

City of
Manistique
Local Economies
Opportunity Report



Table of Contents

2

Introduction

3

Why Manistique?

4-5

**Opportunity 1:
Make Things Easy
for Small Business**

5-7

**Opportunity 2: Improve
Connectivity—Both
Physical and Digital**

7-8

**Opportunity 3: Enhance
Beauty and Safety
Downtown**

9

Conclusion and Next Steps

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Introduction

In 2026, the Michigan Municipal League (the League) and Michigan Municipal League Foundation (MML Foundation) partnered with the Lake Superior Community Partnership (LSCP)'s Small Business Support Hub program to bring our Local Economies program to the central Upper Peninsula. We collaborated with LSCP, four central Upper Peninsula communities and their small businesses, and regional economic development stakeholders to better understand their small business environments and connect them with tools and resources to strengthen their local economic ecosystem.

Since 2022, the Local Economies program has explored entrepreneurship and small business support systems in specific Michigan communities. The goal of the initiative is to consider gaps in resources; e.g., space, capital, technical assistance, and networks that could be filled by local government and community stakeholders to support more equitable local small business environments.

In each community, we met with the local small business leaders and stakeholders for daylong workshops to explore the resources available to entrepreneurs, as well as the challenges and opportunities unique to each community. Following these workshops, we provide tailored feedback and recommendations through community Opportunity Reports.

Why Manistique?

The League and MML Foundation were excited at the opportunity to collaborate with the City of Manistique on this project, as the city boasts many opportunities for growth and redevelopment, with particular momentum occurring in its small business ecosystem.

Historically rooted in resource extraction and manufacturing, Manistique's local economy today is supported by a mix of small businesses, tourism, healthcare, and outdoor recreation. Like many Upper Peninsula communities, the city faces challenges related to workforce attraction and retention, housing, and a seasonal economy.

At the same time, Manistique has many assets. It boasts multiple active and growing business districts, including downtown and Trader's Point. The businesses in these hubs feel both welcoming and authentic, and the cohort of small business owners is a healthy mix of longtime Manistique residents and newcomers who were drawn to the community for its peaceful, small-town feel.

In addition, the city has great recreational resources, attractive historic architecture downtown, some larger anchor businesses, and an excellent public transportation program for a community of Manistique's size. These assets, along with some additional directed investments, could put Manistique in a strong position for economic growth.

What is an Opportunity Report?

This Opportunity Report is a summary of what the League and MML Foundation heard and observed during our Local Economies Stakeholder workshop in Manistique on April 23, 2026.

It is intended to serve as a resource for Manistique and other local and regional partners who play a role in supporting its local economy. This report describes areas for potential improvement, short- and long-term opportunities, resources to consider, and inspiration from other communities doing similar work.

The League and MML Foundation would like to thank the City of Manistique, as well as participating stakeholders, businesses, and others who helped contribute to this "deep dive." Below are short and long-term recommendations across three opportunity areas for the City of Manistique, the city's small businesses and local support organizations, and other regional stakeholders to undertake to strengthen Manistique's small business ecosystem in the coming years.

In addition to the recommendations presented in this report, the City and its partners may find further inspiration in our [Microbusiness Best Practices Playbooks](#), which offer additional strategies and examples for fostering entrepreneurship and strengthening local economic development efforts.



Opportunity 1: Make Things Easy for Small Business

Overview

In recent years, efforts undertaken through the partnership between Schoolcraft Tourism and Commerce (STC) and the communities within the county have successfully focused on marketing the region and supporting the local economy under the “Discover Manistique” branding. There was consistent praise for Executive Director Victoria George and her work in supporting the business community. In addition, the Central UP Small Business Support Hub has provided critical resources and assistance through its small business navigators. These partnerships have provided direct help to local small businesses and made great progress in marketing and uplifting the local economy.

