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Civic buildings such as libraries, city halls, courthouses, museums, and schools help shape a community's character and foster local pride. When built to last, using timeless styles, these valued structures serve as cornerstones of the community that set the bar for private development and draw residents in to create more active and engaging civic spaces. Well-crafted historic buildings sustain their value and provide established, lasting signs of local identity as a community continues to grow and evolve.

Through the years, many of these centrally-located, historic structures in communities were replaced by more modern, isolated buildings with uninspired design focused on auto-oriented access. Such design does little to promote connectivity among cornerstone civic buildings needed to create engaging public spaces that bring lively energy to a community. Public areas like town squares and parks provide citizens a rallying point for events, festivals, and forums that strengthen community bonds and bring greater pedestrian activity to the downtown.

Civic buildings and spaces have the opportunity to serve as vibrant destinations for local residents and visitors that improve the quality of life for downtown as well as surrounding districts and neighborhoods. These significant assets should be embraced by the community and utilized in attracting further growth and development that promotes placemaking and emphasizes the value of vibrant public spaces.

However, too many local governments and school districts make new building decisions based on minimal standards and low bids. The result is buildings that stand out for their lack of anything unique due to their low-cost building materials. Instead of setting the bar for private buildings, they signal the community cares little about good design and the role of buildings in creating quality places where people want to live, work, play, and learn. A community must find a balance between being fiscally responsible with taxpayer money and achieving the community's goals for sustainability.

On the facing page is an illustration depicting some of the attributes of civic buildings and spaces in a downtown setting that can be created or activated by good placemaking. The techniques offered display how schools, libraries, the public right-of-way, and squares can all enhance community character and identify.

The image below depicts Campus Martius, a highly-successful restoration of public space within the heart of downtown Detroit. Seasonal activities are designed to meet the changing needs of the downtown plaza throughout the year, providing opportunities for a summertime beach setting in the central business district.



Image source (this page): downtowndetroit.org.

Image source (opposite page): Holly Madill. Planning & Zoning Center at MSU. Overlay illustration by Na Li, Land Policy Institute, Michigan State University.



Civic Building is in the Heart of Downtown

Retail Fronts Civic Space on Most Sides

Limited Parking or Parking in Back of Buildings Creates a Walkable Public Square

Mix of Civic and Retail Uses Plus Walkability Can Create a Place that People Want to Be in

Schools

New schools are a rare commodity in an era where declining school-age children have instead necessitated school consolidation and closing. That has resulted in many school buildings being marketed for private sector use. How these often grand historic school buildings are repurposed will affect the neighborhoods that surround them for decades to come. Efforts should be made to preserve key historic assets and ensure the sites maintain a vital role in community functions. Former school buildings have been reimagined and repurposed to serve the community in a variety of ways, by providing spaces for community centers, recreation facilities, art studios, business incubators, as well as office and residential units.

Many vacant school buildings reside in residential zoning districts with limited permitted uses, and require developers to seek a rezoning for a non-school use. Detroit has addressed this by approving a [School Building Adaptive Reuse Ordinance](#) (Sec. 61-12-99) to better facilitate the development of potential sites while preserving these historic structures. The ordinance details specific conditional uses as possible redevelopment options now allowed in the former school buildings:

- *Residential:* Assisted living, rest home, dormitory, loft, multi-family;
- *Public/Civic/Institutional:* Child care center, adult daycare center, educational institution, governmental service agency, museum, library; and
- *Retail/Service/Commercial:* Business college, commercial trade school, medical clinic, studio space for arts, professional offices, recreation.

Focusing on the proper reuse of these historic assets through placemaking creates opportunities to restore underutilized school properties so they may once again play a key role in serving the community.





Formerly home to East Lansing High School and later a middle school, the Hannah Community Center now serves the area by offering auditorium space for meetings and events, a swimming pool and fitness center with youth and adult recreational options, and a variety of arts and cultural classes and workshops.

Source: [East Lansing Hannah Community Center. Facebook.](#)

Charlevoix restored its former middle school into a new public library in 2006, keeping this popular and highly visited civic space near downtown.

Source: [Charlevoix Area Chamber of Commerce.](#)

The historic Michigan School for the Blind in Lansing will undergo further redevelopment on its vast campus to provide 44 low-income housing units in the former Abigail Administration Building. Some campus buildings have already been repurposed, such as offices for the Ingham County Land Bank and the Greater Lansing Housing Coalitions' Neighborhood Empowerment Center.

Source: [Holly Madill, Planning & Zoning Center at MSU.](#)



RESOURCES

- 1) [An Honor and an Ornament: Public School Buildings in Michigan. 2003. State Historic Preservation Office.](#)
- 2) [Old Schools, New Uses: Property Developers Conference. Reinventing Vacant School Buildings & Site in Detroit for Innovative Redevelopment. March 13, 2014. Detroit Public Schools.](#)
- 3) [Helping Johnny Walk to School: Policy Recommendations for Removing Barriers to Community-Centered Schools. 2008. National Trust for Historic Preservation.](#)

Libraries

Public libraries offer a welcoming, trusted public space for citizens to share and engage in various educational, social, and cultural activities and events. These institutions are vital common spaces that support community engagement and outreach, bringing residents to downtowns and main streets on a regular basis, and provide services and assistance for residents of all ages and backgrounds. This role as a civic center illustrates the potential that libraries have in placemaking applications within a neighborhood, downtown district, or historic main street.

By devoting the proper time and resources to their public libraries, communities lay the groundwork for a key community asset that can be utilized to promote community growth and development. Library facilities serve the public in a variety of ways and provide spaces for:

- Vast inventory of literature, books, and multimedia resources;
- Theatres, auditoriums, lecture halls;
- Classroom spaces for job skills training, career fairs, educational workshops for youth and adults;
- Interactive areas for children, storytelling, arts and crafts;
- Computer labs, internet connections, and technical equipment; and
- Educational, artistic, cultural, and historic displays/presentations.

These many uses highlight the notion that libraries are made to be shared equally among all members of the community, from all walks of life, and are not limited to simply being a place to check out books and movies. Libraries as engaging public spaces can offer so much more, and help create informative networks and relationships that strengthen community ties and encourage civic values.





The Capital Area District Library system in Lansing features a bookmobile that travels to various neighborhoods and community centers on a rotating schedule through the spring and summer months. This outreach helps extend library resources and further promote its services to a larger portion of the community.

Source: [Branch Bookmobile. Capital Area District Library.](#)

The Hoyt Public Library in Saginaw shows the value of well-kept, long lasting historic structures that continue to serve the community.

Source: [Hoyt Public Library in Saginaw. Wikipedia.](#)

Imaginative displays in the Southfield Public Library encourage creative, educational activities and engaging spaces for library patrons.

