

**MICHIGAN  
DOWNTOWN  
ASSOCIATION**



# SUMMER WORKSHOP

**Thursday, June 5, 2025**

**Traverse City, MI**

**In-person and Virtual Attendance Option**



## **Strong Michigan Downtowns**

**The Importance of Fostering  
Relationships and Partnerships**

Downtown Traverse City

## Summer Workshop

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4, 2025**

*Park Place Hotel*

*300 E. State Street*

*Traverse City, MI 49684*

4:30 pm – 5:30 pm

### **Walking Tour of Downtown Traverse City**

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

*Meet in the lobby of the Park Place Hotel.*

5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

### **Networking Event**

Enjoy complimentary appetizers and a cash bar. H & L Social, rooftop at Hotel Indigo, 263 W. Grandview Parkway, Traverse City  
*Generously sponsored by Lumecon.*

**THURSDAY, JUNE 5, 2025**

### **Strong Michigan Downtowns-**

### **The Importance of Fostering Relationships and Partnerships**

In a world of emails, tweets, and memes, the art of communication between humans seems to be waning. However, for a downtown director and staff, positive interactions are more important than ever. What does it take to accurately disperse information to stakeholders while being an engaged participant in meetings and policy referendums? Building trust with volunteers, staff, board members, municipal leaders, and downtown stakeholders is instrumental to the success of a downtown program and director, but it isn't easy. Join us in downtown Traverse City for the MDA's Annual Summer Workshop and discover how fostering relationships and partnerships can strengthen your Michigan downtown.

8:00 am – 8:30 am

### **Registration**

*Continental Breakfast Sponsored by  
Downtown Traverse City*

8:30 am – 8:45 am

### **Welcome**

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

8:45 am – 9:05 am

### **Welcome to Traverse City**

Over the last 40 years, the Traverse City DDA and its partners have worked to transform Downtown into the cultural and economic hub of Northwest Michigan. Tree-lined and pedestrian friendly streets, boutique shops, unique restaurants and position on Lake Michigan attract new residents and jobs to the region and support a thriving tourism industry - helping to routinely place Traverse City on several enviable "top-ten" lists every year. Learn more about what's next for Downtown Traverse City and its biggest challenge.

*Harry Burkholder, Executive Director,  
Traverse City DDA*

9:05 am – 9:15 am

### **Attendee Introductions**

9:15 am – 9:30 am

### **Vendor & Sponsor Introductions**

9:30 am – 10:00 am **Leveraging Partnerships to Revitalize  
Downtown with Limited Resources**

The City of Evart, a rural community of 1,800 in Osceola County, has leveraged partnerships with the Middle Michigan Economic Development Corporation and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to develop programming and support for investment in their historic downtown. Learn how leaders within the municipality and the DDA learned about development best practices, hosted a developer day, and have actively partnered to transition stagnant downtown properties to excited new owners, bringing much needed investment into a community with limited capacity.

*Joshua Prusik, Main Street Specialist, MEDC  
Todd Bruggema, Director, Evart DDA & Main Street  
Pepper Lockhart, City Manager, City of Evart  
Kati Mora, President & CEO, Middle Michigan  
Development Corporation*

10:00 am – 10:15 am **Networking Break**

10:15 am – 11:00 am **Roberts Rules, Providing Order and  
Understanding with Board Members**

Robert's Rules can provide a framework for organized, productive, and tension-reduced meetings. Understanding the format can help ensure voices are heard appropriately, respect is maintained for all, and the organization conducts business efficiently. The cherry on the top is that proficiency in meeting management can help foster stronger relationships with board and committee members.

*Jeff Aronoff, Principal, Managing Director,  
Miller Canfield*

11:00 am – 11:45 am **Strengthening Trust with Business and  
Property Owners**

As Downtown Professionals, building relationships with local downtown business and property owners is a fundamental part of the job. Often, we get sidetracked because of a host of other things we are asked and/or required to do. In this session, hear how building business relationships is important for achieving career success. Learn how to build trust by creating awareness of programs and resources that are available to business owners and property owners helping them to be more successful while reducing your work related stress.

