



Key Objectives – Spring 2022 – Adopted by DDA Board on 05/09/2022

To maximize the Ada Township Downtown Development Authority's (DDA's) positive impact on the future prosperity of the downtown development district and community as a whole, the DDA Board of Directors has established this set of key objectives to maintain focus and guide the DDA's strategic initiatives.

This set of focus areas is the result of a facilitated process where the DDA Board – along with DDA and Township management staff - worked through past, current and potential future initiatives to determine where focusing DDA resources & efforts will fulfill the goals of the DDA and further define the DDA's role as a collaborative, leading organization that is catalytic to the success of Ada Township's prosperity.

As a kick-off to the process, other key stakeholders in the DDA district were invited to weigh-in via online survey (along with the DDA Board) on the various existing and potential initiatives of the DDA, as well as provide input on SWOT items and suggest other areas of focus. This stakeholder group included the DDA Citizens Council, Township Trustees, private business and property owner representatives.

➤ **S.W.O.T. Analysis**

A SWOT Analysis is a simple but useful framework for analyzing an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It helps to build on what is going and/or being done well, to address what is lacking, to minimize unnecessary risks, and to take the greatest possible advantage of chances for success. The DDA and stakeholders mentioned above participated in a general, open-ended SWOT analysis of the Ada Township DDA, encompassing perceptions of the state of the DDA district as a whole as well as the DDA's scope of work. The comments submitted by these parties are summarized below, in no particular order:

➤ **DDA's Primary Strengths:**

- An engaged board with diverse skillsets that cares about the success of the downtown area
- Tremendous financial support for the many events held in the community
- A successful track record of events in the downtown
- Good financial stewardship
- DDA Director who hit the ground running in her first year in the position, after a long period of the position being vacant
- Consistent positivity about the district and community
- Strengthening revenue base
- Envision Ada vision has largely been accomplished

➤ **DDA's Primary Weaknesses:**

- Lack of clarity on the DDA's role(s) in relation to the other entities working on improving/promoting the business district, such as the ABA, Discover Ada, and even the Township government itself
- Without having a DDA Director for a period of time, it created a gap in services from the DDA
- Communication to the key constituency (property and business owners) and to the general public hasn't been optimized, resulting in a lack of understanding of the DDA's impacts and role
- Focus / vision isn't clear
- Collaboration has only recently been a focus of the DDA
- Overall promotion & marketing of the downtown district

➤ **DDA's Primary Opportunities Moving Forward:**

- Intentional planning and goal-setting, creating focus for the DDA
- Enhanced collaboration and communication with other stakeholder groups and constituents in the district
- Improved web presence to promote the district

- Improving and growing the events that bring people downtown and cause activation of the district
- Clear understanding & partnership with Township government on brick & mortar improvements
- Strong investment in the downtown from the private sector (property and businesses)
- Cultivating a ‘vibe’ that is desirable for residents, visitors, entrepreneurs

➤ **Threats To The DDA’s Future Success:**

- Resistance to change / Inertia
- Potential (or perceived) misalignment between the business base in the DDA and the residential base
- Continued lack of awareness & understanding of what the DDA does
- Staff capacity – how to handle the workload, especially event management
- Being complacent and coasting on past successes
- Failure to successfully engage with the business community – both downtown companies and larger ones (eg Amway)
- The changing landscape of retail

➤ **Mission Statement:** *The DDA is an advocate for the vitality of the Ada Downtown Development District through promotion, business collaboration and public improvements.*

➤ **Vision Statement:** *We strive to develop and foster a ‘vibe’ in the downtown district that makes Ada a community where people and businesses want to be.*

➤ **DDA Key Objectives**

Utilizing a combination of electronic surveying (anonymous responses), research and thorough group discussion, the DDA Board has established a list of key objectives to pursue. These are categorized where applicable. Note that the DDA’s current Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Plan – which was adopted in 2016 – served as the basis for the proposed physical projects & initiatives in the discussion.

It is the DDA’s intent to revisit, reevaluate and potentially amend this set of key objectives in its entirety on an annual basis.

As with any community or organization, the DDA cannot be all things to all people; nor can or should it spearhead every initiative it deems of high priority. Oftentimes, a collaborative role is most appropriate. Therefore, it is critical to define the DDA’s role in each stated initiative, which is indicated in terms of the following:

[L] = Lead; [S] = Support; [C] = Convene; [R] = Respond

➤ **Objective 1: Organizational Priorities.** Between discussion at the board worksessions, the online survey responses and professional advise from the facilitator, the following are opportunities for the DDA organization to enhance the effectiveness of their scope of work. These priorities below would not only support the success of the rest of the objectives identified in this report, but will also set up the DDA for aligned impacts in the future.

