

# Memorandum



Date: May 4, 2026  
To: Downtown Development Authority Board Members  
From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director  
Subject: **Michigan Downtown Association - Summer Workshop – June 3 and 4 – South Haven**

## Background.

Earlier this year the DDA joined the Michigan Downtown Association (MDA). 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 Summer Workshop on Wednesday, June 3<sup>rd</sup> and Thursday, June 4<sup>th</sup> in South Haven. A majority of the workshop takes place on Thursday beginning at 8 am registration and ending and 3:30 pm.

If you are interested in attending, please let staff know before Tuesday, May 26<sup>th</sup> to allow staff time to register those attending.

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**MICHIGAN DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION**  
**MDA**  
*Strengthening Downtowns*

Founded in 1980, the Michigan Downtown Association is a driving force in the interest and growth of downtowns and communities throughout Michigan. The MDA encourages the development, redevelopment and continuing improvement of Michigan communities and downtowns.

The Mission of the Michigan Downtown Association is to strengthen and sustain downtowns.

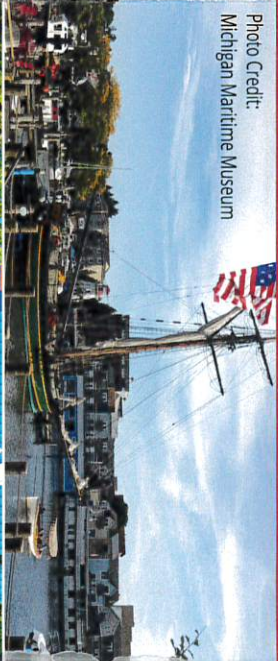
MDA's Vision is to be the leader in preserving and enhancing downtowns and their ongoing management.

[www.michigandowntowns.com](http://www.michigandowntowns.com)



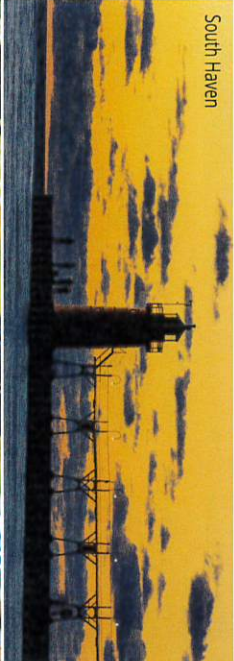
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Photo Credit:  
Michigan Maritime Museum



South Haven

Downtown South Haven



Downtown South Haven

**Upcoming Events:**  
Downtown Day, September 26, 2026, Your Downtown! Annual Conference, November 4-6, 2026, Kalamazoo

**Hotels**

Holiday Inn Express, South Haven, is available by clicking [here](#).  
To make Hotel Room Reservations by Phone, please call the Hotel at (269) 639-0303 and ask to make a room reservation in the Michigan Downtown Association block. \$140 plus tax and fees.

Hampton Inn, South Haven, is available by clicking [here](#). \$259 plus tax and fees.

The Historic Hotel Nichols, Phone: (269) 872-3943 and mention the MDA. Rates and rooms vary. Website: [hotelnichols.com](http://hotelnichols.com)

In addition to all the above, South Haven has an abundance of B & Bs. Visit the South Haven website.  
<https://www.southhaven.org/places-to-stay/>

Thank you to our event technology sponsor, Shumaker Technology Group.

