



ADVANCING DEVELOPMENT
PROJECTS, ADDRESSING
LOCAL HOUSING AND PARKING
ISSUES, AND SUPPORTING A
LARGE SCALE EVENT ARE
ONGOING EFFORTS IN
DOWNTOWN...

GRAND HAVEN

Narrative by Jeremy Swiftney,
Executive Director of Grand Haven
Main Street, and Sharon Beam, Co-
owner of Borr's Shoes & Accessories
and board member of Grand Haven
Main Street, and Phil Eich, Storyville
Social, as part of the Michigan Main
Street Story Series

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Coast Guard Festival

"The Coast Guard Festival is Grand Haven's biggest event and one of the biggest events in Michigan. It's our way of rolling out the red carpet to honor our Coast Guard. The festival runs for 10 days and this year's theme was 'Honoring the Men and Women Who Keep the Lakes Great.'"

The event brings in at least 100,000 people or more—just on Saturday alone—and there are smaller events everywhere during those 10 days. We have the Kids Parade that first Saturday and we also have the Grand Parade, the bigger one, on the last day. We have Senior Day. We have Kids Day. We have Air Dogs. We utilize our beautiful Lynne Sherwood Waterfront Stadium. It's just simply electric here during the event.

Before it sank, the USCGC Escanaba was stationed in Grand Haven. After it sank, the government did not have money to rebuild it, so the citizens of Grand Haven raised the money to buy the bonds to build the Escanaba 2, and down in Escanaba Park on the last Friday of the Coast Guard Festival, we have the national memorial service and it is pretty incredible.

That's the level of passion Grand Haven has for the Coast Guard."

—Jeremy Swiftney, Executive Director of Grand Haven Main Street, and Sharon Beam, Co-owner of Borr's Shoes & Accessories and board member of Grand Haven Main Street

Importance of Development/Re-Development

"We really want to see the year-round opportunities in Grand Haven continue, and the best way to do that is to have more people living here all year long.

We've got a couple big apartment complex units in development right now. Previously, they were vacant properties and one has been vacant since the 70s. We're very excited to see that being used for something that not only brings in more housing options, but specifically housing for year-round residents: it will bring somewhere around a 70% increase in people living within a three-block radius. It's going to have a huge impact on downtown because of all the nearby and new residents looking for places to go and things to do.

The really cool part about both of the developments happening right now is they are local people who own the properties. We have the Tribune Building being built by a local developer and Peerless Flats has opened their first building, which is full! It's so cool to see people walk by there and see activity—it's incredible."

—Jeremy Swiftney, Executive Director of Grand Haven Main Street
Sharon Beam, Co-owner of Borr's Shoes & Accessories and 12-year board member of Grand Haven Main Street




GRANDHAVEN
MAIN STREET

Downtown / Centertown

"A lot of communities have different shopping districts, and here in Grand Haven, we have two: Downtown and Centertown. They're two separate entities separated by a four-block governmental area with a central park in the middle of it.

Centertown understands they're not Downtown and vice versa. They both have their own cool and unique vibes and it should stay that way. At the end of the day, both districts realize what's good for the community would be both of them being successful. It's been really cool to see relationships grow to the point where everybody understands that we're all one Main Street, one community pulling in the same direction.

Both districts are within a six-block area or less, so it's walkable. We can say, 'Oh, you need men's clothes? Well, there's a really cool handmade shop in Centertown. Here's the address. Oh, you need shoes? Here's Sharon's place in Downtown.' We can champion each other and that's how we're going to be successful."

—Jeremy Swiftney, Executive Director of Grand Haven Main Street
Sharon Beam, Co-owner of Borr's Shoes & Accessories and 12-year board member of Grand Haven Main Street



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"Good community growth and development is about understanding what the community needs while having conversations that help people understand that we're really thinking about curating the development that happens."

Strategic Plan

"When we talk about the right type of projects for Grand Haven, we want to make sure people understand we're not '100% for any kind of development': it needs to be the right project for the right space and fit the needs of the community.

For example, if a viable building already exists, we want to see historic renovation of those rather than tearing them down and building new.

In regards to downtown, we want to see a development that fits. If it offers retail, will they be successful? Or would it be a better use of that space to create residences for people to frequent our downtown? We're looking at development opportunities for the waterfront area and the old Chinook Pier, which we had to tear down in 2020 due to mold issues.

We're looking at a possible incubator space to encourage small businesses to just give it a go, and if it works, then we're moving a successful business into the community. 50% or more of new businesses don't make it within two years and they close. We don't want to see that, so the incubator space—where people could try a business out on a small scale with less risk—is something that could help. At some point, we can start moving successful businesses into the downtown or Centertown area and that helps solve future vacancy issues by having successful businesses ready to go and move in.

Good community growth and development is about understanding what the community needs while having conversations that help people understand that we're really thinking about and curating the development that happens."

—Jeremy Swiftney, Executive Director of Grand Haven Main Street and Sharon Beam, Co-owner of Borr's Shoes & Accessories and 12-year board member of Grand Haven Main Street

Working With Main Street

"Main Street has given us a lot of ideas about how other communities have done things or overcome challenges. Having the sounding board of the other directors too is amazing. We share ideas all the time, whether it's parking, trash, etc. The services we receive from Main Street are great: everything from updates and refreshes to talking about what the future of our downtown should be.

Working with Michigan Main Street to determine what we needed has been very successful, and that's where some of the outdoor space really has come into play. For example, when you ask, 'What happens if you close this road to create a social district?', you'll hear complaints about lost parking.



But we did it and lost 21 parking spots: less than 2% of the parking inventory within two blocks. Not the end of the world! So this year, we asked to close down the entire road. We also asked for additional space on the other side of the road because retailers in that block brought up an important issue: they wondered how to let people know they were open at times where restaurants who use the outdoor seating might be closed, making the block look dead.

They asked, 'How do we create that openness and a more vibrant space and let people know we're here?'

So, we said, 'Let's close it down both ways and put out some additional picnic tables. Let's put some live music down there. Let's encourage busking. Let's buy some yard games and just make a fun space where people can go and gather that isn't reserved to any one of the restaurants. It's open to anybody and you can even bring your own food and hang. We'd prefer you grab to go from one of our great restaurants, but if you want to bring stuff from home, that's totally fine, too!

Losing 2% of our parking is nothing compared to what we gained just by thinking about how to use a space just a little bit differently."

—Jeremy Swiftney, Executive Director of Grand Haven Main Street
Sharon Beam, Co-owner of Borr's Shoes & Accessories and 12-year board member of Grand Haven Main Street





Michigan Main Street Story Series



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