



## State of the City 2013: Shaping Ypsilanti

Dear Ypsilanti Friends and Neighbors:

Last fall Ypsilanti City Council considered a development proposal by **Family Dollar Stores** for the **Water Street** property. Family Dollar caters to customers looking for discounts on everyday items. The proposed single-story building conforms to many of the **Water Street zoning guidelines** created by the **Ypsilanti Planning Commission**. The proposal sparked spirited comments. Critics preferred independent retail or a supermarket to attract customers to other businesses downtown. Supporters wanted to start development now with a viable proposal. In the end, the majority of city council voted to continue negotiations with Family Dollar because the proposal conformed to the Planning Commission guidelines, fit in with the buildings directly east and north of the site, and provided a building that could be adapted to other uses in the future.

The crux of the Family Dollar debate was this: what type of developments on Water Street will continue Ypsilanti's transformation into a destination college town? This question will be addressed this year by the **Ypsilanti City Master Plan update**—not just for Water Street, but for the whole city.

The master plan update will be a community-driven process called **Shape Ypsilanti**. Shape Ypsilanti's focus groups and charettes will answer the question: Who are we as a community and what do we want Ypsilanti to be in the future? The answers will shape the 2013 Master Plan as well as a zoning ordinance rewrite.

This master plan process will not be a status-quo update. As the **request for proposals** points out, **Ypsilanti's previous 1998 master plan** assumed that heavy industry like the Ford plant would exist in Ypsilanti indefinitely. As we all know, Ypsilanti manufacturing plants have closed, resulting in reduced tax revenues and the elimination of close to 1,600 jobs. The recession of 2008-2009 dramatically reduced property values. The 2013 Master Plan will factor in these changes along with information from recent studies such as the **Blueprints for Downtown** in 2008, the **2020 Task Force** in 2009, the **Non-Motorized Transit Plan** in 2010, and the **Climate Action Plan** in 2012. Charrette working sessions are scheduled for March and April. Future public notices will give

meeting details. Residents can stay in touch with the process by checking the **Shape Ypsi website** or the **Shape Ypsi Facebook page**. The draft Master Plan will be available for review in the summer. Completion is expected by the end of 2013. A zoning ordinance rewrite will start in September using the updated master plan.

The rest of my state of the city will discuss Ypsilanti's unique attractions and recent accomplishments relevant to Shape Ypsilanti as well as proposals to deliver police, fire, waste removal, and other basic city services.

## **Historic Preservation and Redevelopment**

Ypsilanti actively encourages historic preservation. The **Ypsilanti Historic District** was **created in 1978**, and it is the seventh largest in the state. It encourages rehabilitation and preservation of Ypsilanti's impressive historic structures. Only **Detroit, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Ann Arbor** have more historic buildings. Over the years, Ypsilanti City Council has saved historic structures by transferring them to responsible owners or by expanding the historic district. In the 1970s, the **Quirk City Hall**, the old **Ypsilanti Firehouse**, the **Ladies' Library**, the **Gilbert Mansion**, and the **Towner House** were saved by the actions of Ypsilanti City Council. In 1983, **Eastern Michigan University preservation students** successfully fought to **save Welch Hall from demolition** and its site from becoming a parking lot.

More recently, Ypsilanti City Council has transferred historic structures like the **Thompson Block**, the **Ypsilanti Historical Society Museum**, and the **Starkweather House** to responsible owners. City Council has granted tax incentives to support renovation of downtown historic buildings and loft apartments like the **Kresge, Mack and Mack**, and **Mellencamp** buildings. These renovations have brought in people to support established downtown businesses such as **Haab's**, the **Tap Room**, the **Rocket**, **Beezy's**, and **Puffer Red's**. The increased downtown foot traffic has supported diverse new businesses such as **Model Cave**, **Wolverine Grill**, **Morgan Clothing**, **mix**, **Red Rock BBQ**, **Bona Sera**, and **B-24's**.

In Depot Town, the **Sidetrack Bar and Grill** plans to complete a \$1.2 million renovation and expansion into the adjacent storefront. Ypsilanti City Council has granted an **Obsolete Property Rehabilitation** tax exemption to support the project. On River Street, the **Ypsilanti Food Co-op** is continuing its renovation and expansion. Joining established Depot Town businesses, like **Aubree's** and the Sidetrack, are **Schultz Outfitters** fly fishing store, **Rejoice Clothing**, and **OneLove Culture Shop**.

The long-neglected Campus Town corridor on West Cross street across from EMU now boasts the trendy **Wurst Bar**, the **Crossroads Bar and Grill** (which expanded into the former Magazine Rack adult bookstore), and dependable good food at the **Tower Inn**. Last November the owners of **Sweetwaters Coffee and Tea** shop in Ann Arbor signed a lease agreement for office space in Andrew O'Neil's redevelopment of the **former Campus Drugs**.

