

MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE
CONVENTION2022

MUSKEGON, MI

OCT 19-21, 2022

#MMLCONV

Western Market Chalets

Ann Meisch, City Clerk and Jamie Pesch, Planner for the City of Muskegon

How did we get here?

- Downtown Muskegon's history reflects the past half-century of retail
- In the 1970s, Urban Renewal replaced the historic downtown with a new enclosed shopping mall
- The premier shopping destination in Muskegon County, the Mall was not a failure...



Muskegon Mall

- ...until it was, after competition from a new suburban mall in a neighboring municipality led to its closure in 2001 – after only 25 years in operation
- A conglomerate of local interests (DMDC) purchased the closed Mall, demolished it, and began searching for a developer



Where do we go from here?

The scene was eerily similar to that of 30 years prior, but with far less certainty for redevelopment



Western Market: the idea

- Fast forward through 15 more years of slow but steady progress to late 2016
 - Traditional downtown street grid rebuilt along with a handful of new buildings
 - Farmers market moved to a central downtown location
 - Interest in the urban core beginning to show
- Ongoing goals included:
 - Address a lack of downtown retail
 - Activate vacant lots
 - Provide low-cost start-up opportunities for local businesses
 - Attract and retain visitors to downtown



The Man, The Myth, The Legend

Western Market: the idea

- Western Market was originally slated as a project at the beach
- Red tape, environmental constraints, and a tight schedule prompted a change in location



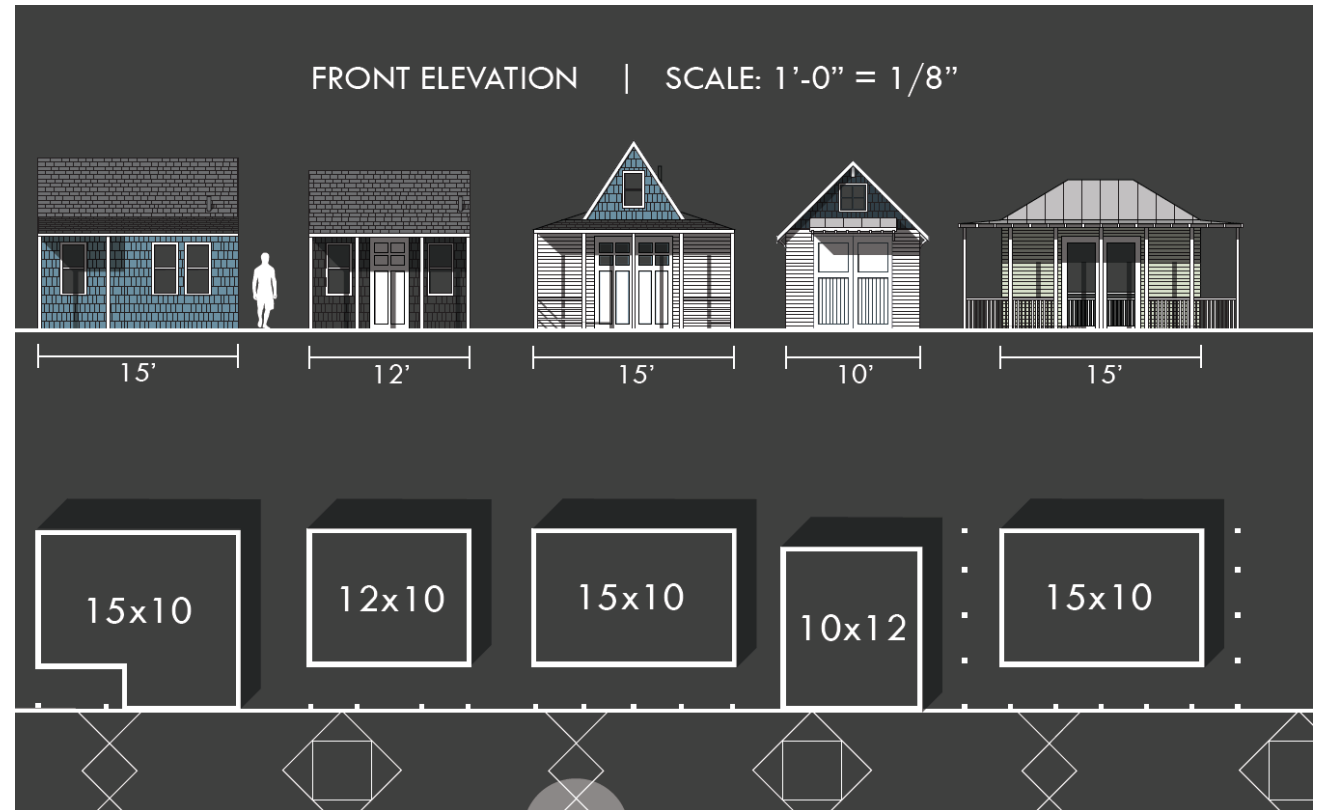
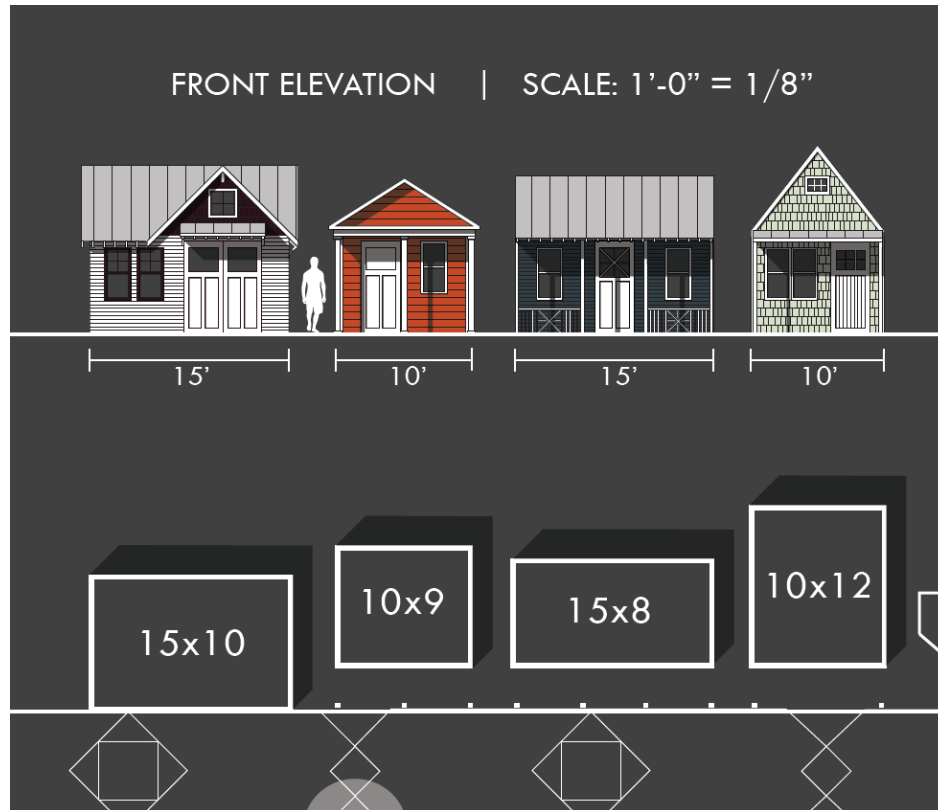
Western Market: the site

