

Executive Summary

Durand, Michigan is a historic railroad city in mid-Michigan located at the intersection of two rail lines. This project focused on promoting growth and expanding opportunity in the downtown, including its small town feel and iconic Durand Union Station building (The Depot). The city has already made strides in making the downtown streetscape welcoming and interesting. By offering a variety of dining and commercial options, as well as special annual community events, the downtown brings in residents and visitors. By assessing the strengths of downtown and seeing what challenges the city still faces, the Practicum Team has created a report that emphasizes how Durand can foster a more consistent and vibrant downtown.

The overall goal of planning and development efforts in this report are to promote a cohesive downtown area that draws new businesses in and supports existing businesses. Improving the physical downtown space, promoting of the downtown to residents and visitors, and connecting the downtown assets to other parts of the city is vital in ensuring the long-term viability of revitalization efforts.

In order to understand the steps necessary to reach these goals, the practicum team compiled and analyzed data regarding the existing conditions in the City of Durand and in the downtown area specifically. This background information on the current state of the downtown informed the recommendations on attracting and retaining viable uses in downtown structures.

Based on the assessment and analysis of Downtown Durand, the following conditions were realized:

Assets:

- The events that Durand currently hosts are well run and unify the community.
- Durand has plentiful examples of buildings with historic charm.
- Previous downtown revitalization efforts have made sections of the streetscape enjoyable for pedestrians to explore the downtown.

Challenges:

- Durand has had trouble getting new volunteers to take over established community events or start new ones.
- Vacancies are common in the downtown area and many structures show signs of decay or damage.
- Durand lacks a unified visual identity in its downtown.
- Durand lacks some essential businesses for a complete downtown.
- The railroad tracks running through the city act as a barrier between the downtown and the historic Depot building.

Recommendations:

Downtown Durand has great potential to become a more dynamic downtown. The following three thematic recommendation categories have been established based on the existing conditions of the community

Placemaking- Encourage the development of public spaces to promote healthy and happy lifestyles, while capitalizing on the community's existing assets.

- Promote and maintain design standards consistent with the city's historical character.
- Further develop a city marketing and tourism strategy with regional coordination.
- Increase amount of public green space in the downtown project area.
- Promote Durand's railroad heritage, including the use of the Durand Union Station (Depot).

Revitalization- Attract businesses to Durand that will draw people downtown and reinvigorate the local economy.

- Carry out Durand's Master Plan goal of mixed use development to combat vacancies and blight.
- Attract businesses to the downtown area by bringing in missing retail, community facilities, and/or recreational opportunities to serve as destination businesses.
- Host additional public events in Downtown Durand.

Connectivity- Connect people to the downtown area to increase pedestrian and economic activity.

- Improve corridors and overall city connectivity into the downtown by focusing on beautification and infrastructural efforts for walking and biking routes.
- Improve physical and visual connections between areas of the city divided from downtown by the train tracks.
- Capitalize on existing transportation infrastructure.