HyettPalma

Big Rapids

Downtown Blueprint Update 2016

HyettPalma

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City of Big Rapids and Big Rapids DDA
226 North Michigan Avenue
Big Rapids, Michigan 49307

RE: ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016***

HyettPalma, Inc., is pleased to present to you the following report titled ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016***.

This document is the result of a process undertaken by HyettPalma, Inc., to revisit, refocus, and recharge the Big Rapids Downtown enhancement effort by updating the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006***. The 2006 blueprint was completed by HyettPalma as part of the Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns technical assistance program offered by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

We thank you for the opportunity to work once again with the Big Rapids community and to be a part of your continuing efforts to further strengthen Downtown Big Rapids. We hope you will keep us informed of your success and know that – as always – HyettPalma stands ready to assist in any way as you proceed with the Big Rapids Downtown enhancement effort.

Sincerely,

Doyle G. Hyett Dolores P. Palma

HyettPalma

Acknowledgements

HyettPalma would like to thank the City of Big Rapids and Big Rapids Downtown Development Authority for their support and participation in completing the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016***.

HyettPalma would also like to thank the Downtown Steering Committee for identifying the critical issues that were to be addressed in this update. The Downtown Steering Committee was comprised of:

1. Mayor – Mark Warba
2. City Commissioner – Lynn Anderson
3. City Manager – Steve Sobers
4. Assistant City Manager – Mark Gifford
5. City Planner – Mark Sweppenheiser
6. Planning Commission Chair – Jon Schmidt
7. Housing Commission Exec. Dir. – Mark Sochocki
8. Historic Preservation Commission Chair – Ann Hogenson
9. County Commission Chair – Eric O'Neil

10-11. Township Board Chair & Trustee – Bill Stanek & Dave Hamelund

12. DDA Chair – Mark Sochocki
13. Downtown Business Assoc. Chair – Randy Ostrander
14. Band of Locals Chair – Carlleen Rose

15-16. Chamber President & CEO – Jim Nostrant & Jennifer Heinzeman

17. CVB Director – Connie Koepke
18. County EDC Director – Jim Sandy
19. Community Foundation President – Gary Trimarco
20. Artworks Director – Lynne Scheible
21. Big Rapids Neighborhood Association Board Chair – Mary Ryan
22. School Superintendent – Tim Haist
23. Newspaper Publisher – John Norton
24. Hospital Manager – Mary Kay VanDriel
25. Industry Representative – Steve Sims
26. Ferris State University President – David Eisler
27. Ferris State University Student Affairs – Jeanine Ward Roof

28-29 Downtown Bank CEO – Bobby Fisher & Kim VonKronenberger

30. Secretary of Cultural Affairs – Ed Mallett

31-41. Key Downtown Business/Property Owners – Rex Schuberg, Connie Freiberg, Clinton Zimmerman, Bob Patterson, Nawal Braden Swart, John Miedema, Rick Swinson, John Milan, Brook Bentley, Emily Robison

42-45. Other Community Leaders – Pat Currie, Marlies Manning, Mark Speas, Clay Dedeaux

46-47. Additional DDA Members – Charlene Nowlin and Paula Robison

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Project Overview

In 2006, in association with the *Cool Cities Initiative* of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006*** was completed by HyettPalma, Inc. In 2016, after ten-years of actively and diligently implementing the 2006 ***Downtown Blueprint***, the City of Big Rapids contracted with HyettPalma to update the blueprint.

The purpose of updating the City's ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006*** was to:

- Review progress and identify gaps that have occurred as the blueprint was implemented over the last ten years;

- Re-gauge local opinion about the Downtown enhancement effort to date, as well as to revisit the community's concerns and aspirations for Downtown's future;

- Refocus, as necessary, the actions that need to be taken over the next five-years to further enhance Downtown Big Rapids;

- Recharge the Downtown enhancement effort and all those involved in that effort; and

- Recommend specific actions that should be taken over the next five-years to move Downtown Big Rapids forward in attaining the economic potentials facing Downtown.

The ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016***, contained in these pages, presents the findings and recommendations that resulted from revisiting Downtown Big Rapids and the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006.***

Accomplishments in Downtown Big Rapids Since 2006

Tremendous strides have been made in the further enhancement of Downtown, consistent with the recommendations of the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006***.

Following is a listing of some of the most notable accomplishments in Downtown during the last 10 years.

- The City received a blight removal grant, which was used to purchase and demolish a vacant, dilapidated former Chinese restaurant across Michigan Avenue from City Hall.
- The Downtown Farmers Market was started and has grown to be very successful -- operating on Tuesdays from 1-6 and Fridays from 8-2, coupled with Downtown concerts that have also grown in popularity.
- The City-wide Festival of the Arts was started. The Festival runs the entire month of February and has events on every day of the month. The 2016 festival presented 72 events in 29 days. Events are held all over the community, with many in Downtown.
- Public art was installed in Downtown. Currently there are installations at City Hall, Artworks, Mitchell Creek Park and Pocket Park.
- Fiberglass Bulldogs (the FSU mascot) were decorated and displayed all over the community and many are still displayed Downtown.
- Over $2,000,000 has been invested in Downtown, including Michigan Avenue streetscape (trees, sidewalks, LED lights in trees, electrical outlets, banners), installation of distinctive wayfinding signs, several façade improvements, Pocket Park renovations, and the remodeling of the Artworks building.
- New plantings were installed Downtown, including 62 hanging flower baskets placed throughout Downtown.

- A $1,000,000 renovation of the library, located adjacent to Downtown, was completed.

- An $800,000 enhancement of the streetscape on Maple Street was completed.

- Collaborations with Ferris State University have continued to ensure a close town/gown relationship.

- Representatives of the Downtown Business Association, Downtown Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau were placed on each other's boards, to ensure good synergy between the organizations.

- An electric car charging station and bike repair stand were installed in Downtown.

- Improvement of Mitchell Creek Park continues, with assistance from Ferris State University, to encourage better usage of the park and to ensure better connectivity to Downtown.

- Historic markers were placed on several Downtown buildings.

- A great number of dynamic new businesses were opened in Downtown, including the Blue Cow, Selfies, Raven Brewery, Good Dog Bakery, Three Girls Bakery, Crankers Restaurant and Brewery, This & That, radio station, Home Town Pharmacy, Lake and Lodge Realty, Pazsians Boutique, Nawal's Mediterranean Eatery Gourmet Cupcakes & Deserts, and the soon-to-open Red Fox Market centrally located on Michigan Avenue.

Course of Action

It is clear from the previous chapter that great strides have been made in Downtown since completion of the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006***. Today, Downtown Big Rapids is much more appealing physically, has a greater number of strong and enticing businesses, and generates a higher level of community pride than a decade ago.

In 2006, Downtown was facing a wide-range of issues including aesthetics, special events, public safety, attitudes regarding its image, and more. This wide-range of issues necessitated actions that were broad in scope.

