

A Vision For

BUCHANAN



A Vision For Buchanan

The Buchanan Brand

BY RICHARD MURPHY,
Community Development Director

Where else in American does a clean running creek with aqueducts wind their way through a beautifully historic and architecturally significant old downtown? We are Buchanan Michigan!

Our vision of the Buchanan Brand is a dynamic quality-of-life center. Our goal is to build a strong and diverse economy that leverages our uniquely special sense of place in a world where business can be done from anywhere and virtually, where we thrive on innovation and seek to build economic engines which evoke high quality of life, health and wellness, historic significance, and our relationship with our special natural resources, while doing so we protect the authenticity, character, and soul of our American small town.

Buchanan is a beautiful and special place that can compete in the global market due to the way business is done in today's virtual world and due to its proximity to important metro areas and transportation hubs.

Our ultimate success is defined as a 360 degrees approach. A young person living in Buchanan enjoys a lifetime of all these assets and upon receiving a good education in order to enter the workplace is afforded the opportunity to stay in Buchanan to put down roots into the community they grew up in if they so choose.

“Life is better here.”



PROCESS & COLLABORATION



**Steering
Comittee**

Guiding the Process

Beginning in January 2021, the project team met regularly with the steering committee appointed and led by Mayor Sean Denison, as well as with City Manager Heather Grace and Community Development Director Rich Murphy. The process began with an extensive review of existing plans, surveys, and initiatives, studying site conditions on the ground, and preparing a preliminary assessment of challenges and opportunities.

The team then proposed a broad range of redevelopment concepts that were reviewed and refined through an iterative process which included extensive discussions and review with various stakeholder groups.



**Downtown
Proprietors**

Heart of the City

A key stakeholder group is the community of proprietors of Downtown businesses and properties. This group has a long history of committing investment and personal dedication into maintaining, growing, and restoring the heart of the city, where tax-base productivity is highest per acre.

The team met with this group to review and discuss various redevelopment concepts, to understand business concerns, and to seek consensus on a variety of issues. This includes public space design, facade improvements, parking, dining options, tree planting, historic properties, and municipal cooperation.



**Northside
Residents**

Proud but Neglected

The Northside of Buchanan is a proud, historically black neighborhood that has been neglected too often. Early on, local residents and property owners were invited to voice their concerns, review preliminary assessments, and share their knowledge and vision for the area. Redevelopment concepts were later made available for open feedback and critique. Issues discussed included improved municipal cooperation and intentional strategies to avoid displacement.

The team also consulted with the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi to understand how redevelopment can honor indigenous history and improve cultural relations.



Underutilized

Few downtowns have a clean, bubbling creek running through it. This beautiful and acoustic amenity currently rushes past buildings and parking areas without being harnessed for waterfront activity.

Blank Frontages

The buildings facing McCoy Creek feature blank walls or very small openings with no access towards the water. This condition discourages pedestrian activity along the creek.

Dark and Hidden

The lack of openings and activity results in an underutilized space that can be perceived as unsafe. The lighting that exists is for security purposes only, which does not shape an inviting environment at night.

No Accessibility

This path along McCoy Creek is not accessible to the disabled. This hinders access in general, but also discourages changes to the building facades by private property owners.



Use of Waterfront

Downtown Buchanan should prioritize waterfront development along McCoy Creek. This creekside network can be named *Zibiwé* - the indigenous word for creek used by the original inhabitants of the land.

Improved Frontages

Facades facing the water should be opened up for access and visibility. This invites economic and social activity and enhances the feeling of safety. Patios, decks, porches, benches, and murals help to promote activity.

Light and Visible

A network of distinctive light fixtures should draw visitors along the creekside places. This design is inspired by the famous Buchanan ducks - lights shaped as duck eggs to create a memorable destination environment.

Accessibility

Public passageways should be barrier-free to broaden access to everyone. Private waterfronts can take advantage of different levels, but should provide at least some accessible outdoor spaces.



All-Season Activity

Buchanan should promote placemaking that enables activity during all seasons - including winter. This design illustrates a new covered skating rink: ice skating in the winter, roller skating or other events in the summer.

Downtown Anchor

The design includes a large public plaza at the corner of Front St and Red Bud Trail. See pages 29 and the back cover for more views. The skating pavilion and plaza act as an anchor to downtown pedestrian activity.

Welcome to Buchanan

The building and its evening lighting should be designed to welcome visitors. Seeing people skating next to the Duck Pond showcases a vibrant community. The roof can feature a large sign to proclaim Buchanan pride.

Parking

East Front Street should be reconfigured to enable on-street parking where possible. An agreement should be made to utilize the large, vacant parking lot next to the Moose Lodge building across the street.

CHAPTER 2

NORTHSIDE

The Forgotten Riverfront

AN INTRODUCTION

A city is only as strong as its most vulnerable parts. The Northside neighborhood is a neglected part of Buchanan, and its riverfront and history is often forgotten.

The image on this page includes some of the principal assets of the Northside:

- Dramatic bluffs with sweeping views over the St. Joseph River.
- A deep history of indigenous settlement by the Potawatomi people and their culture.
- A historically black neighborhood with proud roots at Clark Equipment and deep social bonds.
- Vacant land available for redevelopment.
- Red Bud Trail - the gateway to agrotourism in the northern townships.
- Access to a city-owned public landing on the St. Joseph River.