While the STC and the Support Hub have been pivotal resources for small businesses and entrepreneurs, the City of Manistique and other partners in the region must also play a role in ensuring a welcoming and easy to navigate business environment in the city. The state is scaling back Small Business Hub funding this year. As a result, the entire Upper Peninsula will now have a single business hub to support entrepreneurs and small businesses. This will mean changes in the level of state-funded support provided in individual communities, making it even more critical that the City provide support and uplift its small business economy.

Recommendations

Short Term (<1 year)

Invest time and City resources in supporting small businesses. Small business owners want to feel welcomed, valued, and connected to their community. City leadership can strengthen these relationships through both formal and informal engagement. For example, the City should celebrate new business openings with ribbon cuttings, potentially in partnership with [STC's Business Celebrations](#), and ensure staff and elected officials participate. City leaders should make regular visits to local businesses to hear concerns, build relationships, and share information about initiatives and funding opportunities. Combined with participation in STC's merchant association activities, these efforts can foster ongoing communication with business owners—who may not otherwise have the time or ability to come to City meetings.

Improve online access to information. To make Manistique more attractive to new small businesses, the City should lower the barriers to entry for those looking to set up shop downtown, at Trader's Point, or in other business districts. The City has recently updated its main website to enhance navigation and usefulness, including easy-to-find information on planning, zoning, permits and taxes. However, there is no information directly focused on starting or expanding a business in Manistique. The STC has

a “Business Resources” page that features a comprehensive guide for opening a business, regional and local resource links, and a welcome packet for new residents and entrepreneurs. To maximize these resources, the City should add direct links for “Start a business” and “Welcome to Manistique” to its own website's “How do I” page, seamlessly connecting users to the relevant *Discover Schoolcraft* pages.

Long Term (1–4 years)

Pursue Redevelopment Ready Communities Certification (RRC) and Michigan Main Streets status. This spring, Manistique achieved RRC's “Essentials” designation—a great first step to making the city attractive to new development. The City should now work toward achieving full RRC certification. Fully RRC-certified communities gain access to MEDC's Redevelopment Services Team, which offers pre-development assistance including site design and engineering, environmental assessments, and RFP development. If capacity allows, the City should also consider joining the Michigan Main Streets program. This program provides resources, training, and technical assistance for communities to bolster their downtown or district revitalization efforts.

Foster working relationships with small developers. Through strategic partnerships, Manistique can help uplift the next generation of small-scale, UP-based developers while attracting much-needed commercial and residential investment along downtown and business district nodes. Several statewide and regional organizations (e.g., CEDAM and the Women's Sustainable Development Initiative) host developer boot camps and workshops. City leadership and the small business navigator should participate in some of these events to network with emerging developers. Finally, in collaboration with neighboring communities and economic development organizations such as MEDC, Manistique could host “Small Developer Days” to educate outside investors about the community and its opportunities.

Continue the housing partnership with Delta-Schoolcraft Intermediate School District. During our meetings with small businesses and other stakeholders, the issue of housing emerged frequently, highlighting a critical shortage of both affordable options and starter homes. To address this, the city has successfully collaborated with Build UP—a program of Invest UP—and the Delta-Schoolcraft Intermediate School District to have high school students in the Career and Technical Education Building Trades program construct homes on Otter Street. These partners should continue this program and secure additional funding to build more houses throughout the city. This initiative not only provides essential housing that supports the local economy, but it also serves as an excellent vehicle to train young people in the building trades and engage them in improving their community's quality of life.

