

Title	Village of Lake Orion DDA	07/10/2026
	by Matthew Gibb in 2027 Great American Main Street Awards	id. 54617546
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Original Submission

07/10/2026

Basic Information & Releases

Main Street Program Name Village of Lake Orion DDA

Address: 118 N Broadway St.

City, State Zip Lake Orion, MI 48362

Community Population 2856

Organization's Website: www.downtownlakeorion.org

Facebook Handle <https://www.facebook.com/LakeOrionDDA>

Instagram Handle [@downtownlakeorion](https://www.instagram.com/downtownlakeorion)

Twitter Handle

LinkedIn Handle

Name of Applicant (i.e. Organization Director) Matthew Gibb

Email: gibb@downtownlakeorion.org

Phone Number: 2486939742

Release Authorization (type full name) Matthew Gibb

Coordinator MG
Notification: I confirm that I have notified my Coordinator about my application for GAMSA 2027.

Coordinator Review: MG
I confirm that my Coordinator has reviewed and supports my completed application that I am submitting for GAMSA 2027.

Accreditation MG
Confirmation: I confirm that the Main Street organization I am submitting for GAMSA consideration is or will be a Main Street America Accredited program.

Have you previously applied for GAMSA? 2020/21
If so, when was the last time?

Program Information

Year Organization Founded: 2001

of Years Accredited 18 consecutive years and 21 of 22 years

Organization's Tax Status Government entity

Organization Structure Downtown Development Authority

Number of Staff (full-time and part-time) 3

Vacancy Rate in District – current % vs. % when Main Street program started.

Current 2% vs Start 31% in 2001 when program adopted

Budget

[GAMSA Budget Form.xlsx](#)

If "other" is great than 20% please provide a short explanation.

We are a Tax Increment Financed Authority. Tax capture based revenues come from both Village (City) as set above, and additionally from County General Fund, County Parks, Transit, Services, Community College and other taxing jurisdictions. Tax capture makes up approximately 74% of the total with the remainder coming from grants, interest, merchandise, events and sponsorships

Reinvestment Stats

[GAMSA Reinvestment Stat Template.xlsx](#)

Board Member Matrix

[Board_Matrix__supplemented.pdf](#)

Narratives

Tell us about your community

Imagine being so successful at restoring the identity of a community that you're told "we don't want you here". It happened to us. We survived, and thrived, even more. This is our story.

Lake Orion was born as a destination. Long before the automobile, visitors arrived by train to experience our lake, a bustling downtown, energetic resorts, amusements, and a way of life that inspired our enduring motto, "Where Living is a Vacation." For generations, Lake Orion was a place where people came to gather, connect, and create lasting memories.

Like many small towns, however, we gradually forgot who we were.

By the late 1990s, the trains were long gone, a four-lane highway separated downtown from the lakeshore that once fueled our economy, vacancies approached 30 percent, and investment had nearly stopped. What had once been a destination had become an aging collection of hair salons, blighted bars, and empty storefronts.

Twenty-five years ago, our community made a simple but defining decision. We would not become something new—we would become who we had always been, an identity rooted in heritage and destination. With one hand firmly on the Main Street pillars, residents, business owners, volunteers, and local leaders rediscovered we were more than what we had become and committed to building a downtown worthy of our past and our future. Within four years, that commitment leveraged more than \$14 million in private investment, inspired over 3,000 volunteer hours, reduced

vacancies, and restored confidence in our community.

Then tragedy struck. A devastating fire destroyed nearly one-third of our historic downtown. Rather than replacing our past with something ordinary, we rebuilt with authenticity, restoring the architectural character that defines Lake Orion today. That decision established a philosophy that continues to guide every project we undertake: preserve what matters, invest with purpose, and always honor our community's identity.

