

the review

July / August 2023

the official magazine of the  michigan municipal league

MUSKEGON HEIGHTS

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Muskegon Heights change agents interim manager Melvin Burns (left), Mayor Walter Watt (center), and DDA Chair Brad Hillary (right). The city is reinvigorating its downtown with the goal of bringing people back to live, work, and play.

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the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

Volume 96, Number 4

We love where you live.

The Michigan Municipal League is dedicated to making Michigan's communities better by thoughtfully innovating programs, energetically connecting ideas and people, actively serving members with resources and services, and passionately inspiring positive change for Michigan's greatest centers of potential: its communities.

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\$24 per year for six issues.
Payable in advance by check, money order,
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League. Phone 734-669-6371;
fax 734.669.4223 or mail new
subscription requests and checks to the
Michigan Municipal League, P.O. Box 7409,
Ann Arbor, MI 48107-7409.

The Review (ISSN 0026-2331) is published bi-monthly by the Michigan Municipal League,
1675 Green Rd, Ann Arbor, MI 48105-2530. Periodicals postage is paid at Ann Arbor MI. POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to THE REVIEW, 1675 Green Rd, ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2530.



Downtown Resurgence

Pop Quiz: What do all these famous movie scenes have in common?

Home Alone 2: After nabbing the Wet Bandits, Kevin McCallister makes his fondest wish come true in front of the Christmas tree in New York City's Rockefeller Center.

Mission: Impossible 6: Ethan Hunt leads police on a wild motorcycle chase going the wrong way around the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

Ghostbusters: The team use their proton packs to blast the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man as he rampages up Broadway to Columbus Circle in Midtown Manhattan.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off: Ferris ends his madcap tour of Chicago by lip-syncing *Danke Schoen* and *Twist and Shout* atop a hijacked float in the annual Von Steuben Day Parade.

Answer? Each is set in an iconic downtown or city center so recognizable and memorable, that the place itself plays a starring role right alongside the actors. In fact, can you imagine any of these scenes *without* that profound sense of place?

For centuries, downtowns have been the economic and cultural hub of our cities and villages. They are concentrated areas of commercial and civic activity that act as a catalyst to attract even more businesses, workers, residents, and visitors. The power of a city's identity resides there in its historic landmarks, public spaces, and cultural institutions.

If the city is a body built by people, then the downtown is its beating heart. Admittedly, it's a heart that's also *taken* a beating over the years . . . but it's still ticking and growing stronger again every day. Through the mid-20th century, downtowns reigned supreme, and it was impossible to imagine a city without one. But in the decades following the end of WWII, urban sprawl spawned strip malls and shopping centers, leaving vacant storefronts and blight at the city core.

Thankfully, we began to turn that around in recent years as the concept of placemaking took hold, drawing people back to city centers through the creation of inclusive public spaces that emphasized the identity and character of their local community. Across the nation and especially here in Michigan, downtowns became vibrant, revitalized places again.

Then the pandemic hit. The near-total shutdown of businesses and public institutions led to a dramatic decline in economic activity. But as the pandemic wore on, our most resilient downtowns began to adapt, implementing creative responses like outdoor dining and cultural events, and new infrastructure to encourage outdoor recreation.

As health mandates lifted and retail and restaurants reopened, downtowns continued their recovery by implementing incentives like tax breaks and grants to encourage even more activity to return.

Our downtowns aren't dying. Quite the opposite, in fact. According to the International Downtown Association, downtowns continue to be the driving economic and cultural force for our cities. Nationwide, downtowns deliver an average of 17 percent of a city's property tax revenue, 43 percent of its hotel tax revenue, and 12 percent of its sales tax revenue. They contain 12 percent of the citywide assessed land value, 25 percent of total employment, and 38 percent of the office space.

There are still many challenges ahead, of course, and the pandemic's long-term impact on downtowns remains unclear as the world continues to sort out its changed relationships to social, consumer, and work behaviors.

It's the League's mission to help Michigan's cities, villages, and urban townships find their way through those challenges and out the other side to a more sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive future for us all.

One way to do that is learning by example. In this issue we'll show you how Muskegon Heights reimaged its downtown, while an article on Sturgis demonstrates how events can help build a sense of place and identity. We'll also showcase successful downtown revitalizations in places like East Jordan and Ann Arbor. We'll also share some solid nuts-and-bolts expertise, like the Michigan Downtown Association (MDA) discussion on how to create and maintain a strong downtown.

We'll also talk about how people-friendly streets can and should be an intrinsic component to a vibrant and accessible downtown.

So how about it, Michigan? Let's forget all our troubles, forget all our cares . . . and go downtown again. The lights really *are* much brighter there.

Daniel P. Gilmartin

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The Importance of **STRONG** MICHIGAN DOWNTOWNS

By Dana Walker



Downtowns are multifunctional because they provide places to gather, shop, work, dine, live, worship, be entertained, and enjoy a variety of cultural offerings.

Welcome to Downtown

Picture yourself sitting on a bench in your favorite Michigan downtown. Do you see the family laughing in the park and the colorful shopping bags the pedestrians flash as they walk by? Perhaps you can hear the sound the bell makes announcing your entry at the bookstore or hear the floors creak under your steps as you browse the racks in the boutique housed in a historic building. Breathe deeply and you will smell the flowers that dot the sidewalks. Walking into the toy store you are greeted by name, and you order your 'usual' at the café. Take a bite of the chocolate chip cookie and savor the aroma of the freshly brewed coffee that warms your hand. Can you feel the pulse of your community sitting on that bench?

During your next visit to your favorite Michigan downtown, take a few minutes to observe all that is going on around you. What do you hear? What do you see? Who do you see? Take it all in.

Michigan Downtowns Are Economic Drivers

Downtowns are multifunctional because they provide places to gather, shop, work, dine, live, worship, be entertained, and enjoy a variety of cultural offerings. The concentration of buildings, dating from a variety of periods, forms a unique charm that has evolved over time and reflects the community's character. The compact footprint of downtown makes it a pedestrian-orientated district with buildings located in a manner that creates

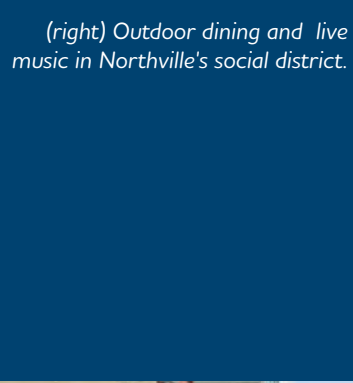
continuous facades set close to or on the property line with entry to buildings directly from sidewalks. Above all, downtown acts as the key defining feature of the community's overall sense of place.

In a nutshell, our Michigan downtowns serve as the social and economic center of our communities and downtown management is economic development. The downtown's walkability, infrastructure, events, small businesses, historic buildings, and amenities all contribute to the economic vitality of a community and region. It starts within the downtown.

The weekly farmers market or annual festival held in the park drives people downtown offering visitors a taste of the small businesses located within the district. Events bring people together, offering cultural experiences and a chance to exchange ideas.

Downtown also tells the story of who we are. Each one of the small business owners located within the district has a tale to tell. Whether it is the barber who cut your grandfather's hair and now cuts your son's or the young entrepreneur who just had her grand opening, the small businesses located on main street provide the narrative for the community.

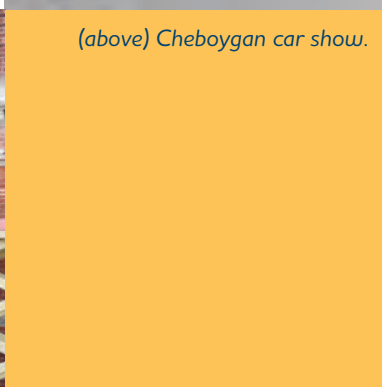
The buildings chronicle the history of the community and have their own story to tell. The architecture provides the backdrop for downtown while maintaining, and sometimes repurposing, the historic gems can increase the tax base which benefits downtown, the municipality, and the region.



Art, outdoor restaurant seating, an inviting streetscape, and well-designed public spaces help to complete downtown's immersive experience. These amenities invite creativity, expression, congregation, and socialization.

A vibrant downtown has a ripple effect that expands into neighborhoods, corridors, and the region. Vibrancy attracts visitors, residents, entrepreneurs, dreamers, investors, and developers.

Downtown offers a full experience—the sights, the sounds, the vibe, the people. Take it all in.



