



**MAIN STREET WAYLAND  
SUPPORTS LOCAL  
VOLUNTEERS AND BUSINESSES  
AS IT LOOKS TO A FUTURE OF  
GROWTH AND COMMUNITY  
INVESTMENT**

# DOWNTOWN WAYLAND

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Narrative by Holli McPherson,  
Executive Director of Wayland Main  
Street, and Jennifer Antel, Mayor of  
Wayland and former DDA Board  
Member, and Phil Eich, Storyville  
Social, as part of the Michigan Main  
Street Story Series

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

## **Holli, Main Street Director**

"I went to school for interior design and architecture and worked in customer service for a long time. But when I was in college, I realized I loved urban development and did as much as possible related to urban development and studying cities.

When I graduated from college, I discovered what a DDA was and said, 'That is where I need to be.' I started volunteering for Main Street before I got the job. I was just mesmerized, and it was awesome to see the different elements of what a Main Street Director does. And then this job opened up, and I applied."

-Holli McPherson, Executive Director of Main Street  
Wayland

## **Benefits of Main Street**

"It was very exciting when Wayland became a Main Street community. We already had the passion: everybody was excited about our town, loved it, and loved the businesses. But we didn't know what to do about it.



DDAs tend to focus on the brick and mortar: redoing sidewalks, adding brick pavers, adding fancy lights, and adding benches, but making things look pretty doesn't bring people to your town. Main Street, on the other hand, looks at the whole picture. It was so exciting to see a structure for promoting a downtown and its history, getting people involved and events.

Main Street offers so much education to our business owners, like workshops on effective social media, how to build a website, how to make online sales, and how to build a beautiful window in your storefront to draw people in. We can bring people down with events we have throughout the year, but we need them to visit our businesses while they're here. That's why we're bringing people down, not just to see our pretty trees and lights. They need to walk through a business's front door for the first time and want to come back.

Another benefit of Main Street is the training they provide to volunteers because volunteers are so important to Main Street's success. What they do for the city is unbelievable. These people volunteer their time to help move Wayland forward. We have volunteers who are committed year-round, people step up and help whenever they're needed."

-Jennifer Antel, Mayor of Wayland and former DDA Board Member, and Holli McPherson, Executive Director of Main Street Wayland

### **We Love Wayland**

"Wayland is a very close-knit community. So many families have lived here for generations, but it's also growing, which is really exciting.

New families are coming in, a lot of new people, and the community welcomes them. While some places might be closed off, Wayland is like, 'Come enjoy this place that we have, because we've enjoyed it for years, and you will, too.'

We love Wayland. It is a small community of about 5,000 people with idyllic



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neighborhoods. You walk down the sidewalk and always see someone you know. It's a place where people say 'hello.'

At the same time, the school pulls from the surrounding areas, and the community is big enough that our kids have amazing opportunities here."

-Jennifer Antel, Mayor of Wayland and former DDA Board Member, and Holli McPherson, Executive Director of Main Street Wayland

### **Pandemic Recovery**

"I've almost always lived in small towns and admired them, but I have also lived in Grand Rapids, so I have both the perspective of someone who has lived in a tiny town where you leave your keys in your car, and that of someone who has lived in a larger city.

When I moved here, I heard stories about how Wayland was really awesome, but, just like other communities, it took a hit during the pandemic. I call Wayland 'the comeback kid' because not only do we have a strong group of volunteers on Main Street now, but the passion among the business owners is there. They want this town to grow, and the residents are doing as much as they can wherever they can to bring this town back.

For a community to thrive, you must invest in the people and businesses there.

It was tough during the pandemic, but as soon as our restaurants, specifically, could at least offer takeout, there was a huge push among the residents to eat local and support our small businesses. My family would get takeout once a week and rotate restaurants because we wanted them to still be here after the pandemic was over.

For small local businesses to thrive, community members need to put their money where their mouth is. If they love their local businesses, they need to support them, and I think we have."

-Jennifer Antel, Mayor of Wayland and former DDA Board Member, and Holli McPherson, Executive Director of Main Street Wayland



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## The Next Generation of Volunteers

"To keep this momentum going, we have to get the next generation involved, so like they have done in Charlevoix, we have students leading projects every year.

Their involvement plays off the fact that Wayland is a multi-generational town. Most of these kids' families are from here, and they'll stay here, too. When you can look at something in your community and say, 'my grandma did that' or 'my grandpa did that,' it adds to a sense of ownership.

And kids have so many good ideas. They think outside the box. When people complain about today's generation, it's because they don't know the kids we know. They've had a lot to say for a long time, but they didn't have a voice. They want to be heard.

