



**Carlisle | Wortman**  
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**TO:** City of Ypsilanti City Council

**FROM:** Megan A. Masson-Minock, AICP Principal; Matteo Passalacqua, Associate Planner;  
Brady Heath, Community Planner

**DATE:** October 20, 2025

**RE:** Results from the Focus Group Community Engagement Events

In September 2025, City staff along with Carlisle/Wortman Associates (CWA) facilitated 4 focus groups on the Water Street Redevelopment Area. The groups shared their hopes and fears along with their needs and wants for the site. Three of the focus groups were in person representing each ward in the city, and one online focus group for anyone to attend. At each in-person focus group, some participants were not from the ward for that meeting, and at two of the in-person meetings, an Ypsilanti Township resident participated. See [Appendix A](#) for more information on the focus groups.

- Ward Focus Group 1 took place on September 8, 2025, with 13 participants.
- Ward Focus Group 2 took place on September 10, 2025, with 7 participants.
- Ward Focus Group 3 took place on September 22, 2025, with 11 participants.
- The online focus group took place on September 30, 2025. This meeting was, unfortunately, overrun by AI bots, so it is difficult to determine how many of the participants were real.

Each participant shared their own hopes and fears as well as needs and wants for the site. Some groups decided that their ideas were in between a need and a want. There were overlapping themes from each group, and the groups as a whole. The tables below shows the common themes for all groups. Transcribed comments are in [Appendix B](#) for hopes and fears, and [Appendix C](#) for needs and wants.

**HOPES AND FEARS**

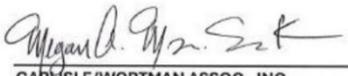
Hopes	Fears
Mixed use development	Displace minority populations
Riverfront remains open to the public	Unaffordable
Community and recreation center	The site continues to sit empty
Preserve trees/open space	Suburban style development
Small businesses	
Affordable housing	
Be an extension of downtown and look and feel like Ypsi	
Recognize the Indigenous populations that were once on site	

**NEEDS AND WANTS**

Needs	In between	Wants
Dense, mixed-use neighborhood as an extension of downtown	Space for small/micro-businesses	Recreation
Affordable housing	Public recreation indoor/outdoor	Green space/parks
Trails and Walkability		Entertainment venues/theaters
The space along the river should remain public		Fits the character of the city
Affordable and mixed housing		

The next steps are to use the information gathered from the focus groups and draft the RFQ and assemble the Ad Hoc Citizens Committee. We are happy to meet with you to discuss the next steps in the RFQ process. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

  
 CARLISLE/WORTMAN ASSOC., INC.  
 Megan Masson-Minock, AICP  
 Principal

  
 CARLISLE/WORTMAN ASSOC., INC.  
 Matteo Passalacqua  
 Community Planner

  
 CARLISLE/WORTMAN ASSOC., INC.  
 Brady Heath  
 Community Planner

The document has the following sections: [Appendix A](#): Process, Results, Next Steps, [Appendix B](#): Hopes and Fears worksheet, and [Appendix C](#): Needs and Wants activity.

## Appendix A

### Focus Groups Summary

Each focus group ran from 6:30 to 8 p.m. and were alternately facilitated by 2 members from the City of Ypsilanti (Katie Jones and Josh Burns), and 2 members from Carlisle/Wortman Associates (CWA) including Megan Masson-Minock and Matteo Passalaqua.