Having it All—Creating and Maintaining a Well-Rounded, Strong Downtown

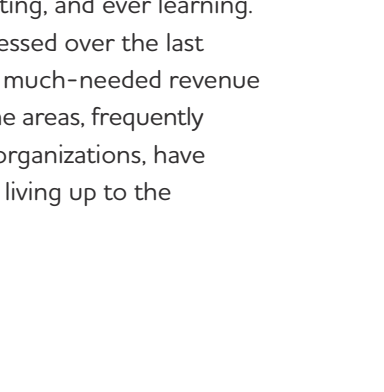
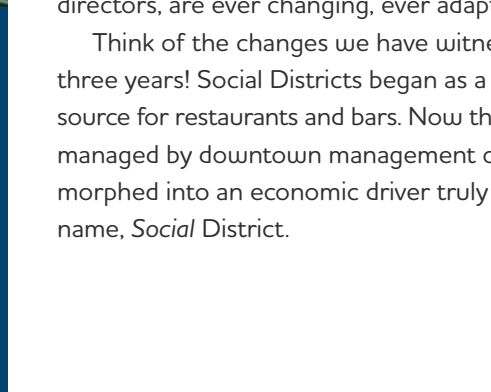
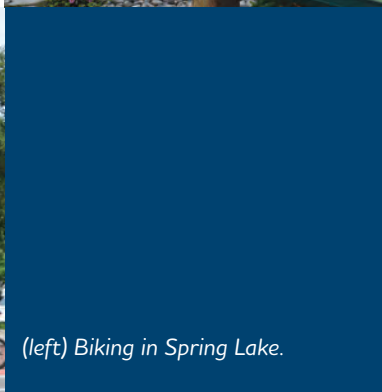
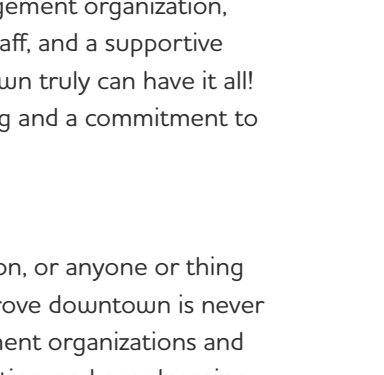
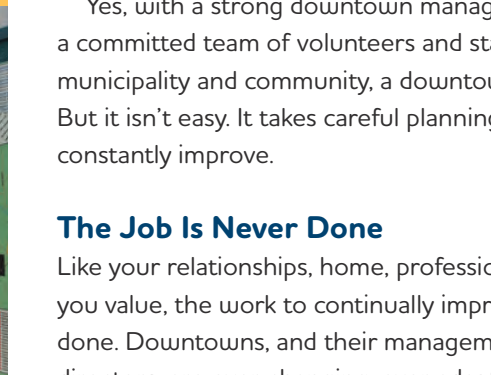
Strong Michigan downtowns are expected to have it all. A dynamic and varied business mix, effective communications with stakeholders, placemaking initiatives, modern infrastructure, pretty flowers, and a pipeline of entrepreneurs begging to rent space are just a few characteristics of a well-rounded downtown. Can downtown really have it all?

Yes, with a strong downtown management organization, a committed team of volunteers and staff, and a supportive municipality and community, a downtown truly can have it all! But it isn't easy. It takes careful planning and a commitment to constantly improve.

The Job Is Never Done

Like your relationships, home, profession, or anyone or thing you value, the work to continually improve downtown is never done. Downtowns, and their management organizations and directors, are ever changing, ever adapting, and ever learning.

Think of the changes we have witnessed over the last three years! Social Districts began as a much-needed revenue source for restaurants and bars. Now the areas, frequently managed by downtown management organizations, have morphed into an economic driver truly living up to the name, *Social District*.



(above) Food co-op in Marquette.

(right) Outdoor dining and live music in Northville's social district.

(below) Food truck in downtown. Cheboygan.

(below) Preserving historic downtown Vassar.

(above) Cheboygan car show.

(right) Grayling mural and bike map.

(left) Biking in Spring Lake.

The Michigan Municipal League's Pillars of Community Wealth Building

We define community wealth building as strategies that build community and individual assets, creating resilient and adaptable systems to address social and economic needs.

We see trust and belonging as a social and emotional fabric that ties the community members and these components together in an interdependent framework:

Trust in neighbors, community leaders, local governments and the other partners and services in place to help our communities thrive is essential to achieving community wealth.


Belonging to the community is what strengthens the tie between community members and the place. Without people, a place is just a physical object. Connecting people who support each other and themselves in a localized way brings a place to life and increases access to community resources and social network.



Small businesses found on our main streets, often with the assistance of a downtown director, have maneuvered through shutdowns, grants, loans, a changing work force, and a shift in consumer spending. This is in addition to the quickly changing world of technology, websites, and social media an entrepreneur must contend with to keep up with the latest trends.

In today's world, the preservation of historic buildings can make the greatest economic sense and office buildings begin to be repurposed into living spaces and other creative uses. Public spaces, whether it is a pocket park or central park, have become even more important gathering places to foster relationships and an appreciation for community.

And through all the changes, downtowns remain the heartbeat of a village or city.

Whether you work, live, or play in our Michigan downtowns, next time you visit, be sure to take it all in. 

Dana Walker is the director of the Michigan Downtown Association. You may contact her at 248-838-9711 or director@michigandowntowns.com.

The Michigan Downtown Association

Founded in 1980, the Michigan Downtown Association (MDA) is a state-wide, nonprofit organization and a driving force in the interest and growth of downtowns and communities throughout Michigan. The MDA encourages the development, redevelopment and continuing improvement of Michigan communities and downtowns. Its members support economic development within the State of Michigan and include cities, Downtown Development Authorities, townships, businesses, and individuals. For more information, please visit www.MichiganDowntowns.com or call 248-838-9711.



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STURGIS DDA:

PROVIDING CREATIVE & (MOSTLY) FREE EVENTS

By Ryan Conrod



Sturgis is a small city located one mile north of the Michigan-Indiana border in southwest Michigan. Besides the convenience of being located on U.S. 12 about 10 miles east of 131, and the 80/90 Indiana toll road, downtown Sturgis has grown to become a destination for a great variety of art and events unlike other municipalities with the same size population.

The Sturgis Downtown Development Authority (DDA), through the generous donation of local area sponsors and support from our Sturgis Area Community Foundation along with the City of Sturgis, is consistently hosting bi-monthly or monthly community events for the general public and for those that want to make a drive to see our vibrant downtown with restaurants, unique boutiques, coffee shop, our Depot Museum, and The Open Door Art Gallery.

“Sturgis has a fantastic downtown and community that supports it. The city acknowledges all of our community and from those of all walks of life and ethnicities. The community gives back which makes our downtown grow and expand through the years.” Cathi Abbs (retired Sturgis Area Chamber of Commerce Director).



Ryan Conrod, DDA event coordinator, in downtown Sturgis.



Public art installation Sturgis.

Downtown Art

To add beauty and expose our community to the arts, we implemented a yearly project called “Art Around Town.” We request the public to submit a 2D medium of art to be judged and from there 17 pieces of chosen art are printed on weathered boards and placed throughout downtown for the year to add visual art to the downtown. This project lasts from May until the following March when we take down the pieces and have an art auction to sell that year’s art pieces and prepare for the upcoming season’s artwork.

Along with the “Art Around Town” project, we have been incorporating permanent public art pieces to beautify our city along with promoting the arts and showing communities how incorporating art adds visibility to your downtown.

Creative Downtown Events

Our events are a mixture of offerings to both residents and the surrounding community. New this year, in April, we hosted the Sturgis Spring Food & Flower Fest. The highlight of the event was the “Tastings of the Great Lakes” food samples. Some larger cities or theme parks do a tasting around the world, so we decided to do a similar concept except with states that border a Great Lake. Each outdoor wood vendor shed represented a Great Lakes state (and we included Canada) and offered a famous food and dessert from that state as the unofficial food item. Some of the tastings were: coney dog and bumpy cake for Michigan; poutine and maple cupcakes for Canada; pork tenderloin sandwich and sugar pie for Indiana; and Chicago deep dish pizza and Palmer House brownie for Illinois. Bringing a sample of fares from nearby states to our community is a help to those that might

not be able to travel to all the great lake states. Resident Dianna Kuwamoto described it as, “A fun new concept and creative way to incorporate something different to downtown.”

As part of the event, the DDA dedicated a cherry blossom tree with visitors from the Japanese American Community League (JAACL). The tree honors community members of Japanese heritage who suffered hardship during and after World War II. It also acknowledges a former Sister City relationship with Shigaraki, Shiga, Japan. David Mori of the JAACL, thanked the DDA for the honor and hospitality. “And now I want to check out downtown,” he said. Ray Ward, a resident whose mother was a World War II Japanese “war bride,” was one of very few minorities at Sturgis High School. “Sturgis is home,” Ward said.

We have several special (and we think unique) draws to bring people to our downtown. MI Art Fest in the middle of summer brings together local artists and our local art gallery, The Open Door Gallery, in provides free art crafts, and an artists’ array spread out along downtown with painting or drawing for passersby to watch and ask questions. “Working the events at the Open Door Gallery, and being a resident of downtown Sturgis, it is great to see how many people come out for each and every event,” said Open Door Gallery Event Coordinator/Gallery Artist Pennie Spence.

