



**HISTORICALLY SERVING STATE  
EMPLOYEE'S AND THE 9-5  
CROWD, CHANGING THE  
NARRATIVE AND CREATING  
VIBRANCY IN...**

# DOWNTOWN LANSING

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Narrative by Cathleen Edgerly,  
Executive Director of Downtown  
Lansing Inc., and Bob Rose, Chair of  
the Design Committee for  
Downtown Lansing, and Phil Eich,  
Storyville Social, as part of the  
Michigan Main Street Story Series

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

"I started out as the Director of Public Service here in Lansing and was part of the effort before we joined the Main Street program. I worked in the engineering department with the permits and such. Then one day, Mindy Bell said to me, 'We're going to be a Main Street. Can you be the chair of the design committee?'

I said 'sure', but the voice in the back of my head went, 'Do you even know what you're doing?'

But I've been doing it ever since...I just keep dancing along to the music!

I got into community work because I evolved from standing outside what was happening in my community asking, 'Why isn't somebody doing something?' to realizing that you can make your communities into what they should be by actually taking part in the process.

Things like public art and beautification of a downtown don't happen magically. They happen with hard work from volunteers, and not just people on committees, but people who will come and do our cleanups and other activities.

Over the years, Downtown Lansing has evolved and gotten bigger and bigger. We work with other districts in Lansing like Old Town and REO Town knowing that together, we're going to rise as a community."

—Bob Rose, Chair of the Design Committee for Downtown Lansing

### Downtown Lansing Transformation

"Downtown Lansing is in a very different position than many downtowns today who are also experiencing transformation and revitalization. For many downtowns, they lost momentum as time went on, but we're going through this transition because of COVID and how it changed the dynamic of our Downtown.

Lansing was home to large companies with many day time workers, but COVID changed that. We lost 85% to 90% of our daytime traffic and sales overnight on top of losing our major employer.

But it forced us after 60 plus years to stop being comfortable with a certain demographic of people or relying on a daytime worker to infuse life into this downtown district. We had to stop talking about what was happening to our downtown and start putting action behind what we know we can be, what we deserve, and what Michigan's downtown, this capital city, should be.

The first thing Downtown Lansing had to do was provide the area with hope and some stability, strategize for our future, and then put action to that strategy.

There have been so many wonderful people, businesses, developers, and city officials willing to roll up their sleeves and say, 'Okay, let's really grab onto this once in a lifetime opportunity to build something great and chart our course forward. How are we going to diversify our business mix next? How are we going to address vacancies in this downtown district? How can we bring more residential down here?'

The transition into something new and being successful is not one simple thing.



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There are a lot of different ways to build community and to build a stronger path forward, and that's what we're figuring out right now. It's exciting and exhausting and we have to believe in ourselves.

There are 50 cities in the United States that have capitals and we're one of them. We're an ambassador for Michigan to the world. We want to make sure people who visit Lansing see the best side of Michigan.

There's not one thing that leads to the future success of a downtown or a neighborhood. So many times, especially in the last year or so, I've been asked, 'What can we do for downtown Lansing? What will it take to help downtown Lansing, what are our next steps?'

