



Economic Development Plan



I. Introduction

A. Purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of the City of Harrison's Economic Development Strategy is to provide a clear framework for how the community will support growth, investment, and quality of life. This plan identifies Harrison's opportunities and challenges, outlines specific goals and actions, and highlights the tools and partnerships the City will use to achieve results.

The strategy is designed to:

- Guide redevelopment and reinvestment in key areas of the City.
- Address housing shortages and encourage a broader mix of housing options.
- Strengthen downtown and corridor vitality through business attraction and retention.
- Expand recreational and placemaking assets that contribute to community pride and tourism.
- Leverage local, regional, and state partnerships to maximize impact.
- Ensure transparency and accountability by reporting progress annually through the Planning Commission's Annual Report to City Council.

This document is not intended to sit on a shelf. It is a living framework that can be updated as projects are completed, new opportunities arise, or community needs shift. By keeping the plan action-oriented and flexible, Harrison positions itself as a ready partner for residents, businesses, and investors.

B. Recent Community Investments

Over the past several years, Harrison has secured major public and private investments that demonstrate the community's momentum. Highlights include:

- \$1.33 million in park improvements funded through the DNR Spark Grant and Community Center Grant, which added pickleball courts, an ADA playscape, new restrooms and concessions, and ADA compliant trail connections. The City also completed the Phelps Nature Trail and expanded use of Town Square for community events.

- \$245,000 investment by the DDA to construct a downtown parking lot, now used for food trucks, the Street Fair, and other public events.
- More than \$250,000 in grants for the Harrison Business Hub and Venue on Main, creating coworking and kitchen space for entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and events.
- Housing investment on Grant Street, where four duplexes were quickly leased upon completion, supported in part by a Michigan Neighborhood Grant.
- \$3.4 million USDA-funded water project completed, repainting towers, replacing mains, and beginning lead service line replacement.
- \$6 million USDA-funded sewer project underway, improving lagoons and sprinkler systems, abandoning an aging lift station, and transitioning some residents to grinder pumps.
- More than \$50,000 annually dedicated to blight remediation, including enforcement, nuisance abatement, and cleanup activities.

C. Housing Shortages and Community Needs

Like many small communities in Michigan, Harrison faces a significant shortage of available housing. Vacancy rates remain near zero, and new units are often leased as quickly as they are completed. The recent construction of four duplexes on Grant Street is an example: every unit was filled immediately, demonstrating unmet demand for additional rental and market-rate housing.

The City also partnered with a developer who received a Michigan Neighborhood Grant to support that project. While the grant required that some units be leased to voucher-holding tenants, the developer reported that market-rate units filled more quickly than subsidized units. This outcome highlights the depth of demand for quality, attainable housing at different price points, especially for working families and seniors.

Recognizing this challenge, the City has made housing a top priority. Through a grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Harrison began a comprehensive Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance update in 2023, with completion expected by the end of 2025. This process will add new permitted housing types, allow Accessory Dwelling Units in select neighborhoods, and modernize zoning to encourage a wider range of residential options.

Housing also remains the central focus of the Harrison Area Economic Development Corporation (HAEDCO), which owns property dedicated to residential development. HAEDCO is particularly interested in attracting senior cottages, assisted living facilities, and other housing that can serve older residents, while also supporting market-rate and workforce housing.

The City's goal is to create a more balanced housing market that supports seniors, families, and new residents, while ensuring that housing remains both attainable and aligned with Harrison's small-town character.

D. Business Growth and Entrepreneurship

Harrison has experienced meaningful business growth in recent years, strengthening both the downtown and commercial corridors. National brands such as Taco Bell, Tractor Supply, and Biggby Coffee have chosen Harrison as a location, while new independent shops and restaurants have added variety and vitality to the local economy. This combination of chain investment and small-business entrepreneurship reflects growing confidence in the community.

Supporting local business remains a priority for the City and the Downtown Development Authority. The DDA continues to operate a façade improvement grant program that encourages reinvestment in downtown buildings, improving curb appeal and supporting long-term commercial activity. The Harrison Business Hub and Venue on Main, supported through more than \$250,000 in grant funding, provide shared workspace, commercial kitchen facilities, and event space that benefit entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and small businesses.

Looking forward, the DDA has expressed interest in purchasing and redeveloping a downtown building to provide leasable space for businesses, ensuring that new ventures have access to affordable, well-located properties. Together, these efforts demonstrate Harrison's commitment to creating an environment where businesses of all sizes can succeed.

E. Community Assets and Quality of Life

Harrison's identity is rooted in its natural amenities and recreational opportunities. Branded as "20 Lakes in 20 Minutes," the community offers abundant access to fishing, boating, camping, and outdoor exploration. Regional assets such as Snow Snake Ski Mountain, three golf courses, Wilson State Park, and multiple campgrounds bring visitors year-round and support a strong tourism economy.

Within the City, continued investment in parks and facilities has strengthened Harrison's reputation as a welcoming place for families and visitors. Town Square has become a community hub through events like Friday Night Delights and partnerships with local organizations, while new recreation projects focus on accessibility and inclusive design. Looking ahead, improvements to Saxton Landing and Budd Lake access, including ADA-compliant features such as a kayak launch, pavilion, and upgraded boat launch facilities, will expand opportunities for residents and visitors to connect with Harrison's natural environment.

Community events also contribute to quality of life and economic vitality. Longstanding traditions like the Harrison Street Fair have grown, while new events such as Jeep the Budd attract regional audiences. By leveraging its outdoor resources and community programming, Harrison continues to enhance its quality of life while positioning itself as a destination for recreation and investment.

