

# Economic Development Strategy

*Village of Blissfield, Lenawee County, Michigan*

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Adopted by Village Council on \_\_\_\_\_

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Adopted by the Blissfield Village Council on \_\_\_\_\_

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction .....1**  
*Planning for Blissfield’s Future..... 1*

**Community Context ..... 2**  
*Regional Context..... 2*

**Public Involvement and Outreach ..... 5**  
*Community Exercises and Key Feedback..... 5*

**Local and Regional Goals..... 8**  
*Blissfield’s Local Goals..... 9*  
*Regional Goals ..... 10*

**Priority Redevelopments..... 12**  
*Catalyst Sites..... 12*  
*Site #1: Former Frosty Boy ..... 14*  
*Site #2: Department of Public Works (DPW) Yard ..... 15*  
*Site #3: Former International Brassworks..... 16*  
*Site #4: Former Hathaway House ..... 17*  
*Site #5: Former Blissfield Manufacturing Company..... 18*  
*Site #6: Western Gateway Vacant Property ..... 19*  
*Site #7: American Farm Museum..... 20*  
*Site #8: Field Property (between Jipson, Depot, CHERRY, and Sugar) ..... 21*  
*Site #9: Vacant Land South of the Aquatics Center..... 22*  
*Site #10: Vacant Railroad Street Property ..... 23*

# Introduction

## PLANNING FOR BLISSFIELD'S FUTURE

The Village of Blissfield's Economic Development Strategy is a guiding action plan that addresses challenges and opportunities for future economic development, retention, and growth. While this strategy is Village-wide, it also specifically supports the downtown development district, both the historic downtown core and the US-223 corridor.

Following best practices established by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), this strategy:

1. Describes Blissfield's role in the region and identifies regional partnerships;
2. Establishes local economic development goals and relates them to regional efforts;
3. Identifies capital improvement investments to assist with business retention and growth;
4. Identifies placemaking opportunities and policy changes;
5. Highlights priority (re)development sites;
6. Outlines an action plan with objectives and projects, that include responsible parties and timelines; and
7. Provides an outline to monitor and track progress of Village efforts for continued future success.

As the Village went through the process of updating their Comprehensive Land Use (master plan) and the Main Street Downtown Development Authority's (DDA) Development Plan and Tax Increment Financing Plan throughout 2021-2024, significant public outreach was conducted. The information gathered from in-person events, various surveys, and several public meetings was instrumental in creating this strategy. As a result, the following key goals were developed for Blissfield's strategy (listed to the right). These goals and the supporting objectives are further detailed within this document and provide the framework for implementation.

### KEY GOALS

Organized by seven key goals, this strategy aims to accomplish the following:

1. Enhance the Sense of Place
2. Redevelop Priority Sites
3. Retain and Expand Businesses
4. Promote Walkability and Complete Streets
5. Advocate for Diverse and Attainable Housing
6. Preserve and Enhance Natural Resources, Parks, and Recreation Amenities
7. Maintain Quality Public Services and Infrastructure

# Community Context

This section provides information on the local, regional, and 25-minute context for Blissfield.

## REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Village of Blissfield is located in Lenawee County and is, for the most part, surrounded by Blissfield Township. However, it is also flanked by Riga and Palmyra Townships to the south and west respectively.

Located off of US-233, the Village lies in between the cities of Adrian, Michigan and Toledo, Ohio. Being in close proximity to the Ohio border, the Village has a strategic location, providing Blissfield residents with opportunities for work, recreation, entertainment, and shopping. Educational opportunities are also readily available with Adrian College, Siena Heights University, Jackson College, and the University of Toledo being close by.

The total area of the Village is approximately 2.2 square miles and has a population of approximately 3,924 people.

## LOCAL CONTEXT

The Village of Blissfield features a blend of historic, small-town character, with the pristine natural environment, including the River Raisin, wetlands, woodlands, and surrounding agricultural land. These features provide a variety of recreational and educational opportunities, while also providing the community a unique location for development, where appropriate. Due to the sensitive nature of these features, the ultimate goal of the Village should be to preserve these features, however wherever possible, the Village should capitalize on these features as one of its placemaking features and marketing opportunities. For many of the predominantly agricultural municipalities that surround the community, Blissfield provides access to restaurants, shopping, recreation, and other opportunities that may not otherwise be available.

Recreational opportunities include seven public facilities and three school district facilities, and total to about 115 acres of land. These facilities include community parks, neighborhood parks, mini parks, an outdoor aquatic center, access to the River Raisin, etc. Blissfield Community Schools serve as an incentive to visit the community as well, as the school district covers a wide swathe of land, with each of the schools being located within the village.

Furthermore, the US-223 (Adrian Street corridor), which makes up the Village's Downtown Development Area (DDA), provides a variety of commercial, office, mixed-use, and residential areas. This mix of uses and zoning districts foster a vibrant and dynamic environment while also creating the potential to attract diverse crowds. Since US-223 runs through the downtown area, it provides a chance to draw in passersby. This includes individuals who may want to take a break during their journey between Michigan and Ohio, residents of Blissfield, and the surrounding agricultural areas. While portions of the corridor have vacant storefronts and land, this also presents opportunity for development, redevelopment, and infill.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Located 43 miles from downtown Ann Arbor, and only 26 miles from the Toledo (Ohio) area.
- Offers a traditional downtown environment, with a wealth of year-round events.

## CHALLENGES

- Can be overshadowed by other areas in the region, including downtown Adrian that boasts higher education facilities.
- Traffic speeds on US-223 result in individuals driving through the community, instead of slowing down and stopping to visit and patronize businesses.

## 25 MINUTE CONTEXT

To properly understand the existing conditions of Blissfield, a 25-minute context analysis offers a concise examination of the surrounding environment.

