

# 12 Critical Elements for Neighborhood & Downtown Vitality

## 1. SAFETY

Most people are only willing to visit environments where they feel safe and secure. Regardless of the actual nature of criminal activity within an area, the mere perception of an unsafe or declining neighborhood can be enough to detract visitors. Well-kept facades and windows, clean sidewalks and streets promote the perception of a safe environment. People are attracted to spaces that are filled with other people. Well-lit and walkable sidewalks are an essential component of downtowns with consistent flows of pedestrian traffic.

## 2. MULTI-MODAL TRANSIT

Transit accessibility through multi-modal options is a deeply held value for many in the millennial generation who prefer to bike, walk, and ride the bus or rail to destinations, rather than drive. Safe and reliable public transit, bike lanes and sidewalks designed for pedestrians give people a range of options to accommodate their lifestyles. Aligning development with transit nodes and routes can catalyze economic development within an area and also encourage ridership for public transit.

## 3. CHARACTER ARCHITECTURE

A downtown's architecture and building façades provides the first impression to a visitor or resident. Historic, distinct and memorable architecture that is human scale creates a unique sense of place for the downtown and promotes a pedestrian-oriented experience that is at the heart of a vibrant downtown or neighborhood.

## 4. ACTIVE STREETSCAPES

A walkable environment geared to the pedestrian experience is paramount to a vibrant downtown. Elements that promote walkability include wayfinding, lighting, engaging storefronts and urban landscaping. During the winter season, vibrant downtowns and neighborhoods embrace the cold weather and find creative ways to encourage people to walk the streets.



downtownbellevue.com



citylab.com

*Vibrant, livable and healthy downtowns and neighborhoods are a magnet for millennials seeking quality of life in an urban setting. Our team has observed 12 common elements that are critical for neighborhood and downtown vitality based on having lived, worked and visited many successful downtowns in Michigan and throughout the country. We believe a combination of these elements will create an attractive central destination that provides memorable, unique and authentic pedestrian-oriented experiences. We seek to apply these principles in our proposals for Manistee.*



chelseamich.com; Burill Strong Photography

# Enliven Vacant Storefronts

There is natural vacancy in all downtown communities, however the overwhelming presence of vacant and underused storefronts discourage visitors and signals decline. The following three strategies are low-cost, temporary and quick alternatives to mitigate blight during a period of high vacancy.



- quick and easy to install
- simple way to provide visual interest
- screens store interior
- attracts new business
- includes leasing details

Window wrappings are a quick and easy alternative to vacant storefront windows. Images can include potential retailers, historic uses or simply leasing information. Wrappings also screen the interior space and have the potential to attract new business. Funding is typically provided by the Downtown Development Authority or the City Economic Development department. The City of Portsmouth, VA provides a Windows of Opportunity Grant (up to \$2,000) for each property owner in the downtown business district to install window wraps in compliance with downtown design standards.

2. City of Portsmouth, Economic Development Authority. 2015. [http://www.portsmouthvaed.com/downloads/windows\\_of\\_opportunity\\_grant\\_application\\_and\\_information\\_06-2015\\_form.pdf](http://www.portsmouthvaed.com/downloads/windows_of_opportunity_grant_application_and_information_06-2015_form.pdf)



- fosters partnerships between city, DDA, chambers of commerce, property owners, students and local artists
- low cost venue for emerging and local artists and designers

A temporary arts exhibit in a vacant storefront can activate the sidewalk while promoting partnerships with the local art community, downtown agencies, and property and business owners. The Looking Lab in Jacksonville, FL features regional artists in “pop-up art” installations throughout downtown Jacksonville through a partnership between city leaders, the Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville, business owners and the art community.<sup>3</sup>

3. Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville. 2013. <http://www.culturalcouncil.org/the-looking-lab/>



- low cost and low-risk way for entrepreneurs to test products
- showcase local businesses and culture
- constantly changing storefronts draw public interest

