

Introduction

Overview

In 1975, Public Act 197, the Downtown Development Authority Act was passed into law to be used as a “tool” by local communities in their efforts in revitalizing their central business districts. A copy of Act 197, with amendments, can be found in Appendix A: Public Acts. Briefly, Act 197 is entitled as:

“An Act to provide for the establishment of a downtown development authority; to prescribe its powers and duties; to correct and prevent deterioration in business districts; to encourage historic preservation; to authorize the acquisition and disposal of interests in real and personal property; to authorize the creation and implementation of development plans in the districts; to promote the economic growth of the districts; to create a board; to prescribe its powers and duties; to authorize the levy and collection of taxes; to authorize the issuance of bonds and other evidences of indebtedness; to authorize the use of tax increment financing; to reimburse downtown development authorities for certain losses of tax increment revenues; and to prescribe the powers and duties of certain state officials.”

Purpose

The City of Evert Downtown Development Authority Master Plan (Plan) is designed to provide the legal authority for the City of Evert (City) to utilize Tax Increment Financing (TIF) as a means to halt deterioration in property values throughout the City and especially in the Central Business District (CBD). The Plan may outline financing for, but not limited to, the following activities, as applicable.

- Public open space and streetscape improvement work.
- Demolition and clearance of selected properties and buildings.
- Costs to acquire, construct, reconstruct, rehabilitate, restore, preserve, equip, improve, maintain, repair, and operate other public facilities and buildings, including public restrooms, information centers, and public parking lots that are appropriate to the execution of the Plan.
- Property appraisals, title searches, legal services, purchase negotiations, eminent domain proceedings (if necessary), and payment for real and personal property acquisitions.
- Relocation assistance payments and compensation payments to displaced businesses and individuals (if necessary) that are affected by a DDA project.
- Planning and promotional costs associated with stimulating business development within the Downtown Development Authority District (DDA District).
- Administrative costs associated with carrying out the Plan.

Establishment of the City of Evert Downtown Development Authority

Pursuant to the provisions of Act 197 of 1975, the City of Evart City Council (City Council) adopted Ordinance Number 240 on August 20, 1984 after conducting a public hearing on the establishment of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) on August 6, 1984. Ordinance Number 240 provided for the creation of the City of Evart DDA. The DDA was given all of the powers and duties prescribed for a DDA pursuant to Act 197. A copy of Ordinance Number 240 can be found in Appendix A: *Ordinances*.

On July 20, 1987, the City held a public hearing concerning the expansion of the DDA District boundaries. Directly following the public hearing on July 20, 1987, the City Council adopted Ordinance Number 247, approving the amended DDA District boundaries. A copy of Ordinance Number 247 can be found in Appendix A: *Ordinances*. Figure 1: *Initial DDA District Boundaries* and Figure 2: *Amended DDA District Boundaries* are located in Appendix B: *Maps*.

Long-term Goals and Activities

The DDA District was designed after giving careful consideration to the factors deemed important to the growth and development of the CBD. The DDA believes that in order to successfully revitalize the CBD, both the public and private sectors must participate in the timely planning and development of the DDA District's infrastructure, which is needed to support new development, demolition or renovation of existing structures within the DDA District, and other physical improvements geared towards creating new jobs, attracting new businesses, retaining existing jobs and businesses, increasing the City's tax base, and increasing property values within the DDA District.

The DDA has identified many long-term and short-term goals and improvement activities which will help revitalize the CBD. Long-term commitment, support, and encouragement from all sectors of the community are needed to implement recommendations of the DDA.

Activities the DDA has identified as requiring improvement, maintenance, or attention may include, but are not limited to:

- Improving and maintaining streets, sidewalks, lighting, and planters within the DDA District.
- Developing and maintaining additional parking facilities with access walkways to Main Street.
- Establishing marketing, educational, and financial assistance programs for businesses in the DDA District.
- Encouraging and supporting policy aimed at multiple use facilities in the DDA District.
- Updating water and sewer lines in the DDA District.
- Developing wireless and/or high speed telecommunication utilities in the DDA District.
- Developing a façade improvement program for buildings in the DDA District.
- Establishing various types of business incubators in the DDA District.
- Developing a business recruitment and retention plan for businesses in the DDA District.

