



# DOWNTOWN PLAN

MILFORD  
DOWNTOWN  
DEVELOPMENT  
AUTHORITY



# The Milford Downtown Development Authority

Addendum to the  
Village of Milford  
MASTER PLAN

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## GUIDING DOWNTOWN DESIGN

Building upon the successes of the previous Master Plan and Corridor Plan, which have facilitated the completion of several commendable developments in the downtown area, this Downtown Plan aims to refine and elevate the quality of future projects. While past developments have adhered to these guidelines, a more nuanced approach is necessary—one that transcends generic elements to capture and enhance the distinctive character of the Village of Milford. This plan fosters continuity while embracing our community's diverse and cherished qualities.

This Downtown Plan provides clearer, more accessible guidance for all stakeholders. It articulates the essence of the Village of Milford, accompanied by illustrative photographs to visually convey the unique character we seek to preserve and evolve. By offering comprehensive insights into the village's scale, architectural character, and high-quality materials, the guidelines raise awareness and establish a foundation for thoughtful development.

New additions to the village should go beyond replication, striving instead to be inventive, progressive, and timeless. The guidelines promote a forward-thinking yet respectful approach, emphasizing contributions to the community's vision of Milford within the broader master plan. The overarching goal is to ensure that each new development or renovation aligns with the established character while enhancing the village's vibrancy and uniqueness.

### Contextual Urban Design

Honoring the Past, Embracing the Future

Contextual urban design requires a deep understanding of strong downtown design principles. Just as painters, architects, and urban designers study the Masters to uncover the elements that hold a composition together, understanding what makes one town feel more inviting, lively, and comfortable than another is essential. Certain common threads create a welcoming atmosphere, while mistakes made in other communities—perhaps even in this one—offer valuable lessons. Learning from both successes and failures is key.

Great urban spaces are shaped by looking outward, drawing from best practices in thriving communities across the country and from innovative ideas that inspire the next generation. Longstanding towns that have successfully retained their essence while evolving to meet the needs of residents and visitors offer valuable insights. Many of the design guidelines that follow reflect these best practices, ensuring that communities like Milford continue to flourish.

Equally important is looking inward, recognizing the architectural moments that define a town's identity. The arch, the waterfall, Central Park, the Opera House, the rhythm of



1880s storefronts, with their triple second-story windows, aligned cornices, recessed entries, and knee walls standing in harmony with their neighbors—these elements shape lasting impressions.

True preservation isn't about freezing a town in time—it's about honoring its past while allowing it to evolve. Milford's architectural heritage should be safeguarded, but not in a way that dictates the future. Some communities get stuck—trapped in a stylistic trend, like the "Alpine" look of the 1970s, or bound by rigid design rules that strip a town of its soul. The most vibrant places reflect an eclectic mix of styles and eras, blending the polished with the imperfect; history with future promise.



The art of design is not about changing a place—it's about revealing its essence and bringing it to life. Milford has a distinct imprint on the landscape, one worth celebrating and expanding. Its character is shaped by significant historic structures, a traditional grid of narrow streets, and an abundance of green space that weaves through and around the community, all of which contribute to a strong, walkable downtown. By embracing these qualities, Milford can continue to grow while preserving its original spirit and staying true to its identity.

Milford exemplifies how a town can honor its past while evolving for the future.

Established within natural geographical constraints that shaped its compact, walkable downtown, Milford is bounded by the Huron River, a railroad, mill ponds, and rolling hills. These features naturally curbed sprawl and preserved the district's dense character. Unlike many surrounding communities that embraced urban renewal efforts in the 1960s and 1970s—demolishing historic structures in favor of suburban-style development—Milford's leaders wisely rejected such changes, safeguarding the village's charm and identity.



Its appeal lies in its seamless integration of history and nature. The well-preserved downtown, within walking distance of a turn-of-the-century residential district, is surrounded by a greenbelt of expansive open spaces, including state, county, metro, and village parklands. This unique relationship between the built and natural environments—where the Huron River meets 1880s merchant row buildings, railroads weaving through rolling hills, and a dense residential core encircled by open farmland—fosters an atmosphere that captivates visitors and residents.



## Guiding Downtown Design – Conclusion

If guided thoughtfully, downtown Milford can preserve its unique character while seamlessly incorporating the next generation's evolving art forms and influences. Successful downtown design programs balance two distinct yet interconnected principles:

*Preserving Architectural Heritage* – Celebrating and promoting the restoration of significant historic structures to maintain the community's rich history.

*Managing Growth with Innovation* – Encouraging development that complements existing heritage while fostering creativity and diversity in architectural styles, which naturally evolve in downtown areas over time.



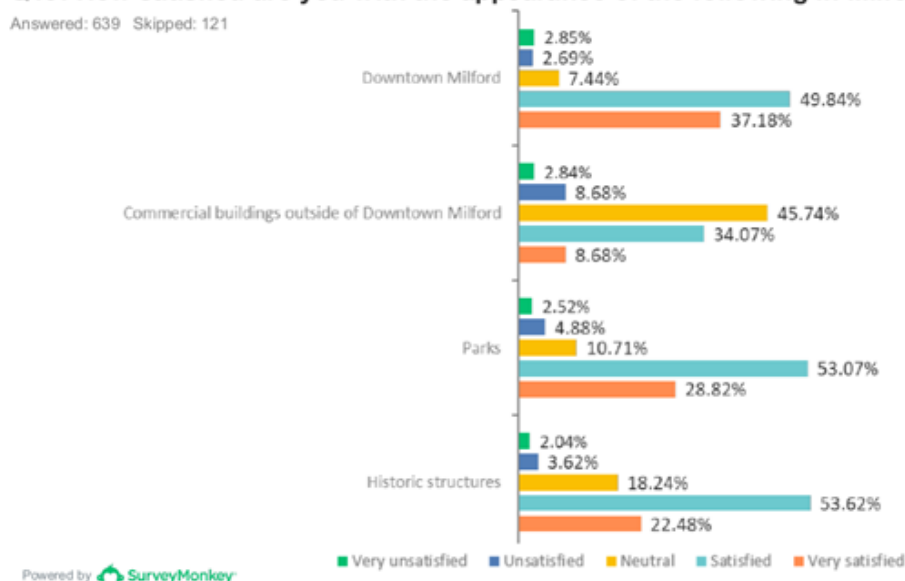
Many communities have adopted themed approaches to downtown design, but these often feel static and become outdated. In contrast, authentic downtowns showcase a dynamic mix of styles, eras, and socio-economic influences, creating the vibrant, ever-evolving character that makes them truly interesting.

## Public Input

As part of the Village of Milford's Master Plan process, a survey and subsequent public discussions were conducted to ascertain the citizenry's views on the Village and downtown. According to the survey, respondents expressed high satisfaction with the town's downtown, historic structures, and abundant parkland and open spaces.

### Q19: How satisfied are you with the appearance of the following in Milford?

Answered: 639 Skipped: 121



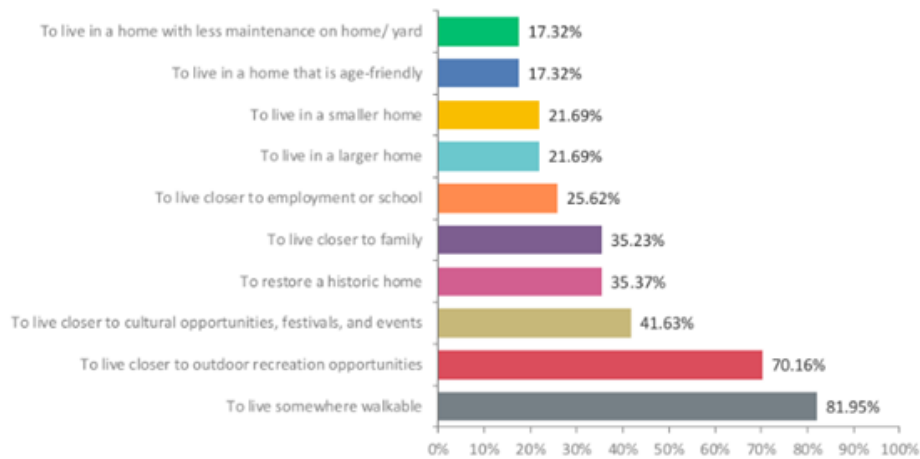
## Walkability

One of the top reasons people choose to live in Milford is that it is walkable. Walkability has become a buzzword in recent years, but at its core, it's about scale, massing, street patterns, and the sense of place created by thoughtfully arranging the essentials of daily life. When amenities—porches, buildings, parks, storefronts—are appropriately scaled and placed in close proximity, they invite exploration, spark curiosity, and naturally draw people from one space to the next.

Walkable communities don't just happen; they emerge organically from intentional design.

### Q6: Which of the following are likely reasons why people would choose to move or stay in Milford? Check all that apply.

Answered: 687 Skipped: 73



True walkability is about more than convenience—it's about creating visual and textural interest, a sense of enclosure shaped by street trees and the architectural rhythm of Main Street, a stunning vista framed by gardens with a glimpse of the river, or the quiet invitation of a porch swing or an engaging storefront. Most importantly, it fosters a sense of belonging and connection to the community.