Opportunity 1: Case Study

Downtown Tecumseh visitor resources:

The Tecumseh DDA maintains an online business directory and a downtown walking map. It also offers a visitor packet—distributed to local merchants to hand out to customers—that includes the walking map alongside information on various attractions in and around the downtown area. While keeping these directories and maps updated requires ongoing staff effort to onboard new businesses and remove closed ones, the investment pays off by promoting Tecumseh as a worthwhile travel destination and encouraging visitors to patronize multiple businesses during their stay.

downtowntecumseh.com/shop-dine-local

Opportunity 1: Resources

1. [Michigan Main Street Program](#)
2. [National League of Cities Boosting Small Businesses](#)
3. [CEDAM Real Estate Development Bootcamp](#)

Opportunity 2: Improve Connectivity—Both Physical and Digital

Overview

At around three-and-a-half square miles, Manistique has several distinct recreational, commercial and residential areas. A destination within the Upper Peninsula, it hosts visitors year-round—though winter is much slower. The small business community in Manistique is creative and engaged, but many entrepreneurs struggle to get the customers they need to thrive.

The different business areas are not well connected for walking, biking, or even motorized traffic. Even residents don't always know about Manistique's various business districts, and there is a lack of cohesive marketing and wayfinding. In addition, there is not enough safe connectivity between the city's recreation and business areas.

Small businesses in the city are further challenged by a lack of digital connectivity. During our site visit, several businesses expressed that lack of internet access is a challenge for point-of-sale and other operations of their business (with persistent problems on certain days of the week). The deep limestone bedrock underneath downtown has made it challenging to get better internet infrastructure for downtown businesses, which is hindering the local economy.

Recommendations

Short Term (<1 year)

Improve US-2 crossing to the marina with a stop-for-pedestrian rule.

This area discourages pedestrian crossings, as traffic is too fast and dense for people to comfortably cross the highway, ultimately limiting foot traffic throughout the city. While Michigan's Uniform Traffic Code only requires drivers to yield to a pedestrian already in the crosswalk, a local ordinance could instead mandate that drivers stop for pedestrians waiting at the

curb to create safe crossing gaps. Passing and enforcing such an ordinance would ease crossings and potentially help the area meet MDOT standards for adding pedestrian-activated flashing beacons or traffic signals in the future.

Use wayfinding to guide visitors between downtown and other districts. Manistique has several distinct, loosely connected business districts, but they don't all enjoy the same visibility as downtown. Better connecting the core downtown to the lesser-known Deer Street and Trader's Point business areas could help support small businesses in those locations. To do this, a mix of temporary and permanent wayfinding and placemaking improvements can help residents and visitors understand where to go, what is walkable, and how to access points of interest like the old Manistique Water Tower or the Lakeshore Campground. Options might include directional signage (e.g., "5-minute walk to Historic Water Tower"), pavement art, overhead banners, lighting, or artistic benches that create a cohesive, branded trail. Additionally, signage directing drivers to existing public parking lots, especially those tucked away off Cedar and River Streets, will help bring visitors downtown with ease.

Better market and expand local transportation options. We heard from small businesses that transportation between different business districts, the campground, airport, and other parts of the city can be limiting—especially with no private rideshare services available. However, the Schoolcraft County Transit Authority offers highly flexible, affordable, on-demand rides throughout Manistique, the county, and even across counties in the UP, including some late-night services after bars and restaurants close. To address these perceived transportation gaps, the city, small businesses, and the



Transit Authority should partner on a marketing push to better inform residents and visitors about these available services. Furthermore, during busy summer months, these partners should consider deploying a small, fixed-route loop shuttle between Trader's Point, the campground, downtown, and Lakeview Park to enhance visitor traffic among these core areas.

Long Term (1–4 years)

Improve pedestrian crossing on US-2 bridge between downtown and Trader's Point. Walking on this bridge is uncomfortable, discouraging circulation between these two business areas and preventing campground visitors from walking downtown. Because the bridge has plenty of width to improve the pedestrian experience without inhibiting automobile traffic, the City could consider shifting the traffic lanes to one side; this would provide a bit additional “shy zone” space for pedestrians on the far sidewalk and allow for placemaking features that signal a safe, engaging crossing. Future bridge maintenance could further widen that sidewalk or add a physical pavement barrier to create a protected bikeway. Alternatively, the City could introduce a chain ferry to link Trader's Point directly to downtown, a river-crossing approach successfully used by other communities like Saugatuck. Given Manistique's proximity to the popular, user-powered raft at Kitch-iti-kipi and the City's existing plans to renovate the historic ferry docks at the mouth of the Manistique River, a chain ferry connector would build beautifully on a local historical theme while serving as a unique tourist attraction.

