



**IONIA**

**DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT  
AUTHORITY**

**2023 Annual Report**





## **Economic Development**

**Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC):** The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) selected cities through an application process to participate in the statewide launch of the Redevelopment Ready Communities® program designed to assist local municipalities establish a sound foundation for redevelopment to occur. RRC is a certification program promoting effective redevelopment strategies. The program measures and then certifies communities that integrate transparency, predictability and efficiency into their daily development practices. The certification is a formal recognition that a community has a vision for the future and the fundamental practices in place to reach that threshold. Communities must commit by participating in assessments, workshops, and evaluations followed by a report of findings that outline recommendations and actions for best practice criteria. Future grant funding administered by MEDC is only awarded to cities engaged or certified by the Redevelopment Ready Communities program. Ionia became fully engaged in the program in April 2017 and began the process of alignment with the Best Practices as required by the project. In July 2020, Ionia became the 46<sup>th</sup> Michigan city to reach certification. Effective July 2021, Ionia's RRC certification was extended through July 30, 2025. Documentation updating and annual reporting is required to maintain certification.

Ionia is designated a low - moderate income community which allows for Community Development Block Grant funding and broadens the scope of grant opportunities. In cooperation with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), the DDA continues to support grant programming for blight elimination, façade improvements, rental rehabilitation, building acquisition, and support of small businesses.

### **MEDC / Community Development Projects:**

**Match on Main:** In 2023, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) announced a new round of Match on Main reimbursement grants for up to \$25,000. Goals included supporting the growth of placed based businesses located in a traditional downtown, brick and mortar businesses creating and / or retaining jobs, leveraging private investments and activating vacant / underutilized space. Applications for two downtown businesses were submitted. Unfortunately, neither were selected for grant funding. Only RRC and Main Street communities were included in the Match on Main program announcement.

**Optimize Main Grant Awards:** Optimize Main Street programs were created to support small businesses by providing technical assistance through grant funding. Awards of \$2,500 each were presented to two Ionia downtown businesses in 2023.

- Downtown Vintage was awarded funding to purchase security cameras and monitor for their retail business. The system allows for a multi-screened view of the building's interior and also alerts business owners to any unauthorized entry.
- Summit Personal Training was awarded funding to cover the purchase and installation of a key card access system for their Main Street facility. The system provides a higher security program for owners and members.

**340 West Main Street:** In 2020, WB Vacation Properties LLC of Haslett purchased the 5,282 square foot structure formerly known as the French's Building. Originally constructed in 1890, the historic property was eligible for grant funding and historic tax credits. Plans for the restoration included a full first floor commercial space, three apartments created within the second floor and climate controlled storage in the basement area. An estimated investment of \$1.084 million, future creation of two full time jobs in addition to providing residential units to the downtown were planned for the property. The project provided a step forward in the revitalization to the business district and also gained recognition statewide through MEDC. An official ribbon cutting ceremony was held in August 2023 followed by an open house and tours of the restored building.



**RRC Priority Sites:** Redevelopment Services Team (RST Team) provides special services including technical assistance, site analysis and assessments, site design, and marketing services for approved / selected properties located in traditional downtowns of RRC communities.

- **The Design and Build Scenario** is a grant funded pre-development planning service to assist downtown property owners of historic buildings in need of storefront and interior rehabilitation. Scenario packages include schematic renderings of the property with written explanations of the budget process. The service is intended to empower the property owner(s) with a clear vision for redevelopment, the tools to clearly communicate project details in addition to an understanding of the financial costs and potential returns. In 2021, the DDA provided an invitation to property owners to complete a request for proposals for review and submission for selection of the Design and Build program. After careful consideration, two properties were submitted for final review by the RST Team. The DDA was notified that each of the properties were accepted into the Design and Build Scenario program with the process beginning 2022 and continued in 2023. The Design and Build Team met on several occasions with the property owners and provided architectural drawing to each for review in 2023.
  - 213-215 W Main Street – Robin and Randy Fazakerley
  - 402 W Main Street – Seth Izzard
- **Priority Site Designation.** A second phase of the program assists in identifying three to five priority development sites within the city. The selected parcels will receive a full report detailing potential for development which will be showcased on the MEDC website, City of Ionia website in addition to being provided to interested parties. The DDA will continue to collaborate with the City Manager, Assistant to the City Manager and RRC Team to provide pertinent information on each site as required.