Today however, as a result of the accomplishments realized over the past ten-years, Downtown enhancement actions taken to further strengthen Downtown Big Rapids must be much more focused in nature. The time has come to:

- Narrow attention to addressing key priorities;
- Turn the considerable local passion for Downtown into focused action; and
- Focus local resources (time, energy, funds) on actions that will catapult Downtown on to the next level of economic success.

HyettPalma has specifically crafted the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016*** so that the above can be accomplished.

It should be noted that discussions held locally to complete the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016*** revealed five broad categories of concern regarding Downtown's future. These were:

- Business development;
- Marketing;
- Connectivity;

- Physical improvements; and
- Housing.

While all of these topics should be addressed, HyettPalma recommends that the following two be made top priorities at this time:

- Business development; and
- Marketing.

Doing so is very important, since focusing on and making strides in the above two areas will allow the community to further strengthen Downtown's economy, appeal, and customer base as quickly as possible.

Top Priorities

The following actions should be taken to address the recommended top Downtown priorities – business development and marketing.

1. Business Development

Strengthening Downtown's businesses and business mix must be a major focus of the Downtown enhancement effort over the next five- to seven-years. This should involve the following.

Destination

The community very much desires to make Downtown more of a compelling destination for customers, business prospects, and investors. This should be accomplished by building on the economic niche – or brand – that has begun to take hold in Downtown over the last ten years. This is:

- A quality collection of food, art, retail boutiques, and entertainment venues;
- In a walkable, safe, and appealing historic setting;
- Providing a unique experience; and

- Attracting local residents, FSU (students, parents, faculty, administration, visitors), residents of the region, and area visitors.

Appropriate Additional Businesses for Downtown

Based on an examination of current business operations in Downtown, an examination of business operations throughout the trade area, and findings of the leakage analysis presented in the last section of this update – and consistent with Downtown's economic niche -- the following types of new businesses should be sought for Downtown:

- Furniture and home furnishings ($3,179,059 in sales leaking annually from the Big Rapids trade area);

- Electronics and appliances ($15,968,223 annual leakage);

- Specialty foods ($8,386,351 annual leakage – *please note that the new, soon to open Red Fox Market has the opportunity to capture a portion of this leakage*);

- Health and personal care ($2,998,027 leaking annually);

- Clothing, shoes, jewelry, luggage and leather goods ($11,699,273 leaking annually); and

- Food service and drinking places ($22,211,974 current inflow of sales to the trade area annually, which indicates that dining and drinking are desirable, pronounced products in the trade area and products for which Downtown Big Rapids is becoming known. It is likely that as more dining and drinking establishments are developed in or near Downtown, the trade area's draw will also increase).

Although not specifically referenced in the leakage analysis, certainly art and entertainment venues should be maintained and expanded, since consumers appear to embrace these uses in Downtown Big Rapids.

Offices should continue to be sought for upper floor building space on Michigan Avenue and on any level throughout the balance of Downtown.

Existing Downtown businesses should also seek to capture dollars leaking from the community, which would negate the need to seek outside businesses.

Business Recruitment Strategy

A clear and aggressive business recruitment strategy is needed in order to further create Downtown's economic niche, or brand. The recommended strategy is shown below.

- **Walk-Ins**

All business prospects (or their agents), who express an interest in locating Downtown should be directed to the recruitment strategy's point-person. That person should be the Downtown Business Association (DBA) Director. If the DBA Director is not available (since that is currently a part-time position), the prospect/agent should be directed to the Big Rapids Assistant City Manager – or their designee.

Naming a point-person, who all prospects should go to or be directed to, will allow clear channels of communication to be established and accurate information to be provided.

Through the point-person, prospects should be:

- Given the market analysis information included in this document;
- Provided with information about Downtown locations for lease/sale;
- Accompanied on a Downtown walk-through;
- Introduced to other successful Downtown business owners; and
- Encouraged to contact the owners/agents of available Downtown property.

The point-person should follow-up with prospects to provide any additional information or assistance needed to help them make their decision regarding Downtown as a business location.

- **Outreach**

A concerted effort should be made to entice successful, well-established businesses to open a business in Downtown. This should be done by:

- Identifying existing, strong businesses that are compatible with the economic niche/brand being created in Downtown;
- Contacting and meeting with the owners of those businesses; and
- Taking the same steps recommended above for working with walk-in prospects – providing necessary information, walking Downtown, providing introductions to Downtown business owners, and following-up with prospects.

Appropriate, successful, well-established business owners should be sought from:

- Throughout Big Rapids;
- Throughout the Big Rapids trade area; and
- Other Michigan Downtowns.

At a minimum, Downtowns from which business prospects should be sought include:

- Ann Arbor;
- East Lansing;
- Mt. Pleasant;
- Ypsilanti;
- Manistee;
- Grand Rapids;

- Saugatuck; and

- Douglas.

Business prospects should be encouraged to establish a presence in Downtown Big Rapids by:

- Relocating to Downtown;

- Opening an additional business in Downtown – of the type they now operate; and/or

- Opening an additional business Downtown – that is of a different type from their current business, but that also "fits" Downtown's economic niche.

- **Pending Vacancies**

As part of the business recruitment strategy, the point person must work closely with owners of Downtown commercial property. This is important in order to:

- Learn well in advance when leases will expire and spaces might become vacant; and

- Help willing property owners – especially on Michigan Avenue – lease their first floor spaces to businesses that will strengthen Downtown's economic niche.

- **New Buyers**

There will be times when successful owners decide to close their Downtown businesses. It is very important for the point person to work closely with these owners – especially when their business is of a type that strengthens Downtown's economic niche – to help them find an appropriate buyer. Doing so will allow Downtown to retain its strong businesses, and foot traffic, despite losing the current owners.

<u>Movie Theater</u>

Downtown is fortunate to have a 4-screen movie theater serving as an anchor on its main street. The community values its Downtown movie theater while also being concerned about its future. The following steps should be taken to address this issue.

- The Downtown Partnership (recommended later in this document) should contact the theater's owner.
- The theater owner should be asked their intent regarding the building's future – will they retain ownership or sell it to new owners?
- If they intend to retain ownership, the current owner should be urged to reinvest in the building and in the theater itself to make it a high quality venue.
- If they intend to sell the theater, new owners should be sought who would operate it as a multi-use entertainment venue (for film, plays, music, etc.).

Business Hours

As additional food and entertainment venues – and FSU students –are attracted to Downtown, it will evolve into more and more of a nocturnal destination. As this occurs, Downtown's retail boutiques and art venues should also evolve, keeping later evening hours to take advantage of Downtown's evening foot traffic. Not doing so would be a very great missed opportunity to capture additional revenue.

In addition, as Downtown becomes more of a thriving destination overall, its business owners should consider staying open additional hours on weekends. Many Downtown business owners throughout the nation have long indicated that Saturday all-day and Sunday afternoons are some of the most profitable hours of operation, for many reasons, but primarily because consumers and families have much more free time during the weekend to shop, dine, and frequent Downtown. Business owners in Downtown Petoskey, Traverse City, Ann Arbor, Grand Haven, Charlevoix, Saugatuck, and many, many other successful Downtowns throughout Michigan can attest to this fact.