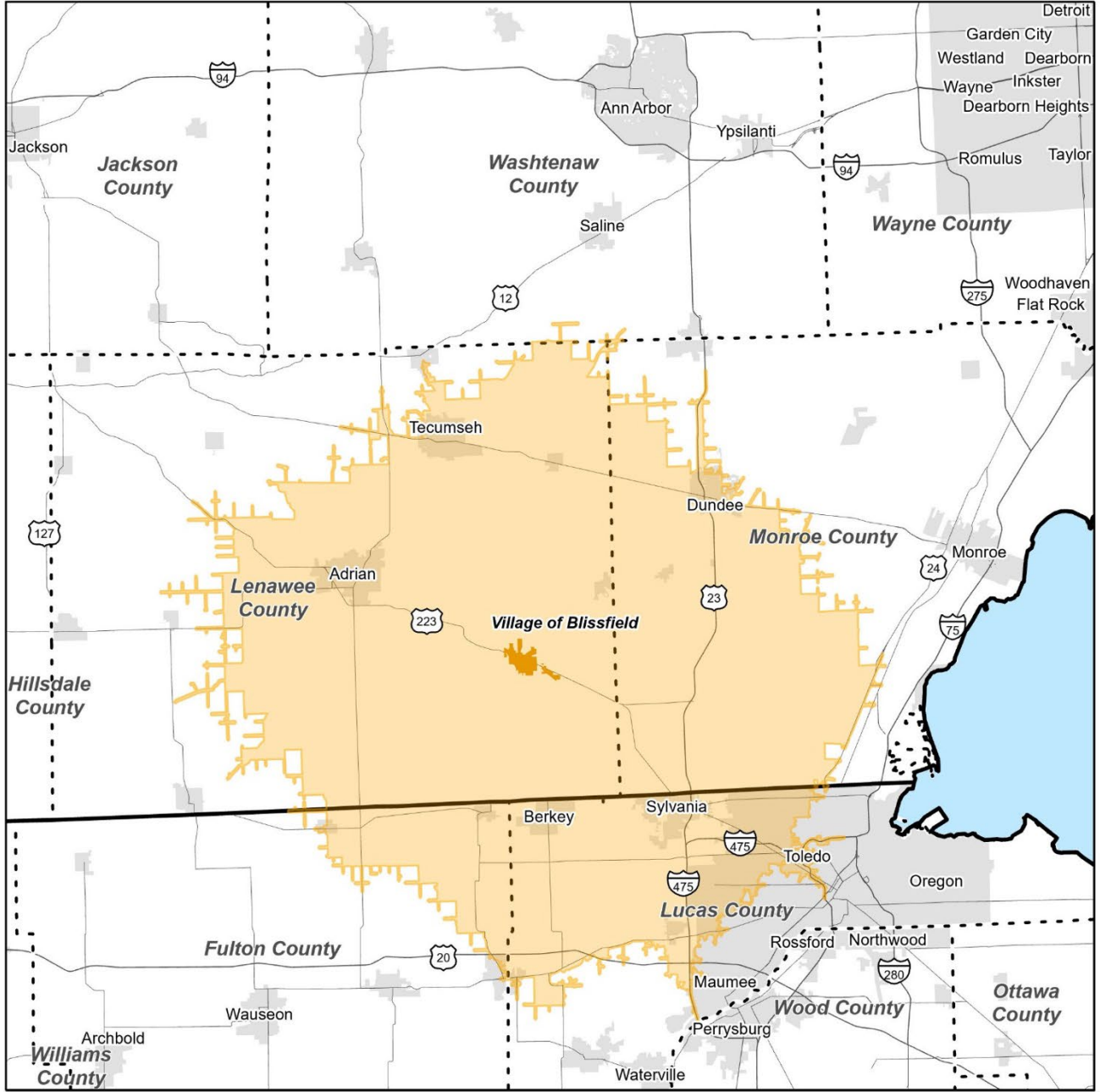
Within 25 minutes of the Village are a handful of larger cities including Adrian, Tecumseh, and Dundee in Michigan and Sylvania and Toledo in Ohio. For the most part, a lot of the land surrounding Blissfield consists of agricultural land in both Michigan and Ohio. However, the Village is also positioned so that it has ready access to a variety of freeways including US-223, which spans from Adrian to Toledo, US-23, which spans upward toward Ann Arbor, and M-52, which reaches from the Ohio border to Saginaw.

Toledo and Adrian are the largest cities that Blissfield lies between. These two cities provide a variety of recreational, entertainment, and retail opportunities for those residing in the Village. They also provide educational opportunities, as these two cities have institutions such as Adrian University, Siena Heights University, Jackson College, and the University of Toledo, among others. Toledo, being one of the largest cities in Ohio, provides a variety of unique opportunities including the Toledo Zoo and the Toledo Museum of Art.

## REGIONAL SUPPORT

Blissfield is located within the boundaries of the Region 2 Planning Commission, which serves Jackson, Hillsdale, and Lenawee Counties. The Region 2 Planning Commission is a voluntary local government association and serves as a planning, research, and advisory resource to its members. The staff at Region 2 provide a variety of professional planning services which benefit member communities including transportation, economic development, and community planning assistance.

In addition to the Region 2 Planning Commission, Lenawee Now (formerly known as the Lenawee Economic Development Corporation) acts as an economic development support organization that is prominent in this region. Lenawee Now focuses on public-private partnership, access to funding sources, and talent enhancements to support business expansion and growth across the county. Two of Blissfield's priority redevelopment sites are listed on Lenawee Now's Zoom Prospector Property Search tool: the Blissfield Manufacturing site (626 Depot Street) and the vacant 15 acres south of the Aquatics Center (600 Jipson Street). Lenawee Now is an important resource for those two redevelopment sites.

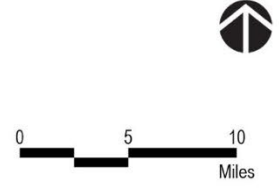


# Map #1: Local Context Map

Village of Blissfield, Lenawee County, Michigan

December 5, 2023

- LEGEND**
- Village of Blissfield
  - 25-Minute Drive Radius
  - County Boundaries
  - State Boundaries



Basemap Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, v. 17a. Data Source: Lenawee County 2020. McKenna 2023.









### Keep, Fix, Aspire Results

Instead of using a traditional “Strength, Opportunity, Weakness, Threat” (SWOT) analysis, a “Keep, Fix, Aspire” exercise was conducted. Below is a summary of the most common feedback:

OBJECTIVES ON WHAT TO <u>KEEP</u> IN BLISSFIELD	OBJECTIVES ON WHAT TO <u>FIX</u> IN BLISSFIELD	OBJECTIVES ON WHAT TO <u>ASPIRE</u> FOR IN BLISSFIELD
Preserve the Historic Downtown’s historic character and architecture.	Strategically update public facilities to and meet the evolving needs of residents and stakeholders.	Capitalize upon the River Raisin with trails and recreational opportunities.
Encourage the ongoing quality of area schools.	Fix up blighted properties.	Establish a new resident welcoming program.
Maintain public safety and area schools.	Organize additional public entertainment, festivals, and events.	Encourage outdoor seating and dining options.
Ensuring safety for cyclists and pedestrians.	Enhance walkability and accessibility.	Host a variety of regular public entertainment opportunities, events, and programs.
Retain existing restaurants and retail establishments.		

### *Identifying Opportunities*

The following tables identify specific economic development opportunities within Blissfield, such as project and redevelopment ideas. These ideas range from Capital Improvements Projects (CIPs), community development / placemaking opportunities, and regulation / procedural projects.

#### **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FEEDBACK**

##### **Types of economic development projects that should take place in Blissfield:**

Increase retail diversity.

Sidewalks and non-motorized improvements.

Develop and implement an education and marketing campaign to increase public awareness and understanding of the DDA boundaries.

Recruit more restaurants that provide meaningful gathering spaces in the community.

Attract job opportunities.

Incentivize redevelopment and façade improvements for underutilized and blighted properties.

Capitalize on Blissfield's natural assets and historic character.

##### **Priority Redevelopment Sites:**

325 W Adrian St (Former Frosty Boy) and nearby corner parcels.

Department of Public Works (DPW) Yard, 105 N. Lane Street.

Vacant property at 9000 E US-223.