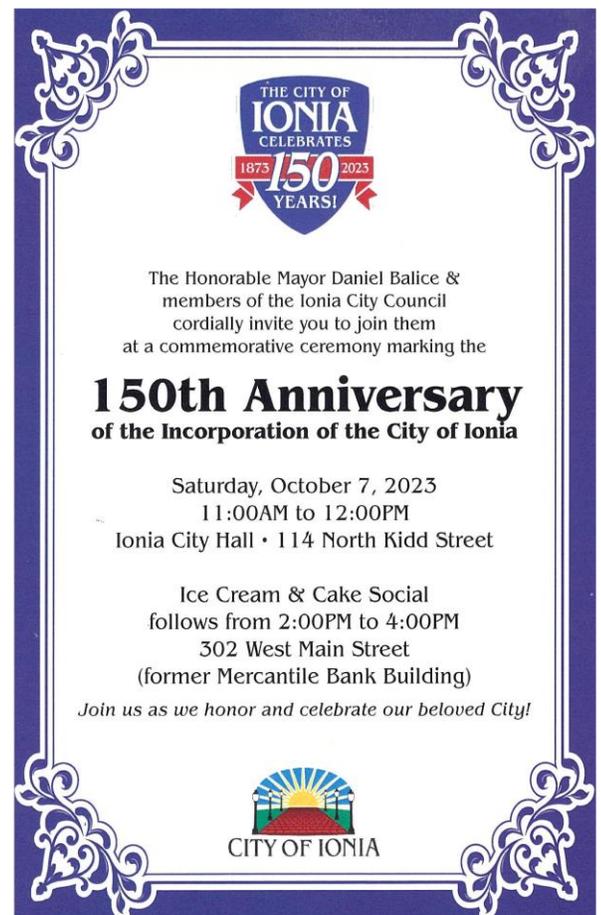
**MIPitch 2023:** In cooperation with The Right Place, Montcalm / Ionia based economic alliances, Chamber of Commerce for each county and the Downtown Development Authority, MIPitch hosted its third annual small business startup competition. A panel of judges selected the top applicants to present their business plans to a live audience. A total of \$11,000 was awarded to five local entrepreneurs at a special tri-chamber After Hours event hosted at the Winter Inn of Greenville. A total of three Ionia County businesses were represented during the competition with Ionia City Market of downtown Ionia awarded the top prize. Funding will be used for commercial kitchen equipment, display pieces and more.

**Small Business Saturday and Buy Nearby Campaign:** Sponsored by American Express, select communities received promotional banners, posters, and tote bags to be distributed to downtown businesses for participating in the event scheduled for the Saturday following Thanksgiving. Many of the area businesses noted an increase in retail sales from last year’s event. The “Buy Nearby” shopping campaign was created by the Michigan Retailers and held in early October. The DDA participated in each of the events to promote shop local initiatives.

### **Special Events, Festivals and Outdoor Experiences Provide a Sense of Place**

Statistics show that continued special events create guest destination sites, attract new residents, promote investment and support economic growth. Every small community develops its own sense of place by providing friendly areas for families to gather, special activities appealing to a broad audience and creating a small town ambiance that will create memories for generations. Included are a few of the past year’s highlights that made Ionia a destination for many and an enhanced sense of pride for its residents.

**City of Ionia Sesquicentennial Celebration:** On May 28, 1833, the first settlers led by Samuel Dexter arrived from New York and began the journey of creating the city we know today. In 1873, the village of Ionia was incorporated as a city with the act being passed by the Legislature and approved by the Governor. 2023 marked the 150th anniversary of that milestone and was recognized by a host of special events and activities. The weekend was highlighted by an official Mayoral Proclamation and presentations by Representatives of the State of Michigan, Blanchard House tours, Ice Cream & Cake Social, window displays showcasing the history of the community, musical entertainment, children’s book giveaways and so much more. A number of lampposts were decorated with banners celebrating the occasion and recognizing families and businesses. The official celebration was hosted October 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>.



**Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail Pedestrian Bridge:** In 2023, a Bridge Light Display application process was approved by City Council. Requests must be from a non-profit organization or governmental unit in order to submit an application for specific lighting requests. The application form can be found on the City of Ionia website.

