

# 3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

In reviewing prior plans, conducting a market analysis, and gathering input from the community, the planning team identified a number of common themes and ideas, described below, to guide the future development of the Harbor District. These themes and ideas were used to develop the guiding principles that follow and inform the recommendations found in subsequent chapters.

## A waterfront provides a unique opportunity

Key stakeholders, community members, and the public at large generally expressed an appreciation of the pivotal role so much available and changing waterfront can play for Milwaukee. “This is a great opportunity - don’t mess it up!” was feedback the planning team received on multiple occasions. The themes outlined below reflect the wide range of desires and recommendations that people have for the waterfront, and together highlight an overarching theme: the waterfront is too special to be reserved for a single use or function. To achieve the potential of this area, we will need to be flexible, creative, and innovative in finding new ways for many uses to co-exist and support one another.

## Public space and access are key



**PRIOR PLANS**

The Walker’s Point Strategic Action Plan focused on providing access to the waterfront and connecting public waterfront to the neighborhoods using stub-end streets and unconventional public spaces. The ReFresh MKE Plan recommended improving access for families and individuals to fish, canoe, and experience Milwaukee’s rivers and to expand the acreage of natural area. The Southeast Side Plan recommends the restoration of the Grand Trunk Wetland.



**MARKET ANALYSIS**

A review of urban waterfront redevelopment case studies, included in the market analysis, found that many communities led their waterfront development efforts with substantial investments in the public realm that demonstrated that the area was meant to be enjoyed by all. These public spaces set high standards for development that raised expectations for the quality of private sector developments nearby.



Creating new public spaces and public access to the waterfront consistently ranked as the most important outcome for future redevelopment of the Harbor District during public input sessions. Restoring the natural environment ranked a close second. Participants prioritized riverwalk, trails, and a waterfront park as the most important public spaces and wanted to see a mix of more active and more natural public spaces.

## Redevelopment should include the economy and the environment



A number of plans discuss environmental improvements and habitat recommendations with the ReFresh MKE plan being the most ambitious. The ReFresh MKE Plan recommends 100 acres of brownfields remediated, net-zero energy performance, and net-zero stormwater runoff in the Harbor District by 2023. Other plans focus on requiring high-performance sustainable site and building designs and stormwater and environmental conservation goals.



The market analysis noted the wide availability of former industrial brownfield sites throughout the cities of the midwest and Great Lakes. For the Harbor District to attract uses or redevelopment, investments will need to be made in environmental clean-up (as well as access and infrastructure) to create “shovel-ready” sites. Additionally, the District will have to craft a narrative - such as the story of sustainable urban redevelopment that attracts users to the Menomonee Valley - in order to set itself apart from similar areas across the region.



Restoring the natural environment to provide habitat for plants, fish, and wildlife consistently ranked as the second most important outcome, just behind new public places, for future redevelopment of the Harbor District during public input sessions. Public input demonstrated wide support for achieving higher environmental goals even if it meant higher cost and/or a longer timeline to complete.

## Support Port Milwaukee



Port Milwaukee is, and will remain, an important economic driver for the City of Milwaukee and the wider region. Prior plans agreed that Jones Island should remain dedicated to the movement of goods into the foreseeable future, and that surrounding land use and infrastructure decisions should support this role.



The market analysis found that Port Milwaukee manages well in its current market, but could explore strategies to become more flexible to respond to future market changes. These strategies could prove to be more cost-effective than adding land to the outer harbor or using land on the west side of the inner harbor. The Port could also expand its mission to better align with and manage freight movement across all modes.



A large part of the identity of the Harbor District is the Port and working waterfront. The public expressed a desire to retain the shipping and industrial character of the District, while also allowing for new development and public spaces to coexist with industry and the Port.

## A mix of land uses is important



PRIOR PLANS

Mixed use is a common theme brought up in visions for the future of the district, including re-use of historic buildings, opportunities for live/work/sell space, and new industrial development as part of a compact, mixed-use district to encourage walkability and neighborhood connections. Buffers, screening, and transitional uses are recommended to minimize conflicts between industry and neighborhood residents.