- Promoting programs and events that increase the sales of goods and services in the DDA District by increasing foot traffic and the visibility of downtown businesses.
- Developing a coordinated way-finding signage system throughout the DDA District.
- Developing designated bicycle and snowmobile routes to serve the DDA District.
- Improving, maintaining, and developing seasonal decoration/beautification measures in the DDA District.
- Providing transportation services, or acquiring transportation services/facilities and equipment to provide access to the DDA District for those without easy transportation.
- Assisting in the development/improvement of recreational and cultural assets within the DDA District.
- Pursuing economic development on an area-wide basis by coordinating economic development efforts between area counties, local governments, and area chambers of commerce and other like-minded organizations.

Amended Downtown Development Plan

The following references to “sections” relate to specific items that must be addressed in any Development Plan as required by State Statutes as found in Section 17(2) of P.A. 197 of 1975.

Section 17(2)(a): District Boundaries

“The designation of boundaries of the Development Area in relation to highways, streets, streams, or otherwise.”

Figure 2: *Amended DDA District Boundaries*, found in Appendix B: *Maps*, shows the boundaries of the Development Area. There are no other development areas located in the DDA District, hence the boundaries of the Development Area are the same as the boundaries of the DDA District.

Section 17(2)(b): Existing and Proposed Land Uses

“The location and extent of existing streets and other public facilities within the development area and shall designate the location, character and extent of the categories of public and private land uses then existing and proposed for the development area, including residential, recreational, commercial, industrial, educational and other uses and shall include a legal description of the development area.”

Figure 3: *Existing Land Use*, found in Appendix B: *Maps*, shows the location and extent of existing public and private land uses within the DDA District. Figure 4: *Existing Zoning*, found in Appendix B: *Maps*, depicts the zoning classification of parcels within the DDA District. The DDA District includes a traditional downtown/city-center area along Main Street, more conventional general commercial development along U.S. Hwy 10 heading east and west from downtown, and industrial areas along River Street heading north

from downtown. The downtown area contains retail shops (hardware stores, pharmacies, video rentals, bookstore, electronics, thrift, etc.), personal and professional service businesses (insurance, accounting, beauty, fitness, etc.), medical offices (physical therapy, chiropractic, dental, etc.), restaurants, Post Office, lodging, arts (dance, art league/studio), civic (library, police, fire, economic development) and upper-level housing. The pedestrian friendly streetscape is the product of a series of phased improvement projects carried out by the DDA, such as decorative street lighting, planter boxes, benches, decorative sidewalk pavers, and trash receptacles.

East and west of the downtown, the DDA District contains general commercial developments such as banks with a drive-through, vehicle repair, gas stations, car washes, restaurants, Laundromat, and other vehicular scale establishments. Similar businesses extend west along US Hwy 10 beyond the DDA District. North of the downtown, the DDA District contains the industrialized area of Liberty Dairy – Dean Foods, located between the Muskegon River and North River Street. This industrial complex contains Dairy offices and production space as well as a large loading/unloading and semi-trailer parking area.

The land development pattern proposed for the DDA District, as outlined in the 2001 City of Evart Master Plan (City Master Plan), is shown in Figure 5: *Future Land Use*, found in Appendix B: *Maps*. As depicted, the proposed future land use generally preserves the established land use pattern while allowing for infill and redevelopment of older or vacant parcels, with the exception of reclassifying the currently zoned industrial/commercial area along North River Street to multi-family residential (while it is not the intention of this Plan to eliminate those uses, the City would like to see this riverfront area converted to multi-family uses if the opportunity should arise).

Further recommendations outlined in the City Master Plan include: encouraging the reuse of older buildings and underutilized properties as an alternate to new construction; a zoning overlay for the CBD that preserves the existing scale, pattern, design, and location of buildings; developing regulations that minimize the visual impact of signage and to help create an uncluttered streetscape; developing more off-street parking; and promoting the CBD with formal entrances at the north and south entrances to the CBD.

Ground-floor space along Main Street is recommended to be reserved for pedestrian-oriented retailing and services, with offices and housing above. Not only will this increased density assist retail uses in the area, but also the vitality of the area will be strengthened due to the increased pedestrian activity during the evening and night. The adaptive reuse of residential units for home occupations, specialty shops, and office uses is therefore encouraged. Other appropriate uses may include places of worship, funeral homes, restaurants, service stations, and lodging. Industrial uses, however, should not be permitted to develop or expand within the downtown district, unless such development or expansion occurs in a currently zoned industrial area.

