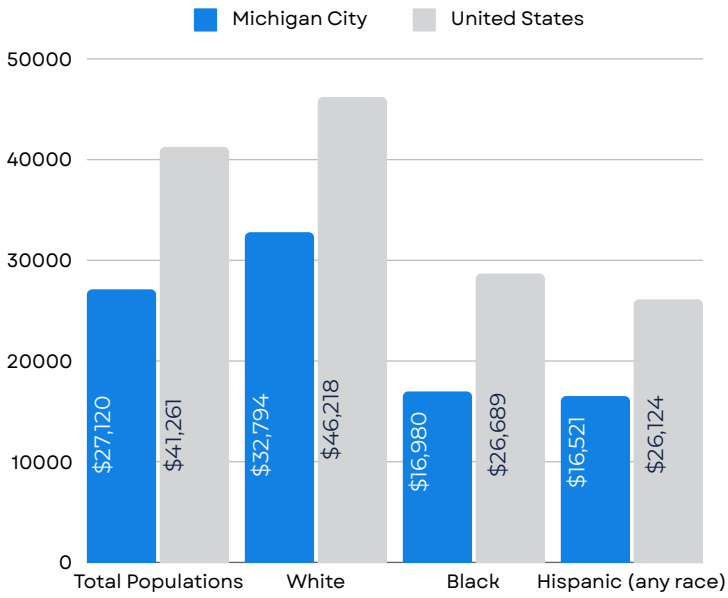


TABLE 2: POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (2022)

Population	Poverty Rate
Total Population	21.2%
White	16.5%
Black	29.3%
Hispanic	24.7%

TABLE 3: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR POPULATIONS IN MICHIGAN CITY

Population	Education Level	Percent
White	High school graduate or higher	91.4%
	Bachelor's degree or higher	21.5%
Black	High school graduate or higher	82.7%
	Bachelor's degree or higher	9.9%
Hispanic (Any Race)	High school graduate or higher	85.4%
	Bachelor's degree or higher	11%
Total Population over 25 years of age	Less than 9th grade	3.4%
	9th to 12th grade, no diploma	7.7%
	High school graduate (includes equivalency)	40.5%
	Some college, no degree	21.5%
	Associate's degree	8.7%
	Bachelor's degree	11.4%
	Graduate or professional degree	6.8%
	High school graduate or higher	88.9%
	Bachelor's degree or higher	18.1%

On another front, this engagement signaled the importance of improving communication and transparency within the community. Participants expressed a notable lack of trust between black residents and community leaders, a sentiment that has persisted over time. However, there are encouraging signs of progress under the current Mayor. Additionally, there's a consensus among respondents regarding the need for better access to information regarding programming, opportunities, and economic development activity. Bridging these communication gaps and rebuilding trust are essential steps toward fostering a more inclusive and informed community that can collectively address economic challenges and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Focusing on economic inclusion will fundamentally enhance Michigan City's viability through fixing system discrepancies which inhibit economic participation, creating a more productive workforce and providing residents with greater agency in determining their quality of life and economic future. A long-term commitment to economic inclusion is vital to Michigan City's prosperity.

### 01

#### **TRACK INCLUSION DATA TO BETTER IDENTIFY DISPARITIES AND CONFRONT THEM IN A TIMELY FASHION.**

- Regularly track data through an inclusion lens to monitor and expedite progress every 2-3 years.
- Identify easily trackable data using existing sources.
- Collaborate with universities and other agencies to compile and analyze information.
- Utilize surveys and other engagement tools to gather qualitative insights.

### 02

#### **DEVELOP AND CULTIVATE THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM.**

- Map the ecosystem of support services by compiling a compendium of existing programs and initiatives to identify gaps to inform the creation of new programs and services.
- Develop comprehensive programming covering training, capital, client access, and other resources for entrepreneurship, workforce development, and housing.
- Provide access to capital and clients to help small businesses scale.

## 03

### **INVEST IN PHYSICAL ASSETS THAT PROVIDE UNIQUE VALUE TO TIE EMERGING FIRMS TO MICHIGAN CITY**

- Develop assets that provide significant value to new industries, such as AI labs, wet labs, and maker spaces, through partnerships with industry stakeholders.
- Establish coworking spaces with connections to academic and industry partners to foster collaboration and innovation.

## 04

### **INCREASE EXPOSURE TO DIVERSE CAREERS**

- Launch a campaign to rebrand the manufacturing industry.
- Showcase success stories of professionals across the community.
- Implement business-in-schools programs to bridge the gap between education and industry.
- Provide targeted workforce training in concert with private industry.

## 05

### **PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE WRAPAROUND SERVICES**

- Provide comprehensive wraparound services (transportation, childcare, and treatment services) to facilitate the ease of employment.

## 06

### **IMPLEMENT TARGETED AND TAILORED COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

- Implement targeted and tailored communication strategies to ensure broader access to information about economic opportunities, particularly for communities facing economic hurdles.