Storefronts can also be used to house pop-up retailers, new businesses and community events. The temporary arrangement provides a low-risk method for emerging entrepreneurs to test out their goods and also showcases local businesses and culture. The startup miLES has facilitated more than 90 pop-up shops and events in New York’s Lower East Side neighborhood since 2013, by providing a versatile kit of tools and furnishings to program a variety of underutilized storefronts in the community. <sup>4</sup>

4. Made in Lower East Side. 2015. <http://www.madeinles.org/>

## 5. PUBLIC, MULTI-USE DESTINATIONS

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## 6. YEAR-ROUND EVENTS & PROGRAMMING

Regular programming brings foot traffic and promotes awareness of downtown's unique amenities – its landscapes, music, culture and food. The programming of a space also engages local merchants, artists, and entrepreneurs in the revitalization process. Recurring events such as a weekly farmer's market can attract hundreds of people on a regular basis, and seasonal programming such as winter festivals and holiday-themed events also draw people to the streets during the cold weather months.



[quartierdesspectacles.com](http://quartierdesspectacles.com)



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[downtownreading.com](http://downtownreading.com)



[alpenadowntown.com](http://alpenadowntown.com)



[lafoundation.org](http://lafoundation.org)



[artlightnow.wordpress.com/2013/12/14/winter-festival-2013-ithaca/](http://artlightnow.wordpress.com/2013/12/14/winter-festival-2013-ithaca/)

# EXCITE THE WATERFRONT<sup>1</sup>

*An excellent synergy of a public multi-use destination and programming can be realized on the waterfront. Development along this edge can be uniquely tailored to enrich the community's quality of life and spur economic activity.*



## CREATE A COMMUNITY FRONT YARD

- unique character and sense of place
- engaging, lively and memorable experiences
- programming / public art / landscaping / lighting



## ENGAGE THE WATERFRONT

- publicly accessible focal points / nodes of activity
- spaces for daily and occasional use
- special events and regular gathering places



## PROMOTE CONNECTIONS

- physical access TO the water and ALONG the water
- tailored to the pedestrian experience
- wayfinding / seating / bike parking / landscaping
- sidewalks / pathways / riverfront promenades / bike lanes
- maximize views of the water from streets and buildings



## MAINTAIN NATURAL SYSTEMS

- riparian buffer zone
- pervious and locally sourced materials
- green infrastructure / native plants



Holland  
boatwerksrestaurant.com



Henry C. Chambers Park, Beaufort  
zippitygoglobal.com



Lowell  
riverwalkfestival.org



The Boardwalk, Grand Haven  
downtowngh.com



Dexter Mill Creek Park  
dextermi.gov



Holland  
boatwerksrestaurant.com

## 7. ARTS, SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT

These elements are catalysts that unite people and draw those who otherwise may not visit downtown. When combined with programming, art and culture can be strong economic drivers for revitalization. There is opportunity to leverage the increase in activity from a downtown show or event with dinner and drinks at a nearby restaurant or shopping.

## 8. UNIQUE SHOPPING, DINING & SERVICES

Third Places are social gathering spaces in addition to homes and workplaces that are important for community vitality. Venues such as bars and pubs, cafes, barbershops, bakeries and bookstores provide informal gathering places for people to socialize and interact. Merchants that are open throughout the day and night promote an 18 hour downtown that is filled with activity well after business hours and a diverse mix of local and community-oriented businesses also create a rich vibrancy that is infused with local culture and tastes.

