

# Michigan Vacant Property Campaign

Site Visit Report: Hillsdale, Michigan

March, 2016



michigan municipal league  
Better Communities. Better Michigan.

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## A. Introduction

The Michigan Vacant Property Campaign (MVPC) exists to efficiently and effectively meet the needs of leaders in the state who are committed to turning the vacant properties in their communities into assets. MVPC is a collaboration between four organizations with unique expertise related to vacant property issues: the Center for Community Progress, Community Economic Development Association of Michigan, Michigan Municipal League, and Michigan Community Resources. Created to develop a statewide network of practice and expertise, MVPC assists small, rural, suburban, and metropolitan areas. MVPC's core activities are to provide education and outreach, community and partner technical assistance, local campaign formation and policy and systems development.

In working with a community, the role of MVPC is to learn about the challenges related to vacant and abandoned properties facing that community and to identify potential strategies, programming and resources that may be effective in addressing those challenges. This report provides an overview of the challenges that the residents and leaders of Hillsdale shared with MVPC during a recent site visit and the potential strategies, programming and resources that the team identified for the Hillsdale community during that site visit. MVPC also recommends the City review the [Michigan Blight Elimination Guidebook](#) for assistance handling vacant, abandoned, and problem properties.

## B. Methodology

On March 8, 2016, MVPC conducted a site visit in Hillsdale, Michigan. MVPC was invited to Hillsdale as a part of a program announced by Governor Snyder's office in the fall of 2015, Rising Tide. Sponsored by the Michigan Department of Talent and Economic Development, this program will provide communities with the tools they need to design and build a solid planning, zoning and economic development foundation to attract new businesses and help existing employers to grow. Communities were chosen based on a series of economic factors including unemployment rates, poverty levels, vacancy rates, high renter occupancy and labor participation rates. The site visit and report are being integrated into the coordinated strategy for economic development and, among other things, will specifically address the issue of high vacancy and renter occupancy rates. The site visit was hosted by Mary Wolfram, Contractual Economic Development Director for Hillsdale, and Allen Beeker, Zoning Administrator for the City.

The site visit included a tour of the city and stakeholder interviews to obtain an understanding of the issues facing Hillsdale with respect to vacant, abandoned, and problem properties. The following individuals participated in the site visit on behalf of MVPC and its constituent members:

- Sarah Craft, Michigan Municipal League (MML)
- Marilyn Crowley, Collaborative Community Development, Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
- Sam Butler, Michigan Community Resources (MCR)

- Julie Hales Smith, Michigan Vacant Property Campaign (MVPC)
- Payton Heins, Center for Community Progress (CCP)
- Jamie Schriener Hooper, Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM)

MVPC committee members toured the downtown and several neighborhoods in Hillsdale and conducted a series of meetings with community stakeholders including City staff, business owners, nonprofit leaders, elected officials, community group leaders, and representatives from the school district, Historic Society, realtors and economic development entities (Tax Increment Financing Authority (TIFA), Hillsdale Business Association, Chamber of Commerce, and Economic Development Partnership of Hillsdale County). The objectives of the site visit were to:

- Solicit feedback from city stakeholders as to the city's blight and vacancy issues;
- Identify through stakeholder discussions what vacant property and blight remediation efforts are taking place throughout the Hillsdale community;
- Identify partners and networks, both current and potential, willing to work on vacant property and blight issues; and
- Compile information and recommendations in a report that can serve as the initial groundwork for a blight elimination strategy.

Each small group was asked to consider and answer the following questions:

- What are the biggest vacant property challenges in the community?
- What current strategies are being implemented to address vacant property?
- What is the city doing, or what can the city better do, to address vacant property?
- Who are the primary stakeholders in the community working on vacant property issues?
- If you could have one thing to improve your community, what would it be?