#### PROCESS:

The meeting began with a Gallery Walk where participants could familiarize themselves with the site's history, environmental status, brownfield plan, and former proposed developments. The boards included:

- Timeline diagram
- Proposed site plans for the Water Street Redevelopment Area over the years
- 2002 Biltmore Plan
- 2004 Alta Survey
- 2013 Shape Ypsi Master Plan pages of Water Street
- 2015 Brownfield Plan
- 2020 Kaufman Plan
- 2024 Spatially Extensive Areas of Contamination/Areas of Concern.
- Request for Qualifications (RFQ) Process

Each participant was also given a packet, which contained:

- Meeting agenda
- Small group discussion ground rules
- A detailed description of each poster board
- City contact information
- Timeline diagram

Following the Gallery Walk, the facilitators introduced themselves, welcomed the participants, and shared an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement. A presentation from City and CWA staff followed. That presentation included:

- Vision of Water Street
- Recap of the History of Water Street Redevelopment Area
- Expectations for the Water Street redevelopment area

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- Request for Qualifications (RFQ) Process
- Explanation of the small group activities

From there participants stayed in one large group or were split into two smaller groups depending on how many people were in attendance, accompanied by a facilitator. Participants were asked to share their hopes and fears about the site (see results in [Appendix B](#)). Then, the participants were asked what they needed and wanted on the site. The participants either wrote their needs and wants on a sticky note, or the facilitator wrote it for them. The needs and wants from participants had overlapping themes within their focus groups and focus groups from different nights. The needs and wants are transcribed in [Appendix C](#).

Following the hopes and fears, and needs and wants activities, the small groups reconvened as one large group where the facilitators shared a summary of what their groups discussed. Before the end of the meeting, participants were then given the opportunity to share their thoughts with the group and ask questions.

**RESULTS:**

Different conversations took place in each group on hopes and fears. Some groups focused on the architecture and layout while others spoke about developers and community engagement. Below is a table highlighting the common discussion points from each group. Transcribed comments for hopes and fears can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Hopes	Fears
<b>Ward 1</b>	
Dense mixed-use neighborhood	Minority populations not being served and displaced
	Developers getting large incentives for the development
<b>Ward 2</b>	
Good architecture for the development – Frank Lloyd Wright	Developed with one housing type, single-family homes
Fits in with the downtown	The dollar store should go and be a lesson
Useful stores that will serve the residents	
Small businesses along Michigan Ave. and integrated with the site	
<b>Ward 3</b>	
Developed into a mixed-use neighborhood	An irresponsible developer will be chosen
Act as an extension of downtown	The project would run out of money
Community and recreation center	Community engagement aspect mentioning that the input feels skewed
Keep riverfront open to the public	Ad Hoc Citizen Committee needs to reflect the diversity of the city

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Hopes	Fears
Preserve as much of the existing trees on site	Need direct input from Indigenous people
<b>Online Focus Group</b>	
Site developed as a mixed-use continuation of downtown	Suburban type of development
Affordable housing	Continue to sit empty

There are more common themes between the groups with the needs for the development including a walkable neighborhood, riverfront access, and preservation of trees and green space. The wants varied for each group including retail, recreation, and prioritizing people over cars. Below is a table highlighting the common discussion points from each group. Transcribed comments for hopes and fears can be found in [Appendix C](#).

Needs	Wants
<b>Ward 1</b>	
River front access	Retail in addition to housing
Pollutants remediated	Local businesses
	Grocery store
<b>Ward 2</b>	
Walkable neighborhood	Recreation
Sustainable neighborhood	Entertainment venues
Green infrastructure	Public gathering spaces
Renewable energy	
<b>Ward 3</b>	
Walkable and bikable neighborhood	Prioritize people over cars
Diverse affordable housing types	Don't make it a massive parking lot
Fits in with the character of the city	
Access to riverfront	
Preservation of existing trees	
<b>Online Focus Group</b>	
Walkable neighborhood	Recreation opportunities for both kids and adults
Parks	
Preservation of green space	
Affordable housing	

The common themes for all groups can be found in the [hopes and fears](#) and [needs and wants](#) table.

