

# Galesburg Community Visioning Session

October 12, 2011

Summary Report



Submitted to:

Galesburg Downtown Development Authority  
200 E. Michigan Avenue  
Galesburg, MI 4905

Submitted by:



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## **Background / Introduction**

The Galesburg Downtown Development Authority was established in 2006/2007. The Galesburg DDA's Mission Statements is:

***“To promote a vigorous downtown business and residential district, while retaining and enhancing a friendly Main Street atmosphere”.***

The DDA's Vision is for the City of Galesburg to:

***“...be recognized and respected as a premier community in Southwest Michigan.”***

In an effort to further its mission in achieving its vision for Downtown Galesburg, the DDA is interested in creating an official Development Plan and Tax Increment Financing Plan (TIF) for the Downtown DDA District. The main purpose for the adoption of a Development Plan/TIF Plan is to take a more proactive and sustained approach to prevent further physical deterioration and economic stagnation in the core downtown business area and to encourage the redevelopment of vacant or underutilized properties. The Development Plan/TIF Plan can also be used to help develop and support public infrastructure projects, community recreational facilities, for the construction and maintenance of public facilities, and for branding and marketing of Downtown Galesburg.

The Galesburg DDA Board of Directors decided that an important first step in creating a Development Plan/TIF Plan for the DDA District was to engage the community in a public forum setting to gain direct feedback from City residents on what they want to see happen in their Downtown. To that end, the Galesburg DDA hosted a facilitated community visioning and focus group session held on October 12, 2011. The event drew approximately fifty residents and included a brief introduction on the history of the Galesburg DDA, an overview of State enabling legislation and a presentation on how Tax Increment Financing (TIF) works. The session also included a written survey and an interactive “SWOT” analysis to draw out from residents what they like most about Galesburg, what they like least about Galesburg, and to receive direct input on what they would most like to see happen or developed in Downtown Galesburg.

This report summarizes the results of the community survey forms and the interactive “SWOT” analysis. We received a total of twenty eight (28) completed survey forms from the session.

## **Summary of Survey Results**

Respondents were asked three basic questions as follows:

1. *What three things do you like best about Downtown Galesburg?*
2. *What three things do you like least about Downtown Galesburg?*
3. *What kind of physical projects, programs, or community events would you like to see developed and implemented to improve Downtown Galesburg?*

Participants were also asked to name other Downtowns in Southwest Michigan that they recently visited and liked. The detailed breakdown of survey results is attached, with a summary provided below:

### **Things Most Liked About Downtown Galesburg**

The majority of respondents indicated that the thing they like most about Galesburg is the “small town feel” of the community. The feedback shows that residents are very happy with the recent streetscape projects and they like flowers and landscaping. The geographic location of Galesburg and its access to I94, Battle Creek and Kalamazoo, etc. was cited as a major positive attribute. Having both a grocery store and a hardware store within easy access was also among the top three responses of the surveys received. Having the Post Office, Library, Museum and City Hall located Downtown and “walkability” and “convenience” were also among the top responses. Additional individual responses are listed in the detailed summary attached below.

### **Things Most Disliked About Downtown Galesburg**

Overwhelmingly, the majority of responses indicated that deteriorating buildings are the main negative factor affecting Downtown. Eighty two percent (82%) of the completed survey forms listed this as the number one thing they liked least about Downtown Galesburg. This response was followed by “empty lots” as the number two thing most disliked about downtown, which was indicated in 56% of the responses. The remaining “top five” negative responses included: “lack of businesses/variety of stores” (18%); “graffiti” (17%); “misinformation/rumor mill” (13%); and “nothing for kids/children” (9%). Additional individual responses are listed in the detailed summary attached below.

### What Projects or Programs do Residents Want to see Downtown?

The top response to this question was the creation of a community center, with many respondents specifically mentioning a facility for “children and seniors”. This was mentioned as the number one choice by 44% of completed survey forms. The second most cited recommendation was a desire for more festivals and family events similar to “Greater Galesburg Days” (39% of responses). Fixing vacant buildings came in at third place with 26% of responses listing this as a priority. Other recommendations included: “more landscaping/flowers” (22%); “better communication/community outreach” (13%); “new businesses” (13%); and “skate board park” (13%). The creation of a “farmers market”, a “river walk”, “bike trails” and “art hop/art festival” were also common ideas mentioned by residents. Additional individual responses are listed in the detailed summary attached below.

### What Other Southwest Michigan Towns do You Like?

The top ten common responses were tabulated as follows: Marshall (35%); Vicksburg (35%); Plainwell (26%); Schoolcraft, Richland, South Haven, Hastings and Rockford all at (13%); and Kalamazoo, Holland at (9%) of responses. Additional individual responses are listed in the detailed summary attached below.