In addition, there is a “Cell Phone Picture Taking” walking tour with a local photographer from the art gallery, and our annual “Color Walk” where participants get bags of colored powder at the start of the event to throw in the air to douse their white shirts with vibrant colors.




Bourbon, Bacon & Blues brings distilleries from Michigan along with surrounding states such as Indiana and Kentucky to offer their product samplings to those that purchase tasting packages or sample tickets. This event includes live blues music, axe throwing, and food truck vendors that incorporate bacon into their menu.

Our outdoor Christmas market, Kristkindlmarkt, is a three-day event offering homemade craft and art vendors, homemade baked good vendors, photo ops, outdoor fire pits, food truck vendors, and more.

Free Events

Throughout the summer season we feature free monthly events like Movies on North, a once-a-month free outdoor movie projected onto a giant screen on a firetruck. The Sturgis Barbeque Fest in September brings challengers together competing for the best BBQ in the area along with kids' activities, live music, and a college game day game also shown on the big screen movie truck.

Another highlight in our downtown is the “Social District” drinks that can be purchased in “To Go” cups from Wings Etc. and can be carried around and enjoyed while walking through downtown during an event or any other time of the year.

We offer a wide range of events for everyone to come out and enjoy our downtown and almost all of them are free. We want to give those who are less fortunate or those that don't have the means to travel out of town an opportunity to enjoy an event, art, or free movies—and take pride in the fact that their city is providing these to make our community living a better way of life. 

Ryan Conrod is the DDA downtown event coordinator for the City of Sturgis DDA. You may contact him at 269-651-1907 or rconrod@sturgismi.gov.



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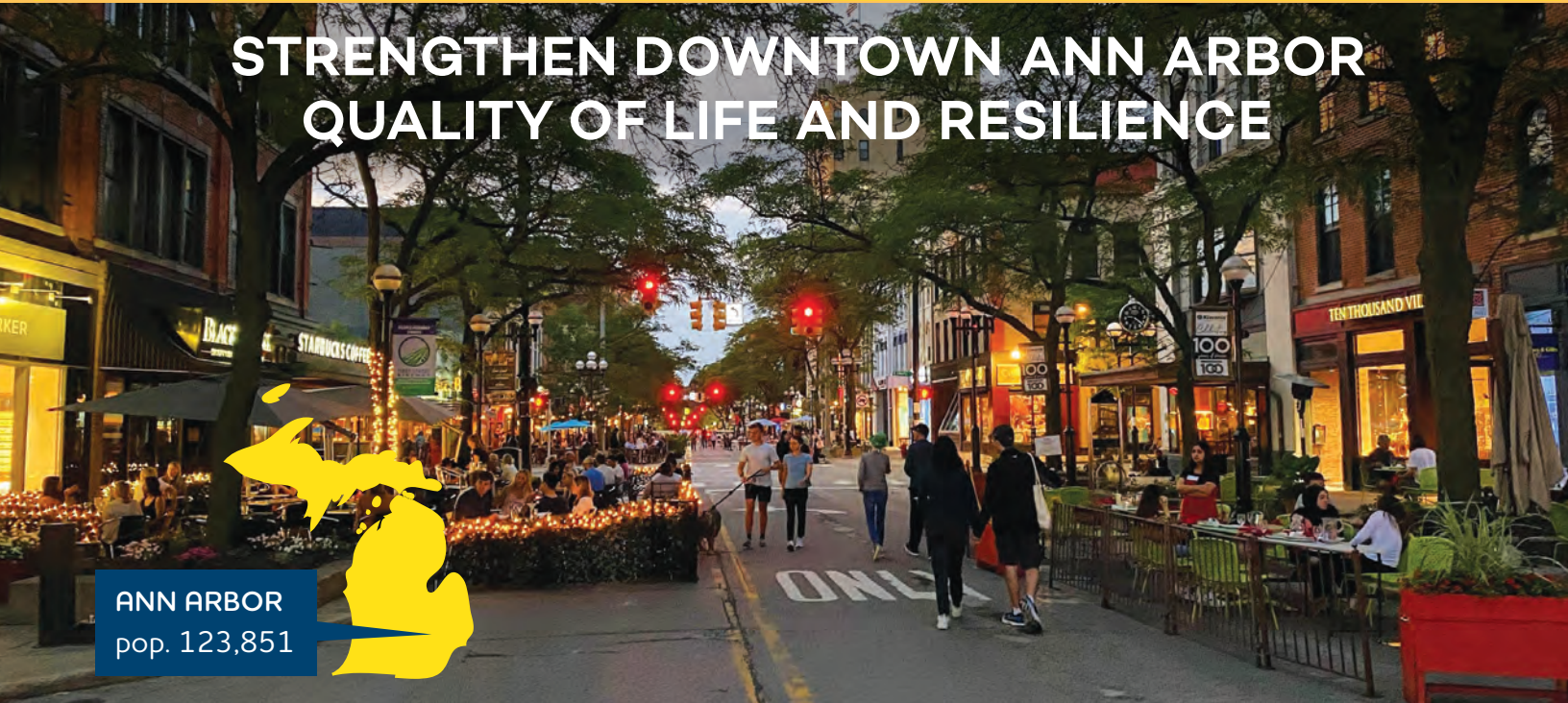
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PEOPLE-FRIENDLY STREETS INITIATIVES

STRENGTHEN DOWNTOWN ANN ARBOR QUALITY OF LIFE AND RESILIENCE



ANN ARBOR
pop. 123,851

By Amber Miller, Chris Wall, and Bob Doyle

Downtowns are the heart of communities, ideally shaped by the values of the people who live there. Ann Arbor's vibrant, active downtown has helped the city earn national best place to live recognition year after year. Despite its strengths, the city's urban core was not immune to COVID-19 impacts. Reflecting on input from engaged stakeholders and lessons learned during the pandemic, the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority (DDA) has implemented a variety of People-Friendly Streets initiatives to promote urban health and vitality and build resilience against future unexpected events. From pilot projects to constructed improvements, downtown streets and spaces have been reclaimed for greater public use in ways that are scalable for communities of all sizes.

Recovery Approach Puts People First

As downtown offices, parking facilities, and the University of Michigan campus emptied, and indoor dining and shopping were prohibited, a new paradigm began. Ann Arbor took the opportunity to reimagine how downtown streets that prioritized vehicle movement and parking could be repurposed to promote more equitable use among people while working toward long-term community goals. In response to safe social distancing needs, it was clear that more space was needed for walking, biking, shopping, and dining. The DDA's People-Friendly Streets concept—to increase safe and comfortable access for people of all ages and abilities using all modes of transportation—became integral to the city's pandemic response and recovery approach.

The duration and extent of COVID-19 pandemic impacts were a wakeup call for organizations responsible for the health and vitality of urban cores.

Gold-Level Bicycle Friendly

Community Award

The League of American Bicyclists



Infrastructure Award

League of Michigan Bicyclists



Downtown Ann Arbor
June-August, 2023



Extensive community outreach, engagement, and education activities were held to verify that projects that prioritize people aligned with the community's desires and expectations for street use. Projects were shaped by the adopted values of the DDA's People-Friendly Streets program: safe, comfortable downtown streets; affordable and inclusive community; vibrant and thriving local economy; connected community with streets as civic space; equitable, just access for all people; resilient, energy responsible downtown; and responsible design and implementation.

Using a multi-phased approach to improvements, the DDA introduced design concepts and temporary changes, gathered feedback from the public, evaluated the impacts, and worked with the community to refine a project's final design before it was permanently constructed. Some of the most helpful feedback came from quick-build pilot projects. This approach also amplified opportunities to collaborate with other agencies and departments to maximize the overall value of community investments.

Pilot Projects Test Viability of Bikeways

Under its Healthy Streets Program, the City of Ann Arbor and DDA conducted five 90-day pilot projects to expand physical distancing for walking and biking. Locations were chosen for their ability to address high priority safety and connectivity issues. Traffic lanes were reconfigured to accommodate temporary non-motorized travel lanes, two-way bikeways, and separated bike lanes. The pilot projects were designed and implemented based on national guidance, city policies and plans, and the DDA's adopted values for People-Friendly Streets. Each project incorporated monitoring, review, adjustment, and opportunity for public feedback.



Pilot project findings were used to inform the design of permanent infrastructure projects. The most successful pilots served a higher volume of users; connected key home, work, and commercial destinations; and linked to other lower stress bicycle facilities. Based on the results, three of the pilot projects have since been installed as permanent bikeways. Embraced by the community, the city's bikeway efforts have yielded a gold-level Bicycle Friendly Community award from The League of American Bicyclists and an Infrastructure Award from the League of Michigan Bicyclists.

