



Evart Downtown Development Authority

Chair, Alan Bengry
Treasurer, Lynn Salinas
Mark Sochocki
Dan Boyer

Vice-Chair, Gary Hartsock
Secretary, Brian Youngs
Cory Juliano
City Manager, Pepper Lockhart
Director, Todd Bruggema

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EVART DDA SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

November 19, 2025

Community Room at The Depot

200 S. Main St. Evart, MI 49631

Attendance

The following board members were present: Chairperson Alan Bengry, Vice-Chairperson Gary Hartsock, Treasurer Lynn Salinas, Secretary Brian Youngs, Pepper Lockhart, Cory Juliano, Dan Boyer, and Mark Sochocki. DDA Director Todd Bruggema was also in attendance. There were no board members absent.

Call to Order

Chairperson Alan Bengry called the meeting to order at 3:32 PM.

Introduction of Guests

Three guests were welcomed to the meeting:

- Laura Krizov – Michigan Main Street
- Hannah Yurk – Michigan Economic Development Corporation (M.E.D.C.)
- Lisa Thompson – Main Street America

Each guest introduced themselves and shared their roles within their respective organizations.

Guest Comments and Discussion

The primary purpose of the guests' attendance was to connect with the Evart DDA board and to gain insight into the board's perspective regarding its overall performance. The guests expressed interest in understanding what the board considered its strengths and successful initiatives, as well as areas where additional guidance or support might be beneficial.

Identified Strengths

- **Collaboration with the Evart Housing Commission:** The board highlighted ongoing cooperation and collaboration with the Evart Housing Commission, particularly related to the refurbishment and revitalization of the property at 101 S. Main Street. Mark Sochocki, Executive Director of the Evart Housing Commission, provided an update on the project's progress.
- **Strong Relationship with the City of Evart:** The relationship between the DDA and the City of Evart was noted as a key strength. The relocation of the DDA director's office into City Hall was cited as a crucial factor in fostering and expanding this partnership.
- **Strategic Planning Progress:** The Strategic Planning process, though relatively new to the Evart DDA, was recognized as progressing well. The board is nearing completion of its five-year Strategic Plan and is confident that the group will be able to utilize the new Strategic Plan to be more effective going forward.

Areas for Improvement and Identified Challenges

- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Despite some success, the board acknowledged a shortage of area residents willing to volunteer for activities. While it is believed there are more potential volunteers within the community, identifying and engaging these individuals remains a challenge. It was observed that far too often, volunteers who do participate typically do not encourage friends, family members, or acquaintances to join them. In searching for a candidate to fill the DDA board's one available position, emphasis will be placed on finding someone skilled at improving volunteerism. Todd Bruggema was recognized for his role in recruiting volunteers for the bump-out gardens during the summer. The participation and enthusiasm of Evert area volunteers in planting and maintaining the bump-outs were well received. The community garden at Main and 5th Streets also saw strong community participation and was deemed successful during this year's growing season.
- **Board Engagement and Training:** Half of the current Evert DDA board members are serving in their first term, with some very early in their tenure. The group recognized that formalized DDA training would be beneficial for these new members and the board, as a whole. It was noted that Alan, Cory and Todd were all in attendance at a Michigan Main Street conference/training session in Grosse Pointe, MI on September 30th. All three participants expressed satisfaction and feel they gleaned valuable knowledge from the experience.
- **Communication:** The board recognized that current efforts to communicate with business owners, property owners, and residents throughout the Evert area have not been as effective as desired. There is a clear need to improve outreach concerning ongoing activities and developments within the DDA district. To address this issue, it was proposed that the board compile a comprehensive list of area businesses, property owners, and non-profit organizations. This list would serve as a database, streamlining future outreach efforts. Once an effective method of communication is determined, the database will facilitate more consistent and targeted updates, helping to keep stakeholders informed about the work and progress of the DDA. The group revealed that the DDA is planning a "Business After Five" event, which will take place at the pop-up building owned by the Evert DDA. This event is scheduled for early 2026 and is aimed at fostering engagement within the local business community. By hosting the event at the pop-up building, the DDA intends to create an inviting atmosphere for business owners, encouraging networking and collaboration. The occasion will serve as an opportunity for the DDA to share updates on its ongoing initiatives, highlight recent successes, and provide information about current developments in the Evert area. Through this event, the DDA hopes to strengthen its relationships with local businesses and enhance awareness of its activities within the community.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:42 PM by Chairperson Alan Bengry.

Respectfully submitted by Brian Youngs, Secretary