- A vacant lot downtown was identified
- Property owned by DMDC (a partner on the project)
- Currently on the market, could be sold at any time
- Connects existing businesses and the farmers market
- 329' fronting Western Avenue



How it started

Our Planning Department intern at the time was asked to create drawings of sheds



How it started

The City Clerk was told there would be sheds left on a vacant lot one block from the farmers market and was asked to “keep an eye on them”

To: Frank Peterson; Ann Meisch
Subject: Pop-up shops....

I have one retailer interested in renting a pop up shop. It was the first business I mentioned it to. So I want nail down hours and rental rates before I mention it to anyone else.

Here are my ideas. John Riegler (cheese lady) said he would help us on this part.

Minimum Required hours for low and high season -

Low Season - May 1 – June 30, August 15–October 30 - OPEN - Thursday, Friday, Saturday 11:00 to 6 pm

High Season - July 1 – August 14, plus all cruise ship and festival days - OPEN- **SEVEN DAYS A WEEK** – 11:00 to 6 pm

Pop up renter contract **requires scheduled hours above as minimum hours open**. Shops can be open any days and times in addition to minimum requirements as weather permits.

How about \$1500 *annually*? But they must sign on for these hours. That is the trade off this great price.

10 Application preferences given to

- Arts, crafts, jewelry and fashion accessories (3)
- Specialty gifts (candles, dishes, decorating items etc) (3)
- Sporting goods/outdoor wear (1)
- Package Michigan Made Foods (2)
- Clothing (1)
- Music, games, kid stuff and Books (1)
- Muskegon/Michigan souvenirs (1)

Your thoughts? I want to help start marketing these ASAP.

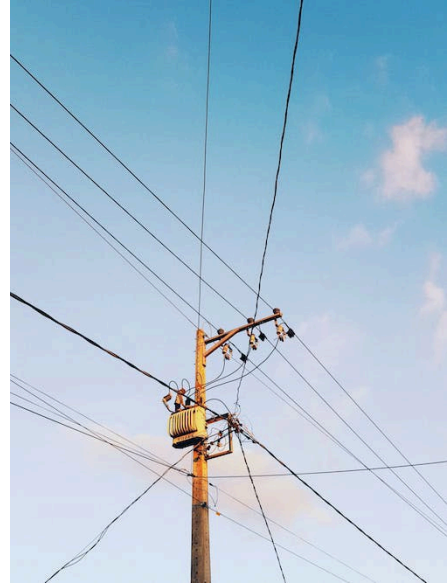


Five-month project checklist

- Build 12 chalets (building started in January with opening day set for late May)
- Create an application process
- Create a lease agreement and set rates
- Find vendors
- Create policies and procedures
- Build a website and social media presence

