



February 19, 2016

Mayor Donald D. Lyons
City Council Members

Dear Mayor Lyons and City Council Members:

Next meeting: City Council Meeting, Monday 2/22, 2016

The following report has been prepared to provide you with an update on current issues or projects in progress:

Economic Development

Earlier this week, a citizen stopped by to have a conversation about efforts on economic development, job creation, and business development. This was a timely conversation because over the past several weeks the City's Facebook page has featured some of the businesses in Dowagiac that are hiring and those posts have been among the highest read each week. This is a good indicator that area businesses are doing ok. Among those hiring have been Borgess-Lee Memorial, Southwestern Michigan College, Lyons Industries, Family, Fair, Whiteman & Associates, Dowagiac Schools, and Elwood Staffing's job fair.

You can find the City's Facebook page here <https://www.facebook.com/dowagiacmichigan/>

Also, in her annual report DDA Director Vickie Phillipson reported 11 new businesses held ribbon cuttings in the downtown district.

Also, City Council and department heads held their annual retreat at the Business Center of Southwest Michigan (formerly National Copper building). Brian DeLong of The Business Center of Southwest Michigan took the teams on a guided tour of the 14 acre facility. During their walk, they had a chance to meet some of the 20 business owners and approximately 50 employees who have made the Business Center their own incubator and launch center.

Even though economic development activities are not always highlighted in these reports, it is important to note that efforts are continuous by the City of Dowagiac.

2015 Staff Reports

As we continue to share portions of reports from City department heads from the February 6' retreat – the following is a report from Vickie Phillips on DDA and Chamber activities from 2015.

Facade Incentive Program

With Mayor and Council reinstating the DDA's Facade Incentive & Design Services Program, in 2015 we saw a continued effort by property owners to renovate the exterior of their downtown storefronts.

For this current round of funding, administered on a matching-funds basis, building owners are eligible to receive an incentive of up to \$2,000 for the front renovation of their building. Owners of twin or double storefronts are eligible to receive up to \$3,000.

Program guidelines encourage property owners to renovate the exterior of their building as close as possible to what the structure may have looked like, when it was built. Turn-of-the-century storefronts should represent a full renovation, including removal of non-conforming materials. The facade program, which was initiated by the DDA during the late-1980s, is credited with having led to the removal of much of the old Kawneer metal storefronts and awnings, as 95 percent of our storefronts have been renovated.

Business recruitment remains a top priority. Staff maintains a database of available properties and stands ready to assist in the location and negotiation of rental space, and the sale of property.

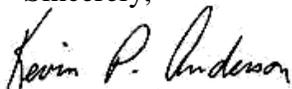
With less than a hand full of open spaces, DDA takes pride in making the right fit between client and properties.

Charter Amendment

At the conclusion of the Dowagiac City Council Meeting on Monday, February 22, 2016 time will be set aside for a discussion about the proposed Charter Amendment that is on the March 8, 2016 ballot that asks the community to decide whether or not the position of City Clerk should remain an elected position or become an appointed position in the City of Dowagiac's administration.

During this time questions will be received and addressed and the public will be free to share comments, concerns, and support or non-support. City officials are looking forward to continuing efforts to share information with voters on this ballot question.

Sincerely,


Kevin Anderson
City Manager

Dec 3 2015

New businesses demonstrate downtown's continual growth

While the thermometers make their expected decline as we head deeper in the winter months, the buzz and activity around Front Street is heating up.

On Tuesday, local pastry chef extraordinaire Jordan Anderson celebrated the opening of the long-awaited storefront bakery, The Baker's Rhapsody, located next to Dowagiac IT3 and The Hairitage near the intersection of Front and Commercial streets. The new eatery offers a dining experience similar to popular coffee houses, with customers purchasing their choice of freshly baked breads, breakfast pastries, cookies, cakes and more, along with a cup of coffee and other hot beverages.

The bakery is the first of a pair of downtown openings being celebrated by the Greater Dowagiac Chamber of Commerce this week.

On Wednesday, members of the organization officially welcomed Fair's Gun 'n Gear into the central business district. The gun store, owned by Eric Fair and several of his brothers,

opened for business on Nov. 18. It is located next to Sew Can You sewing school on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Both new businesses have generated their fair share of buzz before and following their openings. Posts about the two establishments on Facebook have received hundreds of likes, with many people commenting that they'd love to visit the stores when they get a chance.

Others have commented how great it is to see these types of businesses return to their hometown.

As 2015 comes to a close, we want to reflect on what a tremendous year it's been in terms of growth on and around Front Street. In the past 12 months, a number of new businesses have opened or relocated to Dowagiac's downtown — which offer everything from dog grooming, like Bow Wow Bakery & Bath to tradable cards, like Radiant Rogue Games, to a place to view unique pieces of art, like Art enah Suit.

These new establishments have added some diversity to the al-

ready strong offerings located in the area, and have already started attracting a new set of eyes (and wallets) to the city. For a place that was already a great location to eat, shop and live, these new businesses will ensure our beautiful downtown continues to grow and thrive in the years ahead.

We want to congratulate Anderson, Fair and the other owners who have taken the plunge this year with the opening of the stores, and we wish them luck in the years ahead. We also want to thank the members of the Dowagiac chamber and business community who continue to court new entrepreneurs into town and work to create an environment for continuing growth.

With the planned opening of the new Round Oak Revisited in the months to come, we're optimistic downtown is due for another banner year in 2016.

Opinions expressed are those of the editorial board consisting of Publisher Michael Caldwell and editors Ambrosia Neldon, Craig Hauptert, Ted Yoakum and Scott Novak.