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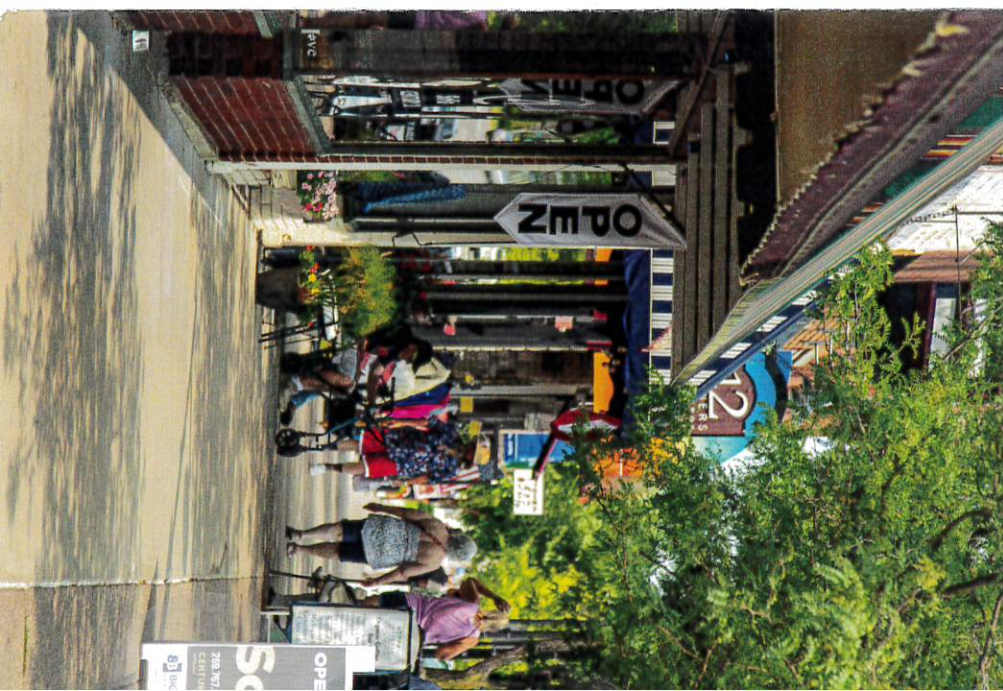
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BUCHANAN, CITY OF  
302 N RED BUD TRL  
BUCHANAN, MI 49107-1311

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MICHIGAN DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION  
**MDA**

**SUMMER WORKSHOP**

June 3 & 4, 2026  
South Haven, MI  
In-person and Virtual Attendance Option



## Summer Workshop

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2026

South Haven, MI

### 4:30 pm – 5:30 pm **Walking Tour of Downtown South Haven**

Be sure to put on your walking shoes for this interactive and informative tour of downtown South Haven.

Meet at City Hall, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI.

### 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm **Networking Event**

Enjoy complimentary appetizers and a cash bar at Idler Riverboat & Docksides, 515 Williams Street, South Haven, MI.  
*Generously sponsored by Lumecon.*

THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2026

Michigan Maritime Museum  
260 Dyckman Avenue, South Haven, MI 49090

## Workshop:

### **The Magic of Strong Michigan Downtowns**

Downtowns offer one-of-a-kind experiences for visitors and residents, unique small businesses, and connections to people, places and ideas. Join us in enchanting downtown South Haven for our Annual Summer Workshop, where we'll explore how these dynamic spaces spark both inspiration and economic vitality. Discover how Michigan downtowns not only captivate visitors and residents alike, but also serve as powerful engines for sustainable growth and development.

8:00 am – 8:30 am

**Registration**  
*Continental Breakfast*

8:30 am – 8:40 am

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

8:40 am – 8:50 am

**Welcome to South Haven**  
*Kate Hosier, City Manager, South Haven*

8:55 am – 9:05 am

**Attendee Introductions**

9:05 am – 9:25 am

**Vendor & Sponsor Introductions**

South Haven



9:30 am – 10:20 am

### **Let's Stay Connected**

What opportunities does your downtown have to create meaningful connections for both residents and visitors? How can you turn those opportunities into vibrant experiences and sustainable economic impact? In this session, we will hear from two communities that used thoughtful planning, strong partnerships, and community-driven insights to transform underutilized spaces and resources into dynamic destinations. Discover how new pathways for connection can drive foot traffic, business growth, and community pride.

*Dan Hopp, Director, Frankenthuth DDA*

*Cassie Blasyk, Board Chair,*

*Charter Township of Highland DDA*

10:20 am – 10:40 am

### **Networking Break**

10:40 am – 11:10 am

### **Where in the World Am I? Wayfinding, Design, & Movement**

How people move through your downtown—and how they feel while doing it—matters. Clear, engaging wayfinding doesn't just help visitors get from point A to point B; it shapes their entire experience and reinforces your downtown's identity. Through case studies found in Michigan downtowns, we will dive into the principles of effective wayfinding and how it connects to your downtown's overall image and brand. Learn how signage, hardscape materials, color, and patterns work together to guide movement, create a sense of place, and tell your community's story.