## Local and Regional Goals

Establishing goals and a vision is essential for community success as it provides a clear direction and purpose. Goals serve as milestones, guiding community leaders, residents, and stakeholders. Being connected to regional goals benefit municipalities through long-lasting community change by fostering collaboration, sharing resources, and aligning efforts to address common challenges. This section outlines local Blissfield's goals, which are connected to regional economic development efforts.

## BLISSFIELD'S LOCAL GOALS

### #1 - ENHANCE SENSE OF PLACE

Foster a strong sense of place through shared experiences, engaging in collaborative projects, preserving Blissfield's historic architecture, creating attractive public spaces, and promoting community events to create a cohesive identity, creating a unique and cherished atmosphere that residents can collectively identify with and take pride in.

### #2 - REDEVELOP PRIORITY SITES

Prioritize key sites that need the most redevelopment; this will be most impactful to other local businesses and most beneficial to Blissfield residents in the long term. When selecting sites, consider economic viability, existing infrastructure, community vision, property owner support, site challenges, available funding, market demand, and if the end use(s) fill a service gap within the community.

### #3 - RETAIN AND EXPAND BUSINESS

Keep, grow, and support existing businesses by maintaining direct communication and staying updated on their greatest needs. Offer programs, partnerships, and funding mechanisms to address challenges. Blissfield should be marketed to prospective workers and residents to increase the availability of skilled labor and customers.

### #4 - PROMOTE WALKABILITY AND COMPLETE STREETS

Promote walkability by maintaining sidewalks, filling sidewalk gaps, and properly placing street furniture, lighting, and bike amenities like racks and lanes. Complete Streets initiatives coupled with green space further enhance the pedestrian-friendly environment, making Blissfield more accessible and inclusive.

### #5 - ADVOCATE FOR DIVERSE AND ATTAINABLE HOUSING

Promote and encourage diverse and attainable housing options through incentive programs, collaboration with non-profit organizations, public-private partnerships, streamlined approval processes, and supporting mixed-use and missing middle housing types.

### #6 - PRESERVE AND ENHANCE NATURAL RESOURCES, PARKS, AND RECREATION

Provide all segments of the Village with access to well-maintained community recreational facilities and natural resources that equally serve residents of all ages and abilities.

### #7 - MAINTAIN QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Provide all segments of the community with reliable, and affordable public services and infrastructure.



## REGIONAL GOALS

The following goals are selected from the Region 2 Planning Commission and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC):

REGIONAL GOALS	BLISSFIELD GOALS						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Region 2 Planning Goals</b>							
Facilitate opportunities for centered growth and infill development.		◆	◆		◆		◆
Maximize the use of existing transportation infrastructure to lessen fiscal pressures.							◆
Increase financial literacy about innovative financing strategies and incentive policies.			◆				
Maintain a full spectrum inventory of regional housing and affordability.	◆				◆		
Improve employers' access to workforce and customers; residents' access to jobs and education.			◆				◆
Ensure households within vulnerable communities, as measured by Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and income metrics, have access to opportunities that meet their needs.		◆			◆		
Fund infrastructure that strategically improves economic outcomes.				◆		◆	◆
Invest and improve development of site infrastructure: water, sewer, fiber optic, and broadband in strategic locations.			◆				◆
Pursue development of outdoor recreation through preservation-minded leveraging of the region's natural and man-made recreation resources.	◆			◆		◆	
Support the attraction of skilled labor and benefit existing residents.			◆		◆	◆	◆
Identify potential multi-jurisdictional placemaking projects that contribute to talent attraction and provide a positive regional impact.	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆	
Promote regional tourism opportunities and maximize local government's revenue through increased visitor activity.			◆			◆	

REGIONAL GOALS	BLISSFIELD GOALS						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Promote innovative and successful companies headquartered in the region.			◆				
Provide attractive, amenity-rich, and walkable communities to attract skilled labor.	◆		◆	◆	◆	◆	
Develop a regional branding and marketing campaign to improve awareness and recognition of the region.	◆		◆			◆	
Business expansion and retention.		◆	◆				◆
Encourage entrepreneurship and innovation.			◆				◆
Support growth of key industry clusters.			◆				◆
Increase local government economic development capacity.			◆				◆
<b>Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) Goals</b>							
Accelerate long-term job growth to address impacts of automation and protect Michigan's economy against downturns.			◆				
Provide equitable pathways toward high-wage growth that supports opportunities for all.			◆				
Bring a customer-first, partner-driven mentality to all we do.	◆		◆				
Attract, keep, and grow businesses that support maximum growth in jobs, wages and investments.			◆				◆
Cultivate the skills and talent needed for in-demand and high-growth occupation statewide.			◆				
Create places in which people want to live, work, visit, and play.	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Support entrepreneurial growth to enable commercialization and new high-tech business creation.			◆				◆
Help existing small and microbusinesses grow and thrive and improve economic prosperity for all through business ownership.			◆				
Promote Michigan's image as a world-class business location and travel destination.			◆			◆	◆

