

# RAP Application: Placemaking Improvements - Connections at Valley Court Park

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## Applicant's Profile

tfehren@cityofeastlansing.com

## ADMIN FIELDS

## Changes Requested

# Michigan Economic Development Corporation

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## Revitalization and Placemaking Program (RAP)

The Revitalization and Placemaking Program (RAP) is an incentive program that will proactively deploy \$100 million in American Rescue Plan funding to address the COVID-19 impacts in Michigan communities through rehabilitation of vacant, underutilized, blighted, and historic structures and the development of permanent place-based infrastructure associated with traditional downtowns, social-zones, outdoor dining and placed-based public spaces. Administered by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) on behalf of the Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF), this tool provides access to real estate development gap financing in the form of grants between \$500,000 and \$5 million per project for real estate rehabilitation and development, grants between \$500,000 and \$1 million for public space place-based infrastructure per project, and grants between \$500,000 and up to \$20 million to local or regional partners who develop a subgrant program.

Per federal program guidelines, all Revitalization and Placemaking (RAP) funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024, and must be expended by December 31, 2026, therefore project readiness is an essential part of this application. The American Rescue Plan Act requires that the payments from the Fiscal Recovery Fund only be used to cover expenses that respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency or its negative economic impacts, therefore qualification of the project and the ability to report both project spending and performance in compliance with federal regulations must be demonstrated for an application to be selected for MSF consideration. Each recipient should review program requirements, including Treasury's [Final Rule Overview](#) and [Final Rule](#) to determine if their proposed project includes eligible uses of State and Local Federal Relief Funds (SLFRF funds). Each recipient must develop and implement effective internal controls to ensure that funding decisions under the SLFRF award and RAP award constitute eligible uses of funds, and document determinations. Each recipient will also be required to register with SAM.gov to obtain a Unique Entity ID (UEI) number after their application is accepted for MSF consideration.

### There are three categories of awards within this application:

1. Real estate rehabilitation awards to be applied to vacant, underutilized, blighted or historic buildings;
2. Public space place-based infrastructure awards for a single project in a traditional downtown; and
3. Coordinated subgrant awards for organizations who intend to implement a coordinated re-granting program to support more than one real estate rehabilitation and/or public space place-based project within their region or community.

Each applicant should apply for only **one** award category outlined above. More information is outlined in the [Revitalization & Placemaking Program Guidelines](#). All projects in each category will be scored against other projects in their specific category. Top scoring applications from all categories will be evaluated against each other to determine which combination of the top scoring applications will most effectively accomplish geographic distribution and also address the program goals below:

- Deploy federal American Rescue Plan funding to support investments that will create the environment necessary to attract and retain talent, add new housing options, enable business creation and attraction, and provide resources for Michigan citizens and communities.
- Help local governments avoid budget crises, retain current residents, and enhance downtown vitality.

To help ensure broad geographic distribution across all Michigan regions and in both rural and urban communities, less responsive proposals may be prioritized in some instances so long as the proposal meets programmatic requirements.

Award amounts may be adjusted to a lesser amount than what is requested based on project underwriting or as determined appropriate by the MSF prior to award approval.

Applications or individual projects may be disqualified for any of the following reasons:

- Failure to demonstrate how the project meets federal qualification requirements in compliance with the [Final Rule Overview](#).

- Failure to align with RAP Program Guidelines or other MSF requirements.
- Failure to demonstrate the development team’s capacity to successfully implement the project.
- Failure to show that the project(s) can be completed before December 31, 2026.
- Insufficient evidence that the proposed project with the requested award is financially viable.
- Failure to provide all required attachments.
- If the project includes a housing element, failure to include attainable units and a plan for income verification and monitoring.
- If the project is in the Public Space Place Based Infrastructure, it will be disqualified if it is not located in or directly supporting a traditional downtown.
- If the project includes explicitly ineligible elements such as construction of a convention center, stadium or other large capital project intended for general economic development or to aid impacted industries (see [Final Rule Overview](#) page 31 and Final Rule Page 200).
- Projects must be related and reasonably proportional to the negative impact that were experienced by those who will benefit from the project. Uses of funds that bear no relation or are grossly disproportionate to the negative impacts experienced will be disqualified.

**Which category of award are you applying for:**

Public Space Place-Based Infrastructure

**Project/Program Name**

Placemaking Improvements - Connections at Valley Court Park

**Applicant Entity Legal Name**

City of East Lansing

**Employer Identification Number (EIN)**

38-6004674

**Applicant Address**

410 Abbot Road

**Address 2**

**City**

East Lansing

**State**

Michigan

**Zip**

48823

**Project Qualifications**

Scoring, 24 points are possible, and less than 20 points will be considered failure to demonstrate how the project meets federal qualification requirements, thus disqualifying the project from further review. All projects must be responsive to the negative public health and/or economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and must fit within and provide reporting for one expenditure category. The RAP Program is anticipated to have projects that align with the qualifications and enumerated uses allowed per the [Final Rule Overview](#) related to the following expenditure categories.