## **C. Observations**

### **Background**

There were 8,164 people in the City of Hillsdale according to the 2012 US Census. Between 1960 and 2000, the city grew by just 7.9%, or an average annual rate of 0.2%. Hillsdale County population data shows a much higher annual rate suggesting a trend of suburbanization away from the city to outlying areas. Also in 2012, there were 3,456 housing units, with the rate of renter occupied units at 46.20%<sup>1</sup>. It is estimated that 63.2% of the housing units in the city were built prior to 1960. Because major repairs and improvements are often very costly, older housing is at greater risk of decline. The overall residential and commercial vacancy rate is 7%. There are approximately 50 industrial facilities located within the city or having a Hillsdale zip code. Many of these are either vacant or underutilized.

### **Feedback:**

The MVPC partners were very impressed with the small group attendance – both quantity and quality. Each of the groupings was very well represented by enthusiastic, forthright stakeholders. This demonstrates an active understanding of the importance of community engagement and provides a solid foundation for implementation of recommendations.

Throughout the site visit, stakeholders and government officials agreed that a top blight and vacancy issue is slumlord and/or speculator property owners who do little or nothing to maintain (or in the case of vacancy, fill) their properties. This problem exists both in the downtown and the neighborhoods and has ramifications for attracting additional investment, as well as quality of life for current residents. The lack of workforce or lower to middle income housing was also explored, highlighting the difficulty in attracting young families and skilled workers for the many new industries moving to the Industrial Park just on the outskirts of the city. Due to its location, Hillsdale cannot be a “bedroom” community to a larger urban area with ready jobs. It must, in part, build on and/or create its own jobs and businesses.

**Six key themes emerged from the discussions that occurred during the site visit, which this report will work to address:**

1. There is a lack of collaboration and development-focused strategic planning among local government, anchor institutions, and community groups;
2. Many residential properties are expensive for owners and new buyers to maintain, leading to blight and poor property maintenance and few options for lower income residents;
3. Many landlords and investors are disengaged from the community and don't have resources available, or don't choose, to update/maintain their properties;
4. Hillsdale has an abundance of vacancy downtown, in both commercial and residential spaces;
5. There are vacant, underutilized, or blighted industrial properties in some Hillsdale neighborhoods, lowering property values and challenging the community's sense of place;
6. Although the City has made great progress on code enforcement and clean-up initiatives, some further improvements may be necessary.

**Entities Currently Working on Blight Elimination**

Representatives and stakeholders identified the following entities that are currently working on blight elimination in Hillsdale:

Entity	Activity
City of Hillsdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recently updated Master Plan</li> <li>● Routinely reports top blighted properties and their owners before city council</li> <li>● New leadership and staff at City level; increased effectiveness due to more focus on code enforcement</li> <li>● Successfully have sought grants to eliminate blight from multiple state agencies</li> <li>● Part of Redevelopment Ready Communities program to help streamline redevelopment policies and processes</li> </ul>

A Few Good Men, Hillsdale College Chapter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Nonprofit community service organization made up of volunteer college students</li> <li>● Neighborhood clean ups, assist elderly/disabled residents, raking, mentoring</li> </ul>
Hillsdale TIFA Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Updated 2015 TIFA plan</li> <li>● Façade Improvement Program</li> <li>● Façade repair/rehabilitation projects (reimbursement of up to 50% of eligible expenses is available per property up to a maximum grant award of \$10,000, maximum of \$2,000 of grant funds may be used for signage)</li> <li>● Exterior paint only projects (reimbursement of up to 75% of eligible expenses is available per property up to a maximum grant award of \$3,000).</li> <li>● A minimum grant award of \$1,000 applies except for projects submitted under the exterior paint only portion of the program</li> </ul>
Hillsdale Rotary Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sandy Beach improvement, with over \$200,000 invested in beach and beach house</li> </ul>
Men with Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Housing rehab/fix up/paint</li> <li>● Build handicap access ramps</li> </ul>
100 Women Who Care, Hillsdale Chapter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A group of over 100 women who get together four times a year to help local charities, non-profits and worthy causes, each contributing \$100</li> </ul>
Jackson, Hillsdale, Lenawee Community Action Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Weatherization grants</li> <li>● Foreclosure prevention counseling</li> <li>● Homeowner rehab</li> </ul>
Local Realtors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Connecting new/potential residents into community network of activities and volunteer opportunities</li> </ul>
Hillsdale College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Removing vacant/dilapidated properties</li> <li>● Attracting new investments to College area</li> </ul>

