



OVERVIEW, VISION & VALUES

Overview:

The Downtown Development Authority (DDA), Public Act 197 of 1975 as amended, is designed to be a catalyst in the development of a community's downtown district. The DDA provides for a variety of funding options including tax increment financing (TIF) mechanism, which can be used to fund public improvements in the downtown district and the ability to levy a limited millage to address administrative expenses. The Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority is made up of four districts—Downtown, Depot Town, West Cross, and Water Street—and captures TIF revenue—which is its primary income source—from all but Water Street. The YDDA operates as an entity under the City of Ypsilanti, with a 9-person board appointed by the Mayor (who is also a voting, ex-officio seat) who provide oversight and guidance to a YDDA Director and varying other staff and interns.

Mission:

The mission of the Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority (YDDA) is to undertake district-wide improvements that have the greatest impact in strengthening the downtown areas and attracting new business. The primary goal of the YDDA is to implement positive economic, physical, aesthetic, and community changes in each of our four districts.

Values:

- Safe / clean / cared for
- Community engagement / participation / ownership
- Historic Preservation
- Diverse and Accessible
- Unique / eclectic / locally owned
- Positive (messaging, communication, approach)
- Sustainability
- Integrated / partnership / collaborative

10-Year YDDA Vision:

It's 2023 and Ypsilanti is a place you want to be, whether to live, work, play, or visit. Our DDA districts—while unique in offerings and character, are very much bound by their commonalities and shared vibrancy. They collectively make up the nucleus of the community. We have a positive reputation across the region and country.

Our DDA is filled with unique and eclectic businesses owned locally; many of those owners live in or very near our community, and are invested in both their own enterprises' success and the community's success. People want to move and invest here to open a business, knowing they'll be supported and have the opportunity to be part of a bigger whole. The historic character of our physical infrastructure has been preserved—and celebrated. Our occupancy is full, including both our historic structures and the fully developed Water Street district, which has been built out in ways that mimic the physical nature of our historic buildings, so while it is clear what is new and old, there is a continuity of look and feel.

A Safe and Well-Kept District

It's safe to be here, and visitors and residents alike know that. Properties are kept up—both individual businesses, and the space between, behind, and in front of them—and that leads to a perception of being cared for, which greatly influences a perception of safety. We all take part in picking up trash, helping one another spruce things up-- there's a proactive approach by residents and employees/owners alike to take part in this. The abundance of activity—people sitting at sidewalk cafes, walking in the day and evening, and strong on-site presence of employees and owners in the districts contribute to the eyes on the street that make the community feel safe.

Diverse Businesses, Visitors, Institutions, and Partnerships

We have exemplified effective placemaking in our districts and community overall. There is a mix of businesses and operations in our districts that both attract visitors and provide for core daily needs of residents. There are both retail and service-oriented businesses. This mix attracts those accustomed to urban living where all of one's needs can be met within a few blocks. We also recognize the value, partner with, and support the core institutions in and adjacent to our DDA, including (and especially) EMU, our library, health care centers, nonprofits, and museums. These anchors are essential to our success. EMU and its student and staff population contribute to this vibrancy in many ways economically and culturally, including an active embrace of the locally-owned businesses on campus and off. Students are an asset as residents and shoppers in our DDA, and many of them stay in the community once they graduate. There are hangouts and retail establishments geared towards this audience.

A Supportive Environment to Start and Grow A Business

This diversity in types of businesses is also reflected in our business and property owners, residents, and visitors. We are strong because we attract, embrace, and celebrate people of all backgrounds, and our business and institutional offerings are geared towards people of a variety of racial, ethnic, economic, and age backgrounds. People move to Ypsilanti on purpose. And they stay.

Business owners know that Ypsilanti is a place that can start and grow a business, and the community has support available at multiple scales for businesses at different stages. There are a variety of business services available, from incubators to district-wide marketing and promotion. Businesses want to start here and have opportunities to stay here as they expand. Our business and property owners recognize the value of working together for shared business and district success. The vibrancy of our DDA districts also attracts development—residential, industrial, commercial—elsewhere in the City; our healthy commercial districts are an indicator of a healthy economy in Ypsilanti and place you want to live, work, play, or invest.

Model Green Infrastructure... A River... And a Train!

Our green infrastructure is a key to this vibrancy as well. Major parks sit in the middle of our DDA districts and are the jewels of our community and are highly connected to our nearby residents and businesses. Community and economic activity in and around the parks are fed through an active festival scene and outdoor recreation for visitors and residents. This connectivity extends through bike and walking trails through surrounding neighborhoods. We couldn't imagine a community or DDA districts without thriving, clean, and safe parks, our beautiful Huron River, and an anchor recreation center. The Huron River has returned to be seen as a centerpiece of the community and its vitality.

Green infrastructure also means multi-modal transportation. The train stops in Ypsi. Our DDA districts are fully walkable, bike-friendly, and handicapped accessible. It's easy and clear how to get around using any form of transit, which also contributes to the DDA as a welcoming space for all. And, you can indeed find parking—whether for a short visit or an overnight stay.

Sustainability means energy efficiency, green materials and reuse, alternative energy, gardens/green areas/trees, pollution prevention, sustainable transportation, and waste reduction. In our DDA sustainability is embraced by business owners, property owners, residents, and visitors. For owners and occupants this emphasis has improved quality of life, health, and affordability. We're a model of sustainability and others visit to learn from Ypsi. This has become a driver for economic development and investment in Ypsilanti.

A Vibrant and Creative Destination

Our DDA is the core of our community and of it as a cultural and activity destination. In addition to our many festivals in our parks, those events that attract residents and visitors occur throughout our districts. There are other regular entertainment and dining opportunities as well for all ages and interests. Public and private art is throughout our DDA, showcasing the creative class that has been core to Ypsilanti's revitalization. People are out and about throughout the day and night, fueling the energy and ensuring the safety that such positive and active presence brings.

Integrated into our Region

The DDA—and its staff and board—recognize that our districts don't exist in a vacuum. Our adjacent residential and commercial districts, our community-wide resources including schools, and other areas impacting community life and livelihood all impact the success of our DDA. We're involved, therefore, as a partner in conversations, initiatives, and organizations within and outside of our district that contribute to making Ypsilanti overall a vibrant place to invest, live, work, play, visit, or go to school. When we can look from the vantage of this success for our city and region, our district is strong.