

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Matthew Gibb – Executive Director

May 19, 2026



I. NEWS AND UPDATES

- a. A complete Application was submitted to the Village of Lake Orion for the Lumber Yard Project on April 30. We are anticipating our first hearing on the preliminary PUD plan approval to occur before the Village Planning commission on June 1, 2026. All Board Members are encouraged to attend.
- b. Multiple nominations were submitted to Main Stret Oakland County for the Annual Main Event. Copies of our contenders are attached. The program is on Thursday, June 11 from 6 pm to 9 pm. The Roxy Rochester 401 Walnut Boulevard Rochester, MI 48307. We are anticipating our nominations are very competitive, so all Board Members are encouraged to attend. The DDA will be procuring tickets for those that can attend.
- c. The LODown was held at Michigan by the Bottle and was a large attendance, more than 25 participants. Our unique pattern of asking for good and bad needs of our district and sharing dialogue on how to respond is gaining regional recognition, and is a welcomed by our businesses.
- d. We participated in the Council Ad Hoc committee to seek alternative revenues for the village.
- e. We participated in the council ad hoc committee to improve knowledge and dialogue between the DDA and the Council.
- f. Multiple meetings with council members on the issues of the DDA's ability to help mitigate increasing costs of residing in the Village.
- g. Obtained approval of our Annual 26-27 Budget from Village Council.
- h. Confirmed the façade grant applications for Prime Time Comics
- i. Created updated job descriptions for Administrative Coordinator and Marketing/Event Coordinator positions. Posted, began interviews on the administrative position, and have a candidate for the May 2026 DDA Board meeting.
- j. Attended planning commission, council, village manager and met with council members.

- k.** Built out and designed content for a double booth at the Art & Flower Fair to promote the Lumber Yard Project and start raising funding for the local artist effort in the public space aspects of the project. Several hundred people stopped to learn and comment and merchandise was sold raising nearly \$1000 in support of the arts.
- l.** Handled all financial reporting and invoice/PO
- m.** Negotiated the final numbers on the seasonal snow plow contract
- n.** Coordinated the installation of the flowers, replaced parts on the current watering pump system on the 4 wheeler, and worked with volunteers to hang the baskets.
- o.** Delivered the bike rakes (that look like bikes) for stripping and re-powder coat finishing, picked them up, and work with DPW to reinstall.
- p.** Purchased and delivered vintage siding to the contractors working to finish the barn repair restoration at the lumber yard project.
- q.** Purchased and delivered mulch and soil for the annual clean up day preparation.
- r.** Purchased and built replacement furniture the Flint street alley, and also purchased and installed yellow and white lanterns over the lighting in the alley to boost awareness of the illuminators for Flower Fair.
- s.** Sorted, found, cleaned and organized banners. Had the winter banners finally taken down with DPW assistance. Ordered new banners highlighting the Illuminators and replacement poles that have been lost over the years.
- t.** Multiple trips to the Township to help resolve permit sand zoning compliance questions for ourselves and businesses.
- u.** WATER MAIN BREAK
 - i.** Coordinated communication. Dozens of phone calls and even more text messages keeping businesses up to date and aware of resources.
 - ii.** Hosted special meeting of the restaurants.
 - iii.** Created sand sent informational content via email and text.
- v.** Obtained new bids for lumber yard work, pending PUD approvals.
- w.** Began the process of moving our DDA storage from Sparebox to the Lumber Yard storage containers.
- x.** A few other things

Respectfully Submitted,

Matthew Gibb

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MAIN STREET OAKLAND COUNTY

AWARD NOMINATION MAIN STREET LEADER

Nominee: Debbie Burgess

Community: Lake Orion Downtown Development Authority / Main Street Program

A Cornerstone of Leadership, Service, and Community – Since 2009

Debbie Burgess has served as a cornerstone of the Lake Orion Downtown Development Authority and its nationally accredited Main Street program—providing steady, principled leadership while remaining deeply connected to the community she serves. Her leadership is defined not only by longevity, more than 15 years on the Board, but by presence, adaptability, and a genuine commitment to the people and businesses that make downtown Lake Orion thrive. Through every phase of the district’s evolution, Debbie has consistently demonstrated what it means to lead with both purpose and heart.