Over the next two decades, that philosophy transformed far more than buildings, it sparked more than \$48 million in new investment. Signature events like Dragon on the Lake, Flower Fair, LO Live, and dozens of community traditions renewed downtown as a regional destination. A new Children's Park, redesigned Flint Street Alley, and enhanced gathering spaces reconnected people and places, while strategic redevelopment projects—including the Lumber Yard at Paint Creek Public Market—demonstrate our willingness to invest in ourselves when others won't.

Today, perhaps the greatest measure of our success is the "Illuminators", a growing movement of volunteers who embody the optimism, stewardship, and pride that define Lake Orion. They represent a simple truth: thriving downtowns are not built by organizations alone. They are built by communities that believe in themselves.

Our investment totals, restored buildings, and signature events tell an impressive story. But they are not what make Lake Orion special. Our greatest achievement has been inspiring an entire community to become who it has always been—a destination defined not simply by place, but by people who believe in one another and in the future they are building together.

Major Challenge or
Obstacle Overcome

Lake Orion is an attitude, just ask us. We have been shaped by a series of challenges that have only proved our resolve. Fires, ballot initiatives, stodgy property owners, none of it worked. Those adversities only made us more creative; and committed.

The construction of M-24 physically separated our historic downtown from the very asset that defined us as a destination, our lake. The symbolic bypass did its job, businesses declined, investment slowed, and our once-vibrant downtown faded. We had become a tumble weed town, and it showed.

By 2001 a small, dedicated group had had enough. They joined together, joined Main Street, and worked the pillars. After millions in new investment, a devastating fire swept through and gutted our core. Rather than seeing an end, we saw an opportunity to rebuild while honoring our historic character. But while the rebuilt district became a symbol of perseverance, it also revealed a legacy problem.

Rebuilding the destination stabilized old leases and empowered owners to hold for greater returns. New restaurants and boutiques were outbid and closed out by a virtual monopoly. Limited availability stalled new business

growth, discouraged entrepreneurs, and slowed redevelopment. Rather than waiting, we became a catalyst for change. The DDA office was housed in a long-neglected automotive garage whose better days passed in the 50's. We thought like a developer and used its potential to recruit and launch a new brewery, breaking the log jam and opening a flood of creative market growth.

Our risk empowered others. Village offices were moved and the old fire hall became a restaurant. Streetscapes, a new Children's Park, bridges over the Paint Creek and, through a historic façade improvement program, more than 20 properties rediscovered who they always were. But, In the midst that great progress, a mass shooting happened in neighboring Oxford. As communities grieved, our Main Street organizations partnered, supporting each other through shared initiatives. We became "Stronger Together".

Our most recent challenge came from the community doubters and a ballot initiative sought that dissolve the DDA and its programs. Facing down a "we don't want you here" vote is daunting, but supporters took action and the question was rejected overwhelmingly. We learned our impact was never about bricks and mortar, we had invested in people and they returned the investment. Within two short years, those same volunteers formed "The Illuminators," a growing network dedicated to positivity, volunteerism, and community pride.

We told you Lake Orion is an attitude, well, in the very month the vote was held to end us, we doubled down and acquired our boldest investment yet, a project to create a transformational community gathering space at the Lumber Yard.

Obstacles pushed us to evolve and became the foundation for future success. Our experience taught us that Main Street organizations must be willing to adapt, lead when the market cannot, and empower volunteers to become champions for their community. Today, Lake Orion is stronger because challenges can't define us, we are what we were, a destination.

Main Streets are for Everyone

Lake Orion has always been more than a place on the map. Our Village is home to fewer than 3,000 residents, yet our downtown serves a community of more than 38,000 throughout Orion Township. Visitors come for the lakes, parks, trails, festivals, restaurants, and historic charm. Residents come because downtown is where the community gathers, celebrates, volunteers, and solves problems together. Around here, "Where Living is a Vacation" is more than a slogan—it reflects a culture built around connection.

