Investing in our Downtowns
The Michigan Municipal League strongly believes that investing in our communities and downtowns is the key to Michigan’s economic growth. Research continues to show that “place” matters more than ever, as an increasingly mobile workforce seeks out places and neighborhoods before finding jobs and opening up businesses.

If you were describing to someone why you like where you live, what would be some of the first things that come to your mind? Would it be a particular event? A favorite coffee shop? Recreational opportunities? Would it also include reminiscing about a lost favorite restaurant, or a vanished corner store?

Over the past several decades, it has been a challenge to keep the core of our downtowns vibrant and people connected, as sprawl and big box retail have left the core of many communities struggling.

The city of West Branch recognizes the importance of bringing people together, of creating a destination where people can shop, enjoy a great restaurant experience and attend events with family and friends. With this in mind, a group of business owners gathered to discuss ways to actively encourage more engagement in their downtown while at the same time celebrating what is unique to their area.

The result? Fabulous Fridays was born, a weekly event throughout the summer that celebrates its culture and heritage by hosting different themed events every week during the summer. Attended by thousands, it has become a catalyst for spurring other events and boosting downtown businesses annually, by 10 to 15 percent. Investing in our downtowns not only reaps economic benefits, but creates that “sense of place” where people can gather and feel proud of their community.
**Why we need to invest in our downtowns**

- Reaps economic benefits by attracting businesses to a quality of life; home values increase, tax dollars stay in the community.
- Creates opportunities for social interaction through walkability.
- Incentivizes property owners to rehabilitate and preserve historic buildings in the community.
- Encourages civic engagement at all levels.
- Creates a feeling of pride and belonging; creates a sense of place.

**What does it take?**

- Educate the community on why investing in downtown is so important.
- Reach out and develop public/private partnerships.
- Identify the leaders and stakeholders in your community.
- Engage the community.
- Identify what defines your community (heritage, people, products, etc.) and celebrate it!
- Identify funding.
- Think regionally to better leverage resources.
- Eliminate the phrase “It can’t be done”!