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# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Talent continues to be one of the most important determinants in where companies invest and grow. The markets that win the competition for talent will also win the global economic competition. An educated, healthy, and trained workforce yields profitability for companies through greater productivity and innovation. As labor is mobile, Michigan City is competing with other markets throughout the region and country to prove itself as a great place to live with robust economic opportunities. Making this case is imperative for Michigan City to further develop, attract, and retain the high-quality workers essential to its survival and competitive advantage.

Michigan City's industry mix is well-balanced with the most significant representation comprised of manufacturing (20.9%), retail (15.4%), and education services, healthcare & social services (18.4%) each representing over 15% of the city's employment. These sectors provide a mix of jobs that allow quality job opportunities for people with diverse education levels. While those sectors remain strong, other high paying sectors such as Professional, Scientific, & Management jobs and Information Technology represent only 8.1% and 1.3% respectively. The lack of jobs in these spaces encourages Michigan City youth interested in these sectors to seek education and employment opportunities elsewhere.

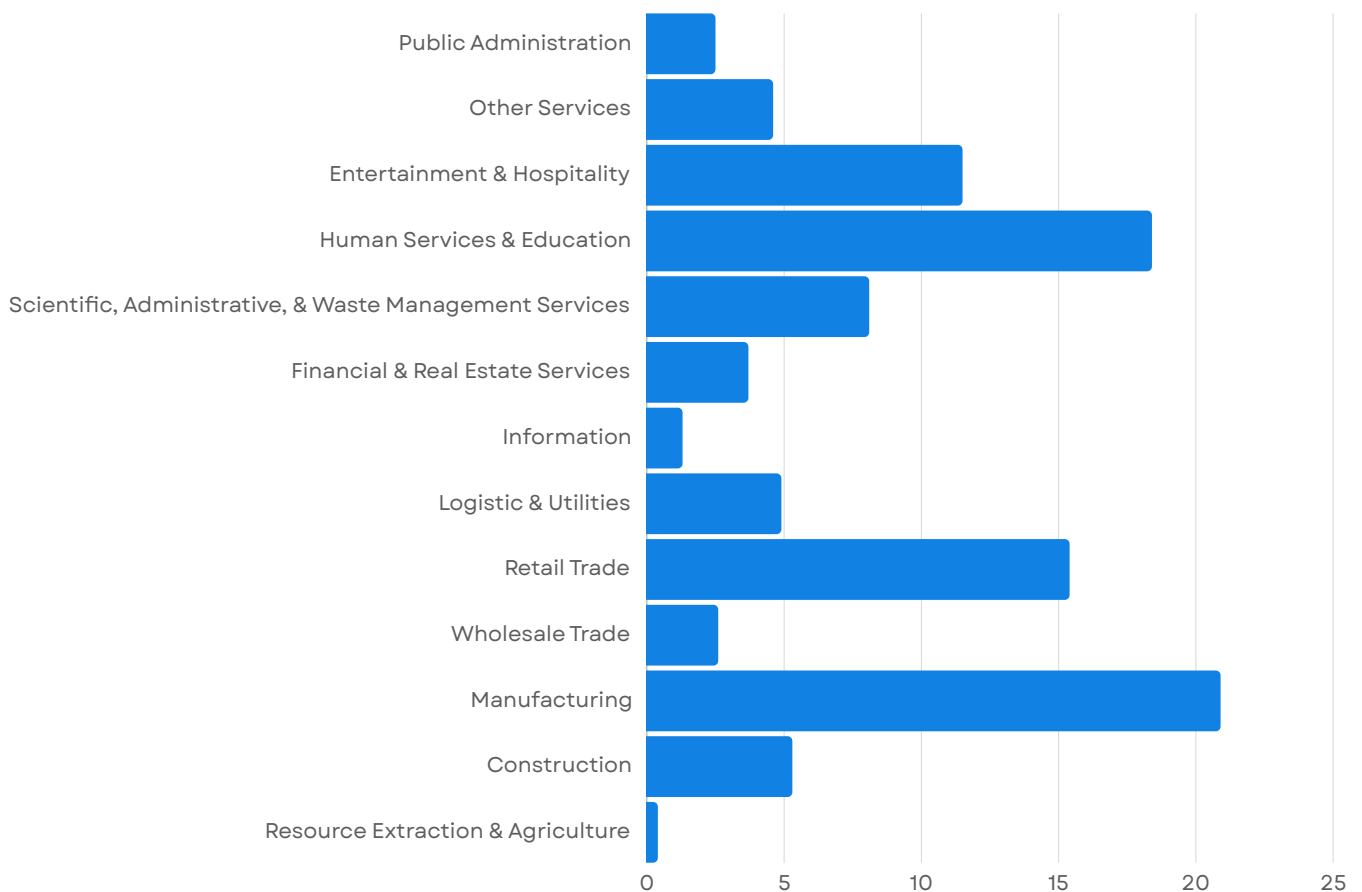
In engaging employers and residents, both sides stressed that their needs were unmet by the current economic environment. Employers want more and better qualified workers. Nearly half of respondents surveyed, cited talent acquisition as a significant challenge. Meanwhile, workers desire a broader myriad of job options and seek compensation that allows them to live well. While jobs exist, the gap between career ladders, training opportunities, and diverse sector opportunities is wide.