F. Partnerships and Collaboration

Harrison's success in economic development depends on collaboration with strong local and regional partners. Locally, the Downtown Development Authority invests in small business support, events, and property improvements. The Harrison District Library strengthens downtown vitality through programming and partnerships that draw residents and visitors alike. The Harrison Area Economic Development Corporation (HAEDCO) plays a key role by preparing property for new housing and exploring opportunities for senior living, workforce housing, and other residential needs. The City also partners with Hayes Township on shared infrastructure planning and long-term growth opportunities.

The City continues to work with MiWorks Region 7B to connect residents with job training and employment opportunities. At the regional and state level, Harrison collaborates with the Middle Michigan Development Corporation, Central Michigan University Research Corporation, and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to pursue funding, redevelopment opportunities, and business attraction. The Harrison Area Chamber of Commerce also supports events and promotions that benefit local businesses.

These partnerships expand Harrison's capacity to deliver projects, leverage funding, and maintain a strong network of support for housing, business development, and community vitality.

II. Community Profile & Demographics

Understanding Harrison's population, workforce, and housing conditions is essential for shaping effective economic development strategies.

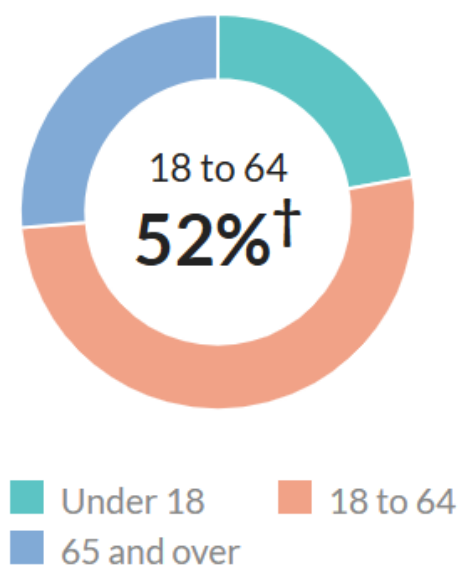
Demographic and economic data provide a snapshot of current opportunities and challenges, and help identify the types of investment and policy decisions that will best serve the community.

The following subsections highlight key trends in population, income, education, housing, and employment. These indicators are paired with local context to explain how they influence Harrison's economic development goals. Graphs and tables are included where available to illustrate the data clearly.

A. Population Trends

Harrison's population has remained relatively stable over the past two decades, with only modest shifts that mirror broader rural Michigan trends. The official 2020 Census recorded 2,150 residents, and the most recent ACS estimate places the 2023 population at 2,275. While this represents a slight increase since 2020, it also reflects a 1.6 percent decline from 2022 to 2023.

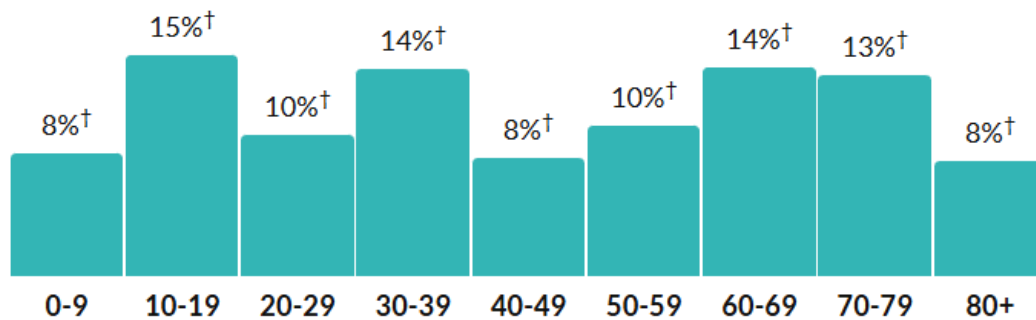
Population by age category



The city's median age of 44.8 years is higher than both the state (40.1) and national (38.9) averages, highlighting Harrison's older demographic profile. Roughly 26 percent of residents are under 18, 52 percent are working-age adults (18–64), and 22 percent are 65 or older.

This age breakdown underscores the dual character of the City's resident base: a significant number of retirees balanced against a younger generation of families and workers. Planning for housing, services, and workforce development must account for both.