12 points if the response states how the project qualifies within the expenditure category, how it fits in an Enumerated Use (from the Final Rule Overview or from the SLFRF Compliance and Reporting Guidance) or is responsive to the Framework for Uses Beyond those Enumerated per the Final Rule Overview and how it also aligns with the RAP program. 10 points if one is not fully responsive, 8 points if two of the three are not responsive and, zero points if qualification is uncertain.

**Please select one expenditure category and respond to the question that follows it.**

Strong Healthy Communities: Neighborhood Features that Promote Health and Safety

**Describe if the project will benefit households or communities that are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic in compliance with federal guidance and in alignment with the RAP program (See Final Rule Overview pages 19 and 20 for guidance on disproportionately impacted communities and eligibility of investments in neighborhoods to promote improved health outcomes, which is further detailed on pages 129 to 137 of the Final Rule).**

The East Lansing Farmers Market already provides much needed access to fresh food and other farm products, especially to those that are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including low-income households, households residing in the project Qualifying Census Tract (or other QCTs in the area), and provides much needed and affordable nutrition and food security through our participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women Infants and Children (WIC), Bridge Cards, and other programs. However, it must be noted that due to limitations with our physical infrastructure, the Farmers market is only able to operate in East Lansing from June through October. This project will make it possible for the market to expand both its footprint as well as its ability to serve its customers throughout the year. This will tremendously improve access to healthy, fresh food, and other farm products, especially to those people who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, as described above.

While improving the market's ability to reach those most impacted by the pandemic, the project will have many synergistic benefits as well. For instance, a larger Farmers Market sustained throughout the year will also make it possible for the City to highlight our programs and to facilitate access to our partners such as community service organizations, grant funders, health care providers, local schools, and other service providers by providing space for direct services, educational materials and support to the communities most impacted by the pandemic. As an example, when a family is updating their information at our SNAP booth, they could also become aware of our CDBG-funded program to repair their home or learn about our affordable housing programs, meet with the local healthcare system to learn more about their healthcare programs and funding assistance available, and learn about our programs to assist with mortgage, rent, and/or utility assistance. They might also learn about opportunities to launch a business or find out about local job opportunities.

Further, the public infrastructure improvements anticipated as part of this project will significantly improve our ability to produce additional recreational opportunities for people throughout our community. We envision a broad array of programming and events that would be possible through this enhancement. With our City's strategic priority in alignment with our Master Plan to develop programs and events geared at providing access and opportunities intentionally inclusive of underserved communities and promoting health and wellness, we are certain that the activities that this new public space infrastructure would make possible will promote improved health and related outcomes for these communities most affected by the pandemic.

Qualified Census Tract can be determined [here](#).

**Specifically identify if the project takes place in a Qualified Census Tract. See link above.**

The entire project area is within a Qualified Census Tract.

The RAP program is designed for projects that include Capital Expenditures (see page 207 of the [Final Rule](#) for the definition of Capital Expenditure). Capital expenditures of \$1 million or greater are required to submit written justification by answering the following questions (see pages 30 and 31 of the [Final Rule Overview](#)). Please respond to the following questions. If your Capital Expenditure is below \$1 million, no justification is required and you can simply state: Capital Expenditure is less than \$1 million.

Scoring, 10 points total for acceptable responses to the following three questions, 8 points for acceptable responses to two questions with only one response needing more information and zero points otherwise.

**Please provide a description of the pandemic-related harm or need to be addressed and why the harm was exacerbated or caused by the public health emergency. Recipients may provide quantitative information on the extent and the type of harm, such as the number of individuals or entities affected.**

The pandemic, and the necessary responses had an extremely deleterious effect on our downtown. Michigan State University Students left town. Other residents avoided downtown altogether. Businesses had to follow health regulations to close and/or significantly reduce occupancy. Employees were sent home. Parks community programming was cancelled. Community Centers were vacated. These activities, although necessary to respond to the public health emergency, harmed the economic, social fabric, and health of our community, especially for the many low income people who relied on the mostly service-based jobs in our local economy and/or access to our community and social services, nutritional food, and other critical elements. As the pandemic emergency continued, these harms continued and were exacerbated.

The City looked for ways to safely help provide access for folks in need of critical assistance including, food, and community resources while also helping business community survive. We quickly learned that creating new or utilizing existing outdoor spaces that allow for people to safely gather, shop, dine, and recreate was doubly positive – it could help people feel less isolated and provide amenities, services, and access to products while also allowing the businesses access to direly needed customers and revenues.

The Farmers Market can see 30,000 visitors in a season and is the only regional market open on Sundays. During the pandemic, the market has seen increasing use of SNAP benefits, and has piloted Power of Produce to further encourage healthy approaches to food for young people.

The proposed project will allow us to make permanent many of the concepts and programs piloted in response to the pandemic, and thereby address some of the systemic harms which were present prior to, but exacerbated by the public health emergency.

