

// Paducah by the Numbers //

Population	26,275
Date revitalization program started	1989
Net number of new jobs	1,000
Net number of new businesses	234
Number of building rehabilitations	119
Number of new buildings	27
Vacancy rate when the program began	70%
Vacancy rate today	14%
Dollar amount of public investment	\$49,700,000
Dollar amount of private investment	\$52,400,000

Website: www.historicpaducah.com



Major events such as the LowerTown Art and Music Festival are attracting more visitors and more investment to Paducah each year. The Art and Music Festival features a wide array of artists' booths, live music and food vendors, reinforcing the image of a strong arts community in Paducah.

“Our neighborhood has moved from a decrepit example of urban blight to a newly restored and revitalized community boasting more than \$3 million in property investment,” says LowerTown resident Gayle Kaler, crediting the Artist Relocation Program for much of the area’s rebirth.

Recognized today as a national model of a vibrant arts district, Paducah boasts nearly \$200 million in yearly tourism income. The

National Quilt Museum alone attracts 5,000 visitors to its workshops, encouraging creative visitor experiences and bringing sales revenue to small businesses in the area. Equally important, new institutions such as the Paducah School of the Arts, located in a rehabbed downtown building, are providing new opportunities for residents and enhancing the community’s image as a strong arts destination.

Riverfront development, funded in part by a Preserve America grant, and major festivals, like the LowerTown Art and Music Festival, Barbeque on the River, and the Paducah Summer Festival, are attracting more visitors and more investment as Paducah’s downtown continues its journey from the crime-ridden place you avoid to the historically hip place you want to be.

FERNDALE, michigan

Ten years ago, before the Ferndale Downtown Development Authority (DDA) got started, this Detroit suburb grappled with a high vacancy rate and hearing people laugh at the “Fashionable Ferndale” moniker. These days, no one is laughing and downtown Ferndale is living by the four Fs by being friendly, fabulous, funky, *and* fashionable. In every respect, the district is hitting the mark – even the organization’s business cards are cool.

A core group of activists weren’t quite ready to call it quits. They formed the Downtown Development Authority in 1980 and change began to skyrocket after its acceptance into Main Street Oakland County in 2001. Creative Class-types were lured to affordable Ferndale and began to reveal the beautiful 1920s architecture hiding underneath the grit and vinyl siding. The narrowing of 9 Mile Road and new streetscape amenities improved pedestrian safety and gave the downtown a fresh, vibrant look. Entrepreneurs caught wind of this activity and enthusiastically contributed to plum-

meting vacancy rates that fell from 30 to 6 percent!

Putting a quirky twist on events helped to win over the general public. The Ferndale DDA is responsible for the “Pimp Your Pot” beautification contest, the region’s largest LGBT festival, dog-friendly shopping events, and the new “Do-It-Yourself” Street Festival.

The community’s commitment to sustainability makes it a model that leaves others green with envy. Downtown bike racks, more street trees, public recycling containers, and a Green Week awareness promotion and plans for LED street lights, rainwater collection, and public transit reflect Ferndale’s forward thinking.

Not to let a national recession slow it down, Ferndale has seen more than \$23 million in reinvestment, and the opening of 40+ new businesses in the last year and a half. Bubbling up from the array of businesses and events and the diverse and creative community, as locals put it, there’s always something happening on “The Nine.”

The narrowing of Nine Mile Road and the addition of new streetscape amenities have improved pedestrian safety and brought new life to downtown Ferndale as shoppers, residents, and visitors enjoy strolling through the district.





© Ferndale DDA



© Ferndale DDA

Listed in the National Register, this two-story brick building began life as a schoolhouse in 1915, became a public library from the 1930s to 1954, and housed a succession of small businesses until 2007. In 2008, Foley & Mansfield, a 40-person law firm, spent \$1.5 million to restore the building and add 7,000 square feet.

SUPPORTING BUSINESSES

The successes of the Ferndale DDA have trickled down to its local partners, too. For example, the Ferndale Chamber of Commerce reports a 12.5 percent growth. “We have attracted businesses from outside of Ferndale to join our Chamber because they want to be part of a friendly, energetic, and creative community,” says Jennifer Roosenberg, the Chamber’s executive director. “Also, as a licensed real estate broker, I can attest that despite Michigan’s troubling economy, Ferndale’s real estate values have decreased less than surrounding areas due to its desirable downtown.”

The stats and stories supporting the notion that Ferndale is a hot market continue to roll in. From 2007 to 2008, the city saw a 299 percent increase of private and public development, which substantially feeds a growing tax base for Oakland County. Ferndale DDA has been working hard to keep downtown booming. It not only has brought in \$1 million in grants for revitalization projects, but it convinced the owner of Rosie O’Grady’s to expand its business downtown and to invest more than \$3 million to redevelop a building for its new, bigger location. Now that’s smart growth.

The president of Rosie’s, Brian Kramer, points out that the DDA was integral in site selection, dealing with zoning issues, and greening the rehab project. The DDA reimbursed the owner \$15,000 for demonstrating how a sensitive restoration project could be done with a 3,000-square foot addition.

Thankful for such a great experience, Kramer says he is looking forward to his

second Ferndale restaurant project – Cantina Diablo’s. “Our businesses have benefitted from the revitalization of downtown Ferndale by increased foot traffic and positive press – Ferndale is always in the newspaper for something positive.”