Population by age range

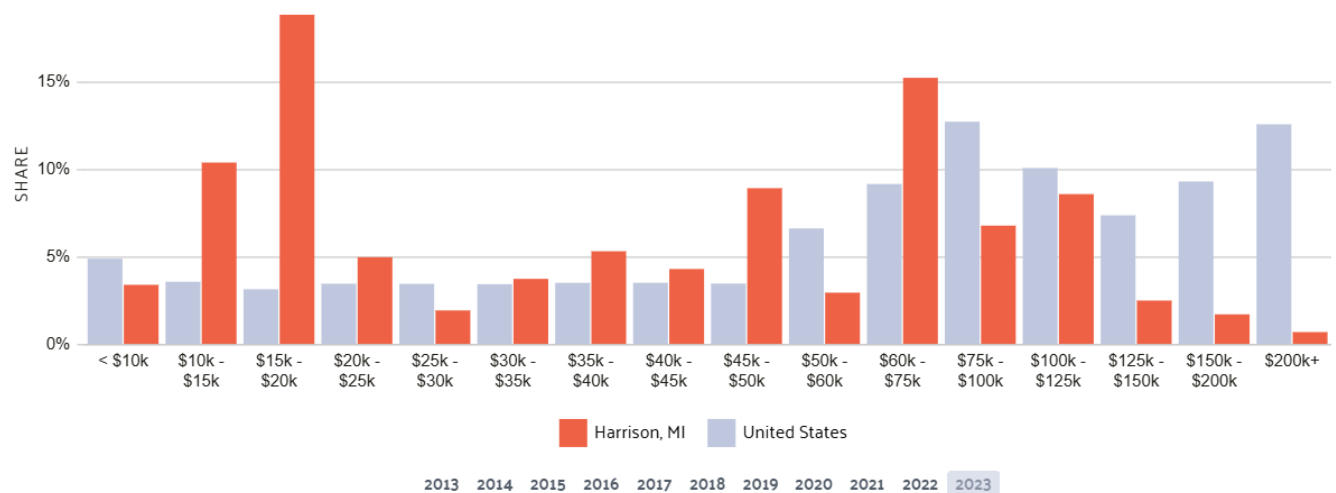


Looking forward, Harrison's population is expected to remain steady rather than experience dramatic growth or decline. This stability offers predictability for City planning but also highlights the importance of attracting new residents and supporting younger households to sustain school enrollment, local businesses, and the tax base.

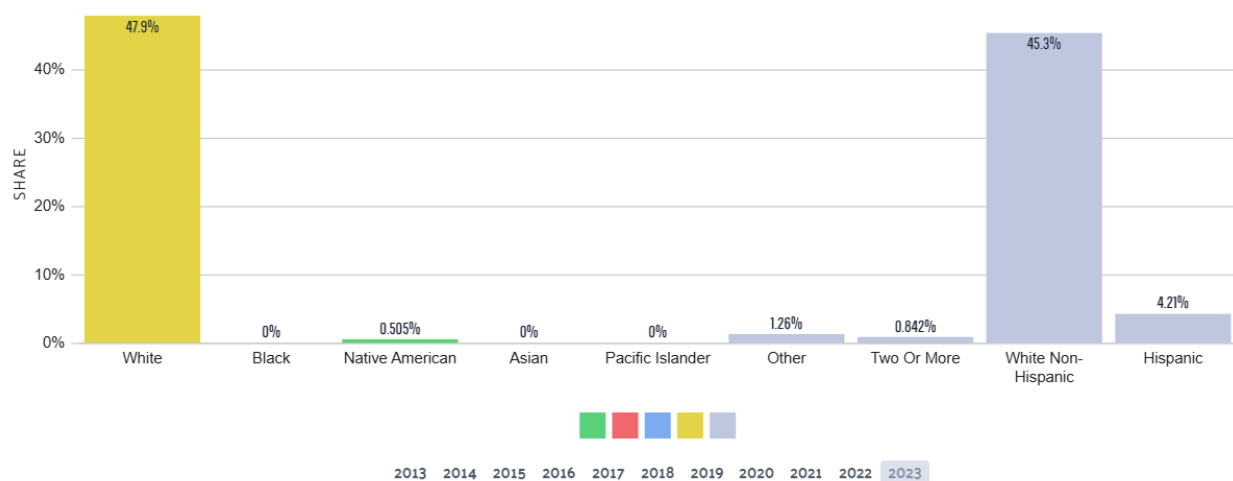
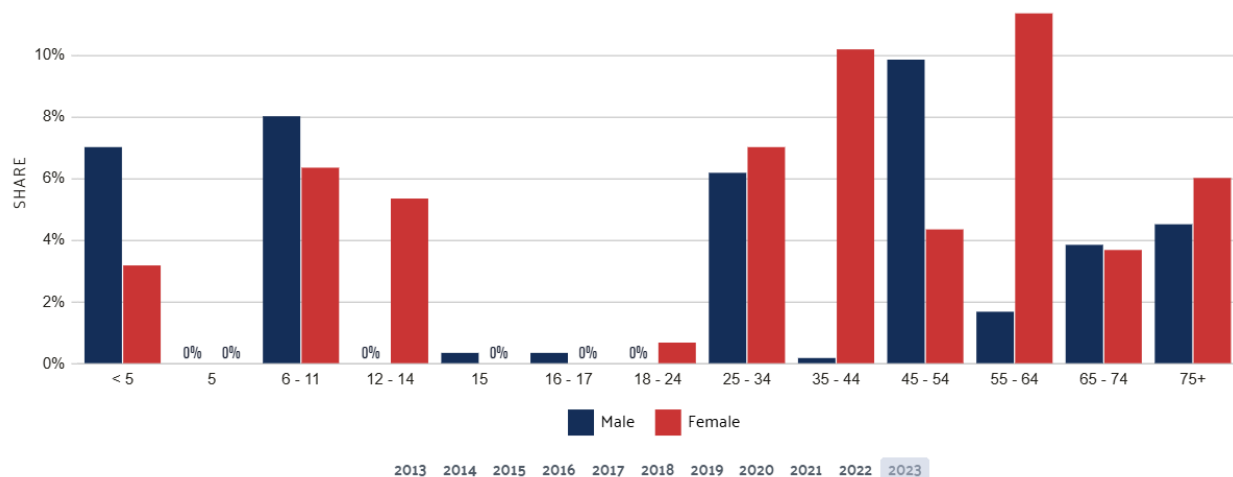
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2023 5-Year Estimates

B. Household and Income Characteristics

Harrison's 887 households average 2.4 persons each. In 2023, the city's median household income was \$40,888, a 13.8 percent increase from the prior year. Despite this gain, Harrison's median remains well below the state median of \$71,149 and the national median of \$75,149, highlighting ongoing affordability challenges for local families. The chart below shows how household incomes in Harrison compare to national levels.

