

July 6, 2026

**Selection Committee**

**Main Street America**

53 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 350

Chicago, IL 60604



**RE: Letter of Support for LAKE ORION DDA MAIN STREET**

Main Street revitalization is never accomplished by a single organization. It is built one partnership at a time. For more than twenty-five years, the Lake Orion Downtown Development Authority Main Street program has intentionally invested in relationships that strengthen our community, celebrate our unique identity, and create opportunities for organizations to accomplish more together than any of us could achieve alone. We are all beneficiaries of that hard work, and the tireless efforts of the leadership, friends and people that have built the strong identity and place we call Lake Orion.

The role of Lake Orion's Main Street team has never been simply to organize events, restore historic buildings, or recruit new businesses. Instead, their strength is working as a convener, connector, and catalyst—bringing together civic organizations, nonprofit partners, businesses, local government, schools, faith organizations, volunteers, and residents around a shared vision for Downtown Lake Orion. The result is a community where success is shared.

Each year, several organizations collaborate with Lake Orion Main Street to create signature experiences that celebrate Lake Orion's history, arts, culture, recreation, and lakeside heritage. Whether supporting Dragon on the Lake, the Holiday Lighted Parade, Flower Fair, LO Live, new businesses, public art, community beautification, historic preservation, or countless volunteer initiatives, these partnerships create a downtown that reflects the talents and passions of the entire community.

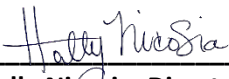
The organizations represented on the following pages are more than event partners. They are co-authors of Lake Orion's story. Together, we have transformed individual ideas into community traditions, strengthened our local economy, preserved our historic character, and built a downtown that belongs to everyone. The impact of the Lake Orion DDA cannot be measured through investment statistics or attendance figures alone. Its biggest impact is reflected in the relationships, trust, and shared purpose that have become the foundation of Lake Orion's success.

For that reason, we proudly submit this collective statement in support of the Lake Orion Main Street program and its nomination for the Great American Main Street Award. Because our greatest accomplishment is not what we built, but what we built together.

Community Partner Letter of Support  
Lake Orion DDA Main Street  
July 6, 2026

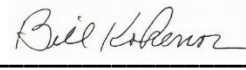
In strong support of your consideration of the Lake Orion DDA Main Street for your next Great American Main Street Award, we sign and reflect,

"We are so grateful for the DDA's support and the role they play in keeping Lake Orion beautiful and welcoming. They understand the value of community, creativity, and creating spaces where people feel connected that drives Dragon on the Lake and the Art & Flower Fair."

  
**Holly Nicosia, Director  
ORION ART CENTER**



"Bringing 15,000 people and families Downtown for a Legacy Lighted Parade, is no small task. The DDA Main Street is invaluable to coordinating street closures, business awareness, and they even find time host a huge volunteer kids viewing party."

  
**Bill Kokenos, President  
ORION AREA PARADE GROUP**



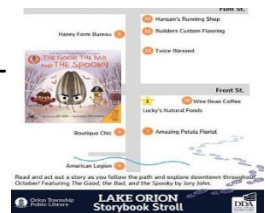
"We work collaboratively with the DDA to enhance the business community. Lake Orion Main Street is such a supportive culture and robust foundation of accessible resources, advocacy, and strategic connections."

  
**Joyce Donaldson, President  
ORION AREA CHAMBER  
OF COMMERCE**

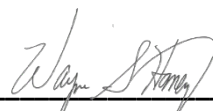


"The Orion Township Public Library really values partnering with the DDA on Downtown Storywalks. The program connects local businesses and the library while giving families a fun reason to explore downtown.."

  
**Chase McMunn, Director  
ORION TOWNSHIP  
PUBLIC LIBRARY**



"The servant leadership of the DDA is evident in all they do, and for us it's a blessing. Our Flags for Heros and Ice Golf Challenge, each raise awareness and resources for those in need, the DDA invites us inside business and Downtown with seamless precision."