Legal descriptions of the initial DDA District boundaries and of the amended DDA District boundaries can be found in Appendix C: *Legal Descriptions*. Since the Development Area is the same as the amended DDA District, the legal description for the Development Area is the same as the current DDA District.

Section 17(2)(c): Existing Improvements to be Addressed

“A description of existing improvements in the development area to be demolished, repaired, or altered, a description of any repairs and alterations, and an estimate of the time required for completion.”

A full description of all projects, including those that may involve any of the changes described above, is provided in Section 17(2)(d).

Section 17(2)(d): Project Improvement Plan

“The location, extent, character, and estimated cost of the improvements including rehabilitation contemplated for the development area and an estimate of the time required for completion.”

The DDA is empowered to undertake a variety of activities in the rejuvenation of its District, including:

- Plan and propose the construction, renovation, repair, remodeling, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, or reconstruction of a public facility, an existing building or a multiple-family dwelling unit that may be necessary or appropriate to the execution of a plan which, in the opinion of the Board, aids in the economic growth of the downtown district.
- Plan, propose, and implement an improvement to a public facility within the development area to comply with the barrier-free design requirements of the State of Michigan.
- Acquire property by purchase or otherwise, on terms and conditions and in a manner the Authority deems proper, or own, convey or otherwise dispose of, or rights of interest therein, which the Authority determines is reasonable and necessary to achieve the purposes of P.A. 197 of 1975, as amended (DDA Act), and to grant or acquire licenses, easements and options with respect thereto.
- Improve land and construct, reconstruct, rehabilitate, restore and preserve, equip, improve, maintain, repair and operate any building, including multiple-family dwellings, and any necessary or desirable appurtenances thereto, within the downtown district for the use, in whole or in part, of any public or private person or corporation, or combination thereof.

The following project improvement plan is intended to be general in nature, allowing for flexibility in design and implementation. Detailed planning, design, and engineering studies should be conducted to specifically set project parameters. Improvements are generally arranged according to their area of impact and are assigned to the following four categories: Infrastructure, Business Programs and Promotion, Downtown Enhancement, and Administration. The order of the projects/activities or the categories implies no ranking of priorities.

Infrastructure

The Infrastructure category provides for the development and repair of City streets, sidewalks, streetscape elements, parking facilities, water and storm/sanitary sewer lines, and Internet/telecommunications to better serve properties within the DDA District. All infrastructure projects should be conducted in cooperation with the City, County, and State and strive to leverage public and private funds (i.e. grants, bonds, special assessments, etc.) to the greatest extent possible.

A. Street and Alleyway Repair and Maintenance

Streets and alleyways located within the District need to be continuously monitored and repaired or maintained as needed. Specific projects may include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Paving and repaving, including steps to do so (i.e. pulverizing, milling, base repair, etc.)
- 2) Crack sealing
- 3) Pot hole repair
- 4) Curb and gutter
- 5) Line painting

B. Sidewalk Repair (Main Street from Railroad Avenue to Fifth Street)

During the early and mid 1990's, the Main Street sidewalk was completed as part of an entire streetscape project by the DDA. Currently, the sidewalk needs repair, especially along the south end of Main Street and along areas with brick inlays. The DDA may consider making repairs/improvements that would reduce potential trip hazards and long-term maintenance as well as improve the visual and functional aesthetics within the District. Specific steps may include:

- 1) Remove and replace sidewalk
- 2) Remove and replace concrete curb and gutter
- 3) Remove brick inlays and replace with colored stamped concrete
- 4) Replace curb ramps at pedestrian crossings with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant curb ramps

C. Sidewalk Repair (U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh St. from River Street to Cedar Street/Twin Creek)

During the early 2000's, the U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh Street sidewalk was completed as part of an entire streetscape project by the DDA. Currently, the sidewalk needs repair, especially along areas with brick inlays and areas adjacent to business drives. The DDA may consider making repairs/improvements that would reduce potential trip hazards and long-term maintenance as well as improve the visual and functional aesthetics within the District. Specific steps may include:

- 1) Remove and replace sidewalk, having sidewalks near business drives engineered to withstand extra traffic
- 2) Remove and replace concrete curb and gutter
- 3) Remove brick inlays and replace with colored stamped concrete
- 4) Replace curb ramps at pedestrian crossings with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant curb ramps

D. Sidewalk Extensions

The DDA may fill in any gaps in sidewalks within the DDA District to promote safer pedestrian access to business, residential, and other properties.