Future Opportunity Site

A vacant building adjacent to City Hall – a former furniture store – is currently the largest and most visible building vacancy in Downtown Big Rapids. Every effort should be made to assist the owner of the building through the business recruitment effort – if the owner of the building desires assistance – to find an appropriate tenant for the building. Ideally, the tenant would be a furniture or home furnishings store, since the closing of the previous furniture store leaves a sizable gap in Downtown's business mix. And according to the Downtown leakage analysis over $3,100,000 in furniture and home furnishings sales are currently going to other communities, or leaking from the trade area. And if appliances and electronic products were added to the furniture business, the leakage in sales from the trade area that could be potentially captured would be substantially higher, at almost $20,000,000. This noted leakage can be found in the Retail Marketplace report attached at the end of this document.

It should be noted that many older, large buildings, like the vacant furniture store building, in a Downtown or any commercial center are often difficult to rent or sell – to desirable businesses -- because they are too large for contemporary retailing. And, many of the buildings are in such a condition that rendering them operable is often too costly. And many of the buildings are designed for past shopper desires in a Downtown setting with vast amounts of parking in front of buildings that are setback from the street wall and thereby conflicting with the zero lot line character of other buildings, particularly in a traditional Downtown environment where pedestrian foot traffic is sought – like Downtown Big Rapids.

If it proves too difficult to rent or sell this particular building, consideration should be given to selling the property to a qualified developer to construct a new building or buildings to attract more contemporary and appropriate Downtown businesses.

If this were to take place, the new structures should be constructed at the sidewalk line of Michigan Avenue, which is zero lot line development. The project should entail building a mixed-use structure, with retail on the first floor and housing, lodging, and/or offices on the upper floors. Adequate parking to meet the development's needs should be placed at the rear of the new structure. If the site is redeveloped in this manner, the City should offer the former Chinese restaurant site – directly across Michigan Avenue from City Hall – to the developer to complete a similar, compatible project on that site, with retail on the first floor and housing, lodging and/or offices in the upper floors and with adequate parking in the rear or underground.

If the site is to be redeveloped, and if the owner of the vacant furniture store desires, the City should make every effort to participate in seeking a qualified developer for both the vacant furniture store and the former Chinese restaurant sites.

Abatements

If tax abatements are offered in Downtown, it is suggested that they be used very, very sparingly. This is suggested since:

- Downtown's economy is healthy and will only become more so in the near future;

- Tax abatements negate the Tax Increment Financing District that has been created in Downtown, by giving away the increments rather than allowing them to accrue and be used for needed Downtown improvements; and

- There appears to be a great desire locally to "increase our tax base" – yet abatements essentially give away tax increases that are realized, thus leaving the City with stagnant revenues from Downtown.

2. *Marketing*

At this time, focusing on marketing Downtown is equally important as focusing on Downtown business development. The Downtown marketing campaign should include the following elements.

Special Events

A number of special events are held in Downtown throughout the year, ranging from signature events (such as the Festival of the Arts) to "serial events" (such as Magic on Michigan).

Events are important, since they draw people to Downtown and expose them to Downtown's businesses, offerings, and unique appeal. However, planning and holding special events is very time consuming and labor-intensive. Therefore, it is better to hold a small number of special events that attract large numbers, than to hold numerous events that draw few people.

A review should be conducted of Downtown's current special events to ensure that all are of high quality and attract large crowds. Those that meet this test should be continued and grown each year. Those that do not, should be discontinued.

Web Sites
Currently, three primary organizations are involved in marketing Downtown. They are the Downtown Business Association (DBA), the Mecosta County Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB), and the Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce. Each of these entities currently has a web site, which should be used to more effectively and diligently market Downtown, in the following manner.

- The CVB web site should feature Downtown via a short video that portrays Downtown as a fun, unique, bustling destination for dining, shopping, and enjoying art and live entertainment. Doing so is in the CVB's best interest, since a Downtown such as Big Rapids' can certainly entice visitors to spend a day and spend the night, thereby putting "heads in beds."

- The Chamber of Commerce should include the same Downtown video on its web site. This would be in the Chamber's best interest, since it has been shown that a healthy Downtown can stimulate economic development throughout its city and region.

- The DBA web site should present Downtown as the upbeat, fun, and exciting destination it has become. This should be done using short videos, invigorating music, photos of crowds on Downtown streets and at its sidewalk tables, and with written pieces that are short and fun to read. The web site should also include a list of all Downtown businesses along with a map showing their locations, phone numbers, and web site links.

- The CVB and Chamber web sites should provide links to the DBA web site.

It is understood that the Mecosta County Economic Development Corporation and FSU are not responsible for marketing Downtown Big Rapids. However, it would be in the best interest of both entities to link their web sites to the DBA's, since the CEOs of industries and corporations routinely consider the economic health of a Downtown as one of their location criteria. And, universities have found that a great Downtown can be used as a very effective marketing tool for attracting students and attracting/retaining faculty.

Social Media Marketing

The DBA, and every Downtown business owner, should consider using a variety of social media platforms (FaceBook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube channel, etc.) to market their businesses and Downtown as a whole. Ideally, this social media marketing would:

- Be of very high quality;
- Add value by including content that goes beyond simply pitching a business or Downtown;
- Engages viewers/followers in conversations; and
- Entertain, surprise, and amuse those who "tune in" to encourage them to return for the long-term.

Downtown Brochure

The DBA produces a printed Downtown brochure, with funding from the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The current brochure is large in format and contains a considerable amount of information.

When next updated, the Downtown brochure should be redesigned as a glossy, professional, one-panel "lure brochure" that can be placed in the information racks of area lodging facilities, area attractions, and regional CVB locations – at a minimum. The brochure should also be distributed at special events

The new brochure should:

- Be made eye-catching, with dynamic photos that show Downtown at its best;
- Contain attention grabbing headlines;
- Be easy to read thanks to short and engaging text;
- Include a "call to action," telling brochure readers what you want them to do;

- Direct readers to the DBA web site and/or social media accounts; and

- Be perceived as worth keeping by those who select it from information racks.

Signage

By contracting with local professionals, the City has created a very visually appealing wayfinding sign system within and leading to Downtown. Now, there appears to be great interest locally in augmenting that system in order to draw additional motorists (potential customers) to Downtown. This should be accomplished in the following manner.

- The monument sign, which has been placed on Perry Street to direct motorists to Downtown, should be made more visible by raising its height to make it taller, by lighting it for evening viewing, and by placing a piece of eye-catching public art near the sign.

- The Downtown Partnership, recommended below, should contact the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to explore the possibility of having a sign placed on Highway 131 that informs motorists of which exit to use to reach Downtown Big Rapids.

- As funds allow, additional signs should be erected to lead motorists from 131 into Downtown. These signs should be compatible in design with the wayfinding sign system.

In addition, the City should conduct a review of signage throughout Downtown to remove any signs that have become redundant due to the wayfinding system and to make sure all regulatory signs are in their appropriate locations.

