

# RAP 2.0 Application: West Branch Commons

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## **Applicant Profile - DO NOT DELETE**

wbtclerk@gmail.com

## **Admin Fields**

### **Changes Requested**

## **Program Overview**

The Revitalization and Placemaking Program (RAP) is an incentive program that will proactively deploy \$100 million in funding to address the COVID-19 impacts in Michigan communities. Administered by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), 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 development and development, grants between \$250,000 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.

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

1. Real estate development 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 development 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 2.0 Program Guidelines

. All projects in each category will be scored against other projects within their region.

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, when necessary to reach regional allocation amounts 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 align with RAP Program Guidelines.
- Failure to demonstrate the development team's capacity to successfully implement the project.
- Failure to show that the project(s) can be completed before September 30, 2027.
- Insufficient evidence that the proposed project with the requested award is financially viable.
- Failure to provide all required attachments.
- 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.
- Projects without a letter or resolution showing support for the RAP2 application from the highest official within the local unit of government in which they are located.

### **Project/Program Name**

West Branch Commons

### **Applicant Entity Legal Name**

Township of West Branch

### **Employer Identification Number (EIN)**

38-2189148

### **Project Address**

Corner of M-76 and Business Loop I-75

## **Public Space Place-Based Infrastructure Project Grant (\$250,000 - \$1,000,000)**

**Project County**

Ogemaw

**Applicant Address**

1705 South Fairview Road

**Address 2****City**

West Branch

**State**

Michigan

**Zip**

48661

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

Public Space Place-Based Infrastructure

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**Background Information (18 points):****1) Describe the proposed project.**

This proposed project is for the creation and construction of what will be known as the "The West Branch Commons". The West Branch Commons will be a large-scale community use space complete with an Open-Air pavilion, Open air market, fire pit gathering space, and a new parking area. This projected will take a delapidated and blighted area in the core of the West Branch Township Downtown District and turn it into a thriving space for the community in the heart of the West Branch Township Business Community.

**2) 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.**

The map is attached showing the properties location in the community and also shows the location of the proposed structures, amenities, and parking areas. It also shows the location of other community resources as well.

**3) What is the amount of the grant that you are seeking from this program and what is the total cost of your proposed project?**

The total cost of the project is expected to be about \$2,620,000.00 as of February 2022. below is a general breakdown of the projects anticipated costs.

Site Preparations - \$160,000.00

Building and Renovations - \$350,000.00

Parking Lot and Plaza - \$730,000.00

Artisan Market Pavilion - \$350,000.00

Open Pavilion - \$650,00.00

Engineering / Contingency - \$375,000.00

**4) Required attachments:****Local support recommendation letter**

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**Financial proforma**

SKMBT\_C22023061915050.pdf

**Preliminary or final design documents**

West Branch Commons Site Plan (2).pdf

**Before photos**

Site Currently.png

**Aerial photos**

IMG\_4369 2.jpeg

**Construction cost estimates**

SKMBT\_C22023061915170.pdf

**Evidence of funding commitments**

SKMBT\_C22023061915190.pdf

**Project map**

Picture1.png

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## **Project Readiness and Programmatic Consideration (82 points):**

**1) Describe the status of the project including status of construction drawings, cost estimates.**

The projects current status as of June 2023 is that we are currently in process of cleaning up the site and making it more presentable to the community. We have also secured a USDA Grant for 220,000.00 to cover initial costs associated with engineering for the project.

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

The project does not need any property acquisitions as the property is owned by the local unit of government and as not associated costs associated with additional acquisitions.

**Average Review Score**

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

As a rural growing community in Norther Michigan providing a gather spot for residents and visitors has become a need for West Branch Township. Recreational parks consisting of ball fields and frisbee golf courses are the primary component of the township's public facilities. However, facilities like a community garden or farmers market are lacking in the West Branch area. An opportunity as part of the Township overall master plan and DDA planning to incorporate such a facility on a township owned property located along the community's primary corridor can fill this void.

The Township has developed in a progressive way over the past few years and recent development along the I-75 Business Loop at the corner of Old M-76 creates the exposure needed for a successful gather spot / public facility. An existing masonry building remains on the property that is structurally sound and provides a great shell building for use as restrooms, an office & storage room and still have space that could be leased out to vendors or used for public events. The site is large enough to accommodate a large parking lot and still have remaining room for other uses such as a plaza, farmers market and open-air pavilion.

There really are no such public facilities for gathering within the area. Irons Park in the downtown West Branch and the Ogemaw Hills Recreation Park are the closest thing to a public gathering facility, but these are facilities that have typical park uses and are not designed to serve other purposes. What the West Branch Commons project represents is a larger gathering location for seasonal events and other local market type events as well as offering a retail element.

The West Branch Commons project was conceived as use to revitalize a brownfield type site with a premium location at the intersection of a major highway and primary road between the West Branch Township business area at Exit 212 and Downtown City of West Branch. The project will have a large covered open-air structure for vendors to set up sales. A large open plaza with a fire pit will offer an inviting atmosphere, and a large parking lot area will surround the existing building which will serve as restrooms, office and storage, and potentially leasable space for something like a coffee shop or similar retail use. With the site's prominent location, a large sign or monument would be appropriate to identify the site.