**NEXT STEPS:**

The four focus groups that were held in September 2025, where participants shared their hopes and fears and their needs and wants for the Water Street redevelopment site. With additional from focus group participants, and the Future of Water Street Community Engagement event that took place on May 1, 2025, enough information has been gathered to inform the RFQ process. The city's next steps are:

- Establish the Ad Hoc Citizens Committee.
- Draft an RFQ document explaining the project background, desired outcomes, required qualifications, evaluation criteria, and submission instructions.
- Post the RFQ for potential developers to respond with a statement of qualifications outlining their experience, staff, portfolio, relevant work samples, and other information that the city may want to require.
- Review the applications based on the established criteria to determine which developer(s) possess the required skills and capabilities.
- Conduct interviews with developers that are qualified to redevelop Water Street.
- A developer is presented to City Council to be approved for negotiation and execution of a development agreement.

## Appendix B

### Transcribed Responses from Participants

### Hopes and Fears Worksheet

Fears	Hopes
<b>Ward 1</b>	
Black/renters/older/disabled not served	Not gentrifying black and disabled people/ensure they are served
Not serve poor populations and displace them	Serve poorer communities
High rise unaffordable/Big developer	Housing for lower income
Don't get caught in materials (like concrete or vinyl)	Mixed development to benefit downtown
Cutting off river from making it public	Population density
Contamination	Residential use
Hard to finance mixed use difficult model (make a potential)	<u>Sustainable</u> economically (big and small houses)
No revenue	Mix of housing
Funding vs what's best	Density
Throwing good money at bad	High density housing and public
No 20, 30 year incentive	<u>Housing, grocery, recreation</u>
Chasing taxes and changing the character of Ypsi	Keep development consistent with downtown character
Negotiations taking too long	Store fronts no retail
Don't cram it all down anyone's throat	Farming/food scenery
	Public entertainment/H2O Park/Amphitheater
	Public art
	Community spaces
	Outdoor museum on walking trail for native populations, native black and enslaved populations
	<u>Keep riverfront</u>
	Pollinator/green infrastructure
	Storm water/Native plants
	Pollinator/public space/nature
	Huron River → Canada
	<u>Retain natural corridor</u>
	Remove all pollutants
	Good street environments, sidewalks, trees, walkable
	AATA stop

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Fears	Hopes
	Shelter/DV shelter mental health services
	<u>Taxes</u>
	City benefit if pilot
	city open to having land to county authorities
	Local partners for remediation – universities and schools
<b>Ward 2</b>	
Small local minority negatively impacted by development	Affordable? Affordable to whom
Fixate on one type of housing	Development becomes a focal point and desirable place
Be large, ridiculous, enormous houses	Developed well and dollar store becomes something else
Gigantic single-family homes.	Incorporate new designs. Stuck with new buildings looking like old buildings. Bold, cool architecture. Not to see lots of parking. See parking structure.
Dollar store is a lesson.	Built in a proper way – good use for the whole community – Frank Lloyd Wright – not old buildings functional for people who live there. Make parking in the same unit – not open lots
More pot stores (put a cap on that)	Incorporate new designs – bold architectural changes
Fear that will not generate tax revenues	Built properly and provides good use for the whole community (townships too)
Look at it as a tax generating place – ax the tax – property taxes abolished	Frank Lloyd Wright architecture
Doesn't get dragged out	Commercial on street
Not generate more demand on fire and police	Business and housing
	Useful stores – Grocery stores
	Underserved in businesses Micro-business support
	Want retail throughout – not just on Michigan Ave – integrate mixed zoning – five-minute neighborhood
	Want businesses on river front
	Removal of the family dollar
	Useful stores, grocery stores (not an Aldi), no weed stores.