Walkability isn't just a trend; for many, it's a key factor in deciding where to live. In a recent survey conducted for the Village of Milford, 81.95% of respondents cited walkability as one of the primary reasons people choose to move to or stay in Milford. (Giffels Webster, 2024)

Other themes emerged in addition to strong views about downtown, historic architecture, and the affinity for nature. Respondents flooded the comments with traffic and parking.



## Traffic

Main Street, the westernmost north-south connector between I-96 and M-59 in Oakland County, bisects downtown. With around 11,000 vehicles passing through daily, congestion is a common concern among villagers and visitors. A recent survey highlighted heavy truck traffic as a top complaint, citing noise, emissions, and disruptions to outdoor dining.

### The Surprising Benefits of Traffic Congestion in a Historic Downtown

At first glance, congestion seems like a problem—something to fix with wider roads and bypasses. But in a historic downtown, slower traffic enhances safety, supports businesses, and improves overall traffic flow.

### Safer Streets for Pedestrians

Slower traffic means safer streets. A pedestrian struck by a moving vehicle at 35 mph has only a 50% survival rate, but at 20 mph, that jumps to nearly 90%. Congestion naturally slows cars, making drivers more aware and more likely to yield. Fewer accidents happen, and when they do, they're less severe.

### The Illusion of Faster Speeds

Speeding through downtown rarely saves time. With frequent lights, turns, and crosswalks, the difference between driving 20 mph and 35 mph is often just 90 seconds per mile. Slower, steady traffic means fewer frustrating red lights.

This concept, known as traffic flow efficiency, is supported by studies in transportation engineering. When vehicles move too fast through an urban setting, they create long gaps between themselves, reducing the overall number of cars traveling through an intersection per light cycle.

On the other hand, a steady, slower flow of vehicles—say, at 20-25 mph rather than 40—reduces the stop-and-go effect caused by sudden braking and acceleration. Instead of bottlenecks forming from high-speed merges and aggressive lane changes, traffic moves continuously and predictably. More vehicles pass through in a given hour, even if each individual car is moving at a lower speed.

### Boosting Local Business

A lively downtown is good for business. Slower-moving cars mean drivers actually notice shops and restaurants instead of zooming past; drivers have better eye contact with walkers. Pedestrians feel more comfortable strolling, which creates a welcoming, vibrant atmosphere.

### Conclusion

Traffic congestion isn't always a bad thing. In a historic downtown, it promotes pedestrian safety, moves more vehicles efficiently, and doesn't significantly impact travel times. Rather than seeing congestion as a problem to eliminate, planners could embrace it as a

## Traffic Objectives

1. Develop a Public Education strategy about transit times through downtown Milford.
2. Discussion with stakeholders about enforcing adherence to established truck routes around Downtown Milford.



tool to create a safer, more inviting, and economically thriving downtown. Sometimes, slowing down is the fastest way forward.

## Parking

Between Canal and Detroit Streets, Downtown has approximately 782 parking spaces and a mix of public and private spots. The Village provides 451 public spaces, including 80 on-street parallel parking spots. Private property owners contribute 331 spaces, with 100 at the Mill Valley Shopping Center. The DDA recently added about 90 spaces at the former TRW site on Commerce, west of the railroad tracks, for event and employee parking to improve access. Additionally, the DDA partnered with the Village to acquire and convert the former PNC lot near the East Lot at Center and Union into a public parking area, adding over 30 new spaces.

There are more than 270 parking spaces in the Southside commercial district (at Huron and Main, north of the river), though only 35% are public, primarily on-street.

### *Perception vs. Reality: The Parking Conversation*

According to survey responses, parking and traffic are top concerns for downtown visitors. This isn't unique—many downtowns face the same responses regardless of on-the-ground circumstances. First, normally, there is an immediate assumption of a general lack of parking. Second, there is a perception that, if the downtown isn't successful, it is because of parking.

The common perception is that a lack of immediate parking inconveniences visitors enough to reduce visits. However, research suggests that parking availability isn't what makes a district vibrant—people do.

Some of the most successful downtowns—where people want to linger, shop, and gather—don't rely on sprawling parking lots. Instead, they focus on walkability, local businesses, and creating an atmosphere that naturally attracts visitors. Compare that to large shopping centers, where vast parking lots often sit half-empty, signaling a shift in how people spend their time.

Interestingly, downtown has proven its ability to handle massive crowds during significant events, accommodating far more people than would ever arrive on a typical day. While this isn't an ideal daily scenario, it reinforces an important point—if an attraction is strong enough, people find a way to get there. A perceived parking shortage doesn't deter determined visitors when there's something truly worth experiencing.

### *Balancing Land Use in a Traditional Downtown*



## Parking Objectives

1. Expand the East Lot
2. Improve connectivity to additional parking in Central Park via the Liberty Street Connection at the Railroad Tracks
3. Establish an employee parking incentive program to move long-term parking to the TRW site on Oak and Commerce Street
4. Develop an overnight parking program for downtown residents
5. Perform a parking study



While parking is necessary, it's essential to balance the use of land to support the long-term success of downtown. Traditional downtowns thrive not because of expansive parking lots, but because of the character, density, and vibrancy of their built environment. Research shows that downtowns with too much land dedicated to surface parking lots lose the very elements that make them attractive in the first place—walkable streets, local businesses, historic architecture, and a dynamic public realm.

Successful downtowns prioritize buildings over empty lots, ensuring space is used for places where people want to gather, shop, and experience the district. A well-planned parking strategy ensures enough parking without sacrificing valuable land that could be home to businesses, housing, or public spaces. Instead of spreading out with oversized lots, the goal is to use available space efficiently, integrating parking into a setting that supports economic vitality and community life.

#### *The Role of Businesses in a Walkable Downtown*

Merchants often worry that fewer parking spaces mean fewer customers. This is a reasonable concern, but studies show that foot traffic, not just parking, drives business success. Customers who walk between shops, stop for coffee, and enjoy public spaces are more likely to stay longer and spend more.

Instead of focusing solely on parking, the opportunity lies in enhancing the downtown experience. Creating inviting public spaces, improving walkability, and fostering a lively atmosphere help businesses attract loyal customers and visitors. A thriving downtown isn't just a place to park—it's a destination.

#### *Planning for the Future*

That said, it's essential to always look toward the future and plan for growth. The DDA continuously evaluates thoughtful, incremental ways to add convenient parking near downtown. Potential opportunities for expansion include:

- Expanding the East Lot, which has reliably served downtown in its current configuration for 75 years.
- Improving connectivity to parking on the other side of the railroad tracks at Liberty Street, where over 100 parking spaces are available.
- Interior block parking at the Southside at Clinton and Water Street.

By making strategic, well-planned improvements, the goal is to balance accessibility with the unique character and walkability that make downtown a great place to visit and do business.



### Employee Parking

Another key factor in parking efficiency is ensuring that the most convenient, short-term spaces are available for customers while long-term parking for employees is shifted to the outskirts of downtown. A well-organized employee parking program has been successful in the past and could help alleviate some bottlenecks, particularly at the busy Commerce and Main intersection.

Encouraging larger groups of employees to use the TRW Site west of downtown or the Liberty Street parking, once that project is complete, for long-term parking would free up closer spaces for customers, making downtown more accessible for shoppers and visitors.

### Historic Preservation

*Preserving Downtown Milford's Historic Structures: A Path to Economic, Cultural, and Aesthetic Enrichment*

Downtown Milford is a treasure trove of history, character, and charm. Its historic structures serve as tangible links to the past, reminding us of the town's rich heritage while offering unique opportunities for economic growth, cultural vibrancy, and aesthetic appeal. Recent surveys show overwhelming community support for preserving these landmarks, underscoring their enduring value to our town's identity and future.

### Economic Benefits



Historic preservation is a proven economic driver. Restoring and maintaining historic buildings attracts visitors, businesses, and investors who appreciate the charm and authenticity that only preserved architecture can provide. A well-maintained historic district fosters tourism, with visitors drawn to Milford's unique blend of old-world charm and modern amenities. This, in turn, supports local shops, restaurants, and lodging establishments, stimulating economic activity and job creation.

Furthermore, revitalized historic buildings offer appealing spaces for entrepreneurs, small businesses, and creative enterprises. Adaptive reuse of these structures reduces construction costs compared to new development and contributes to sustainable growth by repurposing existing resources. Studies consistently show that property values in preserved historic districts tend to be more stable and appreciate over time, benefiting both residents and business owners alike.