### Summary of SWOT Analysis

“SWOT” stands for “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats”. Residents were asked to participate in this facilitated exercise in an effort to perform a realistic assessment of the Downtown and the opportunities and constraints facing downtown redevelopment efforts. It was explained to participants that “Strengths and Weaknesses” are internal issues; while “Opportunities and Threats” are external factors. The following attributes in each category were identified by residents and listed by the facilitator. It is important to note that the major issues for each category are generally, but not necessarily listed in order of magnitude and/or importance:

#### **Strengths:**

People Friendly  
Small Town Feel  
Location  
Walkability  
New Streetscapes  
Great Library/Museum  
History  
Fire Department  
Grocery Store  
Churches

#### **Weaknesses:**

Deteriorated Buildings  
Empty Lots  
Nothing to do/Nothing for Kids  
Parking  
Need More Businesses/Nightlife  
Bike Paths/Not Bike Friendly  
Lack of Weekend Activity  
No Arts/ Entertainment  
Lack of Code Enforcement  
Government Not Working Together/Poor Communication  
Poor Directional Signage  
Poor City Logo/Lack of Marketing & Branding

**Opportunities:**

Enbridge Money  
Develop Better Bike Paths  
Tourism  
River – Waterfront Development  
Community Events  
Community Center  
Good Volunteer Base/Fire Department  
Low/Mod Designation – CDBG Eligible  
Existing Parks & Natural Resources  
(River Oaks Park, Ft. Custer, City Parks)  
Volume of Traffic / Easy Access to I94

**Threats:**

Lack of Leadership  
Bickering  
City Staff Making Policy  
City Logo/Website Outdated

**Summary & Conclusions**

Based upon the level of attendance and the feedback provided by those in attendance, it can be readily concluded that Galesburg residents feel strongly about the health and physical appearance of their downtown. At the end of the session when asked by show of hands how many residents would favor the creation of a DDA Development Plan/TIF Plan, the audience was almost unanimous in its support for such a plan. The information and community feedback contained in this report should be used by the Galesburg DDA and the Galesburg City Council to identify and prioritize future projects and programs for both the Downtown and City-wide. If utilized correctly, the information provided by this direct citizen input can be used as a roadmap to develop a more focused public policy approach to Galesburg's economic and community development efforts.

The potential opportunities provided by Enbridge community improvement funds are significant, and as such these funds should be reserved for special community projects as identified by City residents – and not just placed in the City's general fund. Any use of these monies should be transparent and clearly connected to community improvement projects. A portion of the Enbridge funds could be used as "seed" money to help the Galesburg DDA to begin the process of establishing a legal Development Plan/IF Plan for the DDA District.

Of more immediate concern is the advanced and deteriorating condition of the historic commercial buildings along East Battle Creek Street. Residents have made it clear they value these historic buildings and want to see them saved. If immediate action is not taken to stabilize and protect the properties before winter, it is very likely the buildings will not survive until next spring. The Loss of these historic buildings could deal a major blow to the City's Downtown redevelopment efforts and a psychological blow to the community's pride and sense of place.

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## Summary of Community Feedback

### Top Things Most Liked About Downtown Galesburg:

<u>Response</u>	<u>% of Responses</u>
Small Town "Feel"/Atmosphere	39%
Recent Streetscape Improvements	35%
Flowers/Landscaping	35%
Having Grocery & Hardware Stores	22%
Location to BC/I94/Kzo	22%
Civic Buildings: Library/Post Office/Museum	18%
Recent Renovation to Antique Market	18%
Walkability/Convenience	13%
Historic Buildings	3%
Restaurants/Local Eats	2%

### Other Single Answer Responses:

The Monument	Generally Clean
Good Eating Places	Coffee Shop
Churches	New Bike Racks at Harding's
Local Parks	Proactive Approach to Downtown Development
New Welcome Sign	Bank Downtown
New Residential Sundivisions	Opportunity/Blank Canvas

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### Top Things Disliked About Downtown Galesburg:

<u>Response</u>	<u>% of Responses</u>
Vacant/Deteriorating Buildings	82%
Empty Lots	56%
Lack of Businesses/Lack of Variety of Stores	18%
Graffiti	17%
Misinformation/"Rumor Mill"	13%
Nothing For Children	9%

### Other Single Answer Responses:

No Clock	No Community Center
Not Enough Parking	Noise/Traffic
Stores Not Open In Evening	Poor Signs on Buildings
No Fountains/Restrooms in City Parks	Bank Leaving Town
Lack of Full Time Law Enforcement	No Bike Paths
Lack of Future Planning	Crosswalks at Five Points
Lack of Leadership	

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## Summary of Community Feedback

### What Projects or Programs Do You Want to See Downtown?:

<u>Response</u>	<u>% of Responses</u>
Community Center for Kids <b>AND</b> Seniors	44%
Festivals/Family Events/Galesburg Days	39%
Fix Vacant Buildings	35%
More Flowers/Landscaping	22%
Better Communications/Community Outreach	13%
Want to See New Businesses	13%
Skate Board Park	13%
Farmers Market Downtown	9%
Develop Riverwalk	9%
Better Bike Trails/Bike Friendly Downtown	9%
Art Hop/Arts Festival	9%

### Other Single Answer Responses:

Clock Downtown	More Parking
Downtown WiFi	More Promotional Events for Businesses
Make Downtown Golf Cart Friendly	Develop Tourism
"Complete Streets"	

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### What Other Cities or Towns in SW MI Do You Like?

<u>Response</u>	<u>% of Responses</u>
Marshall	35%
Vicksburg	35%
Plainwell	26%
Schoolcraft	13%
Richland	13%
South Haven	13%
Hastings	13%
Rockford	13%
Kalamazoo	9%
Holland	9%

### Other Single Answer Responses:

Three Rivers	Decatur	Mendon	St. Joseph
Paw Paw	Lowell	Frankenmuth	Mackinaw Island
Coldwater	Otsego	Olivet	