*Shawn Brewer, Commercial Sales,*

*Unilock, Michigan, Inc.*

*Matt Thomas, Sales Professional, Signs by Crannie*

11:15 am – 11:55 pm

### **Preparing Retailers for the Holidays (in June)**

The holiday season will be here before we know it. The summer months are the best time to get retailers in the mindset of preparing for the holiday season. Learn the steps you can take now to help support retailers prepare for a successful Q4. We'll cover the role of eCommerce in downtown businesses, loyalty programs, ways to maximize foot traffic during the holiday season, and the newest Buy Nearby program resources Michigan Retailers Association has for you and your businesses this year.

*Vic Veda, Vice President, Communications,*

*Michigan Retailers Association*

Noon – 1:00 pm

### **Lunch on Site Legislative Update**

1:00 pm – 2:10 pm

### **Intro to Public Spaces-Ready, Set, Activate Your Public Spaces!**

Public spaces are powerful platforms for community connection, cultural expression, and economic growth. This session explores how inclusive and collaborative approaches to public space planning and activation can transform downtown and strengthen local economies. Participants will learn how to center community voices, engage diverse stakeholders, and build meaningful partnerships to co-create welcoming, equitable spaces. Topics will include effective community engagement strategies, the role of public space as an economic driver, and how to use data to inform decisions and measure impact. Examples of projects both large and small from several Michigan communities will be offered and attendees will gain practical tools to ensure public spaces reflect and serve the full diversity of the communities where they belong.

*Nate Heffron, City Manager, City of Negaunee*

*Stephanie L. Carroll, Economic Development*

*Manager, City of Auburn Hills*

*Paula Holtz, EDFF, Managing Director,*

*Regional Development, Michigan Economic*

*Development Corporation*

**Available for MIPDM credit.**

*Sponsored by Lake Trust Credit Union*

2:10 pm – 2:25 pm

### **Networking Break**

2:25 pm – 2:55 pm

### **MI Funding Hub- The One Stop Grant Resource**

Finding and securing funding can often feel overwhelming—but the right tools can make all the difference. In this session, our partners at the Michigan Municipal League will introduce the MI Funding Hub, an award-winning grants and funding aggregator designed to help communities unlock state and federal funding opportunities. Through live, real-time demonstrations, you'll learn how to navigate the platform to identify available grants, access helpful resources, and streamline your search process.

*Melissa Milton-Pung, Program Manager,*

*Policy Research Labs, Michigan Municipal League*

2:55 pm – 3:30 pm

### **The Magic of Downtowns**

While magicians are masters of misdirection and illusion, the work of downtown managers is rooted in creating real, lasting impact. Downtown director by day and magician by night, Jim Alt, will pull back the curtain to reveal how the mindset and techniques of magic can inspire powerful approaches to downtown management. Through interactive examples and creative exercises, Jim Alt will demonstrate how thinking outside the box can lead to innovative solutions that captivate your community and drive meaningful change.

*Jim Alt, Executive Director, Lapeer DDA*

*& Main Street*

3:30 pm

### **Closing Remarks**

*Dana Walker, Director,*

*Michigan Downtown Association*

Registration Form for Annual MDA Summer Workshop:  
MDA Member: **\$150**  
MDA Non-Member: **\$175**  
After May 27, please add **\$25** for late registration fee.  
Virtual Format price is the same.  
Sorry, no refunds, but changes to type of registrative event  
We look forward to hosting a safe and informative event!  
Please return this form with payment to MDA by **May 27, 2026**.  
Make checks payable to the Michigan Downtown Association.  
Send payment to:  
Michigan Downtown Association  
P.O. Box 3591  
North Branch, MI 48461  
director@michigandowntowns.com  
Credit Card payments are accepted over the phone at 248-838-9711.  
**Save time! Register and pay online at <https://www.memberlep.com/members/evr/regmenu.php?rcode=MDTA>**

Name

Organization

Phone

Email

\_\_\_\_ Visa \_\_\_\_ MC \_\_\_\_ Dis \_\_\_\_ Amex

Card No. \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Sec. Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_



Downtown South Haven