- 1) Develop sidewalks from River Street to the Muskegon River along both sides of U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh Street to tie in with the existing downtown sidewalk
- 2) Develop sidewalks along both sides of Fifth Street between Main Street and River Street to fill the existing gap
- 3) Develop sidewalk along the east side of River Street from U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh Street to First Street
- 4) Develop sidewalks along both sides of River Street from U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh Street to Railroad Avenue to allow better access to the Skate Park and Pere Marquette Rail Trail
- 5) Develop sidewalks along both sides of Railroad Avenue from River Street to Pine Street to allow better access to local businesses, City Hall/Depot, the Skate Park and Pere Marquette Rail Trail

E. Light Pole Repair and Maintenance

The decorative light poles located within the District (Main Street, U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh Street, walk-through park, and parking lots) were constructed as part of the respective streetscape projects during the mid 1990's and early 2000's. The DDA may consider making repairs/improvements to the light poles and bases that would improve the visual and functional aesthetics within the District. Specific steps may include:

- 1) Replacing light poles and bases as needed
- 2) Repainting light poles
- 3) Retrofitting existing lights to more energy efficient lights (i.e. LED)
- 4) Upgrading electric controls
- 5) Refurbishing light pole bases
 - a. Replacing bricks
 - b. Re-facing bases with new material (i.e. stone, bricks, solid concrete)

F. New Lighting

Lighting is perhaps the most visible of all the streetscape elements and can be a common thread to tie together a streetscape. The DDA may install new decorative or other lights within the District as needed, with the decorative lights being similar in design to those found along Main Street and U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh Street. The DDA may also install parking lot, alley, and walkway lighting so as to create a safe, inviting, and customer friendly atmosphere.

G. Flower Planters

The current streetscape along Main Street, which was constructed during the mid 1990's, allowed for brick flower planters tied to some of the light pole bases. These planters provide the needed infrastructure to fuel many of the DDA's beautification efforts and serve as a nice platform for a variety of seasonal decorations. However, many of the planters are in poor condition. The DDA may consider making repairs/improvements to the planters that would reduce long-term maintenance and improve the visual and functional aesthetics within the District. Specific steps may include:

- 1) Refurbishing the planters by replacing bricks or re-facing with a new material, such as stone
- 2) Installing similar planters or possibly removable planters along U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh Street from the Muskegon River to Twin Creek

H. Parking Lot Repair and Maintenance

Off-street public parking is essential for both shoppers and employee of the CBD. Current off-street public parking lots are in varying degrees of condition from needing total reconstruction to very little work. Public parking lots located within the District need to be continuously monitored and repaired or maintained as needed. Specific projects may include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Rehabilitation of parking lot on NW corner of River Street and U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh Street, including pulverizing, base repair, grading and compaction, new pavement, and line painting
- 2) Rehabilitation of parking lot located on west side of River Street between U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh Street and Sixth Street, including pulverizing, base repair, grading and compaction, new pavement, and line painting
- 3) Resurfacing and line painting of parking lot located on east side of Pine Street between U.S. Hwy 10/Seventh Street and Sixth Street

I. New Parking Facilities

The DDA may perform a parking needs analysis to determine the need of additional parking facilities. In particular the most northern and southern areas of the CBD may be underserved as there are no current public parking facilities adjacent to those areas. If an analysis demonstrates the need for additional parking facilities, then the DDA may assist in the acquisition of properties, demolition of structures, and construction and beautification of the new parking facilities.

J. Water and Storm/Sanitary Sewer Line Replacement, Repair, and Maintenance

Properly functioning water, storm, and sewer lines are essential elements of a successful CBD and are important to both shoppers and building/store owners. Lines and systems located within the District need to be continuously monitored and repaired or maintained as needed. Specific projects may include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Adjusting and replacing drainage structures
- 2) Repairing leaks and blockages
- 3) Replacing lines

