

Twin Cities Sustainable Harbor Meeting  
Benton, Harbor, Michigan, October 1, 2018

Q Method Sort Summary:

- Strongest Assets are at the Top, Weakest Assets are at the Bottom
- First Sort
  - o Top Three Strengths of Twin Cities Region
    - Tourism
    - Business Opportunities
    - Quality of Life
  - o Bottom Three Weakness of Twin Cities Region
    - Inclusion
    - Lack of Transparent Government (Mostly with regards to Benton Harbor )
    - Public Transportation
- Reasons given for the first sort
  - o Strong waterfront commercial business opportunities has allowed recreation to flourish; mainly due to federal dredging dollars
  - o Tourism and commercial waterfront business provides tax dollars and necessitates coast guard presence
  - o Many tourist become residents of area due to good quality of life
  - o The region needs more public transportation to adequately connect the community.
  - o Difficulty in getting the local governments to work collectively
  - o The region needs more qualified employees for jobs, and local governments willing to attract new industry
  - o Economic disparity with regards to Benton Harbor and St Joseph is holding the region back from further progress
  - o The number of governments (Berrien County, Benton Harbor, St. Joseph, two townships, State of Michigan, USACE) will be impossible to coordinate without government efficiency and transparency
  - o Other (Benton Harbor governing issues as perceived by the participants)
    - Nobody knows what Benton Harbor's government will accept regarding waterfront redevelopment
    - The inability to engage Benton Harbor's government will invalidate any plan to revitalize the waterfront
    - Benton Harbor community does not want new residents or "St Joes" people in their community

- Second Sort: Future thinking of 2028 after harbor has been redeveloped; what type of assets are the most desirable results of redevelopment
  - o Top Strengths of Twin Cities Region as a Result of Harbor Redevelopment
    - Improved, adequate and functional public transit;
    - Strong commercial business in harbor
    - Benton Harbor will not impose “new” taxes on development
    - Benton Harbor government overhaul (Improved government transparency)
    - Robust workforce development program in the region that uses the waterfront redevelopment as a catalyst
- The Second Sort continued a business development approach commercial interests juxtaposed to the recreational approach of the waterfront residents. However, the business community acknowledged how Benton Harbor’s development away from the waterfront will be essential for successful waterfront development.
  - o Strong commercial corridor will provide river with dredging funds
  - o More industry throughout the community that can employ blue collar workers
  - o Development of on-demand car services like Uber/Lyft that will allow tourist to venture throughout the region
  - o Water taxi that will allow tourist and residents to cross into both communities without walking across traditional bridges
  - o A countywide and possibly regional effort; that provides real public transportation options that connect workers to jobs and appeals to young professionals who are not car centric.
- What Stops Second Sort From Becoming a Reality
  - o Lack of inclusion of Benton Harbor residents in their governments planning efforts
  - o No public investments have been designated to redevelop riverfront
  - o Lack of government transparency; specifically business interest are not sure what the individual local governments and Berrien County wants in riverfront redevelopment

#### Questions and Conversation

- 1) Describe your relationship with the harbor/waterfront/river. How is it different than your relationship with the lake?
  - a. Commercial dock and private marina owners believe the waterfront should remain commercial and recreational



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- b. Benton Harbor should consider providing transient boat docking space in order to alleviate congestion at St Joseph marina
  - c. Private dock owners are currently operating at 50%-90% capacity, thus, they do not want a proliferation of new public marinas because they have existing underutilized capacity.
- 2) Mapping Exercise: Referencing the map, what are the areas you use most? Where are assets located? What about barriers (and future opportunities)?
- a. The commercial docks, recreational/private/public docks and Riverview Dr in Benton Harbor were highlighted as major harbor assets
  - b. The major barrier to development were the upland unemployment and workforce development issues that hamper business in the region. Commercial interest believe that the harbor would get developed if region was more prosperous
- 3) Considering what we have talked about today and other projects you have implemented/experienced in the area, what are the most important social, economic, public health, environmental and aesthetic criteria you feel should be incorporated during implementation? In other words, what criteria should be used by the community or the municipal leaders in determining whether an improvement/change should be implemented?
- a. Commercial interest believe that workforce development has to be a primary goal of redevelopment. They would like to see some sort of training facility added to the plan that can develop skilled trades and provide a pipeline to area business owners
  - b. There was interest in exploring with Whirlpool if a new factory could be built in Benton Harbor that could provide blue collar jobs for the region
  - c. They believed that the waterfront redevelopment plan should also contain an economic development plan for Benton Harbor that would incentivize industry placement within the community; specifically, the plan would include zoning and tax incentives for building and providing manufacturing jobs
  - d. Workforce training: Harbor redevelopment plan should be intentional with regards to the future outlook of the regional workforce. Some ideas were presented that highlighted possibly establishing a branch of trade/technical college that could focus on regional strengths of maritime, recreation and hospitality.
  - e. Harbor redevelopment plan must include neighborhoods within at least 1,000 feet of the riverfront. The plan has to include infrastructure improvements (roads, bike lanes, paths, lights, etc),