Flexible Streets Maximize Benefits

As the pandemic evolved, downtown retail and restaurant businesses were desperate to expand physical space to sustain operations. Working with the downtown area associations, the DDA established partnerships and programs that helped businesses set up curbside pickup, extend patio space, and periodically close portions of streets to vehicle traffic. Transforming streets into active community spaces for outdoor walking, dining, and shopping created a more dynamic and accessible downtown landscape for all. Now called A2 Summer Streets, the popular street closure practice remains in summer months with additional features such as live music on Thursday nights, community activities from local businesses and organizations on Friday and Saturday mornings, and a Sunday Brunch with live music.

Envisioning greater mixed-use possibilities for a three-block section of State Street that borders the University of Michigan's central campus, the DDA made improvements to maximize the street's flexibility. Designed as the first curbsless street in the city, the project is intended to improve safety, accessibility, and ease of navigation for all users through the downtown commercial district.

Key stakeholder groups, including local organizations that advocate for people with disabilities, were engaged to help shape the design. Highlights include more versatility to support events with street closures such as Art Fair, more space for business activities and curbside zones, traffic calming measures, and a bikeway link.

The project was coordinated with critical city infrastructure upgrades including water main replacement, street resurfacing, and stormwater improvements.

Infrastructure Upgrades Build Resilience


Anticipating the continued escalation of climate-related events, the DDA integrated a stormwater system into their approach to strengthen downtown resilience and maximize community investment. When a big storm hits, the high amount of impervious area preventing stormwater absorption can cause disruptive conditions like flooding. Challenges are compounded by the Allen Creek Watershed that flows underground through the downtown area and the limited capacity of the original storm sewers installed in one of the oldest and most congested parts of the city.

To reduce the volume of water that enters the storm sewer and improve water quality, the DDA integrated green infrastructure practices, like infiltration systems, bioswales, vegetated areas, and tree wells, into street improvement projects. Designed to comply with the city's Green Streets Policy—where all road reconstruction requires the collection, storage, and infiltration of a certain amount of stormwater—perforated stormwater trenches were designed to maximize water collection and infiltration into underlying soils. Each trench was specifically designed to accommodate varying elevations, utility conflicts, historic building vaults, stone foundations, and other unique characteristics. These practices convey stormwater more naturally to the underground water table and aquifers, freeing up capacity in the storm sewers and reducing pressure on downtown areas that are prone to flooding.



Lasting Impacts

The duration and extent of COVID-19 pandemic impacts were a wakeup call for organizations responsible for the health and vitality of urban cores. The Ann Arbor DDA's takeaway is the need for a clear strategy to build downtown resilience to

withstand unexpected events and ensure equity and access for all in the process. Guided by the premise that streets are for all people, not just vehicles, People-Friendly Streets initiatives were integral to the city's pandemic response. Spacious bikeways, street closures, and expanded outdoor seating that helped people feel comfortable returning to downtown are now part of Ann Arbor's unique character and quality of life. 

Amber Miller is the capital projects manager for Ann Arbor's DDA. You may reach her at 734-994-6697 or amiller@a2dda.org.

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Bob Doyle, PLA, is a principal and senior landscape architect at SmithGroup. You may reach him at 734-662-4457 or Bob.Doyle@smithgroup.com.



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A BRIGHT FUTURE for Renewable Energy in Michigan

By Matt Wagner

DTE

DTE Energy has been developing wind and solar projects in Michigan for more than 12 years and continues to be Michigan's largest renewable energy producer and investor. Our 18 wind parks and 33 solar farms generate enough clean energy to power nearly 700,000 homes. Over the next three years, we plan to add thousands of megawatts of new renewable energy as we continue transitioning our state to cleaner energy sources. In addition to creating cleaner energy, our renewable energy projects strengthen rural economies, create unique and rewarding Michigan jobs, and provide additional resources that support local communities.

Siting Renewable Energy Projects

At DTE, we recognize that deciding to host renewable energy projects is a big decision for any community and we are always happy to answer questions and lend our expertise. Developing a renewable energy project often takes several years. Steps prior to actual construction and operation include evaluation, zoning, siting, feasibility, and environmental studies and permitting. DTE works closely with landowners and local officials through every phase.



DTE's Meridian Wind Park, Midland and Saginaw County, Michigan.

Engaging with Local Communities

DTE engages with the communities that host our renewable energy projects in a variety of ways, with the goal of helping these areas flourish. Our employees are active volunteers, proudly participating in local nonprofits, tree plantings, veteran events and more. We're also actively involved with local schools so we can help students learn more about renewable energy and the exciting jobs available in the energy industry.

Last summer we attended and supported 19 county fairs across the state. We appreciated the opportunity to meet the thousands of people who visited our booth and support local Future Farmers of America and 4-H chapters by purchasing animals.

Whether we are sponsoring a local baseball team or providing a fire department with upgraded lifesaving equipment, we view our presence in communities as a partnership and aim to be a good and involved neighbor.

Strengthening Local Economies

DTE's renewable energy projects also strengthen local economies by bringing in additional tax revenue, monies that can be used to support roads, first responders, schools, libraries, and other community services.

Gratiot County is now home to several of the state's largest wind projects and a great example of how hosting renewable energy infrastructure can build up an entire county. Since 2012, Gratiot County has received nearly \$71 million in additional tax revenue from its wind projects and credits them with attracting more business to the area.

"Where some counties are looking at cutbacks, we haven't had to do that," said Jim Wheeler, President of Greater Gratiot Development. "It's an improvement to the overall quality of life for the county and the people who live in it."

Creating Michigan Jobs

Each DTE renewable energy project supports hundreds of jobs during construction, as well as dozens of permanent jobs during operation. Our Meridian Wind Park, set to come online this spring, utilized Southfield-based construction company Barton Malow and had about 200 local workers on site every day while the park was being built.


Once operational, our wind and solar parks provide rewarding careers for those who want a unique experience in the energy industry. Many DTE employees who work at our wind and solar parks grew up in rural communities and are thrilled that their jobs have enabled them to have a good paying job and live near family. Senior Engineering Technician Austin Osentoski began his DTE career as a wind technician. Austin grew up in Michigan's Thumb region and has worked out of our Huron Renewable Energy Center for five years.

Rebecca Colson, DTE's only female solar technician, worked in Arizona for a few years before deciding she wanted to come home to Michigan. Finding a position with DTE's Renewable Energy Operations and Maintenance team gave Rebecca exactly what she was looking for—a good job near friends and family that also provided opportunities to grow professionally and do work that helps protect the environment. "I found my niche working in the renewable energy field, and I love knowing that I'm a part of generating clean energy for Michigan," said Rebecca.

Protecting the Environment

DTE has a long history of environmental stewardship, and this is deeply embedded in our renewable energy projects. Early in our project siting process, we begin a process requiring up to two years of gathering wildlife data, including studies on avian use and bat habitats. Once we can begin construction, we train all staff on environmentally sensitive areas throughout the site, compliance requirements, and identifying sensitive species and their habitats.

When project development is finished and a wind or solar park becomes operational, DTE does a year of post-construction monitoring to understand actual wildlife interactions at the project. Throughout the life of the project, we implement bird and bat conservation strategies, light management strategies, and annual wind and wildlife training for operations and maintenance staff. "Some of the things we do seem relatively simple, but it's all part of a comprehensive strategy from the start and throughout the life of each project," said Amanda Ignatowski, senior engineer in Environmental Management and Safety.

As part of our work to protect the environment, DTE is also incorporating pollinator habitats at our solar parks to support bees, butterflies, and other pollinating species. In fact, DTE already has more than 36 sites that have achieved habitat certification by the Wildlife Habitat Council, with more under development. "The efforts aren't meant to just benefit the few but be a source of overall improvement within the communities where we live and serve," said Amanda. Learn more at www.dteenergy.com/renew 

Matt Wagner is the manager of renewable energy development at DTE Energy.

Rebecca Colson, senior solar technician, DTE.



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MUSKEGON HEIGHTS

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HEIGHTS
pop. 9,917



By Morgan Schwanky

A diversity can be found all around us. Local government is no stranger to it. Despite difficulties brought on from the pandemic and statewide cuts to municipalities, the City of Muskegon Heights was able to get community input on creating a “new” Muskegon Heights. In a heartfelt press release, the city wrote: “Muskegon Heights is on the cusp of reaching its fullest potential, resilient in overcoming injustice, and reclaiming itself as a destination to live, work, play, visit, and invest. We are empowered to tell our story as we define it—a place of opportunity, hope, and pride. We prioritize our families, safety, connections with businesses and neighborhoods, integrity, and value our diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

The visioning plan, many years in the making is titled “Reaching NEW Muskegon Heights.” The city has been wanting to implement change for a long time—and it is now coming to fruition.