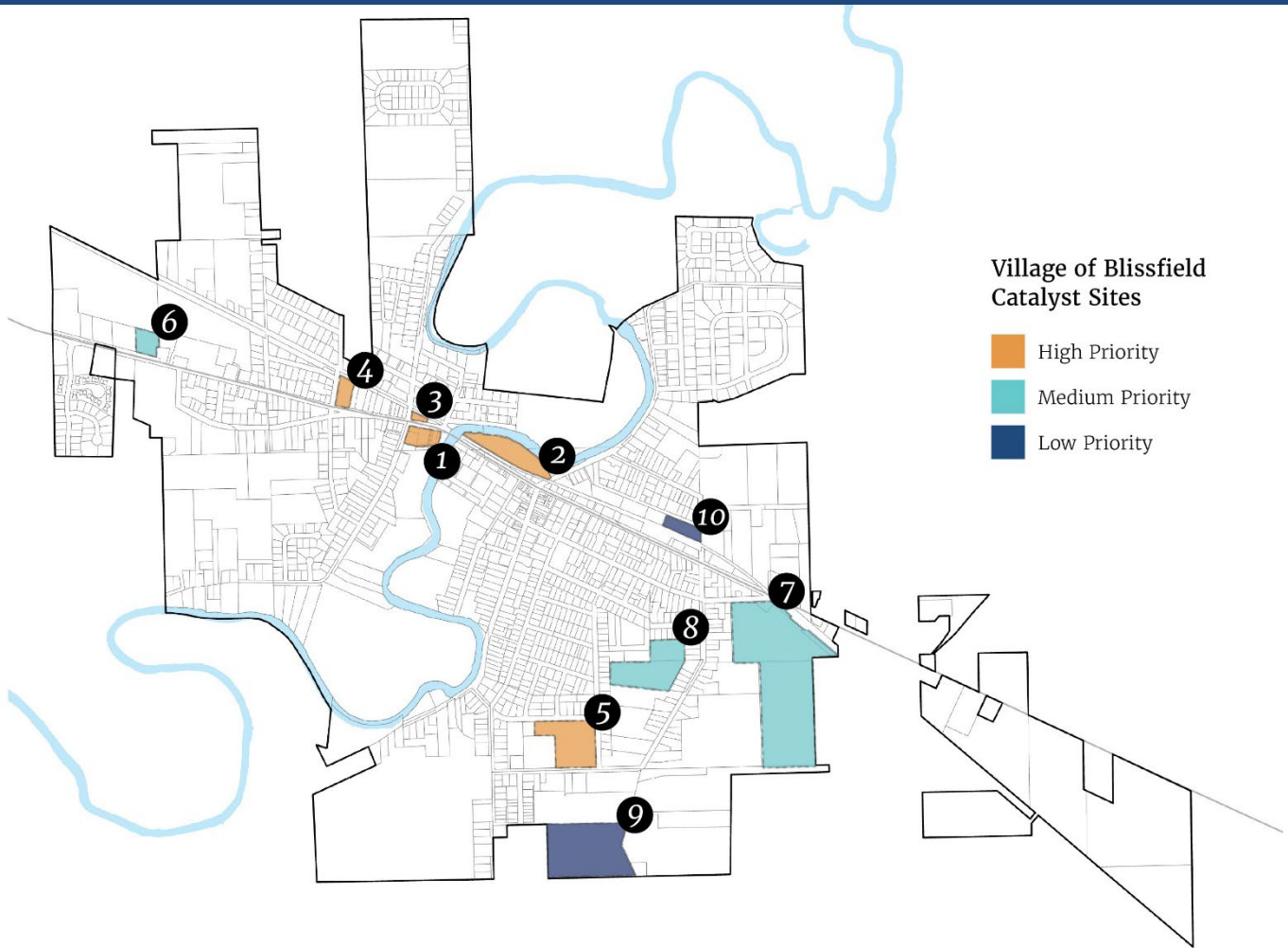


# Priority Redevelopments

## CATALYST SITES

With the public's input on priority redevelopment sites as a foundation, the Village identified a total of 10 key areas as potential economic catalysts. The future uses of these sites include a mix of residential, commercial, and even light industrial uses, and they are dispersed throughout the community (as detailed on the following page).

The potential redevelopment opportunities of each of the 10 sites are presented, along with recommended actions for the Village or Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to pursue. These actions will incentivize the type and scale of future development that the Blissfield community has envisioned. While priority levels (high, medium, and low) are expressed for each site, the Village acknowledges that given site circumstances, funding opportunities, partnerships, and other factors, priority levels may shift. The Village is committed to reviewing this economic development strategy yearly to help identify changes in opportunities and challenges.



PRORITY LEVEL	MAP REFERENCE NO.	PROJECT SITE NAME	PRIMARY ADDRESS
<b>High</b>	#1	Former Frosty Boy	325 W. Adrian Street (plus additional parcels)
	#2	DPW Yard	105 N. Lane Street
	#3	Former International Brassworks	318 W. Adrian Street
	#4	Former Hathaway House	424 W. Adrian Street
	#5	Former Blissfield Manufacturing Company	626 Depot Street
<b>Medium</b>	#6	Western Gateway Vacant Property	9000 E. US-223
	#7	American Farm Museum	440 Jefferson Street (plus additional parcels)
	#8	Field Property (between Jipson, Depot, Cherry and Sugar)	n/a
<b>Low</b>	#9	Vacant Land South of the Aquatics Center	600 Jipson Street
	#10	Vacant Railroad Street Property	100 Railroad Street





### SITE #1: FORMER FROSTY BOY

Address	Parcel No.	Acreage	Zoning District	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use	DDA District
325 W. Adrian	BL2-000-0021-00	0.219	C-3, General Commercial	Vacant Bldg.	Mixed-Use	Yes
105 S. Monroe	BL2-000-0022-00	0.529		Residences		
321 W. Adrian	BL2-000-0040-00	0.758		Vacant Land		
315 W. Adrian	BL2-000-0051-00	0.070				
313 W. Adrian	BL2-000-0052-00	0.362		Commercial Bldg.		
311 W. Adrian	BL2-000-0053-00	0.101				

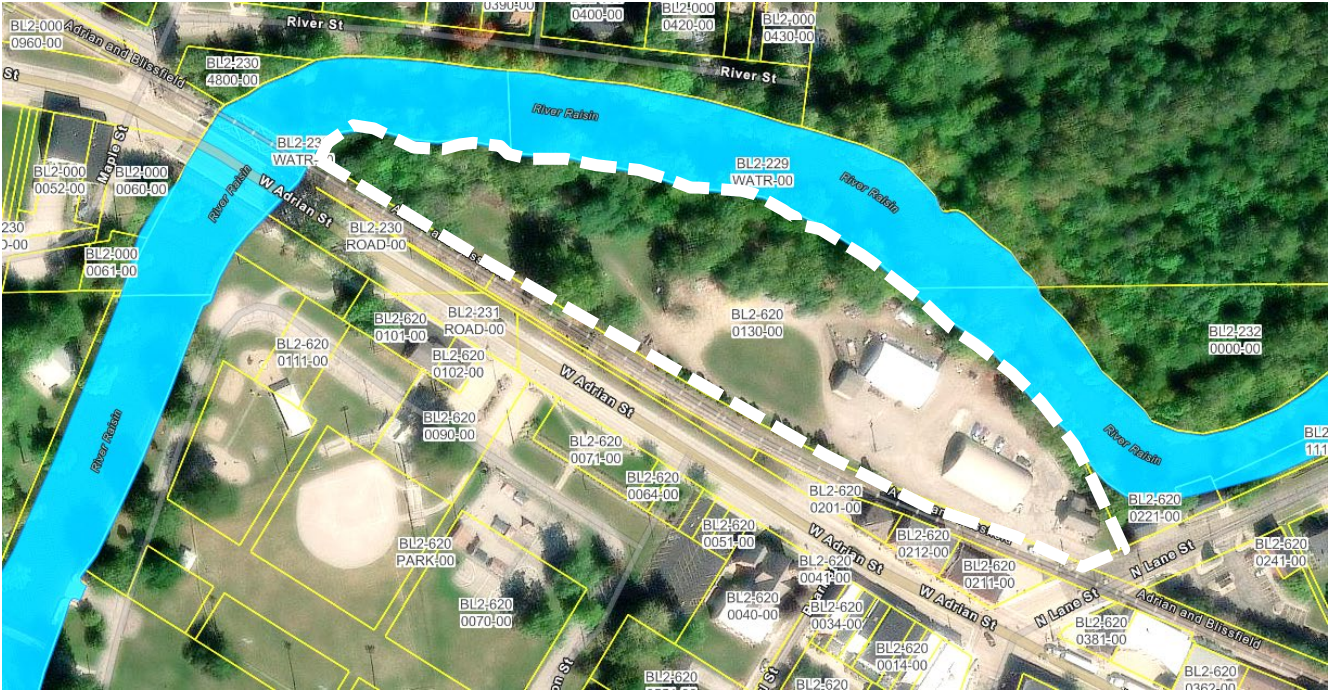
**Priority Level:** High

Located at the intersection of US-223 (Adrian Street) and Monroe Street, the former Frosty Boy site and surrounding parcels (under common ownership) consists of both vacant buildings and vacant land. Since this parcel is designated as Mixed-Use in the future land use map, the parcel has flexibility in the design and use of the future building, but several key principles apply to the redevelopment.