**Provide an explanation of why a capital expenditure is appropriate. For example, recipients should include an explanation of why existing equipment and facilities, or policy changes or additional funding to pertinent programs or services, would be inadequate to address the economic harm caused by COVID 19.**

The needs we have require capital expenditure –new infrastructure to support systems to reach more people, over more frequent time frames, and make community connections.

Enhancing our 5 acre park, with a focus on creating new infrastructure to support our Farmers Market and make intentional connections to downtown is appropriate for many reasons. The Farmers Market venue and surrounding project area was inadequately sized even prior to the pandemic. Further, based on its “pop-up” nature, it is only able to be produced from June-October and for only one day per week.

The lack of storage facilities or bathrooms in/near the park has also been a significant barrier to community participation, production of events, programs, and other recreational opportunities. These upgrades will allow us to enhance existing events while making new events and programs possible for generations to come.

This expenditure will enable our community to create a permanent place – for safe gathering, access to healthy foods, and in support of healthful activities, while also bringing customers within our downtown, creating opportunities for our merchants, restaurants, and service providers to capture more business.

**Provide a comparison of proposed capital project against at least two alternative capital expenditures and demonstration of why the proposed capital expenditure is superior. Recipients should consider the effectiveness of the capital expenditure in addressing the harm identified and the expected total cost (including pre-development costs) against at least two alternative capital expenditures.**

The City has explored two alternative capital expenditures to address the public health, social, and economic impacts of the pandemic on our community as outlined above by creating a safe space for a farm market and related community programming similar to what is proposed herein. The first was to utilize the M.A.C. subterranean garage for this purpose, as was piloted during the winter of 2020. The second was to create a similar market at another existing park (namely, Patriarche Park). Ultimately, it was clear that installing the appropriate infrastructure at Valley Court Park was the superior option for numerous reasons. In terms of the redevelopment/ utilization of a garage – although our pilot project was considered a success – the physical limitations were numerous – limiting the number of merchants and customers who could participate, and thus the access to fresh produce and farm products was limited. Further, due to the singular purpose that a parking garage is designed for (parking), redevelopment/ redesign to accommodate the amenities necessary for overall success in addressing the impacts from the pandemic are extremely difficult from a design standpoint, and costly from a construction standpoint. Also, it would be unlikely that that portion of the garage would be able to be utilized for parking during non-event times, which would reduce the amount of parking available downtown, and thereby further reduce access. Further, a number of other logistical problems are naturally present. For instance, access is restricted to a small number of patrons, people with disabilities must rely on the elevators to access the market, vendors must cart products a long distance and set up takes quite a long time. Installing the infrastructure at Patriarche Park, north of our downtown district, was also considered. Although it was more favorably viewed than the use of our parking structure, and costs would be similar to our final proposal, it was also inferior to the preferred option for numerous reasons. Firstly, although nearby, the park is not directly adjacent to or within the downtown district. Therefore, we expect that visitors to the infrastructure would be less likely to bring add-on business to the downtown merchants who need more customers to recover from the effects of the pandemic. Further, the park itself is essentially fully utilized. Therefore, in order to create space for this new purpose, some other current use would need to be supplanted. Although the proposed infrastructure would be expected to bring additional activation to the park on a net basis, the replacement of current community engagement through existing uses is not preferred to an new venue that will not diminish from current recreational options for our community. Therefore, the proposed capital project is the superior option.

## **Background Information**

Scoring, 4 points with one point for each complete and concise response.

### **Describe the proposed project.**

This public infrastructure project will install a permanent pavilion with public restrooms, storage, and other infrastructure to enhance Valley Court park in our downtown for farmers markets, events, performances, and other programming. An existing playground will be re-located in closer proximity to the space's active, public areas and will be designed as a completely accessible playground to better serve a broader range of children and families. The project will also make an intentional connection to our greater downtown through key pedestrian scale infrastructure such as new sidewalks and crosswalks, lighting, public art, green infrastructure, and café seating. Lastly, a blighted historic property located at the park will be renovated for current reuse to support events and other park activation and to maintain its integrity for future rehabilitation.

### **Provide a map with your application that clearly identifies where the improvements will be made and what types of building uses, and public spaces are around the proposed investment.**

A map has been provided that clearly identifies where the improvements will be made, and the types of land uses around the proposed investment.

### **What is the total cost of your proposed Capital Expenditure?**

The project is anticipated to cost a total of \$2,502,562

### **Required attachment: local support recommendation letter**

Local Orgs Support Recommendation Letters.pdf

### **Required attachment: Place-Based proforma (Template available on website)**

RAP.Placed-based.Proforma\_City of East Lansing.xlsm

### **Required attachment: preliminary or final design documents**

Plan Documents - VCP RAP Grant - Final.pdf

**Required attachment: before photo**

VCP [Before] Photo.jpg

**Required attachment: aerial photo**

VCP Aerial 2.jpg

**Required attachment: construction cost estimates**

Probable Costs.pdf

**Required attachment: evidence of funding commitments**

Certification of Funds - DDA and COEL - Final.pdf

**Required attachment: project map**

Context Plan.pdf

## **Project Readiness and Programmatic Considerations**

Scoring, 72 points possible

**Describe the status of the project including status of construction drawings, cost estimates?**

The project scope has been finalized. It was discussed at public meetings with ample opportunities for public input including the Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee, East Lansing Downtown Development Authority, and the City Council. Preliminary design drawings have been created, and costs have been estimated by our architectural and engineering partners, which are provided herein. Pending the award of the grant, we are ready to facilitate next steps to bring the project to fruition immediately.