**D. Recommendations**

MVPC has developed the following recommendations for the City of Hillsdale and its residents based on the March 8, 2016 site visit and all the input MVPC heard from government officials, and other community stakeholders.

## Issues identified in Hillsdale

**Issue #1: There is a lack of collaboration and development-focused strategic planning among local government, anchor institutions, and community groups.**

### Examples noted by stakeholders during site visit:

- Hillsdale College students don't come downtown and there is tension between many residents and the College;
- There is little collaboration/communication between volunteer service institutions and the city;
- Some Hillsdale residents lack political interest to allow the local government prioritize and enforce blight issues.

### Recommended Strategies & Resources

1. The City can create a more coordinated blight and development strategy, with all actors working on blight elimination (as identified in the Observation section of this report) at the table.
  - a. Instead of stakeholders implementing blight strategies on their own, the City can convene a group of anchor institutional leaders and service organizations to design a blight elimination strategy, as identified in [step 4 of the Blight Elimination Guidebook](#). Partners should identify blight elimination and development goals and strategies using the recently updated master plan as a guide. The final document should be accessible to all partners and should identify clear action steps.
  - b. The City and anchors can better collaborate on economic development opportunities. For example, the school district has an elementary school that is vacant but being nicely maintained. The district has very preliminary plans for the property, but the City and few Hillsdale economic development agencies seem to be aware of each other's priorities. Increasing communication on this project could be an opportunity to partner with economic development entities and surrounding industries. Perhaps the economic development agencies could jointly plan and sponsor an annual Economic Development Summit to pull together stakeholders to encourage and enable communication and collaboration.
2. The City can encourage Hillsdale College to play a greater role in downtown development.
  - a. The College has their own blight reduction strategy, which has raised questions by some folks in the community. The College could work with the City and Historical Society to fit all blight reduction into a strategic plan and better keep the community's historic sense of place by identifying properties that are structurally sound enough to rehabilitate.
  - b. The City can work with the College to complete sidewalk gaps from the College campus to the rest of the City. Many streets adjacent to campus don't have

- sidewalks or crosswalks towards the rest of the city. Simply improving physical connections can encourage students to explore and spend time in the community.
- c. Hillsdale College can implement low-cost wayfinding to direct students, visitors, and residents to nearby destinations that encourage walking and biking throughout the community.
    - i. [Walk \[Your City\]](#) is a nonprofit that creates template signs and resources Hillsdale can use as a starting point.
    - ii. Read “[Getting Americans to Walk More Using DIY Guerrilla Wayfinding Signs](#)” to learn about why communities are doing this type of low-cost wayfinding.
    - iii. Public Spaces Community Spaces is a creative crowd funding opportunity sponsored by MEDC and MSHDA. This could be a funding source for improved wayfinding in public places in the community. It is a relatively simple process and the city and college could partner to make it happen. See <https://www.patronicity.com/puremichigan>
  - d. The City and College can collaborate to better involve students and residents in attracting businesses to vacant downtown storefronts.
    - i. The institutions can ask people what they would like to see in downtown Hillsdale using a variety of survey tools (online, or physical: see an example of a public art and engagement project that encouraged people to share what they wanted to see in their community, “[I Wish This Was.](#)”) This can help students and residents feel better connected to the downtown, as well as help the City better identify and attract certain business types.
  - e. The College can better promote students working downtown.
    - i. The College can post open jobs on campus and actively seek students to fill vacant positions.
    - ii. The College can encourage the City and downtown businesses to create and promote internship programs (separate from the work study program) available to students.
  - f. The City should schedule downtown activities in conjunction with Hillsdale College events.
    - i. For example, if the College has a designated family visit weekend, welcome week, or other events, plan special activities or street festivals around these days to boost participation and encourage students and visitors to explore downtown.
    - ii. The College, student groups, and service organizations can create student-led volunteer activities downtown, including neighborhood clean-ups.
  - g. Additional Resources
    - i. See examples of university-led economic development and placemaking efforts at [Wayne State University](#).