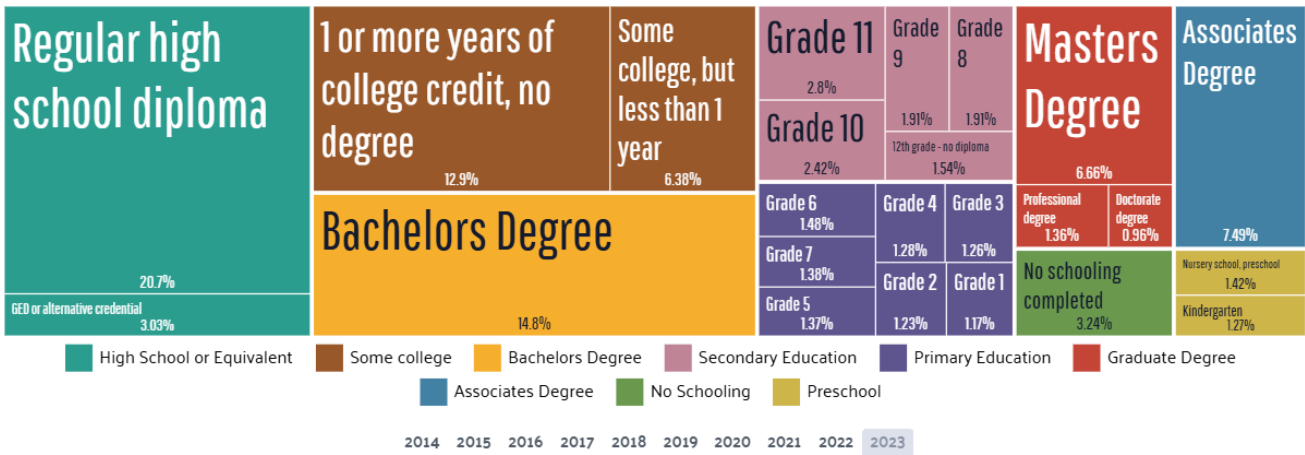


Poverty remains a significant challenge. In 2023, an estimated 28.2 percent of residents lived below the poverty line, more than double the national rate of 12.4 percent. Children under 18 experience the highest levels of poverty, with over one-third living in households below the poverty threshold. Seniors are also affected, with nearly one in five age 65 or older in poverty. The charts below show how poverty in Harrison is concentrated among children and also highlight differences by race and ethnicity.



Educational attainment also influences household income and employment prospects. About 87 percent of residents age 25 and older hold at least a high school diploma, but only 11 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to nearly 32 percent statewide. This gap in higher education levels limits access to professional and technical employment opportunities, but it

also highlights the importance of Harrison’s long-standing Career and Technical Education programs, which prepare students for skilled trades and practical careers. The following charts highlight educational attainment levels among Harrison residents, showing both the distribution of highest degrees earned and the demographic differences that affect workforce readiness.

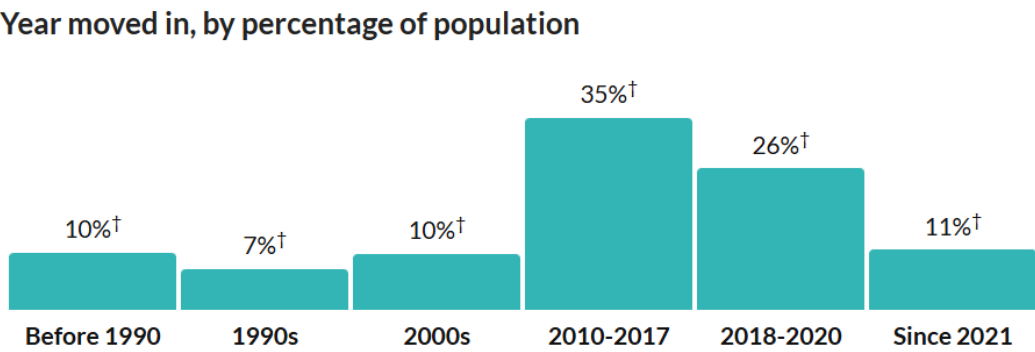


Together, these household and income characteristics show both progress and persistent challenges. Rising incomes indicate improvement, but high poverty rates and lower levels of educational attainment emphasize the need for strategies that focus on workforce training, housing affordability, and family-supporting jobs.

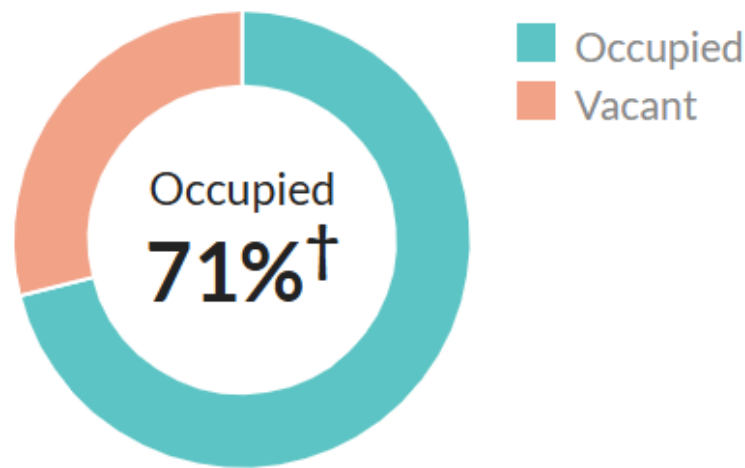
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2023 5-Year Estimates

C. Housing Stock and Vacancy Rates

Harrison’s housing tenure reflects a modestly stable owner base, with about 60 percent of homes owner-occupied and 40 percent renter-occupied. This mix shows that while many residents have long-term ties to the community, rental housing continues to play an important role for younger families, seniors, and those with lower incomes.