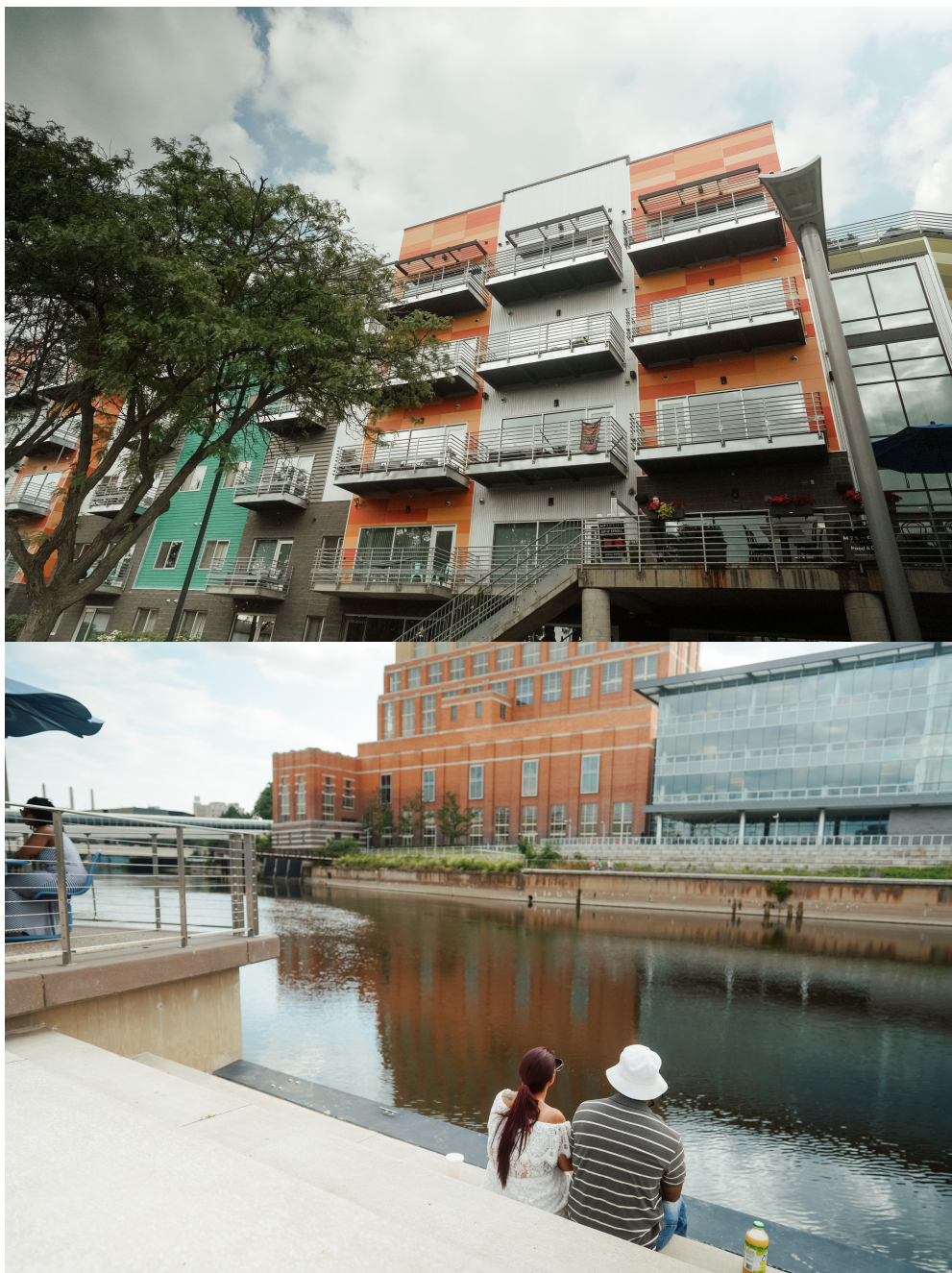
And to put it simply, it takes you. It takes me. It takes all of us chipping in and saying, 'I have passion and pride for this community. I want to continue to be part of its future, so I'm going to invest my time, my talents, my funds in one way or another.' It's about not just committing to building habits of lifting up local efforts, but being more conscious of the people and places who make up your community. It's about taking all the steps to ensure that they're going to be here for years to come.

It takes that kind of community to build a community."

—Cathleen Edgerly, Executive Director of Downtown Lansing, Inc.

"Our Lift Up Local Campaign is about featuring the people who make up this community to create a personal connection. From that, we've seen the spirit of community continue to grow with people looking out for their neighbors or fellow business owners, building off each other's enthusiasm and excitement of doing something new or taking those simple steps that add up to a big impact.

That can mean putting flower pots outside or holding an outdoor concert in front of your building, or putting a patio out in front of your business and saying, 'Hey, neighbors, do you want to use these tables as well?' All of those little things help create a positive transformation by adding to a sense of place and a spirit of community.



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Volunteers help create that, too. It might just be volunteering for one or two days, and the next thing you know, you have ownership of your community. Many of our neighborhoods are exactly that way with people planting things in the right of way. It's infectious. It becomes part of our lives and those people around us and creates a ripple effect.

We also have to be ourselves. We have to 'be Lansing' so well that everybody else wants to be Lansing. We want people to talk about how they can model themselves after what we do here. We also have to purchase with purpose and think about how we're spending our dollars and our time.

It's not an overnight success. Communities like Traverse City or Howell only come after many years of work. It takes a lot of work from many different people to build a community or an area where people can come in and say, 'Wow, you guys have a great downtown!'

It's those times that make you say, 'That's why we're doing this.'"

—Cathleen Edgerly, Executive Director of Downtown Lansing, Inc.

## Social Districts + Placemaking

"Lansing definitely dove right into social districts. It took about a year to get there and that gave us a good chance to research and talk to other communities who implemented it right at the onset of social districts being allowed in Michigan.

