

Memorandum



Date: October 5, 2026

To: Downtown Development Authority Board Members

From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director

Subject: **Michigan Downtown Association – Annual Conference – November 4-6 – Kalamazoo – Radisson Hotel**

Background.

The DDA joined the Michigan Downtown Association (MDA) earlier this year. This membership organization was founded toward enabling and helping to promote downtown commercial districts. Members include downtown development agencies, economic development organizations and chamber of commerce's to name a few.

Attached is the flyer for the Annual Statewide Conference on Wednesday, November 4th through Friday, November 6th in downtown Kalamazoo at the Radisson Hotel. Most of the conference takes place on Thursday, beginning at 9 am registration and ending at 5:30 with a meet and greet from 5:30 to 7:30 and lunch is included. Friday begins at 8:30 am until 1:50 pm.

If you are interested in attending, please let staff know before October 25th if you would like to attend.

MICHIGAN
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ANNUAL STATEWIDE CONFERENCE 2026

**Kalamazoo, MI
November 4-6, 2026**

In-person & Virtual Attendance Option

**Michigan Downtowns,
Investing in the Future**



P.O. Box 3591
North Branch, MI 48461



MICHIGAN
DOWNTOWN
ASSOCIATION



Kalamazoo

Michigan Downtowns, Investing in the Future

The Michigan Downtown Association (MDA) is hosting its Annual Conference in vibrant Downtown Kalamazoo. The conference features educational sessions on today's most pressing downtown topics, including mobility, demonstrating the value and impact of downtown management organizations, real estate development, managing construction projects, effective social media and marketing strategies, and parking solutions that support businesses and visitors alike. The MDA is better than therapy and attendees will have numerous opportunities to build relationships with peers through networking events, interactive discussions, and guided downtown walking tours.

Wednesday, November 4, 2026

3:30 pm **Mobile Tour of Battle Creek**

Join us as we hit the road via bus and travel to neighboring Downtown Battle Creek. The tour will leave the Radisson Hotel at 3:30pm. Wear your walking shoes as once in Battle Creek we will take a stroll and hear how new development is acting as a catalyst for economic growth. Our tour will conclude with a networking event at 50 Beacon in the Double Tree by Hilton Hotel, Battle Creek, with a cash bar and complimentary appetizers. This is an additional ticketed event with only 35 bus seats sold.
\$50 bus, walking tour, and networking event (transportation both ways)
\$30 walking tour, networking event (no transportation)

Generously sponsored by Downtown Battle Creek

Thursday, November 5, 2026 – Radisson Hotel

100 West Michigan Ave. Kalamazoo, MI 49007

9:00 – 11:00 am **Registration- Vendor Expo & Continental Breakfast**

Kalamazoo 1

9:30 – 10:00 am **Coffee and Conversation**

Participants of the MDA Professional Development Certificate Program (MiPDM) are encouraged to join us for a pre-Conference networking opportunity.

Kalamazoo 2

Sponsored by Lake Trust Credit Union

10:00 – 10:50 am **Bonus Session – 3 Round Tables, 15 Minutes,**

Get a jump start on the Conference by joining us for this quick paced Bonus Session! Topics to be covered at three tables include Resources for Small Businesses, How to Educate Local Leaders, and Volunteer Recognition & Recruitment.

Kalamazoo 1

Vic Veda, *Vice President, Communications, Michigan Retailers Association*
Paul Zelenak, *Past DDA/Main Street Director, City Manager, MDA Board Member*
Lisa Croteau, *Director, Niles Main Street & DDA*

11:00 – 11:45 am **2026 MDA Annual Meeting & Welcome Introductions of Vendors and Attendees**

Kalamazoo 1

Cristina Sheppard-Decius, *Chair, Michigan Downtown Association*

11:45 am – 12:05 pm **5 Years of MiPDM, Lessons Learned and Future Plans**

The Michigan Professional Development Certificate Program (MiPDM) recently celebrated five years as the State's only education program dedicated to downtown management. Our panel will discuss what the MDA has learned from the program, how participants have leveraged their involvement to their advantage, and what comes next.