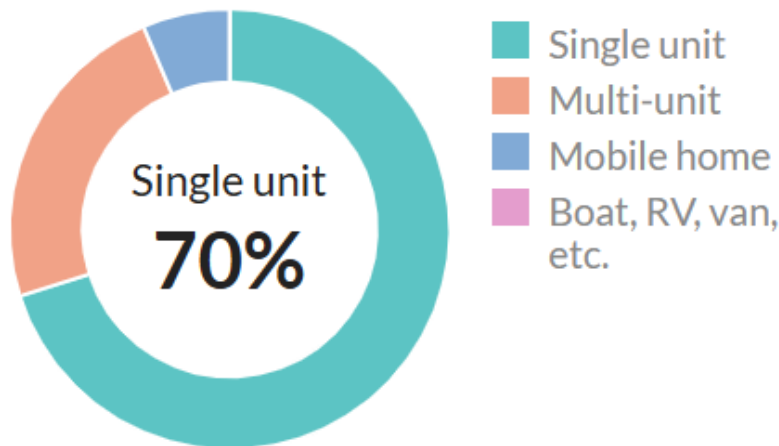
Occupied vs. Vacant



Vacancy is another defining characteristic of the housing market. In 2023, 29 percent of all housing units were classified as vacant, compared to 71 percent occupied. While some of these vacancies reflect the City’s recreational housing market and seasonal use, the figure underscores the challenge of making full use of existing housing stock.

In terms of structure, Harrison’s housing stock is dominated by single-unit homes, which make up about 70 percent of all structures. Smaller portions consist of mobile homes and limited multi-family properties. This lack of variety restricts housing options for residents seeking smaller units, senior-friendly housing, or apartments.

Types of structure



Taken together, these characteristics show that while Harrison offers affordable entry points for homeownership, the community faces challenges in diversifying housing types and reducing persistent vacancies. Expanding housing options will be essential to meeting the needs of

both current residents and new households.

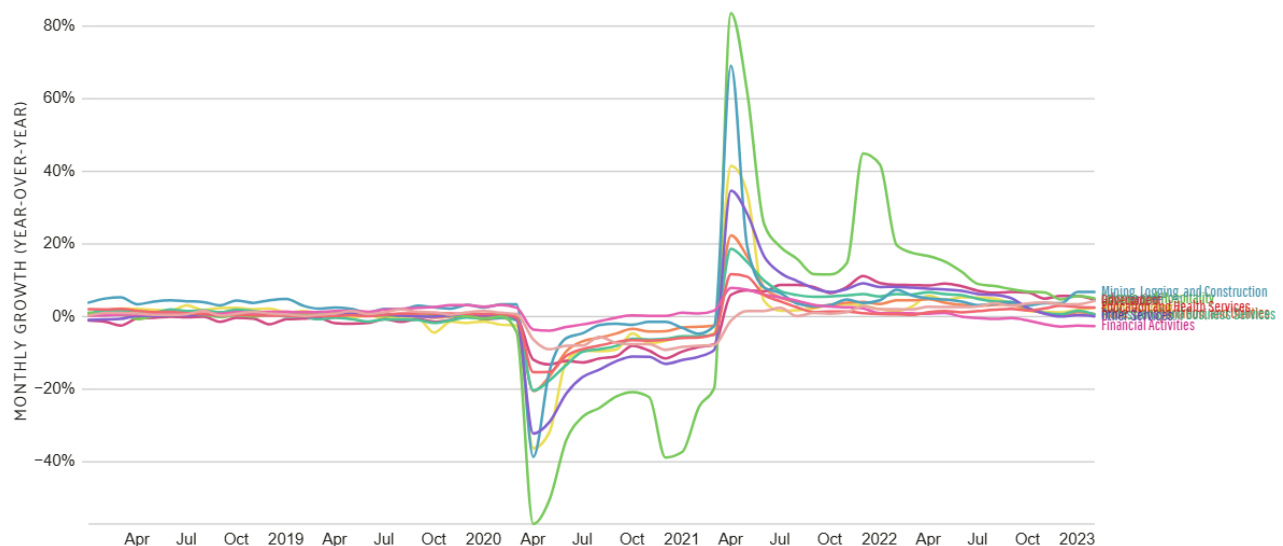
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2023 5-Year Estimates

D. Employment and Industry Snapshot

Harrison's employment base is concentrated in service-related occupations, with food preparation and serving, retail trade, and education among the leading sectors. These industries provide accessible entry-level jobs but are often lower-wage and more vulnerable to seasonal swings. Higher-paying opportunities are limited, though transportation, warehousing, and construction remain important for local growth.

Municipal and government-related employment also plays a prominent role in the local economy. As the county seat, Harrison hosts Clare County's government offices, the jail, the road commission, county transit services, and a large share of the area's public safety jobs, including the police department. Harrison Community Schools further add to the concentration of public-sector positions. Together, these institutions provide a stabilizing employment base and help anchor the local economy.