Source: [Southfield Public Library. Flickr.](#)



RESOURCES

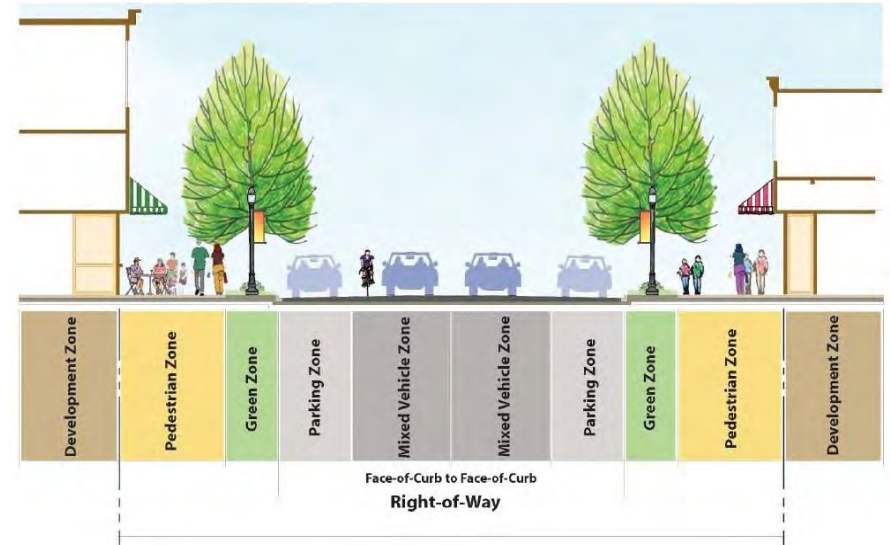
- 1) [The Urban Libraries Council \(ULC\).](#)
- 2) [Libraries and Placemaking. Project for Public Spaces.](#)
- 3) [Parks and Libraries in Partnership. From Great Parks/Great Cities: Seattle, 1998. Project for Public Spaces.](#)

Right-of-Way

There is growing consensus to reexamine transportation networks and envision the road right-of-way (ROW) as more than just a means for moving vehicles. Many urbanists and planners are rediscovering the connection between community and transportation and how that impacts the livability of a community.

The road right-of-way is a public commodity. In addition to providing vehicular travel, communities looking to enhance the built environment are looking to ROW for use by pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit, as well as a place for landscaping, parking, outdoor seating, and where building frontage creates more people-focused Places. Road rights-of-way are foundational to our communities for all that goes below the ground as well: sewer lines, waterlines, storm drains, telephone, cable, and electric lines. Urban designers, planners, and civil engineers creatively employ techniques to maximize the efficiency and design of ROW to serve a wide variety of social needs.

How ROW is used is integral in shaping a more active, vibrant streetscape, and in providing business owners opportunities to further engage and connect with pedestrian traffic. Grand Rapids has recently produced a guide for property owners interested in creating parklets, which are pop-up public spaces in underutilized storefront parking that offer additional green space, bicycle parking, or tables and chairs for outdoor dining. These efforts that apply placemaking to rights-of-way help reimagine the urban streetscape to encourage greater pedestrian activity and non-motorized transportation, while supporting local businesses and enhanced social interactions within the community.





Right-of-way consists of more than a thoroughfare, providing public access and services that meet both public and private interests. Rights-of-way connect public space with private space in ways that help promote greater usage and pedestrian activity.

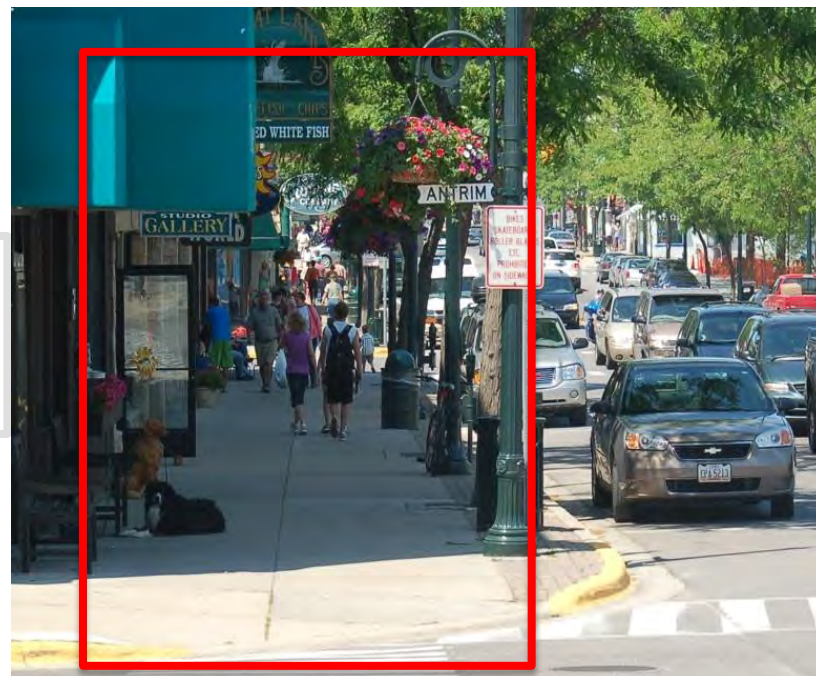
Source: *Charlotte, North Carolina; Urban Street Design Guidelines.*

This active sidewalk in downtown Charlevoix highlights good use of a portion of a street right-of-way to create a vibrant streetscape that encourages walkability.

Source: *K. Schindler, Michigan State University Extension.*

Parklets allow business owners to transform underutilized parking spots into passive recreation areas that provide additional seating while also enhancing storefronts and sidewalk activity within a downtown or commercial district. This is a form of Tactical Placemaking also known as a Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper project.

Source: [The Rapidian.](#)



RESOURCES

- 1) [Tactical Urbanism 2. 2012. The Street Plans Collaborative.](#)
- 2) [Grand Rapids Parklet Manual. 2014. Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc. and City of Grand Rapids.](#)
- 3) [Streets as Places: How Transportation Can Create a Sense of Community. Project for Public Spaces.](#)

Plazas and Squares

Successful public spaces feature design elements and innovative amenities that attract residents to create lively, engaging areas throughout neighborhoods, business districts, and downtowns. These spaces may take the shape of plazas, town squares, public fountains, courthouse lawns, corner lots, boulevards, or other common areas for use by members of the community. Key principles of successful plazas and squares include:

- *Identity* – Public plazas and squares shape an identity for a community and provide a focal point for local pride and heritage;
- *Access* – These spaces should be pedestrian-focused, with transit stops nearby and reduced auto traffic in the immediate area;
- *Flexible design*- They should allow for a variety of activities or settings to accommodate changing seasons, needs, and desires;
- *Amenities* – Food vendors, shopping, recreation, and/or other activities should be located in the vicinity to provide patrons with a variety of accessible options and interesting activities; and
- *Destination* – Strong public squares are more than the sum of their parts, and provide further linkage to the surrounding urban area to create a key destination that promotes a greater sense of community and connectivity (pps.org).

