



2025 Downtown Development Authority Board

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2025 Annual Synopsis

This annual synopsis of the projects and activities of the Downtown Development Authority is prepared to satisfy the reporting requirements of the Tax Increment Financing Act, Public Act 57 of 2018.

As the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) was formed in 2019, there are no revenues that have been accumulated for five or more years at this point to address as to when they will be expended. With 2022 tax increment capture, the DDA has now collected revenues for five years. There were no land investments by the DDA to report for 2025.

The Downtown Development Director's responsibilities work toward implementation three key plans including the Downtown Development Plan adopted by the Township Board in 2019 and the Comstock Center Place Plan for Prosperity and Redevelopment, the 2022 Economic Development, Marketing & Branding Strategy and the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan.

Two new Board members were appointed to the DDA in 2025. Keith Wilcher, resident and Larry Rabbitt, business owner in the DDA District, were approved by the Township Board. The DDA Director worked with the executive Committee to encourage more efficiency and clarification of the DDA bylaws. The DDA has reconfirmed the focus and priorities of their four committees. The four committees are Beautification, Maintenance & Infrastructure, Economic Development, Marketing & Outreach, Events /Special Programs and Executive.

Projects and Activities of the DDA

The Downtown Development Plan spans 30 years. 2025 was the seventh year of this 30-year plan. First steps toward improving the overall appearance of and reminding the community that Comstock Center matters and is worth revitalizing got underway in 2020 as the *Beautify Comstock Center* initiative. In 2025, significant work was to continue to enhance the appearance of the district streets and entryways. Highlights of 2025 include:

Beautification, Maintenance & Infrastructure

- ❖ 2025 was the sixth year the welcome banners hung on poles in Comstock Center. The thirty banners are seasonally themed and swapped out for fall, winter and spring/summer.
- ❖ *Beautify Comstock Center* initiative annual installation and maintenance the five gateway signs and reinstallation of 35 attractive planters near downtown intersections and business. The Kalamazoo River bridge was redecorated with 20 flower baskets along the railings improving the pedestrian walkway on each side of the bridge. The DDA purchased a new security camera to help monitor and deter vandalism of the baskets.
- ❖ The *Beautify Comstock Center* initiative continues to receive support from Comstock Township greenhouse businesses. River Street Flowerland. Wenke Greenhouse and Sportel Greenhouse all donated products and services to help beautify the district.
- ❖ Maintenance of the downtown district was improved with the DDA continuing the final year of a 3-year contract with MowCo., a local landscape firm, to water, weed, maintain the gateways, planters and bridge areas.
- ❖ DDA staff continued weekly tours of the district to visit district businesses and monitor streetscape infrastructure and furnishings.
- ❖ The DDA continued trash removal from eight key locations to encourage cleanup of King Hwy. and River St. streetscapes. A local business owner was contracted to help empty and maintain the containers. Trash along the sidewalks has decreased significantly in 2025.

Events /Special Programs

- ❖ The DDA participated in the National Night Out Event in August at Merrill Park. A local business donated funds for free food and drink. Attendance was approximately 100 people.
- ❖ The DDA partnered again with Comstock Parks and Recreation to hold the 4th Fall Fest at Merrill Park in September. The significant expansion of food, music, games and family activities resulted in higher attendance to 300.
- ❖ The renovated historical-themed mural located at King Hwy. and River St. Landscape planters and Holiday lighting were installed to highlight the mural.

Economic Development, Marketing & Outreach

- ❖ 2025 was an active year for the DDA Board related to economic development. The project target area called Riverfront Redevelopment Project continued to be the priority economic redevelopment site located at the SE corner of King and River St. It includes the enhancement of the Kalamazoo River walkways and connection, access to the Kalamazoo River Trailway and streetscape improvements throughout the district. Legal services were engaged to help prepare a Letter of Interest to purchase key parcels within the project site. By the end of October it was determined that the owner of three key parcels was no longer interested in selling. This decision essentially placed a hold on the Riverfront Redevelopment plan.
- ❖ The DDA continued to utilize the 2024 retail and residential market assessment for business recruitment efforts. The studies indicated that Comstock Center could support 80 new residential units and over 40,000 sq. feet of targeted commercial uses.
- ❖ The DDA Director continued to work with three local realtors to help secure potential buyers for the Comerica Bank building at King and River St., Comstock building on E. Michigan and the Former Langland Funeral Home on King Hwy.
- ❖ The Comstock Center Façade Improvement Program awarded two signage grants to Kate's Kupboards and The Rabbitt Hutch. A total of \$5,000 in façade grants were awarded in 2024 and 2025. The ITC Foundation awarded the second-year grant of \$5,000 to the DDA

Executive Committee. Funds will be made available in 2026

- ❖ The Executive Committee, among other tasks, serves as the sound board for initiatives the Director may undertake, reviewing bylaws and creating new policies and strategies to help lead the full board. The DDA Board was successful in filling two vacancies on the Board.

- ❖ The DDA Executive Committee acted as the Riverfront Redevelopment Project Team to begin seeking support and funding to implement the next step of the project including potential negotiations for land acquisition. Requests were made to the Township Board for an additional Plan funding Township CIP and ARPA funding program in early 2025. The Township recommended we come back once we have made further progress on details of the plan.

- ❖ A second purchase offer was made on 3 of the key parcels in the project area. Unfortunately, the offer was rejected. Negotiations to purchase continued throughout September 2025.

- ❖ The DDA was successful in receiving a \$100,000 Irving S. Gilmore Foundation grant for land acquisition and riverfront enhancement design. The Grant requires the DDA to raise an additional \$45,000 local match to secure the full \$100,000. Fundraising began in October 2024 with Board members reaching out to local businesses and residents. A total of close to \$25,000 was pledged to match the ISC Grant.

- ❖ The DDA Director has provided technical support to a local developer who is renovating a former community center into four affordable residential lofts. Completion was planned for summer 2025. However, a financial shortfall was identified mid-year resulting in the project placed on hold until funds are secured to pay for required utility work.

- ❖ The DDA is working closely with the Township administration to prepare a community Housing Plan. One specific goal is to create a owner-occupied rehab program to help the core neighborhoods surrounding Comstock Center DDA District with improvements for roofing, windows and weatherization. The DDA staff provided input on the Draft Housing Plan presented in late 2025 to the Planning Commission.