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Fears	Hopes
	The community has invested so much in the property. Stay on course. Don't settle (referencing the Family Dollar)
	Supporting small retail spaces to harbor microbusinesses and entrepreneurship.
	Integrate shops throughout the development (mixed-use).
	5-minute neighborhood.
	Leverage the riverfront, perhaps have businesses along the B2B trail.
	Clothing stores.
	Store for everyday items.
	Public space for gathering space downtown
	Want public space – lacking meeting space – public art
	Lacking public bathrooms – B2B Trail
	Canoe livery?
	Livery.
	Public space created for people gathering. Maybe a plaza?
	Public bathrooms.
	People visit the following places outside of the city: Ark, Michigan Theater, Hill, Live sporting events, and entertainment needed (Early entertainment, too).
	New set of spaces on the riverfront
	Leverage the river and B2B trail
	Know what we can control/sustain
	Invested an enormous amount – stay the course – deal with the brownfield
	Denser and walkable – rear alleys for cars
	Dense and walkable, weird alleys.
	No surface lots – structure/underground
	Do need easy parking
	Not a huge amount of parking, perhaps a parking garage
	Minimize traffic impacts
	Zero surface lots.
	Provide accessible parking.
	Needs to be useful
	Need a shelter – incorporate in a way that is meaningful

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Fears	Hopes
	We need a shelter. Could this be incorporated seamlessly?
	New city hall and shelter place in one building.
	New City Hall and shelter for those who need it – all in one – incorporate into one building
	Development becomes desirable, a new focal point in the community.
	Wants this to be special. Is this sustainable for long-term maintenance?
	Success and not another Ypsi shitshow/albatross
	Would generate tax revenue
	Generate revenue. Worried that a loud vocal minority will push for low-revenue developments.
	See the first shovel go in in 2028
	Would like to see the development happen in 10-20 years, or before.
	Happen in 10 – 20 years
	All the wards can come together
<b>Ward 3</b>	
10% affordability seems low	Protect from gentrification
Designed for luxury but then absent (no empty)	See it developed – condos would be the best
Strip mall development	Lots of housing – different types
Push back of clear cutting	Multi use housing
Lots of parking	Fit aesthetically & look “fit in Ypsi”
Irresponsible developer	Historic charm
Showcase → Biggest and badest developer	Less big commercial space
Size developer running out of money and leaving project	Full service grocery store
Pitting people against each other making \$	Community center
Policy impacts; shifts on housing & economy	Recreation center
City capacity	Public utility → roller rink/rec amenities
Who has input? Who is qualified? Need to reflect – feels skewed already	Riverfront remain a commons
	Preserve nature
	Look at tree canopy
	Public river front access
	Livable area in terms of transit
	Walkable

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Fears	Hopes
	Walkable
	Able to extend downtown planning/pedestrian, and bike friendly
	Intentional street design; street calming
	Exit south for River st. (Bridge?)
	Goals of the City – provide \$ for services
	Less \$ to police
	Not be rushed
	Diverse
	Looking larger demographic numbers
	Indigenous acknowledgement
	Burial sites
	Citizen committee – needs to reflect diversity
	Indigenous people – need direct input
<b>Online Focus Group</b>	
Big box development	Affordable housing solutions
Suburban style development	There will be lots of housing, as much as affordable as possible
Developed with a different ethic from the City itself.	Our City is able to get more housing, so more people can live in the City – affordable housing
Not all retail, more recreation	Enough mixed use in that space so people who live here will want to be here – shopping, going to school, etc.
Remediation techniques and keeping contaminants out of the Huron River	Contiguous development
Environmental fears and toxic contamination. Cost of clean up would overwhelm the City and delay the City again. Developers would cut corners.	Harmonious with downtown
Curious about studies on what is there recently	Water Street to be an extension of Downtown of the City in all directions.
Financial fears and major debts. Distrust of new projects due to past failures.	Accommodate existing local grocer
Economic fears	Mom and pop stores
Continues to sit undeveloped and in disrepair	Recreation, not all consumerism, limited retail
Stays the same, nothing happens	Whether or not the redevelopment will be inclusive of the Waterworks area
The site can't be redeveloped and continue to be a large inaccessible plot of land	Cleaned of contamination
Won't finish what we started	Walkable

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Fears	Hopes
Possibility of people of seeing a vicinity where everything has to be met & that mentality. Need to think beyond the box and think all things are possible. Be a place that other cities applaud.	Bring in development in locality or vicinity to bring more visitors, residents, and it will be busier.
Not enough input.	More infrastructure and facilities, more places where problems would be solved.