Obstacles

- Electricity
- Water
- Restrooms
- Heat
- Air conditioning
- Perception



THE COMMENT SECTION

- Welcome to Sunnyvale Trailer Park!
- What a Waste! Is This A Joke???
- ...no one takes Muskegon seriously because of ideas like this.
- Don't most people call those tool sheds
- ...those in charge are going to make Muskegon a laughing stock among cities along the lake shore! We need real buildings, real shops, real business owners...
- Waste of money and not thought out enough to make a difference
- Dumb, cheap to build and expensive to use.
- Well that's a cheap way to cover a sand lot

SHEDS become *Chalets*

A simple name change between the first press coverage and the second was, surprisingly, enough to stop most of the criticism



Application

[Microsoft Word - 2022 application.docx \(muskegon-mi.gov\)](#)

Ask for a fee with the application so the potential vendor has “skin in the game”.

Require a business plan. It can be very simple. You want to make sure the vendor has realistic expectations.

Put a deadline in place.

Require photos and let them know there will be a committee that will be reviewing their application to decide if they are chosen.

Put the dates and hours the vendor is expected to be open.

If pop ups are different size, give them an option to select their first choice, second, etc.

Agreement

[Microsoft Word - 2022agreement.docx \(muskegon-mi.gov\)](#)

State the length of the agreement.

Require a security deposit.

We require \$1,000,000 General Liability Insurance

We do not allow sublets without permission.

We allow three days off before charging a daily fee for absences. Attendance is important!

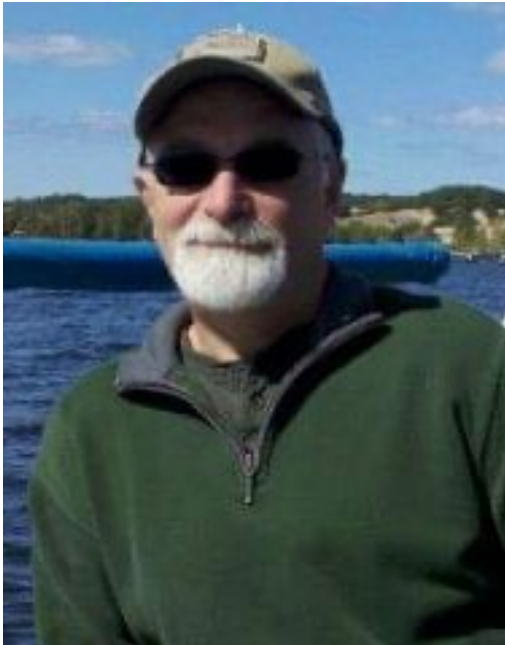
We allow no additional signage than what we provide.

We only allow white paint or natural inside with the exception of trim.

We charge \$50 extra for each additional appliance that will be plugged in.

Our builder

A City employee built 13 chalets with limited help, and four prefab units were purchased and finished on-site



Tim the Builder



Winner of the 2018 Strongest Town contest

“99% of places I go to, this is beneath them. And because it’s beneath them, they lose all this energy, all this place, all this vitality. You’ve humbled yourself to see success that other places don’t see...you’ve created a culture of people, entrepreneurs, and energy that I don’t think you’d give up now if you had the chance.”

- Chuck Marohn, President, Strong Towns





A scalable project

- Within the first year, the Western Market was covered in at least 14 different publications (that we know of)
- One of four finalists in MML's statewide Community Excellence Awards in 2018
- Officially hosted representatives from 10+ Michigan municipalities, as well as groups from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Idaho, Tennessee, Missouri, and North Carolina
- Similar projects include:
 - Batavia Boardwalk Shops, Batavia, IL
 - Berwyn Shops: A Homegrown Project, Berwyn, IL
 - Village Pop-Up Shops, Walloon Lake Village, MI
 - Tionesta Market Village, Tionesta, PA
 - Artisan Market, Montague, MI

Lessons learned

- Have an anchor or connect popular destinations
 - The Muskegon Farmers Market draws between 10,000-12,000 people every summer Saturday, vacant lots do not
- Design variety, but a cohesive appearance
 - Vendor survey informed the design of five chalets added in 2018
- Inviting storefronts – build for people
 - Glass doors and windows are inviting and encourage window shopping
- Complementary businesses
 - Mix of established and new businesses
 - Not everyone can sell jewelry and t-shirts
 - Food brings return customers
 - Empower vendors to create events and promote themselves
- Establish a selection committee for choosing vendors

What we wish we had and/or could have done differently

- Electricity
- Water
- Permanent restrooms
- Heat and insulation



Next steps

- Businesses have graduated to true brick and mortar spaces!
- There's still a gap in downtown retail
 - Existing locations are few
 - Can new developments house small businesses?
 - Rents are still high
- Providing the next step
 - The 500 sqft storefront
 - Incremental development
 - Market rate rent targeted for \$800/mo.





Questions?

THANK YOU!



M M L
CONV
2022

#MMLCONV | convention.mml.org