



Eric Hanna - Developer

OLD TOWN LANSING HAS
FOUND A RELIABLE
PARTNER IN DEVELOPER
ERIC HANNA AND
MICHIGAN COMMUNITY
CAPITAL

Photos and Story by Phil Eich,
Storyville Social, as part of the
Michigan Main Street Story
Series

"This is actually the third building on this site. There was a wooden church here in the 1800s, and then around 1915, a stone church was built but was torn down. The building standing here now was a church built with war bonds the congregation had bought from World War I and then donated. Then they took bricks from all over the town to build the walls and plastered the inside of it to construct the church.

It's sat vacant since about 2007, and we're investing in this building because it was really the thing holding the neighborhood back. Thirty-seven thousand cars go down this street a week.

When people come into the city of Lansing from the northern suburbs, they see this building. If it's boarded up and derelict, which it has been for two decades now, that has a big visual impact on what people think about this area.

Something had to be done with this building, but despite its historical significance, it was completely uneconomical: no private developer would be able to take it on. It would continue to sit vacant for decades and keep the community from moving forward.

This is a problem that needs public funding, and that's where we come in.

What we do at Michigan Community Capital is aggregate private, philanthropic and public funding to solve problems like this so a community can move forward. We have access to a lot of philanthropic and public funds that help us develop vacant properties others can't, and because of our tax status, we have some financial advantages that a private developer doesn't have. We can afford to take some lumps private developers can't and taking on projects like this is our role in the development ecosystem.

This is a \$10 million development, and our job is to bridge a community from a project like this to smaller, \$150,000, \$300,000 and \$500,000 developments. We try to set the stage for private development to do what it's supposed to do: we set good rents, the aesthetic of the built environment, and get retail activity in motion so that private developers can come in behind us and in-fill. Development's a momentum sport. My job is to take a little nugget of momentum and push it over a big hump the community can't overcome without some help. Once we're at the top of that hill, the private sector can come in and do what it's supposed to do.

Despite the challenges, what we have in Old Town Lansing is a perfect setup for this kind of project. The developers here are also business owners. There's a lot of retail energy here and momentum.

So, with this building, we're going to do parking, office, residential and retail. There will be a conference room with three or four single offices for rent. A local coffee shop is opening its third location here on the bottom floor with a little over 800 square feet.



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They're also going to have a liquor license and be open until about 10 p.m., and that will be neat for the community.

One thing Old Town Lansing needs is more residential development to support the retailers. The retail scene here is great, but there are a number of owners here who actually make their money doing something other than retail, and a lot of retail here depends on income from festivals.

So how do you reinforce retail while not losing the unique community you have? There are not many areas like Old Town Lansing with so many creative small businesses in one place, so we need to protect and incubate that.

To strengthen retail while keeping the culture, we need to increase residential density. If you look out of this building, you'll see all low-density housing all the way around forever. In a retail district like this, you need high-residential density to increase traffic. This area needs more people.

So along with developing this building, we've got sites surrounding this block and plan to do another 150 units of residential within a two-block radius.

It'll be neat when it's done because we're going to do all the urban development things needed for an active Main Street."

—Eric Hanna, president and CEO of Michigan Community Capital, Temple Building renovation in Old Town Lansing





Michigan Main Street Story Series



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