

# COMPLETED PLAN PROJECTS

## K. Proposed Improvements

This section elaborates more fully on the policy recommendations addressed in the “Functional Goals and Policies” section (figure H). Each section relates the extent of those accomplishments and what remains to be completed in the update of the plan adopted in 2014.

### 1.) Streetscape

Public improvements such as new street lighting, banners, and landscaping are highly visible elements that have a considerable impact on a community. These amenities help improve the overall community image and also create an attractive business district. Additional considerations include pedestrian scale lighting, signage, benches, waste receptacles, and planters. The proposed streetscape development will include Michigan Avenue from Wolf Lake Road to the DDA boundaries at Maple Street. Another section might be along Lake Street north of Michigan Avenue to connect with a linear park along the Grass Lake DDA boundary.

Estimated Cost: \$200,000  
Estimated Completion: 1995

Several of these improvements were undertaken a little at a time beginning with the installation of trash receptacles, street lighting and landscaping with the installation of “road knuckles” as they are known in key locations near the depot. New sidewalk, curb and gutter work was undertaken on the north side of Michigan Avenue in 1994. Following close behind that work, was the installation of curb, gutter and new sidewalk on the south side of Michigan Avenue in 1996. Topping that progress was the installation of downtown decorative street lights in 1998. The total cost of those projects, landscaping, curb, sidewalk and gutter was \$182,000. That was followed by the placement of the street lights at roughly \$50,000. Subsequently, the initial cost estimates were way off, to some extent, related to the passage of time, but mostly related to the cost of materials and labor and the impact of below the surface drainage details that were also addressed with the removal of the old sidewalk.

What remains are street lighting to continue past Lake Street to Watson Street and a more pedestrian scale of signage containing a uniformity of design that would follow in a wayfinding system in general. The existing streetlights have had various banners deployed, depending on the event, with the installation of Christmas decorations on a regular basis. The DDA has contributed to both the cost of banners and Christmas decorations, but a more standard and seasonal event approach should be taken with the application of banners for the Traffic Jam’in event, Heritage Day, and 4<sup>th</sup> of July festivities

Estimated Cost: \$200,000  
Estimated Completion: 2016

## 2.) Sidewalk/Curbs and Gutters

Ease of walking from business to business is an important element of any downtown development plan. In many areas of the district, sidewalks are in need of repair. New sidewalk extensions, especially along Michigan Avenue and Lake, north of the railroad tracks, add to the overall aesthetics of the area. As funding becomes available, all of the development area will have pedestrian walkways.

Well-defined walkways are also needed with curbs and gutters throughout the central business district. This not only adds to the aesthetics, but enables more efficient drainage.

Estimated Cost: \$250,000  
Estimated Completion: 2000

All of the sidewalk along Michigan Avenue in the central business district has been replaced or reconstructed with the completion of the Michigan Avenue renovation in 2008 and 2009. That project however, included replacement of the water mains below Michigan Avenue and ultimately ended up with the street renovation costing \$740,000 in a bond issue that the DDA currently contributes to with a commitment of \$210,000 to debt service. Along with these various contributions, the DDA undertook a sidewalk extension along Lake Street between Wimple and the County Park Road so that a system of sidewalk was finally completed at a cost of \$8,500, in order to finish the link of sidewalk from Michigan Avenue to the County Park on Grass Lake. Much remains to be done expanding beyond Michigan Avenue to the north and south in order to provide for safe and complete walking patterns. Until the railroad was purchased by the State of Michigan in 2012, the previous owners, Norfolk & Southern, was completely opposed to finishing any sidewalk that crossed the tracks, either at Lake Street or any other crossings in the Village.

Estimated Cost: \$100,000  
Estimated Completion: 2016

## 3.) Business District Parking Area

This project will include the design and construction of new parking areas behind businesses on the south side of Michigan Avenue. Plans will maximize parking potential, minimize circulation conflicts, and clearly define service areas and pedestrian walkways. Site lighting, landscaping, signage, and site furniture may also be included in the overall parking improvement project.

Estimated Cost: \$225,000 (Excluding land acquisition)  
Estimated Completion: 2010

This particular project was badly needed from an organizational standpoint and was completed in 2011, at a cost of nearly \$250,000 with the land acquisition. Back-lot LED lighting was added to the project in 2012 and changed the whole area from 25 disorganized parking spots to 40 clearly marked, organized and lighted spaces. The lot provides both employee and visitor parking for all of the business establishments in the surrounding area.