MARKET ANALYSIS

The market analysis found that there are strong cases to be made for all types of land uses in the Harbor District, but not necessarily all in the same place. As noted below, there is little need to locate industry near the waterfront, but access to ship, rail, highways, and labor make other areas of the District attractive to industry. Service and office uses are attracted to waterfront locations and near large anchors such as the UWM School of Freshwater Sciences and Rockwell Automation. Housing is already developing on the edges of the District in Walker's Point and Bay View, with more expected.



PUBLIC INPUT

Public input made clear that stakeholders want to see a mix of uses that would provide people a variety of reasons to visit the District and would achieve multiple redevelopment goals including job creation, public space and recreation, and spaces for people to live.

## Attract new businesses that provide a variety of jobs for people in the community



PRIOR PLANS

Many prior plan recommendations revolve around attracting and retaining manufacturing jobs; however, there is a strong desire for future targeted industries to be cleaner and more technology-based than the district's former tenants. The Growing Prosperity Plan and others focus on attracting businesses within the Milwaukee region's Asset Industry Clusters which include food and beverage processing; power, energy, controls, and automation; and water research and technology. The ReFresh MKE Sustainability Plan sets an ambitious goal of 22 jobs per acre for new industrial development in the Harbor District.



MARKET ANALYSIS

The market analysis found that thousands of jobs currently exist in the Harbor District, but only 10% of the workers employed there live in nearby neighborhoods. The District offers key ingredients for industrial development including land, strong utility infrastructure, multi-modal freight access, and access to a large labor force. However, there are very few industries that have a need to be on the waterfront. Waterfront locations may be more attractive to service and office users who would provide a different mix of jobs.



PUBLIC INPUT

Public input regarding economic development was focused on providing a variety of jobs that are available to residents from the surrounding neighborhoods and the City of Milwaukee. Creating jobs was consistently ranked by community members as the third most important outcome for future development of the Harbor District, behind providing spaces for recreation and restoring the natural environment.

## Mixed housing is preferred - but challenging



Several plans discuss creating a variety of housing options with the Walker’s Point Strategic Action Plan recommending to “consider incorporating alternative forms of affordable housing” and the Near South Side Plan recommending to “encourage programs that develop affordable housing” to “minimize the effects of rapid property value increases on residents.”



The market analysis found that waterfront sites in Milwaukee tend to gravitate to higher end units. If a mix of housing options is to be achieved, as highlighted in prior plans and by the public, it will require intervention in the market through tax credits or other means.



Providing places for people to live within the Harbor District was not a high priority of public input participants. However, should housing be included in the District, there is a strong desire among the public to provide a mix of housing sizes, cost, and types.

# Guiding Principles

*The planning team and stakeholders participating in the Plan Advisory Group identified the following guiding principles for the planning process. These principles informed the creation of the plan recommendations found in the following chapters.*

The future of the Harbor District provides an incredible opportunity for Milwaukee to remake its port, estuary, and surrounding neighborhoods for the 21st century. The Water and Land Use Plan aims to achieve a world-class revitalization of Milwaukee's harbor that sets the standard for how waterfronts work—economically, environmentally, and socially—for the next century using the guiding principles outlined below.

**ECONOMY:** Encourage employment growth and economic development that contributes to our region's competitiveness and is equitably distributed.

- Strengthen and support the Port of Milwaukee as a freight hub.
- Accommodate a mix of land uses, while prioritizing those that create family supporting jobs and are water-dependent.
- Generate increased property tax revenue so long as it does not unduly hinder achieving other plan principles.
- Reinforce Milwaukee's position as America's Fresh Coast Capital and the City's place as a global leader in water innovation and technology.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Aim for redevelopment to minimize negative environmental impacts, support and restore natural ecosystems, and employ innovative environmental strategies.

- Reduce the discharge of pollutants to the District's waterways.
- Remove or resolve legacy contamination of land and waterways in the District.
- Improve aquatic and shoreland habitat.
- Develop high sustainability and construction standards for new development, existing operations, and infrastructure.

**EQUITY:** Create a place that is welcoming and accessible to all people.

- Increase the amount of dedicated public spaces and public water access.
- Create housing and employment opportunities that are accessible to a broad segment of the community.
- Increase connectivity to and through the District by developing multi-modal transportation options for people and freight.
- Recognize the historic character of the District and the many groups of people and activities that have contributed to the rich culture of the area.