Hospitality Training

Big Rapids is fortunate to have a number of lodging facilities within its city limits. Guests of these facilities provide an important potential customer base for Downtown, as well as for the area's attractions. Therefore, it is suggested that the CVB provide hospitality training for "front line employees" – such as front desk personnel – whom guests are most likely to ask for restaurant suggestions or for info about "what is there to do in Big Rapids." This training should include resource information about Downtown's shops, restaurants, art venues, entertainment venues, and events.

In addition, consideration should be given to extending hospitality training to others who might receive similar questions from their customers – such as restaurant and gas station employees.

Ferris State University (FSU)
The students, parents, faculty, administration, and visitors of FSU constitute a significant potential market for Downtown. To cultivate those in that market – and make them more aware of all Downtown offers – the following steps are suggested.

- Focus groups should be held with FSU students to learn what they enjoy and don't enjoy about Downtown at this time, and what could be done to increase their Downtown patronage;

- Similarly, separate focus groups should be held with members of FSU faculty and administration.

- Rather than telling students about Downtown during Orientation, students should be taken to Downtown, given a tour of Downtown's businesses, and offered on-site specials.

- Students should be encouraged and enticed to become involved in Downtown in all ways possible. This will help students develop a connection with – and feel connected to – Downtown. This could take the form of offering student internships, creating student involvement in special events, and having students sit on the boards of Downtown organizations – as is now done by the DBA.

Teamwork
To best market Downtown, teamwork will be needed among the DBA, Chamber of Commerce, CVB, FSU, and City Hall. Those within each entity who are responsible for marketing should come together, discuss a timeline for implementing the above actions, determine roles and responsibilities, and take aggressive action. Again, it is in the best interest of each – the DBA, Chamber, CVB, FSU, and City Hall – for Big Rapids to have a Downtown that is as economically strong as possible.

Additional Actions

While the resources of time, staff, volunteers, energy, and funds should be focused on the two priority areas discussed above, the following additional actions should also be taken as resources allow.

1. Physical Improvements

Significant, high quality physical improvements have been made in Downtown over the last ten years. Now, the following (much smaller and less costly) improvements should be completed.

Connectivity

Connections should be established between Downtown and the following community assets.

- **Riverwalk**

The river and Riverwalk are great assets that should be more fully connected to Downtown. This should be done by creating a walk – with signage -- between the two along Maple.

- **Mitchell Creek Park**

Park improvements and connections to Downtown are now in the planning stage and should be implemented as quickly as possible.

- **Bikes**

Bike lanes should be created in Downtown where streets are wide enough. Where bike lanes cannot be created – due to road width – "Share the Road" decals should be added to Downtown's streets.

- **FSU**

Warren Street should act as a bike/walk connector between FSU and Downtown. Use of this route should be encouraged via signage and well-maintained walks and street lighting that is aimed downward in order to not adversely impact those who live on Warren.

Adjacent Neighborhood

Downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods should become more mutually beneficial to each other. To accomplish this, Downtown should provide what residents need/want so they are more willing to support Downtown. In addition, the City should seek any available State resources that can be used to improve housing adjacent to Downtown, where needed.

Historic District

During discussions held to define the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006***, the community expressed a strong desire to retain Downtown's history, small town feel, and older architecture. The same was found during completion of the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016***. There also appears to be a continued desire locally to see Downtown's older building façades treated in a way that respects their architecture.

Today, as in 2006, listing on the National Register of Historic Places remains a prestigious designation that can effectively be used to market a Downtown. Having one's building listed WILL NOT result in being told what to do with or to that building. Instead, listing affords the building owner access to historic tax credits when the owner chooses to invest in the structure.

And as in 2006, the only way to ensure that Downtown's façades are not modernized or "improved" in a way that lessens their historic character, is to create a local historic district in Downtown. Typically, local historic district designation comes with review of exterior changes an owner chooses to make to façades that are visible from the public right-of-way. Again, owners are not told they MUST invest in their properties. Review only kicks-in when an owner CHOOSES to make exterior improvements that require a building permit.

It has been found that National Register designation provides added value to a property through prestige and recognition. It has been found that local historic district designation increases the property value of historic buildings, by ensuring that their integrity is not lost.

If it is determined by the community that Downtown's small town charm and architectural assets are worth saving and preserving, then both designations should be given serious consideration.

Future Anchors

There is talk locally of creating additional assets that will serve the entire community, such as a community recreation center and a performance space. If these developments are brought to fruition, they should be located in or in immediate proximity to Downtown. Doing so will strengthen Downtown's position as the hub of the community, a gathering place for all, and a vibrant destination.

2. Management

The following management recommendations are offered to ensure the timely and quality implementation of the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016***.

Downtown Partnership

At the start of this project, HyettPalma requested that the City of Big Rapids create a broad-based, representative Steering Committee to help define issues that should be addressed by the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016***. Now, it is suggested that the Steering Committee evolve into the Big Rapids Downtown Partnership. This group would provide the active leadership needed to ensure implementation of the ***Downtown Blueprint*** – and would ensure that implementation proceeds with maximum participation, coordination, and communication of all those who must be involved. The Downtown Partnership should meet at least 2 to 3 times a year.

Chamber of Commerce

There has been some discussion locally regarding whether the Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce should become the Big Rapids Chamber of Commerce. While HyettPalma will leave that to local determination, it should be noted that – whether or not this change occurs – there will always be a need for the DBA and the Downtown Partnership to continue their work, and for the Chamber to be actively involved in the Downtown enhancement effort.

Adopt

As in 2006, it is suggested that the DBA, DDA, and TIFA adopt the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016*** as the official game plan for Downtown. And, once again, it is hoped that the Big Rapids City Commission will adopt this document as the Downtown element of the City's comprehensive plan.

Market Characteristics for
Big Rapids Core Based Statistical Area

Following is new information related to the demographic and socio-economic characteristics and spending patterns and spending potential of consumers living in the Big Rapids Core Based Statistical Area (CBSA). For the purposes of this update, this geographic area is considered Downtown Big Rapids Primary Trade Area.

A CBSA is a new and more concise designation for Big Rapids.

A CBSA is a U.S. geographical area defined by the Office of Management and Budget that centers on an urban center of at least 10,000 people and adjacent areas that are socio-economically tied to the urban center by commuting. The Office of Management and Budget released the new standards in July 2015.

The CBSA is a more conservative trade area than was defined for the 2006 blueprint. However, the new geographical classification will enable a more accurate examination of evolving demographic, socio-economic and spending patterns of Big Rapids households, since future market characteristics will be compiled and presented consistent with the CBSA defined area. This will provide a much more accurate level of benchmark data used to examine past market activity and future market potential.

The attached reports for the Big Rapids trade area include:

- Demographic and Income Profile; and
- Retail Marketplace Profile.

Several significant findings of the attached new market information include the following.

- The Big Rapids primary trade area currently contains approximately 43,294 residents and 16,436 households.

- The average annual household income for those living in the Big Rapids primary trade area is $49,590 and is projected to increase to $57,097 by 2020.

- The total estimate annual income of households in the trade area is approximately $815,000,000 and is projected to increase to approximately $948,000,000 by 2020.

