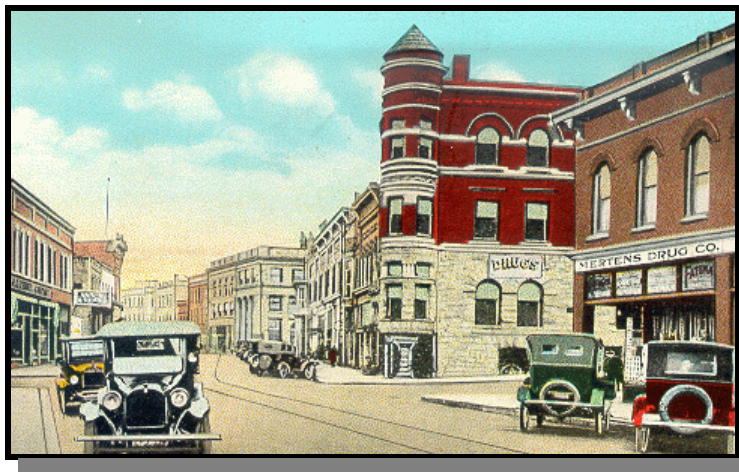


CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Manistee: Past and Present

The famous urbanist Lewis Mumford once said that “history is made visible in the City”. No where is this more evident than in the City of Manistee. The gallery of architectural styles on display in



Manistee highlights the major historical epochs that shaped the early City - the post Civil War (late Industrial Revolution) and the *Golden Age* of the early 20th Century. This was a period which witnessed rapid growth and industrialization of the upper Midwest made possible by such major national events as the opening of the Erie Canal. During this period, many pioneering industrialists were drawn to Michigan, including the Manistee area, to mine and/or harvest locally abundant raw materials such as sand and timber.

Frequently, their efforts spawned rapid urbanization, and yielded substantial personal fortunes resulting in the construction of elegant homes and - in the tradition of many of the famous philanthropists of the time - public gifts of hospitals, parks, libraries and other public monuments.

This was also a period characterized by strict social conventions, as well as manners and tastes, that were largely dictated by - and reflective of - one’s social and economic standing. The City’s large quantity of ‘high’ Victorian residences give us a glimpse into the late 19th Century lifestyles of the City’s newly rich industrialists; whereas, the handful of *Neo-Classical* and *Beaux Arts* buildings found in Manistee reveal a high level of *dawn-of-the-Century*, cultural awareness and civic aspiration in the *City Beautiful* tradition. This is noteworthy considering the City’s small size and relative remoteness.

Through the various plans and promotional materials prepared for the City over the years, much more has been written about Manistee’s colorful history and its special character. Most of this work is quite good and will not be improved upon here. Needless to say, the City’s historical legacy and rich architectural traditions are aspects of the City that residents rightfully take a great deal of pride

systems in the vicinity of US-31. This is perhaps the common thread that links the City's earliest planning efforts with those of the more recent past.

1958

This year saw the adoption of the *Transportation Plan for the City of Manistee*. It was prepared by the same consultant who prepared the

1945 *Master Plan*, and expanded upon many of its same themes. Major plan recommendations were to widen and straighten the Manistee River channel in order to accommodate a new generation of larger Great Lakes freighters, and to construct an over-the-tracks grade separation for a proposed rerouted US-31 just north of the City limits.



1960

The *Comprehensive City Plan* was adopted during this year. Its major focus was on the need to develop and enforce subdivision regulations - a theme that was first raised briefly in the original 1945 *Master Plan*. The plan was also notable in that it was here that the recommendation was first made that a highway bypass should be developed in order to relieve congestion downtown. The plan also called for an additional bridge over the Manistee River at Tamarack Street, and other street connections to span gaps in the City's street grid.



1981

Focusing public attention on the value and techniques of historic preservation and urban design was the crux of the *Manistee Downtown Preservation and Development Plan* completed in 1981. This plan contains both a general urban design program to be applied city-wide, as well as specific building-by-building architectural guidelines including cost estimates. Much of this plan laid the

groundwork for the subsequent National Register nomination of Manistee's downtown, the establishment of the City's Downtown Development Authority (DDA), the development of the City's renown riverwalk, and most recently, the streetscape improvements completed along River Street. Several other proposals presented in this plan have been successfully completed while many others have yet to be realized.

1988

As the predecessor of this plan and its point of departure, the *Manistee Development Plan* is the planning document that has guided the City from the late 1980s to the present. Recognizing the challenges and development opportunities posed by the City's numerous waterfront properties, this plan identified seven "special planning districts" (SPDs) which were felt to warrant special planning treatment. All have water frontage, and most are conceived as multi-use districts consisting of public access areas, marinas, waterfront-appropriate commercial development, and housing of various densities. A major recommendation of the plan, and one which largely dictated the proposed treatments of at least two of the special districts, was the proposed relocations of the existing railroad right-of-way to the east side of Manistee Lake, and its replacement with a relocated US-31 business route. Also proposed to be relocated was the existing Consumer's Energy facility along the western shore of Manistee Lake (SPD-2). Much of what was called for in this plan has been achieved; however, the aforementioned relocations have not occurred thus forestalling several of the recommendations for the City's east side.

1997

Manistee County's most recent master land use plan was adopted in 1997 (*Manistee County Land Use Plan*) The plan's main emphasis is on economic development within the context of 'sustainable' land development practice. The plan goes to some lengths to state that these objectives should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. In this vein, the plan calls for the adequate allocation of lands for commercial and industrial expansion, along with streamlined permitting, but in discrete, centralized areas served by existing infrastructure. The plan specifically warns against 'strip' commercial development and other development practices that may over-strain public and natural resources. Through its stated objectives and land use recommendations, the plan affirms the role of the City of Manistee as the economic and administrative 'seat' of the County.

Looking Ahead

It is the intent of the Manistee City Planning Commission to build on the solid foundation laid out by the findings, recommendations, and strategies of prior plans. In preparing the plan, it has been a goal of the Commission to continually recognize the importance of Manistee's rich heritage and character while setting forth new directions of growth and development.