



BATTLE CREEK MASTER PLAN HOUSING STRATEGY

Community Engagement Plan

(Last Revised: July 22, 2025)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The city of Battle Creek lacks sufficient housing to support existing and future residents. The following documents are three pieces of the puzzle that play an important role in the future of housing for Battle Creek. While there is some overlap between the documents, they each address different aspects of making sure the city is able to provide equitable, safe, and affordable housing for existing and future residents.

2024 Battle Creek Housing Action Plan: In collaboration with Battle Creek Unlimited, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and various stakeholders, the city undertook the development of the 2024 Battle Creek Housing Action Plan, which was adopted in March of 2024. Generally, this plan analyzed data to help the city and its partners identify leads, allocate resources, establish evaluation metrics, and establish a timeline for action to analyze land use and regulatory tools and development feasibility tools related to housing. A key recommendation of the plan is to establish a trust fund for nonprofit development of housing with a goal set for \$10 million.

2025-2029 Consolidated Plan: With the input from the community, the Community Development Division undertook the development of the 2025-2029 Consolidated Plan. The City Commission approved the plan on June 17, 2025. The plan describes how the city will allocate Community Development Block Grant and HOME Investment Partnership funds to meet the needs of low –and moderate-income people in Battle Creek and it will include a housing needs assessment. Every five years, the City of Battle Creek is required to update the Consolidated Plan.

2026 Master Plan Housing Strategy: With the guidance of the Housing and Community Development Steering Committee on the community engagement plan, the city in collaboration with the community, city partners, and various stakeholders will develop the 2026 Master Plan housing strategy. The outreach process and development of the housing strategy of the Master Plan will begin at the end of July and be ongoing through the end of 2025. The plan will address critical housing challenges facing the community and summarize the community's vision for housing to guide future housing policy.



This streamlined community engagement plan outlines a cost-effective approach for a meaningful and inclusive public participation process to better understand the community's housing vision.

HOUSING CHALLENGES

Battle Creek faces significant housing challenges including:

- Stagnant population growth
- Aging housing stock (75% built before 1980)
- Lower household incomes compared to the region
- Increased housing market pressures from new industrial developments in and near Battle Creek such as the Blue Oval Battery Plant development
- Limited quality housing options across income levels
- Potential displacement of long-term residents
- Decreasing household size
- Aging population
- Potential need for multigenerational housing
- Existing Homeowners at risk of losing their homes to foreclosure
- High poverty rate and visible population of homeless people

The housing strategy presents an opportunity to address these challenges through thoughtful planning that incorporates community input, especially from those traditionally underrepresented in planning processes. This engagement plan maintains a focus on reaching vulnerable populations and building trust.

ENGAGEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Primary Goal

To create an inclusive, equitable planning process that genuinely engages the Battle Creek community, particularly hard-to-reach populations, in shaping the housing strategy plan to meet current and future housing needs.



Specific Objectives

1. **Engagement Led Processes:** Ensure there are multiple forms of engagement such as in person activities, videos, multiple types of short surveys that each fit different input priorities of the community
2. **Inclusive Representation:** Ensure participation from all Battle Creek neighborhoods and demographic groups, with special focus on hard-to-reach populations
3. **Meaningful Input:** Gather substantive feedback on housing preferences, needs, and priorities
4. **Education:** Increase community understanding of housing issues, challenges, and develop potential solutions
5. **Trust Building:** Develop and strengthen relationships between the city and community members
6. **Transparency:** Maintain clear, ongoing communication about the planning process and how community input is used
7. **Action-Oriented:** Generate actionable recommendations for the housing strategy
8. **Capacity Building:** Enhance community capacity to participate in future planning efforts

Key Stakeholders

The engagement plan will target the following key stakeholder groups:

Government and Institutional

- City of Battle Creek departments (Planning, Community Development, Economic Development)
- Battle Creek City Commission
- Battle Creek Public Schools
- Calhoun County Land Bank Authority
- Battle Creek Unlimited
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
- Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA)

Housing Sector

- Nonprofit housing providers (Habitat for Humanity, Neighborhoods Inc.)
- For-profit housing developers
- Property managers and landlords