K. Telecommunications and Internet Access Improvement

Modern-day business owners rely on access to high-speed telecommunications, especially high-speed internet access in order to properly conduct and promote their businesses. The DDA may consider providing free or low-cost high-speed or wireless internet to the CBD in order to give businesses in the CBD the competitive advantage they need. Furthermore, limited free wireless internet access may increase pedestrian traffic within the CBD, thus giving an advantage to visitors and residents alike. Free or low-cost downtown high-speed internet project specifics may include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Expanding cable infrastructure
- 2) Working with local internet service providers to provide the best and most cost effective plan for the CBD
- 3) Working with local wireless internet service providers to provide unlimited wireless network access to the CBD
- 4) Developing a method of billing to offset the costs of providing the service (similar to other non-metered utilities)

Business Programs and Promotion

The Business Programs and Promotion category relates to projects and activities that are designed to promote economic growth within the District through the creation of a business, social, and cultural environment that is vibrant, unique, identifiable, and welcoming. This category also supports the development and operation of community festivals and attractions that are intended to draw people to the CBD from the surrounding region. Additionally, this category supports the development of programs specifically suited to the enhancement and betterment of the business community within the District. Particular programs and efforts may include, but are not limited to, the following:

A. Business-Friendly and Multiple-Use Policies

The DDA may encourage and support business-friendly and multiple-use policies at the local, regional, state, and federal levels. Examples of such policies include zoning overlays, form-based zoning, zoning that promotes multiple uses (i.e. retail on first level and residential on above levels), tax abatements and incentives, Brownfield redevelopment, simplifying application and permit processes, eliminating duplicated procedures, and streamlining the development process. The DDA may coordinate with City and County government, State legislators and departments (i.e. Michigan Economic Development Corporation), and other groups (i.e. Michigan Municipal League, Small Business Association of Michigan) to pursue these policy efforts.

B. Business Best Practices

The DDA may develop programs that assist businesses in marketing, education, and finance. Such programs may include establishing one-on-one business consultations, offering topical course/workshop series, and facilitating networking among existing and start-up businesses. To develop such programs, the DDA may need to coordinate and negotiate with professional service providers; educators, speakers, retirees, and local, state, and federal government and organizational leaders and agents; Chambers of Commerce, other business organizations, and the local business community as a whole. Examples of such programs may include: finding a financing consultant for

a downtown business; organizing a series of marketing classes/workshops that may encompass customer service, storefront presentation, finding “niches”, maximizing Web presence, or utilizing social media; or establishing a forum where existing businesses can share business “know-how” they have gained, thus mentoring entrepreneurs, start-up businesses, and other existing businesses alike.

C. Business Retention and Recruitment

The DDA may develop business retention/expansion and recruitment programs to encourage existing and potential businesses to locate and/or expand in the CBD. Current economic development thinking is that the best business recruitment plan a community can have is to have a very good and active business retention plan. Simply stated, the best selling feature for a potential incoming business is the success of the existing businesses community. The reverse is also true: an unsuccessful existing business community can turn away potential incoming businesses. Therefore, a major portion of any business recruitment or attraction strategy must deal with business retention. Additionally, it requires less resources and time to capture the growth and expansion of existing businesses than to attract new businesses to a community. Existing businesses have already invested in and employed people in the community; it is imperative that the DDA retain and encourage those businesses.

The term “economic gardening” focuses on the retention and expansion of existing businesses that are in a high-growth stage, generally small local businesses that employ ten or more people, but which have the potential to create the most amount of jobs if properly “nurtured”. Said differently, economic gardening grows economies from the inside-out rather than relying on the recruitment of outside businesses. However, this does not mean if an outside business is considering a community, the community should ignore that business or that a community should never actively recruit outside businesses; some outside businesses might perfectly fit into the existing business community (i.e. suppliers to existing businesses). Hence, it is important that the DDA consider implementing a business recruitment/attraction strategy that hinges upon a solid business retention/expansion strategy. The following framework outlines a typical strategy.

Business Retention/Expansion

- 1) Coordinate annual or bi-annual retention calls and/or visits for all existing businesses located within the District. The goals of these calls/visits are to discover:
 - a) Owner’s/manager’s general feelings/comments about conducting business in Evart (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
 - b) Baseline statistics for each business (i.e. number of employees, payroll amount, typical revenue and expenses, capital investments, etc.)
 - c) To whom and how the business is currently marketing itself
 - d) What sort of programs or services the DDA can provide and if the business is aware of currently offered programs and services
 - e) If the business has considered forming partnerships with other area businesses or organizations
 - f) How well the business’ industry sect is doing as a whole
 - g) If the business has any expansion or relocation plans

- 2) Post retention call/visit follow-up: answer any questions or provide further information that was promised during the call/visit and offer opportunities for assistance
- 3) Benchmark and measure/track data and results (e.g. jobs created/retained, tax revenue generated, capital investment, payroll generated, etc.)