Michigan City has lower levels of education and workforce readiness when compared to statewide figures. 27% of Michigan City's working-age population has an associate's degree or higher versus 43% at the state level, and 44% nationally. The 2020 Indiana College Value Report finds that a person with some college earns \$150,000 more over the course of their career and with a four-year degree more than a million more. Increasing the educational attainment of the existing labor force is vital. Aligning sectoral and functional interests of residents with training opportunities will likely have the biggest effect on raising income and reducing disparities in Michigan City.

While numerous training programs exist, the wages and benefits of the associated jobs often do not align with the needs of working professionals. Hurdles such as transit, childcare, and housing affordability limit the employment options for many, forcing employees to consider relocation to other areas or settle for more convenient lower income local options. Increasingly younger professionals have greater interests in fields with limited employment in the region such as tech, finance and STEM areas. To develop, attract, and retain the workforce that Michigan City needs to compete it will have to create an environment where industry and government partner to offer diverse employment options, nimble and accessible training, and an ecosystem that provides appropriate social service supports and a high quality of life.



Table 4: Percent of Labor Force in Industries





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# RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below aim to position Michigan City as a magnet for talent that intentionally engages residents in creating their desired economic future, a community which invests in the partnerships needed to train the workforce of the future, and a place that provides a quality of life that is unparalleled for workers from a variety of backgrounds.

## 01

### **ADULT EDUCATION THROUGH ENHANCED TRAINING PROGRAMS**

- Partner closely with the K-12 education system, community college, and universities to provide nuanced and customized programs to meet market needs.
- Increase the quality and capacity of training programs to ensure they effectively prepare individuals for in-demand careers, with a focus on providing wraparound services and compensation during on-the-job training. Michigan City should aim to increase its population with a two-year degree or higher to 50% to more effectively competitive for higher-income jobs and decrease income disparity.

## 02

### **COMMUNITY-CENTRIC TRAINING**

- Offer training programs in communities facing significant economic barriers, ensuring equitable access to opportunities for all residents.

## 03

### **YOUTH FOCUS**

- Strengthen efforts to engage youth in workforce development initiatives, raising awareness of available opportunities and pathways to professional and entrepreneurial advancement. Create targeted internships to provide opportunities to students from Michigan City to gain career experience and opportunities at home with the goal of stemming the brain drain.

## 04

### **TECHNOLOGICAL INTEGRATION**

- Leverage technology to expand the reach and effectiveness of workforce development efforts, potentially offering free software, AI, or other training in collaboration with local educational institutions.

**05****INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT**

- Establish wifi hubs in areas with limited access to increase digital connectivity, facilitating participation in online training and educational programs.

**06****INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS**

- Collaborate with industry partners to create maker spaces, AI labs, and wetlabs, providing hands-on learning experiences aligned with workforce needs.
- Build sector specific partnerships with industry to develop talent in alignment with industry forecasts.
- Engage education partners to connect & collaborate with private sector

**07****PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

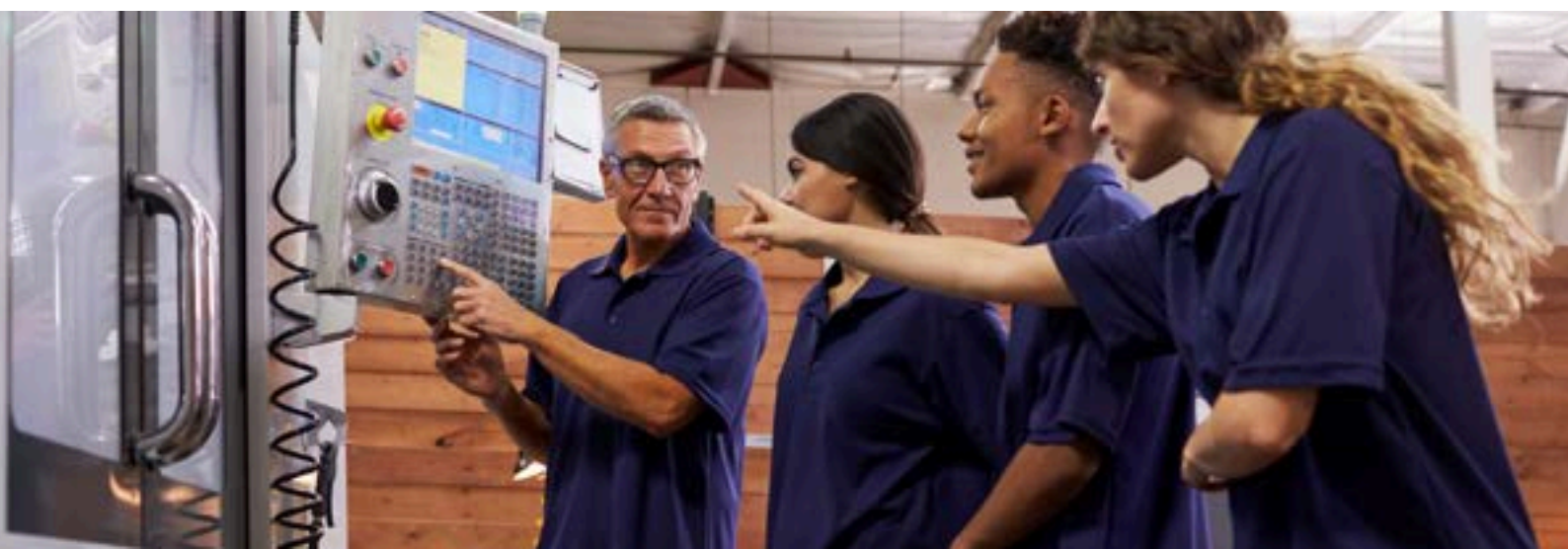
- Create a young professionals' organization to create unique opportunities for networking, career development, and social activities.