*Tara Laase-McKinney, Executive Director,  
Marquette DDA  
Matthew Welch, Northwest Regional Director,  
Michigan Small Business Development Center*

11:45 am – 12:50 pm **Lunch on Site**

*Lunch generously sponsored by  
Lake Trust Credit Union*

**Legislative Update**



12:50 pm – 1:50 pm

## **Building Relationships with Stakeholders Being in the Room Where it Happens**

Downtown revitalization succeeds when all hands are on deck but it can be difficult to juggle the personalities of volunteers, staff, board members, elected officials, and business owners. What are the best practices a downtown director can follow so communication is clear and roles and responsibilities are plainly identified and understood? In this session, learn how to build the political support you need by seeking the right mix of board members and partnering with local government while gaining the support of the business community and a volunteer base.

*Tina Conner Wellman, Director, Portland DDA  
Kaelie Fessler – DDA/Main Street Director,  
Roger City  
Scott McLennon – Mayor, Roger City*

**Available for MIPDM credit**

1:50 pm – 2:00 pm

## **Networking Break**

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

## **The Housing Continuum: Evolution to Solution**

The housing crisis in Michigan is a multifaceted challenge that requires collaborative efforts at local, regional, and national levels. Organizations like Midland County's Housing Forward and Kalamazoo County's Housing Commission are making strides in addressing the urgent need for attainable housing. By understanding the underlying issues and implementing strategic solutions, these entities exemplify how communities can work towards a more sustainable and equitable housing future for all residents. The path forward involves not only increasing the supply of affordable housing but also fostering inclusive policies and community engagement to ensure that everyone has a place to call home.

*Mary Balkema, Housing Director,  
Kalamazoo County Housing Department  
Nicole Wilson, Vice President Economic  
Development, Midland Business Alliance*

3:00 pm – 3:30 pm

## **Dear Abby, I'm a Downtown Director and...**

Throughout the Workshop, attendees will have the opportunity to submit a written concern or challenge they have experienced as a downtown director or staff member. Our moderators will offer their insight and lead the group discussion regarding the topics raised. Advice and guidance regarding work relationships, time management, and every aspect of the job will be given in this interactive session. The MDA is better than therapy!

Moderators:

*Annaka Norris, Principal Planner, Planning and  
Local Business, Development Division, Economic  
Development Department, Oakland County  
Cristina Sheppard-Decius, Owner,  
POW! Strategies & MDA Board Chair*

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.

Workshop Sponsor (includes one table and one registration): **\$300**

Virtual Format price is the same.

Sorry, no refunds, but changes to type of registration can be requested. We look forward to hosting a safe and informative event! Please return this form with payment to MDA by **May 27, 2025**. 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](mailto:director@michigandowntowns.com)

Credit Card payments are accepted over the phone at 248-838-9711.

**Save time! Register and pay online at <https://www.memberleap.com/members/evr/regmenu.php?orgcode=MDTA>**

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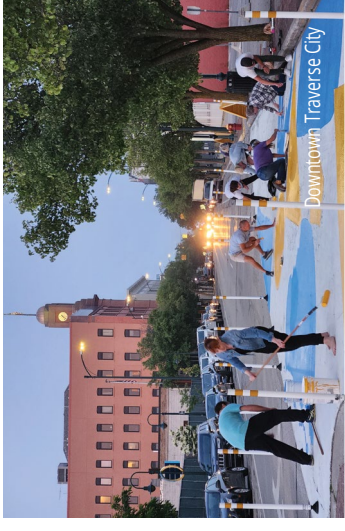
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*Strengthening Downtowns*

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)







Downtown Traverse City



Downtown Traverse City



Downtown Traverse City

## Upcoming Events:

Downtown Day, Saturday, September 27, 2025

Annual Conference, November 6-7, 2025, Downtown Rochester

## Hotel

A special hotel rate is available for attendees of the Summer Workshop at Park Place Hotel, 300 E. State Street, if you book by **May 4, 2025**, for \$189 per night (plus fees and taxes). Call the hotel directly (231) 946-5000, option #0, and use the code **MDA25**.



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