**Describe any property acquisition or easements that are necessary for this project to move forward?**

As confirmed by recent property title and other related research, the City has site control over the project area and will not need to acquire property or obtain easements for the project to move forward.

**Provide and describe how the project will benefit nearby businesses and attach any support letter(s) from adjacent or nearby businesses or property owners?**

The project area is within our Downtown Development Authority and Principal Shopping districts, directly adjacent to several businesses, and one block away from the epicenter of our downtown. The permanent enhancements envisioned as part of this project will create a year-round venue for the people-generating activities of all varieties. This sense of place will attract people – who will bring demand for products, services, and amenities. This will help nearby businesses who can capture that demand. Growing the market may also provide opportunities for new businesses to make investments in nearby properties. A 1.08 Acre site owned by the DDA is adjacent and currently being marketed as a significant redevelopment opportunity. Letters of support are attached outlining the benefits as perceived directly by adjacent businesses and property owners including 1) MSU Federal Credit Union, who is developing a 7-story branch and office building adjacent to the project area, 2) Convexity who owns the mixed use building recently developed including "The Abbot" Apartments and ground floor retail, 3) the Graduate Hotel, a 194-key hotel also recently developed and adjacent to the project area, and 4) Crunchy's East Lansing, a long standing local favorite restaurant adjacent to the project area.

**Please explain the project schedule and how the projects will be completed before December 31 of 2026, as funds need to be expended by that date.**

Upon notification of award, the City would diligently pursue the completion of this project. A conservative timeline has been included below with major milestones and dates and expenditures, which we are confident can be achieved, assuming an award notification date of August 1, 2022.

Submit Proposal Friday, June 3, 2022

Proposal award notification August 1, 2022

Council approve grant agreement August 16, 2022

Council approve Consultant Services Contract September 20, 2022

Design development October 2022 - December 2022 (estimated expenditure: \$50,000)

Construction plans development January 2023 - February 2023 (estimated expenditure: \$200,000)

Bidding and Contract Award March - May 2023

Construction begins June 2023

Construction completion December 2023 (estimated additional expenditure, June-December: \$2,035,000)

Pavilion Soft Opening January 2024

Farm Market Pavilion Grand Opening March 2024

**Explain the applicant's project team's level of similar project-specific experience, including any previous projects requiring construction monitoring and federal reporting that have been undertaken and the status of those projects.**

The City of East Lansing manages multiple design and construction projects every year. These range from \$100,000 sidewalk projects to \$32,000,000 Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF) improvements project. All the City construction projects greater than \$20,000 require the contractor to pay prevailing wages to their workers. In contracts with federal funding such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) or Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF), Davis-Bacon requirements are included. The City has extensive experience administering design and construction project that utilize federal, state and local funding.

The City has utilized CWSRF low interest loan financing for utility improvement projects around the City and at the WRRF. These are 20-year loans facilitated by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). The Water Infrastructure Financing Section (WIFS) of the Finance Division (FD) continues to serve as EGLE's program administrator for the CWSRF. EGLE and the Michigan Financial Authority (MFA) jointly administer the CWSRF under the authority of Part 53, Clean Water Assistance, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, as amended (NREPA), and the Shared Credit Ratings Act, 1985 PA 227, as amended. The state also conducts its CWSRF in a manner consistent with requirements established in the federal Water Pollution Control Act (P.L. 92-500, as amended). EGLE staff work closely with City staff to ensure the Davis-Bacon requirements are met. A Davis-Bacon Act Compliance Certification Form is required to be executed by City prior to any loan disbursements containing construction costs being reimbursed. Congress directed that projects receiving CWSRF financing after January 17, 2014, comply with American Iron and Steel (AIS) provisions unless the project was provided a waiver from EPA. The EGLE office works with the City to ensure that AIS requirements are being met.

Since 2015, the City has utilized over \$123 million in grant funding for the following projects.

- WRRF Ultraviolet and Tertiary Filter Improvements - \$15,143,276
  - o Completed December of 2016
- WRRF Headworks & Grit Removal Improvements Project - \$27,315,000
  - o Substantially complete fall 2021
- WRRF Solids Handling Improvement and Digestion Project - \$33,457,732
  - o Scheduled to be completed in summer of 2022
- Michigan Avenue and Harrison Road Sewer Improvements Project - \$10,641,224
  - o Completed December of 2020
- Woodingham Pump Station Replacement Project - \$5,692,256
  - o Completed July of 2020
- WRRF Clarifier and Aeration Improvements Project - \$30,861,000
  - o Scheduled to be completed October of 2023

Within this same timeframe, the City has utilized over \$800,000 of grant funding from CDBG allocations to repair and replace sidewalks throughout the CBDG boundary in the City of East Lansing. These projects were administered by City staff and wage rate interviews are completed to verify the Davis-Bacon requirements are being met.