- The attached Retail Marketplace Profile displays the amount of sales leakage occurring in the Big Rapids trade area. The column titled “Retail Gap” indicates the amount of sales leakage or surplus. A <u>positive</u> number means that sales are leaking from the trade area for a particular industry group. A <u>negative</u> number indicates a surplus of retail sales for a particular industry group, meaning customers are being drawn from outside to the trade area, which is considered inflow – the opposite of leakage.

- At this time, trade area sales are leaking in the following industry groups:

  - Automobile dealers;
  - Furniture stores;
  - Home furnishings stores;
  - Electronic and appliance stores;
  - Lawn and garden equipment and supply stores;
  - Beer, wine and liquor stores;
  - Health and personal care stores;
  - Clothing stores;
  - Shoe stores;
  - Sporting goods, hobby and musical instrument stores;
  - General merchandise stores;
  - Miscellaneous store retailers;
  - Electronic shopping and mail order houses;
  - Vending machine operators;
  - Direct selling establishments;
  - Special food services; and
  - Drinking places.

- Approximately $129,000,000 in total retail sales are leaking from the trade area each year from the above noted industry groups. This means that approximately 25% of the trade area’s retail sales are leaking each year. This is considered the Retail Gap.

- The total annual demand for retail products and food by consumers living in the trade area is $471,793,147, which is the trade area's retail sales potential or demand. The total annual sales for retail products and food in the trade area is $531,596,281, which is the supply. This indicates that $59,803,134 in retail sales are coming each year to the Big Rapids trade area from customers living outside the Big Rapids trade area. Particular attention should be paid to demand for local products coming from outside the trade area. This means that the Big Rapids trade area is drawing over 11% of it's total retail sales from outside the trade area. An inflow of revenue from outside the trade area indicates the overall strength of the Big Rapids retail marketplace and the inflow should be compounded if possible.

Following are the reports that support these findings.

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Demographic and Income Profile

Downtown Big Rapids Trade Area
Geography: CBSA

Summary		**Census 2010**		**2015**		**2020**
Population		42,798		43,294		43,625
Households		16,101		16,436		16,599
Families		10,182		10,248		10,263
Average Household Size		2.45		2.43		2.42
Owner Occupied Housing Units		11,536		11,536		11,653
Renter Occupied Housing Units		4,565		4,900		4,946
Median Age		34.1		34.8		36.6
Trends: 2015 - 2020 Annual Rate		**Area**		**State**		**National**
Population		0.15%		0.15%		0.75%
Households		0.20%		0.21%		0.77%
Families		0.03%		0.06%		0.69%
Owner HHs		0.20%		0.19%		0.70%
Median Household Income		3.38%		2.79%		2.66%
			2015		**2020**	
Households by Income			Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<$15,000			2,808	17.1%	2,710	16.3%
$15,000 - $24,999			2,461	15.0%	1,927	11.6%
$25,000 - $34,999			2,339	14.2%	1,931	11.6%
$35,000 - $49,999			2,614	15.9%	2,470	14.9%
$50,000 - $74,999			2,899	17.6%	3,234	19.5%
$75,000 - $99,999			1,635	9.9%	2,180	13.1%
$100,000 - $149,999			1,305	7.9%	1,665	10.0%
$150,000 - $199,999			229	1.4%	305	1.8%
$200,000+			146	0.9%	177	1.1%
Median Household Income			$37,641		$44,453	
Average Household Income			$49,590		$57,097	
Per Capita Income			$19,211		$22,115	
	Census 2010		**2015**		**2020**	
Population by Age	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0 - 4	2,228	5.2%	2,158	5.0%	2,095	4.8%
5 - 9	2,368	5.5%	2,182	5.0%	2,120	4.9%
10 - 14	2,396	5.6%	2,272	5.2%	2,250	5.2%
15 - 19	4,306	10.1%	4,003	9.2%	4,076	9.3%
20 - 24	6,198	14.5%	6,352	14.7%	5,822	13.3%
25 - 34	4,263	10.0%	4,777	11.0%	4,781	11.0%
35 - 44	4,072	9.5%	3,857	8.9%	4,023	9.2%
45 - 54	5,218	12.2%	4,784	11.1%	4,342	10.0%
55 - 64	5,172	12.1%	5,593	12.9%	5,648	12.9%
65 - 74	3,843	9.0%	4,414	10.2%	5,006	11.5%
75 - 84	2,040	4.8%	2,124	4.9%	2,629	6.0%
85+	694	1.6%	778	1.8%	833	1.9%
	Census 2010		**2015**		**2020**	
Race and Ethnicity	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White Alone	40,095	93.7%	40,114	92.7%	40,072	91.9%
Black Alone	1,077	2.5%	1,260	2.9%	1,367	3.1%
American Indian Alone	268	0.6%	325	0.8%	372	0.9%
Asian Alone	279	0.7%	385	0.9%	475	1.1%
Pacific Islander Alone	11	0.0%	11	0.0%	11	0.0%
Some Other Race Alone	151	0.4%	184	0.4%	212	0.5%
Two or More Races	917	2.1%	1,015	2.3%	1,116	2.6%
Hispanic Origin (Any Race)	731	1.7%	962	2.2%	1,201	2.8%

Data Note: Income is expressed in current dollars.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010 Summary File 1. Esri forecasts for 2015 and 2020.