- a.) Market Study: the market study should identify the trading area of the downtown district and provide detailed information concerning consumer spending patterns within the market area. Data will be collected by a questionnaire distributed throughout the assumed market area. Information will be cross-tabulated and the results compared to other known information on consumer spending. The result will be a document containing this information as well as recommendations on strategies for improving market share and business in downtown Grass Lake.

Estimated Cost:       \$12,500  
Estimated Completion:       1992

This one was finally completed in 2006 with the publication of the "Grass Lake Downtown Blueprint" by Hyett Palma as a part of the "Cool City Neighborhood" designation in 2005. The cost of the project however, was actually \$30,000 which was accomplished in conjunction with a "Cool City" grant from the State of Michigan of \$15,000, combined with a contribution to the project from the Village Council of \$7,500 and the DDA of another \$7,500. The project encompassed a wide market area surrounding the Village of Grass Lake, and consisted of a number of goals, objectives and strategies to enhance the future of the Village and many of those are in place today in combination with the DDA overall plan.

#### 4.) Public Utility Improvements

A complete study and evaluation of the existing public utility systems should be completed prior to any improvements and additions.

- a.) Sanitary Sewer System: A sanitary sewer feasibility study has been completed which indicates present on-site waste disposal systems are becoming increasingly ineffective. Sanitary sewer service is proposed for the Grass Lake area to remedy the waste discharge problem and accommodate future development. Several alternatives are provided and need to be addressed as funding becomes available.

Estimated Cost:       \$1,750,000  
Estimated Completion:       2005

This one project perhaps resulted in the deferral of so many other projects simply because of the impact it had on the downtown area. Indeed, the Jackson County Health Department would no longer issue septic or pump and haul permits for downtown businesses, thereby deterring the efforts to keep the downtown buildings occupied. With 6 empty buildings in the downtown area, the DDA Board at the time made a commitment to the construction of a new sewer collection system throughout the Village. That commitment of \$1,000,000 to the debt service for the new collection system was perhaps the driving force to the success of the Village through the last 20 years.

Completed in 1994 at a cost of \$2,700,000, the waste disposal collection system was the one driving force that helped to defer all other projects in the Village simply because of the cost, and separately, because it was wiser to have the subsurface construction completed before any other street surfaces were

advanced. As well, the cost of the project at nearly \$1,000,000 more than estimated when the plan was developed, in effect, put off a lot of other more creative projects that could have been accomplished as those creative projects were entirely dependent on the waste water and water development projects. Nonetheless, the project was completed in 1994 with a low interest loan from the State of Michigan and a monstrous commitment from the DDA over the life of the loan.

- b.) Water System: Improvements to the water system in the DDA may consist of, but not be limited to, testing, treatment, and upgrading undersized watermains.

Estimated Cost:           \$300,000  
Estimated Completion:       2005

This one was also approached as a project that would require some considerable wisdom in that the water distribution system itself was constructed in 1936 & 1937 and was badly in need of upgrade as the system approached 75 years of age. Again, a part of the subsurface work that was needed, the overall upgrade and planning did not get completed until 2002. It was again accomplished with a revolving loan from the State of Michigan and that process became so lengthy as to delay the whole process, and indeed, some of those more creative projects that awaited the construction of the water lines under Michigan Avenue (see below). In any event, the project was completed by the Village in 2002, with the exception of the Michigan Avenue main being held off. The DDA did not engage in this project in the initial, but ultimately picked up on the Michigan Avenue work in 2008 & 2009.

- c.) Bury Overhead Utility Lines: In an overall plan to improve the appearance of the DDA, it is proposed to bury overhead utility lines (electrical, cable television, and telephone) mainly along Michigan Avenue, within the DDA boundaries.

Estimated Cost:           \$200,000  
Estimated Completion       2015

This project was largely completed with the reconstruction of Michigan Avenue noted above. What remains is placement of new decorative street lights west from Lake Street to Watson Street.

Estimated Cost:           \$100,000  
Estimated Completion       2020

# ONGOING PLAN PROJECTS

## 5.) Promotional Activities

- b.) Business Promotion and Assistance: One of the major goals of the DDA will be to attract new businesses and maintain existing occupancy in the business district. The development of promotional literature and providing assistance to potential interests will enable the DDA to actively seek additional businesses such as retail, service, and professional offices.

Estimated Cost: \$2,500 Annually (25 year total: \$62,500)

Estimated Completion: Ongoing

This one remains ongoing and continues to be one of the key priorities of the DDA. While neither the Village nor the DDA alone can provide total financing assistance in either case, the DDA can be a catalyst to assisting with financial efforts by networking with the Enterprise Group in Jackson, the economic development authority working throughout the county. Indeed, the Enterprise Group and its ability to provide revolving loan funds was a real attraction for the current Grass Lake Community Pharmacy eventually locating downtown.