The chart below highlights year-over-year employment growth across industries, showing the sharp COVID-era declines in 2020, followed by a rebound in 2021 and stabilization in subsequent years. While most industries have returned to steady patterns, volatility in accommodation and food services underscores the City's reliance on tourism and hospitality.

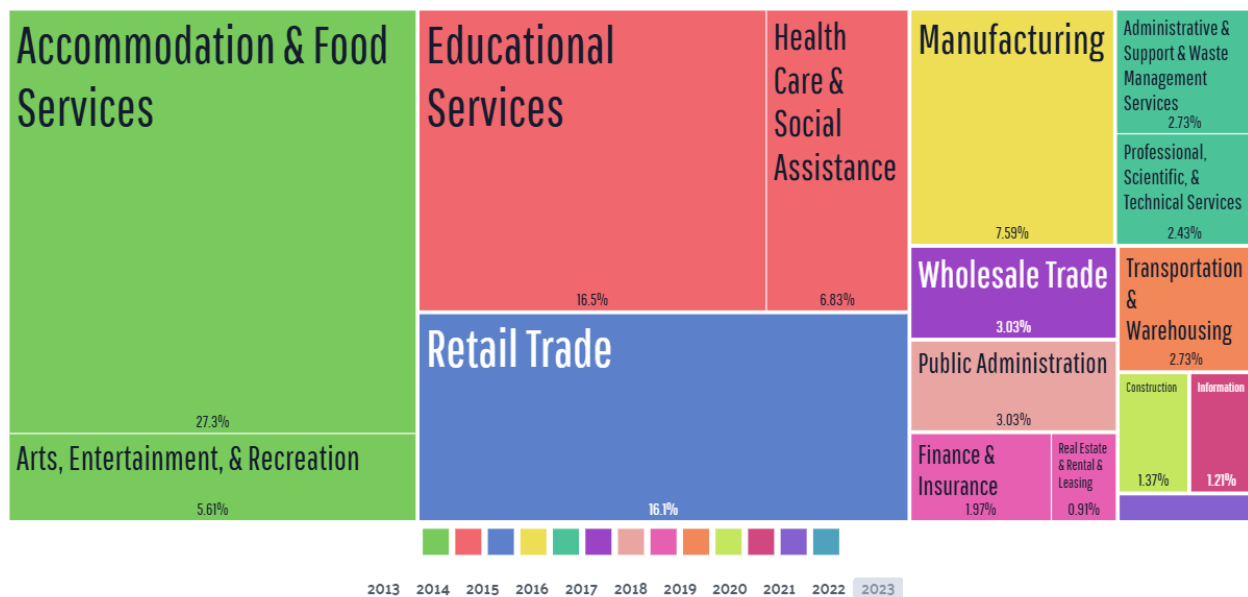


Taken together, these trends demonstrate both strengths and vulnerabilities. Harrison benefits from the stability of public-sector jobs and its role as a county hub, but continued reliance on lower-wage service industries underscores the importance of diversifying the economy, expanding

workforce readiness for higher-paying occupations, and reducing reliance on seasonal fluctuations.

E. Workforce and Education Pipeline

Harrison's workforce reflects the strengths and limitations of a small rural economy. The majority of jobs are concentrated in service-related industries such as accommodation and food services (27.3 percent), retail trade (16.1 percent), and education (16.5 percent). These sectors provide accessible employment opportunities but are generally lower wage and more vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations. Health care, manufacturing, and public administration together add another 17 percent, underscoring the importance of both service and government jobs to the community.



The chart above illustrates this composition clearly: large green and blue blocks highlight the dominance of service industries, while smaller segments show the limited scale of professional, technical, and higher-wage industries. This concentration highlights the importance of programs that expand training pathways and diversify career options.

To support workforce readiness, career pathways begin as early as high school through the Harrison Community Schools' Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. These provide students with exposure to fields such as health care, hospitality, agriculture, welding, and computer science. From there, local

graduates have direct access to postsecondary education and training opportunities at Mid Michigan College and Central Michigan University, both located nearby.

The City has also strengthened its role in business development by partnering with the Middle Michigan Development Corporation (MMDC), the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and the Central Michigan University Research Corporation (CMURC). These partnerships have expanded the City's Business Hub into a co-working and incubator space. With a commercial kitchen and shared office facilities, the Hub provides entrepreneurs with resources from SBDC, MMDC, and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), as well as their first space to launch or grow operations. Several businesses have successfully graduated from the Hub into permanent storefronts, underscoring its role as a pipeline for local business growth.

In addition, MiWorks Region 7B supports Harrison residents by offering job placement, training, and skill-building programs tailored to regional labor market needs. Together, these initiatives link education, workforce training, and entrepreneurial support, ensuring that Harrison's workforce remains adaptable while creating pathways for long-term economic diversification.

III. Target Redevelopment Sites

A. Purpose of Redevelopment Sites

Harrison identifies target redevelopment sites as a tool for focusing investment, attracting developers, and ensuring that underutilized properties are reactivated in ways that benefit the community. These sites highlight properties with potential for housing, commercial, or mixed-use development, many of which align with the City's NEZ and RHEC districts. Each year, the City will update this section to reflect progress, removing sites that have been redeveloped and adding new priorities as they emerge. This process allows Harrison to demonstrate measurable progress toward its housing and economic development goals.

B. Priority Development Sites

The City has identified several key sites suited for housing and mixed-use investment. These locations offer strong potential for growth through zoning alignment, infrastructure access, and available incentives.