- ii. See examples of service learning and social entrepreneurship at [Rochester University](#).

**Issue #2: Many residential properties are expensive for owners and new buyers to maintain, leading to blight and poor property maintenance and few options for lower income residents.**

**Examples noted by stakeholders during site visit:**

- Owners can't afford/are choosing to not keep up home maintenance;
- Hillsdale College's blight strategy of creating a new neighborhood is removing previously affordable housing and driving up some housing costs, creating a challenge for lower income families;
- There are few move-in-ready homes within the \$100-200,000 range within the city (but many in the surrounding township);
- Some grant and low-interest home improvement opportunities exist, but few residents know about them;
- There is tension around the availability of low-cost/affordable rental housing in the area;
- The City has few multi-family properties that can encourage affordable rental rates.

**Recommended Strategies & Resources**

1. The City or service agency should catalogue and promote home improvement grant and loan opportunities.
  - a. USDA Rural Development Single Family Home Repair Loans and Grants can help very low income applicants remove health and safety hazards, make essential repairs or make accessible for residents with disabilities. Learn about all the USDA RD programs [here](#).
  - b. Federal Home Loan Bank programs: In partnership with their members, FHLBI offers three grant programs designed to address the affordable housing needs: the Homeownership Opportunities Program (HOP) to help first-time homebuyers with down payment assistance; the Neighborhood Impact Program (NIP) to assist low-income homeowners with home repairs; and the Accessibility Modifications Program (AMP) to aid seniors and households with disabled family members with home improvements that will allow them to remain in their current homes. Learn more [here](#).
2. The City and housing-focused organizations (including realtors) can better promote homeownership within city limits.
  - a. See what other communities have done to promote their communities, like the [Love Muskegon](#) grassroots initiative.

3. The City and housing-focused organizations (including realtors) can turn home shopping into a community event to attract potential visitors and promote available homes.
  - a. The city of Ypsilanti hosted a [City-Wide Open House](#) with local realtors. They coordinated 20+ open houses on one day, handed out maps to the homes, coupons to downtown businesses, and had an information booth for local schools. The city did this for five years but now “don’t need to do it anymore,” according to one realtor.
  - b. Similarly, the Grandmont Rosedale neighborhoods in Detroit host a [neighborhood-wide open house](#), now running for 10 years.
4. The City and housing-focused organizations can work with anchors to establish an employee homebuying program.
  - a. Hillsdale has a college, county offices, and a downtown hospital, but only 17% of people employed within city limits live in the city<sup>ii</sup>.
  - b. Look for inspiration again from Ypsilanti and their [Live Ypsi](#) grant program for Eastern Michigan University employees to buy homes in targeted neighborhoods. Detroit institutions have a similar program, [Live Midtown](#) and [Live Downtown](#).
5. The City can encourage the development of more multi-family and “missing middle” housing products to encourage greater density and affordability
  - a. The City can work with MEDC CCD to investigate feasibility of commissioning a Target Market Analysis to better understand the market demand for missing middle housing products.
  - b. City planners can work with developers, social service providers, and local Community Action Agency to identify target areas for further multi-family development; City planners can then revise the City’s master plan if needed.