This is one area where expansion of effort may prove quite attractive and successful. A continued marketing program with a joint effort between the DDA and the Grass Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce could prove effective for the Village in the effort to keep the downtown business buildings occupied.

Estimated Cost: \$5,000 Annually (25 year total: \$125,000)

Estimated Completion Ongoing

- c.) Civic Image: Civic image and community pride are other key elements that will help contribute to the positive growth and development in Grass Lake. Well-organized activities, events, and promotional literature sponsored by the DDA are methods by which the community can begin to strengthen its image.

Estimated Cost: \$5,000 Annually (25-year total: \$125,000)

Estimated Completion: Ongoing

This project remains ongoing and is expected to be the project that continues to contribute and drive the growth of the community, and the area surrounding the community, over the next 25 years. This effort has resulted in a number of changes in the community focused on civic image and community pride. Much of it began with the designation of the Village as a "Cool City". That resulted in the creation of the Grass Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce and encompassed a number of events including the "National Outboard Races" in 2009 and 2012, the expansion of the races to include the "Traffic Jam'in" in 2009, an expanded "Heritage Day" event in 2010, the creation of the "Festival of Lights" event in 2010, and the inception of the "Festival of Tables" sponsored by the Grass Lake Education Foundation in 2011.

The DDA has contributed substantially to all of these events driven by the Chamber and the Education Foundation, and was directly involved in the creation of the Grass Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce with an initial capital contribution of \$10,000. Subsequently, while the Chamber operates almost completely on its own, the DDA continues to contribute to these events as sponsors and developers with substantial financial support and that must continue.

Estimated Cost: \$15,000 Annually (25-year total: \$375,000)  
Estimated Completion Ongoing

- d.) Storm Drainage System: Initial observations indicate that the existing storm drainage throughout the DDA is inadequate. Consideration should be given to improving most of the district. Drainage improvements may include, but not limited to, land and easement acquisition, the installation of culverts, underground piping, open ditches, retention/detention basins, etc.

Estimated Cost: \$500,000  
Estimated Completion 2005

Again, this was another subsurface project that held up just about everything else desired by the DDA. However, as the Village continued to work with the Jackson County Road Commission and the Rural Task Force for Transportation, the Village eventually made the list of qualified communities to undertake a total renovation of Michigan Avenue from the eastern border of the Village to the western border at Wolf Lake Road in 2008. That project included upgrading the water distribution line, as well as the drainage lines along Michigan Avenue, with new curb and gutter along the complete route and a finished surface completion of new asphalt throughout the route. Added to that was the removal of almost all of the overhead power lines along the route of Michigan Avenue in the downtown central business district. The total project was completed at a cost of \$1,740,000 with 2 grants from the State of Michigan for a total of \$1,000,000 and a bond issue by the Village of \$740,000. The DDA commitment to this project was \$210,000 to the debt service issue. That commitment continues.

#### 6.) Signage Program

This project will include a complete signage program for the entire DDA. Attractive, well-coordinated, new street signs, directional signs, and informational signs will not only add aesthetic value to the DDA but also assist pedestrian and vehicular circulation.

Estimated Cost: \$25,000  
Estimated Completion Ongoing

This one remains as a strong priority of the DDA with a desire to enhance the signage throughout the community with an emphasis on design consistency and uniformity. The actual placement however still evolves around what the signs should provide. Should that be directions to general public areas in the Village, (i.e. the lake, parks, parking areas, and central gathering zones), or should the signs actually identify business organizations by name?

Estimated Cost: \$100,000  
Estimated Completion: 2016

## 7.) Physical Development

- a.) Improve Lake Access: Taking advantage of natural features can greatly influence the aesthetics of the area while attracting visitors for recreational use. It may be desirable to purchase property along the east side of Grass Lake for a linear park with pedestrian walkways, landscaping, signage, benches, waste receptacles, and planters. The selection and placement of all items should express basic design principles and close harmony with the environment.

Estimated Cost: \$80,000  
Estimated Completion 2010

This one has not caught on very well from the standpoint that all of the properties along the east side of the lake are privately owned and their individual buildings provide for a number of obstacles that would balloon the cost of construction of such a park. Subsequently, the DDA has not approached the linear park idea with any serious consideration, giving way more to the idea of an events park where the idle land still stands near the Seasons Car Wash, (see Open Area/Greenspace below).