housing (rental, moderate income, updated), hotels and access to waterfront (boardwalks, trails, boat slips, etc)

- 4) In your opinion, what type of education and outreach is needed to build public support for this project? Who would you suggest is important to talk with to gain future support for a shared vision?
  - o Final plan must be inclusive (Benton Harbor residents have to be brought into discussion) and with the vocal support of Berrien county and state of Michigan.

#### Thornton Buckeye Group Observations

The October 1 meeting with commercial and harbor stakeholders provided a lot of insight as to why there is limited coordination between Benton Harbor and St. Joseph. The two entities do not trust each other and have no real political reason to encourage residents and businesses interact with each other.

In order for the harbor redevelopment plan to be received as valid and implemented, the equity issues of Benton Harbor will have to be central part of the plan. The amount of available land and subsequent lower prices make the Benton Harbor community the prime starting point for redevelopment of the harbor. However, the workforce and unemployment issues have been a central theme in both residential and commercial stakeholder meetings and rightfully highlighted as a serious obstacle to redevelopment within the region. Also, the loss of manufacturing jobs throughout the region, but especially Benton Harbor, necessitates that any larger scale redevelopment plan must include new job opportunities for blue collar residents.

In order to achieve this goal, the project team will have to engage Benton Harbor residents and community leaders. Those leaders will want answers as to how the harbor development will positively add to their communities and an intentional workforce development plan that provides job opportunities for non-college bound youth and adults would assuage a lot of their concerns. Community acceptance of a river development plan will allow Benton Harbor government officials to engage in the necessary zoning and incentive work that will be essential to attracting development to Riverview Dr and the adjacent area.

The planning approach to the community will be essential to gaining widespread acceptance that riverfront development is a “good” thing. Given, the economic issues facing Benton Harbor residents, harbor redevelopment does not rank very high on the hierarchy of needs. The project team will have to acknowledge and engage on issues such as gun violence, environmental justice and general feeling of discrimination in order to gain clearance to discuss how harbor redevelopment can

help improve their lives. Addressing the lack of economic activity will appeal to a Benton Harbor community which is looking for new jobs and places to spend money/time/recreate. If the harbor redevelopment plan can speak to those issues as well, coordination from the Benton Harbor community could serve as a catalyst to redevelopment.

The proverbial bones of development already exist in the Benton Harbor communities adjacent to the harbor. The arts district could be expanded with the cleanup and development of the old canal (possibly re-opening it to the Paw Paw River). More importantly, new housing and retail investment can be linked to the canal and Riverview Dr projects, which would expand Benton Harbor's tax base and provide tourist with more reasons to explore (spend money) throughout the region and residents more housing options. However, the traditional African American Benton Harbor community will have to be engaged where they currently are located. That may include providing food, transportation and child care for community meeting participants. If at all possible, the vendors for the event should be local businesses with ties to Benton Harbor. The proper engagement can alleviate a lot of concerns about displacement of communities from the harbor's redevelopment.

The government transparency issues that were mentioned throughout the meeting may be valid. I have not spent enough time interacting with twin city local governments to form a fair opinion. However, I do get the sense that Benton Harbor's government may lack the understanding on how and when to engage on a project such as the harbor redevelopment, considering the first university study was commissioned by their actions. I suggest that the project team consider advocating directly to Benton Harbor elected leaders through sustained personal engagement and possible tours of other communities that have undergone a similar redevelopment to the river/water fronts. The exposure to new ideas and sites could inspire officials on a way forward for their community.