

PHYSICAL ASSESSMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES

US-31 Corridor Arrival Experience

The arrival experience into the Honor area on US-31 is subtly defined by topography, land use development patterns, roadway treatments, and signage. Although not currently perceived by most visitors, the first indication of arrival into the Honor area is US-31's descent into the Platte River valley. When arriving from the west, this occurs just west of Covey Road and is soon followed by views of the Cherry Bowl drive-in theater which serves as a memorable landmark. Visitors then proceed through rural character commercial development along US-31 and cross the Platte River before entering the Village of Honor. Entrance into the village is visually signified by passing Honor Plaza shopping mall and A.B. Maley Park. Once in the Village, visitors pass by an auto repair business and roadside motel before entering the core of Honor. Arrival from the east is similar in experience to that of the west in that visitors descend into the Platte River valley just east of Pioneer Road and then pass rural scale development before entering the core of Honor.

Detracting from the otherwise pleasant corridor are several commercial and public properties that have very prominent amounts of parking and driveway pavements that lack interior green space or perimeter screening. Also present, are several properties with unscreened outdoor storage. The community's arrival experience could benefit significantly from a combination of increased code enforcement and a Property Enhancement Grant Program.

Another challenge faced by Honor is the relative scale of the community compared to its geographic setting. The core of Honor occupies an approximately ½-mile distance along the US-31 corridor of which approximately 700-feet is downtown. Without a significant and definitive sense of arrival, many visitors enter and then exit the Village core before they recognize it as more than just a small cluster of development. To enhance Honor's sense of place, the community would benefit from an expanded presence and elongated sense of arrival along the US-31 corridor. By extending a common aesthetic throughout the river valley between Covey Road and Pioneer Road, the community's presence is pushed outward giving visitors a sense of arrival long before they enter the Village core. In a practical sense, this can be achieved through hierarchical levels of corridor improvements including street trees, decorative and functional lighting, banners, holiday and seasonal displays, landscape treatments, flower plantings, signage, and other enhancements.

Key Considerations

- Increase code enforcement
- Initiate a Property Enhancement Grant Program
- US-31 Corridor Improvements including street trees, lighting, banners, flower plantings, etc. between Covey Road and Pioneer Road.

Downtown Character

Currently, first impressions of downtown are dominated by the US-31 roadway and vacant buildings. Those factors combined with lack of street trees, pedestrian lighting, or other enhancements create a rather uninviting business district – just the opposite of the people of Honor. While one vacant structure is in overwhelmingly severe disrepair, others also show visible signs of deferred maintenance. Many others have historically inappropriate façade treatments such as vinyl siding that detract from Honor's desired quaint village

character. In addition, there are a few properties downtown that have large, unscreened vehicle parking and storage that detract from the character of downtown.

However, a closer look at downtown reveals some very unique and interesting opportunities. While many of the buildings have contemporary façade treatments, hints of historical architectural details are visible behind the modern materials. Because many façade modernizations are only surface applied, often buildings can be returned to historical appearances at relatively low cost. A Property Enhancement Grant Program could support owners of existing buildings in this effort. Development and implementation of design guidelines for downtown would also ensure façade renovations and new developments are consistent with Honor's desired quaint village character.

Also consistent with desired character, Complete Streets guided improvements to US-31 would greatly improve the walkability, ambiance and general business environment downtown. Currently, the 50' wide roadway dominates impressions and creates an uncomfortable pedestrian experience on the relatively narrow 8' sidewalks. By narrowing the excessively wide lanes to downtown appropriate dimensions, adding bike lanes, widening sidewalks, and defining on-street parking, the downtown becomes a more balanced and pleasant environment for all users. Rebalancing the uses requires a reduction of the vehicular use areas. The most appropriate way to do so is to designate on-street parallel parking only on the south side of US-31. In order to provide adequate parking on the north side of US-31, a downtown site with US-31 frontage should be sought to develop an off-street public parking facility that is sensitive to the pedestrian street environment. The suggested Complete Streets guided road reconstruction and streetscape project should also include character defining amenities such as pedestrian lighting, street trees, flower planters, benches, banners, signage, etc.