All of these businesses were helped by the **Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority Building Rehabilitation and Façade Improvement Program**. In 2011, the YDDA storefront façade grant program provided \$40,000 in matching grants that spurred \$125,000 in storefront improvements. Late last year the **YDDA approved another round of façade and rehab grants worth \$51,000**. In 2012, the attractive **East Cross and West Cross streetscape improvements**, spearheaded by the YDDA, were completed and are attracting business investment.

South of Michigan Avenue, construction at **Hamilton Crossing** (formerly Parkview Apartments) will be completed this summer. The \$16 million project is on schedule and will provide quality affordable housing to families in the Ypsilanti area. EMU received a **\$250,000 grant** from the **Kresge Foundation** to provide training and counseling for the residents of Hamilton Crossing. This effort complements other support organizations in Ypsilanti: the **Corner Health Center**, which tends to the medical needs of teenagers, **Ozone House**, which counsels and provides shelter for homeless or at-risk youth, and **Hope Clinic**, which provides a broad range of services to low-income families.

Cleaning up blighted properties also supports redevelopment and strengthens neighborhoods. Neglected properties are getting attention from Ypsilanti's **Administrative Hearings Bureau**. The AHB was created by Ypsilanti City Council to encourage owners to fix their blighted or dangerous properties. Currently, forty-three of forty-seven targeted dangerous properties have been abated or demolished. Most recently, through the efforts of the AHB, City Council has ordered **three blighted properties to be demolished** and the **Smith Furniture** building roof to be repaired.

## **Ypsilanti's Transportation System**

Last year, the YDDA staff completed an extensive **parking study**. Primary goals were convenience, integration with walking and other forms of transportation, and suitable parking for a future rail stop in Depot Town. These goals are consistent with **Ypsilanti's Complete Streets ordinance**, which requires road construction to enable safe access for all users. Parking study recommendations included weekend parking enforcement, locations for additional bicycle racks, decreasing parking rates in zones farther away from business hubs, and

instituting a pay-by-cellphone pilot program in addition to metered parking. These changes will be considered by Ypsilanti City Council in the future and will lead to more convenient and accessible parking in the city.

Many people in Ypsilanti depend upon the **Ann Arbor Transportation Authority** bus system. AATA has created a **30-year plan** and a **5-year plan** to improve service in Ypsilanti and Washtenaw County. The plans could have been implemented by a county-wide or regional transit authority formed by participating Washtenaw County cities and townships. Unfortunately, the regional transit authority **lacked sufficient support** from elected officials around Washtenaw County. The authority would have provided a stable source of funding to improve transit throughout the county. As things now stand, the City of Ypsilanti, Ypsilanti Township, and Pittsfield Township all have purchase-of-service agreements with AATA that are subject to annual budget scrutiny by each government. AATA can't depend on this funding and can't permanently expand bus service. As a temporary pilot program, **AATA expanded weekday and weekend service on route 4** along Washtenaw Avenue from Ypsilanti to Ann Arbor. This has increased ridership by 30 percent and demonstrates that bus transit can be successfully expanded; however, a permanent funding mechanism must be identified. Transit improvement options are being discussed by elected officials throughout Washtenaw County. I hope a solution will be found soon.

## Ypsilanti's Recreation Programs

The City of Ypsilanti eliminated the Recreation Department in 2004. For almost ten years volunteer groups have kept recreation alive. The **Ypsilanti Senior and Community Center** hosts diverse events from church services to craft sales. The annual **Rockathon** is a signature fund-raiser.

Last year, Ypsilanti City Council reached construction and operations agreements with the **Friends of Rutherford Pool**. As of February, the Friends have raised over \$940,000 to **rebuild Rutherford Pool**, which includes a \$300,000 grant from the **Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund**. The **Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission** also supported the Rutherford Pool with a \$50,000 grant. The Friends hope to start construction this year.

Recreation in Ypsilanti is supported by other organizations as well. The **Ann Arbor YMCA** holds **affordable summer camps** for youths in the Ypsilanti area, **Washtenaw Community College** runs **youth programs** at Parkridge Community Center, and the **Ypsilanti American Little League** is celebrating its sixtieth year of organized youth baseball.

## Ypsilanti's Growing Arts and Music Communities

Last year **Woodruff's** hosted the fifth annual **Mittenfest** fund-raiser for **826michigan**, a nonprofit organization that supports creative writing skills for students ages six to eighteen. Mittenfest features performances by many local and formerly local musicians over three days during the holiday season.

When speaking to the musicians and others in the crowd at Mittenfest, I am always struck by their enthusiasm for Ypsilanti. For them Ypsilanti is a place where people can be themselves, whether a business professional playing music as a hobby or a serious artist trying to make it. Mittenfest's fund-raising grows every year and the artistic community in Ypsilanti is growing with it.