Kalamazoo 1

Sam Plymale, *Executive Director, Plymouth DDA*
Kimberly Smith, *Executive Director, Oxford DDA/ Main Street*
Annaka Norris, *Planning and Local Business Development Division, Economic Development Department, Oakland County, Michigan*
Kelly Graves, *Office Manager/Board Secretary, Ann Arbor DDA*
Melanie Radabough *Director of Community Development, Parks, and Recreation, Village of Cass City*
Moderated by Theresa Dubiel, EVP/Chief Experience Officer, Lake Trust Credit Union
Sponsored by Lake Trust Credit Union

12:10 – 12:55 pm **Keynote Session: The Value of Downtowns**

Downtowns remain the economic, cultural, and civic hearts of their communities, but the realities shaping them have changed dramatically. Drawing on findings from IDA's 2026 *Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities Trends Report*, this presentation explores national trends in economic impact, population growth, the experience economy, placemaking, and adaptive reuse, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities facing downtowns as they adapt to a new era of growth.

Kalamazoo 1

Cathy Lin, *AICP, Director of Research, International Downtown Association*

1:00 – 2:10 pm **Lunch Annual Awards**

Kalamazoo 1

Lunch sponsored by Catalyst Media Factory

2:10 – 2:30 pm **Legislative Update**

Our friends from Midwest Strategy Group will highlight key 2026 legislative developments that impacted Michigan's downtowns. A preview of Lansing's new political landscape and what members should watch for in 2027 will also be discussed.

Kalamazoo 1

Katie Fuller, *Government Relations/PAC Manager, Midwest Strategy Group*

2:40 – 3:45 pm **Concurrent Sessions**

Session One: Intro to Real Estate Development- Get a Seat at the Table!

Participants will learn the stages of development from site selection and feasibility analysis through financing, approvals, construction, leasing, and project completion. The public sector's role in facilitating development through partnerships, incentives, infrastructure investment, and regulatory processes will also be explored. Case studies from Michigan communities will illustrate how downtown organizations can work with developers to achieve community goals while supporting economic growth. *This session is available for MiPDM credit*

Kalamazoo 1

Kim Marrone, *EDFP, AICP, Director of Municipal Services, City of Oak Park*
Anne Gentry, *Executive Director, Alpena DDA*
Dan Leonard, *EDFP, Senior Redevelopment Services Director, Michigan Economic Development Corporation*
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Session Two: Social Media 101 for Downtowns: Building Engagement, Reach, and Community Connection

Social media is one of the most powerful and cost-effective tools available to downtown organizations, but success requires more than simply posting regularly. This session will cover the fundamentals of creating an effective social media strategy and how to align your efforts with your downtown's goals. We'll also explore the advantages and challenges of managing social media in-house. Finally, we'll discuss the importance of establishing a social media policy to protect your organization, staff, and volunteers.

3:50 – 4:20 pm

Concurrent Sessions

You have heard it before, but in downtown development, size can matter! Attend one of these concurrent sessions that are tailored to specific challenges and opportunities in different sized communities. Contribute to the discussion and learn from what others share in these round table style sessions.

Session Three: Life in a Small Town - Who visits here and why?

Session Four: Big City - Big Problems or Bigger Opportunities?

Session Five: Resort Town - Serving Residents, Businesses, & Tourists all at once?

Session Six: Non-Traditional Downtown & Corridors - Can these places be destinations?

4:30 – 5:30 pm

Walking Tour of Downtown Kalamazoo

The tour will begin at the Radisson Hotel and conclude at Crafted Copper, just in time for networking!

5:30 – 7:30 pm

Meet & Greet

Feather bowling, cash bar, complimentary appetizers, and a room full of downtown stakeholders? Yes, please!