  
**Wayne Haney, President  
LAKE ORION  
SUNRISE ROTARY**



"Beyond their weekly support of our hall, the Legion hosts a Summer Cornhole League that fills the Downtown sidewalks and streets. The DDA embraces it, promotes it, and importantly prioritizes our veterans. Their work makes our Downtown a place."

  
**Lloyd Coe, Member  
SONS OF THE  
AMERICAN LEGION 233**



Community Partner Letter of Support  
Lake Orion DDA Main Street  
July 6, 2026

"Everywhere you look Downtown reflects its history. Buildings are restored instead of torn down, story boards abound, videos capturing Moments in Time are easily discovered. We even give tours, advocating for our heritage through the names of our founders. What a partnership"

*Sharon Konieczny*

**Sharon Konieczny, Chairperson  
ORION HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



"Our DDA Main Street is an important collaborator of the work the Lions do throughout the year. From the Jubilee, to festival tents, to access to the parks, or just general support, we have become more than a friend, we act like family, but without the drama"

*Stephen Tobias*

**Steve Tobias, Director  
LAKE ORION LIONS CLUB**





July 6, 2026

**Selection Committee**

**Main Street America**

53 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 350

Chicago, IL 60604

Re: Support for Lake Orion DDA Main Street

**Dear Great American Main Street Award Selection Committee:**

As neighboring communities, we have witnessed firsthand how Lake Orion's leadership has fostered lasting regional collaboration. Their willingness to invest time, volunteers, and organizational resources into Oxford during our time of greatest need is something our community will never forget. They are not simply a successful Main Street—they are an indispensable community partner.

Main Street communities are often measured by their economic development, preservation efforts, and vibrant downtowns. While Lake Orion excels in each of those areas, what truly distinguishes this community is something much deeper—its unwavering commitment to neighboring communities and its belief that successful downtowns are stronger when they work together.

Following the tragic mass shooting at Oxford High School in 2021, our community faced one of the darkest moments in our history. During that difficult time, the leadership and volunteers of Downtown Lake Orion stood beside Oxford, not as neighboring communities, but as family.

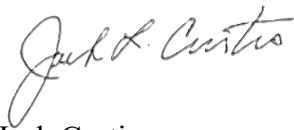
Rather than retreating inward, Lake Orion joined us in launching the **"Stronger Together"** initiative, demonstrating that Main Street organizations can serve as catalysts for healing as well as economic vitality. Together, our communities created opportunities for residents, businesses, volunteers, and visitors to stand united in support of one another. That partnership strengthened regional relationships, encouraged collaboration among our downtown businesses, and reminded both communities that resilience is built through connection.

The relationship between Oxford and Lake Orion did not end after the immediate response to the tragedy. It has continued through ongoing collaboration, shared events, cross-promotion of businesses, organizational partnerships, volunteer support, and a mutual commitment to the success of both downtowns. Lake Orion has consistently demonstrated that its vision extends beyond municipal boundaries, recognizing that vibrant downtowns throughout our region benefit when communities work together instead of competing with one another.

The revitalization of Downtown Lake Orion is impressive. The organization's creativity, investment, volunteer engagement, historic preservation, and entrepreneurial spirit have transformed their downtown into an outstanding destination. Yet what impresses us most is the character of the organization and its people. Their willingness to lead with compassion, collaboration, and service has strengthened not only their own downtown, but ours as well.

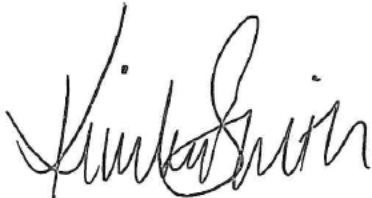
We are proud to call Downtown Lake Orion our partner and wholeheartedly recommend them for the Great American Main Street Award. They exemplify what the Main Street movement is intended to achieve—not simply thriving downtowns, but thriving communities working together for the greater good.