**08****MARKETING CAMPAIGNS**

- Launch aggressive marketing campaigns to promote workforce opportunities within Michigan City and neighboring communities, potentially as part of a broader economic development initiative.

**09****COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH**

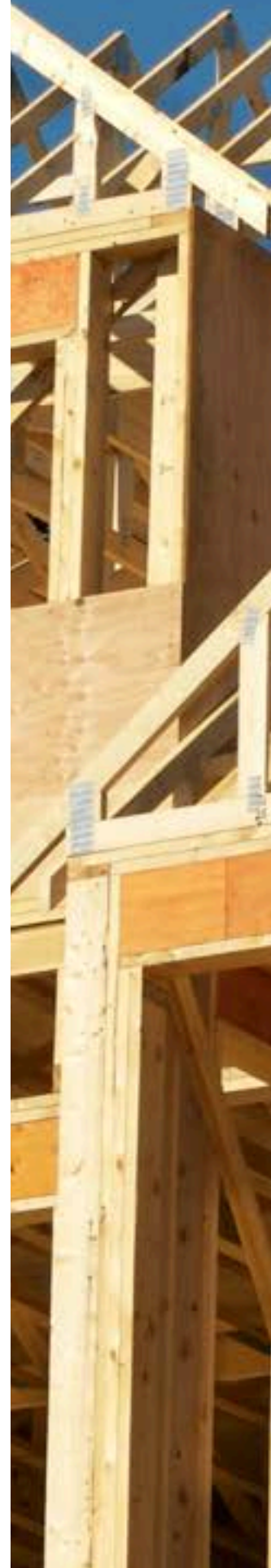
- Develop a centralized workforce portal for employers to promote career opportunities, complemented by job fairs and industry engagement programs in schools.




# PLACEMAKING

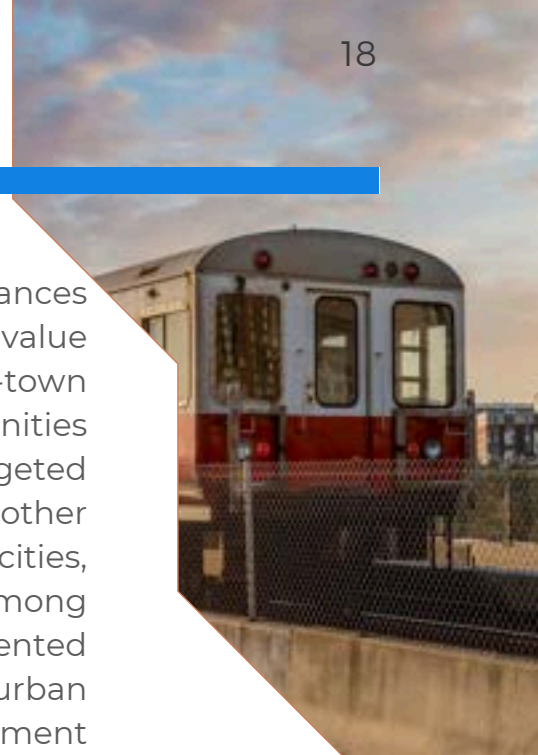
Ensuring that the built environment of Michigan City facilitates the desired investment, public outcomes, and perpetuates the quality of life that has fueled its growth thus far is imperative. Currently, contrasting landscapes of natural beauty and wealth coexist with areas grappling with crime and disinvestment, presenting a dichotomy in the community's character. Socioeconomic disparities manifest in unequal access to resources, with concerns looming over affordability and the caliber of educational institutions. Intentionally building the infrastructure of housing, entertainment, education, transit, and other amenities that align with Michigan City's ambition is a long-term, but necessary journey. While certain locales flourish, others grapple with blight, infrastructure deficits, inadequate housing, and limited amenities. Residents emphasize the need for additional grocery stores, entertainment venues, and co-working spaces to meet community needs. Furthermore, there's a call for increased investment in downtown areas to enhance their appeal as the face of the city for both businesses and tourists alike.