Improve internet access and reliability for downtown businesses. The practical, long-term path for Manistique is to focus on broadband solutions that build in redundancy while avoiding deep drilling through limestone bedrock. For the town core, the City should pursue high-capacity aerial fiber on existing utility poles to connect downtown businesses and key institutions. For edge-of-town homes and remote areas, this backbone can be layered with fixed

wireless access on existing vertical structures—such as water towers or silos—along with LEO satellite (e.g., Starlink) as a targeted option or a critical business backup. Main Street businesses can then use dual-WAN routers for seamless, multi-connection reliability. To transition from idea to implementation, Manistique should form a small broadband working group of local officials, business owners, and residents to map existing speeds, particularly during peak performance drops. This data will help the City lobby current providers and the state broadband office for funding through programs like BEAD or USDA ReConnect, leveraging local matches like pole access or tower sites. Ultimately, packaging these findings into a concise 2–3 page project concept will allow Manistique to clearly demonstrate its unique geographic constraints and drive concrete commitments from providers and funders.

Explore opportunities for marina and harbor grants.

There have been various plans over the years to expand and rehabilitate the municipal marina in Manistique. While the harbormaster building was renovated about ten years ago, the rest of the property remains dilapidated and underutilized. The City does not actively market the facility to boaters—though some promotion exists on the STC's Discover Manistique page. The City's own webpage for the marina lists slip rates and rules, but fails to provide information on available amenities, photographs of the facility, or compelling reasons why boaters should come ashore to visit Manistique. By comparison, other cities along the Great Lakes execute much more robust marketing of their municipal marinas, e.g., the [City of Escanaba's marina website](#). An opportunity exists for the marina and adjacent public park to become a well-maintained, attractive, and engaging destination. To achieve this, the City should pursue additional grant funding from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources or philanthropic sources to make physical improvements to the marina and surrounding property, including the potential expansion of boating, fishing, and recreational facilities, placemaking features, and enhanced event spaces.

Opportunity 2: Case Study

Farmington Pedestrian Crossing Ordinance:

Municipalities including Farmington, Kalamazoo, Traverse City, and Ann Arbor have had “duty to stop” ordinances in place for several years. All have reported significant success in improving crosswalk safety and increased awareness from motorists.

Farmington’s ordinance is provided as potential language:

Sec. 31-55. – Pedestrians; right-of-way in crosswalk.

Rule 702 is amended to read as follows:

(1) The driver of a vehicle shall stop for a pedestrian standing within the designated ADA ramp adjacent to any marked crosswalk facing the roadway, or within the designated ADA ramp adjacent to any unmarked crosswalk at an intersection facing the roadway or at any point within the crosswalk, except at intersections where the movement of traffic is being regulated by a police officer or a traffic control signal; and at such regulated intersections operators of vehicles shall stop for all pedestrians crossing or who have started to cross the roadway on the “go” or “walk” signal.

(2) A person who violates this section is responsible for a civil infraction. (Ord. No. C-790-2018, § I, 12-17-18)

Opportunity 2: Resources

1. [“Walk \[Your City\]” Tactical Signage Toolkit](#)
2. [International Downtown Association Guide for Business Districts Working with Artists on Placemaking](#)
3. [Michigan Broadband Map](#)
4. [MEDC Broadband Office](#)
5. [Schoolcraft County Transit Authority](#)
6. [Saugatuck Chain Ferry](#)
7. [DNR Recreation Grants](#)

Opportunity 3: Enhance Beauty and Safety Downtown

Overview

Community members are witnessing the revival of downtown Manistique firsthand via a busy events calendar, redevelopment partnerships with the MEDC and Invest UP, and steady small business investments. To sustain this momentum, City-led placemaking infrastructure can visually demonstrate municipal commitment and draw more community life into the commercial core.