Sincerely,



Jack Curtis

OXFORD TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR



Kimberly Smith

OXFORD DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Examples of our #StrongerTogether efforts





July 8, 2026

Great American Main Street Award Selection Committee

As the Executive Directors of Oakland County's three Great American Main Street Award winning programs, we are honored to offer our strong endorsement of the Lake Orion Downtown Development Authority/Main Street Program of the next recipient of one of the 2027 Great American Main Street Award.

Our organizations have experienced what it means to earn national recognition as a result of being dedicated to the Main Street framework for downtown revitalization. We understand the perseverance, dedication, and ups and downs that come with the work. We understand the high standards of Great American Main Street Award communities and the ongoing commitment, leadership, and measurable strategies needed to be a Great American Main Street recipient. We believe Lake Orion has earned its place among the nation's best Main Street programs.

For more than twenty-five years, the Lake Orion DDA/Main Street Program has demonstrated that transformative downtown revitalization is built through patience, collaboration, and a clear long-term vision. Lake Orion has remained focused on a strategy of adaptive reuse, recreational assets and family friendly amenities.

Lake Orion can count six historic structures that have been adapted as a result of their efforts ranging from an auto garage turned live music venue that attracts national names, a church turned government building, a former city hall turned restaurant, and a sprawling historic lumberyard being reimagined into vibrant civic, commercial, entertainment, and dining downtown destinations. These investments have not only protected the community's architectural heritage but have also strengthened its economic vitality and reinforced a distinctive sense of place that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Lake Orion has also embraced its natural assets that make it unique. It has integrated downtown with its lakefront, children's park, and the Paint Creek Trail into quality gathering spaces to create an authentic destination where recreation and economic vitality merge as another key transformation strategy. Families are drawn downtown not only dining or shopping, but because it offers experiences that encourage people of every generation to gather.

Today, Lake Orion has no commercial vacancy. The Main Street Program has had to endure its challenges as well from devastating fires to political threats to dissolve the organization because "it's too successful" and wanting to divert its financial resources. The program has risen above those challenges guiding compatible reconstructions following disasters and pulling the community together to rally around the preservation of the organization itself. Lake Orion is operating at the highest levels through talented local leadership that has navigated difficult waters.

While it is an honor to have Farmington to receive the Great American Main Street Award this year, we believe just as strongly that Lake Orion is equally deserving of national recognition. Great downtowns inspire one another, and Lake Orion's accomplishments stand alongside those of Rochester, Ferndale, and Farmington. Its success demonstrates the strength of Oakland County's collaborative Main Street network and how communities can learn from one another while developing their own identities.

The Great American Main Street Award recognizes communities whose work serves as a model for others across the nation. Lake Orion has become precisely that. Its emphasis on historic adaptive reuse, family-oriented placemaking, environmental recreation, and leadership that does not back down in the face of adversity. Lessons for downtowns of every size.

We unanimously recommend the Lake Orion Downtown Development Authority/Main Street Program for the 2027 Great American Main Street Award.

Sincerely,



Jennie Beeker

Executive Director

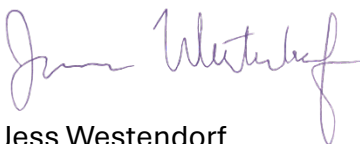
Ferndale Downtown Development Authority/Main Street (GAMSA, 2010)



Kristi Trevarrow

Executive Director

Rochester Downtown Development Authority/Main Street (GAMSA, 2013)



Jess Westendorf

Executive Director

Farmington Downtown Development Authority/Main Street (GAMSA, 2026)



June 27, 2026

### Great American Main Street Award Selection Committee

Lake Orion, Michigan was once a graveyard of hair salons. Twenty-seven to be exact. The hey day of being a resort destination in metro Detroit on the shores of Orion Lake were gone. Highway M 24 severed the connection to downtown and the shore. Shabby storefronts, fires, and a growing pressure to wipe out the historic assets of the district was the new reality of the once bustling village center over two decades ago. Although, Oakland County now counts downtown Farmington among the most recent Great American Main Street recipients, we feel Lake Orion also deserves a serious look for recognition too. Downtown Lake Orion's comeback is more than worthy as the community has creative applied adaptive reuse, along with recreation and family as transformational strategy north stars to their mission. On behalf of our entire team at Main Street Oakland County and Oakland County Economic Development, it is my honor to offer our endorsement of the Lake Orion Downtown Development Authority and Main Street Program for the Great American Main Street Award for 2027.