In this regard, plazas and squares are integral components of placemaking applications, serving as foundational public spaces that attract the greatest concentration of colorful activities and further opportunities for positive community interactions.





Lansing's Old Town features active sidewalks and public plazas that create lively streets with various arts and cultural events and festivals throughout the year. Local actors perform *A Christmas Carol* for passersby as part of the annual Dickens Village festivities, held each holiday season in Old Town along with the Scrooge Scramble 5K Run.

Source: Jason Cox.

The lawn of the Livingston County Courthouse in downtown Howell provides vast public seating for community events, concerts, and festivals.

Source: [Making Howell Michigan Your Next Home Town. Active Rain.](#)

Rosa Parks Circle offers a large central public space in downtown Grand Rapids that attracts patrons throughout the year with seasonal activities such as ice skating, dance competitions, cultural events, and live music performances.

Source: ["Grand Rapids Swing Dancing at Rosa Parks Circle." 2011. MLive.com.](#)



RESOURCES

- 1) [10 Principles for Successful Squares. Project for Public Spaces.](#)
- 2) [Reinventing the Courthouse. Project for Public Spaces.](#)

The intersection of opportunities makes a community a positive, livable, interactive, and engaging environment. A component of a positive livable environment is a thriving arts and cultural experience that engages current residents of the community and attracts outside visitors to the area. A vibrant arts and culture scene involves good urban form, available public spaces of different sizes and characteristics, supportive institutions, dynamic programming that engages individuals of all ages, and spontaneous arts and creative activities.

Following and represented in the image on the opposite page are arts and cultural techniques and strategies discussed in this section that may help activate underutilized spaces in communities:

- Public Art,
- Art Education,
- Book Clubs,
- Live Music,
- Local Arts and Craft Festivals,
- Farmers Markets,
- Museums, and
- Urban Alleys.

These techniques and strategies can be deployed in any community at differing degrees and scales. These techniques are communal by nature and are a mix of infrastructure and programming. The programming elements such as art education, book clubs, and public art can be implemented immediately after coordination with relevant stakeholders in the community.

Other techniques, such as live music, festivals, farmers markets, museums, and urban alleys require physical space and infrastructure to launch. A common theme in these techniques is enhancing the appreciation of art and providing activities for individuals of all ages. These techniques strive to provide educational and entertainment options to enhance the quality of life in a community.



Image source (this page): [Lansing Symphony Orchestra](#).

Image source (opposite page): Holly Madill, Planning & Zoning Center at MSU. Overlay illustration by Na Li, Land Policy Institute, Michigan State University.



Galleries
Bookstores
Museums
Immigrant/Ethnic Neighborhoods
Fairs/Concerts
Theaters
Restaurants

Theater

Public Art/Graffiti

Public art is an expression that modifies the aesthetic of the built environment and elicits an emotional response from the users and audience in that physical space. The response to public art may either be positive or negative depending on the perceptions of the users, but the emphasis should be on the interaction and stimulation between the audience, the art, and the place it is located all together.

On a city scale, public art can include signage, historical monuments and plaques, buildings, facades, boulevards in addition to traditional forms, such as paintings and sculptures. There is no prerequisite or specific definition for what constitutes public art as long as it encourages creativity and assists with enhancing the visual appeal of the physical spaces that make up a city.

Display of public art is a Creative Placemaking strategy that encourages “opportunities for art experiences in people’s everyday lives.” Enhancing these daily experiences can be a talent attraction and retention tool as current and future generations are drawn to unique and creative environments with distinct arts and culture. Public art is also considered a “cultural regeneration” strategy that merges the goal of creating Quality Places and enhancing the values and identity of a community.

Improving a community’s emphasis on public art may evolve into the need for an Arts District or Cluster that may attract tourists and visitors to the community while also laying the foundation for new festivals and educational opportunities.





Signage welcoming visitors and residents to REO Town, south of downtown Lansing, is a public art display that builds on the areas with gritty manufacturing history.

Source: [REO Town. Capital Gains.](#)

Meridian Prime was installed in Meridian Township, east of East Lansing, in April 2014.

Source: [Metal Art of Timothy Higgins.](#)

The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum building on the campus of Michigan State University, is located on Grand River Avenue in East Lansing is an example of a building doubling as public art.

Source: [The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University.](#)



RESOURCES

- 1) [Association for Public Art.](#)
- 2) [Public Art – Purpose and Benefits: Exploring Strategy in the New England City of Pittsfield, MA. 2012. Pamela J. Landi. A Thesis Presented.](#)

Art Education

An enhancement in public art (see p. 1-155) should be accompanied by an expansion in art education programs involving children, adults, and families. A further goal of education programs is to stimulate a creative community that appreciates, respects, and advocates for the arts. The purpose of art education programs is to foster a creative environment where individuals can appreciate and develop a community identity through the arts.

Art education should be encouraged in public school systems and delivered collaboratively with local nonprofits, museums, and businesses. Programming should also be offered for adults searching for creative outlets of expression and awareness of the arts. Art education can focus on painting, drawing, sculpting, photography, music, drama, crafts, and public art.

Art education can take place at the following places:

- Museums,
- Libraries,
- Public schools,
- Public parks,
- Churches,
- Community centers,
- Municipal buildings,
- Farmers markets, and
- Art galleries.

The emphasis of arts education should be on developing a creative community culture that encourages the further exploration of the arts.





The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum on Grand River Avenue in East Lansing has family education and community outreach programs to engage residents in art education and activities.

Source: [Broad Art Museum Welcomes Nearly 6,000 Opening Weekend; Meets 40 Million Goal. November 13, 2012. MSUToday.](#)

Old Town in Lansing has numerous art galleries and opportunities for art education.

Source: [I Love Old Town. Old Town Commercial Association.](#)

The Grand Art Supply store in downtown Lansing sells arts supplies and activities for budding and experienced artists.

Source: [Grand Art Supply. Facebook.](#)



RESOURCES

- 1) [National Art Education Association.](#)
- 2) [University of Michigan – Art Education.](#)
- 3) [National Endowment for the Arts.](#)

Community Book Club

Book clubs are a form of community programming that seeks to bring together a large group of individuals to discuss a book (fiction or non-fiction), theme, or current event. The purpose of a book club is to stimulate conversation between individuals from diverse backgrounds around a common theme or book. Books clubs can be geared towards children, teens, and adults depending on the subject matter and titles selected for discussion.