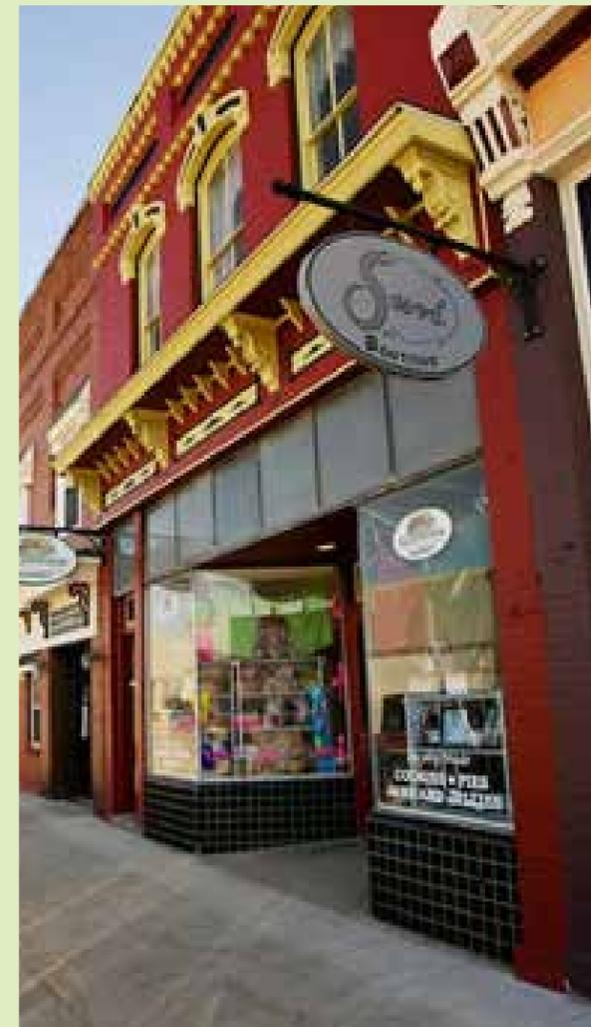
Operators with the energy and commitment to seeing the downtown thrive and succeed are a necessary component to a strong commercial district. They can provide consistent business hours and engaging store displays during peak and off-season that also reinforce the vibrancy of a downtown district. As more people flock to online shopping, retailers should strongly consider expanding their operations and conducting their marketing and promotional activities both online and in-store.



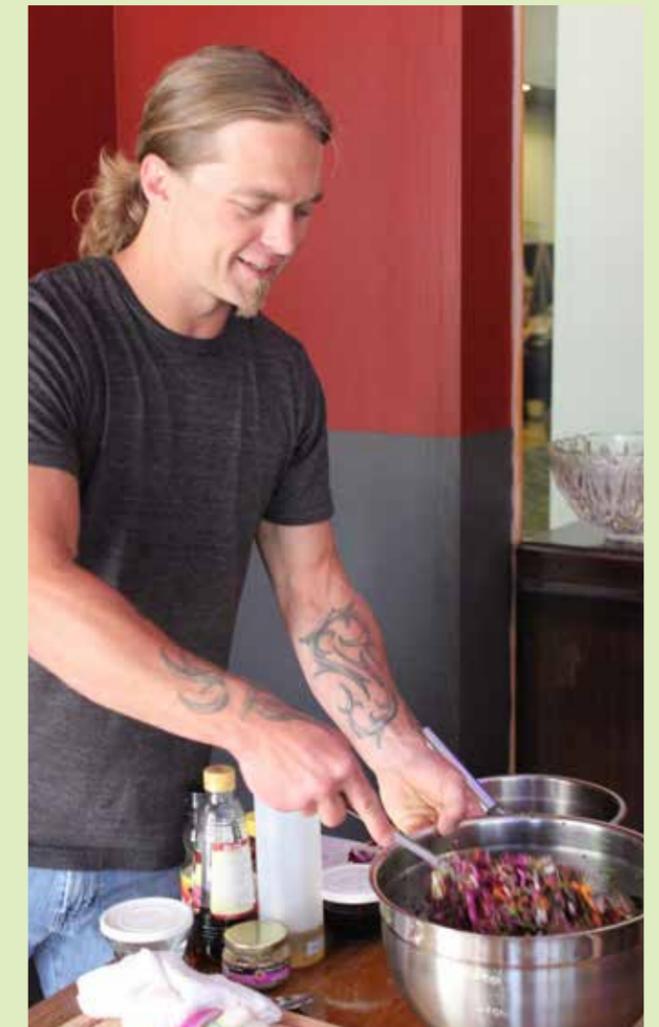
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[daybreakgallery.com](http://daybreakgallery.com)



