

Economic Development 2020 Year End Report



Robert Gross
Economic Development Director

OVERVIEW

2020 began much like any other year, but quickly presented new challenges to our local economy. As the pandemic began to impact so many aspects of our lives, we found ourselves working with all businesses, big and small, to help keep their doors open. The City of Fremont was fortunate to find that most of their large manufacturers were deemed essential by the State of Ohio and were allowed to continue operation throughout the 6 week shut down. Despite restrictions to businesses caused by the pandemic, Fremont was still able to witness growth in their manufacturing sector and offer significant support to small businesses. While 2020 was a hard year in all facets, it made even clearer the strong will Fremont has to not only strive but to thrive in difficult times.

MANUFACTURING

Manufacturing throughout Fremont had a strong presence, with several new project announcements in 2020. The International Cushioning Company (ICC) purchased the old Fremont Plastics building on Cedar Street. This was a \$3.6 million dollar investment, with \$3.4 million of that being new payroll. Not only did this add 75 new jobs to the community, but occupied a building that had been sitting vacant.



First Choice Packaging announced a \$1.6 million dollar investment of new machinery and added 9 new jobs to the already 95 employees working for them.

Quality Steel announced they are adding a 40,000 square addition to their building at an investment cost of \$13.6 million dollars. In addition to the 75 new jobs Quality Steel added to their workforce in 2019, they will be adding 18 new jobs to their operation bringing their workforce to 182 employees.

The Freeman Company purchased new machinery at a cost of over a million dollars and added a commitment to add 10 new jobs.

These investments are signs of being a strong manufacturing community. The importance of manufacturing is often underestimated and can easily be overlooked. However, we value those companies that call Fremont home and work every day to help them grow and be successful.

SMALL BUSINESS

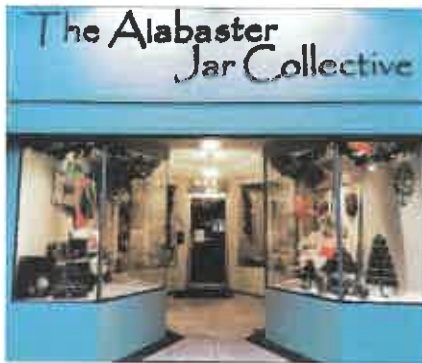
We have been working with several small businesses to help them survive during the pandemic. The FREMONT CARES Small Business Relief Program has helped City of Fremont small businesses and organizations with monetary relief caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Governor Mike DeWine announced a \$125 million dollar grant program to help small businesses.

The City administration has also assisted several locally owned businesses navigate the Small Business Administration website for the Paycheck Protection Program.

In addition, the City offered to those businesses utilizing the Revolving Loan Funds to temporarily suspend their monthly loan payments as an additional form of business relief.

Many of you have seen the construction of the new Chipotle Mexican Grill and Aspen Dental building on the east side of State Route 53. We look forward to the grand opening happening this spring. In addition, to the new Chipotle, Fremont will be getting a Dunkin Donuts. Preparation of the site has begun and construction should be completed this summer.



Lastly, we saw some of our small businesses relocate. The Party Starts Here moved to open in Downtown Fremont and Ideal Bakery moved to Oak Harbor Road. We proud ourselves.

The efforts of the City administration has helped some small business keep their doors open until better days arrive. It has helped family pay their bills and put food on the table. Small businesses have been there for us when we need sponsor for youth sports or various community events. This is now a time that we were there for them.

HOUSING

In an effort to attract new housing, the City has contracted with DiSalvo Development LLC to complete a comprehensive housing study for the City of Fremont. The purpose of the study is the identification of housing opportunities within the City of Fremont and strategies to facilitate housing development. The report is to focus on housing market conditions, demographic and economic analysis.

DiSalvo Development LLC completed the market research analysis and gathered information from the public through various surveys. In the Housing Opportunity Analysis, we discovered the City of Fremont has the oldest housing stock in the Northwest, Ohio and is among the lowest in housing production for more than a decade. A market clearly exist for all types of housing throughout the City of Fremont.

It is our intention to put this housing study in the hands of developers, investors and lenders with the goal of launching new housing development projects.