Another purpose of book clubs is to enhance intra-community engagement through reading. The outcome is a community that is culturally educated, aware, and engaged in literacy and the arts in general.

The East Lansing Public Library has an international themed book club where novels by foreign authors are collectively read by patrons and discussed on a selected date. Book clubs generally span a month to ensure readers of all levels are able to participate. Other book club themes can include: local history, books by local authors, short stories, non-fiction, religion, mystery, science fiction, fantasy, among many others. Curious Book Shop on Grand River Avenue in East Lansing has a state-renowned collection of fantasy and science fiction titles, and has experts on the subject matter that could help lead a discussion around these themes.

Book clubs can be organized at:

- Libraries,
- Book stores, and
- Churches and community centers.





Curious Book Shop in East Lansing is located on Grand River Avenue across from Michigan State University. The store specializes in unusual used and antique books.

Source: [Curious Book Shop. Facebook.](#)

“One Book, One Community” is a joint book club with the City of East Lansing and Michigan State University.

Source: [One Book, One Community. City of East Lansing and MSU.](#)



The East Lansing Public Library has a “Books on Tap” book club that meets regularly to discuss their latest readings over adult beverages. The library also hosts an International Book Club where foreign titles are discussed.

Source: [Books on Tap. East Lansing Public Library.](#)

RESOURCES

- 1) [Simon & Schuster Builds Community: One Book, One Community. Simon & Schuster.](#)
- 2) [How to Start a Book Club. Oprah’s Book Club.](#)
- 3) [Book Club Center. Random House.](#)
- 4) [Libraries that Matter. Project for Public Spaces.](#)

Live Music

Live music can be a formal or informal type of entertainment that can take place indoors or outdoors. Live music can be a part of a festival or an isolated event at a restaurant, park, in the streets, church, or a bar.

Organized concerts encourage the gathering of residents and visitors to a particular venue while promoting local and regional artists. Live music is a collective social event that can be enjoyed by individuals of all ages.

Music festivals such as Jazz Fest and the Great Lakes Folk Festival in East Lansing attract visitors from the region and across the state and both have become annual traditions in the city.

Other local concerts like the summer bandshell concerts at Lake Lansing Park in Ingham County are weekly, seasonal, and more informal in nature. Restaurants and bars use live music as a tool to attract customers on a weekly basis.

In addition to entertainment, live music fosters a culture of arts that is important for the promotion of art education and creativity. A community should explore opportunities to partner with local middle and high schools to give choir and band students the opportunity to perform in the community. Live music from other cultures is also an opportunity to experience and learn about other parts of the world. Music is a unifying human experience that can broaden global perspectives and mindsets.

Quality of life and community interaction are enhanced when live music is incorporated into day-to-day life. Communities benefit from supporting and encouraging live music on a weekly basis and also annually as part of larger festivals.





The Ingham County Parks Department hosts summer concerts in the park at Lake Lansing Park Bandshell.

Source: [Lake Lansing Parks. Facebook.](#)

The Michigan State University Museum organizes the Great Lake Folk Festival every summer.

Source: [Great Lakes Folk Festival.](#)

East Lansing hosts the Summer Solstice Jazz Fest as part of the East Lansing Arts Festival. They also have children's concerts in the spring and summer, concerts downtown every Friday and Saturday, and live performances every Sunday throughout the summer and fall at the East Lansing Farmers Market.

Source: [Jazz Fest Lansing.](#)



RESOURCES

- 1) [Creative Placemaking Case Studies. 2010. White Paper for the Mayors' Institute on City Design. National Endowment for the Arts.](#)
- 2) [Music Cities of North America. November 12, 2009. Richard Florida. Creative Class Group.](#)
- 3) [Community Character: How Arts and Cultural Strategies Create, Reinforce, and Enhance Sense of Place. 2011. Arts and Culture Briefing Papers 03. American Planning Association.](#)

Local Arts/Crafts Festivals

The purpose of arts and crafts festivals is to promote local talent, provide entertainment for current residents, attract tourists to the area, and enhance the creative culture in a community. Festivals can be single-day events or span multiple days and can have a significant local economic impact at retail shops, hotels, and restaurants.

There are niche markets for many hobbies and activities that host various types of festivals. Festivals can include:

- Focus on cultural heritage of a community,
- Music,
- Comics,
- Books,
- Crafts,
- Renaissance festivals,
- Paintings,
- Photography,
- Sculptures,
- Antiques,
- Film, and
- Sporting events.

Festivals attract and showcase the community to tourists. Attracting visitors provide a short-term economic stimulus, boosts a community's brand and cultural identity, and increases the likelihood of converting visitors to permanent residents in the future.

Festivals foster an emotional connection with the content and community and can be regular events that expand to a regional, statewide, and possibly national scale depending on the subject matter and mass appeal.





Meridian Township hosts an Arts and Crafts Marketplace on the fourth Sunday of each month. The site is also used for weekly farmers markets, concerts, and other community gatherings.

Source: [Meridian Township. Facebook.](#)

The Michigan Antiquarian Book and Paper Show occurs twice a year in Lansing, and brings vendors and customers from all over the Midwest.

Source: [Curious Book Shop. Facebook.](#)



Renaissance festivals attract hundreds of individuals to multiple communities in Michigan every year, promoting arts and culture through the celebration of medieval times and traditions.

Source: [Michigan Renaissance Festival.](#)

RESOURCES

- 1) [The Role of the Arts and Culture in Planning Practice. 2011. Arts and Culture Briefing Papers 01. American Planning Association.](#)
- 2) [How cities Use Parks for Arts and Cultural Programs. 2005. City Parks Forum Briefing Papers 08. American Planning Association.](#)

Incorporating Arts at Farmers Markets

Farmers markets are community gathering places where residents can obtain fresh foods from local farmers. Farmers markets are gaining popularity as healthier local options for produce. As their popularity rises, the markets are expanding beyond local foods and into the realm of arts and crafts.

The goal behind the expansion is to create an all-encompassing cultural experience that highlights local food and art. The markets could expand beyond a place where goods are exchanged and into a creative place for art education, awareness, and promotion.

By attracting local artists, musicians, and craftsmen as vendors to the farmers market, the offerings at the market are enhanced to provide live music, performances, art galleries, and public art.

The Lansing City Market and the Farmers Market in Meridian Township are examples of markets that are incorporating weekly summer arts and crafts opportunities for visitors. Alternatively, in Ferndale, an old department store was permanently converted into an arts and crafts market.

The definition of a farmers market is evolving beyond the sale of local food to incorporate activities that spur creativity and enhance experiences for individuals of all ages. A farmers market can be a social hub for a community and a means to support local farmers and artists increasing the cultural capital of the community.