The Master Plan states that the mixed-use district could include multi-story developments with first-floor restaurants, offices, and retail, with upper floors designated as multi-family or businesses. Should it be appropriate in the sense that it supports the economic vibrancy, mixed-use vision, and walkability of the area, the site could also accommodate a single-use development such as townhomes or a senior living facility. Due to the existing two-story structures nearby, it is recommended that the site accommodate a minimum of a three-story development with parking tucked under the building, and if needed, at the rear of the site.

**KEY RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Work with the property owner to rezone the site to the MU-1, Mixed-Use District.



**SITE #2: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS (DPW) YARD**

Address	Parcel No.	Acreage	Zoning District	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use	DDA District
105 N. Lane	BL2-620-0130-00	5.247	C-3, General Commercial (with the eastern portion zoned PL, Public Lands)	Municipal Services (DPW Facility and Storage Yard)	Mixed-Use	No

**Priority Level:** High

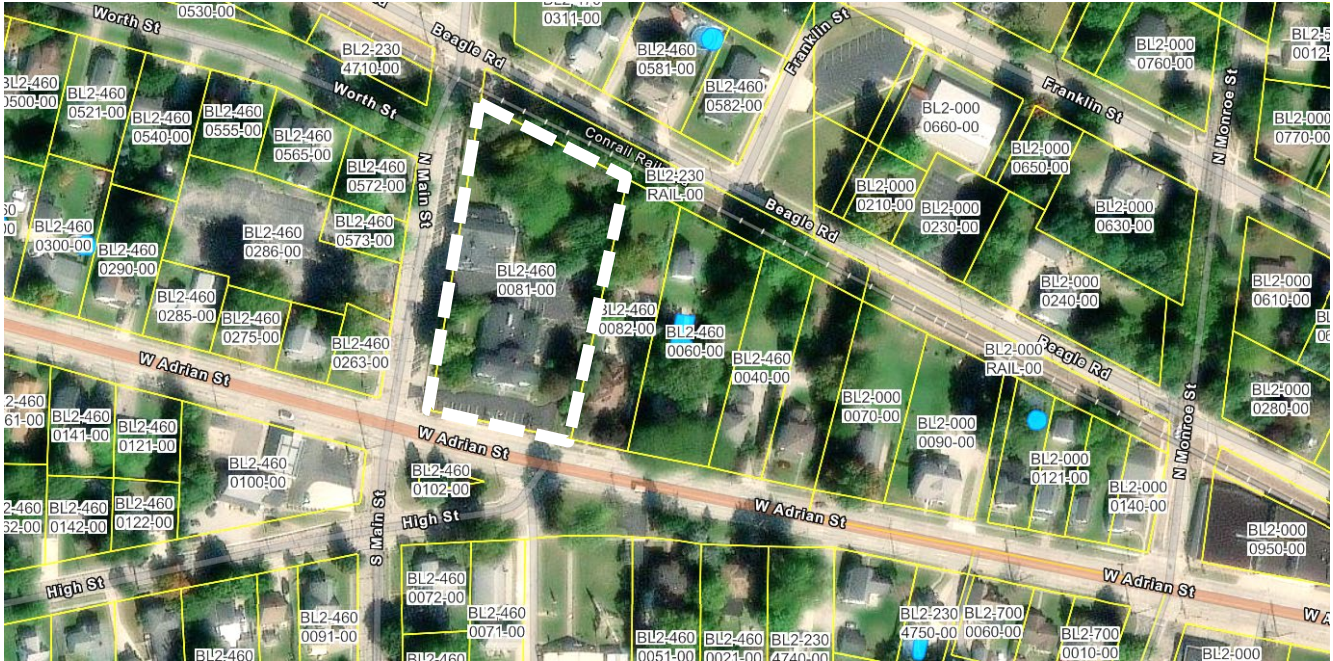
The Village's DPW Yard currently serves as a storage space for aggregate materials and equipment. While the site is within walking distance of the historic downtown core, it is also adjacent to railroad tracks (to the south) and to the River Raisin (to the north), which presents several redevelopment challenges.

With a Future Land Use designation of mixed-use, the DPW Yard has the opportunity to serve as a continuation of the downtown area. Appropriate development could include additional retail and restaurant space along N. Lane Street, with public parking set behind, in conjunction with a trailhead and non-motorized trail along the river.

**KEY RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Village initiated rezoning to the MU-1, Mixed-Use District.
- Relocate the DPW Yard.
- Release an RFP for the site.





### SITE #4: FORMER HATHAWAY HOUSE

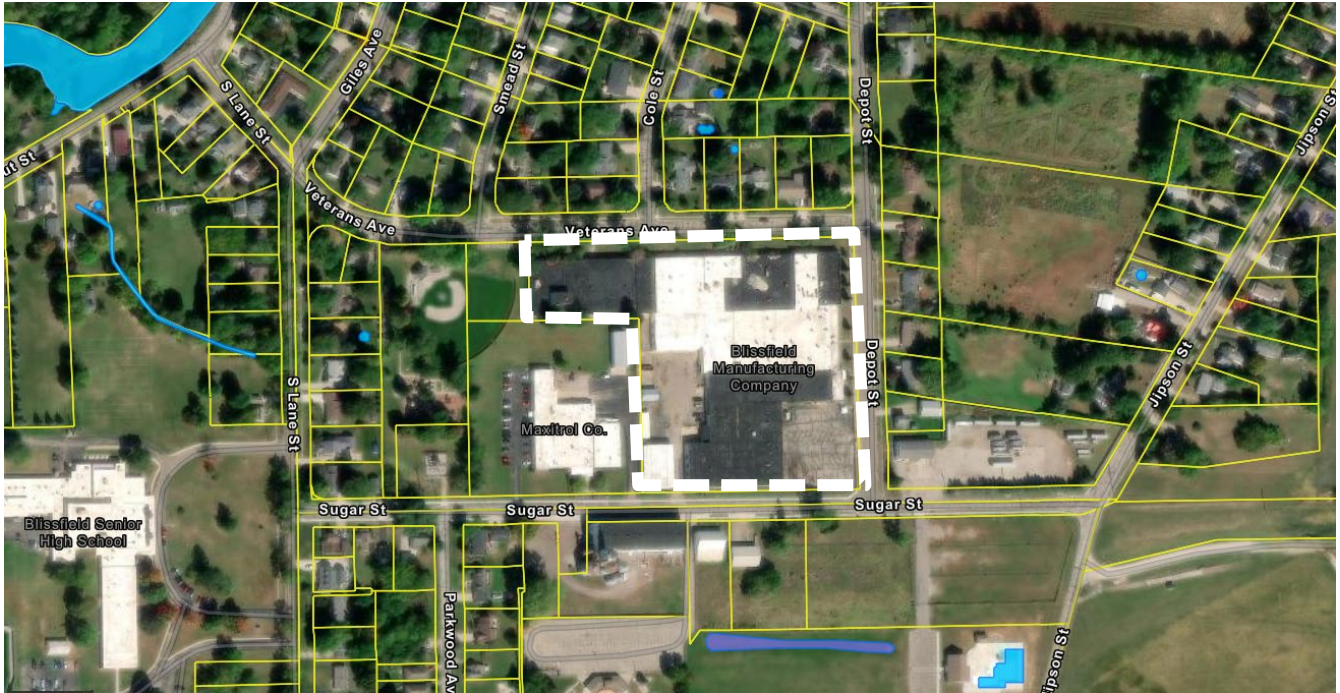
Address	Parcel No.	Acreage	Zoning District	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use	DDA District
424 W. Adrian	BL2-460-0081-00	1.472	MU-1, Mixed-Use	Former Lodge and Restaurant	Mixed-Use	Yes

**Priority Level:** High

The site of the former Hathaway House, lodge and restaurant, has the potential to be reused for a mixed-use development. The two existing buildings could also be added onto / see a reduction in pavement to make them more inviting. A historic marker is established out front along W. Adrian Street, adding to the character and importance of this site.