On another note, the DDA has provided the impetus for improvements in the County Park that currently exists on Grass Lake. That park has become a center of attention as a result of the annual boat races that take place on the lake and the National Boat Races that attract racers from all over the country every two or three years. Also a location where the annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July festivities culminate and end with the Chicken BBQ, the gathering of people has given way to the idea of many improvements to improve access to the lake, and sidewalks, a volleyball court and the addition of several other amenities to make the park and its structures more attractive and accessible.

- b.) Open Area/Greenspace:

There are very few areas within the DDA boundaries set aside as open space. There are a number of small areas which would be well used as such. These areas should be landscaped and provided street furniture to create a pleasant, restful area where pedestrians might stop and pause while they stroll through the downtown area.

Estimated Cost: \$100,000  
Estimated Completion 2010

The renovation of the Depot in downtown and its associated park areas was a catalyst for the survival of the downtown area. While most of that renovation took place outside the realm of the DDA, the first project of renovation by the DDA was the installation of new sidewalk, curb and gutter in front of the Depot to accent the area and provide clear parking in front of the Depot. That was indeed the first

project taken on by the DDA and was completed in 1994 at a cost of \$80,000. That was just for the sidewalk, curb and gutter, and asphalt of the parking area. The Whistlestop Park Association took up the purchase of the property and is the organization responsible for the renovation of the building and the park grounds.

In any case, this is one site where the landscaping, benches and sidewalk provides a place of comfortable rest and relaxation as one takes in the remarkable architecture of the historic Depot and its renovation. The DDA continues to support the atmosphere on the Depot grounds, and events in the building, by lending its support to replacement of the benches and sponsoring a number of events that take place on the site.

At another location, the DDA has taken an interest in the development of another open space area known as 120 Brown Street. The currently vacant area near the Seasons Car Wash has become a center of attraction for special events that take place in the Village including the "Traffic Jam'in" and the "Wheels of Thunder" motorcycle rally, and as well, a "Farmers Market" which now takes place every year. Basically an empty lot next to the Car Wash, the area has worked well as a place for several special events and has driven the idea for the development of the area as a "Community Events Park." That idea is currently in the concept stages as surveys are collected and ideas for development evolve.

Finally, another area of interest of the DDA includes the park and gardens area along and on the north side Michigan Avenue just west of the Clark Street intersection. An attractive entryway to the Village from the west, consideration is now being given to a sidewalk link to the Township Park on Willis Road. That idea is currently developing and provides some excellent potential with respect to community recreation and open space development.

Estimated Cost:       \$200,000  
Estimated Completion       2020

## 8.) Road/Street Improvements

It is the objective of the DDA to upgrade less than adequate streets and roads within the district. Various problems including improper drainage, surface deteriorations, and other irregularities will be improved.

Estimated Cost:     \$300,000  
Estimated Completion     2006

Most of the Road/Street improvement projects undertaken in the Village has been coordinated by the Village with the assistance of a number of grants from both the federal and state governments during the years 2008 and 2009. The DDA has not gotten directly involved with the street improvements, with the exception of the Michigan Avenue reconstruction project in 2008. In that case the Village replaced the water main beneath Michigan Avenue and the DDA currently contributes to the retirement of the debt Service.

Additional side street reconstruction could be undertaken, but in order to reconstruct the streets like Michigan Avenue, the cost would run nearly \$1,000,000 per mile.

Subsequently the DDA should take on some of those projects on an incremental basis and deal with the streetscapes and drainage issues in the same fashion. There are slightly more than a mile (6100 feet) of streets within the district. Approached incrementally, the DDA could impact the streets in the district establishing a priority where streetscape may be important and cover at least a quarter mile of streets in the central downtown area.

Estimated Cost: \$300,000  
Estimated Completion 2025

## 9.) Planning Projects

- a.) Recreation Plan: A comprehensive document examining existing recreation facilities and identifying any deficiencies in the Village of Grass Lake should be developed. This is not only an important element for future growth and development, but is also a prerequisite for any of the recreation grants available from the state for land acquisition and/or recreation facility development.

Estimated Cost: \$10,000  
Estimated Completion 1991

This one was actually completed in 2010 – 2011 year in conjunction with Grass Lake Township, Grass Lake Community Schools, and with the help of the Region II Planning Commission staff. At a cost of approximately \$1,000, the help of Region II was invaluable in constructing and producing this plan. It remains effective and continues until 2016.

