

Date: August 19, 2025

From: Anne Gentry, Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

To: Alpena County Commissioners

RE: DDA & Downtown Alpena Updates

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to share updates on developments within Downtown Alpena and progress on DDA projects. There has been a lot of activity since the boundary expansion was approved in 2023. I have included the highlights below; I will also give an update at the meeting next week and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

1. Boundary Expansion Progress:

North 2nd Ave: Last summer, the City finished up its \$2 million+ reconstruction of the north side of 2nd Ave, which included updating infrastructure, installing curb and gutter, widening sidewalks, planting street trees, and adding pedestrian lighting. Since this investment, nearly every single commercial building (except for one) has either been sold, received a Façade Grant, had a new business open, or has plans to be under renovation. The DDA expansion has been the catalyst for these improvements and allowed these properties to access the resources to make their transformation possible.

Chisholm St: Over the last year, we have been part of the Walkability Action Institute, a collaborative program through the CDC and MDOT to build more walkable, bikeable, and healthy communities. The ultimate goal is to submit a grant application through MDOT's [Transportation Alternatives Program](#) that would allow us to improve Chisholm St from the marina to the 14th Ave bridge, along with key streets downtown (1st, 2nd, 3rd, Water, River). We are working with the City to coordinate with water/sewer updates and other planned infrastructure updates downtown. As part of this program, engineers/urban designers from Toole Design visited Alpena, met with our team, walked the area, and developed early conceptual designs. Some of their conceptual designs included connecting the bi-path to downtown, widening sidewalks, improving lighting, and planting trees. There will be much more to come on this.

2. Façade Grants:

Façade Restoration Initiative: There is much progress on the 11 projects that received funding through the \$400,000 grant we got through the Michigan Economic Development Committee (MEDC). The DDA is contributing \$70,000 of its own funds as match. All projects need to be finished by April 2026. Six of the projects were able to access this funding because they were included in the DDA expanded district. The total projects represent \$1,178,568 of investment; over 50% is coming from the property owners.



Façades complete:

- 113 S 9th Ave (Players Pub)
- 304 N 9th Ave (Clem's Bait & Tackle)
- 626 N 2nd Ave (Old Polish Corner)

Façades in progress:

- 106, 108, 110 3rd Ave & 131, 133, 135 W Chisholm St (Bolenz Jewelry block)
- 102 S 3rd Ave (Alpena Agency)
- 309- 312 N 2nd Ave (Cellar Building)
- 310 W Chisholm St (pink building next to Latitudes)
- 835 W Chisholm St (brick building on the railroad tracks)
- 616 N 2nd Ave (Old Town Coworking)
- 712 N 2nd Ave (Smigelski Kielbasa)
- 106 N 2nd Ave (Parallel 45 Books & Gifts)

Revitalization & Placemaking Grant: In May 2025, we received a \$839,401 grant from the MEDC to support additional Façade Grant projects throughout the downtown. We applied on behalf of the following projects. Each project could request up to 50% of costs through the grant. The projects need to be complete by September 2027.

- 616 W Chisholm St (Sunrise Mission office building)
- 701 N 2nd Ave
- 700 N 2nd Ave
- 1234 W Chisholm St (HPC Credit Union)
- 200 W Chisholm St (Thunder Bay Community Health Services/Bay Athletic Club)
- 144 W Washington Ave (Emery Enterprises)

Residential Program: So far, we have had one residential property apply for and receive a grant. \$5,000 was awarded to update 910 W Chisholm St. A mailing was sent to all residential properties when the program was approved. Properties can apply May 15 and September 15.

3. Riverfront Activation:

Water Street Commons: The DDA is leasing the former Alpena Power Company site (123 Water St) from Target Alpena. We had 6 small buildings built on the site that are rented out to new businesses looking to try out downtown. Three of these businesses have indicated they want to find a brick-and-mortar shop downtown based on this summer's result and the market in Alpena. These shops will remain open through the end of the year, then re-open in the spring. The project has drawn considerable foot traffic to downtown and help activate this key space along the riverfront. We have space for food trucks to hook-up and have had several on the site.

Clem's Bait & Tackle: We wrote and received a \$25,000 Match on Main grant for Clem's to build out their commercial kitchen. They plan to construct through 2026 to open a year-round eatery and bar. This will be the first riverside restaurant/bar in downtown.

4. Business Activity Downtown:

2024 Businesses Opened or Expanded:

- Friendly Foodees
- Highpointe Rehab & Performance
- Sunrise Side Co-Op Market
- SkellaFit Personal Training
- Shear Envy

2025 Businesses Opened or Expanded:

- Water Street Commons- Blu Blends Smoothies & Acai, Knaebe's, Mana Wellness, Alpena Sourdough & Health Store, Callia's EmPURRium, Birch Hill Grocery
- 2nd Ave Coffee Company
- Lulu's Sweet Shop
- Riverside Ice Cream
- Sanctuary Dogs
- Samantha's on 2nd
- Suncatchers
- Rewildings
- Canine Communication

5. Other Construction Activity Downtown:

200 W Chisholm St (Bay Athletic Club/ Thunder Bay Community Health Services)- this building is under complete renovation and will be completed at the end of 2025. They received a \$10,000 Activation Grant through the DDA to contribute to their renovation, along with a Façade Grant.

400 N 2nd Ave (Thunder Bay Theatre)- the original part of the building will be finished later this summer after a \$1.4 million renovation. They anticipate hosting events in the lobby this fall and re-open the theater in 2026.

121 W Washington Ave- This project received a \$30,000 Façade Grant from the DDA to update all three facades. They are adding two apartments upstairs (new units) and will be white boxing the first floor; it will be for rent in 2026.

201 Water St (Federal Building)- Interior work has begun. Anticipated to be completed by fall 2026.

204 N 2nd Ave (State Theater)- The old marquee was removed. The City's Zoning Board gave approval for a new, state-of-the-art marquee to be installed. It is currently being fabricated.

Culligan Plaza- Construction will be done this fall. The \$1 million+ investment will house the newly renovated public space, parking lot, and public restrooms.

6. Beautification Initiatives:

Progress in the expansion area:

- 30 new holiday banners
- 2 new murals completed in 2024 in the expansion area
- 115 hanging flower baskets- added Chisholm to 11th and North 2nd Ave
- \$2 million + in public investment on the north side of 2nd Ave

Other projects:

- Chisholm St Pocket Park improvements- addition of grass, landscaping, and new seating
- Alleyway improvements- new flower bed, public seating
- Water Street Commons- public seating area with lights
- 2 murals being painted this summer- 2nd Ave bridge sides and Thunder Bay Winery storage building

- 7. Promotional Events:** We continue to lead promotional events that have resulted in some of our business' largest sales days, ever. In 2025, we had our inaugural New Year's Event downtown sponsored by HPC Credit Union, which brought record sales to some of our downtown bars. We plan to host it again this year. Flower Festival also continues to be a positive community event, kicking off the summer tourism season downtown and bringing new visitors to the area. We are beginning to plan our holiday events and promotions, including Day of the Dead with Mango's, Witches Night Out, New Year's Event, and a new event, Christmas at the Commons.

In summary, there is a lot of positive momentum throughout the DDA district. You cannot drive, walk, or bike through the district without seeing signs of this on every block. Next summer, there will be nearly 20 buildings whose facades will have been renovated. Culligan Plaza will be updated. The former Huntington Bank building will have been renovated and reactivated. There will be two new apartments on Washington Ave. Thunder Bay Theatre will be re-opened. These are just a few of the changes that are on the horizon. We appreciate your support of these efforts to improve our downtown.



Anne Gentry
Executive Director