In addition the public right-of-way, there are two very interesting privately owned "pocket" spaces in downtown. One is the old Post Office property and the second is a small courtyard space behind the former barber shop. Both offer wonderful potential to be developed into outdoor dining areas, seating areas, outdoor retail spaces, or other similar functions that contribute vitality and interest to the public realm.

Key Considerations

- Increase code enforcement
- Initiate a Property Enhancement Grant Program
- Develop and implement Design Guidelines for downtown
- Develop downtown district parking facility
- Pursue private or public development of outdoor dining/gathering spaces at old Post Office property and behind former barber shop
- US-31 Complete Streets Improvements including reduced roadway width, bike lanes, widened sidewalks, street trees, lighting, banners, flower plantings, etc.

Neighborhood Character

Two very different neighborhoods exist within the Village core. Both have significant contributions to the function and character of the Village but in divergent ways. The neighborhood north of US-31 contains appropriately scaled streets, mature street trees, and an abundance of historic homes. All contribute positively toward a very pleasant village character. This character is evident from downtown when looking at side streets and between buildings. Because the Village Hall, Post Office, and bank have physical presence within the neighborhood or at its edges, downtown and the north neighborhood share an

interesting public/private interaction that positively contributes to the overall Village character.

In many ways, the neighborhood south of US-31 is just the opposite of its northern counterpart. Housing stock is a mix of stick-built homes, modular homes, manufactured homes and permanently configured recreational vehicles. Much of the south neighborhood's housing stock is in some level of disrepair. Streets lack curbs, sidewalks, and street trees. The disinvested neighborhood is visible from downtown when looking at side streets or between buildings and negatively impacts the character of downtown.

Both neighborhoods, but particularly the neighborhood south of US-31, could benefit from increased code enforcement. Zoning should be reviewed and revised as needed to restrict the size, method, and character of residential construction. Because the neighborhoods have a close physical and perceptual relationship to the overall Village character, residential street improvements such as curbing, sidewalks, and street trees should be implemented where they do not already exist.

Key Considerations

- Review/revise zoning for allowable residential construction
- Increase code enforcement
- Residential street improvements including curbing, sidewalks, and street trees

"Village in the Valley" Character

As mentioned previously, the arrival experience to the Honor area is partially defined by its topography and the Platte River. While the river itself is not currently a foreground element within the Village core, the sense of being in the river valley is very evident. Adjacent bluffs north and south of the Village core are visible from just about any location and create a unique "living in the shadows" feel not often found in Michigan. The sense of the natural feature is strong enough that residents refer to Honor as the "Village in the Valley".

Because it is very fitting of the local environment and community and evolved from local culture, the "Village in the Valley" phrase is a natural beginning for community branding. Use of the phrase could be expanded to include an associated logo, identification and wayfinding signage, street banners, tourism campaign, and other marketing purposes. Just as the US-31 corridor improvements discussed earlier expand the community's perceived physical presence over a larger geographical area, unified branding of a community helps expand awareness in minds of visitors and potential visitors.

While the "living in the shadows" feel is an important character asset for the community, equally important is the adjacent bluffs and the opportunities they provide. Sharon Rosa Circle situated on the bluff north of the Village core offers spectacular views of the Platte River valley, Platte Lake, and surrounding countryside. The location is also an incredible vantage point for evening sunsets and is an ideal location for a small public park and overlook.

Key Considerations

- Brand Honor as the "Village in the Valley"
- Implement unified family of identification and wayfinding signage
- Develop public overlook park on Sharon Rosa Circle

Public Access to the Platte River

Arguably, Honor's greatest asset is the Platte River. Its valley largely defines the community's physical and cultural character and is the playground of local and vacationing outdoor enthusiasts alike. However, although the river is only 900' from downtown, it does not currently have a foreground presence in the community and is a greatly underutilized "backyard" asset without provisions for direct public access.