The FerndaleFirst shop local campaign rewards customers with unique and local finds. The pocket-sized Downtown Business Guide is fun to flip through to see the wide variety of what’s in town. You can find an interesting community organization to join, a vintage clothing shop to browse, a bar to sip a martini, and dozens of places to put on your errands list. A fold-out map outlines the districts and even points out parking.

To foster the entrepreneurial spirit, the DDA created an entrepreneurs network and provides consultations for start ups with the Chamber. The DDA connects landlords with successful tenants and assists new business owners to write solid business plans before they sign a lease. The group has influenced reduced permit fees, worked with the city to craft policies that better serve business owners’ needs for events hosted downtown, and improved sidewalk café and sandwich board ordinances – anything that can make being a business owner in Ferndale easier.

LOOKING GOOD

The downtown’s park-and-walk design makes it easy to stroll and discover everything the district has to offer. Pedestrian-oriented amenities include widened crosswalks, crosswalk timers, and beautification elements. Interpretive signage helps tell the story

= Ferndale by the Numbers =

Population	21,000
Date revitalization program started	2001
Net number of new jobs	699
Net number of new businesses	33
Number of building rehabilitations	163
Number of new buildings	12
Vacancy rate when the program began	30%
Vacancy rate today	6%
Dollar amount of public investment	\$4,881,785
Dollar amount of private investment	\$35,182,705

Website: <http://www.downtownferndale.com/>
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Downtown-Ferndale/80390601237?ref=nf>
Twitter: [ferndaledda](https://twitter.com/ferndaledda)

Street life in downtown Ferndale is vibrant and active. Kids love this rocking horse located outside a locally owned vintage shop.



© JWhite Photo



In 2008, the Do-It-Yourself Street Fair debuted, attracting huge crowds who came to hear local music, sample micro-brews, and buy local art.

© Chris Johnston, DIY Street Fair Committee.

of the area’s history, and a new Ferndale Heritage Tourism Wayfinding program will bring consistent and exciting branded signage to the district.

Designing a vibrant district not only improves the quality of life for local people; it also serves to catch the eye of new business owners. In fact, one law firm was looking for an affordable place to open its firm that was not just walkable, but filled with dining, shopping, and banking amenities. Foley & Mansfield found the historic 1915 K-12 Ferndale school and rehabbed it into an office space where employees enjoy coming to work. Ferndale not only benefitted from saving a historic building, but it gained a charitable partner that jumped right into supporting the downtown and its events. Another way Foley & Mansfield has proven to be an excellent partner and neighbor is when it transferred ownership of a rundown alleyway to the city. Together with the DDA, the city nabbed a Michigan grant and transformed the eyesore into a pedestrian area lined with brick pavers, planters, trees, and al fresco dining spots.

The DDA works tirelessly to help local businesses succeed and to create new opportunities for investors. For example, the DDA’s help in getting brownfield status and the Michigan Single Business Tax Credit made the Lofts on 9 development possible. The \$9 million project has brought stylish lofts and ground-floor retail to the community.

NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

“I am in love with Ferndale!” says Jacki Smith, partner of the Candle Wick Shop. She points out that every week she meets new customers who moved to the area because of the open and supportive attitude

of the community. “I am surrounded with a unique diversity that I have found nowhere else in Michigan, or even the country,” she says. “The acceptance of all races, religions, and sexual orientation is the rule and not the exception in Ferndale.”

Cristina Sheppard-Decius, the executive director for Ferndale DDA, wrote an online article for *mainstreet.org* about her community’s inclusiveness and pointed out that there is a high percentage of LGBT-owned businesses, but that only a small percentage of the downtown’s 400 businesses cater

“Downtown Ferndale is a beacon of hope in this challenging economy and ... a prime example for cities across Michigan desiring to revitalize their own downtowns.”

Governor Jennifer Granholm

specifically to that community. And other businesses that generally appeal to the mass market embrace the diversity and produce events specifically for their LGBT clientele. But regardless, she says that all businesses welcome everyone into their establishments and treat them with respect.

Sheppard-Decius explains that one of the reasons why her community is credited for being particularly LGBT friendly is because members of that community are involved at every level of community activism. “This is where I see the difference between communities that are gay-friendly and those like Ferndale that show gay pride 365 days a year,” she writes. “We have shed our shells, blinders, and labels so we can open our hearts and minds to the endless possibilities of working as a single, harmonious community.”

The Ferndale DDA doesn’t just support local businesses. It also helps local nonprof-

its. At many events and festivals, nonprofits can showcase themselves for free, and at other events, they get the spotlight. The annual crafts show pitted nonprofit against nonprofit in the Warm-hearted Cookie Challenge that placed organizations inside shops and cafes as they competed to sell the most home-baked cookies.

From inclusion to an exciting nightlife, Ferndale is a model for others to follow – a sentiment with which the Michigan Governor concurs. “Downtown Ferndale is a beacon of hope in this challenging

economy, and is a prime example for cities across Michigan desiring to revitalize their own downtowns,” says Governor Jennifer Granholm. She saw the downtown’s potential back in 2004, when she designated it a Cool City, giving it access to special grant funding.

A large group of people stood behind Sheppard-Decius on stage as she accepted the GAMSA on behalf of her organization. There were smiles and kazoos and noise makers, and everyone in the Convention Center knew Ferndale was in the house. It was clear to the audience that the Ferndale DDA had earned its recognition as a Main Street leader, but also that it truly is an inclusive, group effort.

“I have volunteered with many Ferndale nonprofits and we could not do without the Ferndale merchants and DDA,” says resident Joann Willcock. “This is why Ferndale is such a great community in which to live. We all work together.”