March 24, 2016

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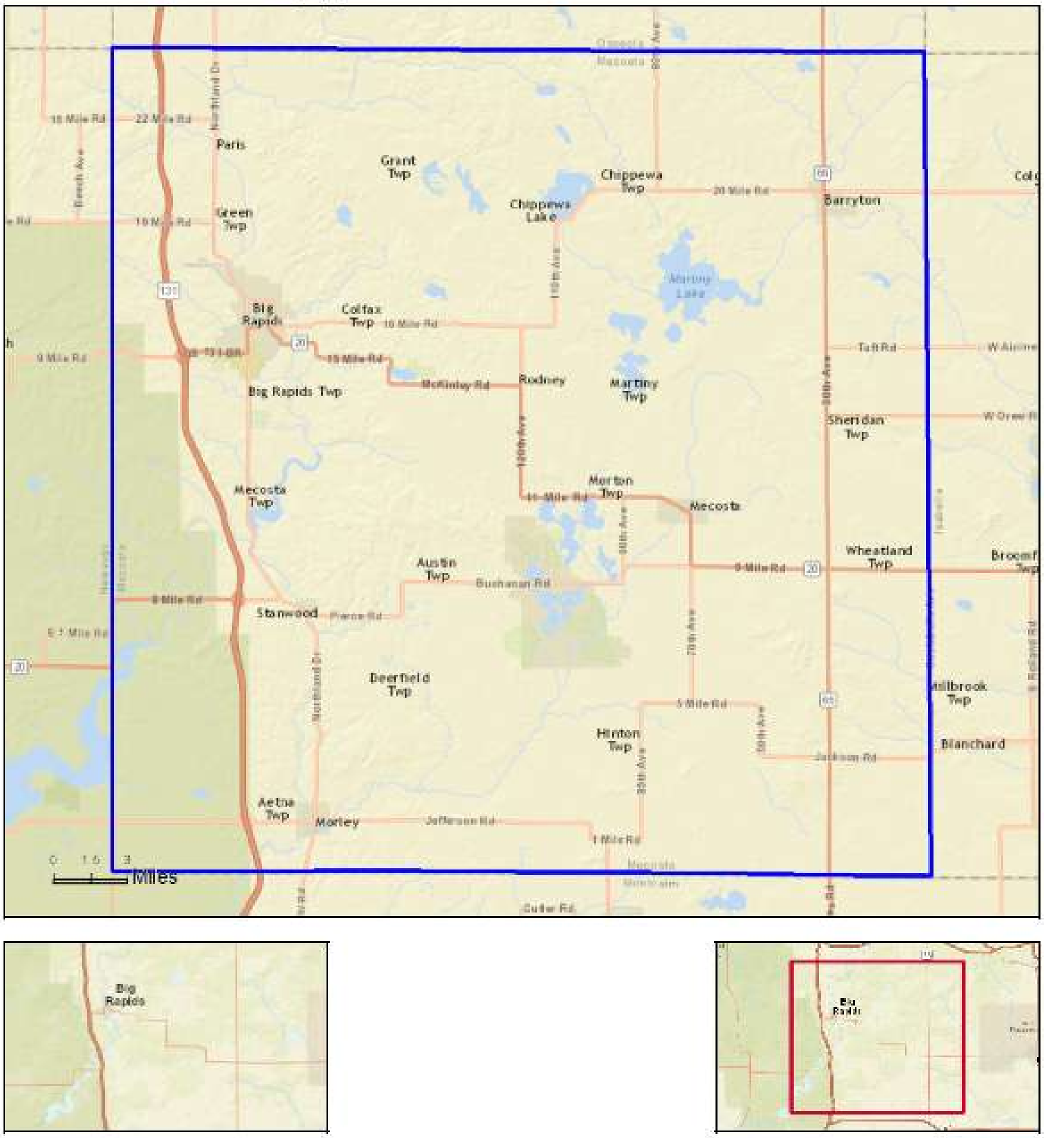
Site Map

Downtown Big Rapids Trade Area
Big Rapids, MI Micropolitan Statistical Area
Geography: CBSA



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Retail MarketPlace Profile

Big Rapids, MI Micropolitan Statistical Area
Geography: CBSA

Summary Demographics						
2015 Population						43,294
2015 Households						16,436
2015 Median Disposable Income						$31,429
2015 Per Capita Income						$19,211
Industry Summary	**NAICS**	**Demand** (Retail Potential)	**Supply** (Retail Sales)	**Retail Gap**	**Leakage/Surplus Factor**	**Number of Businesses**
Total Retail Trade and Food & Drink	44-45,722	$471,793,147	$531,596,281	-$59,803,134	-6.0	340
Total Retail Trade	44-45	$431,994,774	$469,585,934	-$37,591,160	-4.2	246
Total Food & Drink	722	$39,798,373	$62,010,347	-$22,211,974	-21.8	94
Industry Group	**NAICS**	**Demand** (Retail Potential)	**Supply** (Retail Sales)	**Retail Gap**	**Leakage/Surplus Factor**	**Number of Businesses**
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	441	$100,276,054	$74,220,136	$26,055,918	14.9	37
Automobile Dealers	4411	$80,895,894	$50,785,465	$30,110,429	22.9	15
Other Motor Vehicle Dealers	4412	$12,791,272	$16,554,118	-$3,762,846	-12.8	9
Auto Parts, Accessories & Tire Stores	4413	$6,588,888	$6,880,553	-$291,665	-2.2	13
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	442	$11,240,676	$8,140,652	$3,100,024	16.0	11
Furniture Stores	4421	$7,090,490	$4,069,501	$3,020,989	27.1	4
Home Furnishings Stores	4422	$4,150,186	$4,071,151	$79,035	1.0	7
Electronics & Appliance Stores	443	$21,606,637	$5,638,414	$15,968,223	58.6	11
Bldg Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply Stores	444	$21,415,630	$42,662,405	-$21,246,775	-33.2	25
Bldg Material & Supplies Dealers	4441	$17,226,151	$40,273,601	-$23,047,450	-40.1	19
Lawn & Garden Equip & Supply Stores	4442	$4,189,479	$2,388,804	$1,800,675	27.4	6
Food & Beverage Stores	445	$79,461,694	$109,670,058	-$30,208,364	-16.0	24
Grocery Stores	4451	$70,061,792	$92,797,024	-$22,735,232	-14.0	16
Specialty Food Stores	4452	$4,875,055	$13,261,306	-$8,386,251	-46.2	7
Beer, Wine & Liquor Stores	4453	$4,524,847	$3,611,728	$913,119	11.2	1
Health & Personal Care Stores	446,4461	$30,508,621	$27,510,594	$2,998,027	5.2	29
Gasoline Stations	447,4471	$30,899,945	$64,829,245	-$33,929,300	-35.4	21
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	448	$19,802,320	$8,103,047	$11,699,273	41.9	15
Clothing Stores	4481	$13,163,426	$4,213,561	$8,949,865	51.5	9
Shoe Stores	4482	$2,768,242	$1,748,405	$1,019,837	22.6	3
Jewelry, Luggage & Leather Goods Stores	4483	$3,870,652	$2,141,081	$1,729,571	28.8	3
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores	451	$12,749,971	$20,892,843	-$8,142,872	-24.2	20
Sporting Goods/Hobby/Musical Instr Stores	4511	$10,413,134	$9,390,945	$1,022,189	5.2	14
Book, Periodical & Music Stores	4512	$2,336,837	$11,501,898	-$9,165,061	-66.2	6
General Merchandise Stores	452	$74,027,244	$90,041,945	-$16,014,701	-9.8	13
Department Stores Excluding Leased Depts.	4521	$52,411,658	$83,130,326	-$30,718,668	-22.7	5
Other General Merchandise Stores	4529	$21,615,586	$6,911,619	$14,703,967	51.5	8
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	453	$21,747,274	$16,712,498	$5,034,776	13.1	37
Florists	4531	$839,378	$1,119,245	-$279,867	-14.3	5
Office Supplies, Stationery & Gift Stores	4532	$3,751,789	$5,134,118	-$1,382,329	-15.6	9
Used Merchandise Stores	4533	$2,067,638	$2,084,831	-$17,193	-0.4	12
Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers	4539	$15,088,469	$8,374,304	$6,714,165	28.6	11
Nonstore Retailers	454	$8,258,708	$1,164,097	$7,094,611	75.3	3
Electronic Shopping & Mail-Order Houses	4541	$6,166,158	$0	$6,166,158	100.0	0
Vending Machine Operators	4542	$333,136	$87,589	$245,547	58.4	1
Direct Selling Establishments	4543	$1,759,414	$1,076,508	$682,906	24.1	2
Food Services & Drinking Places	722	$39,798,373	$62,010,347	-$22,211,974	-21.8	94
Full-Service Restaurants	7221	$20,299,581	$22,046,072	-$1,746,491	-4.1	50
Limited-Service Eating Places	7222	$16,622,031	$38,025,509	-$21,403,478	-39.2	35
Special Food Services	7223	$925,922	$523,232	$402,690	27.8	3
Drinking Places - Alcoholic Beverages	7224	$1,950,839	$1,415,534	$535,305	15.9	6