In addition to the CWSRF and CDBG projects, the City administers approximately 5 major infrastructure projects every year to resurface local and major roadways, remove and replace water mains and sewers, and sidewalk repairs. It should be noted that these projects have been completed with no significant findings or exceptions regarding reporting requirements.

**Identify and provide evidence for other sources of funds for this project, including the type and amount of local financial support received for this project.**

The East Lansing Downtown Development Authority has allocated \$100,000 from it's project development fund in support of this matching grant. A letter is provided as to the allocation and certification of funds available.

The City of East Lansing has identified funds available from it's general fund and several other non-RAP or MSF-supported sources and has provided a letter certifying the availability of funds. If this project is approved, the City expects to also explore additional grant and other funding sources to install a solar array on the pavilion, which is desired but not able to be included at this juncture due to funding and timing limitations.

**How has the use of public space in the area changed during the pandemic and how will this project have a positive long-term impact on the community? Please address how it will grow the tax base, activate vacant or underutilized space, and contribute to the resiliency of the community?**

Due to the pandemic, the need to use public spaces has expanded and intensified in several important areas. Firstly, the need for people to be able to gather safely to meet others and reduce isolation was met in public spaces. Further, connecting people to



contact-free products, services, and amenities was possible by thinking differently about how public spaces could be used. Through several pilot programs, the City has encouraged these activities as a way to help make community connections, allow for people to have safe access to necessary products and services, while also helping businesses to survive the impacts of the pandemic.

Making the improvements envisioned as part of this project will be a permanent galvanization of our outdoor placemaking efforts – both acknowledging that these types of efforts will need to occur long-term to support public health and our economy, and supporting the development of continued programs, events, and amenities that continue to attract people to safely enjoy. It will dramatically increase the use of the underutilized downtown park space through the additional programming, events, and other activities which will be produced using the new infrastructure. It will also rehabilitate a blighted historic building and activate it for use in supporting events and programming at the pavilion.

It is the continued attraction of people – of all walks of life- to our downtown that is the essential component of our strategy here. In bringing people together safely, we will recover from the negative public health impacts caused by the pandemic such as the effects of social isolation and reduced access to essential services and products. More people at Valley Court Park mean more customers within a quarter-mile walking distance from 74 retail, restaurants, hospitality, and other service businesses. That equates to more opportunity for existing businesses, and more likelihood that new investors will see opportunities to start new businesses by activating privately owned properties and underutilized spaces. It will make nearby redevelopment opportunities more attractive, and increase the likelihood that they will be successfully redeveloped. This new activity will grow the tax base, which will allow for additional essential public services and programming to grow. This virtuous cycle would be catalyzed by this project.

Further, these new ideas about the use of public space has inspired thinking about new ways for small businesses and entrepreneurs to enter our market. This project, through its attraction of people and physical assets, will help us to ideate ways for small format merchants to enter or test the market with limited costs, further expanding the types of products, services, and amenities in our marketplace.

Through this collective expansion and diversification of our market, and the new focus on leveraging public spaces, we will be more inclusive and resilient.

In terms of environmental resiliency, the proposed new Farmers Market development and rehabilitation of the existing historic building at Valley Court Park include several environmentally sensitive solutions. The following list summarizes the proposed components or systems and their intended benefits:

- New bioswales – stormwater management (infiltrate, cleanse, and recharge groundwater reducing loads to existing storm sewers and streams)
- New native plantings – Water conservation and reduction of turfgrass/mowing. Increased biodiversity of plant species and pollinators
- New tree planting – Increased urban tree canopy, reduction in urban heat island, and increase in stormwater management through root uptake
- New standing seam metal roofing systems – Recycled content/reduced maintenance
- New LED light fixtures controlled by occupancy sensors – Energy conservation
- New low-flow plumbing fixtures with hands-free controls – Water conservation
- New on-demand tankless water heaters – Energy conservation

In addition to the inclusion of these new items in the design, the reuse of the existing historic building and basketball court is itself an environmentally friendly approach to the project, limiting the quantity of demolished materials that would end up in landfills. Finally, all new site features will meet universal design requirements:

- No steps or ramps. All routes shall be less than 5% longitudinal with maximum 1.8% cross slopes
- All walks to be minimum of 6' wide and clear of obstructions
- All seating shall include space at each end for companion seating
- Fully accessible playground

The City of East Lansing has adopted a 100% Clean Energy Policy, and, as a result, has recently converted another local park to solar energy. While LED fixtures are called out above, the potential for solar panels will be explored for this project and will be given priority consideration.

