

CITY OF FERNDALE

# A TALE OF TWO PROJECTS

Successful Communications for an  
Engaged Community



FERNDALE

# About Ferndale



## FERNDALE

An active, walkable community of 20,000 located in southeast Oakland County, across the shared 8 Mile Rd. boundary with Detroit.



## BUSINESS

Home to a diverse mix of 1,200+ businesses—commercial, industrial, and entrepreneurial; located within an award-winning downtown district and active manufacturing area.



## COMMUNITY

Makers, artists, entrepreneurs, workers, and visitors—highly engaged, politically involved, and humanitarian in nature, particularly on issues of personal interest. They love to be "Ferndale Normal."



**PROJECT #1**

# **3-60 Parking Development**

*Ferndale Mayor Dave Coulter, far left, listens to concerns about the 3-60 — The Detroit News*

# 3-60 Project Knowns & Notes

## KNOWN PARKING NEED

Residents, visitors, and business owners have long expressed a need for additional parking to support downtown growth and activity.

## SUPPORTING DATA

Parking and traffic studies deliver data that support the community's stated need for additional parking.

## MLUP

The City has a robust Master Land Use Plan, and the Downtown Development Authority has a long-term growth plan in place to support mixed-use parking development.

## DEVELOPMENT = PAIN POINT

While the need for parking is understood and largely agreed-upon, the process of taking current parking offline will be a major pain point for businesses and visitors.

# 3-60 Communications & Engagement

## CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

The City held biweekly City Council meetings, with agendas and minutes posted on the City's website and reminders posted on the City's Facebook and Twitter.

## PLANNING COMMISSION MEETINGS

The City held monthly Planning Commission meetings, with agendas and minutes posted on the City's website.

## NEWS/MEDIA

Local news outlets and media members attended meetings, spoke to residents, and reported regularly on the prospective project and community feedback.

## WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

The City used its own website, Facebook, and Twitter to deliver one-way communications about the project.



# OUTCOMES

## CONFUSION

"I'm hearing different things from the media, the City, my friends, and social media—which things are true and which are rumors?"

## EARLY DECISION-MAKING

"Not the right fit, timeline, or style for MY Ferndale."

## ANGER

"VOTE IT DOWN! VOTE IT DOWN! VOTE IT DOWN!"

## PROJECT IS VOTED DOWN

Level of community negativity is so strong, City Council decides to reject the project and think about other options.

WHAT IS RIGHT  
NO CONCRETE  
BLIGHT!

PARKING  
DECK  
NOW!

**PROJECT #2**

# *The dot* Parking Development

Add a little bit of body text

# The dot Project Knowns & Notes

## KNOWN PARKING NEED

Residents, visitors, and business owners have long expressed a need for additional parking to support downtown growth and activity.

## SUPPORTING DATA

Parking and traffic studies delivered that support the community's stated need for additional parking.

## PLAN

City has a robust Master Land Use Plan, and the Downtown Development Authority has a long-term growth plan in place to support mixed-use parking development.

## DEVELOPMENT = PAIN POINT

While the need for parking is understood and largely agreed-upon, the process of taking current parking offline will be a major pain point for businesses and visitors.

**SAME**



# The dot Communications & Engagement 2.0

## MEETINGS

The same City Council and Planning Commission meetings—plus public engagement/feedback sessions

## DIGITAL & SOCIAL

Complete shift of resources—25% spent on City's website and social media channels, 75% on community forums

## CONSULTANT

The City partnered with an engagement specialist from Bridgeport Consulting to lead and listen

## ADVISORY GROUP

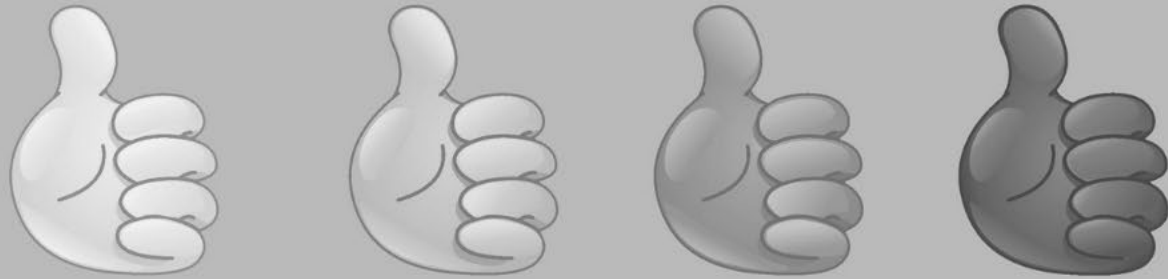
The City engaged invested and opinionated residents and business owners following a community survey

## FOCUS GROUPS

Small-group discussions led by consultant facilitator without City staff present to hear real feedback

## OWNERSHIP

Involving the community in the branding and naming of the parking development



# OUTCOMES

## INFORMATION OWNERSHIP

Predetermined owners and facilitators of information and resources for residents, visitors, and businesses.

## INFORMATION ADVOCATES

A number of residents and community members who act as information sharers and advocates. Note: not necessarily supporters!

## MIXED RESPONSES

Some anger, and also support, begrudging support, hesitancy, fear, and excitement.

## PROJECT IS APPROVED!



# Lessons Learned (aka How We Stopped Sucking at Community Engagement)

1

## LISTEN

100% more important than communicating, we learned some of the real fears and were able to address them.

2

## BE REAL

Peoples' natural interest in dealing with "City Government of Ferndale, Michigan" is a lot lower than their interest in dealing with Kara.

3

## GO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE

Hint: they weren't where we thought they were. They aren't coming to your website, they aren't attending your meetings, and they often won't reach out and ask questions.

4

## SEEK THE WHY

"We hate this project."  
Why? Are you afraid you'll lose the character of your neighborhood? Lose parking? Your property values will decline?

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**If we don't know our audience  
we risk saying just what we  
want to say, how we want to  
say it, without considering  
how they'll hear it.**

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