The Meridian Township Farmers Market is open year-round and has opportunities to incorporate arts and crafts to its offerings. During the winter months the market currently moves indoors to the nearby Meridian Mall.

Source: [Meridian Charter Township](#).

The Rust Belt Market in Ferndale, MI, converted an old department store to a year-round arts and crafts market among other things.

Source: [The Rust Belt Market. Facebook](#).

The Lansing City Market, just north of Michigan Avenue on Cedar Street, has a “Grand Art Market” each summer that provides space to local artists to display and sell their work.

Source: [Lansing City Market. Lansing Downtown](#).



RESOURCES

- 1) [Farmers Markets. Nutrition.Gov.](#)
- 2) [How to Start a Farmers' Market. March 2007. Purdue Extension.](#)
- 3) [How to Organize and Run a Successful Farmers' Market. Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Department of Agricultural Resources.](#)

Museums

Museums are places of cultural significance as they document and showcase local history and knowledge. Traditionally, museums collect, preserve, and display artifacts and historic objects and share centuries worth of knowledge. Museums are also sources of local knowledge and are vital for documenting community history. Museums are open to the public, and provide opportunities for class field trips and attracting new visitors to the community. Museums can be organized around specific topics or local personalities. They can be themed, interactive, or purely visual and feature replica artifacts or originals. Museums enhance the cultural integrity and authenticity of a community.

Traditional museums accommodate individuals of all ages. However, certain topical and educational museums can cater to specific age groups and provide year-round programming. For example, Impression 5 in Lansing (*right*) is a science museum that provides specialized classes and programming for kids and adolescents. These interactive museums are opportunities for learning and can offer after-school curriculums to complement public and private school education.

Interactive museums are particularly important in areas that experience inclement weather which limits outdoor opportunities for arts and cultural experiences.

Also, programming at museums, specifically for children and adolescents, establishes a foundation of cultural appreciation that is likely to continue throughout their lifetimes which will further perpetuate prioritizing investments in local and regional museums.





The Impression 5 museum in Lansing offers interactive activities for children.

Source: [Impression 5](#).

The MSU Museum on campus has historic and modern exhibits that rotate throughout the year.

Source: [MSU Museum. Michigan State University](#).

Museum exhibits can span sports, art, history, anthropology, and many other subjects.

Source: [Michigan State University](#).



RESOURCES

- 1) [Weaving Narratives in Museum Galleries. March 2012.](#)
- 2) [Role of Museums in Education and Cultural Tourism Development. 2012. UNESCO.](#)

FOOD AND FOOD SYSTEMS

LIVABILITY

Public health initiatives and local food movements in recent years have helped raise awareness of community sustainability and the importance of food security. Having access to fresh, nutritious options and equitable, local food systems are vital to a community's health and quality of life. Over time more towns, cities, and municipalities have started to incorporate planning practices that value and promote strong networks of food systems to combat food insecurity within the community.

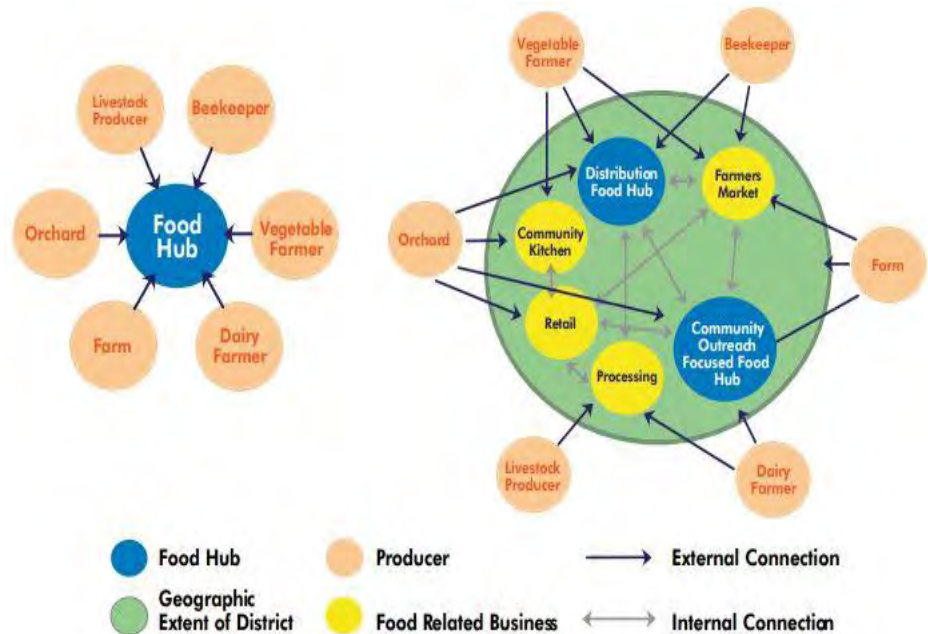
Local and regional food systems involve collaborative networks of producers, distributors, wholesalers, and consumers that comprise a food innovation district. These districts represent the food-related businesses, services, and community activities that local governments support through planning and economic development initiatives in order to promote regional food system development and greater access to local food ([Cantrell, Patty, Kathryn Colasanti, Laura Goddeeris, Sarah Lucas, Matt McCauley, Michigan State University Urban Planning Practicum 2012. Food Innovation Districts: An Economic Gardening Tool. Northwest Michigan Council of Governments. March 2013.](#)).

Such efforts reaffirm the importance of service organizations like regional food hubs and local food banks within the community. These organizations coordinate with food producers in the region and connect them with the distribution/consumer end of the food cycle to ensure food demands within a community are being met. The figure to the right illustrates the role food hubs and community food banks play in local and regional food systems.

Food innovation districts also highlight the value of urban agriculture and local gardening initiatives, and the positive health, social, cultural, and economic impacts they bring to neighborhoods and cities. The growing popularity of farm-to-table movements and mobile food trucks also aligns with this emphasis on eating fresh and locally grown food.

These various food system components are all intrinsically linked (and discussed in the techniques), and can play a key role in applying placemaking principles within food innovation districts. The graphic below illustrates this detailed system of coordinated efforts.

On the opposite page is an illustration depicting elements that provide this linkage between local food systems and community. For more information on food systems, see [MSU Extension's website](#).



[Graphic source \(this page\).](#)

Image source (opposite page): J. Cox. Overlay illustration by Na Li, Land Policy Institute, Michigan State University.



Urban Agriculture

While urban agriculture has played a role in Michigan for many years, the movement has gained further momentum across the state in the last decade. Much like the historic tales of “Pingree’s Potato Patches,” in which the famous Detroit mayor designated vacant land for food production during the Panic of 1893, cities are again looking for innovative ways to utilize urban agriculture. Many communities possess a surplus of vacant parcels and underutilized land that could be managed in new and creative ways.