Data Note: Supply (retail sales) estimates sales to consumers by establishments. Sales to businesses are excluded. Demand (retail potential) estimates the expected amount spent by consumers at retail establishments. Supply and demand estimates are in current dollars. The Leakage/Surplus Factor presents a snapshot of retail opportunity. This is a measure of the relationship between supply and demand that ranges from +100 (total leakage) to -100 (total surplus). A positive value represents 'leakage' of retail opportunity outside the trade area. A negative value represents a surplus of retail sales, a market where customers are drawn in from outside the trade area. The Retail Gap represents the difference between Retail Potential and Retail Sales. Esri uses the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to classify businesses by their primary type of economic activity. Retail establishments are classified into 27 industry groups in the Retail Trade sector, as well as four industry groups within the Food Services & Drinking Establishments subsector. For more information on the Retail MarketPlace data, please click the link below to view the Methodology Statement.
http://www.esri.com/library/whitepapers/pdfs/esri-data-retail-marketplace.pdf

March 28, 2016

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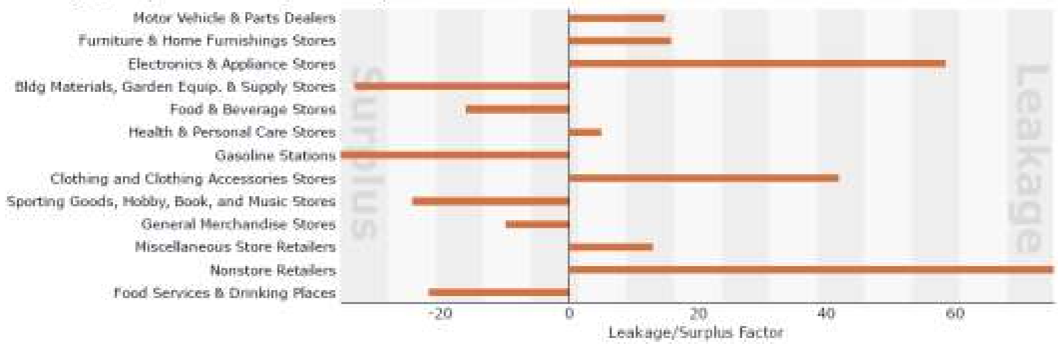
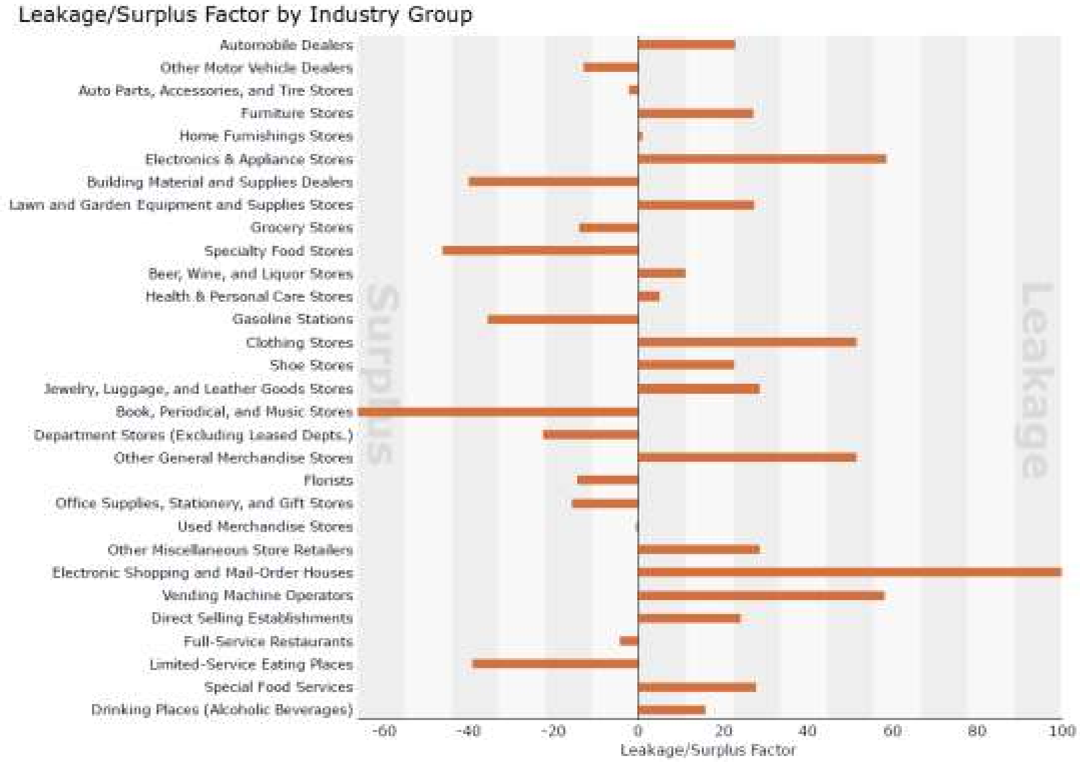
Retail MarketPlace Profile

Big Rapids, MI Micropolitan Statistical Area
Geography: CBSA

Leakage/Surplus Factor by Industry Subsector



Leakage/Surplus Factor by Industry Group



Source: Esri and Infogroup.

March 28, 2016

J-9675

2014 Methodology Statement: Esri Data—Retail MarketPlace

Introduction

A complete, current, and accurate snapshot of the retail marketplace is critical to strategic decisions made by retail trade and related food service establishments to increase business. There are two ways to measure activity in a retail market—supply and demand. Analysis of consumer spending reveals market demand, or retail potential. Examining business revenues—retail sales—reveals market supply. Esri offers both components of economic exchange for a complete assessment of the retail marketplace, including a measure of the difference between supply and demand—the Leakage/Surplus Factor.

History

Before the development of Retail MarketPlace, if data users needed current-year estimates of expenditures within the retail trade industry, the choice was limited to a partial snapshot of this industry. The data covered household demand, but the expenditure estimates were available only by product, not by source. There was no way to estimate retail potential by industry.

In 2002, Esri introduced Retail MarketPlace and expanded the data options. Esri was the first company to offer a complementary and complete portrait of the retail landscape. This groundbreaking database includes both supply and demand of retail expenditures by detailed industry. Since the retail business supply-side estimates represent sales to households only, Retail MarketPlace uniquely captures the comparison to the household-based retail potential profile. The Leakage/Surplus Factor exposes industries that are either oversaturated or underserved for any area. This analytic data source gives decision makers a complete portrait of the retail landscape.

The 2014 Database

Esri continues to leverage and build on its years of analytic insight and experience with the 2014 Retail MarketPlace. The database includes the latest market statistics for Retail Trade and Food Services and Drinking Places (the retail market). The dollar estimates, which represent total retail supply and demand conditions for the past year, are presented in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). These datasets comprise an update of supply and demand for the 27 industry groups in the Retail Trade sector, NAICS 44–45, as well as the four industry groups within the Food Services and Drinking Places subsector, NAICS 722.