**Ionia Fireworks Display:** The Ionia Fireworks Display was proudly presented on Friday June 29<sup>th</sup> and launched from the Fairgrounds. Inclement weather brought rain but did not deter the visitors. The display is made possible by the Ionia DDA and generous sponsors. Dates for the 2024 display are in place.

**Sidewalk Cafés:** The DDA offers the opportunity for Main Street restaurants to host outdoor seating during the summer months to further enhance the atmosphere of downtown Ionia and their businesses. The DDA requires the completion of a permit application prior to approval being granted.

**Autumn Celebration** returned to the downtown on Thursday, October 26<sup>th</sup>. The Ionia Area Chamber of Commerce is the hosting organization of the Celebration with Independent Bank presenting the ever popular Chili Dawg Challenge. Candy and giveaways were provided to children by downtown businesses and those participating in the Trunk R' Treat activity. Several thousand guests visited the downtown celebrating the season and upcoming Halloween holiday. DDA Director is a member of the planning committee.

**Hometown Holidays and Twinkle Town Christmas Parade:** The official downtown Christmas tree was placed at the intersection of Depot and Main Street adding to the ambiance of the holidays. The DDA provides the lights for the tree with DPW staff placing and maintaining the system. The official parade, tree lighting, Santa's arrival and free movie were a few of the activities marking the arrival of the holiday season and are presented by the Ionia Area Chamber of Commerce and local sponsors. The DDA provides support of the project as requested.

**Ionia Farmers Market:** The Farmers Market re-located from the Pavilion to the parking lot area of Michigan One Community Credit Union mid-summer of 2023. DDA Director continues to be a member of the Farmers' Market Board of Directors.

**Ionia Free Fair:** The Ionia Free Fair kicked off the "10 Best Days of Summer" with an early opening on Thursday, July 13<sup>th</sup> as a preview night. Beautiful weather, concerts, Arnold Amusements, displays and more added to another record breaking year. The Agri-Science Division showcased thousands of open and youth exhibits, competitions, and special activities adding to the success of the 2023 Ionia Free Fair.

**Parades, Car Shows, and more:** Numerous special events were hosted in downtown Ionia by non-profit organizations and community groups adding that sense of place atmosphere. DDA works with each individual group to submit street closing applications and barricade requests accordingly.

- Memorial Day Parade hosted by VFW David Huhn Post 12082 was held on Monday, May 29<sup>th</sup>.
- The Ionia Cruisin' Classic Car Show hosted over 250 vehicles in its annual first Saturday of June event.
- The Cow Pie Classic bicycle race's participation grew again in 2023 hosting over 1,000 riders. The famed Michigan gravel grinder bike race offers four distance rides from 3 to 62 miles. A 5K Run / Walk was added to the event bringing additional competitors to the area. This nationally recognized event is hosted by Summit Personal Training / Joe Cantwell.
- The Ionia Free Fair Grand Parade was held on Saturday, July 15<sup>th</sup> showcasing entries from across mid-Michigan.
- First Thursday on the Bricks, hosted by the Ionia Downtown Group, invites patrons to shop during extended hours. Vendors are also a part of the monthly program offering handcrafted items at their outdoor booths.
- The Ionia High School Homecoming Parade was hosted on Friday, October 13<sup>th</sup> to honor students and the time honored football game presented at the High School.

## **Downtown Beautification and Maintenance**

**Dumpster Program:** The DDA continues the downtown dumpster program for businesses / rental units located on the south side of Main Street in the 300 block in addition to limited businesses on the north side of the 400 block. Dumpsters are maintained by Granger Container.

**Flowers / Plantings / Trees / Lampposts:** Spring brought the blooming of daffodils, petunias and other plantings showcasing the downtown. The DDA continued downtown beautification efforts by providing funding for the annual flowers that grace many of the downtown streets. The DDA oversees the ordering of flowers and plantings for the curb jets, pedestrian islands, entrance to the fairgrounds, and decorative urns. All are planted and maintained by the City of Ionia DPW staff providing a beautiful backdrop for our community.