However, many municipalities have little or no language in their zoning ordinance to address land uses such as community gardens or urban farms. In cities such as Flint, Detroit, Saginaw, and Pontiac, vacant parcels are adopted by nearby residents, community groups, or non-profit organizations and transformed into garden spaces. Despite the lack of adequate zoning, this do-it-yourself mentality has created vibrant, active green spaces that help improve community aesthetics, cohesiveness, and connectivity while eliminating blighted conditions. As a result, more and more municipalities are adding supplemental language to their master plan and zoning ordinance to better address community gardens and urban agriculture.

Usually the biggest challenge is whether and where to allow livestock, and which animals to allow. Poultry are most often permitted in small numbers on residential lots, roosters excluded.

By establishing clear and practical goals, objectives, and strategies within master plans that support and encourage urban agriculture initiatives, additional placemaking opportunities may be unlocked that further promote community health and sustainable local food systems.





Urbandale Farm, a part of the Lansing Urban Farm Project (LUIFP), has expanded since 2010 to cover over two acres in the Urbandale neighborhood in Lansing's Eastside. Situated on land leased from the Ingham County Land Bank, Urbandale Farm grows food for local residents, retailers, and markets while offering gardening internship and apprenticeship programs.

Source: [Lansing Urban Farm Project](#).

Food Field is a small-scale urban farm in Detroit built on abandoned school grounds in the Boston-Edison neighborhood.

Source: [Food Field Detroit](#).

Urban agriculture also involves the use of backyard chicken coops, such as this residence in Cadillac. While each municipality has their own requirements or restrictions for chicken coops on residential property, many are updating local codes and ordinances to properly address this land use within city limits.

Source: *Jerry Adams*.



RESOURCES

- 1) [Food Innovation Districts: An Economic Gardening Tool](#). March 2013. Cantrell, Patty, Kathryn Colasanti, Laura Goddeeris, Sarah Lucas, Matt McCauley, Michigan State University Urban Planning Practicum 2012. Northwest Michigan Council of Governments.
- 2) [Meet the Farm Crew](#). Lansing Urban Farm Project.
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- 4) [Good Food Access for Families and Communities: Michigan Good Food Work Group Report Series, No. 2 of 5](#). January 2011.

Community Gardens

Community gardening involves small scale urban farming on land dedicated for that purpose within a neighborhood. These garden spaces provide residents opportunities for food production, neighborhood beautification, community outreach, and educational forums on a variety of food- and health-related topics. Numerous studies have highlighted the positive health, social, cultural, and economic impacts community gardens can bring to residents and the surrounding neighborhood.

Community gardens first and foremost provide a public space for the community to share and engage together. The gardens serve as a gathering spot where ideas and techniques can be exchanged, or a meeting place to host workshops, trainings, and other community engagement events that help strengthen bonds within the neighborhood. Such uses over time contribute to a stronger, safer neighborhood with residents who are invested in their community and its well-being.

While these gardens are sometimes located on land bank properties that have been sold or leased to urban agriculture, many cities do not have language in the zoning ordinance to permit them within city boundaries. This may be problematic if residents or community groups take the initiative to clean up vacant parcels in their neighborhoods and transform them into garden spaces, despite conflicting with the current zoning. Accordingly, cities such as Grand Rapids, Flint, and Detroit have recently added content and language in their master plans and zoning ordinances that establish clear guidelines while promoting the importance of community gardening. The *Design Lansing* Master Plan includes goals, objectives, and strategies that emphasize green infrastructure and encourage urban agriculture and local food systems in community and neighborhood planning initiatives.





The Hunter Park Garden House in Lansing's Eastside neighborhood grows produce year-round for residents and volunteers to enjoy and share with the community. Built in 2008 through the Cool Cities Neighborhoods in Progress Designation, the Hunter Park Garden House was a joint project with the Allen Neighborhood Center and the City of Lansing Parks and Recreation Department.

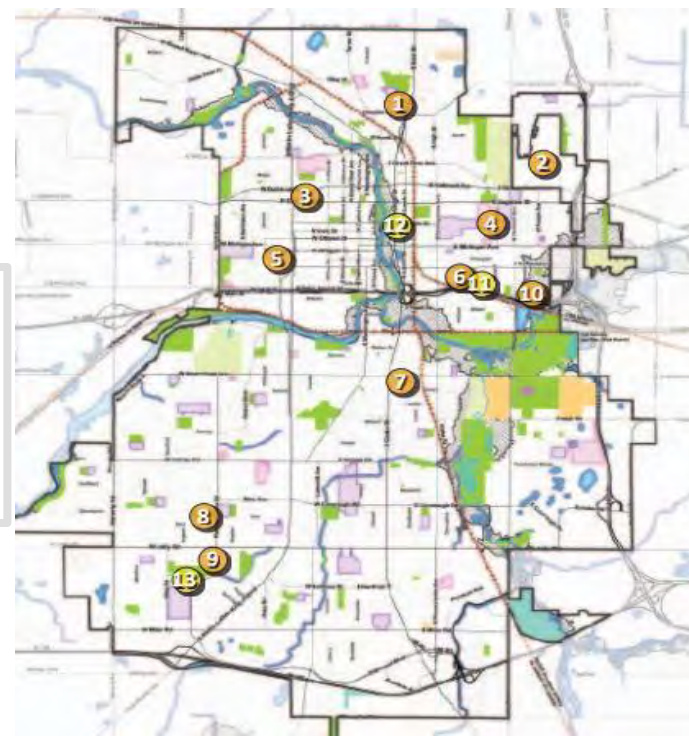
Source: Jason Cox.

The *Design Lansing* Master Plan includes an inventory of community gardens in Chapter 5: Green Infrastructure, and suggests goals and objectives that emphasize local food systems and urban agriculture.

Source: [Design Lansing: 2012 Comprehensive Plan. 2012. P. 102. City of Lansing.](#)

Local initiatives such as Edible Flint create collaborations between the community, local planners, and educators to establish a network of urban gardening to counter blighted conditions in neighborhoods around Flint.