**Describe how your project contributes to the community's vision and priorities as laid out in the local master plan, capital improvements plan and/or economic development strategy or other locally adopted plan that addresses COVID response and community resiliency.**

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the area surrounding Valley Court Park, known as the "Park District Planning Area" was the subject of numerous planning efforts and redevelopment attempts. With the support of the MEDC and other critical partners, a significant amount of private redevelopment has taken place since 2017, including a 12-story mixed use building including apartments and retail ("the Abbot"), a 10-story hotel (the Graduate), a redesign of motorized and non-motorized connectivity between the park and the rest of downtown, and significant underground utility improvements and capacity upgrades. A 1.08 Acre adjacent site purchased in 2009 by the DDA is being cleared, cleaned, and prepped as it is marketed for redevelopment. These projects were made possible through the vision of our community as expressed through our Master Plan, Parks, Recreation Open Space and Greenways Plan (Parks Plan) , and related strategies. An approval of this project would be a major step forward in realizing the City's vision as illuminated in those documents.

With this and other significant densification of our urban core, the contiguous 5 acre park and open space has provided green space so important to health and well being of communities, both pre and post pandemic. However, with the effects of Covid-19 and our knowledge of the importance of utilizing public spaces to address the health and economic impacts of the pandemic, the plans to activate the underutilized park are even more important. It should also be noted that beyond this 5 acre park, we have very limited public spaces in our downtown.

This project is squarely aligned with our Master Plan ([www.cityofeastlansing.com/masterplan](http://www.cityofeastlansing.com/masterplan)), Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenways Plan (Parks Plan) ([https://cityofeastlansing.com/DocumentCenter/View/8870/Draft-2020-PROSG-Plan\\_10-18-19-PDF](https://cityofeastlansing.com/DocumentCenter/View/8870/Draft-2020-PROSG-Plan_10-18-19-PDF)), Economic Development Strategy (<https://www.cityofeastlansing.com/DocumentCenter/View/7887/Economic-Development-Strategic-Plan-2019-PDF?bidId=>), and other local plans in numerous ways. It should be noted that all of these plans had multiple opportunities for public input, which was considered as the plans were developed and ultimately approved.

A primary goal of our Master Plan is to "Capitalize on and strengthen citizen assets". Specifically, the plan calls out the need to create "a space to house a year-round farmers market that encourages and provides year-round local and fresh food access" (page 53). This goal is squarely addressed through our current proposed project, as the infrastructure installation would provide the ability to expand the farmers market and other activities throughout the year.

Further, the Master Plan seeks to "create a direct connection between... the farmers market and the [now redeveloped] properties between Grand River Avenue and Valley Court Park". This vision would also be realized by the infrastructure improvements in our project grant proposal.

In terms of the Parks Plan (see pages 71-73), the project squarely aligns with 5 of the stated goals and objectives to 1) Ensure a safe and accessible park system; 2) Maintain and improve existing parkland and facilities; 3) Promote healthy lifestyles; 4) Provide connections between parks, neighborhoods and community facilities; and 5) Use and re-purpose public spaces, parks and placemaking to support the identity and brand that represents East Lansing. Further, the City considers it a priority project as it clearly would fit into two of our stated focus areas: 1) provide accessible and inclusive programs and facilities and 2) provide programs and projects that serve to connect people and facilities, and to bring people together.

Our updated Economic Development Strategic Plan

(<https://cityofeastlansing.civicweb.net/document/77803/Discussion%20of%20the%20updates%20to%20the%20Economic%20Dev el.pdf?handle=01A86267972A4E07AC3C310978BC6EFB>) discussed recently by the City Council and expected to be adopted on June 7, 2022, has several elements that are directly addressed through our proposed project, Most notably are under Goal 1.2 under our Inclusive Economic Development Practices Focus Area, which states: "In partnership with [Parks, Recreation, and Arts department] and other partners, support the design and production of inclusive, diverse, and frequent programming, including community and cultural events, to welcome community members of all ages and backgrounds to the Community." and Goal 1.4 of the Economic Development Strategic Plan is to "Foster an inclusive and diverse local economy that supports entrepreneurship and increases economic opportunities for broad participation." This project will support opportunities for entrepreneurship and increase economic opportunities for more people to participate in our local economy with an increase in vending space and inclusive programming, as well as Goal 2.4 under our Placemaking Focus Area, which states "In partnership with [Parks, Recreation, and Arts and the Department of Public Works] and other partners, to support the redevelopment and transformation of underutilized public spaces into interesting and unique public places that offer a wide range of seating options, are conducive to hosting community activities, incorporate all forms of the arts, and provide attractive amenities for an enhanced visitor experience. Although there are certainly relevant connections to be made with the existing Economic Development Strategy, the City thought it best to reference the updated strategy as being most related to current City perspective and policy and developed over the last year, largely in response to the pandemic.