- First appointed to the Board in 2009, she has hired, helped and guided multiple Executive Directors, many of whom have themselves received national recognition for their work during her time of leadership.
- Spearhead of visionary initiatives to sustain the long-term relationship between the program and its municipal partner, including the groundbreaking 75-25 future revenue sharing program for capital infrastructure, partnered monthly Leadership in Action Meetings, and regular advocacy at Village Council public meetings.
- Leader and advocate in 2018 to renew and extend the Tax Increment Finance Plan underlying the substantial funding of the program, and again saving that mechanism through a two year campaign to push back a crusade to defund and dissolve the DDA, resulting in an overwhelming public response in support of Lake Orion’s Main Street.



A Leader Rooted in Main Street

Debbie's connection to downtown Lake Orion extends beyond governance—it is personal, professional, and deeply rooted. As the owner of builders Custom Flooring, a long-standing downtown business, she brings a firsthand understanding of the realities, challenges, and opportunities that define Main Street districts.

This dual perspective—business owner and public leader—has allowed her to guide the Downtown Development Authority with a rare balance of practical insight and long-term vision. She understands that economic vitality is not theoretical; it is lived daily by the businesses that line the district. Debbie leads not only from the board, but at times, right from her storefront.



Sustained Leadership and Organizational Impact

Since joining the DDA Board in 2009, Debbie has served in every officer role, ultimately becoming Chair—a position she has held across multiple terms. In this role, she has helped guide a nine-member governing board responsible for shaping the future of downtown through tax increment financing plan extensions, capital investment/improvement planning, Main Street accreditation, and economic development strategy.

Her leadership has been marked by consistency, integrity, and a steadfast focus on long-term outcomes. Under her guidance, the organization has maintained its commitment to the Main Street approach while continuing to evolve in response to changing economic and community conditions. Debbie's tenure reflects the full arc of Main Street leadership—grounded in stability, yet responsive to change.

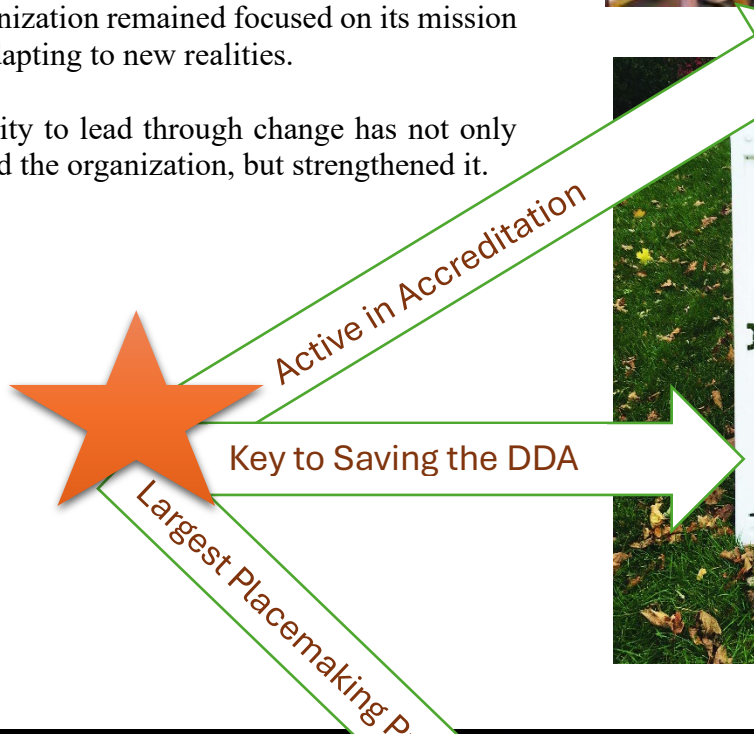


Leadership Through Change and Challenge

Debbie has helped guide the organization through multiple defining periods, including post-recession recovery, years of growth and program expansion, the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the evolving financial and governance landscape facing downtowns today.