Source: ["City Hall Joining Flint's Urban Agriculture Movement. MLive.com.](#)



RESOURCES

- 1) [Food Innovation Districts: An Economic Gardening Tool. March 2013. Cantrell, Patty, Kathryn Colasanti, Laura Goddeeris, Sarah Lucas, Matt McCauley, Michigan State University Urban Planning Practicum 2012. Northwest Michigan Council of Governments.](#)
- 2) [Community Gardening. MSU Extension.](#)
- 3) [American Community Gardening Association.](#)
- 4) [Good Food Access for Families and Communities: Michigan Good Food Work Group Report Series, No. 2 of 5. January 2011.](#)

Farmers Markets

Farmers markets represent a tradition of supporting local food systems and regional commerce by bringing the community together to share and exchange goods and produce. As a placemaking tool, these markets create active spaces that enable social and cultural exchanges. Many farmers markets locate in public spaces such as town squares or municipal building lawns, as seen with the semi-annual market held on the grounds of the State Capitol Building in Lansing. Farmers markets also promote public health initiatives by providing access to fresh and locally grown goods and produce, while supporting low-income consumers through Bridge Card, EBT machine, and double-up bucks programs.

Further positive impacts farmers markets have on the community include:

- Providing economic support to local and regional food producers,
- Enhancing local food system networks and collaborations, such as those with food banks and food hubs,
- Promoting community sustainability, diversity, and civic engagement,
- Offering public spaces for social exchanges, educational booths, creative arts, music, and public forums.

While most are designed as open air markets or a clustering of vendor tents, many farmers markets in Michigan resort to indoor facilities in the winter season to accommodate year-round food producers and their customers. Grand Rapids applied placemaking principles in the design of their new downtown farmers market to create an engaging, multi-use community space to enjoy year-round. Whatever form they may take through the shifting seasons, farmers markets provide opportunities for vibrant public spaces that are integral to the principles of placemaking and community development.





The weekly Allen Street Farmers Market in Lansing's Eastside provides fresh, locally grown food as well as cultural arts and music events to residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. The market has recently expanded to year-round services by moving inside the Allen Market Place during the winter season.

Source: [Lansing State Journal](#).

Traverse City's winter farmers market is held in the basement of a renovated historic asylum.

Source: ["The Village Indoor Farmers Market Celebrates its 5th Year." February 5, 2014. The Village: Grand Traverse Commons.](#)

The new Grand Rapids Downtown Market opened in May 2013 and provides space for up to 80 vendors to share goods and produce in the open-air market. The LEED-certified structure also features second floor office space for classes, youth workshops, and food incubator projects, along with a rooftop greenhouse.

Source: ["Grand Rapids New Downtown Market Opens to Sunshine, Crowds." MLive.com.](#)



RESOURCES

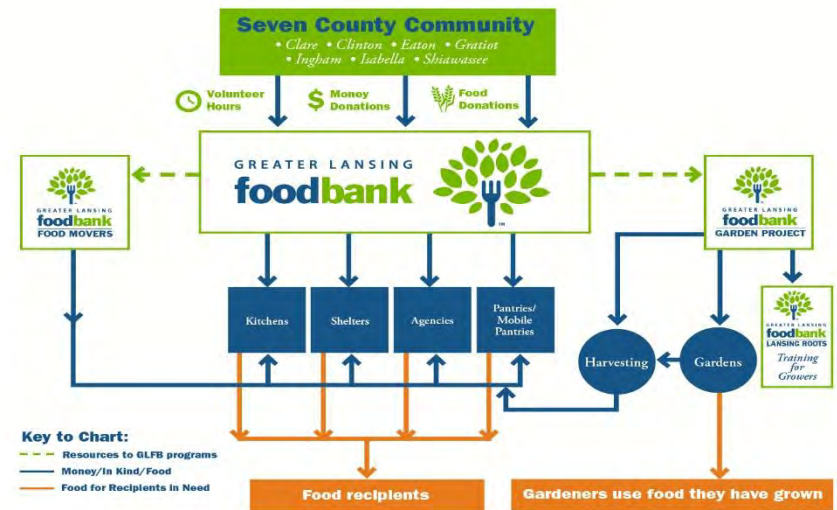
- 1) [Michigan Farmers Market Association.](#)
- 2) [Michigan Agri-Tourism Association.](#)
- 3) [Endless Bounty: The Transformative Benefits of Public Markets. Project for Public Spaces.](#)
- 4) [Food System Infrastructure: Michigan Good Food Work Group Report Series, No. 5 of 5. December 2010.](#)

Food Banks

With the growing emphasis on public health initiatives and food systems planning, issues in food security have garnered further attention and research. Food security ensures community members have proper access to adequate, nutritious foods sufficient for an active, healthy lifestyle. Areas within a city or region that have limited access to local grocers or supermarkets are described as food deserts, and are focal points in the efforts of service organizations such as food banks.

Food banks play a key role in local and regional food systems by providing support services for families and community members in need. Most food banks serve as a primary storage and distribution facility that manages inventory and processes orders for smaller entities in the region, such as food pantries, community kitchens, and shelters. Beyond combatting emergency food needs by amassing, storing, and coordinating food stocks for a city or region, food banks also foster community empowerment and self-sufficiency. Supplementary programs such as the Greater Lansing Food Bank's Garden Project addresses local food security by offering education and assistance to low-income families interested in growing their own food.

Stemming from traditional gleaning practices, food banks serve a similar function by ensuring food resources are properly dispersed and maximized to their full extent. Historically, gleaners were groups of families in need who would pass through farmlands after the prime harvest season to claim any leftover produce before it spoiled. This technique ties into the primary mission of modern day food banks in their work to ensure food surpluses are properly distributed before going to waste. Coordinating these efforts with local restaurants, event centers, or schools and universities allows a food bank to keep its pantries stocked and better prepared to meet emergency food needs in the community.





Michigan State University boasts the nation's first campus-based food bank operated by students to support other students and campus families in need. Recently celebrating its 20th birthday, the MSU Student Food Bank serves over 4,700 clients per year, and stands at the forefront of the national movement to address student food security.

Source: [Food Bank. MSUToday.](#)

Gleaners Community Food Bank coordinates food storage and distribution to southeastern Michigan communities in need, such as low-income or refugee populations.

Source: [Gleaners Community Food Bank. Gcfb.com.](#)

This diagram from the Greater Lansing Food Bank illustrates the network of relationships that help sustain the local and regional food systems supported by the food bank.

Source: [Greater Lansing Food Bank.](#)



RESOURCES

- 1) [Food Innovation Districts: An Economic Gardening Tool. March 2013. Cantrell, Patty, Kathryn Colasanti, Laura Goddeeris, Sarah Lucas, Matt McCauley, Michigan State University Urban Planning Practicum 2012. Northwest Michigan Council of Governments.](#)
- 2) [Greater Lansing Food Bank.](#)
- 3) [Food Bank Council of Michigan.](#)
- 4) [Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan.](#)
- 5) [College and University Food Bank Alliance.](#)

Food Hubs

Food hubs are businesses or organizations that facilitate the aggregation, distribution, storage, and/or marketing of source-identified food products from local and regional producers to help strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand (USDA, 2012). Food hubs coordinate supply chain logistics, and provide food producers with the related technical assistance and education involving:

- Sustainable production practices and planning;
- Packaging and branding;
- Food safety; and
- Greater access to wholesale customer opportunities.