### Historic Preservation Objectives

1. Include the Design Guidelines in the Village's Master Plan, which are based on the National Trust for Historic Preservation
2. Create a DDA TIF Incentive Program for development improvements that adhere to the principles based on the Design Guidelines
3. Consider adopting a local Historic Preservation District Code
4. Continue to educate the public on the attributes of an architecturally diverse and historic downtown that is not stuck in the past
5. Prioritize development of a safe crossing at Liberty Street to access parking at Central Park
6. Encourage the reuse of outdated and obsolete commercial and industrial buildings



### *Cultural Significance*

Preserving Milford’s historic structures is essential to maintaining the town’s cultural identity. These buildings tell the story of generations past—their struggles, achievements, and contributions that shaped the community. By safeguarding these landmarks, we ensure that future generations can connect with their heritage and gain a deeper understanding of shared history.

Historic structures also provide unique venues for community events, arts, and cultural programs. Whether through museums, galleries, or performance spaces, these buildings offer a setting that fosters creativity and engagement, enriching the social fabric of Milford.

### *Aesthetic Value*

Beyond their historical and economic significance, preserved buildings enhance the visual appeal of downtown Milford. Historic architecture adds a sense of place and character that modern structures often lack. The distinctive facades, intricate details, and craftsmanship of these buildings create an inviting and picturesque atmosphere, making downtown a more attractive destination for residents and visitors alike.

Preserving these structures also promotes thoughtful urban planning, ensuring that new developments harmonize with the existing landscape rather than erasing the unique visual identity of the town. The balance between old and newly creates a dynamic yet cohesive streetscape that enhances Milford’s charm and appeal.

### *Community Support and Vision for the Future*

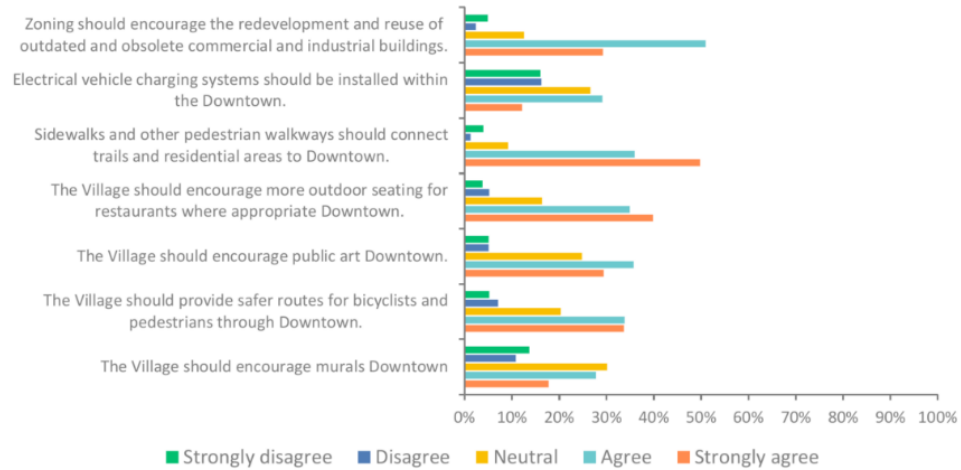
A recent survey revealed that the majority of Milford residents value historic preservation, demonstrating widespread public support for maintaining the town’s architectural legacy. This collective commitment provides a strong foundation for policies and initiatives that encourage preservation efforts, whether through tax incentives, grants, or partnerships with preservation organizations.

As Milford continues to grow and evolve, embracing our historic structures as assets rather than obstacles will ensure a vibrant and prosperous future. By preserving the past, we create a downtown that is not only economically resilient but also culturally rich and visually stunning—a place where history and progress go hand in hand for generations to come.



## Q21: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements for Downtown Milford

Answered: 639 Skipped: 121



## PUBLIC REALM CONSIDERATIONS

### Quality of Life

*Beautiful downtowns improve residents' mental and physical health*

There's something special about a walk-through downtown Milford—the charming, historic buildings, the inviting storefronts, and the lively atmosphere of a vibrant and welcoming community. Whether it's a morning coffee at a local café, an afternoon spent browsing unique boutiques, or an evening gathering with friends at one of the downtown restaurants, Milford's dynamic and well-designed downtown is more than just a place to visit—it's a space that actively nurtures mental and physical well-being.



One of the biggest contributors to stress reduction and overall happiness is a sense of connection, and Milford effortlessly fosters this.



The town’s walkability and community-focused events—like the Farmers’ Market, Milford Memories, Summer Concert Series at the LaFontaine Family Amphitheater, and seasonal parades—create opportunities for residents to interact, strengthening social bonds and reducing feelings of isolation. Simply running into a friendly face or chatting with a local business owner can turn an ordinary day into something meaningful, reinforcing a sense of belonging.

Beyond its social benefits, Milford’s downtown encourages physical activity. The pedestrian-friendly streets and proximity to the Milford Trail and Kensington Metropark make it easy for residents to get outside for a casual stroll, a morning

jog, or a scenic bike ride. Regular movement reduces anxiety, and improves mood and overall health. In Milford, staying active feels natural rather than forced.

Nature plays a vital role in mental well-being, and downtown Milford seamlessly integrates green spaces and natural beauty. Central Park, right along the Huron River, offers a tranquil retreat within walking distance of downtown. Sitting by the water, hearing the rustle of the trees, or simply enjoying a quiet moment away from the daily rush can lower stress levels and provide mental clarity.

The town’s vitality also contributes to economic stability, another key factor in well-being. A flourishing downtown filled with thriving local businesses provides jobs, reduces financial stress, and instills a sense of pride in the community. When residents see their town succeeding, they feel a deeper connection to it, which strengthens mental resilience and optimism.

Finally, Milford’s downtown offers plenty of “third places”—gathering spots outside of home and work that allow people to relax and engage with their community. Whether it’s a cozy café, a lively brewery, or a scenic park bench, these spaces provide opportunities to unwind, recharge, and feel connected.

At its core, Milford’s downtown isn’t just a hub of commerce—it’s a place that fosters joy, connection, and well-being. It encourages people to slow down, appreciate their surroundings, and engage with their neighbors. In doing so, it becomes more than just a downtown; it becomes a part of what makes life in Milford fulfilling mentally and physically.

## Quality of Life Objectives

1. Enhance Walkability and Pedestrian Infrastructure. Expand walkable spaces and enhancing pedestrian crossings
2. Support and Expand Community-Focused Events
3. Integrate More Green Spaces and Natural Beauty: Further integrate nature into downtown Milford to nurture both physical and mental well-being.
4. Develop “Third Places” for Relaxation and Social Interaction: Expand opportunities for informal social gatherings by adding more “third places” around downtown, such as outdoor seating areas, public squares, or cozy seating areas within cafes and businesses.
5. Promote Active Lifestyles and Health Initiatives: Leverage downtown’s proximity to the Milford Trail, Kensington Metropark



## Mixed Land Use

Historic downtowns are unique because they organically layer various uses—commercial, residential, and recreational—often within the same building or block. This mixed-use design was historically essential, as most people didn't rely on cars for transportation. The rise of the automobile led to suburban development. Still, in today's historic downtowns, the walkability fosters a lively, dynamic atmosphere where people can easily move between different spaces, enhancing the overall vibrancy of the area.

### *Reimagining Office Zoning in the Village of Milford: A Path to Vibrant, Livable Growth*

As work habits continue to evolve, the Village of Milford is experiencing declining demand for traditional office space. The rise of remote and hybrid work has left some office-zoned areas underutilized, presenting both a challenge and an opportunity. Rather than allowing these spaces to sit vacant, Milford can proactively adapt office zoning to allow residential development, particularly through missing middle housing.

Missing middle housing—duplexes, townhomes, and small-scale multi-unit buildings—fills the gap between single-family homes and large apartment complexes. These housing types blend seamlessly with Milford's small-town charm, maintaining a walkable, human-scale environment that enhances the village's historic character. By allowing residential uses in former office-zoned areas, Milford can create more diverse and attainable housing options without compromising its identity.

This shift would also bring long-term benefits to Milford's downtown and local economy. Increasing the number of residents within walking distance of Main Street means more foot traffic for local businesses, more 24/7 activity in public spaces, and a stronger sense of community. People draw people! With a growing population living downtown, shops, restaurants, and service providers will have the support needed to thrive year-round.

Beyond strengthening the business district, this approach provides longtime Milford residents with much-needed housing alternatives. As home prices rise and available housing remains limited, many residents—including aging homeowners looking to downsize, young professionals, and families seeking more flexible options—struggle to stay in the community. By embracing missing middle housing, Milford can offer these residents a way to remain in the village, preserving the strong social ties that make it a desirable place to live.

Communities across Michigan, from Troy to Detroit to Alma, are already rethinking office zoning to encourage mixed-use and residential development. Milford can lead among smaller communities by embracing smart, sustainable growth that ensures office-zoned areas remain vibrant and valuable, rather than stagnant and underutilized.

By adapting office zoning to allow residential development, Milford can create a more dynamic, walkable, and connected community—one that honors its past while planning for the future.

## Quality of Life Objectives

6. Improve Connectivity to the Larger Community: Strengthen the connections between downtown Milford and nearby parks, trails, and neighborhoods.

Develop pathways, wayfinding signage, and other amenities that make it easier for residents and visitors to navigate between downtown and recreational spaces, supporting both physical activity and community cohesion.

