



DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (DDA)
WEDNESDAY, JULY 08, 2026 – 5:00 PM
CHAMBER OF BUCHANAN CITY HALL - 302 N REDBUD TRAIL, BUCHANAN MI

MINUTES

I. Call to Order

Chairperson Mast called the meeting to order at approximately 5:01 PM.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

III. Roll Call

Present: Tracy Mast, Julie Capron, Sidney Finan, Michelle Fletcher, Libby Hein, Haley Jones, Michael Reed

Absent: Joseph Williams, Mayor Mark Weedon

City Staff: City Manager Tony McGhee, Planning and Community Development Director Kristen Gundersen, City Clerk Kalla Langston-Weiss

IV. Approve Agenda

Motion by Fletcher, supported by Hein, to approve the agenda as presented.

Voice vote carried unanimously.

V. Public Comments - Agenda Items Only (3-minute limit)

Dennis Mori addressed the DDA regarding the proposed OPEN signs. He discussed accessibility clearance requirements and stated that an 80-inch vertical clearance may apply rather than an eight-foot clearance. He also noted that fixed planters, benches, or similar barriers may provide an alternative where a sign or banner is installed below the required clearance. Mr. Mori encouraged the DDA to consider these options when reviewing the OPEN sign proposal.

No additional public comment was received.

VI. Approve Minutes

A. Minutes - Consider the minutes from the Regular DDA Meeting held on June 10, 2026.

Motion by Hein, supported by Jones, to approve the June 10, 2026, Regular DDA Meeting Minutes as presented.

Voice vote carried unanimously.

VII. Unfinished Business

A. Marketing RFP Interviews

1) 5:05-5:35 pm - Duneland Media

Tim Frankie, President and co-owner of Duneland Media, presented the firm's experience with municipal and tourism marketing in Northwest Indiana. The presentation focused on website improvements, consistent branding, printed materials, social media, video advertising, YouTube, Google Ads, geotargeting, and promoting Buchanan as a full-day destination.

Duneland Media stated that a comprehensive market assessment was not its primary area of expertise and recommended using available tourism and search data rather than spending a substantial amount on a separate assessment. The firm estimated that a website redesign could cost approximately \$10,000 to \$20,000, depending on the final scope.

The DDA asked about performance data, experience with communities similar in size to Buchanan, contract flexibility, seasonal adjustments, content development, visitor retention, and website costs. Duneland Media stated that service levels could be adjusted with approximately 30 days' notice and agreed to provide additional engagement and performance information.

2) 5:35-6:05 pm - Destination by Design

Representatives of Destination by Design participated remotely. The firm described its work exclusively with public-sector clients and its experience with community branding, tourism marketing, planning, website development, wayfinding, content creation, media placement, and visitor-retention strategies.

Destination by Design explained that its process generally begins with discovery and market assessment, followed by development of a marketing strategy, campaign design, implementation, and performance measurement. Representatives discussed prior projects involving downtowns, tourism destinations, event marketing, websites, social media campaigns, and visitor engagement.

The DDA asked about the firm's ability to provide local service from North Carolina, the number of site visits included, contract flexibility, content capture, social media management, project timelines, website development, and initial startup costs. Destination by Design stated that the proposed engagement was structured as a one-year project but could be adjusted. The firm estimated that additional photography and video content capture could begin at approximately \$15,000, depending on the scope.

3) 6:05-6:35pm - JV Studios

A representative of JV Studios presented the firm's proposal and discussed the company's Southwest Michigan location and familiarity with Buchanan and the surrounding region.

JV Studios proposed conducting either a basic or comprehensive market analysis to identify target audiences, visitor interests, business opportunities, and effective marketing channels. The firm also presented several levels of ongoing service that could include social media management, paid advertising, branding, website development, content creation, and reporting.

The DDA asked about the need for a market assessment despite the firm's local familiarity, website costs, seasonal flexibility, photography and video content, and experience working with municipalities. JV Studios estimated that a tourism-oriented website with a business directory and event information could cost approximately \$5,000 to \$15,000, depending on the scope. The firm stated that it had experience with corporate, nonprofit, and local business clients but did not currently have a municipal client performing the same scope of work.

4) 6:35-7:00pm – Kzoom

Dan Martin, owner and founder of KZoom, presented the firm's proposal and described its experience with national businesses, Michigan municipalities, economic-development organizations, tourism initiatives, and Southwest Michigan clients.

KZoom presented preliminary tourism and search-engine data concerning Buchanan. The presentation discussed visitor patterns, overnight and day-trip activity, seasonal peaks, tourism

leakage to nearby communities, regional competition, online search activity, and the potential benefits of creating a separate tourism website for Buchanan.

KZoom reviewed the service levels included in its proposal. The approximately \$60,000 option included market research, search-engine analysis, a tourism website, photography and video production, digital advertising, website maintenance, and reporting. KZoom recommended that the DDA consider beginning with the approximately \$36,000 option, which would focus initially on research, website development, and content creation before beginning a larger advertising campaign. KZoom also presented an optional comprehensive monthly service package.