This project would clearly hit these targets by providing a transformation of a critical portion of our downtown urban park through key infrastructure and placemaking amenities that would support the farmers market, and a host of other community events and programming aligned with our inclusionary focus. This focus will produce outcomes towards responding to the effects of the covid pandemic with a focus on those populations most affected. These outcomes will make the community more resilient.

**How will this project be maintained long-term? Identify maintenance plan, funding, the organization that will be responsible, and elaborate on any other anticipated tasks associated with the maintenance of the final product.**

Staff from the City of East Lansing will provide regular maintenance to the pavilion and surrounding areas, funded through the City's general fund.

Proposed Farmers Market Restroom and Pavilion Maintenance Program 2022

Division Activity - Frequency	Annual Staff Hrs	Cost
Parks Restroom Cleaning-Full Time Staff Daily	180	\$8,902.00
Parks Restroom Cleaning-Seasonal Staff Daily	120	\$2,160.00
Parks Pavilion Cleaning-Full Time Staff Daily	180	\$8,902.00
Parks Pavilion Cleaning-Seasonal Staff Daily	120	\$2,160.00
Parks Cleaning Supplies		\$1,800.00
Total		\$23,924.00

These estimates are based on maintenance costs from similar facilities, anticipating year-round use of the facility with heavier use during warmer weather months. Please note that as a 5 acre park space, this site already receives snow removal, landscape maintenance, and other maintenance from City of East Lansing Staff funded through the City's general fund in parks maintenance. The above costs reflect the additional estimated costs of maintenance costs specific to the increased uses of the park.

**How will this public space be programmed for use by businesses, for recreation, and accessibility for all? Identify how the space will be used, by whom, and how Universal Design will be incorporated throughout the entire project.**

The Farmers Market will be run weekly by our dedicated staff, who tenant the spaces through our annual open solicitation process - ensuring equitable access by all qualified vendors while also ensuring that the mix of fresh produce and other farm products is as expansive as possible. This project will allow for expansion of the market to run more than once per week and for longer portions of the year.

Events and other programming are hosted by our Parks, Recreation, and Arts staff on a seasonal and ongoing basis. The infrastructure will allow us to enhance these existing events in numerous and important ways, including expanding seasons and further expanding programming opportunities and collaborative engagements. Because we have these economies in place, the City will be able to absorb additional incremental costs through our annual budget.

Other activations made possible through infrastructure installed as part of this project will allow for an array of different uses - from seasonal events and vendors, events featuring East Lansing and/or local products and businesses, events featuring or including local food trucks, and opportunities for small-format and low-cost access to our market for folks trying out a new small business or testing our market. These events will be produced in partnership - involving City Staff from multiple departments and divisions including Parks, Recreation, and Arts, Community & Economic Development, and Public Works. It is anticipated that the DDA and LDFA would also have interest in producing events that benefit the business district and promote entrepreneurship.

Although we always plan our events and spaces with Universal Access in mind, this project will include Universal Design features throughout. The Park itself is fully accessible, and recent upgrades to non-motorized connectivity have significantly improved access to the park for people with mobility issues. The improvements envisioned in this infrastructure upgrade will be barrier free, and allow for a flexibility of uses that ensure that people of all walks of life can participate.

## Tie Breaker Questions

These responses will not be scored but will be used to evaluate equally scored Real Estate Rehabilitation Project applications against one another and to determine which combination of top scoring applications from all categories most effectively accomplish RAP program goals.

**Are the project benefits broad reaching? In other words, the project qualifies because it is addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on a specific group, but will the overall benefits of the project impact multiple groups within your community?**

The benefits of this project will be very broad reaching for our community. The Valley Court Area has recently experienced significant growth. Located near the heart of Downtown East Lansing, the Valley Court Park District Area, where the City's Farmers Market is located, is experiencing a renaissance of redevelopment activity. The City recently completed a streets and infrastructure project, vastly improving the pedestrian, bike, and auto connections to the east of Abbot, and increasing capacity for future redevelopment to occur. Surrounding connections and other public property encompass the area. The increased opportunities for community involvement and participation welcome to all.

The East Lansing Farmers Market began in Valley Court in 2009 with the goal of providing East Lansing with access to fresh local produce. The market exclusively features vendors who make, grow, or add value to products locally. The market currently exists as a temporary, one day per week operation on a basketball court/parking lot. Vendors provide temporary tent structures for their limited space set ups. The development of a permanent structure will expand vendor and community participation and provide year-round infrastructure for market development and entrepreneurship. This permanent, public infrastructure would additionally serve as an opportunity for hosting classes, events, community gatherings- increasing access and participation to an even larger audience. This public infrastructure project to better utilize our 5-acre downtown park as a place to gather, participate in community, and for small business owners to provide customers access to healthy food, products, and activities will directly benefit the broader community, especially people and businesses that have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The mission of the market is to support local business and provide the greater community with opportunities for engagement, education and food. In addition, to supporting food assistance access, the market serves as an entrepreneurial avenue for small, local business. The market provides low to moderate income opportunities for access to fresh food that our market provides. East Lansing Farmers Market supports access to the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP/EBT), Double up Food Buck (DUFEB) grant match, Senior Project Fresh, and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Project fresh. Usage of food assistance dollars doubled in 2021 compared to 2020. However, all community members and visitors will have access to the benefits catalyzed by this project.