**Fresh garland wraps:** The fresh garland wraps that adorn the historic lampposts welcome the holiday season. The DDA solicits sponsors for the garland and recognizes each by placing a laminated card noting the donor on the individual wraps. 2023 brought a record breaking year for sponsor participation of the project. The fresh wraps are purchased locally from Sid's Flower Shop.

## DDA District Updates

- Maintained working relations with DDA businesses and property owners.
- Researching new events to create a destination atmosphere for the downtown area. Strive to enhance current events and activities.
- Assisted as requested with community fundraisers and special programs.
- Collaborated with the Ionia Area Chamber of Commerce Director to implement shared / partnered activities to strengthen both entities.
- Maintained a list of available properties within the downtown / district.
- Maintain log of Ionia Theatre donations and thank you letters for each contributor.
- Attended Chamber of Commerce Legislative meetings: Provided DDA District updates.
- The DDA welcomed many new and / or relocated businesses to the area during 2023 including:
  - Downtown Vintage opened on March 1<sup>st</sup>. Located at 221 West Main Street, the retail business offers beautifully repurposed furniture, antiques, collectibles and more. This business re-located from the Mount Pleasant area.
  - Fast Cash relocated to 429 West Main Street from Dexter Street.
  - Mane Stage & Spa celebrated 16 years in business at their 309 West Main location.
  - Farmers Insurance celebrated their first year at 321 West Main Street.
  - Tejanitas Market opened at 109 South Depot Street featuring pre-packaged food items, clothing and other retail items.
  - Ionia City Market opened at 322 / 324 West Main Street the first week of August. Meats, cheeses, organically grown fruits and vegetables, oils, teas and more are offered.
  - Ribbon cutting for 340 West Main Street was held on August 29<sup>th</sup>.
  - Tea Haven opened at 434 W Main Street.
  - Lillie's Foreign & Domestic Auto Repair closed its South Depot site and relocated to North State Road.
  - 423 West Main Street was purchased in 2023 by The Development Studio providing space for restaurant, retail or offices.
- The Zion Methodist Church located at 423 West Washington Street was the scene of a fire on Thursday, January 5, 2023. Fire, smoke and water damage to the building was significant. The Food Panty was relocated to the First Christian Church until the restoration project can be completed.
- Met with several property owners and Bruce Johnston / Revitalize LLC to discuss rental rehab and façade grant funding. Individual meetings were set with each to review the MEDC funding opportunities.
- The renown Lamplight Grill closed on June 30<sup>th</sup> as the owner retired. Property remained for sale for the remainder of the year.

## **DDA Director Community Involvement / Participation**

### **Director Training:**

- Participated in continuing educational webinars and workshops relating to business development, festival / special event management, promotion / marketing, planning and zoning, business recruitment, grant writing, philanthropic management, winter strategies for downtowns, etc.
- Attended the spring and autumn Michigan Downtown Association Conference virtually.
- Attended the annual Statewide Preservation Conference virtually in 2023. Individual workshop topics included historic tax credits, best practices for local historical preservation projects, recreating historic storefronts and facades, and other related topics.
- Enrolled in virtual trainings presented by the International Association of Fairs and Exhibitions for sponsorship, donor solicitation, marketing and promotion as a continuation in Fair Management principles. All of above mentioned used within the daily practices of the DDA.
- Enrolled in a four part workshop series focused on housing issues facing small communities – including downtown residential units.
- Attended the United Way Housing Conference on December 5<sup>th</sup>.

### **DDA Promotion and Marketing:**

- The DDA provides a monthly newsletter highlighting upcoming events, business promotions and activities. Special activities and announcements are placed upon the City's official website.
- WION I-1430 Radio ad campaigns for special events and holiday shop local campaigns.
- DDA included within the Chamber of Commerce Community Guide. Worked directly with magazine development group for content.
- The DDA partnered with west and mid-Michigan media outlets to promote special events.
- Provided the Daily News, Sentinel Standard and Ionia County Shoppers Guide with information regarding upcoming events and paid advertisement.



### **Ionia Free Fair Employee Lease Agreement:**

In November 2022, the IFF Board of Directors presented a request for the extension of the employee lease agreement for the 2023 Ionia Free Fair. As detailed in the agreement, the DDA Director will secure sponsorships and donations to support the upcoming Ionia Free Fair, secure funds for building upgrades in addition to facilitating promotion / marketing of the Fair. City Council approved the Memorandum of Understanding Agreement to share costs and services of the DDA Director as requested. The program outlined the terms, salary sharing, and a list of professional services to be provided by the DDA during a 25% employee time frame agreement. In November 2023, the agreement was extended including an increase to a 37.5% time share.