**KEY RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Establish a working relationship with the new property owner (once sold) and the DDA to spur redevelopment.



**SITE #5: FORMER BLISSFIELD MANUFACTURING COMPANY**

Address	Parcel No.	Acreage	Zoning District	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use	DDA District
626 Depot	BL2-232-3150-00	7.663	I-1, Industrial	Vacant Manufacturing Facility (1-story)	Light Industrial	No

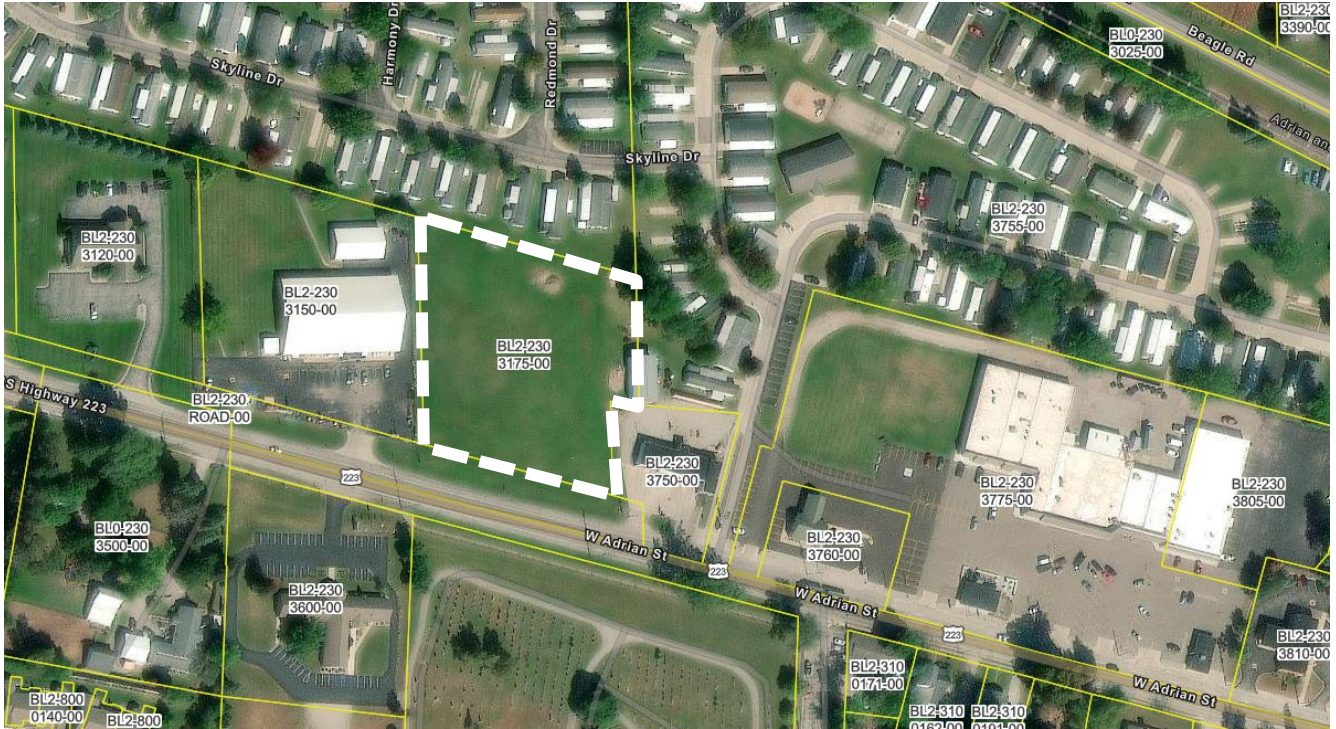
**Priority Level: High**

As a former Industrial facility, the site could accommodate a range of light industrial uses and/or high-technology, research and office uses. Indoor agricultural may also be an appropriate use at this location. However, future improvements to the exterior of the site are critical in any future scenario as the property is directly across from residential uses and public park space.

Site improvements include the removal of the barbed wire fencing and streetscape treatments (such as sidewalks along Veterans Avenue, on-street parking, and street trees).

**KEY RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Continue to work with Lenawee Now on the marketing of this property.



**SITE #6: WESTERN GATEWAY VACANT PROPERTY**

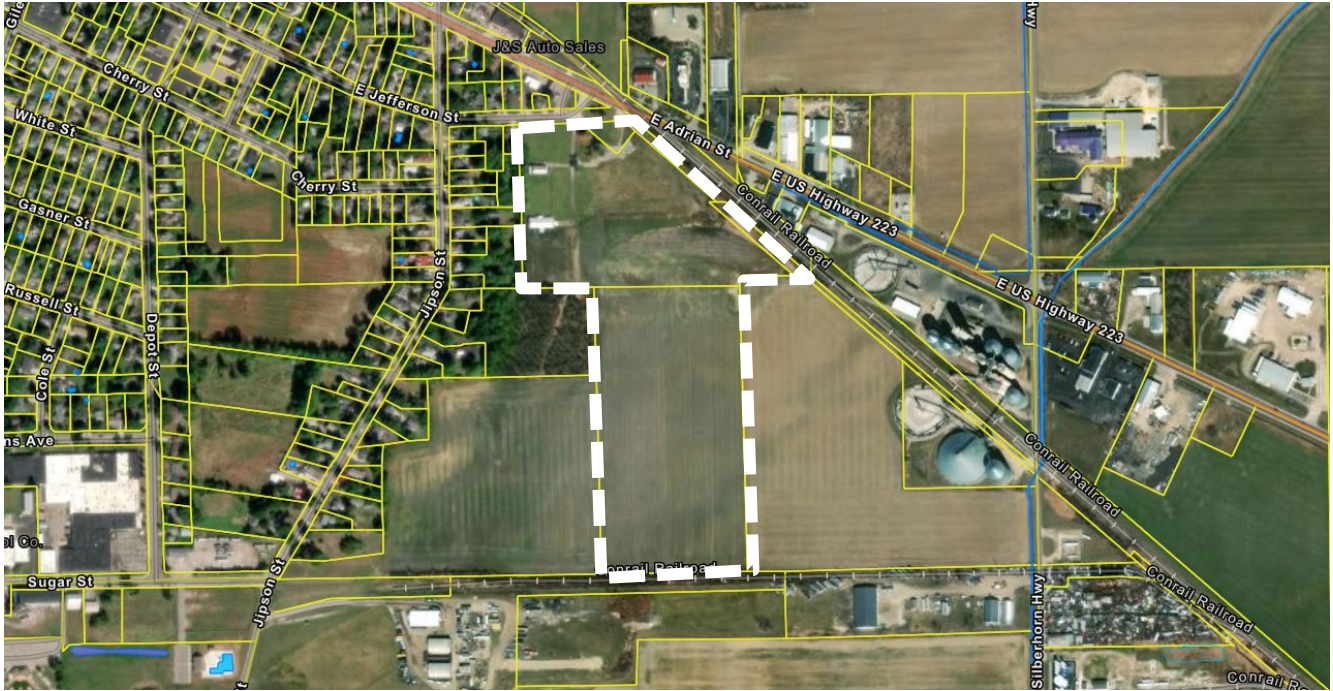
Address	Parcel No.	Acreage	Zoning District	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use	DDA District
9000 E. US-223	BL2-230-3175-00	1.864	C-3, General Commercial	Vacant Land	Regional Business	No