Knowing the need for new housing in Fremont, KF Ventures has begun construction of Sunset Meadows Housing Development in the 1900 block of E. State Street. This new subdivision will be developed in phases over the next few years with approximately 40 new homes being built in Phase 1. Starting in March, we'll begin to see the construction of new homes at Sunset Meadows as part of KF Ventures Phase 1 development. In addition, the City is expecting to see development of new senior housing along Fangboner Road. This new development, Sunny Acres, is anticipated to have a total of 34 units.



We are hopeful the Housing Opportunity Analysis for the City and the need to add to our workforce begins a housing boom unlike anything the City has ever seen before.

DESIGNATED OUTDOOR REFRESHMENT AREA (DORA)

This past fall Fremont City Council passed an ordinance (Ord. 2020-4037) creating a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA) for the City of Fremont. All of the necessary documentation was submitted to the Ohio Department of Commerce – Division of Liquor Control for approval, which was granted approval on October 27, 2020. This process required a significant amount of research, gathering public opinion and detailed work to complete the DORA application. The City of Fremont Administration team collaborated closely with the Parks Department and Downtown Fremont, Inc. to implement the DORA. The DORA became active on Friday, January 29, 2021 with 12 establishments participating. Information regarding DORA can be found at www.fremontohio.org/dora.

OUTDOOR AMPHITHEATER



As 2020 came to a close, our community saw the demolition of the Jackson Annex (223 Arch Street) and 310 Birchard Avenue. The site has been cleared of debris, and plans are underway for an outdoor amphitheater. The City Administration is working with the Rotary Club and Downtown Fremont Inc. to help raise funds and complete the design. We are expected to have a design to reveal to the public later this spring. The Rotary Club will be the primary fundraising organization for the amphitheater, with the City applying for various grants to help with the cost of construction.

FREMONT DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

In 1987, a new 501 (c) 3 was formed and called the Greater Fremont Industrial Park, Inc. This non-profit organization was created to spur the creation and development of a new industrial park. They were successful in creating the Bark Creek Industrial Park, which is now almost full and home to several of Fremont's large manufacturing employers. Fast forward to 2020 and there is very little available manufacturing space left in Fremont. The decision was made to revive the dormant Greater Fremont Industrial Park, Inc. by renaming it the Fremont Development Corporation, Inc. (FDC) and creating a new Board of Trustees. The board consists of developers, bankers and real estate agents from around the area and has been meeting monthly. FDC is moving forward with plans to place an option on or acquire land for an industrial park in 2021.

CODIFIED ORDINANCES

There have been several steps forward in 2020 in terms of codified ordinances. The City of Fremont Codified Ordinances had not been updated in 40 years, so the Zoning Office and Poggemeyer Design Group worked towards making the ordinances current. There were many public meetings that included local developers and the economic development team to be sure that the updates were going to improve the developers' experience working with the City and make City processes user friendly. The update was presented to City Council and was ultimately passed on January 7, 2021.

Another positive step for Fremont, and all of Sandusky County, was the creation of a county wide building department. Previously, developers had to go through the permitting process at the state level, which was more expensive and very time consuming. Time is of the essence during commercial projects, so it was decided that it was in the best interest for all parties involved to make the process local. John Cheatham with SafeBuilt was hired as the Sandusky County Building Inspector and has an office locally in Fremont.

Fremont is heading into year four of the Vacant and Abandoned Building (VAB) registry, which began in 2017. It has proven to be successful in helping the city combat slum and blight on commercial and industrial properties by financially incentivizing property owners to sell or fix up their vacant properties. Since its inception, the VAB has expedited the demolishing of 3 buildings and has assisted 3 others in becoming occupied, while 9 buildings are still active on the registry.

LOOKING FORWARD

We are looking forward to continuing the successes found from 2020 into 2021 and improve upon the positive momentum felt all over Fremont. In the next year FDC is going to work towards securing land to create a new industrial park. The Sandusky County Building Department will fully kick off and assist commercial developers with an expedited and less costly permitting process. There will be many new homes built over the next year and we look forward to offering our residents a new housing option as well as hopefully attract new residents to Fremont. In the next few months we will have a design for the outdoor amphitheater and will be able to see DORA in full effect in the downtown area. It is always exciting to see growth and development but it is even more so when the entire world is experiencing hardships due to a global pandemic. The momentum we are carrying forward is significant and Fremont is heading towards great things in the near future.