Notes:

- Discussed the trail easement – B2B easement – what is the maintenance? – who maintains?
- Do need to generate tax revenue – create to include all types of housing – largest affordable housing – might not be able to do other affordable housing.
- Denser housing
- Mixed use
- Not platted up for 160 SF houses and all MI Ave. commercial
- Space in whole site – diverse ways – mixed use – vibrant and integrated. Big footprint.
- Safe covered bike parking – No STR'[s – (not owner occupied)
- Mixed rental and home ownership
- Slice of Amsterdam and put it here. Buildings that house corner cafes – along river front – walk from place to place. Affordable housing integrated. Townhomes or denser – service ways – minimize motor traffic
- Diversity – problem if would be really different. Ease between the two. Safety – if put in a shelter it would keep folks away.
- Build within acreage – just for the community – City can't tell that don't rent – place open to everybody – don't want to see – projection on the other side of the street/river/recreation asset
- Denser housing options.
- Mixed-use buildings.
- No single-family housing.
- Space on the site to accommodate different uses. (Maybe a plaza)
- Safe covered bike parking. (can lock up bikes)
- No Airbnbs
- Mixed ownership/renting opportunities (ownership reserved to people, not companies)
- Development style similar to Amsterdam. Corner cafes.
- Affordable housing throughout and not concentrated in one area.
- Minimize motor traffic. Include areas or paths where pedestrians do not have to interact with cars.

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- This should be a place open to everybody. Businesses need outside money to succeed.
- Not a gated community. There shouldn't be a wall of tall buildings along Michigan Ave acting as a de facto gate.
- Indigenous people – artifacts
- Markers
- Homeless are on the site – context
- Water Street Millage
- Desires of 30 years ago – not necessarily relevant today
- Land back to indigenous community
- Public \$ → time and effort from residents here
- 20 years – going towards bankruptcy → need developable land
- 2 new developments – have plots – goal is to stay solvent – Commit provide the same services – pool in friends – goals to provide the city solvent – to provide services – to provide bigger spaces, commercial services, housing options
- More than 1 developer
- Historic context of the land has to be respected. Michigan Avenue needs a face and edge.
- Well designed, Include Huron River on both banks. Needs to be integrated.

## Appendix C

### Transcribed Responses from Participants

#### Needs and Wants Activity

Needs	In between	Wants
<b>Ward 1</b>		
Mixed income housing	High rises kept small – 5 stories to keep with downtown character	Grocery store – address food desert
River walk access	Use city residents for labor	Retail in addition to housing
Native plants	Disability in planning	Local businesses
No pollution → continued remediation (natural ways?)	Public learning opportunities on path	Recreation – splash pad, water, sports
Public transportation access	Highlight history	Public learning on path
Historical (indigenous people) include acknowledgement		Generate taxable revenue
		Multiple developers
<b>Ward 2</b>		
Medium density housing	Mixed use zoning throughout the area	Theater
Not a gated community	Space for micro-businesses	Performing arts space
Affordable stores	Riverfront café/bar	Entertainment venues
Useful stores (Everyday items)		ART (public, outdoor)
Grocery store		Public meeting space
Public bathrooms		Safe covered bike parking
Public restrooms		Homeless shelter (in City, not necessarily in development area)
B2B trail maintenance provisions		City Hall
Efficient green construction		City hall + police station
Renewable energy		
Green infrastructure (stormwater)		
Sustainable and not a load on utilities or departments		
Clear, easy, safe access across Mich. Ave.		