**Priority Level: Medium**

Located in the planned regional business district, this vacant parcel could accommodate more intense commercial uses including larger-scale retail stores, a drive-through, shopping plaza, and other uses that are typically served by higher traffic volumes. The site should still prioritize walkability and accessibility, by connecting any parking to the next-door establishment and reducing the number of curb cuts along US-223.

**KEY RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Develop a concept plan for the site, focusing on amenities that would benefit the residential neighborhood to the north.



**SITE #7: AMERICAN FARM MUSEUM**

Address	Parcel No.	Acreage	Zoning District	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use	DDA District
440 Jefferson	BL2-232-2730-00	14.316	C-3, General Commercial	Vacant Land with Two Agricultural Buildings	Regional Business	No
400 Jefferson	BL2-232-2675-00	0.438		Vacant Land		
450 Jefferson	BL2-232-2700-00	0.210				
6000 Silberhorn	BL2-232-4210-00	0.588				
400 Jefferson	BL2-300-8001-00	19.628	I-1, Industrial		Low-Density Residential	

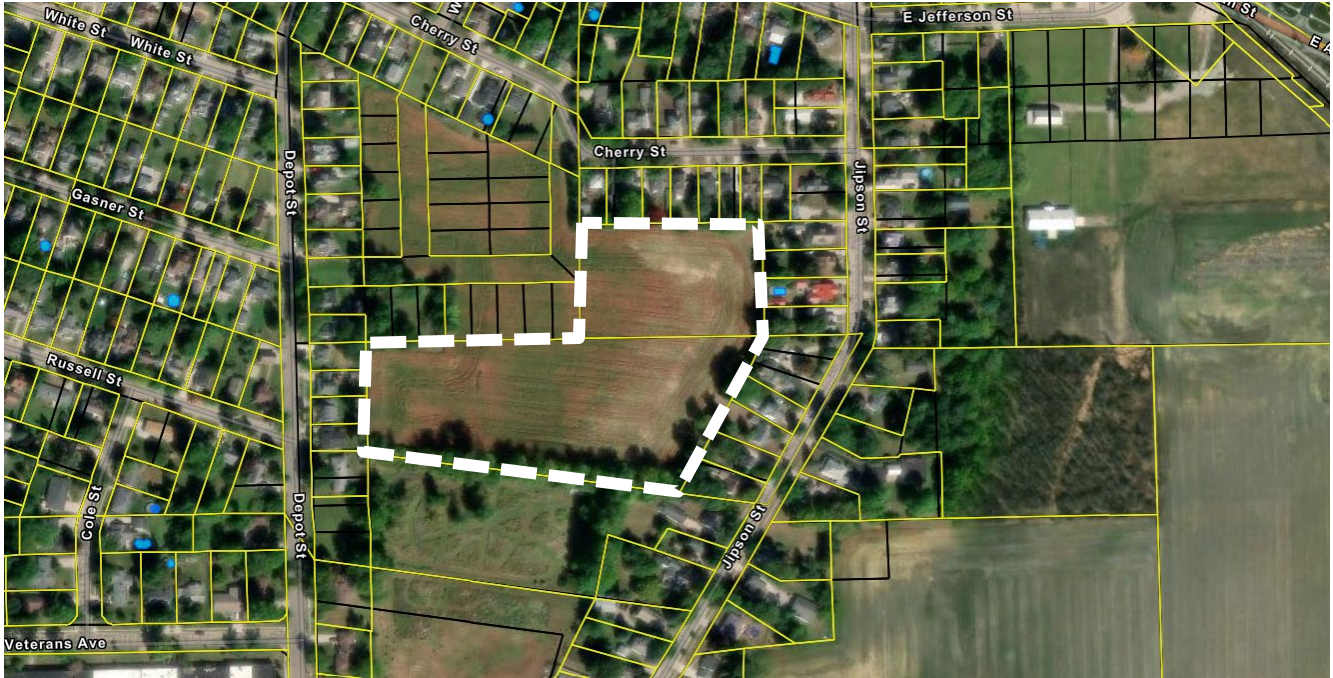
**Priority Level: Medium**

All five parcels are owned by the Tri-County Historical Museum, Inc. and are planned for the future site of the American Farm Museum and Education Center. Their mission is to “*preserve the agricultural history of our community and the nation while cultivating understanding and appreciation of present and future agriculture. The museum will display farm toys and artifacts relating to the history of agriculture, educate through interactive exhibits, and create a place that all ages will enjoy*”.

Conceptual plans are available for review on the project website at: [www.afmeclblissfield.org](http://www.afmeclblissfield.org)

**KEY RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Continue to facilitate the development process with the Tri-County Historical Museum as they seek site village planning and zoning approvals.
- Discuss a rezoning of the southern parcel to the Mixed-Use District (instead of residential).