In the near term, Manistique can deploy low-cost, high-impact design interventions that instantly elevate downtown aesthetics while signaling to residents and visitors that the district is safe, inviting, and active. Over the longer term, the City can integrate these design principles directly into the commercial hub’s zoning framework and combat winter business blues through seasonal programming.

Recommendations

Short Term (<1 year)

Emphasize crosswalks. Crosswalks are both necessary structures for local economic activity and potent symbols of municipal care for community residents. In places that experience heavy snow—such as Manistique—crosswalks must be repainted each spring as soon as the streets are clear and dry. Consider implementing crosswalks featuring

cultural motifs, historical imagery, or student artwork that reflect Manistique’s best assets. Given the wear and tear caused by snow removal, the City should explore installing full-depth colored concrete or stamped concrete, which will not chip like paint. Consider adding vertical placemaking elements such as planters, trees, landscaping, and overhead signage to make crosswalks stand out to both pedestrians and drivers.

Set the vibe with lighting. To help draw people downtown and raise awareness of existing businesses, Manistique should invest in improved lighting along Cedar and River Streets. Draping commercially available string lights across the entire stretch—or just portions of Downtown—could create a luminescent atmosphere for visitors, providing a sense of safety and warmth during summer and winter nights alike. The City can experiment with placement and configuration to draw attention to certain areas, literally “spotlighting” the new sidewalk seating areas and plazas.

Expand façade enhancement efforts. The City has done fine work enhancing the aesthetics of downtown for visitors and residents. Several buildings sport colorful murals or updated windows. However, many of the storefronts look dated and in need of a refresh. Continue to make façade grants available for small businesses to make exterior improvements that enhance the visual appeal



of downtown, encouraging visitors to linger. To increase impact and accelerate momentum, the City should consider raising the matching grant beyond the current \$2,000 limit and offering the funding cycle more than once per year. Increasing grant size would allow businesses to pursue more substantive projects, while moving away from a strict annual timeline would make the program more accessible for small businesses that cannot afford to wait for a single yearly window to open.

Long Term (1–4 years)

Adopt design guidelines. Manistique’s Zoning Ordinance currently offers limited site regulations for the B-1 District, where its core downtown commercial nodes are located. To promote visual cohesion across the commercial activity on Cedar and River Streets, the City should consider implementing light architectural and design guidelines for new construction, redevelopment, and major facade renovations within this district. These standards might include architectural features like minimum transparency requirements for ground-floor commercial elevations, or decorative components such as cornices and murals. To ensure these policies improve aesthetics and the pedestrian experience without overly burdening the business community, the City should actively engage local business owners in the creation of these design guidelines.

Pilot winter programming. Small business owners noted their annual financial challenges during the slow winter season. To alleviate some of this, the City should partner with local business owners to pilot winter programming that captures snowmobilers and other winter recreation enthusiasts. Where possible, snowmobiling trails should be equipped with wayfinding signage directing travelers to downtown amenities. To continually attract residents downtown, consider organizing a tree lighting and mini holiday market at Triangle Park—incentivizing Schoolcraft County’s “Let it Glow” holiday light competition for small businesses on Cedar and River Streets—and identifying underutilized plazas or lots that could be transformed into ice rinks.

Coordinate pop-up business events in vacant buildings. During our site visit, several attendees noted vacancies in ground-floor properties downtown—some of which were simply being used as storage. These “dead zones” considerably lessen the appeal of downtown. The City should work with owners of vacant storefronts to allow for pop-up retail or community activities in those spaces. This could expand existing downtown events with an indoor component, show off the potential of these buildings, and reactivate some of these dead zones.