“From all the meetings, surveys and conversations with community stakeholders, citizens, city leaders, and advocates, the results overwhelming showed that ‘Reaching New Heights’ in downtown Muskegon Heights should symbolize the historical pride of the community.”

—Muskegon Heights Mayor Walter Watt



Creating community consensus with public planning and prioritizing sessions

They decided on three main goals to get the project going:

1. Create community consensus on what projects to prioritize;
2. Show a unified effort to attract investments; and
3. Set a goal to apply for grants from various organizations including the Muskegon County Community Foundation, Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), Greater Muskegon Economic Development (GMED), and more.

Vision Partnerships

GMED worked in partnership with the city to manage the project after the vision plan was approved by the downtown development authority. Cathy Brubaker-Clarke, GMED's community development strategist, has been instrumental in putting Muskegon Heights' vision into action. "Muskegon Heights has experienced difficulties in the past, while it is also a community with heart, that never gives up," said Brubaker-Clarke. "The citizens and administration strive to achieve the best, which includes outreach and partnerships outside the city boundaries. The community has embraced the vision plan, 'Reaching NEW Muskegon Heights,' as well as subsequent plans to implement this vision."

Muskegon Heights Mayor Walter Watt is a big supporter of the vision. He has seen what neighboring communities such as Muskegon have done and hopes that Muskegon Heights' vision plan will create similar results. "If we can get Muskegon Heights moving in the same direction as our surrounding communities that are growing, developing, and beautifying their communities, beautifying their lakeshores and downtown areas, this will be a sought-out destination," said Watt.

Watt and other stakeholders see how important this work is for the community. "We have a lot of opportunity for tremendous growth in this community," said Watt. "I think it is vitally important that we make correct decisions to ensure that we get things right the first time, and not waste time over debating issues that do not move our city forward. I have confidence in my council that we'll be able to do just that."

Watt elaborated that the city does not have a grant writer, which is a "vitally important piece" to accessing opportunities for getting funds. GMED was crucial in securing funding from the USDA through Rural Development grants as well as MEDC's Redevelopment Ready Communities.

Vision Designers

GMED brought in Ann Arbor consultant SmithGroup to help create the vision plan. They were also brought back to help design a variety of the projects created in the plan. Urban designer Michael Johnson and urban planner Kathleen Duffy worked with the community to assess what they were working with and how they could make improvements. Later, landscape architect Bob Doyle helped construct plans to make the vision come alive. They used an online survey (as well as placing copies throughout the city), focus groups, and even socially distanced site visits.

"We were on the ground in the middle of COVID and met members of the community while social distancing on exploratory walks. And many of those same members kept showing up throughout the process. That was really cool to see," Johnson said.

Vision Projects

Work is underway. The summer of 2022 marked a big focus at Rowan Park. Located in the heart of downtown, the improvements will encourage more people downtown as well as attract businesses. Rowan Park received a grant from the Consumers Energy Foundation to make upgrades including a children's splash pad. Plans are in place to move the farmers market to its parking lot to make room for a promenade and a statue highlighting their high school's drum majors.

"From all the meetings, surveys and conversations with community stakeholders, citizens, city leaders, and advocates, the results overwhelmingly showed that 'Reaching New Heights,' in downtown Muskegon Heights should symbolize the historical pride of the community," said Watt. "We are planning to place a statue of a drum major in Rowan Park that symbolizes that historical love and pride of the Muskegon Heights High School Marching Band (donations were taken to fund this project). As well, we are receiving a \$250,000 grant from Consumers Energy Foundation for renovations in the park."

Later this fall, the statue, called Band Together, will go up. The variety of improvements to the park will help make it a gathering place and a great location for entertainment and events.

This past October, the community began construction on the first new homes in the area in 17 years. "We know there's a housing crisis all over the country," said Watt.

"We also have issues with affordability. We are developing housing that meets both of those needs. Our goal is to bring people back to live, work, and play."

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24 smithgroup.com Reaching NEW Muskegon Heights **SMITHGROUP**

Amongst the variety of projects, the community is also making plans for the Strand Theater, which is the largest commercial property downtown. Located near Rowan Park, the historic building has structural issues. "The biggest opportunity that we have is the potential removal or redevelopment of the Strand Theater site," Watt said. "Either option would be a game changer for this community. With the help of the Community Foundation and GMED organizations, I am optimistic that we're going to get it done."

The work in Muskegon Heights has already come a long way, but they are just getting started. As the community continues to gain support from various groups, interorganizational meetings have started taking place to make sure that they can create the biggest impact.

Despite challenges along the way—the pandemic and multiple elections and administrative players—Muskegon Heights kept this project going. It has the united force of its proud citizens and leaders who work hard to continue the momentum. The investments they have and are continuing to make will propel them into the future that they once only dreamed about. 

Morgan Schwanky is a content developer for the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6320 or mschwanky@mml.org.

“We were on the ground in the middle of COVID and met members of the community while social distancing on exploratory walks. And many of those same members kept showing up throughout the process. That was really cool to see.”

-Michael Johnson, Urban Designer, SmithGroup



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FIVE STEPS TO BETTER RECORDS MANAGEMENT

By Caryn Wojcik

Trying to better manage records might sound like an overwhelming and impossible task. It's not. There are practical things that government agencies can do to better manage their records, and these solutions do not require the office to buy anything.

It's worth the effort, because poorly managed records increase storage costs and legal liability. Disorganized records frustrate employees and reduce consistency, quality, and efficiency. However, the office needs to recognize that something needs to be fixed.

It's time for a reality check! In the real world...

- Records management is not a big responsibility for most employees, and it is not a priority
- Most employees think they can destroy official government records whenever they feel like it
- Most employees don't know how long they are supposed to keep records
- Few employees understand the risks of keeping records too long
- Records (both paper and electronic) are purged when space becomes a problem, or when an employee departs
- Filing systems (both paper and electronic) are not well organized, and records are frequently lost or misfiled
- Technology is used to fix record keeping problems without analyzing the source of the problem, all potential solutions, and the total cost of the fix
- Employees are given new technology tools for creating and storing records, but are not informed about the appropriate use of those tools
- Records that are needed for litigation holds and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests are difficult to find and may not be released appropriately
- Confidential and sensitive information is not sufficiently protected

Whew! Reality may feel overwhelming, but the problems will only get worse if they are ignored.

Legal Responsibilities

Before the solutions are discussed, everyone needs some baseline knowledge about the legal responsibilities of government agencies (and every government employee) to manage records.

- Destruction of government records, regardless of the format or storage location, must be authorized by an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule. If a record is not listed on an approved schedule, it cannot be destroyed; it is, by default, permanent.
- To be legal documents, schedules for local governments must be approved by the State of Michigan's Records Management Services, the Archives of Michigan, and the State Administrative Board.
- There are two types of schedules, general and specific. *General schedules* cover records that are common to a particular type of government agency, like a clerk or a treasurer. These schedules are approved by the State of Michigan for use by local government agencies and are published online at www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement. *Specific schedules* cover records that are created by the government agency named on the document. These schedules are submitted by local government agencies to Records Management Services and are approved by the State of Michigan.
- Government agencies are responsible for ensuring that records are kept and destroyed in compliance with the retention periods that are approved on the schedules.



Reality may feel overwhelming, but the problems will only get worse if they are ignored.

Getting Organized Step by Step

Still feeling intimidated and uninspired? That is because there needs to be a strategy to get the chaos under control. The following five steps will help offices better manage both paper and electronic records.

