



City of Hillsdale

Marketing Strategy



Prepared in Association with the MEDC's
Redevelopment Ready Communities Program

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Background

The City of Hillsdale has been involved in the MEDC programs known as Project Rising Tide (PRT) and Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) for some time. The City became involved in PRT in 2016 and, as of late 2017/early 2018, activity drew to a close. PRT work activities generally align with best practices developed for the MEDC's Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) Program. Toward the conclusion of the PRT efforts, the City of Hillsdale continued to work toward RRC Certification and has met most requirements. More recent PRT deliverables included community branding material presented to the Hillsdale City Council, and an Economic Development Strategy completed in May, 2017. These and other work products are valuable steps forward toward RRC certification.

One remaining gap between existing circumstances and potential RRC Certification relates to the need for a Community Marketing Strategy. When Hillsdale was first evaluated by MEDC staff in February 2015 against RRC best practices, it was found that a Community Marketing Strategy was not clearly defined. RRC best practices call communities to rise to high levels of performance in many areas of community development, and the required Marketing Strategy describes deliberate steps to be taken to communicate strategic community messages that reach target audiences. The Marketing Strategy helps to define and leverage the local brand to communicate a positive community identity and helps articulate the business case for private investment by describing uniqueness, worth and value. Therefore, the development of this Marketing Plan builds on prior PRT efforts – but focuses directly to RRC Best Practice #6.2.


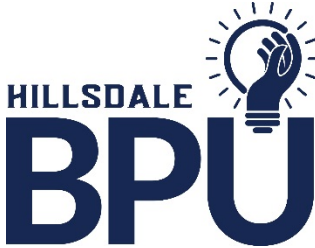




The bulk of the work that led to the development of this Marketing Plan took place in the latter half of 2017. Specifically, local meetings took place in July, September, and October. Meetings in July, September and October were work sessions with city staff. On November 28, 2017, a public workshop was held that included about 30-40 people, including city council members, other city leaders, local staff and the general public. The topics discussed at this workshop included the development/ refinement of the new municipal logo/tag line and necessary steps forward once this material was finalized (which occurred in March 2018).

Defining the Hillsdale Brand

As is sometimes the case, defining a city brand has proven to be challenging and somewhat time consuming endeavor. As mentioned, and as part of PRT, Ben Muldrow conducted branding exercises and provided a complete branding package for Hillsdale. Several focus groups were conducted, along with a public forum on December 12, 2016. An internal presentation and debrief was held on December 14, 2016 for City staff and Council members. A subsequent formal presentation to Council and the public was made in February 2017. The deliverables included a manual with color schemes, font selections, font variations and supporting graphics. The recommended tag line was "Closer than You Imagine" and the brand values included phrases such as "traditional, caring, small town, connected, educated and safe."

The branding recommendations developed by Ben Muldrow continued to undergo refinement and review into early 2018. Additional tag line options were developed and were the subject of an on-line poll. Options were also sent out to Facebook followers for comments. Based on survey results and public feedback, City Council ultimately selected the tag line - **Family. Tradition. Opportunity.**

Other refinements to the logo (color palette, typefaces, and graphics) were also subsequently produced. These final refinements were provided to the City of Hillsdale, and were approved in late March 2018. The logo below was the final version provided and was accompanied by several other variations (color variations, black and white versions, etc.) and include various logo applications.

| City Logo and Select Variations | City Logo Applications for Related Entities |
|---|--|
|  <p>The City of HILLSDALE MICHIGAN</p> |  <p>HILLSDALE BPU</p> |
|  <p>The City of HILLSDALE MICHIGAN</p> |  <p>HILLSDALE MUNICIPAL AIRPORT</p> |
|  <p>The City of HILLSDALE MICHIGAN</p> |  <p>HILLSDALE BPU</p> |

Along with the logo, the City of Hillsdale also has an official city seal that will continue to be used. This seal has not changed in recent years includes specific defined pantone colors for each graphic element. For the most part, this City Seal is regarded as more of an official emblem of the City. It will be used to graphically represent the City in more formal applications such as municipal resolutions, certificates, proclamations and other official city documents. While the City Seal can be updated in the future, it is considered to be more static and more timeless.