During my three decades in the field of place-based development, I have had the privilege of working with hundreds of downtowns throughout the United States. As Coordinator of Main Street Oakland County, few transformations have been as inspiring, authentic, and enduring as that of downtown Lake Orion. Having partnered with the Lake Orion DDA and Main Street Program during its twenty-five journey, we have witnessed firsthand the deliberate, preservation-based work that has transformed a struggling business district into one of Metro Detroit's most vibrant and beloved downtown destinations.

Like many downtowns, when Lake Orion first embarked on its revitalization efforts, downtown struggled with high commercial vacancy rates, limited retail diversity, and a business district that had become disconnected by a four lane highway from its beautiful lake. Today, that story could not be more different. Visitors are greeted by colorful storefronts, bustling restaurants, thriving locally owned businesses, trail users stopping to shop and dine, families gathering in inviting public spaces, and teenagers fishing along the waterway in the heart of downtown. The district is alive with activity and has become a destination where the community's natural beauty and historic downtown function as one unified place.

While many Main Street Programs can claim achievements, Lake Orion's transformation has been guided with a sense of intentionality. It is the product of two decades of visionary

leadership, strategic investment, community partnerships, and an unwavering commitment to authentic place-based development and the adaptive reuse of local landmarks.

Today, Lake Orion enjoys what many downtowns aspire to achieve: a near zero commercial vacancy rate and an economy driven by locally owned businesses that reinforce the unique character of the community. Rather than relying on demolition or bland redevelopment, the organization has embraced historic preservation and adaptive reuse as a fundamental economic development strategy, proving that honoring a community's past can be one of the strongest investments in its future.

That philosophy has resulted in the following:

- A former historic church has been adaptively reused as Village Hall, where the Main Street Board continues to meet.
- A former automobile garages have been transformed into thriving destinations, with one becoming a successful restaurant and another reborn as the popular 20 Front Street live music venue accompanied by vibrant retail spaces.
- The former Village Hall has found new life as a dining establishment
- A historic home was relocated and incorporated into a prominent gateway redevelopment, preserving an important piece of Lake Orion's architectural heritage.
- The organization's commitment to preservation has likewise established an expectation of quality throughout downtown. Following a devastating fire, infill construction respected the historic scale and character of the district.
- Underutilized alleyways have become inviting public gathering spaces, including the successful activation of the Flint Street Alley. The creation of the popular Children's Park has strengthened downtown as a place where families gather, children play, and community life evident with year round activation that ties to its Transformation Strategy.
- Lake Orion's ability to reconnect its downtown with the very natural assets that define the community. Rather than allowing the lake, Paint Creek, and regional trail system to remain separate destinations, the DDA intentionally wove them into the downtown experience. Visitors now move between the business district, waterfront, parks, and the Paint Creek Trail, creating an authentic sense of place. Downtown is no longer adjacent to these assets. It is the heart of them.

All of that vision has culminated into the organization's current crown jewel project: the redevelopment of the long-abandoned lumberyard at the gateway to downtown. This transformational project is converting an underutilized property into a dynamic public destination that physically and visually connects Children's Park, Paint Creek Trail, downtown businesses, and Lake Orion's waterfront. It represents years of planning and demonstrates the organization's ability to think beyond individual projects toward creating an interconnected, walkable, and economically vibrant downtown.

The Lake Orion DDA-Main Street has also demonstrated impressive leadership resilience through periods of challenge. Every successful Main Street program encounter adversity. What

distinguishes Lake Orion is not the lack of conflict, but its ability to rise above it, rebuild trust, and continue moving the community forward with optimism and purpose.