1. Distribute the agency’s Retention and Disposal Schedule to staff

- Ensure that everyone knows how long they need to keep records
- Identify unscheduled records and get them added to an approved schedule
- Instructions for submitting specific schedules are online

2. Train employees about records management

- All employees need to know their record keeping responsibilities
- Free online training is available

3. Plan an annual clean-up day

- All employees need to participate—no meetings, phone calls, or missing work that day
- Make it fun—dress casual and plan a yummy lunch and snacks
- Review paper and electronic records. Don’t forget email!
- Be aware of legal holds and FOIA requests that may require the temporary suspension of the Retention and Disposal Schedule
- Identify what can be destroyed/deleted, and what should be transferred to the Archives of Michigan for permanent preservation
- Carefully destroy confidential or sensitive records
- Take personal documents (non-government business) home, avoid storing them at work

City and Village Record Retention Schedules

available at www.michigan.gov/dtmb/services/recordsmanagement/schedules/glocal


- GS1 Nonrecord Material Defined (approved 2015)
- GS7 Local Health Departments (approved 2018, revised 2018, 2020, 2022)
- GS8 Cities and Villages (approved 1998, updated 2010)
This schedule covers the following city/village departments: general records—all offices, airport, assessor, attorney/legal, building, grants—federal, city income tax, manager/mayor, planning and zoning, public utilities, and public works.
- GS11 Local Law Enforcement (approved 2021, revised 2022)
- GS13 District Courts (approved 2018)
- GS17 Public Libraries (approved 2005, revised 2021)
- GS18 Fire/Ambulance Departments (approved 2007)
- GS19 Prosecuting Attorneys (approved 2007)
- GS20 Community Mental Health Services Programs (approved 2007)
- GS23 Elections Records (approved 2007, revised 2013, 2016)
- GS24 City and Village Clerks (approved 2008)
- GS26 Local Government Human Resources (approved 2022)
- GS28 City and Village Treasurers (approved 2010)
- GS30 Local Government Information Technology (approved 2009)
- GS31 Local Government Financial Records (approved 2009)
- GS32 Local Government Parks and Recreation Departments (approved 2010)
- GS34 Local 9-1-1 Call Centers (approved 2010)
- GS35 Local Government Administrative Records (approved 2023)

4. Adopt new record keeping habits

- Toss drafts, duplicates, and transitory documents, so they don't waste space and increase legal liability
- Create shared filing systems to be used by all employees who have the same work responsibilities
- Develop business rules for filing systems, so records are managed consistently
- Establish naming conventions for folders and documents, so employees can easily find what they are looking for
- Create check out and check in procedures, so records are not lost
- Take a day-forward approach to change. Wait 6-12 months to organize and toss the existing records. This will give everyone time to adopt new record keeping habits first.

5. Avoid individual record keeping

- Store all records of a business process together, so employees only have to look one place for a document, or to answer a question
- Ensure records can be found, regardless of who is in the office on a particular day. If records are stored in an email account or text messages, they may not be accessible.
- Prevent the loss of essential records when an employee retires or moves to another job

Better records management will not happen overnight. It is a process that takes time. It is important that employees have a sense of ownership over the changes that are taking place. Give employees an opportunity to share their opinions and experience, and to contribute to the solutions. It will be worth the effort. Organized and clean files feel good, increase efficiency and quality, and improve employee morale. Please visit the Records Management Services' website for more information at www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement. 

Caryn Wojcik is a senior records analyst in Records Management Services for the State of Michigan. You may contact her at 517-335-8222 or wojcik@michigan.gov.



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Sue Jeffers is a legal consultant to the League. You may contact her at sjeffers1@me.com.

Freedom of Information Act and Police Department's Use-of-Force Policy

FACTS:

Amy Hjerstedt requested a copy of Sault Ste. Marie Police Department's use-of-force policy pursuant to Michigan's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Although initially denying the request, the city disclosed a redacted copy of the policy citing several statutory exemptions. Hjerstedt initiated an action in circuit court, challenging the city's decision.

CIRCUIT COURT DECISION:

The circuit court found in favor of the city, concluding that the policy was exempt from disclosure and citing the following statutory exemptions:

MCL 15.243(1)(n)—policy was a record of law enforcement communication code or plan for deployment

MCL 15.243(s)(v)—policy disclosed law enforcement operational instructions

MCL 15.243(s)(vii)—disclosure of the policy would endanger the safety of law enforcement officers

COURT OF APPEALS DECISION:

Hjerstedt appealed, arguing that none of the statutory exemptions were applicable. The Court of Appeals agreed, reversing the circuit court's grant of summary disposition in favor of the city, and remanding for entry of judgment in favor of Hjerstedt. The Court of Appeals noted that Michigan's FOIA grants the public an opportunity to "examine and review the workings of government and its executive officials" and that persons "are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government...." The Court further noted that FOIA provides certain exemptions from disclosure if the public body provides complete particularized justification.

First, with respect to MCL 15.243(1)(n), the Court of Appeals found that redacted portions of the policy did not contain communication codes or plans for deployment. Secondly, the Court noted that MCL 14.243(s)(v), which sets forth an exemption for "operational instructions," targets instructions relating to operations and not to policy. Finding that the use-of-force policy in this case dealt only with policy, it was not exempt from disclosure.

Third, the trial court had found that the redacted material was exempt on the basis that the disclosure of law enforcement agency records *would* or *could* circumvent [an] officer's actions "thus placing...[the] officer in danger." The Court of Appeals found that the statute requires a finding that the release *would* endanger law enforcement officers, not that it *would* or *could*. Because the city failed to meet its burden to prove that officer endangerment necessarily *would* result from the disclosure of the unredacted policy, the redacted material was not exempt.

Hjerstedt v City of Sault Ste. Marie, No. 358803, February 21, 2023.

This column highlights a recent judicial decision or Michigan Municipal League Legal Defense Fund case that impacts municipalities. The information in this column should not be considered a legal opinion or to constitute legal advice.

Making Great Places: East Jordan Downtown

By John Iacoangeli and Michelle Bennett

EAST JORDAN
pop. 2,239



Master Planning at a Crossroads

At the time of writing its Master Plan, East Jordan was at a crossroads. Redevelopment opportunities were abundant but in need of harnessing their potential into a collective vision. Nestled at the south arm of Lake Charlevoix at the confluence of the Jordan River, East Jordan is optimally located to serve as a hub of recreation-based tourism with a bustling year-round economy. And while much of the redevelopment attention was rightfully focused on the lakefront, the city understood that the downtown also had to be a compelling anchor to become such a destination.

Public Outreach

The city realized that the transformational change they are looking for requires regional coordination and cooperation between the public and private sector. To chart this path, East Jordan chose a collaborative process for the community engagement portion of the Master Plan and as a result won the 2021 MAP Award for Public Outreach. East Jordan invested in a heavily tactile engagement series to inspire its residents to learn by doing. A two-day design charrette allowed residents to work with aerial images of potential redevelopment sites and with blocks, markers, and transparent trace paper to build a reimagined site. After professionals, typically a part of the development process (DDA, the EJ Company, East Jordan Community Foundation, City Commissioners, and Chamber of Commerce), refined the community's suggestions, participants were rewarded with a set of renderings

that reflected their hard work and input. In this way, East Jordan was able to avoid a commonly frustrating part of engagement: well-intentioned exercises that do not produce a tangible resolution for residents to champion afterwards. The charrette process culminated with renderings for three sites that contained a physical vision for each site, a packaged land use framework to market to investors, and a Future Land Use Map to support the proposed changes.

Downtown Sites Reimagined

A city-owned site, 116 Main Street, was selected for the charrette process. A compact site of only 0.37 acres, its orientation, downtown location near the lake, and historic architecture pushed it to priority status. Formerly a community center, the building was re-visioned to become a mixed-used building (commercial on the ground floor and residential on the upper stories). The proposed development maintains and enhances the existing physical setbacks of the existing community center building. This enhances pedestrian activity and can create opportunities for pedestrians to linger, whether it is to shop, dine, or interact with other pedestrians. The recessed setback of the proposed development leads to an open atrium that physically splits the development. The open atrium presents the opportunity for additional commercial frontage and access to upper-level residential units. Furthermore, the open atrium would allow pedestrian circulation from the post office to the east, to Main Street, at which point there are established mid-block pedestrian routes to the marina and waterfront.



As a seasonal city with fluctuating population and a strong service industry (nearly one-quarter of the city's workforce is in retail or art, entertainment, recreation, or accommodations), different housing types are in demand. In fact, the residential Target Market Analysis by Land Use USA estimates that the annual market potential for large and small multiplex housing units in Charlevoix County far exceeds what is supplied in East Jordan. This gap suggests that East Jordan can absorb some of the regional demand for denser housing options, and correspondingly concentrate units near goods, jobs, and services. Similarly, retail analysis and community survey results indicated that certain retail types were underrepresented and had the potential to thrive in East Jordan. This site could help pair the two.

The former municipal boat launch at 98 Bridge Street was also selected as a redevelopment site. The community envisioned that the 1.7-acre site, with its waterfront access downtown, could accommodate a mix of retail, dining, and housing. The proposed development for the boat launch site seeks to maintain the valuable park setting at waters' edge of Lake Charlevoix. To achieve this, the eastern portion of the site will be developed as a public park space in the plan, featuring decks and piers for water and fishing access, a lakeside picnic shelter, and a portion of nonmotorized pedestrian trail linking the space to the proposed boardwalk spanning the Jordan River.

The west portion of the site will be developed to establish commercial and residential opportunities. This development would include single-story commercial featuring upper-level space, which could possibly accommodate uses such as rooftop dining. The two-story developments in the center of the site represent additional first-floor commercial retail opportunities, while the second floor and rooftops would serve as residential space. Because of their orientation and proximity to the lake, residential spaces would provide valuable view of Lake Charlevoix and downtown East Jordan, and proximity to the adjacent proposed park space.



What's Happening Now?