Economic growth often brings price pressures and inflation. Michigan City is experiencing this firsthand in the housing market. The demand for housing of all types is palpable due to the low housing stock, indicating a necessity for options to cater to varying needs. There is a pressing call for more assertive and all-encompassing strategies to tackle housing affordability. Rental unit prices have increased in the past 5 years punctuating the urgent call for clearer definitions of "affordable" housing and proactive measures to rectify the imbalance between supply and demand. Despite governmental efforts, some express skepticism about the completion of announced projects and the pace of development. Meanwhile, others criticize perceived inaction or limited impact, emphasizing the imperative for more robust and tangible solutions to address housing affordability challenges in Michigan City. However, there are voices of commendation for collaborative efforts and support for workforce housing initiatives. While the assessment of progress varies, all agree that more housing of all types including affordable housing is imperative for Michigan City to continue its positive economic momentum.





The arrival of the Double Track significantly enhances Michigan City's development options. Michigan City's value proposition of a high quality of life offering a small-town ambiance is bolstered by increased access to the amenities and employment opportunities of nearby Chicago. Targeted marketing campaigns aimed at Chicago, as well as other communities along the track and major Midwestern cities, hold significant potential for attracting newcomers. Among the most promising opportunities, transit-oriented development stands out as an opening to offer a more urban and bohemian lifestyle. The Double Track is a critical element in enticing new enterprises and residents to the area. Although the Double Track promises various advantages, most residents do not perceive it as a significant channel for boosting tourism.



The closure of the prison presents a significant opportunity for the redevelopment of a substantial portion of the west side of town. Potential development options for the site are diverse, likely comprising a blend of housing, entertainment, and employment opportunities. An integrated approach to development should consider how the project harmonizes with the soon-to-be decommissioned NIPSCO power plant and the nearby Indiana Dunes National Park. While various stakeholders will undoubtedly have competing interests in the site's redevelopment, the inclusion of longstanding community residents in shaping its future direction is paramount. They should have opportunities to engage economically and socially in the redevelopment future through housing, employment, and entrepreneurial options. According to respondents, there is a clear preference for mixed-use development, with 63% identifying it as the most significant opportunity for redevelopment, followed by 19% prioritizing mixed-use, mixed-income housing initiatives.

Michigan City's growth prospects, physically and economically, seem limitless. However, for the community to fully realize this potential, the built-environment must align with the economic opportunities. Growing the City's boundaries smartly to allow for increased residential and industrial development must be a part of the solution.



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# RECOMMENDATIONS

So much of the attractiveness of a community is tied to how easy it is to navigate, the amenities that residents can enjoy, and how clean, safe, and beautiful it is. These components not only foster spending and tourism while offering social opportunities for residents but also play a crucial role in drawing necessary talent to counter outmigration patterns and stabilize the local populace. The following recommendations will accelerate quality economic growth and create the environment for long-term prosperity.

## 01 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Involve local stakeholders in the redevelopment of the prison site and other scalable publicly led developments through community forums, ideation, investment options, and the ability to competitively participate in the development.
- Consider regular forums and perhaps a report to provide updates on developments in Michigan City and gauge interests of residents.

## 02 REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT

- Local Developer Initiative: Foster the growth of local housing developers to create a pipeline of affordable housing projects, supported by targeted visits and familiarization tours focused on housing opportunities. Consider a goal of creating 5-7 local housing developers in the next 5 years.
- Explore land banking as an option to better facilitate desired growth.
- Couple philanthropic, public, and private funds to engage the developer community and induce strategic commercial, industrial, and mixed-used developments to spark greater entrepreneurship, corporate expansion, and live-work-play options.
- Comprehensive Planning Update: Prioritize the update of comprehensive plans and zoning regulations to modernize economic development strategies and align with emerging trends. This includes expanding the City's boundaries to allow for increased residential and industrial development.
- Municipal Development Support: Deepen cooperation and coordination across city departments to facilitate more fluid development.

## 03

### HOUSING

- Attract national CDFIs with housing programs and national affordable housing developers leveraging targeted visits and familiarization tours
- Policy Measures: Implement public policies establishing affordable housing guidelines for multifamily developments, considering the percentage of units designated as affordable and incentivizing investment in affordable housing initiatives.
- Create specific homebuyer programs and targeted incentives focused on first responders, teachers, young professionals, and middle-class residents.

## 04

### FOOD DESERTS

- Explore solutions beyond traditional grocery stores, such as green grocer programs, farmers' markets, and cooperatives to expand access to fresh food options in underserved areas.
- Partner with education and healthcare partners to increase awareness of healthy eating options, the health ramifications of diet, and create a healthy culture lifestyle.