The DDA asked about the Buchanan Promise, the firm's local and regional experience, ongoing content capture, website development, advertising, and measurement of results.

Following the interviews, City Manager McGhee informed the DDA that the Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber was also exploring a countywide marketing campaign and had asked whether Buchanan would be interested in participating. Members discussed whether the DDA could pursue its own marketing program while also participating in a regional effort.

By consensus, the DDA agreed to review the proposals further and continue its discussion at the next regular meeting. Staff will obtain additional information regarding the regional Chamber marketing initiative. No firm was selected, and no contract was awarded.

B. BBB Funding Proposal for OPEN signs - Discussion & Consideration

Staff presented corrected cost information for the proposed OPEN signs. Staff explained that each kit contained two banners and that the estimated cost for the higher-quality banner option would be approximately \$5,160 for the initially proposed area. Expanding the program throughout the entire DDA district would increase the estimated cost.

Members discussed whether the DDA wished to fund the signs, whether the signs should be limited to the downtown business area or made available throughout the district, and whether the signs should instead be incorporated into a future comprehensive wayfinding program.

A majority of the members indicated that they did not support moving forward with the proposal at this time. Members expressed interest in reconsidering signage as part of the DDA's future wayfinding planning.

No formal action was taken.

VIII. New Business

A. Consideration of Donation of Glice Synthetic Ice Rink - Discussion & Consideration

City Manager McGhee explained that the DDA had been offered a donated synthetic ice rink previously intended for use by the Niles DDA. The rink was described as approximately 1,300 square feet and included equipment for synthetic-ice curling. Staff reported that the rink had an original value of approximately \$100,000.

The DDA discussed possible placement near the Common, use during winter events, sponsorship opportunities, storage, setup requirements, surface-grade requirements, insurance, maintenance, skate replacement, volunteer needs, operating hours, and potential staffing costs.

Members acknowledged that a detailed operating plan had not yet been developed but expressed interest in accepting the donation and determining whether the rink could be successfully used in Buchanan.

Motion by Hein, supported by Fletcher, to accept the donation of the synthetic ice rink previously intended for the Niles DDA, subject to staff completing the necessary arrangements.

Roll call vote:

Yes: Hein, Reed, Mast, Finan, Fletcher

No: Capron, Jones

Motion carried, 5–2.

Staff will develop additional information regarding placement, maintenance, insurance, staffing, volunteers, sponsorships, and operation of the rink.

B. Finance Reports

1) Consider approving the expenditures.

2) Accept the Financial Reports as submitted.

Staff reviewed the financial reports and recent transactions. Staff explained that a \$33,400 COPS grant reimbursement had been deposited into the DDA account because the account number had previously been associated with the City's former general fund account. Staff clarified that the funds did not belong to the DDA and would be transferred or corrected in the next financial report.

Members also asked about a \$275 Buchanan downtown promotion expense. Staff explained that the expense was related to Michigan Downtown Association membership and conference participation.

Motion by Hein, supported by Capron, to approve the expenditures and accept the financial reports as submitted.

Voice vote carried unanimously.

A member asked for additional information concerning Farmers Market preparation hours reflected in the reports. Staff stated that the Farmers Market, Common, and Tin Shop Theatre quarterly reports were expected to be presented at the August DDA meeting.

IX. Communications

A. DDA Funding Application

Staff reported that the DDA funding application had been revised in accordance with the DDA's prior direction, including division of the process into an initial application and a more detailed follow-up application. The application also incorporated the submission and review timelines previously discussed by the DDA. It is available to the public now via website.

X. Public Comment - Non-Agenda Items Only (3-minute limit)

A member of the public commented on the marketing proposals and expressed support for conducting a Buchanan-specific market assessment. The speaker also encouraged the DDA to give additional consideration to branding and design services when selecting a marketing firm.

The speaker further stated that uniform OPEN signs could benefit downtown businesses and suggested that the signs could eventually be coordinated with Buchanan's branding and wayfinding efforts.

No additional public comment was received.

XI. Staff/Committee Comments

Fletcher suggested exploring a shuttle between RedBud MX and downtown Buchanan during the RedBud National. The member stated that many visitors stay in recreational vehicles and may not have transportation available to visit downtown businesses.

Staff stated that a Niles Dial-A-Ride bus and driver may be available for approximately \$500 for an eight-hour period and agreed that the concept should be explored before the next RedBud event.

Hein informed the board that the Chamber of Commerce had scheduled the Chili Walk for October 3, 2026. Organizers were working to expand the Chili Walk into a full-day community event following the October 2 homecoming activities. A public subcommittee was formed to assist with the additional events.

Members also discussed the need to begin developing an operating plan for the synthetic ice rink, including its location, volunteer needs, maintenance, sponsorships, and possible winter use.

XII. Adjournment

Motion by Fletcher, supported by Capron, to adjourn at 7:18 PM.

Voice vote carried unanimously.

Kalla Langston-Weiss, City Clerk

Chairperson Tracy Mast