Further evidence of the growing arts community is the **Shadow Art Fair** and **DIYpsi**, both of which feature alternative art from local artists, the **Krampusfest** holiday costume ball, the **Rat Fest** seasonal craft beer rollout, the newly opened **Mix Studio Theater**, featuring plays in an intimate venue, and the quirky **Dreamland Theater** events.

More mainstream cultural attractions include plays and art exhibits at the **Riverside Arts Center**, the **Ypsilanti Heritage Festival**, the annual **Brewers' Guild Beer Summer Festival**, the many vintage **car shows**, and the reorganized **Elvisfest**.

## Ypsilanti's Green Energy and Urban Farming Movements

Last year saw the formal opening of the new **Growing Hope Center** on Michigan Avenue. A model urban garden with hoop houses stretches along the property on busy Michigan Avenue. Growing Hope also had another successful year running the **Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers' Market**.

As the **Google commercial** on **Solar Ypsi** attests, solar energy is thriving in Ypsilanti. In addition to **solar panel installations on many Ypsilanti buildings**, the former city landfill is in the running to become a **DTE solar energy project**. The **Corner Brewery** just finished a **\$250,000 green brewery project** that includes solar panels and a geothermal heating system.

Ypsilanti also became the first Michigan city where over 200 homes had an energy audit through **BetterBuildings for Michigan**. The program has helped residents save an average of \$275 per home per year.

While the Water Street property is awaiting commercial development, the city is **planting trees** on the southeast corner of the property to refurbish the city tree stock. Funding is coming from a federal **Great Lakes Restoration Initiative**

**Grant** with coordination support provided by **ReLeaf Michigan**, a nonprofit tree organization.

## **Ypsilanti's Collaboration with Other Governments**

Businesses along Washtenaw Avenue will benefit from the **Reimagine Washtenaw** collaboration between the cities of Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, the townships of Pittsfield and Ypsilanti, AATA, and the **Michigan Department of Transportation**. Last year, Washtenaw County received a \$3 million **HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant** to improve housing and transportation in the county (only \$7.1 million was allocated for all of Michigan). Funds from this grant will go toward Reimagine Washtenaw as well as Shape Ypsilanti. Recently MDOT completed sidewalk connections under US-23 on both sides of the street. This is the first visible Reimagine Washtenaw project. Next up will be the addition of sidewalks near **Arbor Hills Crossing**. Efforts continue to harmonize the zoning and permitting process among all four municipalities along the corridor.

Other recent collaborations with local governments include the **Fire Box Alarm** system with Ypsilanti Township, Pittsfield Township, and Ann Arbor and the **K-9 collaboration** with Pittsfield Township.

## **Mayors Against Illegal Guns**

The availability of guns has made cities all across the country—including Ypsilanti—less safe. To combat this, New York City mayor **Michael Bloomberg** formed **Mayors against Illegal Guns** six years ago. The group includes mayors from across the nation. I joined in 2011.

This past year, the group **lobbied heavily against the proposed Michigan House Bill 5225** that would have eliminated background checks for private handgun sales. I was glad to join in the effort against this legislation. Fortunately, the hard work paid off and private handgun sales still require a background check in Michigan.

The mass shootings last year in Newtown, CT, and Aurora, CO, illustrate that more gun legislation is needed at the national level. MAIG continues to press for federal legislation on three elements:

1. Requiring background checks for all gun sales
2. Making gun trafficking a federal crime
3. Reducing the firing capacity of weapons

You can lend your voice to this important movement at **[www.demandaplan.org](http://www.demandaplan.org)**.

## Ypsilanti's Budget

Last year, Ypsilanti City Council hired **Ralph Lange** to be the city manager. Mr. Lange's previous positions include city manager of **Albion, MI**, managing director of the **Monroe County Road Commission**, and executive director of the **Community Improvement Corporation of Henry County** in **Napoleon, OH**. Mr. Lange was hired by Ypsilanti City Council to guide the city to a **balanced budget**.

This is no easy task. Since the rejection of the **city income tax and Water Street debt millage proposals** last spring, city staff has been reduced due to retirements and resignations, even though property values and property tax revenues have stabilized. These changes will allow the city's general fund to be solvent until 2018 (as shown in the graphs below). The general fund pays for police, fire, planning, legal, and many other basic city services. The Motor Pool fund is being reallocated to account for a smaller city workforce. The city Solid Waste or Garbage fund is out of reserves and will require hard negotiating for the new contract this year. The major and local streets funds are depleted and will not allow major road repair without the help of other funding.

Many cities are in much worse shape than Ypsilanti, but running the city with reduced staffing under the current structure is unsustainable. A **hybrid public safety organization** is being considered that would include a smaller fire department and cross-trained police officers who can also respond to a fire. This system is projected to be more cost effective than the current system or consolidating with other municipalities.