In each of these moments, Debbie has provided steady and thoughtful leadership—ensuring that the organization remained focused on its mission while adapting to new realities.

Her ability to lead through change has not only sustained the organization, but strengthened it.



VIDEO: DDA CONSIDERS PURCHASE OF OLD LAKE ORION LUMBER SITE, MULTIPLE USES POSSIBLE



Servant Leadership in Action

Beyond policy, planning, and governance, Debbie's leadership is defined by her servant approach and her visible presence within the community.

She is not a ceremonial chair—she is an active participant in the life of downtown Lake Orion.

Debbie regularly shows up in ways both large and small: assisting with holiday traditions, helping to light the community tree, engaging with families during downtown events, and personally supporting programming that brings energy and connection to the district. She has hosted community events such as Ice Golf within her own business, contributed seasonal décor to enhance the downtown environment, and embraced the spirit of community events with enthusiasm and authenticity.

Whether passing out candy to children, supporting volunteers, or participating in themed promotions, Debbie consistently demonstrates that leadership is not confined to meetings—it is lived out in the community.

Her presence is approachable, genuine, and constant.



A Lasting Impact on Community Identity

Debbie Burgess's influence extends beyond individual projects or decisions. Her leadership has helped shape the culture of the Downtown Development Authority and the identity of downtown Lake Orion itself.

She has cultivated an environment grounded in accountability, service, and community pride—values that will continue to guide the organization well into the future.

Her sustained commitment, steady leadership through defining moments, and genuine connection to the community have left an indelible mark on the program and the district it serves.

Debbie Burgess exemplifies what it means to be a Main Street leader. Through more than fifteen years of dedicated service, she has guided her community with integrity, resilience, and a deep sense of purpose.



A Nominee who Exemplifies Main Street

Debbie Burgess's leadership cannot be measured by any single project, meeting, or moment—it is defined by her unwavering presence over time. She has guided the Lake Orion Downtown Development Authority through growth, challenge, and transformation, all while remaining deeply connected to the people and businesses that define the district.

She is a leader who shows up—consistently, authentically, and without hesitation. Whether navigating complex public issues, supporting the daily work of the organization, or simply being present in the life of the downtown, Debbie leads with a steady hand and a servant's heart.

Her impact is lasting not only because of what she has accomplished, but because of how she has led—through integrity, resilience, and a genuine commitment to her community.

For her sustained leadership, her visible presence, and her defining role in shaping the identity and success of downtown Lake Orion, Debbie Burgess stands as an exemplary Main Street Leader and a truly deserving recipient of this recognition.

MAIN STREET OAKLAND COUNTY

AWARD NOMINATION BUSINESS RETENTION

Program: The “LODown” – A Lake Orion Business & Entrepreneur Roundtable

Community: Lake Orion Downtown Development Authority / Main Street Program

A System for Listening, Responding, and Retaining

The LODown was created to address a fundamental challenge faced by many downtowns: how to maintain consistent, meaningful communication with the business community while identifying and resolving issues before they become barriers to success.

Rather than relying on periodic outreach or reactive responses, the Lake Orion Downtown Development Authority developed the LODown as a structured, recurring forum for open dialogue, shared insight, and collaborative problem-solving.

At its core, the LODown is not simply a meeting—it is a system designed to support business retention through continuous engagement.

A Structured Approach to Real-Time Business Intelligence

The LODown meets monthly, and more frequently as needed, bringing together a diverse group of business owners, entrepreneurs, and community stakeholders. Attendance typically ranges from 20 to 30 participants, creating a consistent and representative cross-section of the local economic community.