Kalamazoo 2

Jennifer Finney, Owner,
JGF Creative Edge LLC
Jeff Genova, DDA Coordinator,
City of Holland

Kalamazoo 1

James Alt, Director, Lapeer DDA/
Main Street

Kalamazoo 2

Meghan Beyhmer, Downtown
Coordinator, City of Kalamazoo

Kalamazoo 1

Becky Goodman, Director, Harbor
Springs DDA

Kalamazoo 2

Molly LaLone, Executive Director,
City of Southfield DDA

Crafted Copper,

229 East Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo
Generously sponsored by Lumecon

Friday November 6

8:30 am

Registration- Vender Expo and Coffee

9:00 – 9:25 am

Therapy Session- Facing Adversity with Grace

Dana Walker, director of the MDA, will have a casual, honest, and insightful conversation with Michigan downtown directors regarding adversity they recently faced and what practical, and shareable, knowledge they gained from the experience. The MDA is better than therapy!

9:30 – 10:20 am

Concurrent Sessions

Session Seven:

This session follows Middleville's journey from governance uncertainty and discussions about dissolving its Downtown Development Authority to adopting a new Development & TIF Plan, earning Michigan Main Street Engaged designation, and beginning implementation of a community-driven Downtown Vision Plan. Presenters will demonstrate how governance reform, long-term planning, and urban design each played an essential role in rebuilding momentum for downtown revitalization.

Session Eight: MOUs & RFQs- The Importance of Alphabet Soup

Successful downtown organizations rely on strong partnerships and transparent procurement processes to achieve community goals. Participants will learn how well-crafted Memos of Understandings establish clear roles, responsibilities, expectations, and accountability, helping to build trust and reduce misunderstandings. The session will also examine how thoughtful Request for Proposal processes promote fairness, attract qualified vendors, and ensure projects are completed efficiently and in alignment with organizational goals.

10:15 – 10:50 am

Brunch & Networking

10:50 – 11:55 am

Concurrent Sessions

Session Nine: Historic Preservation Designation and Incentives- Design Guidelines In Your Downtown

People are drawn to historic downtowns for specific reasons, subconsciously or not. When a downtown utilizes design guidelines, this empowers planners, DDA directors, preservation staff, and the public in identifying and promoting elements of their downtown that contribute to feeling. This session will explore how design guidelines can contribute to an activated downtown and how guidelines can be implemented into local government planning. *This session is available for MiPDM credit*

Session Ten: Everyone's Favorite Topic- Parking

Parking is more than spaces and meters. It's a strategic asset that shapes access, economic vitality, equity, and placemaking. Our experts will pair practitioner-focused principles with real-world case studies to show how large and small communities can plan, operate, finance, and modernize public parking to support local goals.

Kalamazoo 1

Kalamazoo 1

Matt Jenkins, Executive Director,
Ortonville DDA/Main Street
James Lenon, Executive Director,
Main Street Old Town Lansing

Kalamazoo 1

Douglas Powers, Director of Community
and Economic Development, Middleville
Nathaniel Mehmed, Williams and Works
Maleah Rakestraw, Williams and Works

Kalamazoo 2

Jonathan Seywerth- City Manager,
Muskegon
Alex Hritcu, Planner, OHM Advisors

Kalamazoo 1

Kalamazoo 1

Haley Schriber, CLG & Community
Preservation Coordinator, MI State Historic
Preservation Office
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Kalamazoo 2

Lindsay Bayley, Consultant,
Walker Consultants
Lauren Bermudez, Consultant,
Walker Consultants
Juliana Smith, Regional Sales Manager,
ParkMobile by Arrive

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12:00 – 1:05 pm

Concurrent Sessions

Session Eleven: Rolling Together: Managing Micromobility in Downtown Districts

As e-bikes and electric scooters become more popular as a way to travel in common areas, downtowns are faced with new challenges. What is the balance between safety, economic development, and mobility? Participants will hear from downtown professionals and bicyclists whose goals are to safely share the streets and sidewalks in a downtown for all visitors, no matter the type of mobility they use.