**Issue #3: Many landlords and investors are disengaged from the community and don’t have resources available, or don’t choose, to update/maintain their properties.**

#### **Examples noted by stakeholders during site visit:**

- Some owners are purchasing multiple properties but not maintaining them – some of whom reside outside of the city or state;
- Many landlords don’t improve properties because there’s they don’t expect to see a return on their investment.

#### **Recommended Strategies & Resources**

1. The City can consider adopting a performance-based rental certification model.
  - a. The City could establish a rental registration and certification ordinance that is performance-based. Initially all rental property owners would need to register, have their property inspected and obtain a Certificate of Compliance. Renewal of registration could be annual, while the timeframe of the Certificate of Compliance could vary depending on the owner’s compliance history. Good performing landlords that voluntarily comply with local property maintenance standards

would require less frequent renewal of their Certificate of Compliance, while poor performing landlords would require more frequent inspections and have a shortened timeframe that the Certificate of Compliance is valid. The extended timeframe can be particularly compelling if the certification inspection fees are viewed as costly by the owner. Improving property conditions in the immediate term will save them money on inspection fees in the long term. Other benefits and incentives (e.g. reduced fees, maintenance and repair loans) could be layered on top of a performance-based inspection schedule to further encourage responsible rental property maintenance. For more information on this topic and the creation of a performance-based rental regulation model, [click here](#). For an example of a local performance-based rental program, [click here](#). Grand Rapids issues two, four, and six-year certificates based on the condition and history of the rental property.

2. The City should work with partners like MSHDA and MEDC as well as participating local lenders, like Chemical Bank, to publicize the availability of repair financing options for landlords.
  - a. MEDC offers [Community Development Block Grant resources](#) for Rental Rehabilitation, a program that partners with landlords to provide safe, decent affordable rental housing.
  - b. MSHDA, through participating lenders, offers a Property Improvement Program loan for rental properties. The PIP loan can provide landlords with the funding needed to make repairs up to \$25,000 for single-family homes. More information about this program can be found [here](#).

**Issue #4: Hillsdale has an abundance of vacancy downtown, in both commercial and residential spaces.**

**Examples noted by stakeholders during site visit:**

- Local investors purchase properties, but don't have a plan of how to reoccupy the property;
- There are some large vacant commercial buildings downtown and a lack of diverse restaurant and retail options;
- Downtown has underutilized residential space above storefronts.

**Recommended Strategies & Resources**

1. City planning could concentrate retail to help activate the downtown.
  - a. Hillsdale's Central Business District covers a lot of ground. If reduced, the city may have an easier time gaining political support for more selective design and business standards using Form Based Code guidelines. For example, St. Joseph, Holland, Traverse City, and Ferndale all have a retail district

concentrated on one street, with other types of businesses supported on side streets. Putting this restriction on parcels fronting Howell Street could be a great opportunity to concentrate retail activities and help activate downtown.

- b. The American Planning Association has an information packet on “Promoting Ground-Floor Retail in Mixed-Use Districts,” which can be [purchased here](#) for \$30.
2. The City and economic development agencies can encourage entrepreneurial activity and promote available storefronts through pop-up retail.
  - a. Many large and small communities have been able to attract new businesses by offering temporary space for little-to-no cost to small businesses and entrepreneurs. The city of Allegan recently led a successful pop-up retail event and the [final report is available here](#), which outlines what they did and specific resources available to communities.
3. The City can consider joining the Michigan Main Street program at the Associate Level to help attract and retain local volunteers dedicated to economic development.
  - a. Information on the Michigan Main Street program is available [here](#).
4. The City and economic development agencies can help property owners leverage state and federal aid for building maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation.
  - a. Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits provide credits up to 20% of qualifying costs. The Michigan Historic Preservation Network may be able to provide more information and training on how to leverage these credits. [More information available here](#).
5. Additional Resources
  - a. [National League of Cities toolkit](#) for supporting entrepreneurs and small business.
  - b. [Social media guidelines](#) from ICMA.
  - c. Look to entrepreneurship ideas from:
    - i. [Detroit SOUP](#)
    - ii. [Revolve Detroit](#)

**Issue #5: There are vacant, underutilized, or blighted industrial or large properties in some Hillsdale neighborhoods, lowering property values and challenging the community’s sense of place.**

#### **Examples noted by stakeholders during site visit:**

- There are underutilized or vacant factories and industrial buildings in the middle of neighborhoods with potential environmental issues.