Each session follows a deliberate and repeatable format that ensures participation, accountability, and actionable outcomes.



Every attendee is asked to respond to the same two-part prompt:

“Introduce yourself, your business or entrepreneurial effort, and share one accomplishment from the last 30 days that was outstanding, and one challenge, speed bump, or frustration you have faced since we last met.”

This simple but powerful framework creates a structured flow of information that captures both success and struggle in real time.

The result is a dynamic and transparent snapshot of the local business environment—one that allows participants and the Downtown Development Authority to understand emerging trends, identify concerns early, and respond proactively.



From Conversation to Collaboration

The strength of the LDown lies in what happens after the question is asked.

As participants share their experiences, common themes begin to emerge. Challenges are not isolated—they are often shared across multiple businesses. This creates immediate opportunities for peer-to-peer problem solving, where participants can offer ideas, share resources, and provide support based on their own experiences.

This collaborative environment transforms individual frustrations into collective solutions. Rather than operating in isolation, business owners become part of a network that actively works together to overcome obstacles and improve conditions within the district.



Strengthening Relationships and Building Trust

The LODown serves as a bridge between the business community and the Downtown Development Authority. By creating a consistent space for open dialogue, the program establishes a continuous feedback loop that keeps the DDA informed, responsive, and aligned with the needs of the businesses it serves.

This ongoing interaction builds trust. Businesses know their voices are heard, their challenges are acknowledged, and their input directly informs decision-making and program development.

At the same time, relationships among business owners are strengthened, creating a more connected and supportive downtown environment.

Early Identification and Proactive Response

One of the most significant impacts of the LODown is its ability to surface issues before they escalate.

Because challenges are discussed regularly and openly, the Downtown Development Authority can identify patterns and respond proactively—whether addressing operational concerns, coordinating solutions, or connecting businesses with appropriate resources.

This early intervention is a critical component of business retention. By addressing problems before they become crises, the LODown helps businesses remain stable, adaptable, and successful.

Creating a Culture of Engagement and Accountability

The consistent structure of the LODown encourages accountability among participants.

By returning each month to share progress, accomplishments, and ongoing challenges, business owners develop a rhythm of engagement that reinforces both personal and collective investment in the success of the downtown.

The inclusion of both “wins” and “speed bumps” ensures that meetings remain balanced, forward-looking, and solution-oriented.

This approach fosters a culture where success is celebrated, challenges are normalized, and participation is valued.

Demonstrated Outcomes and Business Retention Impact

The LODown is designed to move beyond discussion and into action. Through its structured, recurring format, the program has consistently generated tangible outcomes that directly support business retention, problem resolution, and economic growth within downtown Lake Orion.

Key Outcomes Include:

- **Downtown Signage Improvements and Compliance**
 - Facilitated ongoing discussions around temporary and A-frame signage regulations
 - Helped align business needs with municipal standards
 - Created a more consistent and compliant visual environment throughout the district

 - **Direct Coordination with Local Government**
 - Established the LODown as a working liaison between the business community and Village staff
 - Enabled real-time communication with code enforcement and administrative officials
 - Helped resolve ordinance questions and compliance challenges quickly and collaboratively

 - **Access to Training and External Resources**
 - Hosted guest speakers and subject matter experts on topics including:
 - Marketing and business development
 - Oakland County programs and resources
 - Grant opportunities and application processes
 - Increased awareness and utilization of available support systems for local businesses