Business Recruitment/Attraction

- 1) Have a solid business retention/expansion program in place
- 2) Know community assets inside and out and build upon strengths
- 3) Know what types of business would be compatible with the existing business community and what types of business the area market would support
 - a) New businesses in a strong regional sector
 - b) Suppliers to existing businesses
 - c) New sectors that the State is prioritizing (may get extra incentives)
- 4) Know what types of business would achieve community goals – do not try to recruit a business the community does not want
- 5) When competing with neighboring communities, let the “best site win” – do not be afraid to inform a business about a better neighboring site – any new business in the area is good for the community as a whole
- 6) Market the community as a great place to conduct business – what assets can downtown Evart “sell” (i.e. workforce, space, location, tax and other financial incentives, DDA programs and events, infrastructure, etc.)
 - a) Promote and advertise (print, radio, television, web, social media, etc.)
 - b) Visit trade shows
 - c) Partner with local, regional, state, and educational organizations or institutions for cooperative advertising and promotion (businesses dislike community infighting)
- 7) Measure and track results (e.g. website hits, site inquiries, jobs created, tax revenue generated, capital investment, new payroll generated, etc.)

D. Retail Business Incubators

The DDA may establish various retail business incubators within the District. Business incubators are programs designed to accelerate the successful development of entrepreneurial companies through an array of business support resources and services. These resources and services are often shared among several businesses which are part of the incubator. For example, incubator businesses may share space, utilities, telecommunications, supplies, equipment, or advertising and promotional costs.

According to Section 7(2) of P.A. 197 of 1975, “if it is the express determination of the board to create, operate, or fund a retail business incubator in the downtown district, the board shall give preference to tenants who will provide goods or services that are not available or that are underserved in the downtown area. If the board creates, operates, or funds retail business incubators in the downtown district, the board and each tenant who leases space in a retail business incubator shall enter into a written contract that includes, but is not limited to, all of the following:

- The lease or rental rate may be below the fair market rate as determined by the board.
- The requirement that a tenant may lease space in the retail business incubator for a period not to exceed 18 months.

- The terms of a joint operating plan with one or more other businesses located in the downtown district.
- A copy of the business plan of the tenant that contains measurable goals and objectives.
- The requirements that the tenant participate in basic management classes, business seminars, or other business education programs offered by the authority, the local chamber of commerce, local community college, or institutions of higher education, as determined by the board.”

To properly establish a retail business incubator, the DDA may need to perform the following steps:

- 1) Perform an incubator feasibility study
- 2) Determine the preferred type of incubator (i.e. arts, kitchen/food, fashion, home-based, mixed retail, traditional retail)
- 3) Obtain a suitable incubator building
- 4) Recruit incubator businesses
- 5) Provide proper management and oversight of the incubator program
- 6) Have “Business Best Practices” programs in place and require incubator businesses to participate (see Business Programs and Promotions section)
- 7) Measure and track the success of incubator business while in the incubator
- 8) Seek sites to which businesses in the incubator can “graduate” to
- 9) Measure and track the success of incubator businesses after “graduation” and offer limited services as needed (business would fall into retention/expansion program)

E. Façade and Building Improvement Program

The DDA Board approved a Façade and Building Improvement Program on September 15, 2010. This program is a 50/50 matching grant program utilizing DDA general funds. Program categories include paint, signs, awnings, windows/doors, landscaping, design assistance, façade renovations, and interior renovations. Grant limits vary per category and range from \$100 to \$5,000.

Additionally, the DDA Board approved a demolition plan in November 2011 to assist property owners in removal of substandard buildings or portions thereof. The goal of this matching program is to encourage an increase in quality structures in the DDA district.

These existing programs ought to be evaluated and modified as needed and at a minimum every two years. There ought to be continuous promotion of the program to business and building owners. Alternate funding for the program may also be researched and implemented, as sufficient funding is key the survival of the program.