Since street lighting costs the city about \$500,000 per year, Ypsilanti City Council is considering a **streetlight special assessment district** to pay for that cost as well as an upgrade to LED technology. If enacted, the fee would be assessed on property owners according to the amount of benefit received.

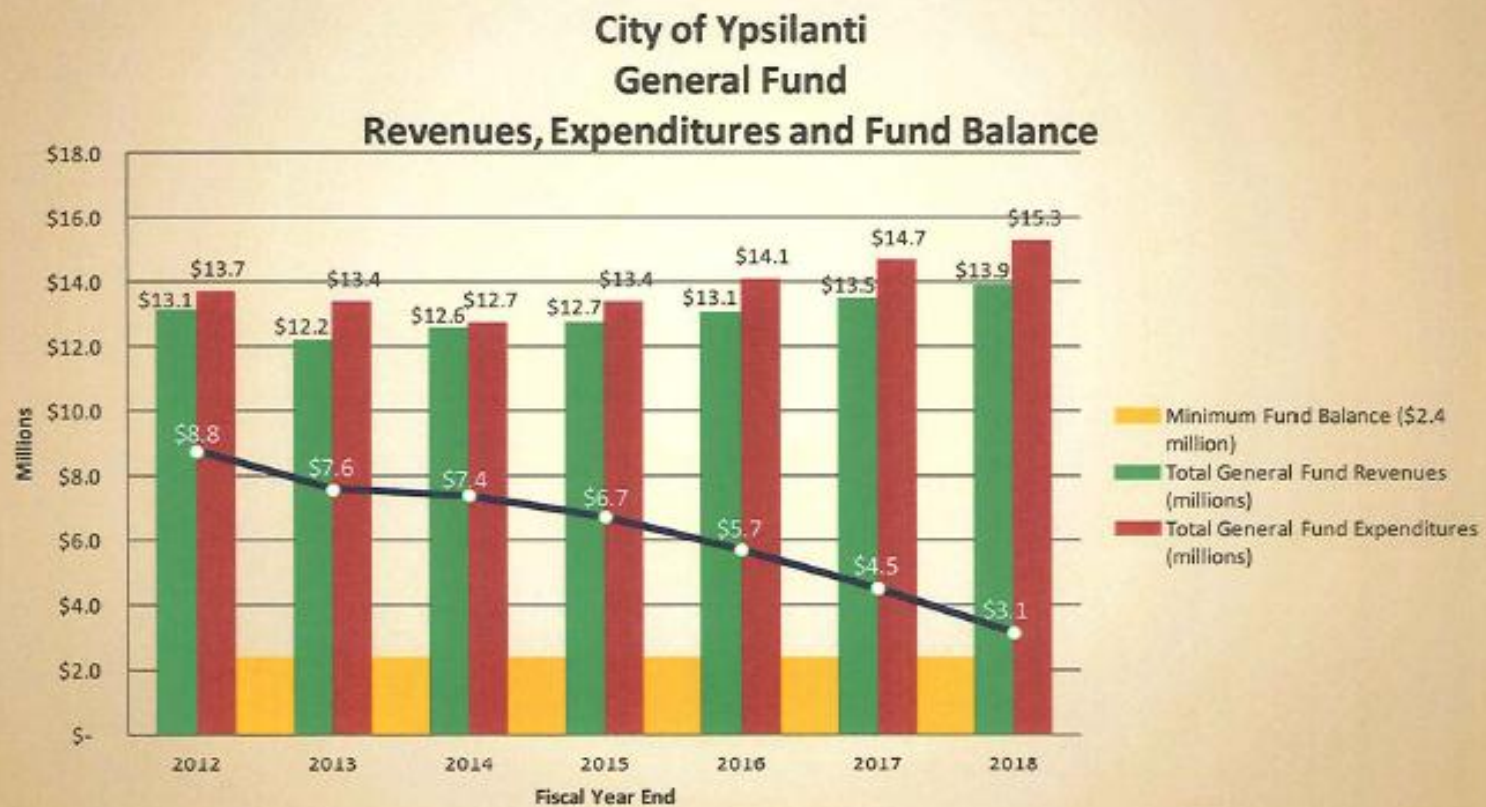
The combination of savings and increased revenue pursued by city council will bring Ypsilanti closer to a balanced budget.

## Ypsilanti Fire Chief Jon Ichesco Retires

Finally, I thank retiring fire chief and fire marshal **Jon Ichesco** for his twenty-eight years of service to the City of Ypsilanti. Chief Ichesco always had the best interests of Ypsilanti at heart. His compassion and dedication will be missed.

Best regards,  
Paul Schreiber  
Mayor, City of Ypsilanti

# Impact on Base Model with Changes: Net Positive Improvement





# 5-Year Outlook: Other Major Funds