- b.) Design Study

A design study addressing specific DDA projects should be prepared. The study should include evaluations and design recommendations for buildings and site development. The purpose of the study would be to evaluate existing conditions, examine alternatives, and establish standard design guidelines for future development. Recommendations should include proposed styles, colors, types, etc., for lighting, landscaping, signage, and site furniture such as benches, waste receptacles and planters. The selection and placement of all items should express basic design principles such as rhythm and harmony. Each element should complement the others.

Estimated Cost: \$12,000  
Estimated Completion 2010

This one was actually completed in the years 2003 to 2004. In this case, the DDA received a grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs for \$6,500 and matched that with \$6,500 in DDA funds. That brought a team of architects and engineers to the Village from the Design Michigan team of the Arts Council over the course of about a month to offer ideas suggestions and recommendations. While a big part of that process included façade improvement ideas and streetscape ideas, it was also recommended that the Village undertake the potential for a Wayfinding Signage system throughout the Village and the

creation of a Chamber of Commerce in the community. The Grass Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce actually evolved out of that process in 2004.

10.) Maintenance/Repairs/Equipment

The maintenance of proposed improvements such as lighting, landscaping, and recreation areas will be an additional expense, not currently provided by either the DDA or the Village at large. The actual maintenance could be provided by a subcontractor to the DDA or on a shared time expense basis with Village DPW personnel. The allocation of revenue for this purpose would include the salary and benefits of a maintenance individual(s) and the costs associated with repairs and replacement of fixtures, structures, etc.

Estimated Cost: \$2,500 Annually (25-year total: \$62,500)

Estimated Completion: Term of Plan

The DDA has at various times contributed to the maintenance where it was practical. For example, the DDA contributes to clearing snow during the winter months on the central business district sidewalks, and as well, contributes to the purchase of flower baskets and Christmas decorations that are placed on the downtown streetlights during the year. Outside of incidental items, the Village DPW crews have largely handled maintenance such as, mowing grass, sweeping the streets, repainting and replacing signs, maintaining street lights and so on. Continued maintenance contributions of the DDA needs to focus on the maintenance of various gardens, the community events park, the county park area, Christmas decorations and plantings in the central business district and perhaps street cleaning prior to large community events.

Estimated Cost: \$5,000 Annually (25-year total: \$125,000)

Estimated Completion: Term of Plan

# OTHER POTENTIAL PROJECTS

## 11.) Property Acquisition

It may be desirable and/or necessary to acquire properties located throughout the DDA in an effort to accomplish various improvement projects. Some of those projects include, but are not limited to, properties for expansion of commercial facilities to be leased out to private business. Additional property may be acquired by the DDA as it becomes available and offered for private development in the future. The DDA may look at purchasing property along Grass Lake for recreational use, such as a linear park, and land for greater public access.

The DDA over the past 20 years has not engaged in the purchase of property, primarily believing that private enterprise can accomplish the development of properties more effectively and efficiently, and continues to encourage the sale of private properties in that fashion. As well, the DDA financial status often times has not had the flexibility to engage in the purchase of property. In two cases however, the DDA had a major impact on the purchase, or taking in custody on behalf of the Village, private property.

In first case the DDA did assist in the purchase of the former hardware store for a non-profit community group that returns its income to the community and is known as the current Copper Nail. In this case, the DDA assisted in the purchase with a down-payment loan/grant in the amount of \$60,000, and continues to carry that loan for the Copper Nail. Ultimately, had the Copper Nail failed in its mission, the DDA would have had the opportunity to continue the rest of the financing and hold title to the building. At the current time, the Copper Nail has become one of the most successful businesses in the downtown central business district and has become recognized by the "Rural Partners Conference of Michigan" as a "destination" in the Village of Grass Lake. It remains an outstanding entity and proves the worth of the DDA's investment in the purchase.

In the second case, the DDA took custody of a piece of property donated to the Village with the development of the Seasons Car Wash on Lake Street in downtown Grass Lake. An area of ground encompassing nearly an acre and a half, the area benefitted from the construction of the new car wash and the reconstruction of Brown Street as the State of Michigan and CSX Railroad sought to close the Brown Street crossing of the railroad tracks. Newly constructed with a \$112,000 grant from the state and \$10,000 from the railroad, the southerly end of Brown Street, that would have become simply a "deadend", was constructed with an extension westerly to Lake Street so that Brown Street residents, and all other residents on the north side of the tracks would have a clean and accessible route for getting to the central business district downtown. That major donation by a private property owner provided a much more aesthetic and pleasing route to the central business district for all those on the north side of the track and our gratitude can never be expressed enough to the owner of Seasons Car Wash.