- Real estate professionals
- Lenders and financial institutions
- Construction industry representatives

Community Organizations

- Neighborhood Planning Councils
- Faith-based organizations (churches, mosques, temples)
- Social service providers
- Community foundations and philanthropies (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek Community Foundation)
- Advocacy groups representing vulnerable populations
- LISC
- CINAR
- IFF
- CDIF
- Community Development
- Financial Institutions

Residents and Workers

- Current homeowners
- Current renters
- Prospective homebuyers
- People experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness
- Major employers and their workforce
- BlueOval representatives and prospective employees

Hard-to-Reach Populations

Based on the Housing and Community Development Steering Committee's input, special effort will be dedicated to engaging the following hard-to-reach populations:

1. ALICE Population (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)

Barriers: Less time to participate, create more opportunities for them to participate

Strategy: connecting through service providers and community organizations

- Urban League
- African American Collaborative
- Voces Childcare Center
- Full Blast



- Voces Child Care Service

2. **People with Disabilities** (physical, cognitive, sensory, and other disabilities)

Barriers: physical access to meetings and access to information that conforms to their disabilities, limitation to get information and provide feedback

Strategy: connecting through service providers and community organizations

- Southwest Michigan Disability Network
- Purpose Care of Michigan

3. **Youth**

Barriers: scheduling, not homeowners/renters therefore lack of interest at this time in their life

Strategies: connecting through service providers and community organizations

- New Level Sports, Chris McCoy
- Kingdom Builders, Tino Smith
- Full Blast
- Cereal City Hoopsters
- Kool Center
- African American Collaborative
- Voces Childcare Services
- Washington Heights United Methodist Church & Community
- Local Schools

4. **Non-English Speakers** (Burmese, Guatemalan, Congolese, and Latinx)

Barriers: language, cultural differences with communication or land tenure models

Strategies: connecting through service providers and community organizations

- Burma Center
- Voces
- Owizo Swahili community

5. **2nd/3rd Shift and Non-Traditional Workers**

Barriers: work outside standard 9-5 hours



Strategies: connecting through service providers and community organizations

- Battle Creek Unlimited

6. Families with Children

Barriers: childcare needs, exhaustion, time constraints, competing priorities

Strategies: connecting through service providers and community organizations

- Washington Heights United Methodist Church & Community
- Childcare Centers
- Voces

7. Seniors

Barriers: accessibility, transportation, comfort issues (hearing, mobility), limited technology use

Strategies: connecting through service providers and community organizations

- City of Battle Creek Housing Commission
- Silver Sneakers
- Calhoun County Senior Services
- Purpose Care of Michigan

8. People Experiencing Homelessness

Barriers: schedules, transportation, basic survival needs take priority

Strategies: connecting through service providers and community organizations

- The Haven of Rest

9. Transitional Housing (residents needing timely placement)

Barriers: schedules, transportation, basic survival needs take priority

Strategies: connecting through service providers and community organizations

- The Haven



Public Housing

Barriers: schedules, transportation, basic survival needs take priority

Strategies: connecting through service providers and community organizations

- Battle Creek Housing Commission

Engagement Best Practices

The engagement process will incorporate the following best practices identified by the Housing and Community Development Steering Committee members:

Category	Details
Meeting people where they are	Bringing engagement to existing community gatherings, utilizing familiar locations that are comfortable for residents
Food	Providing culturally appropriate food options
Accessible design	Accommodating different learning styles, ADA-compliant venues and materials, graphics
Child care	Providing activities for children of all ages, enabling broader participation from families
Engagement activities that match the audience	Offering multiple formats for input, tailoring activities to audience preferences and needs
Being conscious of people's time	Respecting scheduling constraints, Efficient meeting design and implementation
Translation services	Ensuring language accessibility for non-English speakers, having interpreters available at key events
Circular process	Creating ongoing feedback loops, showing participants how their input was used

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Phase 1: Preparation and Launch (July 2025)