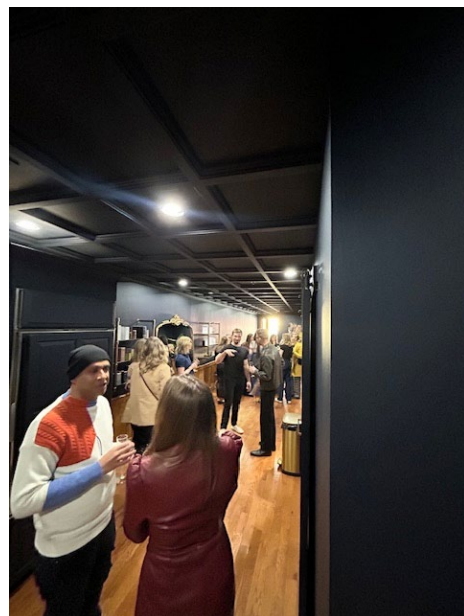
 - **Proactive Issue Identification and Resolution**
 - Provided a consistent forum for identifying operational challenges early
 - Enabled peer-to-peer problem solving and shared solutions
 - Reduced the likelihood of small issues becoming larger barriers to business success
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Case Study: Business Retention and Recruitment in Action

A clear example of the LODown's effectiveness is demonstrated through the successful placement and launch of a new business, **Cosmedics**, within the downtown district.

- A licensed cosmetic services business expressed interest in locating within downtown Lake Orion but faced limited availability of suitable space
- Through LODown discussions, participants were aware that an existing insurance business was preparing to relocate outside of the downtown corridor
- This real-time knowledge allowed immediate coordination between:
 - The incoming business
 - The current tenant
 - The property owner

- Within **three days**, the new business was able to:
 - Tour and evaluate the available space
 - Engage in lease negotiations
 - Secure a lease agreement
- Simultaneously, the LODown's established relationships with Village officials enabled:
 - Accelerated zoning compliance review
 - Expedited permitting for interior buildout
 - Efficient resolution of signage and accessibility requirements
- As a result:
 - The existing business successfully relocated without disruption
 - The new business was secured within the downtown district
 - The business completed its buildout and held its grand opening within **60 days** of initial engagement



MAIN STREET OAKLAND COUNTY

AWARD NOMINATION

MAIN STREET VOLUNTEER

Nominee: The Illuminators – A Lake Orion Volunteer Corp

Founding Members:

Alaina Campbell, Cookies & Cream
Debra Novara, Novara Designs
Brian Wintner, SOAR Study Skills
Jen Todd, Breakthrough Partners
Les Morrison, Re:Connect
Bill Kokenos, Lake Orion Parade Group

Community: Lake Orion Downtown Development Authority / Main Street Program

A Volunteer Movement Built on Positivity and Community Pride

The Illuminators Volunteer Corps was created in response to a defining moment within the Lake Orion community. During a period marked by public debate, social media conflict, and negative discourse, there emerged a clear need to shift the narrative—to highlight the positive, celebrate community effort, and restore a sense of pride in place.

Rather than respond with words alone, the Downtown Development Authority’s Main Street program chose action. From that effort, the Illuminators were born—a volunteer-driven initiative designed not only to support downtown projects, but to actively reshape how the community sees itself.

The Illuminators were intentionally built as a recognizable, engaging, and inclusive identity. Volunteers contributed to naming, branding, logo creation, and outreach. This ensured the group was not simply managed—it was owned by the community.



Debra Novara created the Logo

WXYZ COVERAGE: <https://youtu.be/ekFDnkFX3KY?si=YqQAB4pUE58aoZNW>

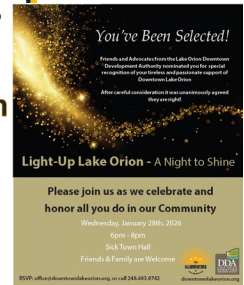
The Illuminators are widely recognized through their yellow branding and visible presence. Members are regularly identified in public, reinforcing a strong identity tied to civic pride. The goal of changing the discussion in Lake Orion from one of frustration and keyboard advocacy to a place where all neighbors feel welcome to join in, to volunteer, and to celebrate the bright light that is our downtown is reflected in the huge programs, events and presence they have already accomplished:

LIGHT UP LAKE ORION - A NIGHT TO SHINE

The Illuminators inaugural volunteer awards and recognition event. Attracting nearly 100 guests, awarding six unique categories, and launching a new way to celebrate our daily champions.