#### **Recommended Strategies & Resources**

1. The City can identify priority industrial properties and work to eliminate environmental, health, and safety risks.

- a. For industrial sites and suspected brownfields, the Environmental Protection Agency offers \$200k [brownfield assessment grants](#), both site-specific and community-wide/multi-site, that can be used to understand specific contamination issues. Call for proposals annually, applications usually due in December:
2. Look to examples in other communities for how to repurpose these large properties.
  - a. Some Michigan communities are using large, vacant properties as community centers, art spaces, or breweries. The MML offers a few site-specific examples:
    - i. [Lathrup Village](#)
    - ii. [Ferndale](#)
    - iii. [Frankfort](#)

**Issue #6: Although the City has made great progress on code enforcement and clean-up initiatives, some further improvements may be necessary.**

#### **Examples noted by stakeholders during site visit:**

- Recent enforcement efforts are working and properties are improving, especially when cited by police;
- Top 25 blighted properties list presented to council is well-received and making an impact;
- Some residents may not understand or empathize with challenges low-income families face;
- Some residents reject the idea of the government enforcing property maintenance standards on private property.

#### **Recommended Strategies & Resources**

1. The City and partnering agencies can conduct a blight-focused awareness campaign.
  - a. This campaign can promote the importance of blight elimination and its impact on the local economy, highlight current City actions to address blight, and increase public knowledge about property maintenance requirements. Partners should share information about the broad ramifications of blight in Hillsdale, incorporating both the financial impact to the City as a whole (lower property values, lower tax revenue, drain on policy and City resources, resulting in less funding to support high quality services) and the impact to residents (lower property values, loss of home equity, more difficult to sell property). Although there aren't specific studies on the Hillsdale area, the City could share highlights from relevant studies from other areas such as:
    - i. [“Vacant Properties: The True Cost of Blight,”](#) Smart Growth America
    - ii. [“The Cost of Blight: Vacant and Abandoned Properties,”](#) Pittsburgh Quarterly
    - iii. [“The Cost of Vacant and Blighted Properties in Atlanta,”](#) Center for Community Progress

- iv. [“Detroit Demolition Impact Report,”](#) Skillman Foundation and Rock Ventures
2. The City can consider adopting vacant property registration and inspection ordinances.
  - a. A Vacant Property Registration Ordinance (VPRO) can be designed to serve a number of purposes related to vacant property issues. Chiefly, a VPRO provides a way for the City to gather current, local contact information for the owners of vacant properties. This contact information is then used to communicate with owners when there is a property maintenance issue that needs to be resolved. Some VPROs also require owners to provide a plan for repair and re-occupancy with their registration. Find more information on VPROs [here](#). MML also offers a sample of ordinances from across the state, which can be found [here](#). The [City of Muskegon Heights](#), for example, outlines a VPRO with an escalating fee of \$0 if the structure is vacant for less than six months to more than \$5,000 if the structure is vacant for more than 10 years.
  - b. See also, Center for Community Progress [property registration website](#).
3. The City can improve, promote, and coordinate City-led clean-up services, like leaf pick-up and bulk trash pick-up. The City should consider contracting with a nearby municipality to share a leaf pick-up vehicle to help reduce new costs. Additionally, the City should better work with service-based organizations to publicize clean up events around bulk pick-up days.
4. The City or service agencies could host a Poverty Simulation so more people may better understand the difficulties involved with living in poverty.
  - a. A Poverty Simulation is a unique and interactive experience of what it’s like to live in poverty. In the simulation, people go to work, take care of their family, grocery shop, buy clothing and look for resources to keep their family afloat for a month. The entire simulation takes three hours and includes facilitated discussion. Participants will leave with a better understanding of poverty and its effect on people and communities. For more information visit [CEDAM's website](#).