1. Strategic Partnership Building

- Focus on 5-10 key organizations that can reach hard-to-reach populations
- Establish formal partnerships for outreach and engagement
- Create a shared calendar of community events for piggybacking engagement



2. Digital-First Communications Launch

- Create a simple project webpage on the existing city website
- Develop social media content with engaging graphics and simple explanations
- Prepare limited printed materials in key languages for targeted distribution
- Leverage partner organizations' newsletters and communication channels

Phase 2: Education and Listening (August – September 2025)

1. Piggyback Engagement

- Instead of hosting separate events, take engagement to 5-10 existing community meetings or events
- Include an interactive activity about housing issues and options
 1. Focus discussion on local cultural patterns, lifestyles, and expectations. To what degree are community members already in multi-generational households or doubled up with other families? How well does this work? What might make those arrangements more fulfilling and enjoyable?
 2. What is the community perception of the existing housing stock? How well is it serving local needs? What would we change if we could? How do we think about local neighborhoods and the amenities within them (parks, schools, shops, etc.)? What would we change about them if we could? What obstacles do you find with the housing you have today, such as adding on to your home?
 3. What types of housing is needed to meet your needs?
- Collect preliminary input

2. Targeted Focus Groups

- Conduct 3-4 focused discussions with specific groups
- Partner with trusted community organizations to host and recruit participants
- Document group-specific concerns and priorities

Phase 3: Focused Engagement (October – November 2025)

1. Housing 101 and Listening Session

- Hold workshop in key community hub (libraries, schools, community centers). Workshop is followed by listening session. Content includes:
 1. State of housing in BC, from Housing Strategy
 2. Affordability explained
 3. Housing development process
 4. Underlying assumptions about housing typologies
 5. Neighborhood change and anti-displacement strategies
- Conduct digital story/song collection at workshop
 1. Create simple online platform for housing story or song submission
 2. Collect stories through partner organizations and at community events
 3. Share stories and songs (with permission) to humanize housing issues

2. Housing Discussion Working Group Session

- Small group discussion with NPC council, one local builder, and one developer
- Use simple visual aids to discuss the state of housing
- Address concerns about neighborhood character and change
- Identify potential infill sites and appropriate housing types through mapping activity
- Develop neighborhood-specific housing strategies

3. Virtual Housing Tours

- Create simple video tours of different housing scenarios
- Share through social media and at Housing Discussion Groups and Employer Lunch Sessions
- Address misconceptions about affordable and higher-density housing



4. Employer Lunch Sessions

- Work with up to 3 major employers
- Conduct brief sessions during lunch breaks
- Gather input on workforce housing needs

Phase 4: Review and Refinement (December – January 2026)

1. Return to NPCs, Partner Organizations

- Return to present recommendations to up to 5 partner organizations
- Gather feedback through their established networks
- Make adjustments based on focused feedback

2. Virtual Community Review Meeting

- Hold one virtual meeting for reviewing recommendations, will be recorded and a screen cast made for distribution

3. Online Feedback

- Provide opportunity to prioritize proposed vision, goals, strategies

4. Implementation Discussion

- Small working session with steering committee
- Identify roles and commitments
- Build framework for ongoing involvement

5. Master Plan Strategies

- Finalize content for Master Plan amendment
- Provide to staff to lead approval/amendment process

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- Translate essential materials into Spanish, Burmese, and other languages
- Create simplified versions for different literacy levels
- Develop audio and video versions for those who prefer non-written formats



- Use culturally appropriate imagery and examples
- Utilize city's communication team for leadership support
- Focus on the following messages:
 - **Everyone deserves quality, affordable housing in Battle Creek**
 - **The community's voice is essential in shaping Battle Creek's housing future**
 - **Together, we can create housing options that meet diverse needs and strengthen neighborhoods**
 - **Your participation matters and will directly influence the Housing Strategy update**

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

1. Project Brand and Identity

- Consistent visual identity for all materials (utilize existing Master Plan as basis)
- Clear, memorable project name
- Simple, compelling tagline

2. Basic Information Materials

- Project presentation
- Engagement process timeline
- Frequently asked questions

3. Housing Education Materials

- Housing Ecosystem
- State of Housing 101