No other reasonable or readily accessible sites are available in the area. With this project the site has really driven the vision for the development within the Heart of Downtown Development Authority District. Also, no other site has as much accessibility to the business district, community campground, and educational facilities all within .5 miles of the site.

**Letter of support (optional)**

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**4) Explain the project schedule and how the projects will be completed before September 30, 2027, as funds need to be expended by that date.**

Below is a breakdown of the Project duration from this point through the Spring of 2025

- Continue Clean Up of the Site and prep for Bid allocations - Fall of 2023
- Prepare for site construction by spring of 2024
- Construct major components of the project Fall 2024 into winter
- Continued construction through the Spring of 2025
- Completion by the Fall of 2025 and into the winter

**5) Explain the applicant's project team's level of similar project-specific experience.**

The current Team members that the township has leading the charge on this project is the West Branch Township Clerk, Zoning Administrator, and DDA Administrator who has a long history of working on township projects including administering the township DDA for 3 plus year, being the West Branch Township Zoning Administrator for 5 plus years and being the township clerk for 3 plus years.

The project is also working with Lapham and associated which has a long history of working in community development projects all over the state of Michigan and has a lengthy record of community development projects like the one list in this application. Some of those projects include park development in Richfield township in Roscommon County.

**6) 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.**

West Branch Township currently has a significant fund balance and also numerous funding streams to help support the project and has voted to have this property turned into the proposed community use space.

West Branch Township was also awarded 220,000.00 dollars from the USDA for the initial development of this place making site.

**7) 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? Address how it will grow the tax base, activate vacant or underutilized space, and contribute to the resiliency of the community.**

The pandemic showed that our community and business area have a significant lack of usable outdoor spaces for things like gathering and outdoor event hosting. As the pandemic has evolved and we have learned that people's interest in outdoor activities has not only increased but also our township through this project is trying to capitalize on this new and increased interest in outdoor activities.

This project's location has been a blighted and vacant piece of property for over 10 plus years. The need for change on this property has been evident for a long time but there has never been a clear plan until now. Also, by developing this site into a large-scale community use space will help to enhance the educational facility across the street. It will increase the experience for the campground located within walking distance of the project and should spur further development in the core of the DDA district in West Branch Township.

**8) 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.**

This project is a leading priority of the West Branch Township Downtown Development Authorities T.I.F Planning since 2007. It is clearly mentioned in the plans and with each update to the plan it makes to top 5 priority list of things to accomplish and by the partnership between the USDA, West Branch Township, and the West Branch Township DDA we are on our way to accomplishing yet another of the T.I.F plan goals.

Also, since the COVID times hit West Branch Township has adopted its first ever Capital Improvement Plan which has the West Branch Commons project on the top of the list of its projects to complete and secure funding for in the future. Both the DDA T.I.F Plan and West Branch Township Capital Improvement plan can be viewed and reviewed at [www.westbranchtownship.org](http://www.westbranchtownship.org)

**9) 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.**

This project will be long term maintained and owned by the local Unit of government. The township currently and has for the past four years been operating with a fund balance and in the future as the township continues to develop a park system which we currently do not have we would like to use a portion of this increasing and ongoing fund balance to maintain and further develop this community use space. We would predict that the biggest ongoing expense in the future will be the proper maintenance of the structures and the parking lot but also general annual improvements like landscaping.

Also, this project is centered in the West Branch Township downtown development authority district which allows the West Branch DDA to commit DDA funds for this project as well. The DDA currently has room in its budget to assist in the needs of this community use space that will be located within its jurisdiction as well.

**10) 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 main goal of how this space is the community first and foremost. The Township has always wanted this to be a safe and secure location for a farmers' market as the West Branch Area does not currently have that. Also, community use space is a priority of the site for community organizations to gather and host events like wellness fairs, food festivals, holiday events, and just a gathering spot for tourists visiting the area. Its proximity to the only local campground in West Branch ( less then .2 of a mile from the site) makes it an even more appealing spot for local vendors to set-up for a weekend or for a community event to gain even more attention and tourists that can get to the site on foot.

The design of open air and a plaza style make the site and easy visit for ADA individuals and the proximity to not only downtown West Branch Township but also the downtown of the City of West Branch make it an easy walkable project for the whole community.

## **Tie Breaker Questions:**

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

**1) 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? Provide a letter of support from each City, Village or Township that will benefit from the proposed program.**

Yes

**How many letters of support?**

1

**Letter of support #1**

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**2) Provide a summary response to the following questions:**

**a. 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 supports West Branch Townships efforts to create place making elements not only through projects like this but also elements we have adopted in Zoning and ordinances changes and this project also working in conjunction with our continued effort to become a Re-development Ready community.

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

While this project will not help local government avoid a budget crisis, we have proven over the past four years that we as a township can weather storms financial and can even use those challenging times create even better opportunities for our community like this project by being fiscally responsible and even leading our township into a past four years of budget surplus.

The creation of placemaking is ESSENTIAL to West Branch Township long term plan for the community's future. Our DDA T.I.F plan, Capital Improvement Plan, and engagement and continued work in the redevelopment ready program are all signs we know that's going to be the future and will help not only change but make out downtown better but will help us to continue to retain and gain new residents to the community.

**Submission Date**

06/19/2023