Michigan Municipal League

Sundquist Pavilion
in Riley Park
PROJECT SCOPE:

Challenge:
During a community visioning process, residents tried to answer the question: Where is the heart of your downtown? Answer: There wasn’t one.

Overview:
A collaborative effort of residents, business owners, philanthropists, and city leaders created an active city center by transforming a surface parking lot in the middle of a strip mall into a ¾ acre park. The park has a large pavilion, attractive landscaping, and a large space to host community events year-round. The team was able to do all this without losing one parking spot.

Accomplishments:
- The Sundquist Pavilion in Riley Park hosts about 60 events throughout the year, offering a space for neighbors to gather, connect, and spend time downtown. For example, the Saturday Farmers Market hosts about 2,000 visitors each week and hundreds attend the Holly Days winter market. Resident-led programming, like weekly swing dancing performances, draws a smaller audience but keep the space activated.
- With more people in downtown Farmington on a regular basis, many local retail stores and restaurants have seen more foot traffic and higher sales. Improving the streetscape and walkability also encouraged...
business owners to enhance aesthetics in their property. For example:

- Dress Barn used the opportunity to remodel their store, enhance their product line, and feature the Farmington store in a national photo shoot.
- Many downtown restaurants, like Los Tres Amigos, added outdoor seating and improved landscaping.

Farmington planners were able to keep the same number of shopping center parking spaces, despite adding the park and pavilion to the middle of the surface lot.

Development of the Sundquist Pavilion in Riley Park built momentum for the downtown Master Plan, which also included redeveloping other aspects of the area:

- The Grand River Streetscape Project was completed in 2009 and improved pedestrian safety, aesthetics, business environment, and reduced road congestion. Planners used tactics of bump-out parking to narrow the road and creative landscaping to make the sidewalk more comfortable.
- The Grove Street Project was completed in 2013 and upgraded the shopping center and streetscape, adding parking, and improving aesthetics and pedestrian safety.

**Budget:**
Total cost: Approximately $2.2 million
Ongoing costs: $25,000–$30,000 annually, not including major items

**Funding:**
Project start-up funding came from a private foundation, donations, bonds, and city contributions from the capital improvement fund. Maintenance is mainly funded by the DDA through its Principal Shopping District Special Assessment.
Participation:
City leaders engaged a wide group of supporters and planners to help with the project, including:
• Residents
• Local business owners
• The Farmington Downtown Development Authority and planning committees
• Private architecture and design firms
• Local philanthropists
• Nonprofit organizations
• Other governmental agencies (library, schools, etc.)

How-to:

1) ENGAGE RESIDENTS FOR VISIONING
Create a foundation for the project by bringing residents and business owners together to talk about their community and identify what they want for their downtown. In Farmington, the engagement process smoothed implementation because planners could refer back to what neighbors discussed at early planning stages.

2) FIND INSPIRATION
To help residents imagine the final product, city leaders used Plymouth’s Kellogg Park as an example of what Farmington could look like. Planners drew up illustrative designs of the project to keep residents excited and supportive.

3) FUNDRAISE
Before redevelopment could begin, Farmington officials needed to secure funding. Using donations from local foundations, business leaders and residents, the community invested in the park and pavilion.

4) CHANGE ZONING AND DESIGN STANDARDS
Farmington used its Master Plan process to make changes to the downtown zoning laws. The space was previously zoned for a suburban shopping center, which was exactly what they got. Changing laws to more traditional downtown zoning and design standards (for example, building on the front of a lot instead of the back) allowed planners and landscape architects to improve aesthetics, safety, and comfort.

5) BUILD
Once everything was in place, the city started construction.

6) CELEBRATE
To kick off the new downtown space, city leaders worked with residents and business owners to organize an opening night celebration. On an October evening in 2005, neighbors gathered for the Harvest Moon Dance, which has become an annual event.

7) PROGRAM YEAR-ROUND
Programming in the new space didn’t stop with the Harvest Moon Dance; the Downtown Development Authority coordinates events in the park year-round. With a weekly farmers market, a summer concert series, art fairs, community events, and even an ice rink in the winter, the space is well used throughout the seasons.
8) KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING

As residents and visitors were spending more time downtown, it became clear that Farmington needed to continue their placemaking efforts and redesign wide streets that divide the downtown. In an effort to improve walkability, aesthetics, calm traffic, and improve the business environment, local leaders were able to redesign Grand River and Grove Street, major corridors of the downtown.

Lessons Learned:

► Effective engagement makes for smooth implementation.
An in-depth community visioning process, seven years before the park’s grand opening, was the best way for residents to communicate to city leaders what they want in their downtown. The priorities and ideas that came out of this meeting helped ensure public support and smooth implementation for the park and pavilion, even over controversial topics like parking and street design.

► Year-round programming keeps the space activated.
Once Sundquist Pavilion was built, residents need a reason to gather. Moving the city’s farmers market was an obvious decision, but only occupied the space once a week through the growing season. The DDA took an active role in hosting events and coordinating community groups’ events that invited residents and visitors to gather in Farmington’s redesigned downtown spaces. City leaders took the attitude of trying to “find a way to ‘yes’” when approached by residents and organizations interested in using the space. Be flexible and allow for resident innovation.

► Get creative with parking spaces.
The pavilion and park were built on an existing strip mall parking lot. Instead of throwing out the idea because of the fear of losing parking, planners had time to be creative with the space and rearrange parking spots. After the development was complete, the lot around the pavilion had the same number of spaces as before.
Know your funders.
City leaders built strong relationships with local funders and residents interested in investing in the city. If residents and business owners are in full support, leaders will have an easier time finding funding.

Experts:
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Similar Projects:
• City of Plymouth’s Kellogg Park
• City of Detroit’s Campus Martius Park
• Village of Dexter’s Monument Park
The Center for 21st Century Communities

Building 21st century communities
Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is place. Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at mml.org.

Who we are...
The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

What we know...
Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? Place, specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

What we offer...
Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a “one-stop-shop” for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.