When we were redoing our city park in the center of town, we wanted kids to have a role in designing it. So, they got to draw, share their ideas, and tell us what they wanted. That was probably 10

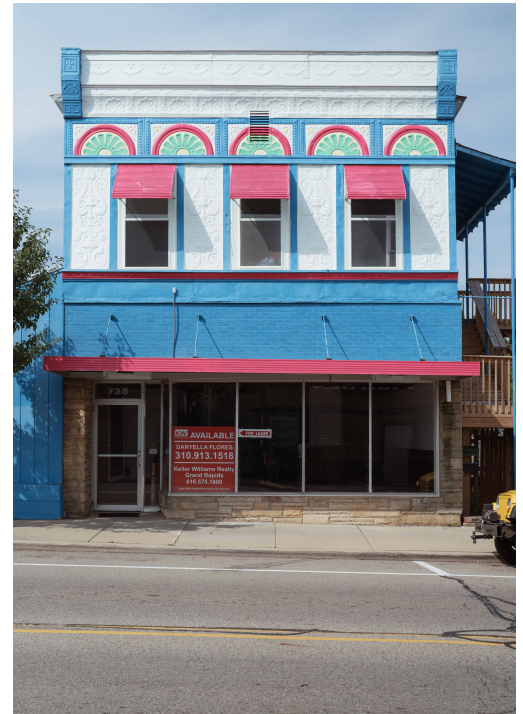
years ago, but those kids still remember that and are so proud that they helped design our splash pad and playground."

-Jennifer Antel, Mayor of Wayland and former DDA Board Member, and Holli McPherson, Executive Director of Main Street Wayland

## Summer Fest Murals

"Our first mural in town was a volunteer-led paint-by-number-style public art project during Summer Fest.

Summer Fest happens annually here, and it has been happening for decades. We shut down the whole of Main Street, bring in a bunch of activities and concerts, and everyone celebrates all



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weekend long. It serves almost everyone in the community, all ages.

So, during Summer Fest, families and businesses came out and painted that first mural. It was such a success that we added a second one and then a third. They all happen in the summer, and the whole community comes out and leaves a piece of themselves.

That's placemaking.

You own that place. You own that mural because you helped paint it, and it helps to create a sense of place."

– Holli McPherson, Executive Director of Main Street Wayland

### Good Transformation

"Good transformation benefits everyone involved. For example, if a new business opens downtown, the citizens and neighboring businesses benefit.

Bad transformation is the city ignoring the community's needs to create what they believe is a utopia. All cities are not exactly alike. Something that works well in another community may not resonate with people here, and if we do something without listening to community members, we could spend all this money on something that just flops.

Good transformation is saying, 'this is Wayland, this is what our citizens want, and this is what's going to make us better even if it's not what everyone else is doing.' It's about embracing who Wayland is and then building on it to make it better."

-Jennifer Antel, Mayor of Wayland and former DDA Board Member, and Holli McPherson, Executive Director of Main Street Wayland



### Community Partnerships & Volunteers: Driving Main Street Success

"Working with Main Street are the business owners, council, and planning commission. They play a role in the planning, what's going to go where, and determining where we can be flexible.

The school also plays a huge role. It's our largest employer and brings in a lot of people from out of town every day for sports, so it's probably our number one economic development attractor. People don't think of the school that way, but it is. You not only have the teachers, coaches and the rest of the staff but also the people visiting for sporting events. It's a huge attraction, and we need to include them in the conversation about what we're doing with our community.

The volunteers are also so important to Main Street's success. What they do for the city is unbelievable. These people volunteer their time to help move Wayland forward. We have volunteers who are committed year-round. People step up and help whenever they're needed."

-Jennifer Antel, Mayor of Wayland and former DDA Board Member, and Holli McPherson, Executive Director of Main Street Wayland

### Wayland's Future

"In the future, Wayland will have a non-motorized trail connecting Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids. You will then be able to go from Battle Creek to Cadillac and, pretty soon, the bridge. Allegan County is the missing piece, so that will be a game-changer for Wayland.

Non-motorized transportation like biking, running and hiking is one of Michigan's top tourist attractions. We're No. 1 in trails in the nation. As soon as we can connect to that network, that will be huge for us. We're very excited about that transformation.

Wayland is growing. A lot of people are choosing to move to small towns. And with that growth, we'll see a vibrant downtown come back to life. There are some things people have to leave the city for, but if we can bring those things here, Wayland could be an even more incredible place to live and spend time."

-Jennifer Antel, Mayor of Wayland and former DDA Board Member, and Holli McPherson, Executive Director of Main Street Wayland





# Michigan Main Street Story Series



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