Seal of the City of Hillsdale



Color Map

| PANTONE SOLID COATED | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 655C | (OUTER RING / WATER) |
| 2905C | (SKY) |
| 102C | (SUN / DATE) |
| 369C | (NEAR HILL / TREE TOP) |
| 357C | (FAR HILL / DARK LEAVES) |
| 412C | (SHADED BRANCHES) |
| 731C | (SHADED SIDE OF TREE) |
| 7511C | (LIGHT SIDE OF TREE) |
| WHITE | (INNER RING / TEXT) |

EFFECTIVE MAY 2012

Economic Development Strategy

The Economic Development Strategy provides an economic overview of the City, a description of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis results generated in November 2016 and February, 2017, an updated list of community goals and an updated Economic Development Strategy. Eight strategic objectives are defined in the plan and they include:

1. Fully Utilize Social Media Channels to Market Hillsdale
2. Redevelop Keefer House into Boutique Hotel or Mixed-Use Development
3. Redevelop former depot
4. Expand partnerships with Hillsdale Public Schools, ISD, Workforce Development and major employers to create and promote skilled trades training for youth
5. Create more upper floor housing units downtown
6. Façade Improvement Program
7. Redevelop former movie theater downtown
8. Hillsdale Manufacturing & Technology Park Development

Tactical and strategic steps toward these objectives are also described in this Economic Development Strategy.

Marketing Plan

Building on the new Hillsdale brand logo and Economic Development Strategy, this Marketing Plan addresses next steps toward building the Hillsdale Brand. It focuses on intentionally communicating community identity for maximum impact and significance. It identifies ways to take control of how community identity and image are being delivered through various communication channels. Fundamentally, the aim is to make an emotional connection with people and help residents and non-residents feel more compelling reasons to visit, invest, and reinvest in Hillsdale.

The new branding package for Hillsdale provided in March 2018 is an important step forward, but it will have little impact and meaning if it is not activated and used to its full potential and supported by more initiatives to create synergy. This Marketing Plan provides those specific action steps and recommended initiatives that will help further activate local marketing and image-building efforts.


The City of Hillsdale's image and identity is communicated in many ways. It is expressed as people arrive in town and see physical places and public signage. Also, impressions are created and reinforced as people see official municipal communication and interact with electronic media such as the municipal web site, Facebook and Twitter. The City of Hillsdale's image and identity is also defined by the sum all communications and messaging streaming from a wide variety of local private institutions, organizations, business and individuals who express their own identity and image.

Despite the stream of messaging flowing from hundreds (if not thousands) of sources, Hillsdale only has direct control over its own communications and messaging. Specifically, the City has control over signage on public buildings, public spaces, public signage and print and electronic media emanating from city hall. It also has control over what appears on community features and public facilities such as water towers, municipal uniforms and city vehicles, etc. This Marketing Plan is focused on how the municipal streams of communication can become more intentional and deliberate to seize opportunities to consistently express and reinforce a community identity and brand. When any brand image or message is carelessly and inconsistently used, or morphed into variations that stray far from core values and image, it loses power and meaning.

The emphasis of this Marketing Plan is not on creating entirely new marketing materials, marketing programs or developing marketing gimmicks. Rather, it is about rethinking how the City of Hillsdale can use its new logo, new economic development and planning strategies to more deliberately express its identity, uniqueness and brand values. It also draws attention to how Hillsdale can take steps to manage and develop its brand to add strength. In Michigan, the power and significance of intelligent marketing to draw in tourism and investment is on grand display with the success of the Pure Michigan campaign. The Pure Michigan campaign has been in place for more than 10 years and has won major awards for effectiveness. A recent (March 2018) study by Strategic Marketing & Research Insights (SMARInsights) found that the 2017 campaign puts \$147.5 million into state coffers in generated state taxes, for a return on investment of \$9 for every \$1 spent on paid media.

Five Community Marketing Channels

This Marketing Plan considers community marketing efforts across five primary channels of communication. Each engages residents and visitors in different ways, but all offer different and unique ways to reveal and support community identity and brand.

- 
- physical presence
 - print, electronic and verbal communication
 - economic development promotion
 - tourism promotion.
 - local partnerships

The first channel is **physical presence** and it relates to how people experience a community in a physical, tangible and interactive way. People form impressions of a community by simply being there. One element of the physical experience is publically-owned signage, and it is perhaps the most direct way to express a community brand. Signage includes a wide array of sign types and extends into the realm of ancillary elements such as signage on water towers, city vehicles, facility identification, etc. Increasingly, communities are recognizing that public signage is far more than just functional. It can also serve to reinforce community identity and image.