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Needs	In between	Wants
Better pedestrian bridge across river		
Parking structure		
Provisions against Airbnb/external ownership		
<b>Ward 3</b>		
Affordable housing	Mix of housing parcel sizes	Mixed use development along Michigan
Variety of unit sizes / income diversity	Single Family homes as an aspect of the project	Aesthetic vibe (look, fit, finish) reflective of Ypsi architecture history
Affordability to reflect needs for housing among all residents of Ypsi – need to do research on this	River activities Micro-Businesses	Fits character of the city
Affordable 50% + accessible 30% + (zero step entry) housing	Full-service grocer	Public park or recreation space
Not all rentals! Different ownership models – coops, condos	Grocery store	Dog park?
Housing for seniors who want to remain in Ypsi, but downsize	Public Recreation (i.e. multigenerational entertainment, like roller skate rink) etc...	Complete another part of the Olmstead plan for a border-to-border park along the river in Ypsi
Woonerf – style residential streets in the interior	Rec center or other indoor community space	Sustainable energy use
Mixed housing needs → for diverse families, elders, students, all integrated together, not segregated	Recreation building + recreational space	Dark sky compliant lighting
Provide housing types we don't currently have (condos)	City square/park + new admin building	Development that prioritizes people over cars
Semi – degree multi-family buildings + smaller commercial frontages	Abundant green space & not build all the way up to the river.	Safe pedestrian access @ park & grove tracks
Preserve architectural beauty + diversity of the City of Ypsi. No track housing	Park space (near river)	Parking, for visitors and occupants, well integrated -0 so not big or blocky buildings and such

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Needs	In between	Wants
Cherry Hill, store frontage @ street, parking in rear, different housing types, walkable, no huge stores, no snout houses, lots of common space	Walkable towards south – services that are needed but might be able to get to	Underground parking structure.
Retail that responds to Ypsi population	Emergency shelter	Eliminate parking minimums
Small businesses along Michigan Ave. to preserve walkability + pleasantness of Ypsi → extend it		No HOA's
At the scale → the whole thing needs to be a focal point – a presence – in its “footprint”		No tax breaks or HOA
Permaculture + recreate human spaces		Ideally, a Michigan developer – or development company hq'd in Michigan actually
Protect river access as public		
Preserve + increase along riverfront, common green space		
Large band of preserved trees around the B2B + where landfills were		
Respect the river, linear park, as many residents as possible should have a view (layered development height wise)		
Climate – Resilient Design, materials, functionality		
Flooding mitigation, plant for climate change, reducing <u>impact</u> , green roofs and trees preserved, flood mitigation downstream in case of land balancing		

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Needs	In between	Wants
Walking trails (open to public)		
Access by bridge or something south or via Catherine		
Preserve + increase walkability → connect to downtown		
Preserve walkability		
Walkability/bikeability		
Geared towards humans, not cars		
To work with MDOT now to work on traffic-calming up & down MI Ave. to make an attractive corridor		
NO TAX BREAKS		
Provide enough taxes for solvency		
Provide a tax-base that makes Ypsi sustainable for long term (AVOIDS BANKRUPTCY) H2O Street millage taken care of this land.		
Indigenous imputing honoring burial site and on land stolen – possibly markers + space preserved.		
Indigenous markers + preserve		
<b>Online Focus Group</b>		
Affordable housing/mixed use		Existing businesses to expand into as opposed to new business
Affordable housing/mixed use housing		Public bathroom/shower
Affordable housing		Kayak rental
Part of the City not separated off		Recreation for adults and kids
Park and green space		Entertainment

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Needs	In between	Wants
Preservation of some existing areas		Opportunity to connect to Water Works and boat launch & making a waterway corridor
Green space		Green space
Preservation of existing green space		Park
Green infrastructure for stormwater		As much remediation as possible
Walking path with water recreation and parking		ADA accessible
Direct access to public transportation with bus stop on Michigan Ave.		Parking
Sufficient parking		Safe space
24/7 safe space		Workshop for the youth development
Recreation passive and active		Homeless facilities
Infrastructure (water, sewer, roads)		
Equity in development in community benefits agreement		
Protection from gentrification		
Free accessible health care center		
Local hiring		
Recognition of sacred land, monuments		