F. Events, Attractions, Promotions, and Incentives

The DDA may choose to promote a positive image of the District and potentially increase the sales of goods and services within the District via special community events, attractions, promotions, and incentives. Current activities of this nature include the annual Memorial Day Parade, Downtown Summer Musicale Series held at the Depot, annual Independence Day activities including the Parade and Party in the Park, the Shop Local Campaign and associated Fall Festival Streetfair, and Christmas in a Small Town. Additionally, there are several events held outside of the District at the Osceola County Fairgrounds and Evert Air Industrial Park that also contribute to the well being of the Evert business community as a whole; when at all possible, the DDA may wish to capitalize on these other events.

The Downtown Summer Musicale Series and the Shop Local Campaign are the two main event/promotion activities the DDA currently organizes and sponsors. As such, they deserve special mention and assessment.

Downtown Summer Musicale Series

The Downtown Summer Musicale Series (herein referred to as “Musicale”) began as a response to the perceived lack of cultural opportunity around the Evert area and in 1996 began offering Saturday concerts performed by local entertainers. Each year the Musicale expanded its talent pool and by the late 1990’s and early 2000’s offered world-renowned talent to Evert. Since that time, the Musicale has been scaled back performance date wise, due to the economic climate; however, artistic quality, diversity, and overall enjoyment are still key ingredients in the selection of performers.

The Musicale is perhaps the most well known and most successful of any DDA project and it receives much support from the local business community and individuals. On average, the Musicale receives \$6,000-\$7,000 annually from local support. In addition, the DDA has secured grants for the Musicale from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the Osceola County Community Foundation for a number of years. However, in the past there has been concern over the amount of DDA general fund dollars going towards the Musicale and if those dollars would be more effective going elsewhere. Some discussion has taken place regarding whether another organization would be willing and able to take over operations of the Musicale. Other potential changes to the Musicale may include purchasing a mobile stage to enable the performances to be conducted in the heart of the CBD rather than at the Depot, which is on the fringes of the CBD; and the employment of a separate part-time Musicale Program Coordinator, which would free-up the DDA Director’s time to pursue other projects.

Shop Local Campaign

The Evert Shop Local Campaign (Campaign) started in the Spring of 2009 with an official kick-off event that Fall. The main objectives of the Campaign are to educate consumers as to the products and services available in Evert; to encourage consumers to shop in Evert for those products and services instead of travelling elsewhere; and to support locally-owned and operated businesses

throughout the Evert area. Campaign sanctioned activities have included promoting businesses in the Evert Journal; the issuance of “Evert Bucks”, a local currency that can only be spent at participating businesses; monthly Shop Local drawings for Evert Bucks and donated prizes; and the formation and organization of an annual Shop Local Streetfair that is a mix of a business expo and street carnival. Future potential Campaign activities may include, but are not limited to the following: coupon books, reusable shopping bags, limited time city-wide discounts, sidewalk sales, scavenger hunts, in-store miniature golf scramble, punch cards, and etcetera. It is important to note that whatever activity is pursued, it will be imperative to have the input, cooperation, and participation of the business community to make the activity successful.

G. Transportation to Downtown

Ensuring that residents and visitors have viable and affordable means of transportation to get downtown is essential to the success of the CBD. Tens of thousands of people attend events held at the Osceola County Fairgrounds (Fairgrounds); many of whom decide to camp at the Fairgrounds before, during, and after their respective events. Campers at the Fairgrounds and other area campgrounds often do not have a separate vehicle to travel about in and tend to be “stuck” wherever they are camping. Elderly and disabled people are another sect who tend to be “stuck” where they are. Thus both visitors and non-mobile residents may have a difficult time reaching the CBD. In response, the DDA may provide transportation services or acquire transportation services /facilities and equipment to provide access to the District for those without easy transportation. In the past, acquisition of a double-decker bus was considered, however it was decided, for various reasons, the rental of busses may be less expensive and preferable. The DDA may consider partnering with the Mecosta-Osceola Transit Authority or local taxi and dial-a-ride services to provide greater access to downtown Evert.

H. Regional Economic Development

The DDA may consider pursuing area-wide or regional economic development efforts or strategies between area counties, local governments, area chambers of commerce, and other like-minded organizations. Regional economic development efforts allow local economic development organizations to share costs, cross-promote, form networks and partnerships, advertise cooperatively, coordinate non-conflicting events, and compete more effectively in the global market.