As we talked about social districts here in downtown, it was a great opportunity to work with our neighbors to the north and south, Old Town in REO Town, and say, 'Hey, we all have the capacity to implement social districts. Let's work together on this plan, and then approach the city council together, talk to our police department together and the city administration, with this complete plan and set the boundaries for the district.' .



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Now, people are able and encouraged to sit, shop, linger and enjoy their community. It added an additional point of sale opportunity for these businesses. It not only benefited the restaurants, bars and distilleries that are part of our community, but as people were lingering, they were checking out the neighboring businesses as well. So, it supports retail and other industries.

We had a meeting just recently about a project that the Cap City Film Festival is working on. We've been working with them for a while and got a grant working with Dominic Cochran to do a 3D projection onto the Comerica building. It'll be a regular nightly projection and it will change over the years to keep it fresh and exciting. There'll be this exciting show that will happen. They have it in places like Disney, where the building will disappear and turn into something else. That's what we're doing there.

COVID really accelerated many of our placemaking projects. It also opened people's minds and eyes to just how much creativity can lead to better community and economic development. It made us look at how we can change our ordinances or our processes to allow for these things to happen and it's not that scary, especially if we are all talking and working together.

Placemaking is a word that is newer, but it's also a vibe, a feeling and an experience that so many of our communities and downtowns have been practicing for generations, we just didn't have a word to put to it. We love when people are like, 'I don't know what it is about this community. But I just, I just love it and it has this feeling.'

We've used both small and large impact and placemaking projects to transform different things. One was a building that has been vacant for longer than many of us have been alive. It was something that people just kept complaining about the way it looked.

So we decided to work with our local artists and photographers and put some art into this space, wrapping this building with some love and a positive identity.

Or things like how can we help our businesses and our residents who are looking for safe spaces to meeting. In some areas the community has gone dark, so having a safe space to gather and serve their customers is great. One easy way to do that is by putting a bunch of picnic tables out there with umbrellas in the public space and let anyone in our community use them.

Now, through some of these projects, we look forward to winter events. We're in Michigan and winter happens. It takes up a large part of our year. So, rather than hiding from it, let's embrace it and have a celebration of winter in the middle of our downtown.

Or let's purposely look at these neglected park spaces that are really iconic and beautiful and historical and say, 'Let's purposely kick off a winter market and then add additional seasonal activations to it.' That adds to property values and makes for more people coming in, wanting to open their business here, develop here, live here and call Lansing home."

—Cathleen Edgerly, Executive Director of Downtown Lansing, Inc. and Bob Rose, Chair of the Design Committee



## Staff

"I get a huge smile talking about the staff. It is never one person in a community or at an organization that makes a difference. It's everybody who's bringing their individual skill sets, passion and their 'why' for what they're doing. To be able to work in a Main Street organization that has multiple staff members, means we can lean on each other. That's so important, especially on the really tough days whether you're tackling something that's brand new, or has its own unique set of obstacles.

They're phenomenal with all the skills they bring in marketing and communications, to our other co-worker who leads community and business development for downtown. She started herself as a merchant, or market vendor, similar to those who are here in Middle Village. She grew her business and expanded it three times, then she went into interior design and community development. Just in the way she did it, that's a unique skill.

That ability to communicate and cross multiple divides to get people talking to each other, and work on the puzzle pieces. That's what we all do here. We are our own puzzle pieces building a collective puzzle, together. We have three staff members. Julie and Whitney are a phenomenal team and we are very lucky to get to work with them. We truly are a team. It sounds corny, but we are. We all have bad days, but we all lift each other up on those days. We all bring that skill set. I'm so lucky to get to work in this organization with them."

—Cathleen Edgerly, Executive Director of Downtown Lansing, Inc.



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**DOWNTOWN  
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### Downtown Lansing as Part of Michigan Main Street

"One of the benefits of being a Michigan Main Street is getting an effective framework and model to work with. But more importantly, it's a model we can make our own.

To take it further, they are not like a lot of programs that can come along, that maybe give you plan and then walk away. Main Street gives you the tools, teaches you how to use those tools, teaches you how to expand those into other tools and build from there. They teach you how to foster community investment, passion and pride from the community for years and years to come."

—Cathleen Edgerly, Executive Director of Downtown Lansing, Inc. and Bob Rose, Chair of the Design Committee





# Michigan Main Street Story Series



**MICHIGAN ECONOMIC**  
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