Over the last 25 years we learned that successful downtowns are not created by a Downtown Development Authority alone. They are built by people who believe they belong and believe their ideas matter. A community cannot support Main Street, without becoming Main Street. Long before projects appear on annual work plans, they begin with conversations. Our Transformation Strategy was developed through business roundtables, resident surveys, market studies, retail analyses, public workshops, committee meetings, and ongoing collaboration with our Village, Orion Township, schools, nonprofits, and business community.

Monthly "LODown" meetings, annual community planning sessions, and public Board discussions keep those conversations active throughout the year.

The result is not simply public participation. It is public ownership.

Lake Orion's leadership intentionally reflects the many voices that shape our community. Business owners, property owners, residents, educators, elected officials, institutional partners, and community organizations all serve together through our Board and committees. Every Board member accepts leadership responsibilities beyond monthly meetings, ensuring decisions remain connected to the people we represent.

Recognizing that traditional committee structures do not fit everyone's schedule or interests, we created the Illuminators volunteer initiative. Instead of asking people to attend meetings, we invite them to make a visible difference through hands-on projects, beautification, event support, historic preservation, visitor assistance, and neighborhood improvement. The program annually generates hundreds of volunteer hours, with members spanning four generations, while creating new pathways into civic leadership. Many volunteers who began by planting flowers or welcoming visitors now serve on committees, lead projects, and inspire others to become involved.

Signature events such as Dragon on the Lake, Flower Fair, LO Live, Storybook Stroll, Movies in the Park, historic cemetery tours, seasonal celebrations, and dozens of community festivals invite families, seniors, young professionals, artists, entrepreneurs, and visitors to experience downtown in different ways throughout the year. We collaborate with the Village, Township, Chamber of Commerce, Public Library, Orion Art Center, Rotary, Lions Club, schools, churches, nonprofits, and countless volunteers because we believe vibrant downtowns are built collectively.

Historic preservation, adaptive reuse, public art, accessible parks, connected trails, and new gathering spaces all share a common purpose: bringing people together. Whether someone has lived here for generations or discovered Lake Orion for the first time, we want them to feel that this is a place where they belong. Our greatest accomplishment is not measured in dollars invested, buildings restored, or event attendance. It is measured by something far more enduring—a culture where people believe they have a voice and living up to that standard.

Community Evaluation Standards

The six Community Evaluation Standards aim to elevate local revitalization efforts and provide the Main Street America Network with a strong foundational framework to review progress, recognize strengths and accomplishments, understand trends and challenges involved with local revitalization, and implement strategies that keep moving Main Street programs forward. You can read more about the six standards [here](#). From the six Standards, please select three that best reflect your Main Street program's strengths and use the space below to describe, in 250 words or less, how your program advances that Standard in its work. Please be sure to select three (3) different Standards.

#1 Narrative

Lake Orion's greatest infrastructure investment wasn't a street, a building, or a park. It was building a community where every organization has a role in revitalization.

Lake Orion Main Street has intentionally invested in relationships and believes a thriving downtown cannot be created by one organization alone—it succeeds when every organization sees itself as a steward of the community's future. Our role is to convene, connect, and empower others to accomplish more together, and then tell everyone about the success.

Those partnerships span every corner of our community. We work alongside Lake Orion Community Schools through regular leadership meetings that connect education with community development, engaging hundreds of students each year through mentorship, service-learning projects, and volunteer opportunities. Annual community calendar summits unite nonprofit organizations around shared programming, while year-round collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, Orion Art Center, Rotary Club, Public Library, VFW and businesses strengthens community capacity far beyond the reach of any single organization.

Perhaps our greatest measure of success is that many of the initiatives launched by Main Street have grown beyond us. Programs that began as Main Street initiatives are now owned, led, and proudly identified with partner organizations. That evolution was intentional.

Our goal has never been to own great events—it has been to build the organizational capacity for others to lead them. We have built a community where collaboration has become our strongest infrastructure, revitalization is a shared responsibility, and every organization understands that when downtown succeeds, we all succeed.