A second channel is **print, electronic and verbal communication**. The City has a web site and Facebook page that expresses a municipal brand identity. It also routinely prints letters, reports, business cards, pamphlets, etc. which help to convey a community identity. Further, as will be discussed later, in a few months, Hillsdale will have a rare opportunity to speak to a large radio audience about Hillsdale's core strengths, values and unique brand.

A third channel is **economic development promotion**. This includes deliberate steps to describe specific opportunities to redevelopment a particular property downtown or perhaps a vacant lot. Development RFP's sent to development companies can be stronger when married with the force of a strong community identity and image. Additionally, communities often take out ads in publications, and they sometimes produce marketing materials that are sent to target audiences. These ads and communications are also an opportunity to leverage and reinforce a strong community brand.

The fourth channel is **tourism promotion**. Most communities have natural and manmade features that draw tourists. Tourism marketing is often done at the County level through organizations called Convection and Visitors Bureau's (CVB's).

Finally, the last channel relates to **local partnerships**. Strategic partnerships are critical to marketing and branding success. In Hillsdale, the three most important partnerships are with the Hospital, Hillsdale College and the local school system. The Hospital is locally managed and Hillsdale College has a huge national and international presence. The local school system is also an important partner, given that education is an important value expressed by the community during the initial public engagement efforts.

1) Physical Presence Channel

A person's physical presence in a community provides a constant stream of images and messages. Most images are of private property, but they also see public buildings, parks, transportation networks and other public infrastructure as they travel through a community. Often these public buildings, spaces and infrastructure have associated signage that identifies, directs or otherwise communicates important messages. However, signage has dual purposes. It can be both functional and an important means to communicate a civic brand identity. Presently, the City of Hillsdale lacks a comprehensive signage system that consistently communicates its image and brand for people walking, biking or driving through the City. This is an important community need that should be met in the future. It is also a need that has also been previously identified in earlier planning work. In 2009, HyettPalma prepared the Hillsdale Downtown Blueprint (similar documents were prepared for many Michigan communities around that time). Among many things, the Hillsdale Downtown Blueprint made the recommendation for a *"A wayfinding system should be designed and installed throughout Hillsdale, directing travelers to all major destinations throughout the community, including Downtown, Hillsdale College, the hospital, library, parks, fairgrounds, etc. The wayfinding system should be created as a multi-agency, cooperative effort between all entities identified by the signage system."* Additionally, the development of a city-wide wayfinding system is also included in the most recent Master Plan Update (2015), page 104.

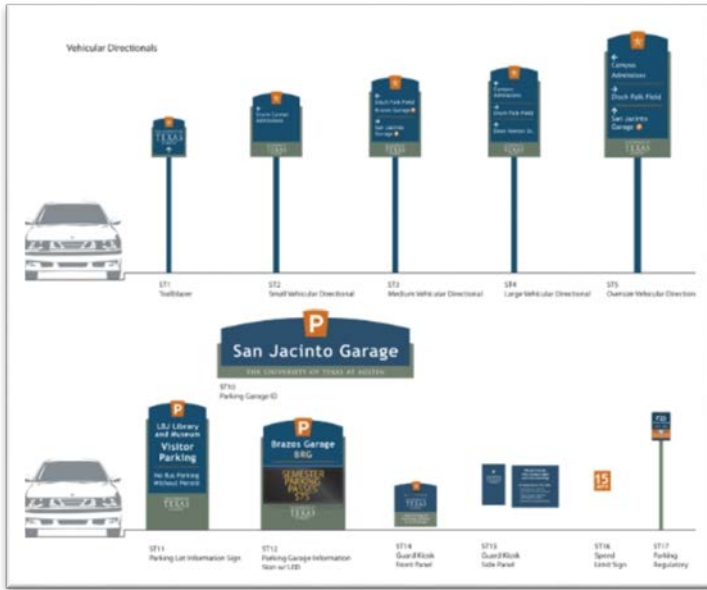
To begin, the City of Hillsdale should develop a comprehensive system of gateway signs, directional signs and identification signs. This can be viewed as a "family of signs" wherein all have different purposes and function; but all have a similar look and feel. This similarity helps to reinforce community image and identity each time a person looks toward a civic sign for information.

Although the City of Hillsdale does not now have a comprehensive wayfinding program, it did recently upgrade its gateway sign and other directional signs (as shown below). Going forward, a new comprehensive wayfinding signage system should either mirror the design shown below, or it should offer an eventual replacement. This decision should be made after a more complete study of alternatives and options and agreement on a complete and coordinated signage system.