- Enhanced communication efforts with/to the following audiences:
 - *Constituency of the DDA, including business & property owners in the district*
 - *At-large members of the public, including local residents and visitors*
 - *Other organizations with key roles in the district, such as the Township, ABA, DiscoverAda, Historical Society, KDL, Citizens Council and The Community Church.*
 - *An annual, intentional joint worksession between the DDA and these stakeholder entities would be an appropriate opportunity to establish and keep alignment as a priority for all.*
- Examine the opportunity to update the DDA’s current TIF plan
 - *potentially reflect the goals & priorities above*
 - *potentially remove the no-go and/or completed infrastructure items*
 - *consider direct business support activities such as entrepreneurial programming, façade grants, etc.*
 - *address the township’s upcoming master planning process, with the desire for consistency between the DDA TIF plan and the township’s new master plan*

➤ **Objective 2: Align & Optimize Promotional Activities.** As a whole, the DDA’s slate of promotional events is fulfilling its purpose; which is creating a positive image of the district & community, engaging locals with the district and bringing in some visitors. An emphasis should be placed on event **quality over quantity**, and there is an important opportunity for the DDA to spearhead **cross-organization coordination**, and serving as a clearinghouse for event information to the general public. The DDA intends to

continually evaluate promotional activities and their desired/intended impacts to the district; therefore, the priorities and roles stated below may change based on this ongoing recalibration effort.

- Focus on aligning efforts of entities planning promotional events in the district [C]
 - *The goal: to optimize everyone's efforts for the greatest impact*
 - *Find ways to collaborate with partner organizations and leverage strengths/roles*
 - *Provide support as possible to initiatives that align with DDA's mission and goals*
- Beers At The Bridge series [L]
- Farmer's Market [L]
- Winter Wonderland holiday lights display [L]
- Brats & Bonfires [L or S]
- Enhancement of online presence to promote the downtown district [C or S]
- Exploration of a downtown social district pilot [L]

- **Note:** especially if the slate of DDA-planned events is streamlined, and within the context of available DDA resources & staffing, the DDA has an opportunity to lead, support or collaborate on new non-festival-type promotional efforts, such as: (in no particular order)

- *Enhanced Small Biz Saturday promotion(s)*
- *Shop Downtown Day – MI Downtown Association (late Sept)*
- *Explore art hop concept to drive shopping*
- *'Downtown Dollars' – local currency to keep spending downtown*
- *Taste of Ada / restaurant week*

➤ **Objective 3: District Beautification & Placemaking.**

- Ongoing installation & replacement of public space amenities such as benches, flower pots, etc. [L]
- Downtown district wayfinding signage [L]
 - *This is a one-time project that is already in the capital improvements budget*
- Train bridge mural project [C, then L]
 - *This is a one-time project that is already in the capital improvements budget*
- Gateway signage & landscaping at East and West ends of Fulton corridor [L]

▪ **Notes:**

- *If the proposed social district pilot initiative is approved, the DDA would naturally take the lead on implementing the necessary signage & amenities. If the social district proves successful and is continued and/or expanded in terms of timeframes or geography, additional amenities may be desired or needed. This is proving to be the case in many other communities.*
- *It was discussed that an intentional effort to incorporate public art into downtown would add to the 'sense of place' and attractiveness of the district. Perhaps a mural program on buildings could be explored, as well as an outdoor sculpture program via Midwest Sculpture Institute or similar partnership. This could be leveraged with the Grand Rapids-based Artprize event, bringing additional exposure and visitors to the community.*

➤ **Objective 4: Public investments & Maintenance.** The DDA and Township have developed a successful collaboration with addressing brick & mortar-types of **infrastructure improvements and maintenance**, and work together on capital budgeting multiple years into the future, for planning purposes. That said, there are multiple infrastructure projects specified in the TIF plan that the board sees as either no-gos (such as boulevarding Fulton since it is an MDOT roadway) or not in the purview of the DDA since they would span outside of the district (such as the non-motorized trail and pedestrian bridge across the river).

- Exploration and development of additional parking for commercial areas [L]
- Sidewalk replacement program [L]
- Sidewalk snow removal [L]
- Street sweeping [L]

▪ **Notes:**

- *The parking priority above is framed as 'pending' further analysis and study of parking needs & opportunities which the DDA is planning to undertake in the near future.*
- *Electric Vehicle charging stations in the district – while currently identified in the capital improvement budget plan for future years – remain a 'question mark' in terms of whether the DDA should provide these, what the operational process would be (charges to user, etc) and the like. With four slow-charge stations already installed by a third party entity, the use and ROI of these stations can readily be studied*