7. Create Safe, Inclusive, and Accessible Spaces: Ensure that downtown is accessible, well-lit and safe.



## Downtown Identity

### Enhance and preserve a unifying identity

Downtown should be the civic, cultural, and activity center of the entire community. Continuity with branding, signage, street furniture, and the like creates a stable backdrop that allows individual storefronts plenty of creative expression. This is accomplished through a specification of street furniture amenities developed with input from the Milford Downtown Development Authority (DDA), for the following:



### Streetscape & Public Space Uniformity

#### Sidewalks & Paving

For a classic, polished look, use consistent sidewalk materials such as brick, detailed concrete finishes, or stone pavers.

#### Street Furniture

Install uniform benches, ornamental landscape edging, bike racks, and trash receptacles that reflect the town's character.

#### Lighting Fixtures

Streetlamps should be uniform in design, preferably styled to match the historical or modern identity of the area.

### Greenery & Landscaping

#### Consistent Plantings & Trees

Use native trees and plants for regional identity.

Maintain consistent spacing of street trees.

Seasonal flower beds, planters, or hanging baskets add vibrancy and enhance awareness of seasonal change.

#### Planter Boxes & Window Boxes

Encouraging storefronts to maintain flower boxes or potted plants adds charm and aesthetic appeal.



### Pocket Parks & Green Spaces

Small landscaped areas with seating, water features, planters, and sculptures help soften the urban environment and encourage varied uses



### Public Art & Cultural Identity

#### *Murals & Art Installations*

Commission local artists to create murals reflecting the town's culture, history, or natural surroundings.

#### *Sculptures & Decorative Elements*

Install small sculptures or public art pieces that complement the overall downtown theme.



#### *Historic & Interpretive Markers*

Display historical plaques or markers with a uniform design to educate visitors about the town's heritage.



#### *Outdoor Seating Areas*

Restaurants with sidewalk seating, railings, tables, chairs, and umbrellas should be coordinated in style and color.

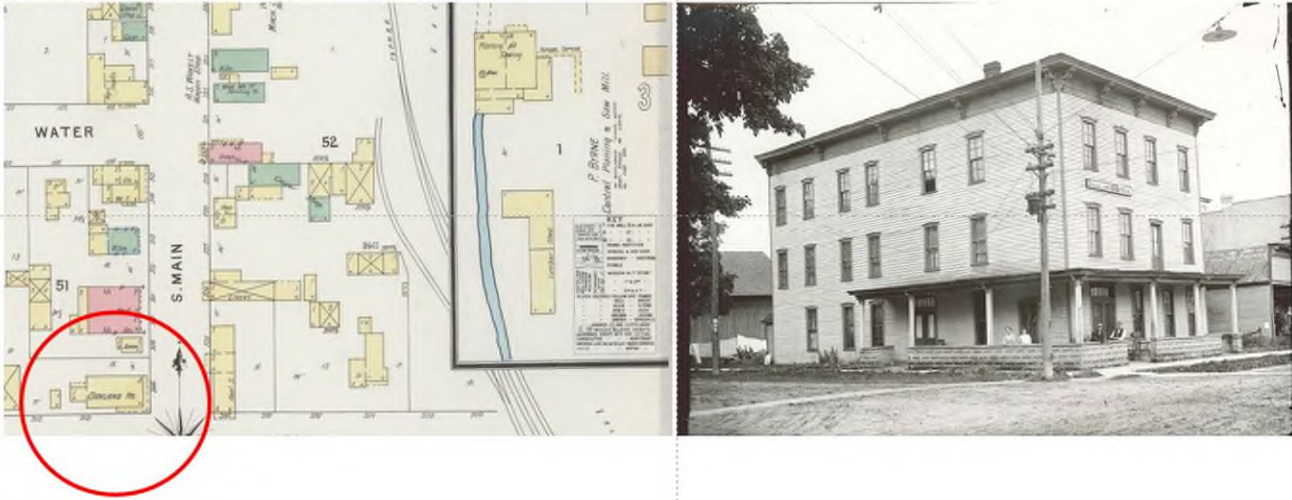
### Seasonal & Festive Enhancements

#### *Holiday Lighting & Decorations*

Keep an inventive but cohesive approach to seasonal decor, such as uniform string lights or lamppost wreaths.



1907 Sanborn Map; 308 S. Main, 3 stories



Preserving the architectural heritage of the scale and proportions of Main Street

*A Natural Fit: The History of Building Height in Milford*

Milford’s historic charm has always been defined by its balance—a blend of past and present that makes the village both welcoming and vibrant. As conversations continue about development, it’s important to remember that two- and three-story buildings are neither new nor out of place downtown. They are a natural fit, rooted in our history and fully supported by current zoning.

At the turn of the last century, three-story buildings were a familiar sight in Milford. Structures like Ye Olde Hotel on Main Street, another at the corner of Main and Huron, and a few more stood proudly, contributing to the character and walkability of the area. Even today, one of our most treasured landmarks, the two-story Opera House, reaches 36 feet—a height comparable to a modern three-story building. The scale of these structures never overwhelmed the village; instead, they added to its appeal, providing space for businesses, residences, and community gatherings.

It’s also worth noting that while some think of “three stories” as looming, construction standards have changed over time. A contemporary three-story building is usually similar in height to its historic counterparts due to differences in ceiling heights and materials. This means that thoughtful development within this scale would meld compatibility with existing structures, preserving Milford’s unique charm while allowing for growth that supports local businesses and community needs.

Rather than fearing overdevelopment, we can embrace the opportunity to fill vacant lots with buildings that reflect the village’s past while meeting its present and future needs. When done thoughtfully, these additions will enhance the character of downtown, ensuring Milford remains a place where history and progress walk hand in hand.



## Enhancing Gateways and Unifying Corridor Streetscapes

The DDA has spearheaded projects like the Mill Pond Project, the Heritage Wheel Project, and Central Park, while contributing to minor enhancements such as pocket parks, including the Trestle Islands and the Commerce Road underpass. These distinct green spaces serve as inviting gateways to the downtown area. Additionally, the DDA collaborates with developers to incorporate streetlights and right-of-way improvements during the site plan review process, to aid in unifying the corridor streetscape, ensuring a well-connected and visually appealing community.



## Wayfinding



The Village of Milford’s Downtown District is a well-established destination for residents and visitors. However, some visitors have struggled with navigation due to inconsistent signage. To address this, Milford is refreshing its wayfinding system to update colors, refine signage content, and enhance the focus on outdoor amenities and quality of life.

The wayfinding refresh prioritizes clarity and functionality while modernizing the visual appeal. Village officials, business owners, and urban designers are collaborating to introduce a contemporary design for directional signage, updated street markers, and strategically placed maps. Additionally, updates may include improvements to crosswalk signage and other key navigational elements to enhance pedestrian safety and accessibility. The revision will also remove references to specific buildings and places in favor of highlighting parks, trails, and outdoor attractions, aligning with Milford’s identity as a gateway to regional trails and outdoor recreation.



Additional signage is needed at parks in the district to guide water users to key access locations in the park.

The anticipated results of these efforts include a more engaging and inviting downtown atmosphere. Improved signage will enhance the visitor experience, ensuring that residents and tourists can easily find and enjoy Milford’s outdoor amenities and quality of life offerings.

Milford’s investment in updating its wayfinding system highlights the importance of maintaining a dynamic and accessible downtown. These enhancements will improve navigation and contribute to a stronger sense of place, ensuring that visitors and locals alike can fully experience all the district has to offer while emphasizing its role as a premier destination for outdoor enthusiasts and community living.



## Connection to Nature/ Milford Trailhead

Downtown Milford's vitality is closely tied to its proximity to the Huron River, the National Water Trail, numerous bike paths, and surrounding parks. As a hub for outdoor enthusiasts, it is evolving into a premier gathering place and a potential trailhead for the next generation of adventurers. The Milford DDA has actively shaped this vision by helping establish the Milford Trail, creating trail signage, and enhancing parks and recreation amenities to strengthen this aspect of downtown revitalization. Positioned at the heart of Western Oakland County, Milford is poised to become the ultimate downtown trailhead for hikers, bikers, and water trail users.

## Complete Streets

Complete Streets is a design approach that ensures roadways are planned, designed, and constructed to provide safe and efficient access for all users, including motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists. In Michigan, the Complete Streets legislation, enacted through Public Acts 134 and 135 of 2010, encourages transportation agencies to consider the needs of all legal users in their planning processes.

Downtown Milford exemplifies the principles of Complete Streets with its walkable streetscape, variety of shops, restaurants, and professional services. The area is designed to be pedestrian-friendly, featuring public gardens, parks, and updated streetscapes.

Importantly, Complete Streets call for narrow roads with tight turning radii, which discourages high-speed, high-volume traffic, and causes slower movement around turns. All streets in the downtown area currently comply with most Complete Streets criteria.

