

## Brief History of the Edmore DDA.

By Jack Miller

Back in 1986 or about then, Edmore Village Manager Bill Cargo presented to the Village of Edmore the idea of adopting a DDA. These entities were created by act of government, with the purpose of reinvigorating the downtown districts of cities and villages. Several local business owners formed a committee to explore the idea, liked the concept, and council voted at that time to adopt the creation of the Edmore Downtown Development Authority. I was elected President at age 27. I have been re elected as president ever since. The DDA acts as an advisory entity to the ruling village council.

Every project, every purchase and every action by the DDA must first be approved by the village council. Every action the DDA has ever taken or will ever take will always be with the prior approval from the council. It is not an autonomous, independent body.

The most important part of a DDA is to establish a map. The map serves two main purposes. First it establishes the properties that will be included in the redevelopment. Next, it creates a tax base paid by those exact properties, from which the DDA can capture any INCREASES in assessed value. Those increases in assessed value, and subsequent increases in tax revenues flow into the DDA coffers. The idea is to establish the areas that need help, and keep those tax dollars for redevelopment within the district. So the tax dollars that are reinvested come only from the properties included in the DDA, mainly businesses. The DDA map of Edmore roughly includes all properties from the Edmore golf course ending just short of Sunrise development, encompassing both sides of M-46, and including the building known as the General Bag building. It also includes the industrial park in Edmore.

When the DDA was created, there was little tax revenue captured. The first years were fairly uneventful, as the only monies we received were from the inflationary nature of tax assessments. By law DDA's could issue bonds (borrow money) to stimulate the development within the district, to jump start projects, but we elected not to do so. Gradually investment within the district created significant cash flow that permitted some projects to be funded. Edmore added a Burger King and McDonalds restaurants, and the Maxfield family made a huge investment within the district that jump started our income stream. We started small by repairing and extending sidewalks, purchasing and paving parking lots in the downtown. We were able to help finance the expansion of the industrial park in the 1990's, and participated in the redevelopment of the old Edmore Hospital, and other small businesses in the downtown. By the early 2000's the DDA was seeing revenues of nearly \$50,000 per year, but struggled to find projects to fund. One of our continuing duties was to create and or find ideas that were worthy of funding. I think that all small towns in the mid Michigan area were in the same struggle during that period of 2000-2006...how to spend those monies wisely. So we nibbled at some small projects but still had developed a cash balance of over \$250,000. In 2007, we were approached by the township and agreed to reduce the DDA capture by 50%, because we had no larger projects to fund. It made no sense at that time to divert those revenues from the schools, county and township. We continued to discuss ideas with local residents and business owners during these formative years, but fortunately opportunities were to arise that we felt were important to the community.

Around 2008, as the Fred Meijer trail was rapidly developing south of town, and the DDA had the opportunity to purchase the old Bird Fertilizer plant on South Lewis St. With that purchase, we established a trailhead for the Rails to Trails project in Edmore, and removed a blighted area in the community. We sold the right of way back to the trail, tore down the old buildings on site, participated in the construction of the parking lot with bathrooms for the trail riders, and suddenly recognized that the old bag building next to our parking lot was salvageable, and very unique. Unexpectedly, we had the opportunity to purchase the General Bag building from the Sprosty family, and agreed on the first offer of \$15,000. We were now the owner of a special piece of Edmore history, a soundly constructed, beautiful old 28,000 square foot turn of the century factory! After 20+ years of searching, we had our seed in hand.

Originally the idea of a turn of the century marketplace was floated for the Hitachi Magnetics building. With metals prices high and the cost to maintain the building deemed unaffordable, the Sunrise project elected to scrap the building. With the purchase of the bag building, the DDA could shift that focus into a period proper building with the General Bag purchase. We assembled a team to engineer the building renovation, pursue grants and move the project forward. Our first order was to repair the roof, and stabilize the building. We hatched the idea to include our Amish partners in this stabilization, and found an engineer that was willing to work with those unlicensed craftsmen and put his stamp of approval on their finished product. Local state land white pine logs were purchased from the DNR, along with other standing lot purchases and 40,000 board feet of lumber were sawn at local Amish mills. After drying over the spring and summer, the old roof was removed and replaced 12 feet at a time in the fall of 2012 just before the snow came.

The roof was completed, the building stabilized, and the years since have been spent pursuing and fortunately obtaining grants to complete the project. With sizeable grants in hand after 4 years of hard work, we have started the renovation

of the Bag Building. We have been supported and encouraged by our local legislators, and I would like to thank Judy Emmons and Rick Outman for all they have done to help obtain grants for our town.

It is important to understand that this project is a building block for Edmore. My hope for the last 8 years has been that our community could understand the benefits of such an undertaking and rally around the Bag building as something unique and to be proud of. As a point to start working on ideas that survive in this small town environment, where they don't make sense in big box stores or cities, but are unique and valuable because of the flavor they offer. These types of projects are not business plans or pre funded profit making ventures, rather they are economic stimulus vehicles. If they were immediately viable, then they would be funded privately and those business persons would reap the benefits! What the project needs at this point is an open minded exploration and participation of the area residents. This project is your project, and it will be what you make of it. Make it great!

Reflecting back over the last 30 years, it has been my great honor to have served all the Edmore residents. I would like to see this project thru to its completion, with vendors intact and rents flowing into the DDA. My final goal is then to hand the reins off to another (hopefully) young business person with a desire to give back to the community, as it has so graciously given to me over the last three decades!

Sincerely,

Jack S Miller  
Edmore DDA Chair