Some general samples of comprehensive community wayfinding signage systems are shown below. Sign types will vary throughout a community, but they should share common design elements so that there is consistency and subtle visual reminders that help mentally knit the community together.





The specific list of sign types that should be included in a local wayfinding program include the following:

1. **Gateway or Arrival Signs** (signs at major community entrances, or areas within a community such as a neighborhood, college campus, or special districts, that help to create a sense of arrival).
2. **Directional Signs** (signs that point toward one or more destinations)
3. **Trailblazer Signs** (signs placed along routes such as bike trails, heritage routes, scenic corridors, etc.)
4. **Identification Signs** (signs in front of buildings that identify the building and function)
5. **General Information Signs** (signs such as information kiosks that provide information about a general area, such as a downtown).

Signs should also be scaled and placed to relate to motorists or people using non-motorized transportation. Naturally, auto-oriented signage is larger so it can be read at the speed of associated vehicular travel. It should also be less complex as there are just seconds to read and absorb the signage content. Signage oriented toward non-motorized travel can be more complex and contain substantially more information.

The design of the wayfinding signs themselves should incorporate some (or all) of the new logo elements. There are likely to be dozens of possible variations to visually link sign style, colors, fonts and supporting graphics with the new logo. Several alternative designs of a “family of signs” (that includes the 5 sign types mentioned above) should be developed and thoroughly vetted by the community. After one design is chosen, new signs should systematically replace existing ones.

2) Print, Electronic and Verbal Communication Channel

Cities produce a huge variety and volume of print and electronic communications. Each piece of communication conveys information and has the potential to reinforce the community brand and image.

Direct Communications

Direct communications include both print and electronic sources emanating from city hall. This includes a variety of print materials and electronic communications. Specifically, the new logo should be included in subsequent versions of municipal letterhead, business cards and similar materials. Additionally, emails should also include standardized signature blocks with the new municipal logo. In this way, each email sent helps to reinforce and strengthen the community brand.

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Municipal Documents

Cities produce a wide range of documents that are physically printed and made available electronically as .pdf's. These include planning documents (master plans, recreation plans, zoning codes) and a wide range of forms and information brochures. Going forward, each publication should include the new logo so that Hillsdale brand is made a part of the document.

Web Site/Facebook/Twitter

A municipal web site serves multiple functions. At a basic level, it is a means to share information about public meetings, access public documents, find links to other community organizations and to obtain general community information. The primary audience for this basic information is local residents and officials. Beyond this, a municipal web site is also a significant expression of community character and

image. People unfamiliar with a community (perhaps never having been there) will often look to a web site for information and they will form important first impressions and conclusions. A strong and compelling web site can help drive outside interest.

In the context of the RRC program, it is essential that communities meet the threshold of functionality. Beyond this however, municipal web sites should do double duty and also deliver messages that speaks to the community brand, image, desirability and opportunity. There should also be a connection to local economic development strategy which tells the more complete story of local opportunities, potential and an exciting future. The purpose of the municipal web site is not to carry the full burden of articulating local economic development strategy. Rather, it is the opportunity to make a digital introduction that is engaging enough to encourage someone unfamiliar with the community to look further and become more informed. The municipal web site is essentially the “public face” of the community that invites further discovery.

The Hillsdale website meets the basic functionality benchmark and overall it is easy to navigate with organized information. During the efforts to develop a new logo and tag line (and steps to prepare this marketing strategy) efforts were made to update the Hillsdale web site. This occurred in late 2017/early 2018. The older version of the web site had many shortcomings. Some shortcomings included the fact that it used valuable home page space as an area to list information that was less compelling. Rotating images provided links to daily police and fire reports, and another was a plain link to routine public notices. These were missed opportunities to form positive first impressions of the community. During the early staff meetings in July and September, 2017, this issue was discussed and led to subsequent web site upgrades.

The new web site is an improvement and offers four pull down menus that include – Government, Community, Business and “I want to.” This is combined with five links to the BPU, Bill Paying, Calendar, Public Notices and Forms and Permits. There is also a newsfeed and the bottom of the home page includes a section titled “Video tour of Hillsdale” with links to short videos providing a welcome message, and topical information on education, economic development, quality of life, and community organizations. These videos are well done and provide a more personal connection between the person looking at the web site and the community.

With a new logo/tag line now defined, it should obviously have a predominant place within the updated web site. Additionally, as will be discussed later, efforts connect Hillsdale with the Pure Michigan website are needed to help provide a stronger connection between Hillsdale and the powerful Pure Michigan campaign.