## Filling in the Gaps

Several prime downtown properties sit vacant, with some repurposed as parking lots—many of which are underutilized—while others remain entirely unused. Many of these spaces once housed multi-story, zero-lot-line buildings, a defining architectural characteristic of a thriving downtown. Their absence disrupts the vibrancy of the area, making it feel less dynamic and cohesive. Addressing these gaps, whether through direct acquisition or strategic incentives, presents an opportunity to enhance downtown's energy and functionality.

**Tax Increment Revenue Incentives.** Some communities have implemented Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district revenues to encourage development on underutilized downtown land. These incentives help offset development costs for property owners willing to build mixed-use projects.

**Public-Private Partnerships.** Can be employed with private developers to repurpose vacant lots into vibrant mixed-use developments.

**Temporary Activation & Pop-Up Uses.** Detroit, MI, has successfully turned vacant lots into temporary parks, markets, and event spaces to maintain engagement while awaiting long-term development.

### Connection to Nature Objectives

1. Prioritize trailheads in the downtown area
2. Market to bike and river trail enthusiasts
3. Gear Wayfinding and other signage to water and walking/bike trails
4. Pair with outdoor partners to promote downtown as a regional trailhead

### Complete Streets Objectives

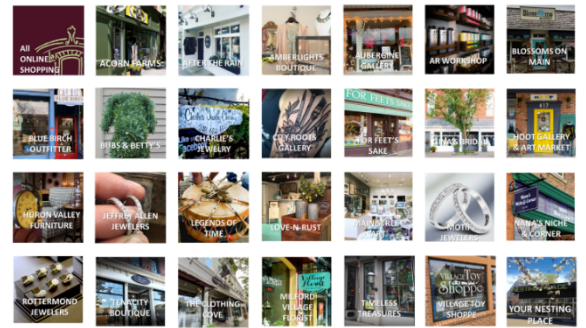
1. Employ best practices for Complete Streets, using narrow streets, on-street parking, narrow curb radii, and pedestrian focused street amenities



Good design starts with what’s already there—you can’t create something meaningful from scratch. Some communities have tried to "build" Main Streets out of nothing, resulting in places that might look interesting but lack authenticity and depth. A better approach is to build on the existing development patterns of the community.

Take Main Street, for example—extend it north of Commerce to create Mill Valley Plaza, the Flat Iron, and the Heritage Wheel. Honor the iconic Albert Kahn Powerhouse, the natural curve of the land, and the creek by positioning the Amphitheater there. Embrace new architecture within the footprints of the historic buildings that are missing. Then, enhance the streetscape with trees, flower beds, walkways, resting spots, and pocket parks—creating spaces that invite people to gather and enjoy.

**MILFORD GUIDE FOR ONLINE SHOPPING. CLICK IMAGE TO LINK TO SHOPPING SITES**



**Economic Development; Business Retention**

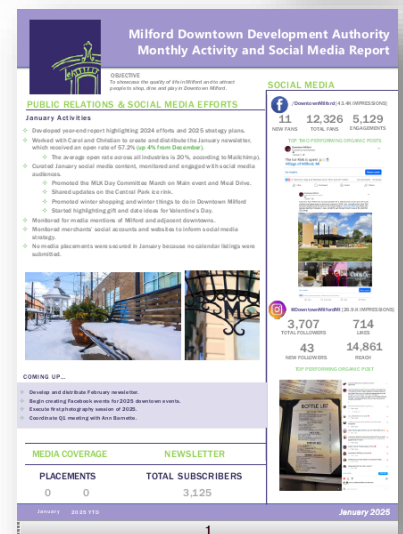
**Branding & Identity Development**

- Develop a strong brand identity for the Village’s downtown, including a logo, tagline, and messaging.
- Implement cohesive branding in signage, banners, and promotional materials.
- Support wayfinding and beautification efforts to enhance the visitor experience.
- Promote a “Shop, Dine, Experience Downtown” campaigns to highlight local businesses.



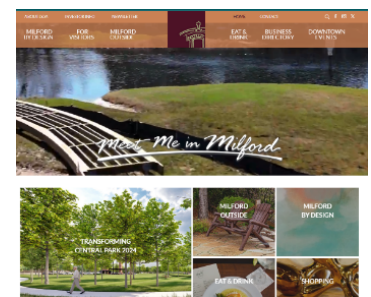
**Marketing Strategy**

- Develop a strategic marketing plan focused on attracting residents and visitors.
- Utilize digital and traditional media (social media, email newsletters, print ads) to promote downtown.
- Partner with local influencers, bloggers, and media outlets for increased exposure.
- Create video content showcasing downtown businesses, experiences, and success stories.
- Implement a loyalty or rewards program to encourage shopping and dining downtown.
- Develop and distribute a monthly Downtown Newsletter highlighting downtown events and merchants’ events; maintain and increase an ongoing email database.



**Downtown Property Database**

- Maintain a publicly accessible online database of available properties for lease or sale.
- Work with property owners and real estate agents to keep listings updated.
- Provide resources for potential business owners, including zoning and incentive information.
- Support pop-up shop initiatives to activate vacant spaces and test new business ideas.
- Provide economic data analysis for prospective investors.



### Merchant & Restaurant Support

- Facilitate business development workshops and networking opportunities.
- Provide marketing assistance and cooperative advertising opportunities.
- Advocate for policies that support small business growth and sustainability.
- Connect businesses with resources for financial assistance, grants, and mentorship.

### Downtown Events & Attractions Support

- Sponsor and support community events such as Farmer’s Market, Ladies Night Out, Dinner’s On Us, scavenger hunts, fishing competitions, pet activities, holiday events, and festivals.
- Partner with local organizations to promote seasonal events and themed promotions.
- Encourage businesses to participate in events through promotions and extended hours.
- Support micro-events (e.g., live music, sidewalk sales) that drive foot traffic downtown.

### Website Development & Digital Presence

- Build and maintain a website featuring a directory of downtown businesses and attractions.
- Integrate an interactive map of businesses, available properties, and parking locations.
- Provide an online event calendar highlighting sponsored and supported events.
- Develop a blog featuring business spotlights, downtown news, and success stories.

### Social Media & Public Relations Campaign

- Maintain active social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok) to engage the community.
- Develop a content calendar featuring business spotlights, event promotions, and local stories.
- Encourage user-generated content and social media contests to boost engagement.
- Implement a public relations strategy to secure media coverage and partnerships.

### Seasonal Displays & Enhancements

- Support and promote displays and seasonal decorations that change frequently to create a vibrant downtown atmosphere.
- Encourage businesses to participate in window display competitions.
- Assist in coordinating interactive public art installations to attract visitors year-round.



### Outdoor Dining & Dining Platforms

- Support businesses in creating and maintaining outdoor dining spaces.
- Work with the Village to streamline permitting processes for expanded outdoor seating.
- Promote enhancements such as seasonal heaters, lighting, and decorative elements.

### Social District

- Assist in establishing and promoting a Social District allowing alcohol consumption in designated areas.
- Partner with local bars and restaurants for participation and community engagement.
- Develop signage and public awareness campaigns about Social District rules.
- Support efforts to ensure safety and evaluate the district's success.



**SOCIAL DISTRICT**  
DOWNTOWN MILFORD  
est. 2025

### HOW TO ENJOY

**ORDER** Your local pour in a Social District cup only, from a participating establishment

**CHILL** Within the designated boundaries of the District Commons Area only

**TOSS** Cups are one-time use only; no outside alcoholic beverages allowed.

**ENJOY** The Social District Monday through Sunday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.

**KEEP TO THE COMMONS AREA AT ALL TIMES**

**COMMONS AREA:** Sidewalks & approved park area

**EVENT COMMONS AREA:** Only during approved street closure events

**PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY.**

For more information please scan the QR code or visit [meetmeinmilford.com/downtown-milford-social-district](http://meetmeinmilford.com/downtown-milford-social-district)



## PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT

### Design Guidelines

#### *for Evolving Milford's Historic-Based Downtown*

The Village of Milford owes much of its success as a vibrant, cherished community to its historical authenticity, which is evident in the preservation of many original storefronts dating back to the 1880s. These architectural gems contribute a rare and distinctive quality to the downtown streetscape, offering a unique visual and experiential identity. Milford has wisely embraced new development, allowing for careful and respectful infill that complements the town's historic charm. Over time, the blend of architectural styles from various eras has created a dynamic and ever-evolving environment; each layer enhancing the overall appeal.



Downtown areas are distinctive because they bring together diverse functions such as commerce, offices, entertainment, residences, and civic spaces. This blend shapes the unique and authentic identity that fosters a strong cultural connection. To maintain Milford's success, it is essential that the downtown evolves thoughtfully. While residents value their historic architecture, it is equally crucial to support new businesses, events, and mixed uses that keep the area vibrant. This growth must be carefully managed to preserve Milford's distinctive character.

Historic buildings should be identified and protected, with new developments designed to complement the character of Milford's downtown streetscape. Innovative design should respect the architectural and socioeconomic context of the time in which it is built.