Awards given included:

- “Bring Your Tools” – Tim Marriott
- “New Recruit” – Les Morrison
- “Tour DDA Force” – Boy Scout Troop 124
- “Strongest Paddler” – Linda Crane
- “Ambassador of the Year” – Jen Todd
- “Spirit of Main Street” – Sharon Konieczny
- “DDA Legacy” – Stan & Rosemary Ford



ONTV News Break: Light Up Lake Orion (01/28/26)



Orion Neighborhood Television
4.46K subscribers



<https://youtu.be/3shnewppyY0?si=44LHJWwW2kQla4yc>

ALLEY INVASION – Dragon on the Lake

Shortly after forming the “Illuminators” the group took to the streets to take over the Flint Street Alley, displaying the smiles and welcoming spirit of Main Street. Kids fun, Dragon selfies, and the open invite to join the volunteer corps. was a great success, resulting in more than 30 new members to the group.



MAIN STREET OPEN HOUSE – And Ice Cream Social(s)

To inform, and advocate for the Four Point approach that has supported Lake Orion success, the Illuminators threw a huge Open House at the DDA office and have followed up with several “Ice Cream Social”: events at Cookies & Cream.

Our “Sign Up” membership now stands at 87!



Advancing the Main Street Approach Through Volunteerism

The Illuminators represents a unique and highly effective model of volunteer engagement—one that directly supports all four points of the Main Street Approach. Rather than focusing on a single type of activity, the Illuminators contribute across the full spectrum of downtown development, significantly expanding the capacity and reach of the Lake Orion Main Street program.

What may appear at first glance as simple acts of service—picking up litter, planting flowers, assisting at events—actually reflects a much deeper and more comprehensive level of impact. The Illuminators are not defined by a single task. They are defined by their ability to contribute wherever the community needs them most.

Organization: Building Capacity and Community Engagement

- Volunteer recruitment and onboarding through community outreach and events
- Development of a recognizable identity that strengthens participation and belonging
- Support of administrative functions, including data collection, surveys, and program tracking
- Creation of a volunteer culture that emphasizes accessibility, ownership, and pride

Promotion: Activating and Supporting Downtown Experiences

- Active participation in downtown events, including setup, staffing, and public engagement
- Distribution of marketing materials and event promotion to local businesses
- Contributions to social media and digital storytelling efforts
- Creation of a visible and welcoming presence that enhances the visitor experience

Design: Enhancing the Physical Environment

- Beautification efforts, including seasonal décor installation and maintenance
- Flower planting, landscaping, and public space care
- Support for public art installations and creative placemaking initiatives
- Ongoing stewardship of downtown spaces through cleanup and maintenance efforts

Economic Vitality: Supporting Businesses and Program Delivery

- Direct support to downtown businesses through outreach and engagement
- Assistance with grant-related efforts and program implementation
- Participation in business inventory and data tracking initiatives
- Contribution to efforts that strengthen the overall economic health of the district

Through this broad and integrated approach, the Illuminators function as a true extension of the Main Street program—supporting its mission not in isolated ways, but across all areas of impact. This level of engagement is both rare and highly effective. It allows the Downtown Development Authority to deliver more programming, maintain a higher standard of care within the district, and foster stronger relationships with businesses and residents.

More importantly, it demonstrates that volunteerism, when structured with intention and identity, can become a driving force behind the success of a downtown.

A Lasting and Scalable Model

The Illuminators Volunteer Corps represents an innovative approach to volunteer engagement—one that combines branding, accessibility, and meaningful work into a cohesive and scalable model.

They have demonstrated that volunteerism can become identity, and that identity can drive participation, visibility, and long-term impact.

Their continued growth and influence suggest that this model can serve as an example for other communities seeking to strengthen engagement and build a culture of positivity.