The city continues to move forward achieving this vision. East Jordan is currently developing an RFQ for this Community Center site that includes the community's vision. With this work done at the forefront, East Jordan can target developers that are willing to fit into the city's established framework for redevelopment. With community supported renderings, the city has elevated its chances for fulfilling the goals of expanding housing, repurposing a building, livening up downtown, and creating space for new business. 

This article first appeared as a blog on the Michigan Downtown Association's website. Reprinted with permission.

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Beckett & Raeder, Inc. is a Michigan corporation headquartered in Ann Arbor with additional offices in Grand Rapids, Petoskey, and Traverse City, Michigan. The firm has a staff of professional landscape architects, planners, and civil engineers; many of which have LEED Accreditation, Form Based Code Institute Certification, Congress for New Urbanism Accreditation, and National Charrette Institute Certification. Our services include sustainable design, land use programming and analysis, master planning, campus planning, placemaking, site planning and civil engineering, site development, municipal engineering, storm water management, downtown revitalization and redevelopment, community planning and urban design, form based code, economic development, public/private development services, and ecological and environmental services.

TIF TIPS:

Using Tax Increment Financing to Promote Private Investment

By Richard K. Carlisle



Tax increment financing (TIF) is a tool that has been used throughout the country since the 1950s. TIF permits local government to create a defined district in which the increase of real and personal property taxes of various taxing jurisdictions are captured starting from an established base year. In the process of establishing a TIF, the percentage of capture of the increase in taxes from the taxing jurisdictions subject to capture must be identified in a TIF Plan. Taxing jurisdictions continue to collect the taxes they would acquire prior to the established base year and whatever percentage increase in taxes set up by the TIF Plan. The captured tax revenues are reinvested in public improvements and programs identified in a Development Plan with the intention of stimulating private investment in the development district and furthering the increase in taxable value. In Michigan, tax increment financing is permitted to be used by several different authorities. Prior to 2018, all the authorities that were allowed to conduct tax increment financing were identified under separate acts. However, PA 57 of 2018 codified TIF authorities under a single statute.

Currently, there are approximately 585 established authorities in the State of Michigan, the majority of which are Downtown Development, Local Development Finance, and Corridor Improvement Authorities. Many local jurisdictions have multiple authorities though no two are permitted to encompass the same geography. One of the criticisms of past TIF practices has been the lack of transparency and accountability, which Act 57 has attempted to address. Part 9 of the Act requires increased reporting of TIF activities to the State Treasury Department. More information is required to be posted on the local government's website and all TIF authorities are required to hold two annual informational meetings with taxing jurisdictions subject to capture.

1. While the purpose of the various Authorities under PA 57 differs, there are common practices that can make more effective use of tax increment financing: Every authority must operate within a defined development district, which is the area where the Authority operates and allowed to collect and spend tax increment revenues. The development plan defines the projects and programs the authority wishes to pursue. In preparing the development plan, TIF Boards should carefully consider those public investments which will attract private investment. The insight of developers, bankers, and real estate experts should be solicited.
2. Determining the percentage of TIF capture is a strategic decision. Not only is a TIF authority capturing the taxes of its own jurisdiction, but the impact of the tax capture requires justification to other taxing jurisdictions. Building a strong case for how the TIF dollars will be used and the expected long-term results is critical.
3. The boundaries of the development and TIF districts do not necessarily need to be the same. The TIF district cannot be larger than the development district but may be smaller. The TIF district should encompass properties that will provide a positive contribution to the TIF by the increase of value. Vacant or underutilized properties are particularly important because their ultimate development will provide greater TIF capture than developed properties given their lower initial base taxable value. The local assessor is best consulted early in the process to verify these predictions.
4. The timing of when to establish a TIF Authority is also critical. Whenever possible, establishing the TIF district ahead of the development curve will allow the capture to capitalize on upward trends.


TIF STATUTES CODIFIED BY PA 57 OF 2018

PREVIOUS STATUTE	PURPOSE
Downtown Development Authority Act (197 of 1975)	Downtown district improvement
Tax Increment Finance Authority Act (450 of 1980*)	Economic growth and increase in property values
Local Development Financing Act (281 of 1986)	High tech Job creation
Corridor Improvement Authority Act (280 of 2005)	Commercial corridor improvement where a traditional downtown is not present
Water Resource Improvement Tax Increment Finance Authority Act (94 of 2008)	Water resource improvements
Nonprofit Street Railway Ave amendment (486 of 2008)	Promotion & financing of street railway transit operations
Neighborhood Improvement Authority Act (61 of 2007)	Promotion of residential growth or stabilization in existing neighborhood

*Beginning January 1, 1987, no new authorities were allowed to be created

- The timing of when to establish a TIF Authority is also critical. Whenever possible, establishing the TIF district ahead of the development curve will allow the capture to capitalize on upward trends.
- Negotiating with taxing jurisdictions subject to capture prior to establishing a TIF Authority is prudent, especially given their ability to “opt out” of the TIF Plan. Since retaining a critical mass of tax capture from a variety of taxing jurisdictions is the key to success, it is best to engage these entities early and avoid assumptions. A successful approach can involve a written agreement between the TIF Authority and other taxing jurisdictions which lays out the specific parameter of the capture.
- Finally, TIF should not be viewed as a sole source of funding. Successful Authorities typically leverage their TIF to provide “seed” money to projects, match funds to grants, public and private resources and to obtain other financial support where available.

TIF Authorities remain one of the limited tools that local governments can utilize to foster economic development. However, the Michigan legislature continues to feel the pressure to reform and/or eliminate tax increment

financing. Therefore, sound decision-making and effective results on the part of existing or proposed TIF authorities is the best means to answer the concern. 

Richard K. Carlisle, FAICP, has been a practicing planner for over 45 years, and is the founder of Carlisle/Wortman Associates in Ann Arbor.



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MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

HANDBOOKS

These handbooks are essential reading material for both new and veteran elected and appointed officials in cities, general law, and home rule villages.

Topics covered include:

- Structure and Function of Local Government in Michigan
- Roles and Responsibilities of Municipal Officials
- How to Select and Work with Consultants
- Running Meetings
- Personnel and Human Resources Issues
- Special Assessments and User Charges
- Planning and Zoning Basics

Numerous appendices include:

- Open Meetings Act
- Freedom of Information Act
- Sample Council Rules of Procedure
- A Glossary
- Frequently Asked Questions
- A Sample Budget Ordinance



Q. We can't find six residents/electors to serve as trustees on our village council. We are a general law village with a very small population. What can we do?

A. General law villages have the option to reduce the number of trustees on council from six to four. This is done by ordinance.

The ordinance takes effect 45 days after the date of its adoption, unless a petition signed by not less than ten percent of the registered electors of the village is filed with the village clerk or village office within such 45 days. If a petition is filed, the ordinance shall then take effect only upon its approval at the next general village or special village election held on the question of whether the ordinance shall be approved. Notice of any delayed effect of this ordinance and the right of petition under this section shall be published separately at the same time and in the same manner as the ordinance or a notice of the ordinance is published in a local newspaper of general circulation.

The MML has collected sample ordinances from villages that have done this and there is also a sample ordinance in our "Handbook for General Law Village Officials" at mml.org.

Q. The last issue of the *Review* contained a Q&A on how cities change from an elected to an appointed clerk. How do villages do this?

A. There are two types of villages in Michigan—general law villages and home rule villages. General law villages use Act 3 of 1895 (GLVA) as their "charter" and home rule villages have individualized home rule charters voted on by their residents, under authority from the Home Rule Village Act of 1909 (HRVA).

General Law Village Process:

As of 1998 changes to the GLVA, general law villages may change the position of clerk from elected to appointed by ordinance.

The ordinance takes effect 45 days after the date of its adoption, unless a petition signed by not less than ten percent of the registered electors of the village is filed with the village clerk or village office within such 45 days. If a petition is filed, the ordinance shall then take effect only upon its approval at the next general village or special village election held on the question of whether the ordinance shall be approved. Notice of any delayed effect of this ordinance and the right of petition under this section shall be published separately at the same time and in the same manner as the ordinance or a notice of the ordinance is published in a local newspaper of general circulation.

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Home Rule Village Process:

To change the clerk's office from elected to appointed, a home rule village must amend its charter. The process for amendment can be found in MCL78.11-78.20 of the Home Rule Village Act.

Q. We are curious about how mayors are chosen in Michigan cities—how many are directly elected and how many are chosen from amongst the council? What about presidents in villages?

A. To the best of our knowledge, 196 cities directly elected the mayor, in three the mayor is determined by the most populous votes, and in 77 cities, the mayor is chosen by the elected councilmembers.

In general law villages (208), all presidents are directly elected. In home rule villages, nearly half (24/46) of presidents are directly elected.