The database reflects new geographic inventories and boundary definitions, starting with standard geographic areas like block groups, tracts, and counties based on 2010 geography. Reports generated for user-defined polygons like rings and drive times leverage the 2010 block point inventory and updated weight file. The data is also available in the latest Core Based Statistical Areas, places, Congressional Districts (113th Congress), Designated Market Areas, County Subdivisions, and ZIP codes.

The estimation of retail sales also incorporates 2014 business data from Dun & Bradstreet. This database differs from Esri's former source with regard to data collection

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methodology and maintenance, industry classification, and employment and sales estimation.

Lastly, the estimation of retail potential by industry incorporates the latest product line tables from the 2007 Census of Retail Trade (CRT), as well as the latest Consumer Expenditure surveys (2011 and 2012) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Market Supply (Retail Sales)

Estimates of retail sales begin with the benchmark, the 2002 and 2007 CRT from the US Census Bureau. Trends from the economic censuses are used to update the base along with Esri's extensive portfolio of demographic and business databases. These include commercial and government sources such as the Dun & Bradstreet business database and economic statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Supply estimates also incorporate data from the Census Bureau's Nonemployer Statistics (NES) division. Smaller establishments without payrolls, such as self-employed individuals and unincorporated businesses, account for a small portion of overall sales. However, these businesses represent more than half of all retailers in the United States. Their inclusion completes the report of industry sales.

Esri's model captures economic change by first differentiating employer and nonemployer sales growth. Multivariate statistical techniques are used to model data that is subject to disclosure issues in CRT and NES. Sales estimates have been recalibrated against the Monthly Retail Trade (MRT) survey and independent sources to address the disparities that can exist between independent input data sources. This methodological improvement yields a more precise estimate of the retail sales attributable only to domestic households.

Esri licenses Dun & Bradstreet's business database, which also provides sales for the retail market. Although Esri utilizes this database in the derivation of small-area estimates, the methods differ. Esri estimates retail sales only to households for implementation within the Retail MarketPlace data. Additionally, Esri relies heavily on data from both the CRT and MRT to improve estimation. Furthermore, the Dun & Bradstreet business data file is reviewed and cleaned to improve data content.
All estimates of market supply are in nominal terms and are derived from receipts (net of sales taxes, refunds, and returns) of businesses that are primarily engaged in the retailing of merchandise. Excise taxes paid by the retailer or the remuneration of services are also included, for example, installation and delivery charges that are incidental to the transaction.

Market Demand (Retail Potential)

To complete the profile of a retail market, Esri estimates consumer demand, or retail potential. That is the amount expected to be spent by consumers on products in the retail market. Esri's 2014 consumer spending data provides expenditure estimates for more than 700 products and services consumed by US households.

Esri draws estimates of consumer spending from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' annual Consumer Expenditure Surveys, which provide consumer spending information for hundreds of goods and services by households but not by source. The 2014 consumer spending model incorporates Esri's new generation of the Tapestry™ Segmentation system. This yields improved differentiation of spending, particularly for smaller markets where distinctions can be difficult to measure and for big-ticket items where consumer preferences are more pronounced.

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The product line sales from the Census of Retail Trade are the basis for the crosswalk to market demand by establishment from the consumer expenditure data. The impact of the economic downturn on business activity in recent years has shifted the structure of the retail market in small areas. Spending habits of consumers have shifted drastically in many areas, with consumers preferring to shop at discount stores, local shops, and Internet retailers.

The Leakage/Surplus Factor (Supply and Demand)

Esri enables the comparison of supply and demand simply in one measure, the Leakage/Surplus Factor. Leakage/Surplus conveniently measures the balance between the volume of supply (retail sales) generated by retail industry and the demand (spending by households [i.e., retail potential]) within the same industry. Leakage in an area represents a condition where a market's supply is less than the demand. That is, retailers outside the market area are fulfilling the demand for retail products; therefore, demand is leaking out of the trade area. Surplus in an area represents a condition where supply exceeds the area's demand. Retailers are attracting shoppers that reside outside the trade area, so the surplus is in market supply.

Esri's Retail MarketPlace data is available for standard levels of geography or any size ring or polygon. Data is reported for the following NAICS industry subsectors and groups:

Three-Digit NAICS Industry Subsectors and Four-Digit NAICS Industry Groups

NAICS 441: Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	**NAICS 451: Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, and Music Stores**
NAICS 4411: Automobile Dealers	NAICS 4511: Sporting Goods, Hobby, and Musical Instrument Stores
NAICS 4412: Other Motor Vehicle Dealers	NAICS 4512: Book, Periodical, and Music Stores
NAICS 4413: Automotive Parts, Accessories, and Tire Stores	**NAICS 452: General Merchandise Stores**
NAICS 442: Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores	NAICS 4521: Department Stores
NAICS 4421: Furniture Stores	NAICS 4529: Other General Merchandise Stores
NAICS 4422: Home Furnishings Stores	**NAICS 453: Miscellaneous Store Retailers**
NAICS 443: Electronics and Appliance Stores	NAICS 4531: Florists
NAICS 4431: Electronics and Appliance Stores	NAICS 4532: Office Supplies, Stationery, and Gift Stores
NAICS 444: Building Material and Garden Equipment and Supplies Dealers	NAICS 4533: Used Merchandise Stores
NAICS 4441: Building Material and Supplies Dealers	NAICS 4539: Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers
NAICS 4442: Lawn and Garden Equipment and Supplies Stores	**NAICS 454: Nonstore Retailers**
NAICS 445: Food and Beverage Stores	NAICS 4541: Electronic Shopping and Mail-Order Houses
NAICS 4451: Grocery Stores	NAICS 4542: Vending Machine Operators
NAICS 4452: Specialty Food Stores	NAICS 4543: Direct Selling Establishments
NAICS 4453: Beer, Wine, and Liquor Stores	

NAICS 446: Health and Personal Care Stores	NAICS 722: Food Services and Drinking Places
NAICS 4461: Health and Personal Care Stores	NAICS 7221: Full-Service Restaurants
NAICS 447: Gasoline Stations	NAICS 7222: Limited-Service Eating Places
NAICS 4471: Gasoline Stations	NAICS 7223: Special Food Services
NAICS 448: Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores	NAICS 7224: Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages)
NAICS 4481: Clothing Stores	
NAICS 4482: Shoe Stores	
NAICS 4483: Jewelry, Luggage, and Leather Goods Stores	

Esri's Data Development Team

Led by chief demographer Lynn Wombold, Esri's data development team has a 35-year history of excellence in market intelligence. The combined expertise of the team's economists, statisticians, demographers, geographers, and analysts totals nearly a century of data and segmentation development experience. The team develops datasets, including Updated Demographics, Tapestry Segmentation, Consumer Spending, Market Potential, and Retail MarketPlace, that are now industry benchmarks.

For more information, visit esri.com/retail-marketplace or call 1-800-447-9778.