## 05

### STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS IN PUBLIC AMENITIES AND CREATE SPACES BRINGING DIFFERENT POPULATION SEGMENTS TOGETHER

- Make strategic investments in public and private amenities that showcase Michigan City's quality of life and create spaces to bring different segments of the population together.
- Program public spaces downtown and other districts to engage residents and visitors year-round.
- Promote and increase public transportation options within and amongst communities across the region. Consider expansion of the transit system, alternative rideshare, bus rapid transit, and other options to optimize the gains brought by the arrival of the doubletrack.
- Consider establishing a business improvement district along Michigan Boulevard to strengthen business promotion and marketing, enhance the urban environment, increase security and safety, and support business advocacy.



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# STORYTELLING

Michigan City must craft a story that honors its past but establishes a solid foundation for the future of the community. Currently, there is not a shared narrative around Michigan City's value. The story of Michigan City must resonate with families that have been in the community for generations as well as spark possibilities for a brighter future for newcomers to the city. The story of Michigan City must be one of economic opportunity, business growth, and quality of life – the kind of community where one can prosper, socially, financially, and personally. The ideas that emerged through this research suggest that the narrative should revolve around the following:

- **SMALL TOWN FEEL WITH BIG CITY AMENITIES**
- **A GROWING ECONOMY WITH QUALITY JOBS AND AN ESTABLISHED INDUSTRIAL BASE**
- **SERENE NATURAL BEAUTY AND TOURISM HUB – THE MARTHA'S VINEYARD OF THE MIDWEST**
- **UNPARALLELED QUALITY AND EASE OF LIVING IN A COMMUNITY THAT IS MORE AFFORDABLE THAN MANY OF ITS COUNTERPARTS**
- **OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES AND ENTREPRENEURS ABOUND**
- **A GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION THAT PROVIDES ACCESS TO DIVERSE JOBS, MAJOR MARKETS, AND AMENITIES**
- **MICHIGAN CITY IS AT AN INFLECTION POINT WHICH WILL ALLOW IT LEADERS AND PEOPLE TO DEFINE ITS FUTURE**
- **A COMMUNITY WHERE ALL ARE WELCOMED**

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

While there exists a significant marketing program for tourism, there is a noticeable gap in marketing efforts aimed at attracting businesses and talent to Michigan City. Michigan City lacks a cohesive and widely disseminated message articulating its value proposition, hindering efforts to attract businesses and talent to the area. Michigan City's marketing efforts should focus on attracting businesses as well as talent through a targeted campaign leveraging social media, direct outreach, and local industry.

## 01

### STORYTELLING AND BRANDING

- Design and implement a storytelling campaign across the region to capture stories of business success and highlight key assets to promote a shared narrative and sense of pride.
- Coordinate with other partners across the region to launch a branding initiative to optimally position Michigan City for targeted companies, investors, and talent.
- Engage the local business community as ambassadors to promote and sell the market to companies and individuals, leveraging their networks and influence to amplify storytelling efforts.
- Create a tour that encompasses Michigan City's history and future. This tour should be used to educate residents, tourists, visiting executives and part-time summer residents about the opportunities that Michigan City offers.
- Provide resources and tools to implement storytelling initiatives across a broad swath of stakeholders and communities to sustain momentum.

## 02

### BUSINESS ATTRACTION

- A targeted campaign that builds on the existing competencies by focusing on businesses that diversify the sectoral landscape with particular emphasis on small businesses in manufacturing, information technology, and healthcare is recommended.
- Implement targeted outreach efforts to businesses, developers, and companies aligned with Michigan City's narrative, offering specific opportunities such as available spaces, technical assistance, and capital investment.



## 03 TALENT ATTRACTION

- Leverage diverse channels including social media, events in other markets, and paid and earned media to share the Michigan City opportunity in specific geographies and amongst distinct demographics.
- Michigan City needs to attract more young professionals and families with a geographic focus on major midwestern cities and communities along the doubletrack.
- Demographically consider leveraging Michigan City's higher levels of diversity to attract more African American and Hispanic professionals and immigrants.



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# ECONOMIC MODERNIZATION

Overall, the economic development ecosystem functions well in Michigan City, with the Michigan City Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) being a valued and trusted partner. Business and civic leadership touted the professionalism and deep expertise of the MCEDC as an undervalued asset. The following points emerged as opportunities to modernize the economy of Michigan City:

- More entrepreneurial activity – start up, scale up, and stay up – is needed to balance the abundant corporate growth with opportunities for local people to obtain wealth and plug gaps in services locally. This will ensure a more balanced economy that can confidently manage global economic uncertainty.
- Greater Regional collaboration to achieve economies of scale and streamline bureaucratic processes is needed. Focusing on areas such as permitting and land use, social services, and transportation will likely yield the greatest benefits. There is a consensus on the need to update comprehensive plans and zoning regulations to align with modern economic development goals and address emerging challenges.
- Sector Diversification with a focus on tech centered industries is important to accelerating the growth of the economy as well as the retention and attraction of talent.
- Industry participation in leading the economic growth conversation tends to be limited to a few select businesses or episodic at best. Consistent industry collaboration and partnership on workforce, investment, and growth will accelerate economic progress.
- Embracing technology and digital infrastructure should be a central piece of the economic growth plans of Michigan City. While there is some digital infrastructure, the perception is that the community lags competitor markets in digital access and literacy.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Michigan City must reinvent itself to continue to be viable in the coming economic age. Michigan City must pivot from an older industrial city to a next generation community, fusing its traditional efforts in manufacturing and tourism with emerging opportunities in sectors such as tech and healthcare. The work of economic progress must be shared by private firms, governments, nonprofits, and academia in a regional context. Lastly, these efforts need to be undergirded by a digital infrastructure that gives businesses and residents the greatest chance to compete, be profitable, and be efficient in an increasingly complex world. The recommendations below provide greater granularity around how Michigan City can modernize its economy to best compete.

## ● TRADITIONAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- 01** Industry Diversification: Focus on diversifying the industry mix, including the promotion of tech-centric jobs and the creation of assets such as AI labs and coworking spaces in partnership with industry and academia.
- 02** Continue to leverage traditional channels of site selection consultants, C-Suite decision-makers and corporate real estate executives to share the value proposition of Michigan City in targeted sectors.
- 03** Promote and leverage opportunity zones to accelerate investment in catalytic projects and attract new capital to the city.
- 04** Host at least one familiarization tour annually to showcase unique assets, companies, and opportunities for companies to achieve higher productivity, profitability, and innovation in Michigan City.
- 05** Develop a “hot list” of 25-50 site selectors which you provide with information quarterly regarding specific investment opportunities, industry and market insights.
- 06** Strengthen the existing business retention and expansion program with drill down activities into the supply chain of mid-sized and large local firms to identify new recruitment opportunities.
- 07** Focus on identifying gazelles (companies growing at 20% per year or more for several years) in competitor markets and targeted sectors and offering a viable satellite option. Key benefits include quality of life, lower costs of living, and proximity to both customers and the regional headquarters. Markets which may make strong targets include Chicago, Indianapolis, and Detroit.
- 08** Prioritize the update of comprehensive plans and zoning regulations to modernize economic development strategies and align with emerging trends.

## ● ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMALL BUSINESS

- 01** Launch a small business program competition to highlight local small businesses and provide cash grants, technical assistance, and real estate support to accelerate expansion of these firms and raise the profile of Michigan City as an entrepreneurship hub.
- 02** Develop plan and support for a business resource and technology center, a co-working space that offers inexpensive options for burgeoning entrepreneurs to launch their businesses with low overhead and accessible technical assistance.
- 03** Develop a maker space that offers low cost access to 3-D printing, welding, CAD and other services to support emerging entrepreneurs.
- 04** Pull together a small business council comprised of diverse CDFIs, technical assistance providers, and other partners to create an ecosystem map clarifying roles, responsibilities, and capacity as well as coordinate around increasing startup activity and providing greater support for scaling up and business sustainability.

## ● DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- 01** Implement citywide fiber infrastructure and widespread wifi to improve digital access and opportunity.
- 02** Michigan City should lead in technology by upgrading its internal infrastructure to facilitate efficiency and appropriate position the community with innovative companies.
- 03** Embrace online economic development and government services to position Michigan City as progressive and efficient, enhancing its attractiveness to businesses and residents alike.
- 04** Offer free training to Michigan City residents in computer skills, AI, and other emerging technologies.



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# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## **ECONOMIC INCLUSION**

Michigan City exhibits disparities in economic inclusion, with limited opportunities for certain demographics and communities. There is a need to address trust issues, align career opportunities with workforce interests, and improve access to economic information and resources.

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

While workforce development programs exist, there are concerns about their effectiveness in reaching those most in need and addressing talent acquisition challenges. There is a desire to enhance training programs, particularly for youth, and leverage technology to expand market capacity.

## **PLACEMAKING**

Michigan City boasts areas of natural beauty but faces challenges such as crime, blight, and inadequate amenities in some neighborhoods. Stakeholders emphasize the need for housing affordability, downtown revitalization, arts and cultural programming of public spaces, and leveraging transportation infrastructure for economic growth.

## **STORYTELLING**

Michigan City should cultivate a shared narrative and promote its value proposition to attract businesses and talent. Stakeholders recommend crafting a shared narrative highlighting quality of life, diversity, employment opportunities, and regional amenities.

## **ECONOMIC MODERNIZATION**

Michigan City's economic modernization efforts involve traditional business development, support for small businesses, and digital transformation. Recommendations include diversifying sectors for corporate attraction, enhancing regional collaboration, updating comprehensive plans, supporting small business growth, and investing in digital infrastructure.

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# METRICS

The timeless wisdom of "What gets measured, gets done" holds especially true today. It is imperative that Michigan City consistently tracks its progress on these goals in a manner that ensures transparency and accountability. Emphasizing data-driven decision-making elevates discussions beyond personal experiences and perspectives to empirically grounded truths. This approach not only enhances credibility, but also guides effective planning. The metrics outlined below are designed to capture key indicators of progress. Regular sharing of these figures by the EDC will enable ongoing refinement of strategies in response to evolving market dynamics, resident needs, and political changes.