Opportunity 3: Case Study

Port Huron Downtown Development Authority:

In recent years, Port Huron’s DDA has implemented many beautification, public art, and winter programming projects intended to draw foot traffic downtown, especially during winter months. The DDA recently worked with business owners to install suspended string lights above businesses along its main central business corridor. The lights are held safely in place by sleds atop buildings. Together with investments in custom murals, wayfinding signage, and public art, these string lights have transformed the pedestrian experience of downtown, creating a dreamy backdrop for residents and visitors to enjoy after a night of shopping and dining in Port Huron.

downtownph.com/projects-648/

Opportunity 3: Resources

1. [Main Street Solution Center Guide to Design Guidelines](#)
2. [Downtown Clean Up and Maintenance Guide](#)
3. [Michigan Main Streets Solution Center – Signage Guide for Downtowns](#)
4. [MiPlace Winter Strategies for Downtowns and Business Districts](#)
5. [Port Huron Downtown Hanging Lights](#)
6. [Allegan Pop-Up Retail](#)

Conclusion and Next Steps

The momentum behind Manistique's ongoing revival—fueled by steady small business investments and partnerships with the MEDC and Invest UP—presents a fantastic opportunity for long-term growth. To sustain this economic turnaround, the City must actively address the structural, physical, and digital barriers currently holding local entrepreneurs back.

Manistique boasts distinct commercial nodes and exceptional recreational assets like the Boardwalk and Lakeshore Campground. Yet, these areas remain disconnected, isolating districts like Deer Street and Trader's Point from the core downtown, which limits customer foot traffic and deepens the winter business slump. To bridge these gaps, a coordinated municipal approach is required, as well as creative and resourceful planning to bring digital connectivity downtown.

Ongoing placemaking and beautification will be pillars of revitalization. With consistent wayfinding and ongoing facade renovations in the B-1 District, the City can cultivate a sense of visual cohesion along the core commercial corridors of Cedar and River Streets. Furthermore, transforming underutilized properties like the municipal marina into attractive waterfront assets visually communicates to both residents and Great Lakes boaters that Manistique is a place worth exploring.

Proactive municipal leadership is vital. While partnerships with STC and the Central UP Small Business Support Hub have made remarkable strides in regional marketing and technical assistance, state funding structures are shifting. The City of Manistique must step into this gap to ensure a welcoming, navigable, and competitive business climate. By taking ownership of these physical, economic, and digital networks, the City can fully empower its small business community and secure a vibrant, resilient future.

Small-Scale and Short-Term Interventions

- Invest time and city resources in supporting small businesses.
- Improve online access to information.
- Improve the US-2 crossing to the marina with a stop-for-pedestrian rule.
- Use wayfinding to guide visitors between downtown and other districts.
- Better market and expand local transportation options.
- Emphasize crosswalks.
- Set the vibe with lighting.
- Expand façade enhancement efforts.

Large-Scale and Long-Term Interventions

- Pursue Redevelopment Ready Communities Certification and Michigan Main Streets status.
- Foster working relationships with small developers.
- Continue the housing partnership with Delta-Schoolcraft Intermediate School District
- Improve pedestrian crossing on US-2 bridge between downtown and Trader's Point.
- Improve internet access and reliability for downtown businesses.
- Explore opportunities for marina and harbor grants.
- Adopt design guidelines.
- Pilot winter programming.
- Coordinate pop-up business events in vacant buildings.



Acknowledgements

The Michigan Municipal League would like to acknowledge our partners who were integral to this exploration: Lake Superior Community Partnership, Central Upper Peninsula Small Business Support Hub, the City of Manistique, and Schoolcraft Tourism & Commerce for their enthusiastic engagement, local knowledge, and deep community connections, as well as McKenna for consulting support to our team.

We would also like to thank the dedicated Manistique entrepreneurs, small business owners, and support organizations (both local and regional) who participated in our stakeholder workshops in Manistique, as well as a regional partner convening at the end of our site visit week.

We extend our deepest gratitude for your support and partnership in this effort!

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