The City of Hillsdale also has a Facebook page with about 2,300 followers. This account is actively managed with postings and sharing of posts occurring regularly. This site includes posts of official material (notices of municipal meetings/events) as well as many posts regarding transit, community events and social activities. The City does an excellent job of keeping material current and is responsive to messages. The City of Hillsdale also has a twitter account with about 106 followers. In January 2018, the City used Twitter as one means to obtain input into tagline choices. In terms of both the Facebook page and the Twitter feeds, material should be updated to include the new logo and tag line.

Verbal Communication

Occasionally, cities have the opportunity to speak to a large audience in conjunction with a larger event. In 2018, Hillsdale is scheduled to be included in the WJR Pure Michigan Tour hosted by Paul W. Smith. WJR is a maximum power radio station that reaches large portions of the Midwest and Canada during the day and much of the eastern half of North America at night. The Pure Michigan Tour typically includes a morning time slot allocated to extensive interviews with local people about what makes a place in Michigan unique and compelling. This will be a rare and very important opportunity for Hillsdale to express itself to a large audience of listeners. Hillsdale can seize on this opportunity and broadcast its brand and image to a huge audience. Conversations that will take place as part of interviews will provide many opportunities to express how Hillsdale is connected to the values associated with family, tradition and opportunity. Significant preparation should take place for this event to leverage maximum impact.

3) Economic Development Channel

The City of Hillsdale has been very active in promoting specific economic development projects in the City. These efforts are tremendously important as they fundamentally and directly touch the ultimate goal of encouraging local investment. Notably, the City recently issued an RFP for renovation of the Keefer House which is a prominent downtown building that has been vacant for many years. Proposed uses include a boutique hotel or other type of mixed-use building.

The City (specifically the TIFA District) has experienced some success with efforts to develop RFP's and will no doubt continue to use this approach to attract interest in development projects. As these efforts continue, other communities around Michigan (and nationally) are similarly taking steps to attract development interest in key projects. As a result, Hillsdale must continue to compete and draw developer interest. Essentially, the goal should be to "think like a developer" and make the solid argument for considering a project in Hillsdale, verses many other choices elsewhere. Increasingly, communities are preparing optional concept plans and offering third party feasibility studies, (as was done for the Keefer House) to draw a clearer picture development potential.

There is also a marketing component to the development of RFP's. Most RFP's promote the community and draw attention to considerations such as city rankings, local awards, walkscores, and favorable statistics.

Additionally, efforts to build a compelling argument for local investment can be supported by crafting a succinct, clear and focused mission statement and "elevator speech." While both a mission statement and elevator speech may be developed and refined with more input, the following material was generated as a starting point for more consideration. Notably, this material connects to the fundamental brand values of family, tradition and opportunity.

DRAFT - HILLSDALE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MISSION STATEMENT

From a solid foundation of core values that include family, tradition and opportunity, Hillsdale will fundamentally focus on community-building efforts and support for local entrepreneurial endeavors. At the same time, Hillsdale will also take steps to attract new business activity similarly drawn to this unique and authentic place of economic potential.

Similarly a draft elevator speech was prepared

HILLSDALE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEVATOR SPEECH

Nestled in quaint rural Midwestern surroundings near major cities, Hillsdale is located among some of the most beautiful landscapes Pure Michigan has to offer. Here, our community celebrates achievement and success like no others. We are home to a world-class educational institution well known for advancing principles of independence and liberty that fuel the pursuit of individual dreams. We encourage and welcome inquiries about investment in our community from those who share a thirst for innovation, and we work hard to make sure the reasons to bring new business to Hillsdale are compelling. Between such inquiries, we are busy building the kind of community people love and passionately support local entrepreneurship and self-reliance.

As we build and rebuild our community around our enduring core values that support family, tradition and opportunity, we find we are increasingly “discovered” as a place for business relocation and business expansion. We also know that sustained efforts to cultivate fertile ground for local entrepreneurship will pay major dividends as we create a future that is full of promise, opportunity and attachment to a special place to live and work.

4) Tourism Promotion Channel

Tourism is among Michigan's top industries, providing jobs for residents and tax revenues to support services. Since launching in 2008, the Pure Michigan Campaign is frequently honored as one of the best tourism advertising campaigns in the country and it is credited with large increases in tourist visits, tourist spending, job creation and new tax revenues. As mentioned previously, Michigan.org is often named as the most popular state tourism web site in the nation and the Pure Michigan brand is now visible on a wide range of platforms; from license plates to consumer products offered through various private sector partnerships.