The Northside has great potential.

Sometimes we need to be reminded that the City of Buchanan is built beside a majestic river asset that can and must be leveraged for quality of life as well as higher real estate values. Life on the river should be an everyday Buchanan experience, a way of life. Restoring vistas and public access to get back to the times when “we went down to the river, fished, canoed, kayaked, shared lunch on the dock and admired the flowing water.”

This strategy to make important connections between Buchanan and the St. Joe River will drastically improve quality of life of all Buchanan residents. At the same time leveraging this important water asset will supercharge the real estate around it to allow for stronger housing, hospitality, and mixed-used development opportunities.





A New Victory Park

The neglected park features a few pieces of playground equipment in very close proximity to the basketball court. This discourages young children from using it. The proposed vision includes expanding the park to the north and features (1) an improved basketball court with bleachers, (2) a large picnic pavilion, (3) fully equipped playgrounds for younger and older children, and (4) a large illustrated historical marker celebrating black history in the Northside and Buchanan.

NORTHSIDE

A PROUD, HISTORICALLY BLACK NEIGHBORHOOD

BY JEANNIE HARRIS

Growing up on the Northside of Buchanan is an experience that the current and past citizens will always have as some of the happiest memories of our lives. We truly cherish our neighborhood life on the Northside. Families were very close as we went to the same schools, the same churches, our dads worked at Clark Equipment Company some of our brothers and friends ended up working there as well. Some of us ended up being corporate employees at Clarks. Clarks is how and why many of these families came to Buchanan. We appreciated our neighborhood, everyone knew and respected each other. There might have been at least three or four families that were related. A family in need was helped out by their neighbors. We were indeed a “village”.

It’s the neighborhood of Mr. Kelly’s Store supported by at least 4 generations where you could get penny candy, ice cream, pop and snacks. It was walking down to the river to throw rocks in the water or watching guys young and old walking with their fishing poles to go fishing. It was the 4th of July celebration of tons of fireworks on Bluff street purchased by the homeowners which created a line of cars parked along the street. It was Miss Bessie’s “huck a bucks” which were sold from her home for a quarter. Simply kool-aid she made and put in a Dixie cup which generations enjoyed. It was Miss Jewel’s homemade ice cream with her homemade sign on her fence. These are lasting memories that generations have enjoyed. This great neighborhood has produced business owners, teachers, nurses, accountants, lawyers, psychologists, social workers, plumbers, lab technicians, chefs, carpenters,

paralegals, bishops, ministers, mayors, policemen and bodyguards. The younger generation no matter how far life has taken them from Buchanan truly love their Northside “Bucktown” and they cherish the memories of growing up in this “village”. The Northside still has residents who take pride in where they live and have concerns about the upkeep of this side of town. Myself, as well as James Busby and John Brown will contact the city with any issues or concerns we might have to try and get them resolved. There’s always been advocates for the Northside.

Some of our concerns seem to be ongoing issues. Code enforcement needs to be more effective about enforcing the guidelines for property cleanup. Implement and enforce guidelines for empty and condemned houses, unused vehicles on properties, fallen trees on properties or properties with dwellings around them that are falling apart. Overgrown vacant lots in the spring and summer has always been an issue. Would like to see street repairs before we have to call about them and not having a huge dip in the road that’s so big you have to drive around it or it starts to totally sink.

We would like to see grants available to encourage property owners to improve the appearance of their property. The City of Niles has a partnership with Michigan Gateway Community Foundation to help low income residents and senior owned housing to help repair homes, replace roofing, replace windows, fencing and to make the homes safe for the homeowners and to improve their neighborhood

If there are going to be proposed changes in our neighborhood the homeowners have a right to know what’s going on. In the past, the Northside has often felt neglected, unheard, and excluded from decisions that affect our neighborhood. We want to support our new city leaders and administrators as they commit themselves to openness, transparency, and collaboration.



Engaging the River

This concept illustrates a raised boardwalk that traverses the bluff and enables visitors to reach the water. Tree limbs are kept trimmed to enable views. The boardwalk can be extended to connect with the public landing.

Honoring Culture

The improved park features a circular fire pit area near Richards St and is oriented with a direct view of Moccasin Bluff downriver. The *Indigenous History & Ecology Trail* informs visitors of the significance of this landscape.

Celebrating Ecology

The park is designed to be gentle on the land and to promote the restoration of a native species ecology. Educational markers on the trail engage visitors, and the inn is built to the highest standards of sustainable design.

A Northside Destination

Richards Street is improved with tree lines, on-street parking, and trails leading to the park and a destination inn and restaurant. This is where Buchanan interfaces with the agro-tourism landscape of nearby townships.



Extending Bike Friendliness

BEYOND THE CITY LIMITS

The City should work to expand its trail into a network that connects multiple destinations, including on the Northside and beyond. Nearby businesses such as River St. Joe have already been recognized with bike friendly awards. An expanded dedicated trail network helps to connect Buchanan with the region and establishes it as a place for active and healthy lifestyles. The concept illustrated here proposes that the River Street Bridge in Buchanan be retrofitted to include dedicated trails on each side of the bridge.

