

# Case Study

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Environment, Energy & Natural Resources

## Michigan's "Cool Cities" Initiative

### *The Cool Cities Initiative*

In September 2003, Governor Jennifer Granholm launched a new, comprehensive economic development initiative for the state of Michigan called [Cool Cities](#). The goal of the initiative is two-fold: first to bring discussions about supporting and investing in cities to a statewide level; and, second, to find out what state tools and resources local citizens think would be most effective in improving their communities.<sup>1</sup> The initiative posits that to survive and thrive in the future, Michigan's cities must retain and attract more people, including young knowledge workers, to its cities by making them attractive, vibrant, and diverse places.<sup>2</sup> While clearly an economic development initiative, Cool Cities has emerged as a tool to create healthy, active communities, as well.

The Cool Cities initiative began by gathering information through three channels: city- and state-level advisory groups<sup>3</sup>; a series of conferences and workshop involving participating cities and college studies; and an [online survey](#) that began in November 2003 and targeted university students and recent college graduates through email invitations. Within six months, the survey received more than 13,500 responses.<sup>4</sup>

Findings drawn from the outreach activities ranked attributes of healthy communities as important to economic development. According to the study, the top three attributes of preferred places to live were: 1) safe streets, 2) affordability, and 3) walkable streets. If the data is analyzed based on city type, the most important attribute for downtown areas is walkable streets, for suburban areas is safe streets, and for small town/rural areas is scenic beauty.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: Ranking of Most Desirable Attributes of Preferred Places to Live<sup>6</sup>**

Attribute	% answering 5,6, or 7 on a 7-point scale	Attribute	% answering 5,6, or 7 on a 7-point scale
1. Safe Streets	93.0	16. Arts/Culture	68.5
2. Affordable	89.7	17. Near Friends/Family	66.1
3. Walkable Streets	86.9	18. Nightlife	62.6
4. Many Different Jobs	82.6	19. Low Traffic	61.3
5. Place for Family	79.3	20. Historic/Architectural	60.8
6. Shops/Service Businesses	79.2	21. Beach/Waterfront	60.5
7. Gathering Places	78.1	22. 4-Seasons	57.9
8. Public Schools	76.0	23. Music Scene	57.6
9. Sense of Community	75.3	24. Low Taxes	57.0
10. People My Age	75.3	25. Public Transportation	52.2
11. Scenic Beauty	74.9	26. Adventure Sports	46.9
12. Diversity	73.2	27. Malls/Shopping Centers	43.4
13. Trails & Parks	72.8	28. Pro Sports	36.3
14. Concern for Environment	69.7	29. My Own Business	35.1
15. Different Lifestyles	68.9	30. Warm Weather	27.9
		31. Gambling/Casinos	7.6

From the attributes chosen, a factor analysis was conducted to evaluate how the attributes might be grouped together. This analysis provided the initiative with seven groups of attributes, which have been termed Development Targets. The Development Targets and the attributes contained in each are<sup>7</sup>:

1. Cool Cities Core Values – Different lifestyles, diversity, art/culture, gathering places, four-seasons, music scene, walkable streets, historic architectural character, many different jobs, and service businesses.
2. The Outdoor Factor – Adventure sports, scenic beauty, trails/parks, beaches/waterfront, and environmental concern.
3. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Factor – Professional sports, gambling/casinos, malls/shopping centers, nightlife, and people my age.
4. The Safety & Security Factor – Public school, place for family, safe streets, and sense of community.
5. The Economic Factor – Affordable, low taxes, low traffic congestion, and friends/family.
6. Convenience Factor – Public transportation and warm weather.
7. Entrepreneurial Factor – My own business.

Communities are encouraged to create strategic plans to help them emphasize one or two of the Development Targets listed above. Strategic plans take into account a community's unique strengths and amenities, and help to build on those by utilizing the Development Targets to create more attractive cities.

After evaluating what cities and residents most wanted, the Michigan Cool City Pilot Program was launched on April 1, 2004 by Governor Granholm and David C. Hollister, Director of the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG). The program combines more than one hundred of the state's community improvement grants, tax credits, loans, and assistance programs into a single [Resource Toolbox](#) that serves as a one-stop-shop for communities seeking revitalization and development assistance. The Resource Toolbox is a novel partnership effort involving fourteen different state agencies: the DLEG's Michigan State Housing Development Authority, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and Michigan Broadband Development Authority; Department of History, Arts & Libraries; Department of Transportation; Department of Environmental Quality; Department of Natural Resources; Department of Agriculture; Michigan State Police; Department of Treasury; Department of Community Health; Department of Corrections; Department of Civil Rights; and Department of Management and Budget.

The goal behind the creation of the Toolbox is to promote holistic approaches to creating neighborhoods with a mix of residential and commercial uses, mixed-income housing, and a pedestrian-friendly environment. To encourage the use of the Toolbox, DLEG solicited applications for a "Catalyst Grant" to encourage "cool" development projects. In June 2004, recipients of the Catalyst Grants received up to \$100,000 as well as assistance in accessing millions of dollars from the Toolbox.<sup>8</sup>

A review of the [twenty Cool City Pilot Program participants](#) demonstrates the emphasis Michigan communities are placing on shaping healthy communities:

- In the City of Alpena, the Catalyst Grant will be used to develop a [pedestrian-oriented heritage walkway](#) on both sides of the Thunder Bay River, providing links between the downtown, public and private development projects, and an existing 13.5-mile bicycle path.<sup>9</sup>
- In Detroit, investment in recreating the historic [Eastern Market](#) is expected to produce a vibrant, walkable, mixed-use neighborhood. The project will establish an education center to increase the understanding of how an individual can improve personal health with nutritious foods. It will also construct a greenway to create a link to the waterfront. The project is expected to bolster the Eastern Market's economic viability by incubating small businesses

and creating spinoff investment in restaurant, residential, and market-related businesses adjacent to the city-owned sheds.<sup>10</sup>

- In Grand Rapids, the [Uptown Revitalization Project](#) will focus on three interrelated components. First, the project will create distinct, attractive, and user-friendly signage to ensure a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood with a sense of place. Second, it will improve the facades of historic commercial buildings to ensure an attractive walking and shopping environment. Finally, the project will include new state-of-the-art retail development that is compatible with historic district standards and uses green technology. The green building is sited on a former brownfield and includes zero storm water discharge technology, a vegetative roof garden, an environmental energy demonstration center, and passive solar design strategies.<sup>11</sup> Environmentally friendly reuse of the property will help to ensure clean air and water, as well as a place to be active.

All of the pilot projects include diverse partnerships among public, private, and nonprofit organizations. Funding from multiple institutions is committed to each project, as well. For example, Grand Rapids' Uptown Revitalization project involves seventeen partners including a developer, a green technology firm, neighborhood and business organizations, arts and community councils, and the Grand Rapids Cool Cities Advisory group. Through the Cool Cities Initiative, Governor Granholm has assembled a comprehensive economic development program for the state and also provided assistance to Michigan communities wishing to design healthy, walkable neighborhoods. Michigan communities have been enthusiastic about the Cool Cities program, and in response Cool Cities has expanded in 2005 to include more cities and provide new programs to complement the existing ones.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Governor Partners with Local Communities to Develop 'Cool Cities,' Spur Economic Growth," Office of Governor Jennifer M. Granholm, State of Michigan, September 19, 2003. Available at: [http://www.michigan.gov/gov/0,1607,7-168-29544\\_29546\\_29555-75516--00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/gov/0,1607,7-168-29544_29546_29555-75516--00.html) (accessed September 17, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> "Welcome," CoolCities.com. Available at: <http://www.coolcities.com/> (accessed September 17, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> "Governor Partners with Local Communities to Develop 'Cool Cities,' Spur Economic Growth," Office of Governor Jennifer M. Granholm, State of Michigan, September 19, 2003. Available at: [http://www.michigan.gov/gov/0,1607,7-168-29544\\_29546\\_29555-75516--00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/gov/0,1607,7-168-29544_29546_29555-75516--00.html) (accessed September 17, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> "What We've Heard," CoolCities.com. Available at: <http://www.coolcities.com/heard/> (accessed September 17, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> *Michigan Cool Cities Survey: Summary of Findings*, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, April 2004, p. 11. Available at: [http://www.coolcities.com/cm/attach/7DAC9167-89CF-46DB-834C-D2382ED19B15/Summary\\_Findings.pdf](http://www.coolcities.com/cm/attach/7DAC9167-89CF-46DB-834C-D2382ED19B15/Summary_Findings.pdf) (accessed September 20, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> *Michigan Cool Cities Survey: Summary of Findings*, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, April 2004, p. 10. Available at: [http://www.coolcities.com/cm/attach/7DAC9167-89CF-46DB-834C-D2382ED19B15/Summary\\_Findings.pdf](http://www.coolcities.com/cm/attach/7DAC9167-89CF-46DB-834C-D2382ED19B15/Summary_Findings.pdf) (accessed September 20, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> *Michigan Cool Cities Survey: Summary of Findings*, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, April 2004, pp. 6-12. Available at: [http://www.coolcities.com/cm/attach/7DAC9167-89CF-46DB-834C-D2382ED19B15/Summary\\_Findings.pdf](http://www.coolcities.com/cm/attach/7DAC9167-89CF-46DB-834C-D2382ED19B15/Summary_Findings.pdf) (accessed September 20, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> "Pilot Program Summary," CoolCities.com. Available at: <http://www.coolcities.com/pilot/summary/> (accessed September 20, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Michigan Cool Cities Pilot Program, "Executive Summary: Alpena—Creation of Walkable Community Connecting Downtown to River-Rehabilitation of Historic Former Armory Building for Housing" [online], [cited 20 September 2004]. Available at: <http://www.coolcities.com/cm/attach/67477F47-5801-4EEA-8CFD-329E11606DDD/alpenaCreationWalkable.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Michigan Cool Cities Pilot Program, "Executive Summary: Detroit—Eastern Market District Small Business Incubation—Improved Facades and Historically-Restored Market Shed to Create Year-Round Market" [online], [cited 20 September 2004]. Available at: <http://www.coolcities.com/cm/attach/67477F47-5801-4EEA-8CFD-329E11606DDD/detroitEasternMarket.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Michigan Cool Cities Pilot Program, "Executive Summary: Grand Rapids—Uptown Revitalization—Innovative Green Technology" [online], [cited 20 September 2004]. Available at:

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<<http://www.coolcities.com/cm/attach/67477F47-5801-4EEA-8CFD-329E11606DDD/GRUptownRevitalization.pdf>>.

<sup>12</sup> Michigan Cool Cities 2005 Grants and Planning Programs, [cited October 20, 2005]. Available at:

<<http://www.coolcities.com/cm/attach/C9EA6DEA-2479-4933-8F7B-2364FBD25363/2005announce.pdf>>.