The Delta Avenue business district is also very long, and the local market is unlikely to ever support full occupancy of this corridor with business uses. The zoning and incentive strategy should require commercial occupancy only in a focused area—e.g., the blocks between 7th and 11th Streets along Delta Avenue—with the remainder of the district having the flexibility to be used for commercial, residential, or mixed-use. This will open more pathways for property owners to invest in development, and residential options will support business owners with more customers at their doorstep. Regardless of use, sites and buildings should be designed to support a main street environment, featuring small setbacks, parking accessed only from the alley, etc.

Recommendations

Short Term (<1 year)

Implement planned CBD zoning on Delta Avenue.
The current "B-2" zoning assigned to downtown Gladstone is a poor fit for a walkable main street area and may be inhibiting both investment and sense of place along Delta Avenue. The City's Master Plan calls for the creation of a "Central Business District" for this area that would differ from the automobile- and parking-oriented commercial areas. Implementation of this CBD zoning should be prioritized and need not wait for a full update of the zoning ordinance. Review the User's Guide to Code Reform—published by the League, MEDC, and other partners—for best practices and a model Main Street zoning ordinance.

Identify a tax abatement toolkit to support investment. Building rehab and new construction are challenging in Gladstone, as construction costs are high relative to commercial rents and residential prices. The City has many options for supporting housing investment by deferring new tax revenue (e.g., Housing TIF, PILOT, Neighborhood Enterprise Zones), whether on Delta Avenue or in the surrounding neighborhood. The Commercial Rehabilitation Act (PA 210) and Commercial Redevelopment Act (PA 255) are similar tools the City can use to support commercial investment. An understanding of these options—and a willingness to use them—can help Gladstone recruit developers to rehab buildings and fill gaps in the business district.

Offer a lighter-weight version of façade grants.
During our meetings, local business owners expressed that available funding was not enough to allow for major building rehab, and that certain requirements—e.g., building liens—were too burdensome for small projects. To help make visible improvements quickly, focus a portion of the DDA's grant capacity on relatively small-dollar improvements—e.g., signs, painting, awnings, or lighting—and adjust requirements for the owner. Given the DDA's fiscal year start of April 1, consider a spring (rather than fall) call for projects to make funds available as early as possible and ensure funded projects can begin immediately.

Long Term (1–4 years)

Implement a vacant/dangerous structure program.
The Center for Community Progress publication *Revitalization in Michigan* outlines various options and statutory authorities that Gladstone can consider to go beyond its existing application of property maintenance code to monitor, evaluate, and manage vacant and blighted properties.

Opportunity 3: Case Study

Downtown Farmington Sign & Façade Grants:

Farmington's DDA—the 2026 winner of the Great American Main Street Award—offers both a façade grant for large projects and a small "sign grant" topping out at $4,000 per property. The sign grant, which emphasizes "three-dimensional, symbolic, projecting signs," is a low-cost way for Farmington to improve the appearance of the public realm while also serving a direct need of operating businesses. **downtownfarmington.org/resources/doing_business/incentive_programs.php**

Opportunity 3: Resources

1. **Enabling Better Places: User's Guide to Code Reform:**
2. **Revitalization in Michigan: A Guide to Transforming VAD Properties Through Code Enforcement:**
3. **Michigan Commercial Rehabilitation Act:**
4. **Michigan Commercial Redevelopment Act:**