

July 24, 2024

Douglas Downtown Development Authority,

I am writing in response to the recent letter from John Thomas regarding the Douglas Farmers Market. Mr. Thomas expressed concerns about the market's impact on local businesses and its broader effect on downtown Douglas.

First, I would like to address Mr. Thomas' assertion that the farmers market operates as a Trojan horse, unfairly competing with brick and mortar businesses. While I understand the concerns about competition, it's important to recognize that the farmers market serves a distinct purpose in our community. It provides local farmers and artisans with a platform to sell their goods directly to residents and visitors, which enhances our local economy and promotes community engagement. Rather than viewing it as a threat, we should consider it as complementary to existing businesses, attracting more foot traffic and potentially increasing overall spending in downtown Douglas.

Mr. Thomas mentioned that the farmers market does not contribute to increased traffic or economic activity in Douglas. Contrary to this assertion, I would like to emphasize that since the inception of the farmers market, there has been a noticeable uptick in foot traffic on Tuesdays. Nobody claimed that people would drive from Chicago or Detroit just for the market. However, people who are already visiting Saugatuck are making their way to our downtown when they might not have otherwise. Many attendees of the market also patronize nearby shops and eateries, benefiting other businesses in the area. This increased activity not only supports our local economy but also fosters a vibrant and dynamic downtown atmosphere that is appealing to residents and tourists alike.

As a business owner in the district, I am extremely happy with the market. If someone sells dog treats at the market, I welcome it. Perhaps I would offer to bring their product into our store. I believe in "community over competition" and do not see the market as competition. If a 4-hour market is impacting business, we have bigger problems!

The Douglas Farmers Market plays a vital role in our community by promoting local products, supporting small-scale producers, and enhancing the overall downtown experience. The response has been overwhelmingly positive from business owners, residents and visitors. I commend the Downtown Development Authority and Douglas City Council for welcoming the market and look forward to its growth in coming years.

With Gratitude,

Randy Walker