

Quality of Life

The Opportunity:

Site selectors evaluate communities on more than cost and infrastructure. Increasingly, they ask: will our employees want to live here? Can we recruit a plant manager from another state who will be willing to relocate? Will their partner, spouse, parents, or children be happy here? Are there parks, schools, restaurants, healthcare, and things to do?

Quality of life truly is a competitive factor in the site selection process. Communities with strong schools, walkable downtowns, recreational amenities, and cultural assets have a leg up on the recruitment battle for both companies and workers. Communities that cannot offer these things might lose to more livable locations.

The unrealized opportunity is to connect industrial tax revenue to the quality of life investments that attract and retain both employers and workforce. More and more, savvy communities see quality of life investments as an economic development strategy.

What Communities and Developers Should Know

Industrial tax revenue can fund the amenities that attract more investment.

A large manufacturing facility can generate millions of dollars annually in property tax revenue. That revenue is often absorbed into a community's general fund without a deliberate reinvestment strategy. Communities that earmark a portion of industrial tax revenue for parks, trails, streetscape improvements, public safety, and school support create a virtuous cycle—industrial investment improves quality of life, which can attract more workers, which can attract more employers, and bring more investment.

Healthcare access is a workforce issue, not just a social issue.

In many smaller communities across the 11-county region, access to primary care, urgent care, and mental health services is limited. Workers who cannot access healthcare close to home are less reliable employees, more likely to turn over, and less likely to recommend the community to others. Attracting a healthcare provider or urgent care clinic to a community with growing industrial employment is both a quality of life investment and a workforce retention strategy.

Recreation and culture matter more than communities realize.

A younger workforce places high value on outdoor recreation, walkability, local food and drink, and cultural amenities. The Detroit Region has significant natural assets, including Great Lakes access, extensive trail networks, rivers, and state parks. The growing recognition of these assets as economic development tools is paramount to the Detroit Region's ability to compete for talent and investment. Connecting trails to employment centers, improving public spaces, and supporting local arts and food culture are tangible steps that improve recruitment outcomes.

POPULATION



EMPLOYMENT



Source: "Improving quality of life—not just business—is the best path to Midwestern rejuvenation." Brookings. Austin, et al. January 26, 2022

What Communities and Developers Can Do

Dedicate a portion of industrial tax revenue to quality of life investments. Make this commitment visible and public. Show residents that the new plant is funding the park improvements, the trail extension, the streetscape upgrade. Larger projects often achieve this through community benefit agreements, *See Community Benefits*. This can build community support for industrial development.

Recruit healthcare services alongside industrial recruitment. Work with hospital systems, urgent cares, and private healthcare groups to establish access near growing employment areas.

Invest in parks, trails, and public spaces as economic infrastructure. Apply for Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grants, MDOT Transportation Alternatives Program funding, and Land and Water Conservation Fund resources to build and improve recreational amenities. These investments pay economic returns through worker attraction and retention. In addition to pursuing funds for development of parks and recreational amenities, consider utilizing tax increment financing mechanisms or establishing funds to ensure maintenance and improvement of these assets over time funded by industrial development projects.

Support local food, arts, and cultural programming. Farmers markets, public art programs, community events, and local restaurant districts are low-cost, high-impact quality of life investments. They signal that a community is alive, welcoming, and worth moving to.

Market a community's quality of life to site selectors and employers. Do not assume those looking for locations know what a community offers. Prepare a community profile that includes parks, schools, healthcare, recreation, cultural assets, and housing options alongside the usual infrastructure data.

Increase childcare access. The MI Tri-Share Child Care Program splits the cost of licensed child care equally among three parties: the participating employer, the employee, and the State of Michigan. It reduces working families' child care costs by two-thirds, helping employers recruit and retain talent while expanding access to care.

Key Takeaway

Quality of life truly is a competitive factor in capturing industrial investment. The communities that have a chance to secure the best industrial projects are the ones that are genuinely good places to live. Industrial tax revenue is the tool that makes quality of life investment sustainable.



Resources and Tools

Common grant and funding resources that support quality of life development projects:

- MEDC Community Revitalization Program
- MI Tri-Share Child Care Program
- MNRTF
- Recreation Passport
- RAP Grants
- Transportation Alternatives