Downtown Enhancement

The Downtown Enhancement category relates to projects and activities that are designed to enhance the physical, cultural, and recreational aspects of the District. As opposed to the Infrastructure category, these types of physical improvements are not necessarily vital to the operations of the CBD, but are merely nice enhancements that improve the overall enjoyment and use of the CBD. All enhancement projects should be conducted in cooperation with the City, County, and State and strive to leverage public and private funds (i.e. grants, bonds, special assessments, etc.) to the greatest extent possible.

Particular enhancements may include, but are not limited to:

A. Seasonal Decorations/Beautification Measures

The DDA may coordinate seasonal decoration and beautification measures throughout the District to help create a more festive and interesting Downtown atmosphere. Decoration measures may include searching for decoration companies (both retail and rental) and contracting with such companies, coordinating with the City for the installation of decorations, or incorporating decorations as part of an event (i.e. decorating contests). Seasonal decorations may include Christmas and other holiday decorations, flags, banners, lights, flowers, trees, and other items deemed suitable for outdoor ware. Beautification measures may include developing landscaping and planting guides for parks and green-spaces, purchasing flowers (for planter boxes) and/or hanging baskets for downtown, and maintaining landscaped and planted areas (i.e. weeding, mulching, watering, etc.).

B. Way-Finding Signage

The DDA may develop a coordinated way-finding signage system throughout the District to direct motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists to public offices, recreational facilities, emergency services, and points of interest. Such a signage system ought to make Downtown Evert more “user friendly” for people passing through town, visitors, and residents alike. The signage system ought to be visually coordinated and similar in appearance to other City signs (i.e. welcome signs, park signs) and aid in the development of a cohesive City “brand” or image. The DDA may need to coordinate with other City entities, such as the Department of Public Works, and with appropriate State agencies, consultants, landscape architects, or engineers to design and implement a way-finding system. Specific actions steps may include:

- 1) Developing a list of sites and locations to be included on way-finding signs
- 2) Developing a list and/or map of signage location and placement
- 3) Drafting standard sign design and sign type (i.e. banner, freestanding, decorative, expandable, etc.)
- 4) Drafting specific sign design with grouped sites/locations
- 5) Installing and maintaining signage

C. Alternate Transportation Routes

Downtown Evart is currently serviced by a good network of automobile and pedestrian routes (roads and sidewalks), but lacks in alternate transportation routes such as designated bicycle lanes. The Pere Marquette Rail Trail crosses the southern portion of the DDA District. The trail is frequently used by bicyclists, rollerbladers, and pedestrians during the summer months and heavily used by snowmobilers during the winter; however, trail users have difficulties reaching and getting around Downtown Evart (and hence the businesses and services provided there) due to the lack of a designated and well-marked and signed alternate transportation route. The DDA, in conjunction with the City and/or the Michigan Department of Transportation may design and implement a designated bicycle/snowmobile route from the Pere Marquette Rail Trail to serve the downtown and other business areas. Specific actions steps may include:

- 1) Developing a list of possible routes
- 2) Coordinating with appropriate entities to decide the most suitable route
- 3) Coordinating with appropriate entities to implement the chosen route
- 4) Developing appropriate signage and markings to make the route visible and user friendly
- 5) Promoting and enforcing the use (rather than sidewalks) of the route

D. Recreational and Cultural Assets

The DDA may assist in the development and/or improvement of recreational and cultural assets within the District. Current recreational assets the DDA may be involved with include Guyton Park, the Main Street walk through connector (pocket park), the Skate Park, and the Depot area. Developments and improvements may include expansion projects, equipment (i.e. benches, picnic tables, bicycle racks), infrastructure (i.e. sidewalks, fountains, sprinklers), and public art installations.

Administration

The Administration category provides for professional services and operational activities relating to the DDA. This category is relatively variable and is subject to the level and complexity of future activities taken on by the DDA.

A. Professional Services

Professional services may be required to implement the activities and projects outlined in this Plan and to manage and operate the DDA. Services may include, but are not limited to: grant writing and administration, planning and architectural design, engineering, landscaping services, inspections and construction management services, environmental assessment and mitigation planning, artistic and entertainment services, financial and accounting services, janitorial services, advertising and marketing services, and legal consultation.

B. DDA Operations

Operational expenditures may include staff compensation, office expenses (i.e. supplies, repairs, maintenance, furniture, rent, utilities, etc.), equipment usage and/or rentals, capital expenses, mailings and promotions, public notices, meeting space fees, and etcetera.