## ECONOMIC INCLUSION

### ● **TOPLINE METRICS**

Monitor changes in income levels, poverty rates, unemployment rates, labor participation rates, and homeownership rates across various demographic groups.

### ● **SECONDARY METRICS**

Track outreach efforts, manufacturing job growth, tech job growth, healthcare job growth, and employment vacancy trends to gauge the effectiveness of targeted interventions.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### ● **NUMBER OF PEOPLE TRAINED IN TARGETED SECTORS**

Track the number of individuals completing training programs in key sectors such as healthcare, technology, and manufacturing.

### ● **JOB VACANCIES AND RETENTION**

Measure job vacancies and retention rates in targeted sectors, alongside indicators of employee engagement, promotion rates, and income levels.

### ● **EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT LEVELS**

Monitor the percentage of the population with a two-year degree or higher as a measure of workforce readiness.

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## PLACEMAKING

### HOUSING STATISTICS

Analyze housing ownership, age of housing stock, housing type (multifamily/single-family), and rental versus ownership percentages to understand housing dynamics within Michigan City.

### EMPLOYMENT CENTERS / CORRIDORS

Identify key employment centers and corridors within Michigan City, examining the geographic distribution of jobs relative to residential areas.

### FOOD DESERT/GROCERY NUMBERS

Assess the presence of food deserts and availability of grocery stores within Michigan City to understand access to fresh and healthy food options.

## STORYTELLING

### EARNED MEDIA

Measure the quantity and quality of earned media coverage generated by storytelling initiatives, including press mentions, features, and interviews.

### BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PIPELINE

Track the progress and growth of the business development pipeline, including the number of inquiries, leads, and conversions resulting from storytelling efforts.

### POPULATION GROWTH

Monitor population growth trends within Michigan City as an indicator of the effectiveness of storytelling in attracting new residents and talent to the area.

### VACANT ROLES IN TARGETED SECTORS

Evaluate the decrease in vacant roles within targeted sectors over time, reflecting improved talent attraction and retention efforts driven by storytelling campaigns.

## ECONOMIC MODERNIZATION

### JOBS

Measure the creation and retention of jobs within Michigan City across different sectors and industries.

### CAPITAL INVESTMENT

Track the amount of capital investment attracted to Michigan City through various initiatives and projects.

### SQUARE FEET OF REAL ESTATE ABSORBED

Evaluate the absorption of real estate space within Michigan City, indicating economic activity and development.

### STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION

Assess stakeholder satisfaction with economic modernization efforts and initiatives, ensuring alignment with community needs and priorities.

### DIGITAL ACCESS METRICS

Utilize metrics such as internet penetration rate, broadband access, device ownership, digital literacy skills, digital infrastructure quality, affordability of digital services, and effectiveness of digital inclusion policies and programs to measure progress in enhancing digital access and inclusion within Michigan City.

In recent years, many communities have created departments to track data, measure progress, and support innovation. While this report falls just short of pushing for that investment, a partnership with a university or think tank is recommendable to support these data collection efforts. It is also advisable that an online tool or report be published at least biannually. Some examples of similar efforts are profiled below:

- Baton Rouge City Stats <https://www.brcitystats.org/>
- National Equity Index <https://nationalequityatlas.org/>
- South Bend Economy Database <https://shiny.lucyapps.net/sbeconomydb/>
- Stats Indiana [www.stats.indiana.edu](http://www.stats.indiana.edu)
- Tacoma Equity Index <https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=175030>



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# CONCLUSION

Michigan City stands at a pivotal moment in its history, brimming with potential for substantial improvement in its economic landscape, setting the stage for long-term success. The pathway to attaining economic prosperity, resilience, and sustainability is clear. It is imperative for Michigan City to take an active role in shaping economic change rather than simply reacting to it. The moment is ripe for action. By establishing robust foundations in terms of people, place, and assets, Michigan City will be strategically positioned to navigate future economic challenges and effectively mitigate unforeseen risks.

The strategic plan for Michigan City's economy outlines a multifaceted approach aimed at fostering inclusive and sustainable growth. We can build a more competitive economy by bringing together business leadership, elected officials, and the community to ensure that the economic development strategies meet local needs and that there is ongoing information sharing and dialog. By prioritizing enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, leveraging resources regionally and across sectors, and diversifying the economy greater economic opportunities should emerge for all residents. However, this collaborative approach must also be tied to thoughtful and targeted investments in physical and digital infrastructure to maximize performance and reinforce the quality of life and economic stability that are hallmarks of Michigan City's value. Grounding these decisions in data and tracking guarantees that Michigan City will its growth trajectory with transparency and an informed community. actions, Michigan City can create a more inclusive, vibrant, and resilient economy that benefits all residents and stakeholders. A data-driven approach will enable us to track progress, identify gaps, and make informed decisions. Together we will build a more prosperous city and future for ourselves and generations to come.

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The Evolution of the Southern Economic Development Strategy  
<https://www.epi.org/publication/rooted-racism-part1/>

Vibrant Michigan City Playbook  
<https://vibrantmc.com>

