

Memorandum



Date: June 30, 2026
To: Buchanan Downtown Development Authority
From: Tony McGhee
Subject: Consideration of Downtown Open Sign Program

Background

The Buchanan Business Boosters submitted a funding proposal requesting that the Downtown Development Authority consider funding a coordinated “OPEN” sign program for downtown businesses.

The proposal requests DDA funding for the purchase and installation of open signs for businesses in the downtown area. The proposal identifies approximately 40 storefronts along Front Street, Days Avenue, and Main Street between Redbud Trail and Oak Street, and requests that the DDA fund 20 open sign kits. The anticipated cost included in the proposal is approximately \$52.99 per kit for 20 kits, for a total material cost of \$1,059.80, plus labor.

The stated goal of the proposal is to create a coordinated and professional appearance throughout downtown, improve visibility for visitors and residents, help identify which businesses are open, strengthen the visual identity of the downtown district, and support small businesses by reducing the individual cost of purchasing and installing signage.

Prior DDA Discussion

This item was discussed during the June DDA meeting. During that discussion, there appeared to be general interest in the idea of a coordinated business open program, but there was also discussion about the quality of the signs and whether a more expensive option would be a better investment if the DDA were going to pursue the program.

The concern discussed was that if the DDA is going to spend money on this type of district improvement, it should try to purchase something that lasts multiple years so the same funding request is not coming back on an annual basis. A lower-cost banner may reduce the initial cost, but if it wears out quickly, fades, or needs to be replaced after one season, the long-term value to the DDA is reduced.

During that discussion, the open banner used by Thistle Down and Row was referenced as an example of a more robust banner that appears similar to the one proposed but has been in place for more than a year and has continued to wear well. Based on that conversation, staff said it would investigate the cost and availability of a more durable open banner option before bringing the item back to the DDA for further discussion.

Staff reviewed a more durable open banner option available through Etsy. The product is listed as an “elegant, double-sided, heavy-duty open flag”. This type of banner appears to be a more substantial option than the lower-cost banner kits referenced in the original proposal and is more consistent with the DDA’s discussion about purchasing something that looks professional, holds up better outdoors, and provides a longer-term visual benefit to the downtown.

Cost Comparison

The original proposal was based on 20 open sign kits at \$52.99 each, for a total material cost of \$1,059.80, plus labor. This was the cost included in the Buchanan Business Boosters proposal for the initial request.

After the June DDA discussion, staff reviewed a more durable open banner option similar to the banner used by Thistle Down and Row. That banner option is available through Etsy at a cost of \$129 per banner. This is a higher upfront cost than the option included in the original proposal, but aligns with the DDA’s discussion about purchasing a higher-quality banner that may last multiple years and avoid the same funding request coming back on an annual basis.

For the original request of 20 banners, the cost comparison would be:

Original proposed banner option: $\$52.99 \times 20 = \$1,059.80$, plus labor.

More robust Etsy banner option: $\$129 \times 20 = \$2,580.00$, plus labor.

Cost difference for the original 20 banners: \$1,520.20.

If the DDA were to make the program available to the entire DDA district, staff estimates there are approximately 70 businesses or leasable spaces that could potentially request a banner. The cost comparison for a district-wide program would be:

Original proposed banner option: $\$52.99 \times 70 = \$3,709.30$, plus labor.

More robust Etsy banner option: $\$129 \times 70 = \$9,030.00$, plus labor.

Cost difference for a district-wide program: $\$5,320.70$.

This is the core cost and policy question for the DDA. The original option has a lower upfront cost, but the more robust banner may be a better long-term value if it lasts multiple years, maintains its appearance, and prevents the DDA from needing to fund the same request again each year. If the DDA wants this to become a consistent downtown standard, staff believes durability and long-term appearance should be significant factors in the discussion.

Program Scope

If the DDA wants to pursue this request, staff believes there are two larger questions the Board should discuss before making a final decision.

First, the DDA should decide whether it wants to fund the lower-cost option identified in the original proposal or invest in the higher-quality open banner discussed during the June meeting. If the DDA's intent is to create a program that lasts more than one year, the more durable banner option may be the better fit even though it will cost more up front.

Second, the DDA should decide whether this program should be limited to the original area of the DDA included in the proposal or whether it should be offered to all businesses and leasable spaces within the DDA district that want to participate. This is an important policy question. All businesses and properties within the DDA district contribute to the DDA's funding through the tax increment captured within the district. For that reason, the Board should discuss whether program opportunities funded by the DDA should be limited to one portion of the district or made available district-wide.

If the DDA limits the program to the original proposal area, the total cost will be lower. However, businesses outside that area may reasonably ask why they are not eligible for the same program when they are also located within the DDA district and contribute to the DDA's funding. If the DDA opens the program to the full district, the cost could increase, but the program would be more equitable and consistent across the DDA.