<https://travelwithcastle.wordpress.com>



[www.traversecity.com/](http://www.traversecity.com/)

[theglenwoodmarket.com/market/index.htm](http://theglenwoodmarket.com/market/index.htm)

## 9. DIVERSITY OF PEOPLE AND LIFESTYLES

A truly vibrant downtown will draw a diversity of people of all ages, backgrounds and lifestyles. It will be accessible and welcoming for long-time residents and visitors, families, young single millennials, children and seniors. This diversity of downtown patrons will be reflected in the programming, design and use of space, merchants and services.

## 10. HOUSING OPTIONS

There is a strong market for historic buildings that offer modern amenities and a convenient, central location. Vibrant downtowns need to provide affordable housing for millennials and other groups who may be getting priced out of the downtown core. Housing for families who want to stay downtown and raise their children in the neighborhood is also important, as are accessible units for those with mobility challenges and seniors and empty nesters to promote aging in place. Although these options do not necessarily have to exist in one building, considering how downtown can provide a greater mix of housing options will facilitate a more diverse tax base and readily-available market within the area, ensuring there is activity on the street after regular business hours.

## 11. COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

It is absolutely critical to have a mix of stakeholders and interests that are engaged and committed to seeing the community succeed. In addition to the groups that are typically involved in downtown development such as the downtown development authority and local chamber of commerce, partner organizations can also include neighborhood block clubs, merchants associations, the local theatre or arts collaborative or a bicycling club. How can the downtown community find ways to collaborate and cooperate with stakeholders who may be excluded from the process, but offer a fresh perspective on common issues?

## 12. CULTURAL, HISTORICAL & RELIGIOUS LANDMARKS

These are elements that are often in abundance and convey the heritage of your downtown. Preserving these invaluable assets and developing the connection with downtown through branding and promotion, or aligning with seasonal programming are all strategies for showcasing these qualities that are unique to your community.



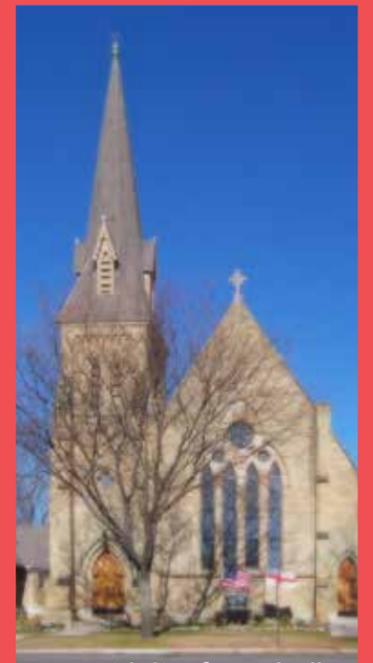
Iron Works Cafe  
manisteeKitchen.org



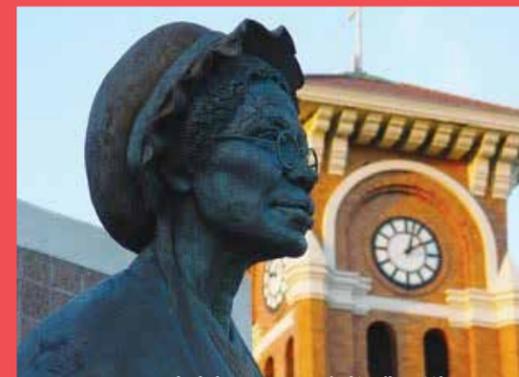
kgi.org/jesses-garden



time.com



trinityofmarshall.org



michigan.org/city/battle-creek/



upperpeninsula.biz/