## E. Conclusion

Vacant, abandoned, and problem properties contribute to neighborhood and community decline, drive up crime and negatively impact the quality of life for residents. Vacant properties also become liabilities for local governments; they can detract businesses from investing in a city and, while not raised as a specific issue in Hillsdale, can mean less revenue generated for schools and local governments when property taxes also go unpaid.

With limited capacity and resources, it is increasingly difficult for local governments to adequately maintain property and foster a strong community. The dedication of the residents of Hillsdale, the City of Hillsdale and their many partners was evident in the small-group interviews. Leadership in the community appears to be supportive of the effort to engage new partners, eradicate blight, develop a plan of action and attract people and businesses to the city.

This report contains strategies, programs and initiatives to help return vacant property in Hillsdale to productive use. These will only be effective if carried out as part of a coordinated, comprehensive approach in which all community stakeholders are working together to pursue common goals for the community. This assessment can serve as the catalyst for change by challenging outdated assumptions and rethinking existing systems. The City of Hillsdale should be commended on taking the first step in facilitating the assessment. The next step is to translate the recommendations into action. Ideally, the City of Hillsdale and participating stakeholders will review this document, adopt it, and incorporate it into the coordinated economic development strategy.

## **F. Appendices**

**Appendix 1: Do-it-yourself Strategies for Neighborhood Residents**

**Appendix 2: MVPC Blight Elimination Guidebook**



**Appendix 1: Do-it-yourself Strategies for Neighborhood Residents**

- Consider creating a “paint patrol” to help spiff up facades of small businesses or homes that may just need a small makeover. Consider working with a local paint store to get their mistint or “oops” paint to help paint the facades.
- Consider doing plant exchanges and seed shares to beautify vacant properties.
- When considering urban gardens, look at how you can connect this to health issues in order to find additional funding.
- Talk to Lowes and Home Depot about their small grants to help provide small dollar grants for the beautification program revitalization.
- Consider a mural program on large walls to begin to address graffiti or even a class on how to paint brick.
- Consider going door to door and talking to neighbors to get people together to do activities.
- Public Spaces Community Places Program: Join dozens of other communities around the state who have identified projects in public spaces and conducted successful crowdfunding campaigns to fund them. In Michigan we have a very unique resource that not only makes the process easier with a step by step guide, but offers a match for your local efforts. Learn more about the [Public Spaces Community Places program](#) sponsored by MEDC.
- Launch an Anti-litter Initiative
  - Tap into the artist community to paint informational signs in heavily littered areas or to create art with trash found on-site. Look to the [Heidelberg Project](#) in Detroit for an example.
  - Communities as far as Alaska are struggling with this issue and here’s an interesting [article](#) about changing the community’s culture on litter.
  - Work with schools to do special anti-litter educational campaigns with elementary students. The Ferguson Foundation offers an Anti-Litter Campaign template [here](#).

**Appendix 2: Michigan Blight Elimination Guidebook**

The document is designed to provide municipal leaders with a variety of blight elimination resources and lead them through the development of a blight elimination plan. The guidebook is available online at [miblightguidebook.org](http://miblightguidebook.org)—making it an ever-changing document that compiles the most recent blight mitigation resources, opportunities, and ideas from across the state. It also serves as a primer for Michigan communities interested in developing a strategy to more effectively address blight with limited resources.

End notes

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<sup>i</sup> 2008 - 2012 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau;  
<https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/easy-stats/>

<sup>ii</sup> Census LEHD, 2014; <http://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>