**SITE #8: FIELD PROPERTY (BETWEEN JIPSON, DEPOT, CHERRY, AND SUGAR)**

Address	Parcel No.	Acreage	Zoning District	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use	DDA District
n/a	BL2-300-0590-00	2.608	R-2, One Family Residential	Vacant Land	Medium Density Residential	No
n/a	BL2-610-0080-00	6.103			Low Density Residential	

**Priority Level: Medium**

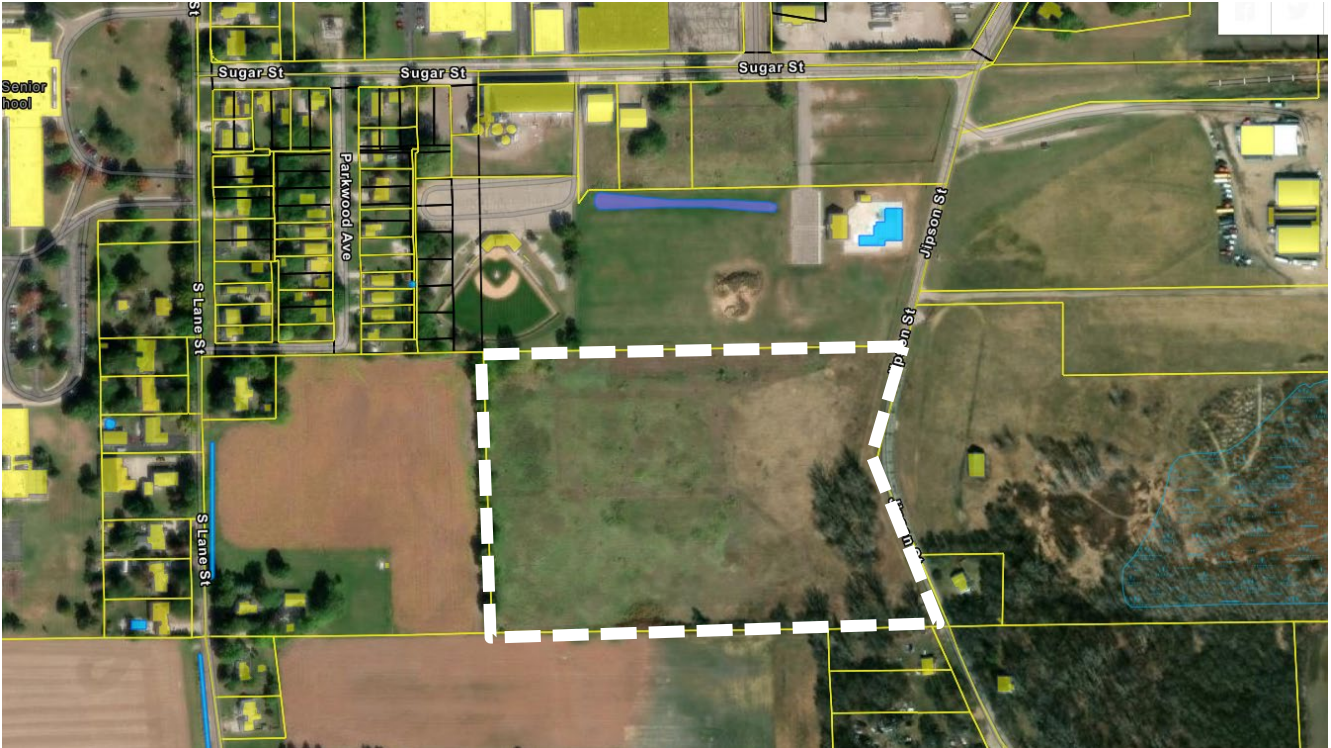
Planned for residential uses, these two vacant properties (under common ownership) would benefit from a mixed-residential development to incorporate Missing Middle Housing (duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, loft units). Located in close proximity to the downtown core, and naturally buffered from adjacent single-family residential properties by a mature tree line, the 8+ acre site could accommodate several housing choices for new residents.

Future street access would be provided from the platted subdivision to the northwest and any internal street system should be planned in a walkable, grid-like fashion.

**KEY RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Develop a concept plan for the layout of future residential blocks, incorporating Missing Middle Housing options.





### SITE #9: VACANT LAND SOUTH OF THE AQUATICS CENTER

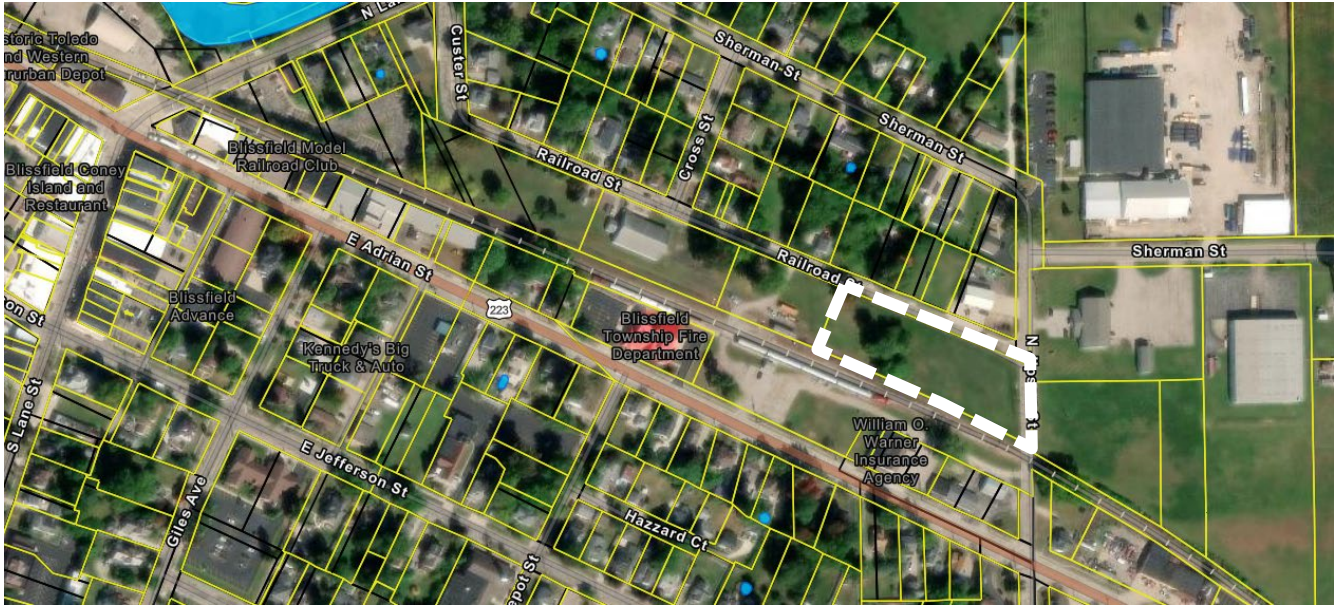
Address	Parcel No.	Acreage	Zoning District	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use	DDA District
600 Jipson	BL2-232-3680-00	15.032	I-1, Industrial	Vacant Land	Mixed-Use	No

**Priority Level:** Low

This property has the potential to act as a southern gateway to the Village and due to its larger size, can easily accommodate a mix of residential and commercial uses. Residential uses are further supported by the proximity of the school campus to the west and to the Aquatics Center directly to the north.

**KEY RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Work with Lenawee Now to update the future land use of the site to match Mixed-Use.
- Develop a connectivity plan for integration of future uses into the park facilities and Aquatics Center to the north (based on final users).



**SITE #10: VACANT RAILROAD STREET PROPERTY**

Address	Parcel No.	Acreage	Zoning District	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use	DDA District
100 Railroad	BL2-232-1400-00	1.690	ORI, Office, Research, Industrial	Vacant Land	Mixed-Use	No

**Priority Level:** Low

Located directly adjacent to the railroad and fronting both on streets that contain residential and light industrial uses, the future use and build of this vacant property is challenging. However, any future design should complement the adjacent residential neighborhood and provide a buffer to the railroad.

**KEY RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Work with the property owner to rezone the site to the MU-1, Mixed-Use District, or another Commercial District.