The City's expressed commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion broadens the reach of this project within our community, as well. Our Farmers Market Manager, Karla Forestt-Hewitt, recently collaborated with the Farmers Market Coalition on the development of the Anti-Racist Farmers Market Toolkit, which is being implemented in East Lansing's Farmers Market, as well as markets across the country. The Valley Court area has recently experienced significant growth. The City understands that an effort to enhance the opportunities for programming, gathering, and enjoyment within the park and surrounding areas is likely to be successful for building community for generations to come.

Please attach up to five letters of support that are not also included above.

**Letter of support**

Letter of Support - MSUFCU.pdf

**Do you have a second letter of support?**

Yes

**Second letter of support**

Letter of Support- Convexity.pdf

**Do you have a third letter of support?**

Yes

**Third letter of support**

Letter of Support - Graduate Hotel.pdf

**Do you have a fourth letter of support?**

Yes

**Fourth letter of support**

Letter of Support - Crunchy's.pdf

**Do you have a fifth letter of support?**

Yes

**Fifth letter of support**

Letter of Support - LEAP.pdf

Please provide a summary response (no more than 500 words total) to the following questions.

**How does the project support investments that will create the environment necessary to attract and retain talent, add new housing options, enable business creation and attraction, and provide resources for Michigan citizens and communities?**

This project is squarely aligned with our attempts to address multiple challenges facing our economic and community development efforts.

We know that talented people have options available in terms of where they choose to work, and which community they decide to call home. The quality of a place in terms of recreational and service amenities, public services, and the “cool” factor are all critical factors in the decision-making process. The City of East Lansing is the home to Michigan State University, so we’ve never had a problem attracting talented people – in fact they come here from all around the world. However, many view East Lansing as a place to come for a college degree and then move out into the “real” world- often landing their first job opportunity far away. Further, although our housing market is strong overall due to many students having access to the means to pay high rents per-bed, the pressure this puts on our market also drives prices up. Most developers, therefore, will target high end projects, leaving less options for those of limited means to access housing in East Lansing.

Our community development strategy involves several initiatives aimed at addressing our challenge to retain talented people locally and to provide attainability into our housing market for those starting out or otherwise facing economic difficulties. As a place-based strategy, we focus first on providing the quality of place, activities, and infrastructure. This project is a critical component of that effort. It will activate our downtown park, providing direct and indirect economic opportunities for individuals and businesses, and community access to the amenities and services they provide. This activation through the farmers market and multiple envisioned programs and activities will draw more people downtown, and therefore more customers for downtown businesses. The vibrancy created by this initiative will thereby help to attract businesses and entrepreneurs who want to develop their businesses and create job opportunities in a place they know a talented workforce will want to be. If our grant application is funded by the MEDC, this synergistic cycle will be catalyzed through this public infrastructure/ placemaking project.

**How does the project help local governments avoid budget crises, retain current residents, and enhance downtown vitality?**

Our local government relies on a healthy downtown economy and the tax revenues it generates to sustain the budget necessary to continue providing quality community services. The economic crises experienced over the last several decades have resulted in loss in tax revenue, stagnating revenue growth, and ultimately our City was required to respond with budget cuts including reduced staffing and service levels. Since 2018, East Lansing (especially downtown) has seen several transformational redevelopments come to fruition – thanks in no small part to the support of the MEDC. This project will help bring the transformation forward into the new, post- Covid-19 economy in a number of ways – all of which are focused on creative placemaking and inclusionary programming. By creating a welcoming space, activated by a regular farm market and myriad other flexible uses, we are certain that a popular park will become the center of gravity for our downtown – attracting people from all walks of life to experience community together. That is the type of magnetism we need for downtown East Lansing. There is no doubt that such a place will draw people. It will help us retain current residents (and attract new residents) looking for more activities to do. It will provide opportunities for people to test or enter our marketplace with limited barriers. Investors will see the vibrancy and want to participate. A broader mix of businesses and types of businesses can be supported. Our downtown will be more diverse and therefore more resilient to future economic fluctuations. The City’s budget, too, will be more resilient, as new tax revenues created by these activities will increase our ability to provide the services and programming necessary to keep our downtown vital and keep the positive cycle of place-talent-business in motion.

**Average Review Score**

96.00

## Applicant Profile: tfehren@cityofeastlansing.com

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**First Name**

Thomas

**Last Name**

Fehrenbach

**Email Address**

tfehren@cityofeastlansing.com

**Phone Number**

5173196887

**Which award category are you applying for?**

Public Space Place-Based Infrastructure Project

**What is the total amount of funding requested for this project?**

\$1,000,000

**County**

Ingham

**User Login**

tfehren@cityofeastlansing.com