Services performed for the 2023 Ionia Free Fair included but were not be limited to:

- Designed and implemented a sponsorship solicitation program specific to the general Fair, individual events and building restoration needs. Full return on investment program developed recognizing the levels of funding provided by donors. Created spreadsheets detailing sponsor involvement – both funding and in-kind contributions.
- Secure funding and in-kind donor programming to directly decrease budget expenses.
- Met with committee / event chairpersons to define needs that could be filled with donor funding and / or in-kind contributions. Worked with IFF administrative staff to review past donor records, annual renewal programming related to specific contributions, and contact lists for same.
- Met with individual former and potential donors to present the sponsorship program and secure contributions accordingly. Provide a review of the prior year interaction to allow for additional donor involvement in decision making. Met with donors who had secured first right of refusal for special event funding.
- Created a sponsor signage program allowing for greater recognition and esthetic appeal. Exceeded goal of replacing vinyl banners with coroplast signs as they provide sharper imaging, longer life, less labor intensive for set up and tear down, storage, and more. An example of the project are the 4' x 4' signs that line the front entry gateway to the fairgrounds.
- Continued work with naming rights agreements to assist with long term investments by area donors for restoration of the aging buildings. Agreement secured with Mercantile Bank for full restoration of the former National Bank Building. Signage placed on the front of the facility recognizing Mercantile Bank.

- Created a Building Restoration Partnership program allowing for multiple donors to assist with specific building upgrades collectively. This program was extremely successful in 2023 and allowed for numerous upgrades to the Grandstand, Merchants Building, and numerous buildings located in the Agri-Science Division of the grounds. Donor signage is placed on each respective building recognizing investments.
- Worked with local businesses to produce new promotional signage recognizing donors and supporters of the Fair and facilities. Older plywood signage was replaced with coroplast materials allowing for longer life of the sign, brighter / sharper imaging and lighter weight allowing for easier placement / removal / storage.
- The livestock panel purchases made in 2022 through a specifically created donor program allowed for the increase in equine and livestock competitions within the Covered Arena facility in 2023. In addition to the rental of the Covered Arena for the competitions, stall rentals and camping sites also saw a large influx of users providing a greater revenue in ground rental income.
- Worked directly with radio / TV and print representatives to create a positive ad campaign for the Fair. Created a consistent message to be used by all media outlets. Strived to increase campaign trade-outs reducing expenses and maximizing air time.
- Worked directly with a data analytics company that tracked visitor traffic during the 2023 Fair. Report to be utilized in 2024 providing an in depth overview of the Fair's audience when meeting with potential donors.
- Attended IFF Board of Directors meetings to present a monthly report of activities related to solicitation of funding through the sponsor program in addition to all promotion and marketing.
- Member of the Ionia Free Fair Foundation Fund committee to assist in securing endowment funding. Currently the recording secretary of the committee.



**DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (DDA)**  
**Annual Report of Expenditures - DDA Project Fund**  
**Fiscal Year 2022-2023**  
**Prepared Pursuant to Section 884.11 of the City Code of Ordinances**

**REVENUES**

Taxes	\$ 46,023
Interest income	\$ 1,409
Charges	\$ 20,000
Contributions from primary government	\$ 350,000
Miscellaneous	<u>\$ 17,767</u>
 Total revenues	 \$ 435,199

**EXPENDITURES / EXPENSES**

Personnel services	\$ 94,161
Contractual services	\$ 198,020
Benefits	\$ 52,892
Materials and supplies	\$ 6,865
Utilities	\$ 8,804
Promotion	\$ 17,814
Contributions to primary government	<u>\$ 24,460</u>

Total expenditures / expenses \$ 403,016

Revenues over (under) expenditures / expenses \$ 32,183

**FUND DEFICIT/FUND BALANCE**

DDA Fund – Fund balances / net position, beginning of year	\$ 169,132
DDA Fund – Fund balances / net position, end of year	\$ 201,315