Q. How many charters contain provisions that block someone who is "in default" from holding office?

A. To the best of our knowledge, there are 154 home rule cities with a charter provision disqualifying someone who is in default to the city from holding office; and there are 13 (out of 46) home rule villages with provisions disqualifying someone in default from holding office. Persons in default are disqualified from holding office in all general law villages (See MML Fact Sheet "Default: General Law Village Elected/Appointed Officials.")

Q. How many municipalities have instituted term limits for their elected officials?

A. To the best of our knowledge, there are 31 cities with term limit provisions in their charters. Most of these provisions limit terms of office to two consecutive terms, while a few are for three consecutive terms. Most are for the office of mayor. We are not aware of any villages with term limits for any elected office.

The League's Information Service provides member officials with answers to questions on a vast array of municipal topics. Call 800-653-2483 or email info@mml.org.

Municipal Wage & Salary Survey and Searchable Database

By Heather Elliot

For decades, the Michigan Municipal League has conducted a wage and salary survey for the benefit of our members. It's intended to be used by management employees and/or their designees, or elected officials working on behalf of member communities for official municipal business.

For many years, we compiled the data through a mailed questionnaire. This became much more efficient and innovative when we created an electronic database in the early 2000s. Now members fill in an online survey and the League compiles the data into a searchable database. To date, the wage and salary survey has served 211 participating communities.

Positions/Titles

The searchable database contains 163 positions—elected and non-elected positions alike. Positions include mayor/president; councilmember/trustee/commissioner; human resource director; city/village manager/administrator; network administrator; office manager; receptionist; treasurer; city/village attorney; police captain; fire lieutenant; public works maintenance worker; and water plant operator—just to name a few!

Search Capabilities

The searchable database allows users to search by position, population, the League region, and perform side-by-side comparisons of results from selected municipalities. The salaries can be exported as yearly, hourly, or raw data into an Excel spreadsheet. There will be minimum, maximum, and actual salary categories sorted in rows. From there the data can be sorted or arranged in various ways to analyze. The Excel spreadsheets allow users to take averages, medians, sums, etc. of all the numbers—including things like taxable value, therefore maximizing on the effectiveness of the wage comparisons.

Union Contract Library and Benefits Analysis

The League also keeps an archive library of union and non-union contracts ranging from public works, police command, firefighters, engineers, teamsters, and more. There is also a benefits analysis that breaks down paid time off averages, healthcare premiums—including dental and vision, retiree health insurance, and retirement savings.

WAGE & SALARY SURVEY TIMETABLE

Survey Sent to Members Via Email = Mid-July

Survey Due Date = Early August

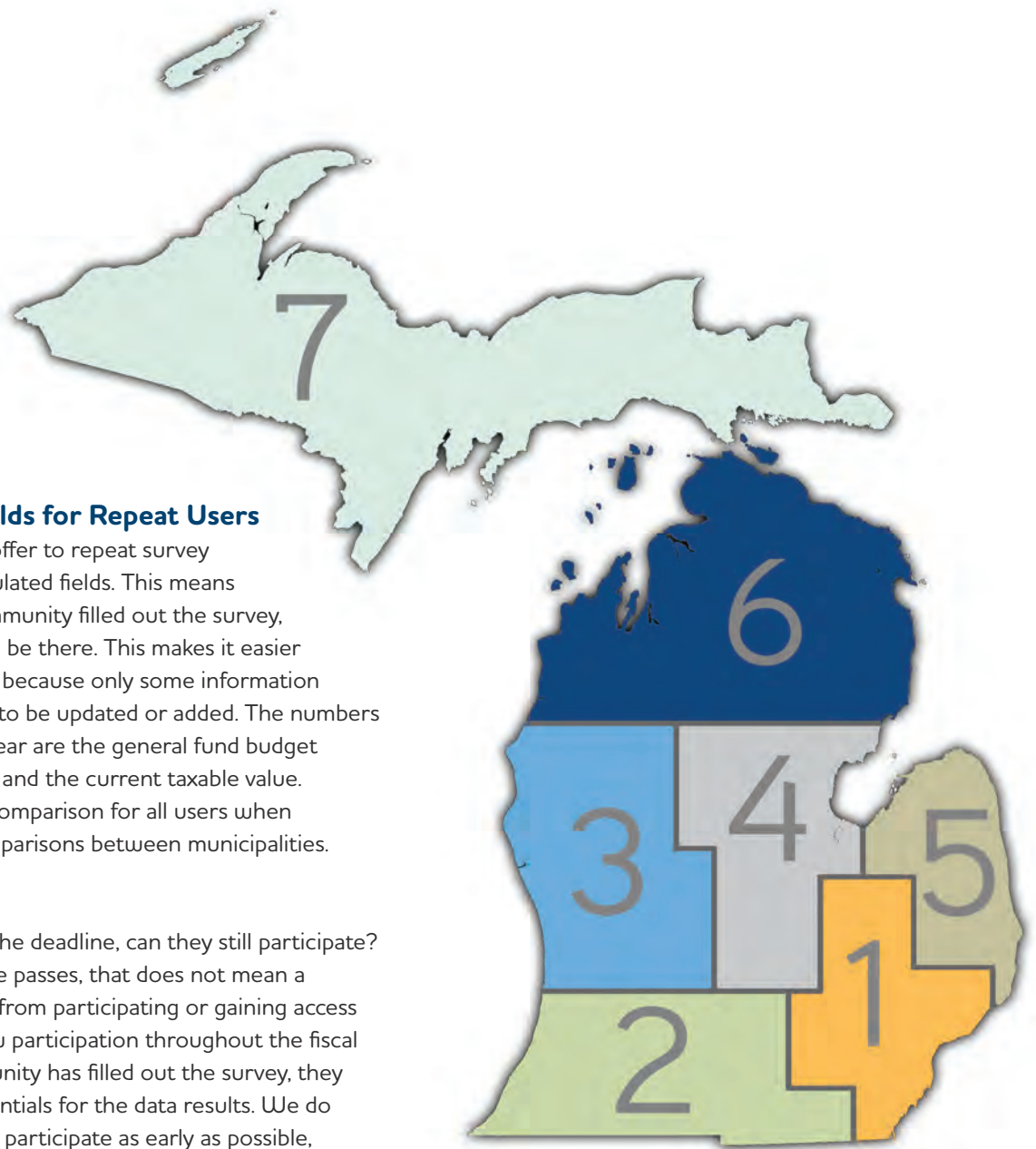
Data Go Live Date = Mid- to Late-August

Yearly Timetables

Around mid-July, the new survey goes out to full member communities to participate via email with the anticipated deadline in early August. The League sends out emails to city/village managers, human resource directors, finance directors, clerks, and treasurers to ensure we reach as many Attendee Commentaries as possible within the community. The results typically go live in mid- to late-August.

Access

The person who fills out the survey is not necessarily eligible for access to the results. Access is given to managers, department heads, and elected officials only. We leave it up to them once they gain access to pass on the login credentials to whomever they wish.




Pre-Populated Fields for Repeat Users

One great feature we offer to repeat survey participants is pre-populated fields. This means that if last year the community filled out the survey, the information will still be there. This makes it easier to complete the survey because only some information and numbers will need to be updated or added. The numbers that do change every year are the general fund budget revenues and expenses and the current taxable value. This ensures accurate comparison for all users when doing side-by-side comparisons between municipalities.

Deadlines

If a community misses the deadline, can they still participate? Yes! Even if the deadline passes, that does not mean a community is ineligible from participating or gaining access to the results. We allow participation throughout the fiscal year and once a community has filled out the survey, they can request login credentials for the data results. We do encourage members to participate as early as possible, though, because the more data we have, the more accurate and thorough it is for those looking to utilize the results.

The League encourages all full member communities to continue to participate in the wage and salary survey every year. It has proven to be a useful, valuable tool for our membership over the decades. We will always be adding positions and looking for ways to keep improving how the data is obtained and presented. We hope to receive your data for the 2023/24 survey this August! 

Heather Elliott is the member programs coordinator at the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6362 or helliott@mml.org.



michigan municipal league

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COMMUNITY Excellence Award

The Community Excellence Award, the League's annual statewide competition, recognizes outstanding municipal services, projects, and programs.

2023 Community Excellence Award Timeline

- ~~4/19/23: Start submitting projects~~
- ~~6/12/23: Deadline for submissions~~
- 7/18/23: Four finalists announced
- 10/19/23: MML Convention, Traverse City

For details go to cea.mml.org

WINNERS

- 2022 - Cassopolis
- 2021 - Rochester Hills
- 2020 - Canceled Due to COVID
- 2019 - Bay City
- 2018 - Fraser
- 2017 - Hudsonville
- 2016 - Beaverton
- 2015 - Westland
- 2014 - Harbor Beach
- 2013 - Ironwood
- 2012 - Grandville
- 2011 - Clare
- 2010 - Grand Haven
- 2009 - Lathrup Village
- 2008 - Jackson
- 2007 - St. Joseph