To ensure Milford's continued success, it is vital to follow these flexible but essential guidelines:

#### **Rehabilitation Guidelines: A Foundation for Future Development**

As revealed by a public survey, residents overwhelmingly support preserving Milford's historic buildings and landmarks. These structures are the foundation of the Village's identity and must be identified and preserved. To achieve this, the Secretary of the Interior's Historic Preservation Standards and Guidelines should be followed. Key principles include:

**Preservation of Historic Character:** The distinctive character of a property must be retained. Removing historic materials or altering defining features and spaces should be avoided.



### Design Guidelines Objectives

1. Incorporate Design Guidelines into the Village of Milford Master Plan
2. Develop a Façade Improvement Program based on the Design Guidelines, administered by the MDDA
3. Develop Tax Increment Revenue Incentives for redevelopment projects that follow the National Trust's recommendations for appropriate development in Historic Districts



**Recognition of Historic Integrity:** Each property should reflect its original time, place, and use. Avoid adding speculative features or architectural elements from other eras.

**Retention of Significant Alterations:** Changes that have become historically significant should be preserved. Notable features, finishes, construction techniques, and craftsmanship that define the property must be maintained.

**Repair Over Replacement:** Deteriorated historic features should be repaired wherever possible. When replacement is unavoidable, the new element should match the original in design, color, texture, and material. Missing features should only be replaced when evidence supports their original design.

**Thoughtful Additions and Changes:** New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction should not compromise the historic materials that define the property. New work should be distinguishable from the original while remaining compatible in massing, size, scale, and architectural style to uphold the property's historic integrity and surrounding environment.



Design evolution of Rotterdam's Jewelry with DDA architectural assistance



## Design Guidelines for New Development

New developments should align with the established streetscape and historic architectural pattern of development by following these key principles:

### Building Placement

Buildings along Main Street (between Liberty Street and Commerce) and parts of the south end form a continuous street wall with minimal gaps. These buildings are positioned right at the street's edge, creating a strong visual presence. This continuous building line enhances pedestrian comfort by creating a sense of enclosure, which is key to a welcoming and intimate streetscape. Additionally, buildings set closer to the street encourage drivers to reduce their speed, improving safety. New infill should align with the setbacks of surrounding buildings to maintain this successful pattern.



*Downtown's Continuous Street Wall*

### Scale and Massing

The scale and massing of buildings play a crucial role in creating a pedestrian-friendly environment. Traditional Milford buildings are generally narrow and deep, creating a consistent rhythm that adds to the village's charm. New infill should respect this pattern, either by maintaining similar proportions or by dividing wider facades into bays. Maintaining a consistent visual rhythm reinforces the inviting nature of the streetscape.



*Street Wall Maintained with Inset Dining*

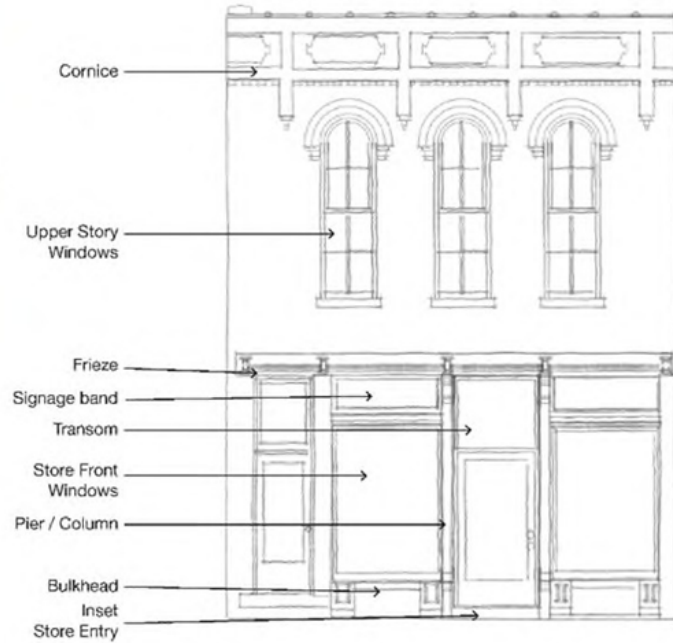
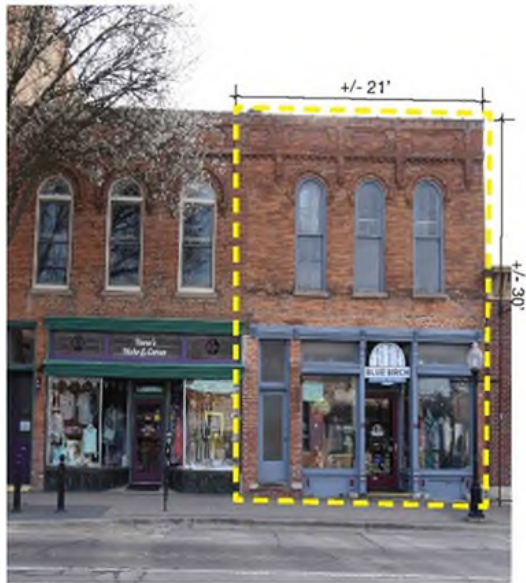


*New Infill Articulated Into Bays*



*Proposed Development 505 N. Main; Triptych Bays*

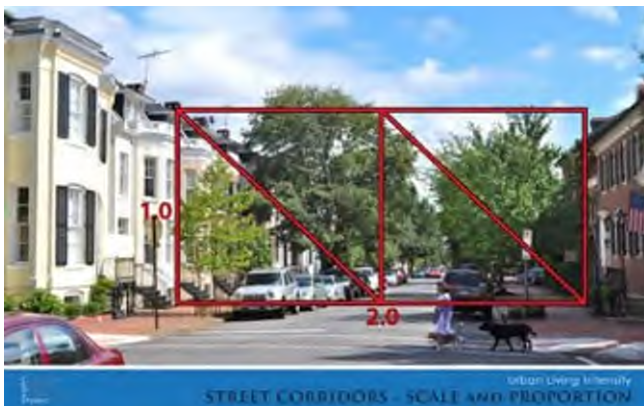




### Height

Studies suggest that pedestrian comfort is enhanced when the ratio of building height to street width is between 1:2 and 1:3. Milford's streetscape closely follows this ideal ratio, with building heights averaging around 30 feet and street corridor widths around 80 feet. This balance supports a sense of intimacy and enclosure.

The local zoning ordinance permits buildings up to three stories and 40 feet tall, which can further enhance pedestrian comfort without disrupting the established aesthetic. Ensuring appropriate building heights, along with uniform story heights, helps unify Milford's streetscape while still allowing for individual building character.



### Exceptions for Special Buildings

Some exceptions to standard height and massing guidelines may apply to corner buildings, gateway structures, and civic or significant architectural landmarks. These buildings should have a greater presence, featuring enhanced architectural detailing and higher-quality materials. Methods to distinguish these structures may include increased height, added width, or distinctive design features such as turrets or unique rooflines.

To further highlight these special buildings, designers are encouraged to provide additional setback space to create plazas or courtyards filled with pedestrian amenities, seating, art, and sculptures. These enhancements can elevate the building's prominence while contributing to a vibrant public space.



### Building Proportions

New developments should maintain the established proportions of downtown buildings. This includes a clear distinction between the base (storefront), middle (upper floors), and top (cornice or roofline). Such consistency ensures cohesion while allowing flexibility in style and materials.



### Openings for Windows and Doors

Openings should adhere to traditional proportions—taller than they are wide. Upper-story windows should follow the established rhythm, typically featuring three windows in alignment.

### Building Elements

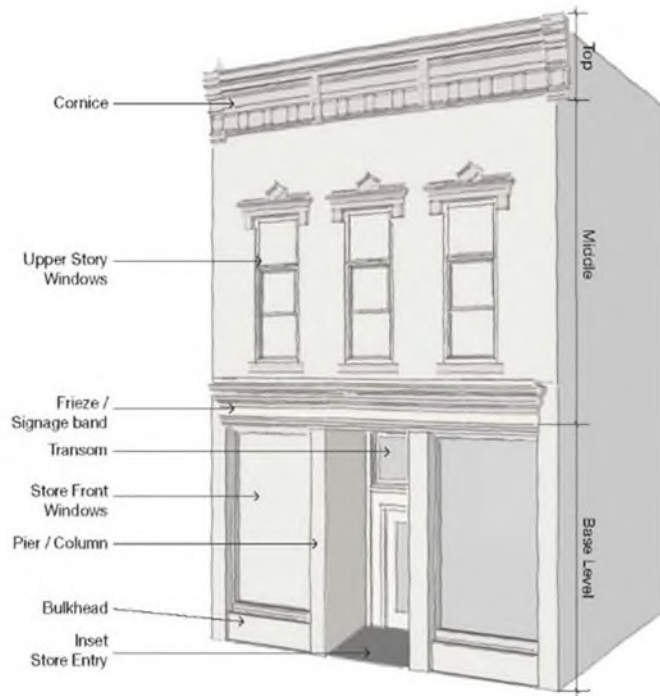
#### Storefronts - Base Level

New storefronts should draw inspiration from existing elements, adapting them to align with contemporary architectural styles. Storefront designs should include detailed elements such as:

- Window frames
- Bulkheads
- Transoms
- Door insets

These features should be three-dimensional to provide a sense of quality and substance expected in the Village.