Priority Site One – 945 Old County Farm Street

Parcel ID: 070-028-400-44

Zoning (planned): R-4 Mixed Use Residential (rezoning from R-3 in 2025)

Acreage: 51.35 acres (approx. 49 usable)

Utilities: City water/sewer (8"), Consumers Energy electric, DTE gas, Spectrum fiber/telecom

Incentives: Located in NEZ and RHEC districts; Redevelopment Ready Community; Opportunity Zone; disadvantaged area designation



Development Potential:

This is the City's largest development-ready site, with full utilities, nearby schools and downtown access, and flexible zoning. It can support single-family, townhomes, multifamily, senior or assisted living, and neighborhood-scale mixed-use. Incentives through the NEZ and RHEC districts help reduce costs, while the acreage allows for phased build-out and long-term growth.

Priority Site Two – 161 East Beech Street (Former Rite Aid)

Parcel ID: 070-812-007-00

Zoning: C-2 Commercial

Acreage: 0.52 acres (building: ±7,930 sq. ft.)

Utilities: Full municipal utilities; corner site with dual street access

Incentives: Eligible for façade improvement program; central location within primary commercial corridor



Development Potential:

This property offers a high-profile corner site with excellent visibility and traffic counts at the edge of downtown. The building's size and layout make it well-suited for adaptive reuse as a recreation center, gym, medical office, or large-format retail. On-site parking and access from two streets enhance convenience for customers and employees. Its position within the City's main commercial corridor makes it an anchor opportunity for new investment, strengthening nearby businesses and supporting downtown vibrancy.

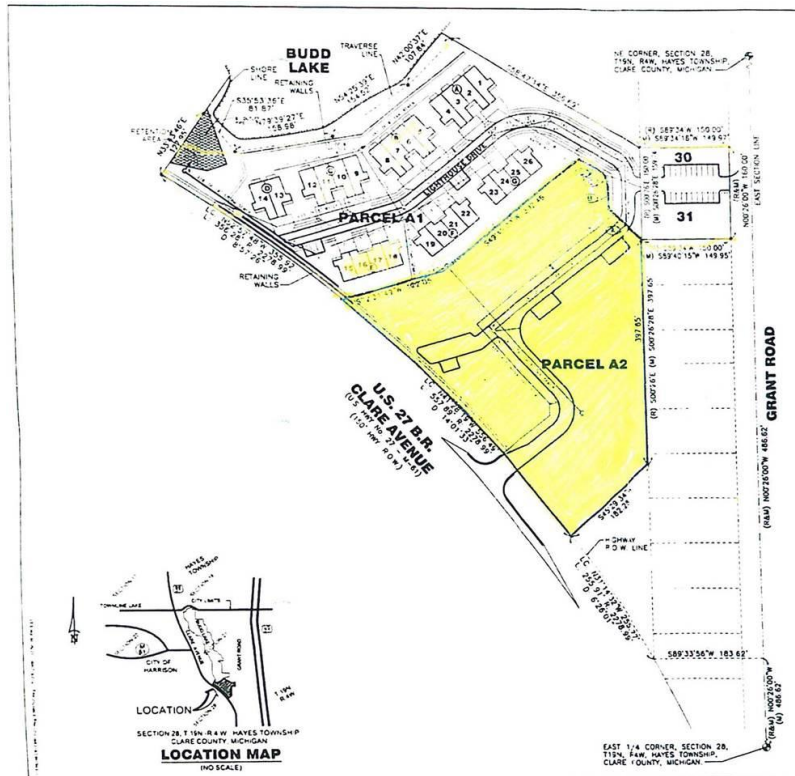
Priority Site Three – N. Clare Avenue (3.97 Acres)

Parcel ID: 070-028-203-17

Zoning: R-2 Residential

Acreage: 3.97 acres (paved and serviced lot)

Utilities: All underground and installed (city water, sewer, storm drains, natural gas, electric, phone, internet)



Development Potential:

This site offers a rare opportunity for immediate development with all utilities and infrastructure already in place. While zoned R-2, its size and location make it suitable for duplexes, townhomes, or a potential hotel with supporting residential uses. Situated across from a grocery store and gas station and overlooking Budd Lake, the property benefits from visibility, convenience, and strong market potential for both housing and hospitality.

IV. Goals and Objectives

The City of Harrison's economic development goals provide a focused and attainable framework for growth. These goals respond directly to community needs and position Harrison as a place where people want to live, invest, and spend time.

A. Housing

Housing remains the top priority. The City will expand the supply and variety of homes by enabling duplexes, townhomes, senior cottages, and multifamily housing in appropriate districts, while also permitting Accessory Dwelling Units in select neighborhoods through the 2025 zoning update. Incentives such as the Neighborhood Enterprise Zone and Residential Housing Exemption programs will reduce development costs and encourage a steady pipeline of projects. Harrison's role is to capture residential demand generated across the region, offering a high quality of life and a strong small-town identity while ensuring that new residents also support local stores, restaurants, and services.

B. Commercial and Corridors

Commercial and corridor development is the second focus. Harrison will strengthen its downtown, US-27 corridor, and M-61/First Street corridor by attracting retail, recreation, and hospitality uses that serve both residents and visitors. Vacant and underutilized properties in these areas present immediate opportunities for adaptive reuse and reinvestment. The City has already streamlined zoning approvals so that minor adjustments can be handled administratively, making Harrison one of the most efficient places in the region to launch or expand a business. Filling empty storefronts and repurposing large-format sites will broaden the commercial base, grow the tax roll, and increase day-to-day services for the community.