More efforts to showcase Hillsdale on the Pure Michigan web site are needed. Hillsdale is located in the Southeast Region and it competes with many other larger and similar-sized communities. Hillsdale is represented, but information is somewhat buried. Other similar-sized communities (Adrian, Tecumseh) are more prominent and provide lists of featured local events. Continued steps to place Hillsdale in a more prominent position are needed so that Hillsdale's association with Pure Michigan will help reach regional and national audiences. It would also help to connect and associate Hillsdale's brand with the strong and appealing Pure Michigan brand.

Hillsdale (and surrounding communities) are at a disadvantage when it comes to tourism marketing because Hillsdale County does not have a Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). At the local level, Michigan communities typically promote tourism through a local CVB. CVB's are typically funded by taxes on hotel beds and they use their resources and expertise to promote tourist visitation. They often engage directly with the Pure Michigan Campaign and leverage resources. Hillsdale does not have a CVB, and therefore efforts to promote tourism rests largely with the City and Chamber of Commerce. Also, the Hillsdale area also has few hotel rooms and so, even if there was a CVB, its revenue generation would be limited. The creation of a Hillsdale County CVB has been discussed for many years, but support for such a step has been limited. While efforts to form a CVB continue, more work can be done to make sure that local and up to date marketing materials are found in local hotel rooms so that out of town guests can become informed of local attractions.

5) Partnership Channel

While the City only has direct control over a finite number of ways to express community identity, it should also continue developing deeper collaborative partnerships with local large institutions with a stake in community success. Hillsdale College, Hillsdale Hospital and the local school system are dominant entities on the civic landscape. Hillsdale College is particularly unique as it has a strong national and international identity associated with conservative values, liberty and personal freedom. Even with this identity and presence, it is not an island. It is part of the community, and this fact is particularly significant in the context of recruiting talented and highly educated people to fill key positions. Often candidates are from outside the area and those candidates must be drawn to both work and live in the community or general area. To this extent, the future successes of local institutions (and all businesses and organizations for that matter) are aided or diminished by the image (and reality) of the City itself.

Some examples of future collaboration include, encouraging Hillsdale College and Hospital to use of the City's new logo, tagline, elevator speech, etc., in related efforts to promote the community as a great place to live to potential employees. Cost sharing of marketing materials is also possible, along with joint efforts to promote the community. The local school system is also a partner in future collaborative efforts.

Strategies and Implementation

| Strategies | Tasks/Actions | Timeframe |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Define, Maintain and Control City Image and Identity</i> | 1. Formally adopt new logo and tag line as updated and refined. | <i>Early 2018</i> |
| | 2. Adhere to parameters for variations in logo. | <i>Ongoing</i> |
| <i>Express Municipal Identity physically in the community.</i> | 1. Develop a wayfinding system and systematically replace community signage | <i>Begin design work in 2018 and then install</i> |
| <i>Intentionally communicate with new civic brand.</i> | 1. Update municipal letterhead, business cards, vehicle graphics, etc. as appropriate | <i>Ongoing</i> |
| | 2. Update web site to contain new logo and tag line. | <i>Early/Mid 2018</i> |
| | 3. Prepare for the WJR Pure Michigan Tour | <i>Early 2018</i> |
| <i>Enhance economic development efforts with marketing and Branding</i> | 1. Use marketing and branding messaging to enhance development RFP's | <i>Ongoing</i> |
| | 2. Refine and adopt an Official Economic Development Mission Statement and Elevator Speech | <i>Early 2018 – then ongoing</i> |
| | 3. Connect new city image and marketing materials to advertisements for redevelopment sites. | <i>Early 2018 – then ongoing</i> |
| <i>Encourage Tourism</i> | 1. Continue to link with Pure Michigan Web Site and maintain a strong presence. | <i>Early 2018 – then ongoing</i> |
| | 2. Continue to work toward creating a Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). | <i>Mid. 2018 – then ongoing</i> |
| | 3. Develop local marketing materials for local hotel rooms | <i>Early 2018 – then ongoing</i> |
| <i>Create and Strengthen Local Partnerships</i> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain close communication with both Hillsdale College and Hillsdale Hospital with regard to coordinated and supportive marketing efforts. 2. Continue to contribute information to the MEDC regarding local development opportunities. | <i>Mid 2018 – then ongoing</i> |