In order to realize common synergies between the Platte River as a recreational asset and downtown as an active business district, Henry and South Streets should be developed as physical connections between the two. In addition to serving functional aspects of vehicular and pedestrian connections, the corridors also need to be planned and designed to bring the river and downtown together in mindset. In other words, the corridors need to convert the river from a "backyard" asset into an integral element within the community. This can be accomplished in part by planning appropriate future development and land uses that better transition the corridors between the river and downtown. This opportunity is greatest along Henry Street with its connection directly to the center of downtown. The larger land use context also needs to be reinforced with unified corridor improvements such as non-motorized facilities, pedestrian lighting, landscape treatments, unified signage, etc.

In tandem with connections to downtown, the community should seek opportunities for significantly sized public access wherever available. Of particular interest are opportunities for riverfront public land adjacent to the Henry and South Street connection corridors. Again, the greatest potential is adjacent to Henry Street because of its direct connection to the center of downtown.

Opportunities for access from public road right-of-ways should also be explored. Currently, informal parking and river access occurs at Henry Street and, to a greater extent, along South Street where the river flows parallel to the road for approximately 400'. Improvements could be made at both locations to formalize on-street parking and provide for safe access to the water. These improvements become particularly important in the short term if significant riverfront land is not immediately available.

Key Considerations

- Develop Henry and South Streets as connections between downtown and the Platte River
- Seek opportunities for riverfront public land adjacent to the Henry and South Street downtown connections
- Develop public road right-of-ways to facilitate public access when adjacent to the Platte River

Gateway to Sleeping Bear Dunes

While major GPS and mapping software does not route regional visitors from Traverse City or downstate through Honor, CR-708 is a vital local connection between Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Platte Lake resort associations, and the nearest significant offering of goods and services in Honor. The distance along the county road, also known as Deadstream Road, between Honor and Platte Lake is approximately 2-miles. The National Lakeshore is approximately 5-miles from Honor along CR-708. Both are within easy biking distance of the goods and services in Honor. Although non-motorized improvements are not currently present, Deadstream Road is a relatively popular biking route within the Platte Lake area and, to some extent, between the resort associations and Honor.

Developing and implementing a regional non-motorized plan for CR-708 between Sleeping Bear Dunes and Honor would enhance this recreational opportunity and provide expanded economic opportunities within the Village.

While not a primary regional route to the Dunes, CR-708 is still an important local connection for many seasonal vacationers exploring the area on US-31 or M-22. However, the intersection of CR-708 (Deadstream Road) and US-31 is currently a rather unmemorable intersection marked only by a fairly inconspicuous Sleeping Bear Dunes roadway sign. Creating a more significant gateway to Sleeping Bear Dunes will help solidify Honor as the nearest neighboring community to the Dunes in the minds of those travelling US-31. With that mindset, travelers are much more likely to consider Honor their “base of operations” for exploring the area. To that end, re-designating a portion of CR-708 and enhancement of A.B. Maley Park could create a memorable showcase gateway along US-31. In order to provide a safer and more recognizable CR-708/US-31 intersection, Leelanau Street could be designated as CR-708 in place of Deadstream Road between Leelanau Street and US-31. The newly undesignated portion of Deadstream Road could then be visually de-emphasized as a Village road to further accentuate the Leelanau Street gateway. As part of the gateway experience, A.B. Maley Park could be enhanced with significantly scaled signage, banners, landscape treatments, enhanced picnic shelters, play equipment, etc.

Unfortunately, one of the primary views when on Leelanau Street or Deadstream Road is the existing sand and gravel pit. While the operation is privately owned and operated, it has a large and detrimental visual presence at the gateway. The Village should work with the owner to develop a long term land use plan for the property that capitalizes on the gateways economic potential and is more visually fitting to the gateway experience.

Key Considerations

- Develop and implement regional non-motorized plan for CR-708 between Sleeping Bear Dunes and Honor
- Re-designate Leelanau Street as CR-708 in place of Deadstream Road between Leelanau and US-31.
- Develop A.B. Maley Park as a gateway to Sleeping Bear Dunes
- Develop long term land use plan for sand and gravel pit