C. Downtown Vibrancy and Third Places

Downtown vibrancy is a central goal. Harrison lacks traditional gathering places such as bars, restaurants, and entertainment venues that help anchor community life. The City will work to attract more of these "third places" where residents and visitors can socialize, enjoy dining or live music, and contribute to a more active downtown. Redevelopment District Authority liquor licenses provide one pathway for interested businesses, but the broader objective is to create a mix of destinations that bring people into downtown in the evenings and on weekends. By combining business recruitment with

expanded programming, Harrison will build a downtown that is both livelier and more resilient.

D. Placemaking and Recreation

Placemaking remains a defining element of Harrison's strategy. The City has already invested in new recreational opportunities, including the addition of four pickleball courts that draw dozens of players daily. Events in City parks have also expanded, providing regular opportunities for residents and visitors to gather. Moving forward, the City will continue to improve underutilized spaces, grow the number and quality of community events, and connect downtown activity with recreational amenities. By linking recreation and placemaking to its "20 Lakes in 20 Minutes" identity, Harrison strengthens both quality of life for residents and its appeal as a regional destination.

E. Partnerships and Accountability

Partnerships are essential to achieving these goals. The City will continue to work closely with HAEDCO, the Downtown Development Authority, the Chamber of Commerce, and regional and state organizations such as MMDC, MiWorks, CMURC, and MEDC. These collaborations will ensure access to funding, technical support, and marketing opportunities. To maintain accountability, progress will be reported annually to City Council through the Planning Commission's report, which will track housing units approved and completed, new businesses recruited, RDA licenses obtained, façade improvements awarded, and event attendance.

V. Implementation Strategy

Achieving Harrison's economic development goals requires a clear, practical approach that connects vision to action. The City will rely on incentive programs, streamlined zoning, strong partnerships, and consistent reporting to ensure measurable progress.

A. Local Incentives and Tools

The City of Harrison offers a suite of incentives to support both new and existing businesses. The façade improvement grant program encourages reinvestment in downtown storefronts, enhancing curb appeal and strengthening long-term viability. Businesses have also found significant success through the Match on Main program, which the City actively promotes and supports in partnership with MMDC. Harrison regularly

encourages local businesses to apply, resulting in frequent submissions and competitive awards.

Beyond grants, the City's Business Hub provides direct support for entrepreneurs and startups. The Hub offers coworking space, a shared commercial kitchen, and rental retail space when available. To help businesses establish themselves, the City offers tiered rental rates on long-term spaces, starting below market rent and gradually increasing over three months. This structure gives entrepreneurs time to build clientele and stabilize operations before transitioning to full rent. Collectively, these incentives position Harrison as both supportive and pragmatic, lowering the barriers for business growth.

B. Partnerships and Collaboration

Partnerships remain central to implementation. The City will continue working closely with HAEDCO, the Downtown Development Authority, and the Chamber of Commerce to align local initiatives. At the regional level, Harrison's collaboration with the Middle Michigan Development Corporation (MMDC) and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) plays a vital role. These organizations regularly meet with clients in the Harrison Business Hub, providing technical support, financial planning, and mentoring. This partnership allows businesses to launch in the Hub, test the market, and eventually move into permanent storefronts, helping fill vacant buildings downtown and along the City's corridors.

C. Marketing and Site Promotion

The City will continue to strengthen its marketing and property promotion efforts by working directly with local realtors to provide zoning information, permitted uses, and streamlined review details. Realtors are an important partner in bringing prospective investors to Harrison, and the City will ensure they have the tools to actively market available sites. MMDC will continue to lead broader site marketing efforts for HAEDCO's development-ready property, while the DDA promotes Harrison as a whole through general marketing campaigns, business engagement, and events. Together, these efforts ensure that available spaces are actively promoted and that Harrison maintains a positive image as an investment-ready community.

D. Infrastructure and Zoning Readiness

A strong development environment depends on reliable infrastructure and modern zoning. The City has invested in water and sewer systems through

multi-million-dollar USDA projects, ensuring capacity for new housing and commercial development. A comprehensive zoning update, scheduled for completion in 2025, will expand housing options, introduce Accessory Dwelling Units in select areas, and simplify approvals for businesses. Minor site plan adjustments and sign permits will continue to be handled administratively, reducing delays and positioning Harrison as one of the most efficient development review environments in the region.

E. Tracking and Accountability

To ensure transparency, the City will track and report progress annually through the Planning Commission's report to City Council. Metrics will include new housing units approved and completed, businesses recruited, façade improvements awarded, incentive-supported projects advanced, and event attendance. This reporting process provides accountability and allows for timely adjustments as conditions change, ensuring the plan remains a living framework rather than a static document.

VI. Conclusion and Next Steps

The City of Harrison's Economic Development Plan sets a clear path for housing growth, business development, downtown vibrancy, and quality of life improvements. By combining incentive tools, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to accountability, the City positions itself as a proactive and supportive partner for residents, businesses, and investors.

This plan is not intended to remain static. The Planning Commission will report annually to City Council on progress, ensuring that goals remain current and strategies adapt to changing conditions. As redevelopment sites are activated, new opportunities will be added, keeping the plan responsive and forward-looking.

Through consistent effort, collaboration, and community engagement, Harrison will continue building a stronger, more vibrant future for its residents and its regional role in Mid-Michigan.