On the opposite end, food hubs also coordinate with distributors, processors, or wholesale buyers to ensure that food production meets the market demand of the region. In this sense, food hubs play a key role in the cycle of local and regional food systems, connecting food producers with the proper networks to ensure resources are efficiently managed and distributed. Similar to organized farm cooperatives, these networks help link small and mid-sized farming operations to wholesale customers that could include local restaurants, grocers, institutional entities, such as schools or universities, and other regional distributors.

Food hubs illustrate a growing commitment to improving food access and food security within both the community and surrounding region, while encouraging greater coordination and teamwork within the food supply chain to maximize regional production and efficiency. The growing numbers of *food policy councils* in Michigan also share this mission, bringing together members of production, consumption, processing, distribution, and waste recycling sectors of the food system to coordinate and maximize their resources in an effort to create a healthy, sustainable food system for the region.





The Allen Market Place in Lansing's Eastside neighborhood expanded their operations into an adjacent warehouse to become a food hub for the Mid-Michigan region. The "Exchange" program links regional farmers to local markets, restaurants, and commercial buyers, who then come to the Allen Market Place each Wednesday to pick up their food orders.

Source: ["The Logistics of Going Local. Lansing City Pulse."](#)

Western Michigan FarmLink in Grand Rapids serves as a food hub for the surrounding region.

Source: ["West Michigan Restaurants Go Local with FarmLink." Rapid Growth."](#)

Known for its lively farmers markets every Saturday, Detroit's Eastern Market has evolved through the years into a key food hub for Southeast Michigan, and is one of the nation's oldest publicly-owned wholesale-retail markets.

Source: ["Improving Detroit Neighborhoods through Placemaking and the Power of 10. Project for Public Spaces."](#)



RESOURCES

- 1) [Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network. MSU Center for Regional Food Systems.](#)
- 2) [Regional Food Hub Resource Guide. April 2012. USDA.](#)
- 3) [Michigan Food Policy Council.](#)
- 4) [Greater Lansing Food Systems Workgroup.](#)

Farm-to-Table

With the growing emphasis on community sustainability and regional food systems, access to fresh produce and locally made goods are in greater demand than ever before. Initiatives such as the Healthy Communities movement recognize the importance of sustainable local food systems and the positive impacts they can have on a community's health and vitality. The farm-to-table movement plays a key role in this regard by providing a linkage between regional food producers and local consumers. Having direct access to fresh, locally grown ingredients encourages healthier diets, while raising awareness about local and regional food systems. Farm-to-table practices can be applied in various aspects of the community:

- Restaurants, cafes and food trucks;
- Farmers markets, local grocers and produce stands; and
- Public schools, universities and hospitals.

The farm-to-table movement also promotes community investment and sustainable food practices that provide economic support to food producers within the region. More and more, consumers are choosing fresh, local options in their meals and recipes over produce shipped in mass quantities from hundreds of miles away. These farm-to-table options decrease consumer dependence on the wholesale produce found in chain supermarkets, and create standards for quality ingredients that support local farmers and food systems. This increasing awareness of the nutritional, economic, and social benefits of locally sourced goods will only continue to further the farm-to-table movement and its positive impacts on the community.





The Purple Carrot, Michigan's first Farm-to-Truck food stand, serves unique and locally sourced recipes in various areas of East Lansing and Okemos. The popular food truck also opened Red Haven, a fine dining restaurant near MSU's campus that features fresh meats, seafood, and produce from farms in the surrounding region.

Source: ["Food Trucks are on the Move in Michigan." MSU Extension.](#)

Fork in the Road in west Lansing displays a list of the many food producers in the region they rely upon regularly to keep their kitchen stocked with fresh food.

Source: [Dine Michigan. DineMichigan.com/Lansing.](#)

Since 1976, Café Cortina in Farmington Hills has used its on-site garden to provide the majority of the herbs, tomatoes, and other produce needed for their authentic Italian recipes.

Source: [Café Cortina's Second Generation Continues Family Tradition. Farmington Hills Patch.](#)



RESOURCES

- 1) [Michigan Farm to Institution Network: 20% by 2020.](#)
- 2) [Growing Michigan's Future: A Guide to Marketing your Michigan Food and Agriculture Products. Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. 2012.](#)
- 3) [Michigan Farm to School. MSU Center for Regional Food Systems.](#)

Food Trucks

Placemaking principles emphasize activating public space through a vibrant mixture of uses. The rise in popularity of mobile food trucks aligns with these ideals through the colorful activity they bring to a downtown or community space. As a result, more and more Michigan communities are embracing food trucks in their parks and downtowns.

The amount of time and capital involved in starting a restaurant operation have led many to assess mobile food trucks as a more practical option to begin their culinary endeavors. While some cities already have zoning regulations in place to address such uses, other municipalities are working with mobile vendors to establish guidelines that will allow these placemaking opportunities to occur. The potential benefits food trucks bring to the community include the following economic, social, and cultural impacts:

- Low cost start-ups encourages entrepreneurial creativity, makes eventual transition to a permanent location more feasible;
- Promotes entrepreneurial creativity, stimulates business activity and further innovation in the surrounding area;
- Utilizes vacant space, fills gaps in parcels with social capital opportunities and improved safety from the increased activity in the area;
- Introduces fresh, new food options to a locale with limited food services or restaurants to choose from;
- Offers a variety of cultural and exotic food options previously unavailable in the community; and
- More direct access to locally sourced food and more personal relationships between food truck owners and patrons emphasize community sustainability.





Lansing's El Oasis food trailer, located along Michigan Avenue, has offered authentic Mexican cuisine year-round to both nearby residents and passersby for almost a decade.

Source: [The State News](#).

Dia De Los Tacos in Marquette was one of 8 food trucks statewide awarded grant funding through MEDC's Mobile Cuisine Start-Up Program.

Source: [Mobile Food News](#).

Mark's Carts in Ann Arbor is a dedicated lot where food trucks come together in a common public space to form a 'trailer park' food court of dining options. These user-friendly and engaging areas create opportunities for social capital while patrons enjoy and share their favorite food selections.

Source: [The Ann Arbor News](#).



RESOURCES

- 1) [Food Cartology: Rethinking Urban Spaces as People Places](#). Urban Vitality Group.
- 2) [Michigan Municipal League Case Study-Mark's Carts. 2013](#).
- 3) [Food on Wheels: Best Practices for Integrating Food Trucks into City Life](#). National League of Cities.
- 4) [Food Trucks: Transcending from Utilitarian to Epicurean](#). APA MI.