That spirit has been recognized with the program's award-winning Illuminators Volunteer Program. Created to shine a light on the positive work occurring throughout downtown while combating misinformation through transparency, engagement, and celebration, the program has attracted scores of new volunteers who have become ambassadors for their community. It reflects an understanding that successful downtowns are built not only through physical improvements but also through civic pride, community ownership, and people engagement.

Lake Orion exemplifies every one of those principles. It has become a model not simply because of what has been built, but because of how it has been built. The Great American Main Street Award recognizes communities that embody excellence in comprehensive, preservation-based revitalization. Lake Orion exemplifies those principles in every respect. Its story demonstrates how historic preservation, adaptive reuse, placemaking, natural resource stewardship, and community engagement can work together to create an authentic destination that is economically resilient and unique.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Bry".

John Bry, CMSM  
Coordinator, Main Street Oakland County  
Administrator, Local Business Development  
Oakland County Economic Development

**July 8, 2026**

## **MAIN STREET AMERICA**

### **Selection committee**

Re: LAKE ORION DDA MAIN STREET  
Support for Great American Main Street Award



### **Dear Great American Main Street Award Selection Committee:**

It is my pleasure to offer my strongest support for Downtown Lake Orion's application for the Great American Main Street Award.

As the developer leading the transformation of Lake Orion's historic 1926 High School into the West Village 55 redevelopment, I have experienced firsthand the leadership, creativity, and collaborative spirit that define Lake Orion's Downtown Development Authority and Main Street program. Historic redevelopment projects are never easy. They require vision, persistence, public-private partnership, and a community willing to invest in preserving its heritage while creating opportunities for future generations. Throughout every stage of this project, Downtown Lake Orion has been an exceptional partner.

The leadership of the DDA has significant knowledge and understanding of how historic preservation based development works; because they have actually done it. Those abilities, and their prioritization of Lake Orion's place in time, created an environment where adaptive reuse became possible—not only through advocacy and community engagement, but by helping navigate complex development issues, coordinating local support, and championing incentives that make historic preservation financially feasible. Their commitment to tools such as rehabilitation incentives, the use of historic tax credits, state based placemaking grants, and thoughtful planning, demonstrates an understanding that preserving history and encouraging private investment are not competing goals, but complementary ones.

What impressed me most throughout this process was the culture of collaboration fostered by the Downtown Development Authority. Questions were approached with solutions instead of obstacles. Meetings focused on achieving shared success rather than simply satisfying regulatory requirements. The Director personally brought to the table members of the public, key leadership, and legacy voices who attended the school, to listen, learn and adapt the ideas of the community. The DDA understands that successful downtown revitalization depends upon strong partnerships between the public and private sectors, and they consistently demonstrate that philosophy in practice.

As a developer, I work with communities that vary greatly in their willingness to embrace redevelopment. While those communities often speak about historic preservation, Lake Orion has demonstrated how to make it happen.

Through this aggressive collaboration, we are persevering the character and history of an iconic school building, and within its classrooms creating custom residential lofts, complete with the original slate chalkboards, built in bookshelves and teacher cabinets. Lockers will line the halls, and the original gymnasium will be restored to the glory days and made available for public gatherings and events. Transformation of the historic high school will serve generations of residents while preserving an important piece of Lake Orion's history. That project would not have reached this point without a local Main Street organization committed to collaboration, innovation, and long-term community stewardship.

The best towns in America understand more than the wish of saving a building, they know how to do it. Lake Orion's DDA may be the best in the business.

For these reasons, I enthusiastically support Downtown Lake Orion's nomination for the Great American Main Street Award. Their leadership has helped transform not only buildings, but the confidence that private investors have in the future of downtown Lake Orion.

Sincerely,

  
**Kyle Westberg**

West Village 55, LLC  
West Construction Services LLC  
79 Oakland Ave., Pontiac, MI 48342  
248-758-9925