#2 Narrative

People invest in places where they become part of the story. That belief has guided Lake Orion's revitalization for more than twenty-five years.

Historic preservation is not simply one of our programs—it is the foundation of our economic development philosophy. We believe communities create lasting value when they preserve the identity that makes them unique.

Our designation as a National Historic District affirmed the significance of our historic downtown, but preservation extends far beyond designation. Through a preservation-based façade grant program guided by architectural standards and design review, we have invested in restoring more than twenty historic commercial buildings. When fire destroyed nearly one-third of downtown, we rebuilt to honor our heritage rather than replace it. Historic Preservation Tax Credits transformed our 1926 high school into loft apartments. We preserved the historic Captains House while requiring new development inspired by the original Lake Orion Amusement Company. Today, the historic Lumber Yard at Paint Creek is being transformed into a regional public market, proving that our future is strongest when it grows from our past.

Preservation also means preserving memory. Through our Moments in Time historical series, heritage wayfinding, Dragon on the Lake, cemetery tours, public art, and community storytelling, we ensure each generation understands the people, places, and traditions that shaped Lake Orion.

Historic preservation is often measured by the buildings that remain. In Lake Orion, we measure it by the people who choose to become part of the story—and help write its next chapter.

#3

Strategy-Driven Programming

#3 Narrative	Successful revitalization begins with listening—and succeeds because we never stop listening. Lake Orion's success is not the product of isolated projects. It is the result of a disciplined planning process that transforms community input into measurable action. Every initiative begins with a simple question: Does it advance our Transformation Strategy? Our 2025 Transformation Strategy was re-assessed and re-focused through market analysis, stakeholder engagement, business outreach, and community participation. We built work plans, market attraction proposals, and promotional concepts with the directed intent to strengthen Lake Orion's identity as a lakeshore economy while preserving its authentic character and community strengths. That strategy approach guides every committee work plan, annual budget, capital investment, and organizational priority. Planning is continuous. Our monthly “LO Down” roundtables convene business owners to discuss opportunities, permitting, code enforcement, staffing, marketing, and barriers to growth. Monthly coordination meetings with Village leadership align redevelopment, zoning, infrastructure, and economic development efforts, while monthly reports to the Village Council ensure transparency, accountability, and shared priorities. Business and building inventories, asset tracking, visitation analytics, market research, and ongoing stakeholder engagement continually refine our understanding of downtown and inform future decisions. This disciplined process ensures every initiative—from building community events during traditional down customer periods, to promoting national acts at LOLive, business recruitment, historic preservation, and the Lumber Yard at Paint Creek—advances the same long-term vision. Our work plans are not annual checklists. They are living roadmaps that transform community ideas into coordinated action, measurable results, and lasting investment.
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Images & Supporting Documents	Within each category please title documents with numbers (1-5 for Letter of Support and 1-15 for images) as this helps with tracking.
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Images

- [GAMSA-2027-Photo-Ledger-Template_FINAL.xlsx](#)
- [LakeOrion_GAMSA_Image1.pdf](#)
- [LakeOrion_GAMSA_Image2.pdf](#)
- [LakeOrion_GAMSA_Image3.pdf](#)
- [LakeOrion_GAMSA_Image4.pdf](#)
- [LakeOrion_GAMSA_Image5.pdf](#)
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[LakeOrion_GAMSA_Image13.pdf](#)

[LakeOrion_GAMSA_Image14.pdf](#)

[LakeOrion_GAMSA_Image15.pdf](#)

Map of District

[Lake_Orion_Village_DDA_DISTRICT.pdf](#)

Letters of Support

[GAMSA_Winners_Letter_of_Support_Lake_Orion_GAMSA_2026.pdf](#)

[letter_from_West.pdf](#)

[LO_GAMA_Letter_of_Support.pdf](#)

[oxford_letter_of_support.pdf](#)

[partner_letter_of_support.pdf](#)

Optional Video

[DDA_Main_Street_Video_2026_720p_HD.mp4](#)