### Ground-Level Windows

Ground-level windows should engage pedestrians by displaying store interiors to add vitality to the street. At least 60% of the ground-level façade should feature transparent glazing.



### Recessed Door Openings

Entrances should be recessed to maintain traditional building depths. This design offers several benefits:

- Distinctive storefront design
- Additional display opportunities
- A welcoming transition area with shelter from inclement weather



### Awnings

Awnings are historically appropriate within the village. They enhance storefront distinction and improve pedestrian comfort. When designing awnings, consider the following:

- Fit the awning to the window frame without extending across multiple windows.
- Ensure awnings match the building's architectural style.
- Use compatible shapes and avoid shiny materials or bright colors.

### Windows

Upper-story windows should follow the established pattern of three vertically proportioned windows with detailed ornamentation. While design flexibility is encouraged, these windows should offer the same depth and substance characteristic of Milford's historic architecture. Roof and cornice lines should align with neighboring buildings and scale proportionally with building height. This alignment greatly influences architectural harmony. Detailing should reflect the complexity of Milford's historic architecture while remaining relevant to contemporary design. Cornices, pilasters, brackets, and other structural details should mirror the depth and craftsmanship of traditional buildings.



Facade Improvement Renovation Color Study



Flat roofs should not be visible from the Main Street frontage to preserve the area's aesthetic appeal.

### Rear Facades and Entrances

Rear facades and entrances should reflect the dominant materials and design elements of the building's street-facing side to maintain a cohesive identity. Since the primary visual focus is on the street side, rear facade designs can be simpler with fewer details. The choice of materials and design quality should match the visibility and usage of the rear entrance.



### Appropriate Building Materials

Architecture should emphasize craftsmanship and use authentic materials. High-quality, genuine materials such as brick and stone are ideal for aligning with the downtown district's character. While new designs don't have to rely solely on these materials, they should still evoke authenticity.

Synthetic materials like vinyl, EFIS, concrete blocks, and acrylics that mimic natural materials are not considered appropriate.



Infill facades should use materials that complement neighboring buildings rather than starkly contrasting them. For instance, differing materials can still harmonize by sharing similar color tones. Colors should be muted and simplified, with a dominant color and at most 1-2 accent colors.

For contemporary infill designs adjacent to historic buildings, designers should consider using similar materials but applied in modern patterns, jointing, or finishes.

### Lighting

Lighting should minimize glare and comply with the zoning ordinance requiring shielded fixtures. Light color should maintain natural or true color rendering to preserve material appearance.

A clear lighting hierarchy should be established:

The brightest lighting should highlight the building's key architectural features and storefront displays.

Streetscape lighting should focus on providing security without overpowering building illumination.

### Signage

Signage should blend seamlessly with the building's architecture, enhancing the facade rather than dominating it. It should be appropriately scaled for both pedestrians and slow-moving vehicles.

Signage placement should align with neighboring signage, typically located in sign bands above doors or on awnings. Creative blade signs mounted perpendicular to the facade, along with engaging window displays, are encouraged to enhance the streetscape experience.

Further details on signage regulations can be found in the sign ordinance, especially within the downtown overlay district section.



*Example of New Infill Adjacent to Historic Architecture*



## Facade Improvement Assistance

Over the past three decades, the Milford Downtown Development Authority (DDA) has played a pivotal role in shaping the aesthetic and structural integrity of private developments within the village. By leveraging prior planning documents such as the Milford Corridor Plan, the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Design Guidelines, and the former 2009 Master Plan, the DDA has consistently guided development projects to align with a cohesive, historically mindful, yet forward-thinking vision for the community. A fundamental approach employed by the DDA has been the direct engagement of professional architects to design building facades, ensuring new and renovated structures maintain a balance between historic preservation and contemporary needs. The DDA has also actively collaborated with developers through design consultations and, in some cases, has entered into public/private partnerships to enhance the village's architectural integrity.

Several key projects exemplify this strategic guidance, including the Rotterdam building, Clothing Cove, Tenacity, the River's Edge building in its former iteration, and the Flat Iron building. Each of these developments reflects the principles outlined in the referenced planning documents, showcasing thoughtful design that respects Milford's historic character while integrating modern functionality.

Beyond architectural influence, the DDA has played a crucial role in site plan negotiations, contributing to over \$20 million in investment towards landscapes, streetlights, public gardens, and facade improvements. These enhancements not only elevate the visual appeal of the village but also reinforce a sense of place that is both welcoming and aesthetically cohesive.

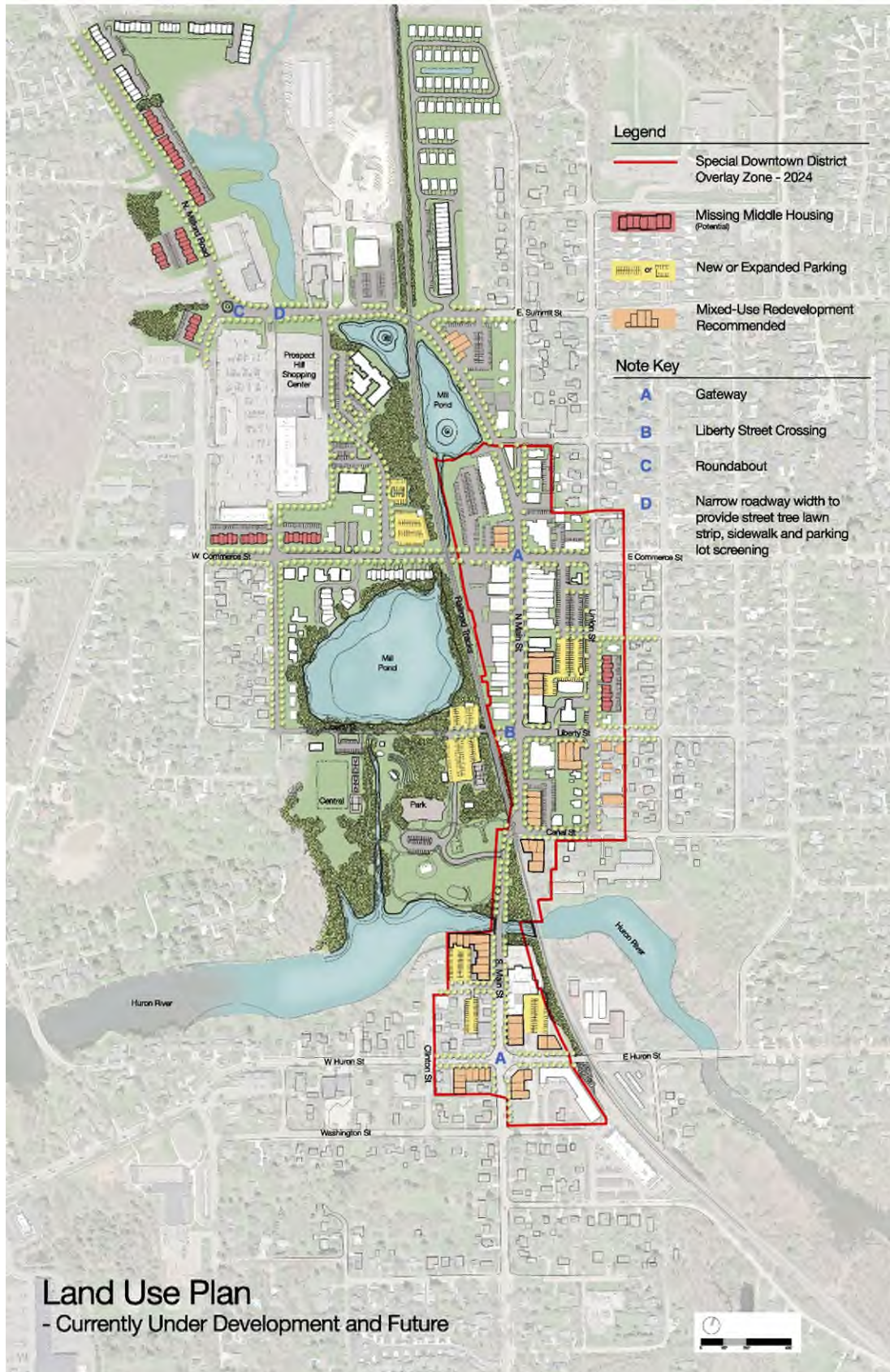
By incorporating design guidelines into these public documents and fostering a shared vision with the community, the Milford DDA has ensured that future developments honor the village's historic charm while allowing for artful, compatible, and considerate growth.



DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN



Land Use



## Entrance Nodes





1



2



3



4

Existing Condition

1. Commerce and Main intersection
2. Mid-block on Main, between Liberty and Commerce, east side
3. Liberty Street and Main
4. Huron and Main



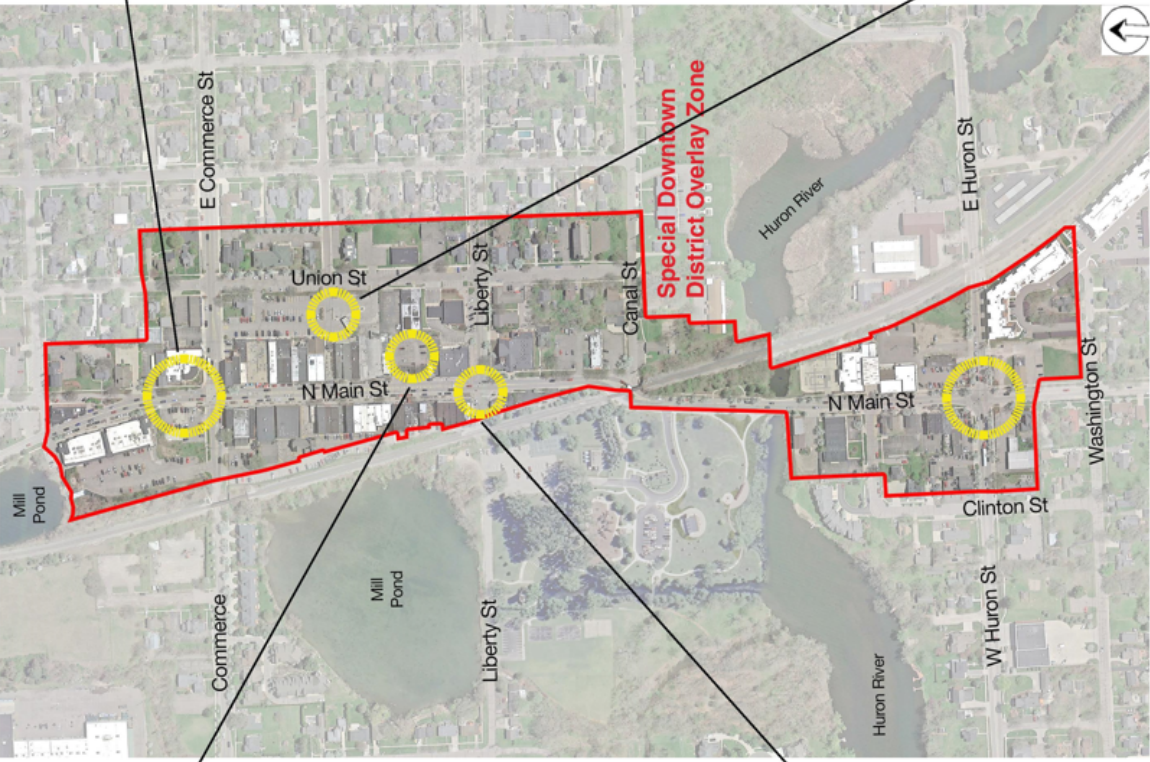
Special Projects

Entrance Nodes

Liberty Street

Special Downtown Parking







Existing Condition



East side of Main Street, mid-block between Liberty and Commerce



Existing Condition



East and West corners of Main and Commerce, north side





Existing Condition  
Corner of Huron and Main, artists interpretation



Existing Condition  
Liberty Street, west of Main at the Railroad Tracks





Milford Master Plan - Liberty St Access to Central Park  
Milford, Michigan

Current Conditions  
Conceptual Design  
2/11/2016

GRISSIM  
METZ  
ANDRIESE

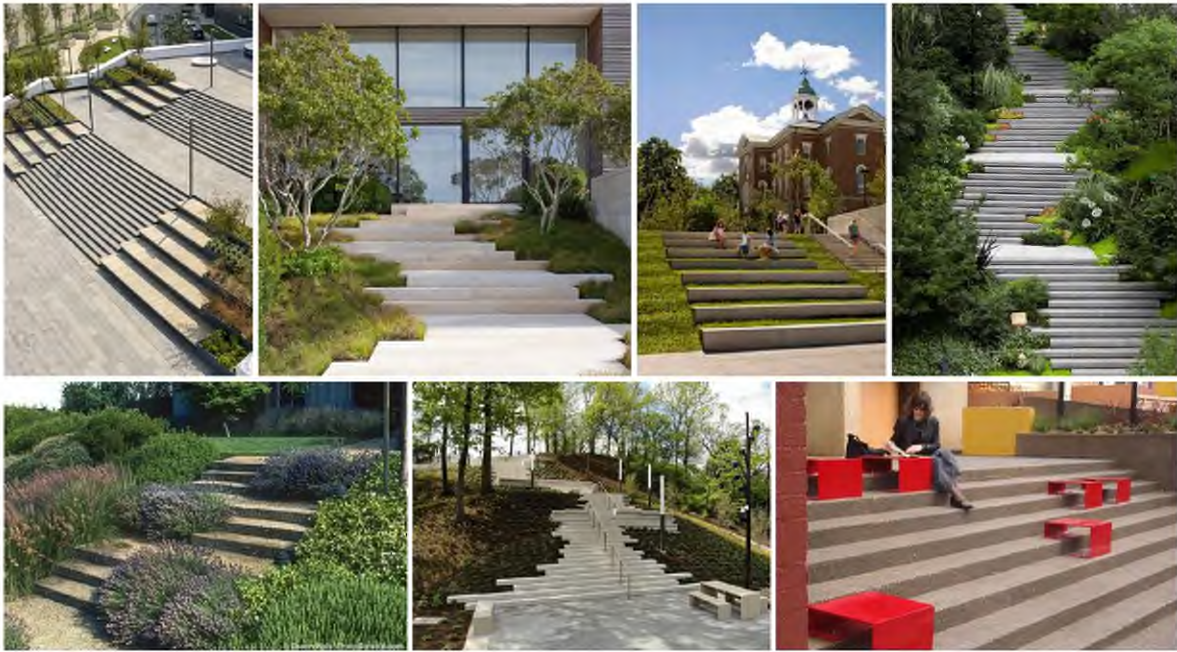


Milford Master Plan - Liberty St Access to Central Park  
Milford, Michigan

Downtown Milford Connectivity  
Conceptual Design  
2/11/2016

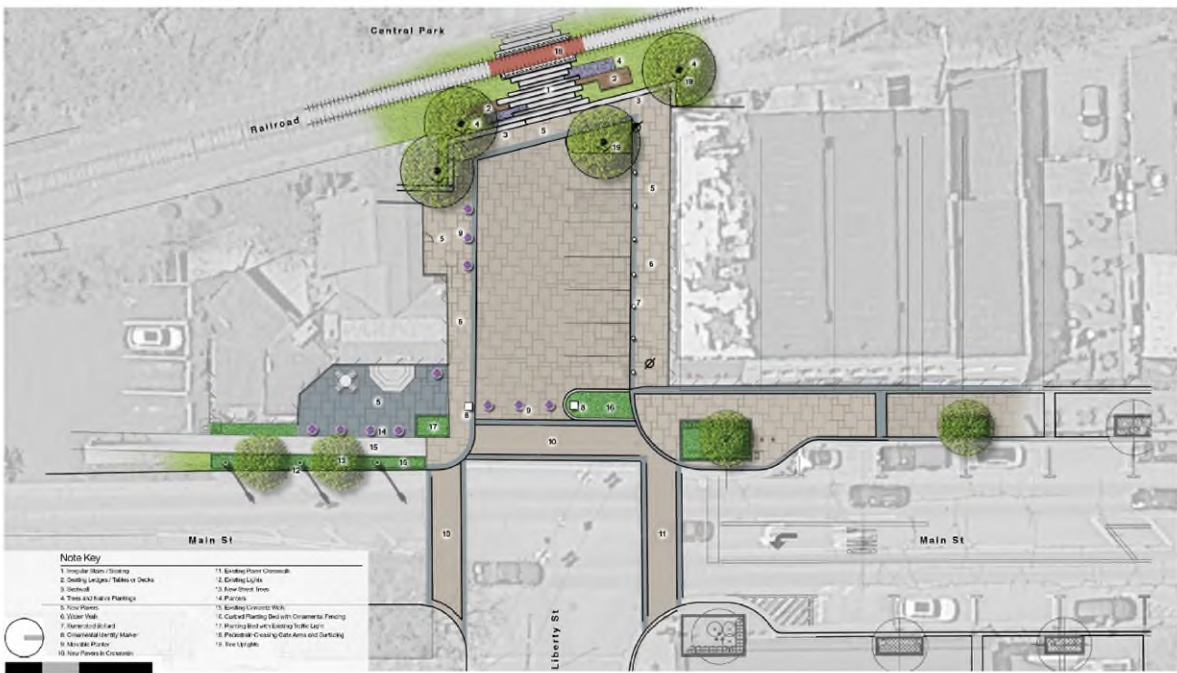
GRISSIM  
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ANDRIESE





Milford Master Plan - Liberty St Access to Central Park  
Milford, Michigan

Reference images  
Conceptual Design  
2018-2021



Milford Master Plan - Liberty St Access to Central Park  
Milford, Michigan

Landscape Plan  
Conceptual Design  
2018-2021



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