Installation and Compliance

The DDA should also consider the requirements for hanging banners or signs from buildings. Before any signs are installed, staff should confirm compliance with the City's sign, building, zoning, and design review requirements. Depending on how the sign is mounted and where it is located, the business or property owner may need approval from the building owner, confirmation that the sign does not create a safety issue, and review to ensure it does not interfere with pedestrian movement, doors, windows, building features, public sidewalk clearances, or other signs.

Because many downtown buildings are within an area where exterior building changes and signage can trigger additional review, the DDA should assume that any program needs to be coordinated with staff before installation. This will help ensure the program is consistent, safe, and does not create confusion for individual businesses or property owners.

Pros and Cons

Pros

- Depending on the banner selected and number of businesses offered to, the program could be a relatively low-cost way to provide a visible improvement downtown.
- It directly supports downtown businesses by helping reduce the individual cost of signage.
- A consistent open sign program could improve the appearance and identity of the district.
- The signs may help visitors and residents more easily identify businesses that are open.
- A higher-quality banner option may last longer and provide a better return on investment than a lower-cost product.
- If made district-wide, the program would be available to all businesses and leasable spaces within the DDA district.
- The program would show that the DDA is investing in small, practical improvements that benefit businesses.

Cons

- If the program is limited to only a portion of the DDA, other businesses may question why the benefit is not available to the full district.
- The more durable banner option will cost more than the original proposal.
- There may be additional labor, installation, hardware, shipping, or replacement costs.

- Some buildings may have different mounting challenges or design review considerations.
- The DDA will need to determine who owns the signs, who maintains them, and whether replacement signs would be funded in the future.
- A district-wide program could increase the total cost if all businesses or leasable spaces request a sign.

Policy Decision

Ultimately, this is a policy decision for the DDA. The Board should determine whether this type of business support and visual improvement program is an appropriate use of DDA funds. If the DDA wants to move forward, staff recommends that the Board also determine whether it wants to fund the original limited request or create a district-wide program available to all businesses and leasable spaces within the DDA district.

Staff further recommends that, if the DDA proceeds, the Board select one standard sign style, confirm the final cost of the more durable banner option, determine whether the program will be limited or district-wide, and direct staff to review installation and approval requirements before any banners are purchased or installed.

Attachment A: Open Banner Request from Buchanan Business Boosters

Attachment A





FUNDING PROPOSAL

JUNE 1, 2026

■ **CITY OF BUCHANAN DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**



PREPARED FOR

TRACY MAST, Chair
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Buchanan Business Boosters is respectfully requesting that the DDA make an investment of \$1,500 for the purchase and installation of OPEN signs at every business downtown (Red Bud Trail to Oak, Chicago to Dewey). A coordinated downtown OPEN sign program is a simple, cost-effective beautification initiative that improves business visibility, enhances the customer experience, and reinforces a unified downtown identity. By helping businesses present a consistent and welcoming appearance while drawing people inside of the businesses that are open, the DDA can make a visible investment in the success of the entire downtown district.



ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

The Buchanan Business Boosters exists to bring together all business owners, organizations and community members who believe Buchanan matters. Through collaboration, events and community-driven initiatives, we work to strengthen downtown, support local businesses and create a vibrant community for residents and visitors alike.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As Buchanan continues to invest in creating a vibrant, welcoming, and visually appealing downtown district, consistent signage presents an opportunity to further strengthen the customer experience while enhancing the overall appearance of our business corridor.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The proposed signs would:

- Create a uniform and professional appearance throughout downtown.
- Improve visibility for visitors and residents by clearly identifying businesses that are open and welcoming customers.
- Strengthen the visual identity of downtown Buchanan.
- Support small businesses by reducing the individual cost of purchasing and installing quality signage.
- Demonstrate the DDA's continued commitment to investing in initiatives that benefit the entire downtown business district.

RECOMMENDATION

The proposed sign style, which is visible at RiverTown Gallery & Studio located at 111 Main St serves as an example of a cohesive design that could be adopted across participating businesses. While each business maintains its unique identity, a consistent "OPEN" sign program would provide a recognizable visual element that unites the district and contributes to a more polished downtown atmosphere.



ANTICIPATED COST

We are estimating a total budget of \$1,500 based on the list price on Amazon of \$59.99 per two kits. There are an estimated 40 storefronts on Front St, Days and Main St between Red Bud Trail and Oak.

The kits are currently on sale for \$52.99 per two.

$\$52.99 \times 20 = \$1,059.80$ plus labor

This relatively small investment would provide a lasting visual improvement while supporting local businesses and reinforcing the welcoming character of downtown Buchanan.