Session Twelve: Technical Training Coordinating Construction Projects

This course provides downtown directors with the knowledge and tools needed to effectively coordinate construction projects with municipal staff, contractors, property owners, and stakeholders. Participants will learn strategies for communication, project management, business support, and minimizing disruptions while maintaining positive public engagement. *This session is available for MIPDM credit*

1:10 – 1:35 pm

Downtown Math, The True Value of What You Do

What is the true value of your downtown management organization?

More importantly, how does your organization contribute to the municipality's budget and overall economic health? In this interactive session, attendees will work with their own downtown budget as Mr. Gibb demonstrates practical ways to measure, articulate, and communicate an organization's value.

1:35 – 1:55 pm

MythBusting Downtown Management

Downtown organizations and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) programs are often misunderstood, leading to misconceptions that can hinder revitalization efforts and erode public trust. Our closing session tackles the top five myths surrounding downtown management and TIF, separating fact from fiction.

1:55 pm

Closing Comments & Raffle Drawing

Kalamazoo 1

Amy Tweeten, *Director, Downtown Petoskey*
Michael Darga, *Board member for the League of Michigan Bicyclists*
Lisa J. Hamameh, *Attorney, Rosati Schultz Joppich & Amtsbuechler*

Kalamazoo 2

Kate Knight, *Executive Director, Northville DDA*
Kate Terpstra, *Senior Recreation Director & DDA Administrator, City of Coopersville*
Laura Cloutier, *Executive Director, Wixom DDA & Main Street*
Doug Schultz, *PLA, Senior Landscape Architect II, Associate, ROWE*
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Kalamazoo 1

Matt Gibb, *Executive Director, Lake Orion DDA & Main Street*

Kalamazoo 1

Cristina Sheppard Decius, *Chair, Michigan Downtown Association*
Molly LaLone, *Vice Chair, Michigan Downtown Association*

Kalamazoo 1

Dana Walker, *Director, Michigan Downtown Association*
Thank you to the ShumakerTechnology Group for sponsoring our Technology



Kalamazoo



Registration Form: Annual Statewide Michigan Downtown Conference 2026

Each attendee must provide the following information as unique login or registration information will be sent to each attendee via the email listed below. Registrant's information may be changed prior to the Annual Conference by contacting Dana Walker at the MDA, director@michigandowntowns.com or 248-838-9711.

Name _____

Organization _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Registration Fees (use registration form or register online at www.michigandowntowns.com):

Early Bird Rate (Now through 10/26): MDA Members: \$275 Non-Members: \$295 Students: \$150

Regular Registration & At the Door (After 10/26): MDA Members: \$295 Non-Members: \$315 Students: \$160

One Day Rate (either November 5 or November 6): \$150

Virtual Format price is the same.

___ Yes, I will attend the \$35 ticketed Downtown Mobile Tour of Battle Creek, November 4, includes bus ride, walking tour, and networking.

___ Yes, I will attend the \$30 ticketed networking event only on Wednesday, November 4. (Bus ride not included.)

___ Yes, I will attend the complimentary Meet and Greet, Thursday, November 5.

_____ TOTAL AMOUNT DUE

Please return form with payment to MDA by Oct. 26, 2026. Once payment has been received, all registrants will receive unique login or registration information for the Annual Conference.

Make checks payable to: Michigan Downtown Association

P.O. Box 3591 North Branch, MI 48461

Credit card payment available at www.michigandowntowns.com or call the MDA at 248-838-9711.

Sorry, no refunds will be offered.

___ Visa ___ MC ___ Dis ___ Amex Card No. _____ Exp. Date _____ Sec. Code: _____

Name on Card: _____ Signature: _____

Zip Code: _____

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